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2015

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

The Expanding Universal: Participation and Pedagogy in Experimental Music

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

by

Adam Tinkle

Committee in charge:

Professor Anthony Davis, Chair  
Professor David Borgo  
Professor Anthony Burr  
Professor Amy Cimini  
Professor Shahrokh Yadegari

2015

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2015

## DEDICATION

My dissertation is dedicated to my family, whose love and patience make possible all of the efforts that lie behind my writing. My parents always prioritized diverse, enriching, creative experiences for their children, and have been unwaveringly supportive of all the directions my art and life has followed. Jess, my partner, has been the pillar of support and stability in my life that has allowed me to even consider taking on a project like this one, as well as to see it to completion. And, in her life so far, my daughter Alice has taught me so much about human musicality and the nature of creative and communicative expression.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, thank you to my committee—five wonderful and caring mentors, within a community where I have been the lucky recipient of mentorship from numerous others. The entire team behind the Universal Language Orchestra merits special acknowledgment, as that project was the wellspring and inspiration behind all my subsequent research. Thanks especially to Prof. Charles Curtis, Joe Mariglio, Issac Garcia-Munoz, and Bonnie Whiting, Sixth College’s Culture, Art and Technology program, and all the other individuals who contributed to projects in and around the Spring Valley Community Center. Much of that initial work was funded in 2011-12 by an implementation grant from the University of California Institute for Research in the Arts. Above all, I must thank Renell Nailon for tirelessly instigating, inspiring and facilitating so many of these projects in ways that stretch well above and beyond professional obligation. None of our efforts would have been possible without Renell’s groundwork—he always made sure that when we arrived ready to make music, there were always young people there waiting, willing and even excited to be a part of our experiments; anyone who has ever taught in a community context knows that this is no small achievement.

Thanks to all the other institutions who have supported, underwritten and sustained this work and who have hosted my classes, workshops and groups, including: A Reason to Survive (ARTS), the Carlsbad Music Festival, the Yankelovitch Foundation, the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego (especially Anne Kindseth and the MCASD Education Department), the Media Art Center, San Diego, Prof. John Wixted, and the other members of the UCSD Psychology Department engaged with UCSD Community-Based Research and Outreach. This dissertation was written with the support

of the UC President's Dissertation Year Fellowship.

Thanks to all of the inspiring artists and lifelong friends in the artistic community at UCSD. The thoughts I think now and the work I make all tap a vast reservoir of idiosyncratic brilliance that makes its home on campus—I am so thankful that I chose a path that brought me there. Thanks to my partner, Jess Sullivan, for reading many drafts and always being available to talk through these ideas, as well as for your unwavering love and companionship in cultivating our garden under a wider sky. Thanks to all of my interviewees and interlocutors, including those whose words did not make it into this document. Thanks to all the scholars I have met, read, and quoted along the way.

Since much of this dissertation is about teaching, I must also acknowledge all the other teachers, beyond UCSD's faculty, who have inspired my notions about teaching and experimental music, particularly Pauline Oliveros, Anthony Braxton, Alvin Lucier, Ron Kuivila, Paul Lichter, and the faculty of the Maine Jazz Camp, as well as to all the teachers who showed me a way into scholarly life, like Yonatan Malin, Brigid Cohen, John Troutman, Richard Elphick, Cecilia Miller, and Mark Slobin.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, thanks to all of the students and families who have ever given me your time, trust and music. Music is often spoken of as a gift, given from teacher to student, a resource that flows to pupils from a wellspring of tradition. All of my students gave me a very different sort of musical gift, by allowing me to conduct my experiments and work out my ideas with their willing cooperation, participation, and creative engagement.

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Expanding Universal: Participation and Pedagogy in Experimental Music

by

Adam Tinkle

Doctor of Philosophy in Music

University of California, San Diego, 2015

Professor Anthony Davis, Chair

This dissertation considers the interlinked artistic and pedagogical work of several distinct communities of experimental musicians, stretching from the late 1950s through the 1970s. Each of these groups created a substantially-widened context for musical participation and authorship by less-trained or untrained musicians, especially relative to Western art music norms. This study places the approaches of these diverse experimentalist pedagogical sites (John Cage’s New School course, a general music course called The Nature of Music at UC San Diego, the community music schools of Black Arts Movement-era collectives like the AACM and the Black Artist’ Group, and the Creative Music Studio of Woodstock, NY) in dialogue, and situates them within diverse theoretical frameworks, including critical pedagogy, the intellectual history of the “long Sixties,” the ethnomusicological literature on musical participation, and critical

race theory.

Additionally, this study places these investigations of experimentalist music teaching methods alongside analysis of musical scores and performances that foreground the participation of untrained or less-trained musicians, many of them created by those very same musician/teachers. These include: the work of Cage and his students Allan Kaprow and George Brecht in and after the New School course; Pauline Oliveros's *Sonic Meditations*; an album entitled *Whisper of Dharma* which was created by a mixed-skill, age-diverse group associated with the Black Artists' Group of St. Louis; and scores written by Anthony Braxton to introduce his language music system in classroom and workshop contexts. These close historical links between such participatory musics and dissenting, anti-hierarchical pedagogical sites suggests the need for a new theorization of musical participation, skill/unskill, and knowledge transmission as constitutive concerns for a segment of the musical avant-garde that has received too little consideration.

Pulling together these diverse threads—participatory musics and anti-traditional pedagogies from both the post-Cage tradition of experimental composition and the “creative music” tradition associated with black experimentalist composer-improvisers—this dissertation aims to assemble both a historically-grounded philosophical intervention into, and a useable past for, contemporary music-making and music-teaching.

## **Chapter 1.**

### **Experimental Expansions**

It's a hot July afternoon in La Presa, a densely settled, unincorporated part of southeast San Diego County. I am standing in a multipurpose room of a community center, gesticulating at a group of musicians ranging between about 10 and 13 years of age. In response to my gestures, the players make sounds—long sounds, short sounds, other sounds they wouldn't be invited to make in concert band. On one cue, some switch instruments, from the ones they play in (and are borrowing from) their middle school concert band, to others I've brought in—drums, noisemakers, synthesizers. When I cue another student with a different signal, she knows that it means that she is supposed to *improvise*—a word she learned on Monday. It is Thursday. She, like many in the group, has been playing her band instrument for less than a year. Understanding that this will be a kind of “solo,” other students instinctively ease back to clear sonic space. But one by one, I also give the “improvise” signal to every other student. Now everyone is articulating themselves, amidst a mild cacophony, as best they can, given the substantial technical obstacles they face on their band instruments and on the even more unfamiliar ones I have loaned them. But they are making their own music. And, with their help, I am making my music.

It is a sort of music that I would ordinarily call “experimental,” but this summer, I call it the Spring Valley Jazz and Improvisation Camp, a terminological concession to what I imagine will get people through the door, as well as a tribute to the jazz camp that I had attended at their age. During the school year, I collaborate with a team of faculty and other students to teach in a related program for elementary-aged students at the same community center, in which almost none of the students have ever had any formal musical training. With this younger group, we build nearly all the instruments ourselves, combining the experimental music tradition for techniques (graphic scores, field recording, contact microphones) that we think might work with such raw novices. The name of that group, the Universal Language Orchestra, was proposed to us by the center’s director, so I suppose it’s mostly coincidence that the gestural conducting that I am using to lead the summer camp group in collective improvisation happens to be a personal variant of one called the “language music” system—so named by its inventor Anthony Braxton, from whom I learned it.

After a break on Thursday, I try handing over the reins for conducting the group over to students. I sit down to join the ensemble with my saxophone. The stuff they come up with ranges from timid and unengaged to utterly explosive. At one point, there is an anime-inspired mock-battle between two conductors.

The next day, Friday, we get on a school bus, together with many of the musicians’ parents and siblings, and head northwest from La Presa, through downtown and then up the coast. We have been engaged to perform at an all-day, outdoor music festival in a rather exclusive, largely white suburb. Those on the bus, with the exception of me and my family and a few others, are mostly people of color. La Presa is also

considered a high-poverty area, as measured by the large percentage of government-provided free lunches and English-language learners in the schools. These are numbers I wrote down as facts in my various grant applications to fund this camp and programs like it. These facts might have helped pay for the school bus. These facts are not unrelated to the fact that, for most kids on the bus, this camp will be their only formal musical experience this summer; whatever progress we make this week, chops are likely to wane by September. These facts are not unrelated to prospects of any of these students ever owning their instruments, studying music with a private teacher, forming a band, going on tour, making a record, or seeing that record reviewed in the *New York Times*. These facts I regard to be a danger to the equitable distribution of the sort of music education of which I was the lucky, privileged beneficiary. From a certain perspective, these facts seem to be a danger to the distribution and availability of certain forms of musical participation, to the availability of a certain idealized form of musical knowledge itself—“music literacy.” These facts often make me incredibly uncomfortable, or angry, or sad.

We arrive at the festival. The students get to watch performances by a Balinese gamelan orchestra and a Kenyan master drummer. They see a classical chamber ensemble and a noise band. There are no music festivals like this in La Presa.

We set up our instruments under a tiny cupola. Dozens, perhaps hundreds of people are milling or gathered around. I'd like to extend the previous day's experiment and have a student lead the group, but ultimately, I want this to be the best, tightest, most energized performance it can be, so I decide that I will remain in charge, and I start our set the way I learned from playing with Braxton, and from film footage I've seen of Sun Ra leading his Arkestra. I begin by giving a signal that tells everyone to play a long, loud

note, any note that comes to mind, any note they choose. Sun Ra called this sonority the “space chord,” and now I know why. The cupola nearly lifts off. After the set is done, we walk down to the beach; the kids dip their feet in the ocean.

### **Preface: From life into words**

This dissertation unfolds at the intersection of experimental music and a re-thinking of pedagogy and participation for one central reason: I lived, worked and made music at this intersection, and, finding few words of wisdom to guide me there, I ultimately decided to try to write some. I first became interested in this intersection not because I had a scholarly question to frame it, but because I experienced and then came to advocate the intersection of experimentalism and participation, through regular, repeated, deeply felt musical interactions with young people, none of whom would be labeled, by any commonsense definition, “trained” musicians. These experiences, in a situation framed unmistakably as pedagogical, then directly triggered two trajectories of work, moving beyond the pedagogical frame: First, I sought, as an artist, to think through how I could include broader-based participation in my own music, perhaps to think of teaching as part of creating and vice-versa. And secondly, I began the research into the history, theory and practice of artistic participation that has led to this dissertation.

As someone interested in the past, excited by archives, and often in awe of the achievements of older generations of musicians, I have chosen to conduct my research largely on the topic of the past, using a historian’s and a music analyst’s toolkit. However, the central purpose of this investigation of the past is to collect ideas, tools, inspirations, and strategies that I think might be useful for anyone today who, like me, is

interested in putting participation and experimentalism into dialogue. Thus, while the tone I adopt throughout is frequently critical (in the sense that I am attuned to and try to lay bare the unresolved problems, fissures and contradictions that I encounter), the central goal of my criticism is to make the past more *usable*. If, in the process, I also make the past more legible, all the better. But, insofar as some aspects of my project resemble a project of canon-formation (i.e. the gathering together of a new critical figuration of a sort of “field” of participatory/pedagogical experimental music), my aim is *not* to suggest that the works I gather here are the best or the ones most deserving of attention, nor that these works represent a particular “tradition” as the artists themselves would have seen it. Instead, I want to make absolutely clear that the “field” I am gathering together under my imposition of discursive unity is nothing more than a suggested assemblage for action. Indeed, I hope that this and other scholarly outputs of this project will be just half of a toolkit for praxis, the fatter “teacher’s edition” that accompanies the plain “workbook,” which might consist simply of all the scores, teaching techniques, and inspirations as I found them in their raw, historically-situated form.

I have begun with an account of my own experience, because without it, what follows is difficult to account for. In situating participation and pedagogy at the center of my problematic, I am not particularly following in the footsteps of anyone else’s work in experimental music studies. (Nor, because centered on experimental music, do my investigations have much to do with the academic discipline of music education.) However, in the rest of this introduction, I assemble a literature review by pulling together bits of the theories and insights of other fields, in an effort to argue for the

usefulness and connectedness of my questions to wider terrains of interdisciplinary inquiry, as well as to suggest some preliminary definitions for my key terms.

*Participation*, in my usage, is not a bounded or fixed category; rather it refers to the *desire for and movement towards* the inclusion of larger numbers of people, or previously excluded people, in the making of art. An artist, moving from sole authorship towards co-creation by the few may still evidence a participatory tendency. An artist's extending the *offer* of participation, lowering the hurdles that prevent others from joining in—even if this invitation is not accepted by “the many”—may still be described as suggesting a participatory intent. There is no minimum number of people who have to be included for an artwork, gesture, or deed to be participatory. In its uses during “the long Sixties,” however, the period that concerns me, the word “participation” undeniably suggests oppositional intent. Its strict denotation is simply the act of taking part, but its historically situated *connotation* suggests an overcoming of stubborn barriers that *prevent* people from taking part. However, I leave the question of what is “participatory” open, so that, in juggling its many inarticulate forms, I can suggest, by my conclusion, what it might be, and what it should be.

My usages of *pedagogy* are, admittedly, similarly wide-ranging. I refer throughout to *pedagogical sites* (like schools and workshops) and *pedagogical contexts* (anywhere knowledge was intentionally transmitted), because these are the literal spaces where much of the activity that interests me occurs. However, I also refer to—and question—the *pedagogical frame*, the discursive boundary that differentiates between situations where knowledge is *formally* transmitted, and everywhere else. Because this frame is constructed and contingent, and what occurs therein has no ultimate claim on

what knowledge is “real” or important, I am also concerned with transmission of knowledge that occurs outside this frame. I am particularly attuned to music-making itself as an important site, *outside* the pedagogical frame, where knowledge may be transmitted and where people may learn. Where possible, in an effort at terminological clarity, I try to call instances of teaching and learning that occur outside the formal pedagogical frame “educative” (rather than “pedagogical”). However, “pedagogy” sometimes retains its appeal in spite of potential confusions, in large part because, as we will see, the field often called “critical pedagogy” has forced a questioning of whether the formal pedagogical frame is itself a powerful confusion, or even a debasement, of how subjectivities are formed, and how they may be transformed.

Finally, the work contained herein must be regarded not as a sculpted form, but rather as the dirt kicked up from the archival and historical burrow hole of a seeker, a would-be teacher, and an artist in a state of political confusion. I cannot say, as Frederic Rzewski (who appears in Chapter 3) did, that “I am a Gramscian, and I am totally optimistic.”<sup>1</sup> All I can say is: I am in favor of participation. I am in favor of experiment. I hold both to be musically and ethically important. But I do not know how best to engender them, and I do not know where, or even if, they can truly meet.

Despite this position of uncertainty, I have sought, following the disciplinary conventions of the academic humanities, to construct a linear argument that engages with theory, to articulate my differences in thinking from those of other scholars who have worked on my subjects, to seek out new documents and archives on which other scholars

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<sup>1</sup> Frederic Rzewski Interviewed by Daniel Varela. *Perfect Sound Forever* (March 2003), [www.furious.com/perfect/rzewski.html](http://www.furious.com/perfect/rzewski.html).

have not worked, to track down some of the musicians involved in my story to ask them to recount their recollections, and beyond this point, to mostly refrain from personal confession. However, my ultimate purpose is to thread the beads of history as I found them onto a string of my own weaving that, in ways both said and implied, points forward towards future experiment—the outcome of which is unknown.

### **Experimentalism Expanded**

Because nearly all of the material upon which I construct my argument comes from experimental music's past, and because I use experimentalism as a springboard to discuss matters that ramify far beyond it, my work bears nearest resemblance to, and represents an engagement with, the sub-field of historical musicology concerned with the critical study of experimentalism. In particular, I follow in the footsteps of scholars George E. Lewis and Benjamin Piekut in seeking an expanded theoretical perspective on experimentalism. Like these scholars, I look at sites, concerns, individuals, and groups whose contributions have not been deemed central to experimentalism, and then ask how these new “data” offer us critical leverage on the tradition as it has been heretofore constituted.<sup>2</sup>

In this spirit, then, the particular areas of observation that ground my arguments are largely absent from other published scholarship. They include: a harder look at what experimentalists thought of institutionalized Western traditions of music training and of

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<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), George E. Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), as well as Lewis' earlier article “Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives” in *Black Music Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (1996): 91-123.

the skills thus obtained, a consideration of what experimentalists actually *did* once in a situation where *they* were engaged in pedagogical labor, and a hermeneutic unpacking of the strategies used to facilitate non-musicians' participation in experimental music-making. While Chapter 2 mainly reshuffles the extant documentary record on John Cage from a new perspective, each of the other chapters is driven by new interviews and archival research. Through these new "data," I will argue that at least *some* experimental music distinguishes itself both from other "art" musics as well as from vernacular musics in its uniquely elevated valuation of non-musicians, as well as in its unique critique of the intersubjective transmission of musical knowledge itself. Together, this re-valuation and this critique make for a politically resonant, uniquely individualist figuration of musical participation. Admittedly, this is in some sense a dissenting trajectory or minor history within experimentalism—I'm not trying to argue for these or any other features as those which bound or define a genre or canon. What is important to me is not whether such figurations are what "make" experimentalism, it's that experimentalists made *them*—and thus, if experimental music is a source of a usable and powerful articulation *of* participation, knowledge, value, etc., then, experimental music deserves our (and others') attention.

One tendency whose articulation I borrow from recent music scholars like Piekut and Brigid Cohen is to view musical actors from the perspective of their immediate social and practical worlds. This means narrating art and artists, not as a closed circle of biography and works, but rather in relation to their wider communities, usually consisting of other the artists with whom they interact. Constructing a critical biography of composer Stefan Wolpe as a study in how community-as-lived affects musical

production, Cohen shows how Wolpe's works "were not composed as abstract documents to be sent out into the ether—nor primarily imagined as autonomous members of a vaunted canon—but rather were created as works calling out for concentrated community engagement and dialogue."<sup>3</sup> Proving the point, Cohen shows how radically Wolpe's music changed depending on where and near whom he was living and working. Following Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT), Piekut suggests that despite their importance, such artistic communities are not "real" things with traits (e.g., the New York School stood for indeterminacy). Rather, they are simply enacted and lived attachments between actors, and therefore, what happens between compositions and other moments of music-making may tell us as much as the music itself.<sup>4</sup> Throughout what follows, I will use "network" to denote such links between individuals who were thus directly, interpersonally connected, as differentiated from the looser "community," which can refer to more diffuse intellectual and potentially "imaginary" affinities.

Yet while tracing the social worlds constituted by artistic "scenes" in is now an established methodology, it is perhaps too little noted that, for many musicians, a substantial amount of time and energy is spent on pedagogical labor, within communities constituted by such labor. Especially following its expansion in the post-WWII period, American academia has become perhaps the overarching "artworld" which supports and makes possible many formulations of avant-garde and experimental music and art. (Notwithstanding the precarious appearance, in Chapters 4 and 5, of several formulations of non- or quasi-institutional "alternative academies" operating outside of schools and

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<sup>3</sup> Brigid Cohen, *Stefan Wolpe and the Avant-Garde Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 207-8.

<sup>4</sup> Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 6-10.

academia.<sup>5</sup>) For example, Marter has shown how some of the artists who appear in Chapter 2, as students interacting in John Cage's New School course, were simultaneously active as an avant-garde network through the university where they were employed.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, attention to such pedagogical sites and the networks that arise therein remains the exception, not the rule. What might we learn if we asked about the networks to which pedagogical labor gives rise—those that unite students and teachers or that join like-minded colleagues? This dissertation suggests substantial, though perhaps basically unsurprising, influences flowing in two directions: The demands of pedagogical labor affects the music that gets made, and artists' aesthetics affect what and how they teach when they are given the latitude to teach as they wish. Yet already, these simple points suggest why pedagogical sites might differ in important ways from other nexuses of artistic community, and why they might deserve study.

Given the dearth of past efforts focused on pedagogical sites, my method seeks some breadth for purposes of comparison. So, rather than following the now well-established historical methodology that focuses in on a *single* place and time (e.g., Sally Banes at Greenwich Village in 1963, Piekut at New York avant-gardes in 1964, or Amy Beal at Americans in West Germany after WWII), this dissertation considers several pedagogical sites—one each per chapter.<sup>7</sup> This represents a step away from much work

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<sup>5</sup> I take this term from George Lipsitz, who in turn credits Robert Farris Thompson, *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 109. See also George E. Lewis, "Singing Omar's Song: A (Re)construction of Great Black Music" in *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interarts Inquiry*, Vol. 4 (1998), 72

<sup>6</sup> Joan Marter, *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-garde, 1957-1963* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Amy C. Beal, *New Music, New Allies: American Experimental Music in West Germany from the Zero Hour to Reunification* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

on artistic communities, however, because I group several otherwise unconnected networks under the set of music pedagogical *strategies* that they seem to have held in common, across time and space. Thus, I look not at a single network, but at a certain type of network, linked by a major point of intellectual affinity. What all these sites had in common was that they featured experimentalist musicians peeling back most or all of the pedagogical techniques associated with Western art music instruction, and opening their doors to anyone, regardless of past musical experience, to author their own music. In all these sites, untrained musicians were given the opportunity (and in most cases, the assignment) to compose and create music without scaffolding their creations on the traditional “fundamentals” which, in most Western art music pedagogies, are held to be necessarily prefatory to skilled performance as well as to composition.

It’s important to assert at the outset that the musicians who devised and implemented this pedagogical stance, in each of the sites I consider, did so—as far as I know— without explicit reference to one another’s work and without citation of any extant philosophies of education. I want to be careful not to give the impression that I am exhuming any sort of pedagogical “tradition,” cutting across these sites, that was enacted through sharing of resources or explicitly-named mutual influence. Instead, it is better viewed as a pedagogical *tendency* that I am assembling here, largely for the purposes of comparison, writing *through* these nameless pedagogical strategies, *towards* the articulation of one that builds on all of them.

As each chapter will show, disparate historical forces shaped each pedagogical site, which differ in numberless ways, despite core similarities in their welcoming re-valuation of non-musicians and their creations. One of the central cleavages to which I

attend is between white-dominated academic worlds (Chapters 2 and 3) in which experimentalists elect to more or less completely banish Western art music and theory, and, on the other hand, non-academic sites linked to “creative music” (Chapters 4 and 5) in which Western theory is regarded as an important adjunct to, though perhaps still not a prefatory underpinning for, individual creation.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the deeper post-Cage antipathies to traditional Western art music theory allow me to make a somewhat simpler argument in chapters 2 and 3, which I then am forced to substantially complicate and qualify in order to do justice to chapters 4 and 5.

But while remaining attentive to the import of their differences in origin and trajectory, I want to focus, across cases, on how we might understand the momentous articulation they all share: a music pedagogy in which “fundamentals” are no longer fundamental, in which no prior authorization is required for the student to create music. What can we say of such a pedagogy? Certainly, it is a *critical* pedagogy, in at least two senses. First, as we will see again and again, this is a pedagogy with a clear adversary and object of critique: the exclusions wrought by placing Western art music at the top of a hierarchy of musical value. Second, it can be regarded as a cousin to the discourse, unfolding entirely outside and away from the world of music, that is called “critical pedagogy.” While recognizing the perils of imposing an “etic” reading on my actors’ thinking (none have ever, to my knowledge mentioned the critical pedagogy tradition as an influence), I want to sketch a few parallels that will be helpful for correlating certain lines of thought that recur again and again throughout my historical case studies.

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<sup>8</sup> Nor am I the first to suggest this; in some ways, my observation is just a further unpacking of points Lewis first made in “Improvised Music After 1950”, 105-109.

### Music's "Ignorant Schoolmasters"

The experimentalist critique of Western art music brings us to the core questions of pedagogy, which are, at heart, questions of epistemology and ethics: what is (musical) knowledge? How is it (best) transmitted? And what are the ramifications, especially in terms of agency and power, of different modes of knowledge transmission? In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Jacques Rancière writes of a teacher called Jacotot (1770-1840) who was placed in a situation where he had to teach French to students who spoke only Flemish, a language he didn't speak. He gives the students a bilingual text, and, without any further explication from the schoolmaster, the students learn French. Jacotot becomes briefly famous (and, through Rancière's reincarnation, famous again, since the book is now oft-cited, especially in the art world) for the idea that anyone can learn alone, a finding bolstered by the insight that, of course, everyone learns their native tongue without being explicitly taught it. From this tale, Rancière draws out the implication that teachers should not "explicate"—they should step aside and let students learn for themselves. Clearly, this is also a proposal for a radical egalitarianism, one that must be *asserted* and *demande*d through a refigured, radicalized pedagogical encounter, in which the schoolmaster is not placed above the student.<sup>9</sup> I raise this case because the musicians of whom I write were all committed (perhaps to varying to degrees) to strategies that avoided explication. Instead, somewhat like Jacotot, they tried to enter the pedagogical

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<sup>9</sup> Jacques Rancière *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 4-8, 12-18

encounter with the assumption and assertion that the novice is not ignorant, and possesses the (innate?) ability to create and author their own music.<sup>10</sup>

Yet my actors also represent a continuum of beliefs about the value of transmitted knowledge; while critiquing and dissenting from normative and hegemonic Western music pedagogical practices, none fully hold the line of Jacotot's absolute disavowal of explication. Thus, perhaps an equally relevant model might be Brazilian author and educator Paulo Freire. Where Rancière is interested in emancipation from the inherent structures of hierarchy that "explication" itself engenders, Freire is perhaps best known for criticizing the widely-prevailing "banking model" of education, where knowledge is placed in the heads of passive pupils. Advocating instead a "dialogical" and "problem-posing" method, he wrote of how to facilitate the working class person's self-education, authentically generated from within the stuff of their everyday experience, rather than imposition of the knowledge ratified by the powerful, which will be necessarily alienating and disconnected from their lives.<sup>11</sup> But similar critiques, albeit not as essentially class-oppositional, have deep roots in American thought as well, from John Dewey's *Education and Experience* (1938) to Ivan Illich's more confrontationally countercultural *Deschooling Society* (1971). These books critique less the inherencies of pedagogical encounter, and rather focus on the contingencies: stultifying institutions,

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<sup>10</sup> "Create" is an insufficiently specific word with respect to music, because a student's realization of an etude is still, in the moment it is sounded, musical creation. In most cases, "compose" would be the emic term used by the actors to whom I refer, but, especially given the charged problematic of improvisation and composition, this will not always be true. "Author" is an admittedly imperfect attempt to collapse personally expressive and explicitly *non-recreative* musical invention, whether scored or not, because it suggests that the author is *authorized*, e.g. to take liberties beyond any musical "rules." The notion of authorship, however, also exposes something of the gulf between Jacotot's interest in language-learning and the case of musical authorship, described herein—the ability to create music is *not* a symmetrical concept to literacy. However, through this dissertation, we will see numerous attempts to compare the two.

<sup>11</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2000), 71-86.

outmoded curricula, and social rigidity in schooling practices.<sup>12</sup> In fact, American education can be said to be under an unbroken assault from these and other reformers and radicals, who are generally united around the ideas (I pull out these three points specifically for their applicability to the case of music) that that (1) the educational system as it currently stands reproduces hierarchy when it ought to be a means towards equality, that (2) education should be more experiential and based less on hardened creeds and inherited texts, and that (3) students can acquire the knowledge they need from unimpeded direct encounter with the world and the lessons that it has to teach. These latter two points harmonize with what what we might more broadly term a naturalist philosophy of education, an goes back at least as far as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile*, and its powerful re-emergence in the 1960s is much related to the wider adoption of varied and diffuse philosophical naturalisms throughout the period and constitutive of the very culture of "the Sixties."<sup>13</sup>

My interest here is not to parse the finer debates between all these accounts of education, nor to cross-correlate them too strictly to the ideas of the musicians on whom this dissertation focuses, especially since, as I mentioned, the music pedagogical ideas I will discuss did not seem to arise in response to, or dialogue directly with, wider educational philosophy debates. Instead, I mainly want to suggest at the outset the

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<sup>12</sup> Ivan Illich *Deschooling Society*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).3-12.

<sup>13</sup> In Rousseau's conception, the "natural man" is fundamentally good. We can learn from experience, from our own nature, and from the literate "education of men," but this latter education must be based upon and harmonized with the other two. In effect, the lessons of "nature," internal and external, must guide the pedagogical apparatus, means and goals of culture. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or Education* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1921), 5-7, 64-65. For the re-emergence of Rousseauian naturalisms in the Sixties counterculture, see David E. Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* (Athens & London: University of Georgia Press, 2001), pp. 250-4. Influential documents of the era which particularly foregrounded "nature" in this way include: Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1970), 1-22, 92; Theodor Roszak, *The Making of a Counterculture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), pp. 34-5.

common threads that run through all these theories, which will recur again and again in varied guises throughout what follows. Insofar as they are united by a rejection of old hierarchies and a search for new, more “natural” and egalitarian bases for culture and knowledge, these pedagogies are deeply linked to “the long Sixties,” a historical marker whose proper characterization has been endlessly described and debated.<sup>14</sup> Rather than subordinating actors to a kind of historical predestination, however, I want to follow scholars like Scott Saul and Sally Banes, who have insisted that artists were as much responsible for *making* “the Sixties” as the historical upheavals were responsible for shaping the artists. Thus for Saul, aspects of 1950s jazz—cool, spontaneity, interracial integration—had ramifications in the following decade across culture, far beyond music.<sup>15</sup> Similarly for Banes, the Greenwich Village avant-garde “set the stage for both political and artistic cataclysm in the later Sixties, [having] shaped the debates, forms, and institutions that would animate art and culture for the rest of the century.”<sup>16</sup>

Such assertions of the agency of art in history hold some appeal here (although I hardly require them for my particular argument) because so many of the ideas that arose in experimentalist classrooms precede and seem to prefigure their wider articulation, beyond music. Thus, as I recount in Chapter 2, students in John Cage’s New School course proposed a radical blurring of the differentiation between artists and audiences,

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Robert Adlington’s introduction to *Sound Commitments: Avant-Garde Music and the Sixties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4-6. My “long Sixties” runs, perhaps, all the way from the debut of “4’33” (1952) until the closure of the Creative Music Studio (1981), where, despite the changing cultural environment everywhere else, a Sixties-like spirit survived, Robert E. Sweet, *Music Universe, Music Mind: Revisiting the Creative Music Studio, Woodstock, New York* (Ann Arbor: Arborville, 1996), p. 116

<sup>15</sup> Scott Saul, *Freedom is, Freedom Ain’t: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 5-6, 10-19.

<sup>16</sup> Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 6.

transforming the latter into “participants” and causing a well-publicized sensation for its imputation of dissolved hierarchies. This was 1958 or ’59, fully three years before the Students for a Democratic Society, in their epochal Port Huron Statement, put the phrase “participatory democracy” into the mouths of campus activists across the country.<sup>17</sup> This is hardly to propose a line of influence, but perhaps only to suggest, as Attali did (and so many have done since, citing him) that music is a space where emerging social relations can be pre-articulated as a kind of prophetic early-warning system.<sup>18</sup>

Without fixating on questions of mutual influence, I want to explore the ramifications of and relationships between such articulations of participation across the disparate cases of politics, art, and education. Certainly, there is the obvious structural commonality: an anti-hierarchic leveling and assumption of equality between schoolmaster and pupil, ruler and subject, artist and audience. But more narrowly, what will interest me in this dissertation is the actual attempt to *implement* such a non-hierarchic, anti-traditional perspective. Re-inhabiting the fraught effort to remove fixed musical “curricula” in favor of individual self-discovery, experience, and exploration, we will see the fissures, challenges and difficulties encountered in putting their egalitarian and naturalistic education into practice. One major problem was surely that many of the “schoolmasters” who aspired to do so were themselves deeply learned and immersed in the Western art music theories and practices which they were trying to expurgate from their classrooms.

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<sup>17</sup> The SDS Port Huron Statement became the most influential English-language articulation of the ideals of the New Left and the political “wing” of the counterculture. See James Miller *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 141-48

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Attali *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 11-12.

Instructively, then (both for us and their synchronic pupils), in parallel with such pedagogical efforts, Cage and many who followed him would *also* “deskill” themselves, by removing, to varying degrees, the traces of Western art music tradition that clung to their artistic practice. Thus, core to my narration in Chapters 2 and 3 will be an attempt to track such co-occurrences of “deskillling” and “deschooling” in particular individuals’ dovetailing artistic and pedagogical work. How do we understand the relation between artist and schoolmaster in the same person, experimenting with and feigning “ignorance” in both domains?

### **Deskilling/Reskilling**

Deskilling, a word first used to describe the replacement of workers’ manual skills by technology, has recently moved into the field of art criticism, where it is now used in ways somewhat distinct from its origin in economic thought. John Roberts proposes a re-thinking of much of 20<sup>th</sup> century art history on the basis “the dialectic of skill-deskillling-reskillling” in visual art after Duchamp’s introduction of the readymade—an object that instigates a conceptual revolution by *being art* despite the fact that the artist’s manual skill was not utilized in fabricating it.<sup>19</sup> Cautiously accepting and extending the oft-made parallel between Duchamp’s readymade and Cage’s “musicalization of aurality”<sup>20</sup> usually represented by *4’33”*, I argue that, across the long Sixties, experimental music’s history can also be read in terms of a dialectic of skill-

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<sup>19</sup> John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (London: Verso, 2007), 2-3.

<sup>20</sup> Julia Robinson, "From Abstraction to Model: George Brecht's Events and the Conceptual Turn in the Art of the 1960s," *October* 127 (Winter 2008/9), 79-80. Douglas Kahn *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 178. For Kahn’s notion of the “musicalization of aurality,” see *Noise, Water, Meat*, 102.

deskilling-reskilling.<sup>21</sup> I unpack this triad as (1) a traditional regime under which it is expected that music is played by musicians, defined by their musical skill, which is closely bound to Western art music training; (2) a demand, made *by* trained musicians, for the removal of all traces of such training, skill and tradition, often linked to the demand for unrestricted, egalitarian participation; and (3) a synthesis: new notions of skilled music-making, demanding the invention of new pedagogies to inculcate those skills.

It's a curious fact about the relation between music studies and art criticism that Cage, a trained musician and composer, is held to be the progenitor of an entire region of art practice that music studies has effectively ignored. Thus, art historians and curators locate Cage as the font of what has been called "participatory art" (a positioning I unpack in Chapter 2),<sup>22</sup> but experimental music studies has given little attention to participation as a broad theme.<sup>23</sup> One goal of this dissertation is to trace the figuration of musical participation on the diachronic axis, suggesting the skill/deskilling dialectic as one potential analytic tool for charting what appears to me to be a tide that swept up numerous experimental musicians, across disparate communities, many around the same

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<sup>21</sup> However, my notions of the meanings of these words deviate substantially from Roberts', and hew closer to their use by Claire Bishop, another art theorist who is more directly interested in performance and participation. See Bishop, "Unhappy Days in the Artworld? De-skilling Theater, Re-skilling Performance" *Brooklyn Rail* December 10, 2011, <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2011/12/art/unhappy-days-in-the-art-worldde-skilling-theater-re-skilling-performance>

<sup>22</sup> Rudolf Frieling, *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now*, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2008.), 33-34, 82-86, 94

<sup>23</sup> For a few very recent counterexamples of where participation *has* been noted in experimental music studies, see George Lewis "Benjamin Patterson's Spiritual Exercises" and Virginia Anderson "British Experimental Music After Nyman," both in *Tomorrow is the Question: New Directions in Experimental Music Studies.*, ed. Benjamin Piekut, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014, as well as Amy C. Beal "Music is a Universal Human Right: Musica Electronica Viva" in *Sound Commitments*, ed. Adlington, 99ff.

time. Hopefully, my analysis can help position music in the ongoing dialogue about participatory art's genesis, after and beyond the oft-noted generational transmission—from Cage to conceptual and performance art, via his course at the New School for Social Research—that too often marks the *end* of the story of composers' intertwinement with the development of “advanced” ideas in art.

I follow art theorist Claire Bishop in suggesting that deskilling, rooted in Cage, is crucial to understanding participatory art practices more broadly.<sup>24</sup> In describing the genesis of deskilled performance, Claire Bishop locates Fluxus and Judson Dance as early precursors—two networks which, along with Happenings, forms an oft-recited holy trinity of the early 1960s avant-garde directly “descended” from Cage's New School course.<sup>25</sup> Describing a classic exemplar of Judson deskilling as a kind of *negativity* towards old skill hierarchies, Bishop writes:

Unlike amateurism, de-skilling denotes the conscious rejection of one's disciplinary training and its traditional competences. Crucially, one has to have *acquired* this training in order to *reject* it—and this is what differentiates a “de-skilled” performance, such as Yvonne Rainer's *We Shall Run* (1963), from an amateur performance in which a jogger runs about on stage.<sup>26</sup>

One could make a similar claim about Cage's *0'00"* (1962, consisting of the performance of an everyday action, amplified by contact microphones), but perhaps not about much of his work from before 1959. Thus, a major goal of Chapter 2 of this dissertation is to more carefully trace the idea and development of deskilling through Cage's work and his teaching, as well as to interrogate the art historical narrative: *Does* deskilling go hand in hand with participation? In what sense is Cage's music a participatory art? What value

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<sup>24</sup> Bishop “Unhappy Days”

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Banes *Greenwich Village 1963* 28-29, 53-54. Frieling omits Judson.

<sup>26</sup> Bishop “Unhappy Days”

did his deskilling techniques have in his New School classroom, and might they still hold such pedagogical value today?

As I will argue in Chapter 2, Cage spent most of the 1950s sharing unstated notions about training and skill with most other modernists working in Western art music—chiefly the assumption that musicians are needed for the performance of music. Until beginning to problematize the category of “musicians” during the period of the New School course (1956-60), Cage wrote scores that invariably assumed and required the skills, and increasingly the extremes of virtuosity, produced by the Western art music pedagogical apparatus. Thus, Cage didn’t yet question that musicians should be produced (educated, credentialed, put to work) by the means society provided, didn’t yet recognize the problematic of participation as one that might be linked to his wider program of “let[ting] sounds be themselves.”<sup>27</sup> Under this first regime of the skill dialectic, conventionally (and highly) trained musicians are still understood to be necessary for the realization of scores, even unconventionally notated ones, even ones supposedly emptied of compositional intention. No other conduit or means of translation has yet been located for the transmission of musical ideas from composer to others.

Under the second regime (“deskilling”), whose first stirrings I associate with the interactions and exchanges of the actors within the network of Cage’s New School course, Cage comes not only to expurgate the need for traditional musical performance skills from his scores, he also teaches (or learns?) that non-musicians can *compose*, thereby introducing ideas of chance, the everyday, and notation-realization into visual and performance art. While the ramifications of this on Fluxus, Happenings, and Judson

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<sup>27</sup> John Cage *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 10.

have been extensively unpacked elsewhere, less clear are the possible implications of the underlying “double” deskilling (under the regime of the deskilled score, anyone can potentially perform *and* compose) on the world of music itself. Into the late 1960s, numerous other musicians and composers would subsequently expurgate the instruments and notation of the Western tradition—the most immediate barriers preventing “anyone” from performing. In the modalities that rose to replace them—improvisation, electronics, “everyday” sound and assorted other conceptual, textual, and listening-oriented strategies—were musicians just seeking new sounds, or were they seeking a music in which anyone might be able to participate, regardless of past musical training and experiences?<sup>28</sup>

Thus, in Chapter 3, I trace a few of the younger Cage-influenced composers for whom deskilling actually *did* translate into practices that more directly invited an unambiguous broadening of participation. Again, I concentrate here on a pedagogical site, the nascent Music Department at the University of California, San Diego, which was, from 1967, engaged in a unique expansion and transposition of many of the precepts of Cage’s New School course—a tiny seminar, mostly of already-committed artists in an institution devoted to adult education—into the core curriculum of a large research university. In recounting their development of the department’s “Music 1” course (also known as “The Nature of Music”) I trace the many challenges faced by a group of

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<sup>28</sup> Much synthetic work remains to be done on the careers of musicians who I don’t sufficiently engage with here, such as the closely linked network of Christian Wolff, Cornelius Cardew and Frederic Rzewski, all of whom went through a similar period of deskilling involving renunciation of Western notation, instruments and skill-hierarchies in their compositions around 1968, but all of whom subsequently and around the same time, moved *back* into writing music meant to be played by musicians. Other interesting narratives of a “deskilling” of specifically musical and sonic production, which might incorporate Max Neuhaus, Ben Patterson, Henry Flynt, Malcolm Goldstein, Phillip Corner, James Tenney, and likely very many more, remain to be told.

musical and pedagogical experimentalists in implementing an avowedly naturalist, anti-hierarchical, dialogic, experiential music pedagogy to replace, at ambitious scale, what one might call the “banking model” of musical education represented by “music appreciation.” When Cage gave non-musicians—most of them, albeit, adults and artists already—the permission and injunction to author experimental scores, he thus provided the template which UCSD would enormously expand both in scale and scope, asking thousands of much younger people, potentially with *no* artistic training, to create their own experimental music in a variety of authorial modalities—scored, on tape, and improvised.

Extending my parallel consideration of composers’ personal artistic work with their labor inside pedagogical sites, I focus in Chapter 3 on UCSD faculty member Pauline Oliveros during the years of the development of Music 1. In particular, I analyze her *Sonic Meditations*, a major and relatively well-known opus for participants of whom “no special skills are required,” which was written, in part, for use in Music 1. Tracing the development of these scores alongside a trove of unpublished materials related to Music 1, this chapter asks about the relationship between Cagean deskillling/deschooling (an artistic *and* pedagogical regime under which no special, music-trained, skills are required of performers/students) and the emergence of what I regard to be a *post*-Cagean interest in “reskilling” in Oliveros’ work: What would it mean to teach people how to make music together via a dialogic, non-hierarchical approach that banishes inherited tradition and imposed knowledge? What musical skills or knowledge could we attain if we committed ourselves to such a pedagogy?

At the heart of this particular construction of musical “reskilling” lies a naturalist philosophy of education—sonic “nature” can teach us what we need to know, without the imposition of a cultivated or formalized theory. So, in an effort to both gain new analytic perspective on the *Sonic Meditations* and to understand the figuration of “nature” both in her work and in “The Nature of Music” course, I trace, in parallel with her compositional and pedagogical work, Oliveros’ attachments to another actor-network, the musical community of post-Cage composers (most prominently, David Tudor and the Sonic Arts Union) with whom she was engaged in dialogues and collaborations, primarily with regards to the development of live electronic music. Engaging with the now-substantial scholarly literature on the conceptualizations of “nature” in the music of Cage, Tudor, and other experimental musicians, I use focus on the issue of amateur participation in both Lucier and Oliveros’ work from 1967-70 to extend and complicate the insights of this literature. By considering the issue of the seeming virtues of *non-musicians* in these contexts, I move towards a richer conceptualization of “nature” as it abuts a Rousseauian philosophy of education, linking human beings’ essential “nature” to the “nature” found in the biological and non-human world. Luckily, because of Oliveros’ and Lucier’s close links, this search doesn’t take us far from the pedagogical site of UCSD and “The Nature of Music” course—Lucier debuted his first such participatory work, *Chambers*, on the campus, with Oliveros and some of her earliest students participating. For obvious reasons, such links between “The Nature of Music” course and the major participatory opuses of both composers usefully bolsters my larger approach of placing pedagogical concerns in proximity to artistic ones.

### **Problematizing the Pedagogic and the Participatory**

As I suggested in my earlier attempt at a definition of “the pedagogical,” I will, throughout this dissertation, suggest that, even aside from their concrete links to pedagogical *sites*, the music-making practices I analyze often have a kind of educative intent, built into the very works themselves. To some ethnomusicologists, this would be an unsurprising assertion, since participating in music in any capacity is often held to model and articulate an ideal way of being and belonging in the social world, such that music, like any ritual experience, transmits a culture’s knowledge and value.<sup>29</sup> Yet, under the banner of anti-traditionalism, deskilling, and universal participation, pieces like the *Sonic Meditations* and *Chambers* represent an extreme position on this continuum. Because they don’t claim to require any prior musical background, they attempt to encode an insight within the score-instruction itself, trying to take an idea and then make it immanent to musical experience, pushing pedagogy into the forefront of the actual work of realizing the score. Building on a recent article, I explore how, in such pieces, participation is not just a goal in and of itself, it is also a means to a deeper educative end.<sup>30</sup> Such pieces’ underlying purpose, I contend, is to leverage the engagement and immersion that participation (perhaps) specially affords to *lead* people into an expanded or improved way of actually perceiving reality, to “wake up to the very life we’re living,” as Cage put it.<sup>31</sup> (As I try to assess, this pedagogy, which I occasionally compare to a kind of quasi-religious missionary injunction, seems to differ fundamentally, in style and

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<sup>29</sup> See Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008), 2-3

<sup>30</sup> Adam Tinkle “Sound Pedagogy: Teaching Listening Since Cage” *Organised Sound* 20 (no. 2), 2015, pp. 222-230 (in press as of this writing).

<sup>31</sup> Cage, *Silence*, 12, 95.

content, from the dialogic method I have linked to Rancière and Freire. Thus, I trace threads of double-voiced ambiguity in Cage's thought: does he know better, or do you?) Under this injunction—participate so that you may perceive—individual musical works become, merely a kind of adjunct or guide to the process of coming to a new way of being in the world.

So, one might ask, if all this is really pointing towards *experience*, cutting across art and life, are scores and works necessary? And relatedly, if the central imperative towards participation is to break down hierarchies, isn't the continuing activity of individual composers writing instructions (closely related to the pedagogical act of *giving instruction*) already at cross-purposes with the politically charged tenets of a dialogic, naturalistic self-teaching and self-creation?

Bishop, in her field-defining text on participatory art, meets this question head-on, suggesting that we should welcome the dialectical play of ethics (the opposure of hierarchies and the will towards acknowledging and including the Other, as well as the questionable instrumentalization of participants) and aesthetics (the making of works that enact a particular artist's vision and will). Thus, "instead of obeying a super-egoic injunction to make ameliorative art, the most striking, moving and memorable forms of participation are produced when artists act upon a gnawing social curiosity without the incapacitating restrictions of guilt." In my reading, Bishop defense of "highly-authored situations" and their "fidelity to singularized desire—rather than to social consensus" also makes a convincing apologia for the whole fraught business of individual composers

*scoring collective participation*, despite its seeming inherent contradictions.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the participatory experimental music I am interested in unfolds at the dialectical interface of the existing (inherently hierarchical) norms, definitions and structures of Western art music (which anyone claiming to be a composer can never wholly wriggle out of), and, on the other hand, the desire to dismantle hierarchies and thus include more people in the creation of music. Here, we can recall Lydia Goehr’s insight about how Cage’s *4’33”*, a work with no composer-specified sound content, is at first a *challenge* to the ontology of musical works, but ultimately is a confirmation of the work-concept because it asserts that it *itself is* a musical work which demands to be as faithfully treated as any other. But while I am concerned with ethics (where Goehr is concerned with ontology), I think that a similar point can be made here: In their insistence that anyone can join regardless of literacy or “preparedness,” participatory scores enact a conceptual challenge to the idea of notation as literate transmission, but, through re-inscribing the practice of *scoring* people’s actions “in the expanded field” (that is, breaking the old frame of notational tradition), they actually confirm the practice of score-making, and, tacitly, its history, value, and future.<sup>33</sup>

Largely because most of the works I analyze are, as Bishop puts it, “highly-authored” by individuals, the participatory experimental music on which I focus bears more consistent similarity to recent participatory artworks in the art world than to participatory practices in the traditional musics studied by ethnomusicologists. Yet, there

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<sup>32</sup> Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), 39.

<sup>33</sup> Lydia Goehr, “Werktreue: Confirmation and Challenge in Contemporary Movements” in *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 261.

is good reason to seek the insights of the latter, both because the case of specifically *musical* participation may contain features not found in other arts, as well as because many of the world's traditional music practices (including Indonesian, South Asian, Native American, Euro-American folk-traditional, and numerous African traditions) would substantially influence numerous experimental musicians, likely representing a particular inspiration on the matter of participation.<sup>34</sup>

But rather than tracing those lines of influence, I want to instead turn to the historically-situated rhetorics of ethnomusicologists, that is, the individuals in the U.S. largely responsible both for bringing out recordings of these musics and telling other Americans how to think about them. Their articulations of the superiority of more participatory music cultures over that of the West provide a contemporaneous comparison with experimentalists' anti-Western art music, anti-hierarchical discourses that will subsequently fill these pages. As early as 1956 (the year Cage would open up his composition course to non-musicians), Bruno Nettl, a founder of the field of ethnomusicology, would reach towards participation as a kind of natural fact of culture at degree zero, writing: "One aspect which may be unique to primitive cultures is the general participation of all members of a tribe in music. ...the same songs are known by all the members of the group, and there is little specialization in composition, performance or instrument making."<sup>35</sup> But for a younger generation, after Port Huron and in the throes of the Sixties, such observations would sharpen to a polemic that reads a lot

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<sup>34</sup> For examples of such influences that are particularly relevant to the actors in this dissertation, see: Pauline Oliveros *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963-1980*. (Baltimore: Smith Publications, 1984), 244-50; *Sweet Music Universe*, 121-133; and Benjamin Looker, "Point from Which Creation Begins": *The Black Artists' Group of St. Louis*. (St. Louis: Missouri History Museum, 2004), 174-175.

<sup>35</sup> Bruno Nettl, *Music in Primitive Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 10.

like those of Cage et al. In 1966, Charles Keil, later to forward an influential analytic schema for analyzing musical participation,<sup>36</sup> would grow

angry and increasingly frustrated as I realized that Professor [Leonard] Meyer's arguments in favor of syntax, emotion and meaning in music, the deferred gratifications of melodic/harmonic tensions, though certainly an excellent summation of the Western music esthetic, could not account for the value and greatness I felt... in all the groovy, sensual musics of the world. So I set out to overturn Meyer's paradigm completely, put syntax at the bottom and "vital drive" or groove on top. I think I was deconstructing the Western civilization esthetic and music-as-text way ahead of the French deconstructionist school. ... [I]t's not about composers bringing forms from on high for mere mortals to realize or approximate, it's about getting down and into the groove, everyone creating socially from the bottom up.<sup>37</sup>

We needn't dig far into Keil's forthright reversal of the old vertical hierarchy, nor assess the actual strength of the resonances with deconstructionists (like Rancière). My point is simply that ethnomusicologists, nearly at the very founding of their discipline, had come to articulate the same critiques of Western art music as the experimentalists. In another text foundational to the field, John Blacking sharpened the critique further, from Keil's inversion of value into a fully-fledged declinist philosophy of history, placing members of Nettl's "primitive cultures" in a sort of musical Eden and the modern West in a state of imprisonment, in which "social and cultural inhibitions...prevent the flowering of musical genius."<sup>38</sup>

We must ask why apparently general musical abilities should be restricted to a chosen few in societies supposed to be culturally more advanced. Does cultural development represent a real advance in human sensitivity and

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<sup>36</sup> His widely influential theory of the "participatory discrepancies" that characterize the sounding surface and practice of participatory musical forms needn't concern us here in its particulars, although future research might usefully assess whether participatory experimental music is equally characterized by the features Keil identifies. See Charles Keil "The Theory of Participatory Discrepancies: A Progress Report." *Ethnomusicology* 39, no. 1, 1995, 1-19.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>38</sup> John Blacking, *How Musical Is Man?* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1974), 7.

technical ability, or is it chiefly a diversion for elites and a weapon of class exploitation? Must the majority be made ‘unmusical’ so that a few may become more ‘musical?’<sup>39</sup>

Like so many of the words and deeds contained in this dissertation, there is much to admire and much to critique in this artifact of the “long Sixties.” One feature of Keil’s and Blacking’s above words that is undoubtedly key to understanding much of experimentalist thought on post-Cage participation in Chapters 2 and 3 is the firebrand protestation against and negation of an obstinate value hierarchy that wouldn’t consider any alternatives to Western music. If we were to be slightly ungenerous, we could ascribe such Manichaeian arguments for absolute inclusiveness as a credulous panacea for absolute hierarchy, tarring with the same brush both the avant-garde ideal of deskilled utopia as well as the naïve ethnographic ideal of a primitive Eden. Or, we could somewhat excuse the prevalence of binarized, absolutist dualities in both musical discourses of the long Sixties, on the basis of their shared mission to uproot an intractable Eurocentrism. I point this out in part to suggest that experimentalism was not necessarily unique or special in its implacable oppositions and rhetorical enmities in those days, as well as to suggest that, with time, such positions can attain greater nuance.

Today’s ethnomusicological theories of participation retain many of Keil’s and Blacking’s basic axioms and critiques, but offer subtler articulations that might be especially useful in pointing us beyond dualisms of skill/deskilling, Western/Other, composition/co-creation, and even exclusivity/inclusion. Thus, in his recent synthetic work on the politics of musical participation, Thomas Turino defines participatory performance as an “artistic practice in which there are no artist-audience distinctions,

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 4.

only participants and potential participants performing different roles, and the primary goal is to involve the maximum number of people in some performance role.”<sup>40</sup> Here, he moves beyond the notion that participatory musics are inherently without specialization or are completely absent of hierarchy, critiquing the mistaken, though widely held belief that “participatory music must be uniformly simple so that everyone can join in.”<sup>41</sup> Instead, he devotes himself to showing how “the inclusion of people with a wide range of abilities within the same performance is important for inspiring participation. ... People at each level can realistically aspire to and practically follow the example of people at the next level above them.” This “provides reachable goals for people at all skill levels.”<sup>42</sup> Thus, Turino’s formulation of participation-within-hierarchy looks slightly “conservative” by the lights of the radical egalitarianisms discussed above. Yet this is a function of its nuance: it makes room both for the transmission of traditional knowledge that can lead to (desirable) mastery—not everyone is assumed to be equal, and you can’t just “teach yourself.” But, perhaps refiguring the trope of dialogical and experiential pedagogy, the ladder to mastery can be climbed within the site of music-making itself; amateurs become masters *through* participation.

Thus, moving away somewhat from the oppositional dialectics of skill-deskilling, I turn, in Chapters 4 and 5, to a set of pedagogical sites and ideas of participation that, to a degree, partake of the slate-wiping naturalist mentality of the Sixties, but in other ways are perhaps better characterized by Turino’s framework of participatory traditionalism. In the sites I visit in Chapter 4—the pedagogical efforts of the Black Arts Movement-era

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<sup>40</sup> Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 26.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 1. Turino’s case studies are Shona mbira music (Zimbabwe), Aymara sikuri music (Peru), and contra-dancing (US).

collectives AACM, UGMAA and Black Artist’s Group—and, Woodstock’s Creative Music Studio (CMS) in Chapter 5, conceptions of musical virtuosity, grounded in the traditions of jazz while moving beyond them, managed to coexist with tendencies towards “deskilling.” There are certain resemblances between Oliveros’ *Sonic Meditations* and AACM/CMS affiliate Anthony Braxton’s “Introduction to Cell Structure and Language Design” scores (the subject of my analysis in Chapter 5) — both are works, aimed at music learners, that aim to “reskill” the student and the group in a new way of making music that claims little or no basis in tradition. Both model inclusivity and anti-Eurocentrism through an abstracted, post-cultural notion of music’s “building blocks” that is mirrored in innovations in the actual form of the notation itself.

Yet in what remains perhaps the most provocative case that I analyze (in Chapter 4), a 1972 Human Arts Ensemble recording of completely free improvisations by a group that includes a six year-old child,<sup>43</sup> I locate an experimentalist reformulation of one of Turino’s most important observations about participatory traditions: they bring people of widely varied skill levels together, which in turn engenders learning and transmission in and through musical co-action. However, at the same time, in making a kind of music that seems to avoid the repetition and stabilization necessary for the transmission of positive musical content from master to novice, the Human Arts Ensemble’s authorization of a child’s equality of authorial agency and status within a wide-open, anti-traditional free improvisation seems, on the other hand, to directly countermand Turino’s assumption of what music is made of, which is to say, stable, identifiable practices and

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<sup>43</sup> Human Arts Ensemble was closely linked to St. Louis’ Black Artists’ Group, with its members, especially Oliver Lake, later active in the orbit of AACM and CMS. See Chapter 4.

traditions. Such an authorization of the child's equality suggests an extreme articulation of what Paul Gilroy calls "strategic universalism," a polemical re-valuation of shared "species being" that cuts across race, age, and ability. For Gilroy, this is explicitly "counter-anthropological," an optimistic assertion of human potential beyond all observed "facts" about the nature of the human.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, through such figurations of amateur "non-musicians" caught in the paradoxical, impossible act of *making their own music*, this dissertation concludes on a note of audacious propositions that locate the individual human being over and above the demands of concerted, collective, enculturated, ritualized co-action—which, ironically, are precisely the things that ethnomusicologists like Turino believe are fundamental *to* participatory music-making. Yet, lest the iconoclastic individual have the last word in a document putatively about group participation, I want to mine the ethnomusicological literature on participation for one last assertion, this time of the very value of musical participation itself. In tension, perhaps, with what we might deem his focus on the actual fact of specialization and differentiation *within* participation, Turino still holds that participatory musics enact a kind of provisional or contingent *striving* towards the state of non-hierarchy, and that they do it better than other kinds of music:

What happens during a good performance is that the multiple differences among us are forgotten and we are fully focused on activity that emphasizes our sameness... Within the bounded and concentrated frame of musical performance *that sameness* is all that matters... This experience is akin to what anthropologist Victor Turner (1969) calls *communitas*, a possible collective state achieved through rituals where all personal differences...are stripped away allowing people to temporarily merge through their basic humanity.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Paul Gilroy *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 96, 220, 327,333, 348-9.

<sup>45</sup> Turino *Music as Social Life*, 18.

We might call this, to somewhat echo Rancière, a strategic egalitarianism: it is asserted and enacted against all the evidence that we are *not* the same. Thus, despite the many differences separating “highly-authored” experimentalist approaches to participation from the traditions Turino catalogues, here is one important commonality. In what follows, the striving towards *communitas* will collide, again and again, with individuals’ will towards authorship, alterity and experiment. But though such individuals and their radical experiments may offend the collective and hobble the chances for wide communion, I want to re-float some past proposals, and to propose myself, a music that could be both *against* tradition and yet *for* the wider human community.

## Chapter 2.

### Deschooling composition, Deskilling Performance: Cage at the New School

Art historians have judged John Cage's music to be an important progenitor to the art historical trajectory of "participatory art." In a genre-defining museum survey at SFMOMA, *The Art of Participation since 1950*, Cage's *4'33"*, his famed and extensively discussed "silent piece," appears as the first item in the catalogue, and is then immediately followed by the works of those whom he directly influenced through his course at the New School for Social Research.<sup>1</sup> By this means, the SFMOMA show situates Cage as perhaps the central font of all that follows. But is, in fact, Cage's own music in any sense actually a "participatory art"? Are the terms by which art historians have evaluated it as such ones to which musicians would assent? Would those (e.g. ethnomusicologists) who study participatory music recognize it as such?

The 2012 centenary of Cage's birth certainly occasioned efforts to assert his legacy as one of benevolent openness to everyone's contributions.<sup>2</sup> For example, at the New York Public Library's "John Cage: A Living Archive" website, the text atop the splash page tells us, "Cage believed that, following his detailed directions, anyone could

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<sup>1</sup> Frieling, *Art of Participation*, 33-34, 82-86, 94.

<sup>2</sup> For other examples, see the numerous musiccircuses that were put on that year, e.g. at the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art, Vanderbilt University, and the Aldeburgh Festival. Peter Dickinson, "John Cage and his Musicircus," *The Guardian* June 20, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/jun/20/john-cage-and-his-musicircus>

make music from any kind of instrument — and so we welcome your interpretations of his music.”<sup>3</sup> Did Cage actually believe this? In his work, did he create “directions” that, realistically, could be interpreted by “anyone?” What sorts of experience and background might be necessary and prefatory to actually being able to realize and re-interpret Cage’s work? What education, enculturation or pedagogy would need to precede participation in the Cagean project?

Thus, this chapter aims to connect the dots between art criticism, which unproblematically links Cage to the discourse of participation, and music studies, which has barely begun to investigate what “participation” in experimentalism might actually mean. At what point in Cage’s long and varied career did participation become central, and what led him there? Tracing the development of Cage’s music alongside his pedagogical work and ideas articulated in the famous class he taught at the New School from 1956-60, this chapter suggests that teaching a group of artists untrained in music may have led Cage to take the crucial steps toward “deskilling” and a concomitant possibility of participation.

In his catalogue essay for the SFMOMA survey, “Towards Participation in Art,” Freiling justifies Cage’s inclusion as central historical progenitor, quoting the composer saying that *4’33* “should make clear to the listener that the hearing of the piece is his own action — that the music, so to speak is his, rather than the composer’s.”<sup>4</sup> However, there is another, much less discussed aspect of *4’33*, which here escapes consideration: the

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<sup>3</sup> “John Cage: A Living Archive.” *New York Public Library*. Accessed April 16, 2015. <http://exhibitions.nypl.org/johncage/>

<sup>4</sup> Cage, quoted in Frieling, *Art of Participation*, 33.

piece is, compared with most other piano music associated with the avant-garde, rather easy to perform.

Thus, I begin with the hypothesis that *4'33"* may be important as an opening to broader-based arts participation in two distinct ways. First, according to Cage, the piece offers the audience the new right and responsibility to make music out of whatever they hear. Kahn has referred to Cage's assignment of music-making to the ear of the beholder as his "musicalization of aurality itself," a phrase and notion to which I will return repeatedly, given its avowed centrality in Cage's project.<sup>5</sup> This is the sense in which Freiling asserts that *4'33"* is participatory: the audience is activated and transformed. But I will give equal attention to a second way in which Cage moves towards the participatory, which has been much less noted: *4'33"* "deskills" the concert performer; no piano training, no manual skill is strictly needed to perform it. Yet, when debuted by piano virtuoso David Tudor in 1952, this deskilling is perhaps still a nascent, germinal feature that would only later bloom in Cage's thought.

One curious feature of Cage in the 1950s is that he routinely denigrated Western art music competencies, even as he continued to rely on them: "Reading music is for musicologists. There is no straight line to be drawn between notes and sounds," he said, in *45' for a Speaker*.<sup>6</sup> True enough, perhaps, but to perform Cage's scores of the 1950s, music reading remained a wholly essential precondition to participation. Though as early as 1953, Cage would claim in print that he has severed all dependence on Western art music "tradition," anyone who wanted to play his music would need to be steeped in that

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<sup>5</sup> Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*, 102.

<sup>6</sup> Cage, *Silence*, 172.

tradition as only a formal Western art music education could provide. The musicological literature on Cage, ensconcing him as another Great Composer in a lineage stretching back to Europe, has been premised centrally on Cage's making of scores in this notational tradition (that is, scores written for to be interpreted by music-trained performers). In pointing this out, Piekut suggests that music scholarship itself is binding him ever tighter to that tradition by emphasizing this very continuity.<sup>7</sup> To focus on the aspects of his work that try hardest to sever that link with music-trained, conventionally-skilled performers (as this chapter does) may, in turn, suggest another modality of an "experimentalism otherwise," as Piekut has called for.

Thus, I will show how, in the 1960s, Cage eventually moved into creating work that facilitated (or at least made possible) the participation of those without musical training. His work, throughout most of the decade, exhibited a clearing away of the entrenched limits (and permissions) which had traditionally licensed performers to realize composers' scores, an increasingly plain "deskilling" of the performers, who, more and more, could stand on stage and do actions that anyone, regardless of musical experience, might be able to do. Thus, to reiterate the definition given in the introduction: by "deskilling," I do not mean that no skills were needed to perform this music. Rather, deskilling here refers to de-emphasis, refusal and reversal of the *traditional* set of skills and competencies that credential musicians as such, the competencies that one would learn in formalized study of Western art music.

However, while such deskilling would seem to imply the utter antithesis and opposure of music pedagogy, my core argument, as throughout this dissertation, concerns

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<sup>7</sup> Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 15-18.

the ongoing relationship between such deskilling and pedagogy. Because the very notion of “music education” is so closely tied to pedagogies that train or “skill” students for Western art music, pedagogies of experimentalism might at first appear to be anti-pedagogies (just as much of the “deskilled” art of the early 1960s has been received as anti-art).<sup>8</sup> So, in what follows, I trace Cagean deskilling through two interrelated senses or scenes of pedagogy: in one, I look at Cage in the classroom (a commonsense definition of pedagogy); in the other, I consider Cage’s “pedagogy” in the expanded definition granted it by critical pedagogy discourse: the forming and transforming of subjectivities through communicative and cultural practices, through the educative function of music itself.

### **Cage in the Classroom**

Cage’s course at the New School for Social Research is often mentioned as an art historical shorthand for the transmission of Cagean ideas to the artists who studied with him there.<sup>9</sup> These included George Brecht, Al Hansen, Allan Kaprow, Jackson Mac Low, Toshi Ichiyangi, and Robert Watts, all quickly becoming important as founders of Fluxus, Happenings, and conceptualism. But what exactly was transmitted in this course, and did all the lessons flow in one direction, from teacher to students? One core question here (which will re-appear in each chapter) is: what is the relationship between music-pedagogical sites (that is, in classrooms self-defined by the teaching of music) and the history of experimental music? If Cage’s pedagogy was of such momentous art-historical

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<sup>8</sup> Frieling, *Art of Participation*, 34-5.

<sup>9</sup> See for example, Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*, 275-278; and Ken Friedman, Owen Smith, Lauren Sawchyn, eds., *Fluxus Performance Workbook* (N.p: Performance Research, 2002), 1.

import, I contend, it would be useful to know more about what this pedagogy actually was like, what its goals and means were. What might we learn from the apparent success of Cage's pedagogy?

I want to suggest that, far from a simple transmission of already-cooked Cagean ideas to his pupils, the New School course *engendered* a key change in Cage's work towards deskilling. The key insight here is that, only after he found himself teaching music composition to people who *lacked* any background in music would Cage start to remove the precondition of Western notational literacy from his own scores—potentially following his students as much as leading them into a terrain in which writing and performing “music” was thinkable and practical even without “musicians.” Once this “deskilling” is accomplished (that is, obviating the necessity of the traditional skillset which, at least for the purposes of Western art music, had distinguished musicians from non-musicians), a door is opened to gradually invite various forms of broadened participation—not only that of artists who are not trained as musicians (as in so much early Fluxus), but also of audiences and potentially even wider notions of “the public.”

Careful attention to this period necessarily results in a decentering of the narrative of Cage as the leading progenitor of participation, in advance of his New School students. Schimmel's catalogue essay for the influential *Out of Actions* exhibition situates Allan Kaprow's Happenings as a pupil's response to Cage's preexisting interest in “encouragement of the participation of audience members [which] was motivated by his desire to relinquish authorial control.”<sup>10</sup> In my view, this is a coarse and inaccurate

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Schimmel, “Leap into the Void: Performance and the Object”, in *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979*, (New York, London: MoCA Los Angeles, 1998), 63.

narration of the history. From at least 1952, Cage certainly relinquished *authorial* control: to chance procedures, environmental and contingent sounds (4'33"), and performer choice (as in Tudor's production of new performance scores cementing many of the choices left open by Cage's indeterminate manuscripts).<sup>11</sup> However, careful attention to Cage's catalogue doesn't easily support either Schimmel's chronology or his causality when it comes to the issues of audience participation.

Exemplary of the over-attribution to Cage in the history of participatory art is the oft-made statement that Cage's *Black Mountain Piece* (1952) was the "first Happening."<sup>12</sup> In that work, Cage invited artists from multiple media (including poet Charles Olson, dancer Merce Cunningham, and painter Robert Rauschenberg) each to present their work during specific time intervals, whose sequence and duration Cage determined using chance procedures. The audience was seated in the round, meaning that the proscenial arrangement characteristic of concert hall performance was also disrupted; there was no privileged perspective on the events, which unfolded all around the audience.<sup>13</sup> If by "Happening" we mean a performance engaging multiple media, combining art forms in a semi- or non-coordinated manner, or utilizing a non-standard seating arrangement for the audience, perhaps *Black Mountain Piece* was a Happening. However, despite being named in numerous sources (usually in the same breath as Kaprow), Cage's *Black Mountain Piece* obviously falls short of the narrower and more precise definition of Happenings as propounded by Kaprow, as events in which audience

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<sup>11</sup> Piekut *Experimentalism Otherwise*. 56-7.

<sup>12</sup> William Fetterman, *John Cage's Theatre Pieces: Notations and Performances* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996), 97-104.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 97-104.

members' own activities are scored, or their spontaneous interaction otherwise welcomed, such that the audience members become participants in the performance.<sup>14</sup>

So, critiquing the view of Cage as *originator* of participatory Happenings, I will trace the issue of broad-based participation through his career, particularly between 1957-9 (when Kaprow, George Brecht and other artists raised the issue of everyday activity and broad-based participation in Cage's New School class, and when Cage moved towards his decade-long abandonment of Western music notation) and 1967 (when Cage created his first *Musicircus*, arguably the culmination of *his* work articulating an aesthetic of broad-based participation). In between these signposts, I devote substantial analysis to works by students in Cage's class and by members of the closely related Fluxus circle, developing related ideas in the same milieu and at the same time as Cage. Telescoping in on the development of Cage, Kaprow, and Brecht's work during their interactions in the course, I am interested in understanding how *scoring* "participation" first became a concern in the context of a course which was nominally concerned with music composition. But what "music composition" meant for Cage, what means could be employed in scoring it and what materials it could include, would undoubtedly shift between Cage starting to teach the course in 1956 and its final iteration in 1960.

To introduce their shared investigation using an extremely broad brush, all these artists—Cage and his students—would contribute, by about 1960, to dethroning one of the key assumptions that had pertained in Western performing art forms: that the forms of

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<sup>14</sup> Kaprow's first known use of "Happening" is in the text "Influence of Jackson Pollack," (1958) He then titles his 1959 Reuben Gallery show *18 Happenings in Six Parts*, and inaugurates the audience-participatory Happening as a genre of performance. C.W.E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama: Volume 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 45. See also Schimmel, "Leap into the Void", 61ff.

performance (particularly music and theatre) are a class of actions clearly separate from ordinary life. Though characterized by vast differences, all these areas of artistic practice (Fluxus events, Cagean music, Happenings) would incorporate a strong focus on elements borrowed from the “everyday,” and indeed blur the border between daily life and performance. Scholars have dealt with “the everyday” primarily as a subset of “chance” and an outgrowth of Cagean indeterminacy.<sup>15</sup> But rather than subordinating “the everyday” to these well-known terms in Cagean aesthetics, I want to suggest a reading of “the everyday,” instead, as a kind of deskilling, where everyday actions represent an antidote and replacement for the specialized class of dexterous, trained or otherwise exclusive art practices, which fall under the regime of traditional musical skill and training.

### **Of Radios and Staves**

But hadn't Cage been working with everyday actions for quite some time? He certainly *had* worked with everyday objects and certain sorts of “everyday” sounds, but always in a notational and presentational matrix that yoked such actions close to more traditional notions of musical performance. As early as 1951, Cage had composed his first work that calls for *none* of the instruments of the Western classical instrumentarium. His *Imaginary Landscape #4* is scored for conductor and 24 players, each one either turning the volume or tuning knob on one of 12 radios. Yet Cage's score is written, somewhat curiously, in Western notation—despite the fact that this might not be an

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<sup>15</sup> See Rebecca Y. Kim, “In No Uncertain Musical Terms: The Politics of John Cage's Indeterminacy.” (Ph.D dissertation, Columbia University, 2008), 143-160; Branden W. Joseph, “Chance, Indeterminacy, Multiplicity” in *The Anarchy of Silence: John Cage and Experimental Art*. Organized by Julia Robinson. (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona [MACBA], 2009), 210-238.

intuitive or even particularly useful manner of notation for an action as seemingly simple and one-dimensional as turning a single knob.<sup>16</sup> Yet, in writing about the compositional process behind *Imaginary Landscape #4* for the German music journal *Die Reihe*, an organ of the Darmstadt serialists, Cage concludes with a proudly polemical assertion of his music's liberation from any trace of Western musical history and practice. His work, Cage claims, is 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.”<sup>17</sup>

Yet, despite the sneering quotation marks around “tradition,” this work was debuted with Cage beating time in front of an orchestra of 24 radio-players who couldn't have made head or tail of the notation unless they were extremely conversant in the “literature and ‘traditions’” of Western art music. Indeed, music literacy is explicitly, almost willfully demanded: the range of the dial has been super-imposed on the Western 5-line staff, with the knob turns notated as glissandi between definite pitches. While someone with no music training could perhaps, with a bit of practice, interpret the “pitch” axis as an indefinite graph paper, the score marks the durations of its knob-turns with a scrum of precisely notated eighth-note rhythms. These must be executed in relation to the conductor's constantly shifting ictus, whose tempo changes have, like all the rhythms and “pitches” in each part, been determined by chance operations.

The obvious result was that only musicians with a background in reading Western notation (almost invariably acquired through training on a traditional Western instrument) could have been among Cage's performers—although one could imagine an alternate

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<sup>16</sup> Fetterman, *John Cage's Theatre Pieces*, 18-19.

<sup>17</sup> Cage, *Silence*, 59./

means of notating such a work that lacks Western instruments. Performers for *Imaginary Landscape #4* are required to transfer the knowledge acquired in substantial formal musical training to the new context of playing the radios in conductor-beated time. This expanded technical challenge would inevitably narrow, not expand, the potential pool of performers; expanding the pool of participants is clearly not (yet) a concomitant of expanded sonic resources.

Some five years later, Cage would finally create a radio piece that was performable by someone without musical training. *Radio Music* (1956) consist merely of a table of numbers—time points and associated numbers that correspond to radio frequencies to be sought on the dial. 1956 was, perhaps not coincidentally, also the year Cage begins teaching a course for “those with or without musical training,” a course in which he assigned his non-musician pupils the task of composing for portable radios. It is telling that radios would be the appropriate “instrument” for performances by the musically untrained, because, by playing radios, performers are truly blurring the line between music-making and music-listening—the same line whose blurring makes *4’33”* such a putatively important precursor to participatory art.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Yet by handing non-musicians a radio—a consumer object designed for media consumption—and telling them to “make music” with them, Cage offers, it seems to me, a rather equivocal empowerment. While radio-playing is certainly a mode of non-specialist participation that requires no prior training, the music coming out of the radios, and thus the sounding content of the radio-playing participants, is still wholly dependent on professionally produced and transmitted music. In this sense, Cage’s 1950s work with radios would set the terms for a number of later works in which consumer technologies are harnessed to pull already-mediated music into collision in the performance space. Such a strategy would reappear both in the large-scale radio reception event *Variations VII* (1966) as well as his 1969 interactive phonograph installation *33 1/3*, which consists of an arrangement of multiple consumer sound systems, turntables and hundreds of records which visitors can play and overlay as they wish.

This installation was created for one of Cage’s large-scale musicircus events, which concludes this chapter. For *Variations VII*, see Douglas Kahn, *Earth Sound Earth Signal: Energies and Earth Magnitude in the Arts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 115-17. For *33 1/3*, see Pritchett, *Music of John Cage*, 158. Such strategies of interaction with mediatized music obviously prefigure some of the elements of “participatory culture” to which new media scholars like Henry Jenkins have been so attentive.

Aside from the important exceptions provided by these works for radios alone, Cage's uses of everyday objects would remain largely yoked to the more traditional instruments of Western art music for most of the 1950s. In *Water Music*, from 1952, Cage extends the ideas he had long been developing around everyday objects in and as musical instruments (e.g. in his early percussion music and preparations for the piano) in the direction of multisensory, intermedia theatricality. Written for piano and 12 other objects (whistles, receptacles for water, a deck of cards), the score blends actions from disparate domains, such that the performer alternates rapidly between traditionally-notated passages at the piano with non-piano actions like "pour[ing] water from one receptacle to another." To organize these heterogeneous sorts of stage directions, Cage uses the same strategy he would use in *4'33"* or *Black Mountain Piece* (both also composed 1952); he assigns each action a precise time-point in fractional seconds, in this case down to the specification of three decimal places.<sup>19</sup>

*Water Music* utilizes traditional staff notations for the passages at the piano. Thus, bits of Western notation appear on the page alongside the straightforward text instructions about what to do with the other objects, which read rather like a theatrical stage direction. But because of the presence of the traditional staff notations, the

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"Remix" aesthetics make it possible that those without traditional art-making skillsets can still express themselves through reconfiguration of extant media objects. Cage's particular implementations, however, reproduce and enact the conventional split between music-listening and music-making by calling attention to consumer devices and to mediatized contexts for music listening. Nonetheless, most scholars emphasize instead how Cage places the listener/consumer "in" the piece and permits these mediated musics to interpenetrate and overlap. But Jenkins understands the underlying means by which remix aesthetics facilitate participation as "a process by which students learn by taking culture apart and putting it back together." Do Cage's uses of mediatized music permit this? If not, in what sense are they facilitating meaningful participation? See Henry Jenkins, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 55ff.

<sup>19</sup> Andre Mount "Laughter Over Tears: John Cage, Experimental Art Music, and Popular Television" *Andre Mount Researchblog* June 2, 2010. <http://researchblog.andremount.net/?p=505>.

necessity of a piano, and the demanding hyper-specificity of the time-points, this score certainly depends on trained performers and thus just tweaks, rather than rejecting, the norms of Western art music concert hall performance.<sup>20</sup> In its incorporation of everyday objects and sounds—which must be triggered with precision and speed—*Water Music* thus manages to double down on, rather than interrogate, the assumption that experimental music is, like most notated music in the Western tradition, written to be performed by highly specialized interpreters.

David Tudor came to represent the vanishing point of such hyper-specialization and virtuosity; by 1958, some of Cage’s notations had become so exotic and complex that, at the time, perhaps only Tudor could probably have read, let alone played them. Of the *Solo For Piano* from the *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* (1957-58), Pritchett claims “Cage knew he could entrust such an idiosyncratic score *only* to [Tudor]” (emphasis mine).<sup>21</sup> Not long after the completion of this enormous work, Pritchett suggests, Cage’s work undergoes a major shift: “he ceased making musical *scores* in in any sense of the term, and instead began making what Pritchett calls “tools”: works which do not describe events...but which instead present a procedure by which to *create* any number of descriptions or scores.”<sup>22</sup>

Piekut points out, however, that Tudor had already been using Cage’s indeterminate notations as in this way, producing his own realizations in the form of (surprisingly determinate, unchanging) performance scores. Piekut’s larger aim here, in the context of his retelling of the New York Philharmonic’s supposed disrespect and

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<sup>20</sup> In Mount’s analysis, *Water Walk* is “essentially a concert piece for solo pianist.” Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Pritchett, *Music of John Cage*, 123.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 126.

butchery of Cage's *Atlas Eclipticalis* in 1964, is to expose the tension in Cage's formulation of indeterminacy: it represents a heroic freedom and independence *from* Western art music tradition that is nevertheless made possible and mediated *by* mastery of that tradition. Tudor and the rest of the tiny cadre of committed Cage interpreters "had already been trained in more conventional art music traditions...[and] had *chosen* this position within indeterminacy."<sup>23</sup> But by contrast, the traditionalist players in the New York Philharmonic, who "could not be trusted to handle the freedoms of indeterminacy," must be held to the demands of *werktreue*, or fidelity to the score. For Piekut, the tension is at its rawest when, on the one hand, the Philharmonic musicians must be scolded by their employers (and excoriated by Cage in print) for not playing the music as written and inserting traditionally classical-sounding improvisations, yet Cage himself, performing the work's electronics from the mixing board, is free to dispose of his score and improvise. Here, the Cagean indeterminate score is almost a cudgel to discipline musicians imprisoned by Western art music convention, into Cage's particular formulation of freedom.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps we can see the details and the difficulties of Cage's more traditional (that is, Western art music-based) notations in this light: they are tools to teach traditionally trained musicians how it might sound to free themselves from that training.

More broadly, Cage's instrumental works of the 1950s and early 60s seem to demand performers who had attained both literacy and mastery in Western art music, yet who are also comfortable critiquing and rejecting nearly everything in the culture

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<sup>23</sup> Emphasis is Piekut's, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 49.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 49, 63.

surrounding their skill and literacy. Reliant and comfortable as he was in his close collaboration with Tudor and a few other sympathetic interpreters, Cage moved only gradually to loosen his insistence on and need for music-trained performers; after all, the performers he had attracted were acting as his trusted emissaries, perhaps even as missionaries for his ideals. The strategy of reliance on Tudor was working so well, it seemed, that Cage could, over time, give over yet more co-compositional authority to him. The first of what Pritchett terms Cage's "tool" compositions (*Music Walk*, *TV Köln* both early 1958), were both written for piano, and for Tudor. Like the scores for *Fontana Mix* and the early *Variations*, these consist of rules and diagrams that are to be used to derive the parameters and timings of sound events, inevitably yielding the sorts of realizations, highly controlled and difficult to precisely execute, for which Tudor had made himself indispensable.<sup>25</sup>

But over the next few years, these tool compositions became progressively less bound to concert tradition, classical instrumentation, and indeed, to the centrality of sound itself. *Music Walk* may represent a jumping off point, beyond expectations of particular instruments and interpretive skill sets: its parameterization of sound refers specifically to the piano ("plucked or muted strings," "notes played on the keyboard"), and its graphic includes dots on a diagonal 5-line staff (albeit one which no longer signifies pitches). *Variations I* (also 1958, dedicated to Tudor) refers more obliquely to the piano and its attendant notational universe. Its parameterization of sound specifies sonic morphology (frequency, amplitude, overtone structure), not instrument-specific gesture. Like the musical staff, the graphics in *Variations I* still contain five lines each,

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<sup>25</sup> Pritchett, *Music of John Cage*, 126-33, 136-37.

now on transparency, but the lines no longer run in parallel, and cross one another at varied angles like the yarrow stalks of the I-Ching.<sup>26</sup> This visual fragmentation of the western staff from *Music Walk* to *Variations I* would be just the first of these purposeful disintegrations of Western music performance's norms. Over the course of their close collaboration on the subsequent *Variations*, Cage and Tudor would progressively abandon nearly all the trappings of Western art music practice, moving gradually away from pianos and written scores into amplified everyday actions, electronic systems, feedback, and improvisation.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, throughout most of the 1950s, Cage's compositional practices did *not* necessarily imply or even invite the possibility of non-musicians participating in performance. Relying on the skills of music-trained virtuosos and taking the composer-performer relation more or less as given, Cage evidenced only scant interest in composing scores that untrained musicians could realize. The exceptions, *Radio Music* and perhaps *4'33"*, are instructive—they both seem to dramatize listening itself, enacting a performance of perceptually or mechanically “tuning in” to sounds inaudible or ignored (rather than to sounds actually *made* or acoustically triggered, by a non-musician). Nevertheless, questions of skill, training and competence must have been, at some level, of interest to him. Otherwise, what would have led him to open up his course in “Experimental Composition” at the New School to “those with or without musical training,” as he put it in the description for the course catalog, starting in 1956?<sup>28</sup> Perhaps this was intended as another challenge to the Western art music establishment, another

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 136-37.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 146-154.

<sup>28</sup> Kim, “In No Uncertain Musical Terms,” 132.

chance to iconoclastically announce the sort of severance with music history he had trumpeted in *Die Reihe*, another means of groping towards a more perfect disunion with all traditions.

Thus, as I will suggest repeatedly throughout this dissertation, the opening up of broader-based *participation* in experimental music seems often to occur at an interface with *pedagogical sites*. Though Cage had had some short-term academic affiliations before the New School (most notably at Black Mountain College), his first experience as the instructor of a repeating, ongoing academic course began in 1956. Explicitly locating his formulation of experimental music in contrast to Western art music tradition (and, in effect, to the content of any and every other college composition course likely available at the time), Cage distances himself, in his course description for the New School course catalog, from most (and later, all) historical precedent, while maintaining a focus on the sonic:

A course in musical composition with technical, musicological, and philosophical aspects, open to those with or without previous training.

Whereas conventional theories of harmony, counterpoint, and musical form are based on the pitch and frequency components of sound, this course offers problems and solutions in the field of composition based on other components of sound: duration, timbre, amplitude, and morphology; the course also encourages inventiveness.

A full exposition of the contemporary musical scene in the light of the work of Anton Webern, and present developments in music for magnetic tape (*musique concrete; elektronische Musik*).<sup>29</sup>

In summer 1959, Cage would remove this final paragraph, this erasure completing the flight from an extant musical tradition of past masters and techniques.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 132, n8.

Yet, given its focus on the morphology of sound, the course description is hardly a warm invitation to visual artists, and would seem to suggest a Darmstadt-esque focus on the quasi-objective parameterization of sound. Yet for reasons that are not altogether clear, by the time he enrolled in 1958, Brecht recalls that the class contained no Western-trained musicians. Brecht relates his first impressions of Cage's pedagogy, confirming both his planned focus on the analysis of sound morphology outside of the context of music traditions: "In the first class, he talked about the properties of music in terms of dynamics, duration, envelope, and so forth. First, he asked who everybody was, what you did, why you were there, and did you know anything about music. Most people didn't. There weren't any musicians, trained musicians."<sup>31</sup>

So how to teach music composition to such a group? Despite Cage's obvious *interest* in the consideration of sound as such (that is, outside of its structuring in extant music traditions), there were few techniques in his own past compositional output that would provide an example of *how* exactly untrained musicians might go about beginning to compose. At the beginning of 1958, Cage had just one score – *Radio Music* – whose instructions would be legible outside of the cultural matrix of Western art music, with its particular notation and conservatory-credentialled interpreters.<sup>32</sup> Is it possible that, *because* of the necessity of rethinking notational communication (and with it, compositional possibility) alongside his music-untrained students that he began to shift

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<sup>31</sup> "George Brecht: Interview by Michael Nyman," *Studio International* 192 (Nov/Dec 1976), 256-66 collected in *Michael Nyman: Collected Writings*, ed. Pwyll ap Siôn, (London: Ashgate, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> Brecht specifically recalled an assignment Cage gave for students to write for "five portable radios.", *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-garde, 1957-1963*, ed. Joan Marter (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 39.

his own project away from staff notation, and towards the sorts of text instruction favored by Kaprow and Brecht?

Over the course of his association with his New School students, Cage's reliance on Western notation would weaken and then disappear.<sup>33</sup> After *Atlas Eclipticalis* (1961), a major orchestral commission and one whose prestige he eagerly sought, he would hardly ink another five-line staff until the end of the decade.<sup>34</sup> Julia Robinson finds a particularly powerful piece of evidence that Cage was influenced by his non-musician students in his late revision of *4'33"* from versions that utilized Western grand staff into its final, definitive version, which is all text:

[I]n 1952, *4'33"* was conventionally notated. In 1953, when Cage began to frame the piece in relation to his project at large, he reformulated the score as a graphic object. It appeared as a series of vertical lines on white pages (where 1/8 inch equaled 1 second), elegantly echoing the abutments of Rauschenberg's white canvases. At the end of the 1950s, as he was teaching his class, the most radical transformation came. Since the artists and poets among Cage's students could not write music, they composed their own experimental works with words, widening the conceptual scope of the score in the process. At this time, Cage redefined his *4'33"* for the last time, casting it into text, with one word for each of the three movements: "tacet," "tacet," "tacet."<sup>35</sup>

Along with the rejection of the musical staff, Cage thus re-invents *4'33"* ("sometime around 1960," according to Pritchett) by removing it from the musical staff and turning it into an Event-score not unlike those which were invented by Cage's student George Brecht in the context of the New School course.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> In practice, however, he would remain reliant on music-trained performers like Tudor—although it's equally the case that a non-musician *could* read, interpret and realize the later *Variations*.

<sup>34</sup> After the brief farewell to staff paper in 1962's *Music for Piano 85*, Cage would write no more works with Western notation until 1969's *HPSCHD* and *Cheap Imitation*.

<sup>35</sup> Robinson, "From Abstraction to Model," 82n6.

<sup>36</sup> Pritchett, *Music of John Cage*, 208n22.

It is important to keep in mind that the enrollees for his course on music composition were not *only* musical amateurs, they were also active as artists in other media, primarily painting and writing. Unsurprisingly, then, these students' knowledge and comfort in their own media would flow in to fill the gap of their musical amateurism. Indeed, as early as Brecht's *Confetti Music* and *Three Colored Lights* (both 1958), prose was used to describe systems of visual and sonic media, which would cue and trigger one another.<sup>37</sup>

In the context of the New School course, "musical composition" would come to designate such a media-agnostic and resultantly multimedia field of activity. For Cage, temporal duration had long been the factor gluing everything together, the medium in which the musicality of putatively non-musical or environmentally contingent events would become recuperated into his expanded definition of music: sounds in time. Indeed, his previous engagement at an academic institution, at Black Mountain College in 1952, and the interaction of artists across media had compelled him to loosen his definition still further, to actions (in any artistic media) in time.<sup>38</sup> Yet Cage's definition of what it meant for something to occur "in time" was a rigorously controlled one throughout the 1950s; as in *Water Music or Radio Music*, he would characteristically assign timepoints, sometimes down to a fraction of a second, to tightly circumscribe the moment and duration that each activity would occupy. This, too, was his means of composition in *Black Mountain Piece*. By dictating "time brackets within which to work" to the participating artists, he structured the interpenetration and overlap of their performance activities (reading poetry,

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<sup>37</sup> Robinson, "From Abstraction to Model," 85; Brecht, "Interview by Michael Nyman."

<sup>38</sup> Fetterman, *John Cage's Theatre Pieces*, 97-104.

dancing, and the display of slides). Through the imposition of this temporal structure, Cage rendered their activity, in his cosmology, part of musical composition. He left the content of these other artists' performance up to them, but this is not to say that *Black Mountain Piece* was in any important sense an innovation in broadening the terms of artistic participation beyond the normalized definitions of who is an artist. All of the performers in the *Black Mountain Event* were already "authorized" practitioners in their own media.<sup>39</sup> Thus, *Black Mountain Piece* is a simultaneous multi-media performance structured via Cagean control of durations, but it's not, by any but the loosest and most informal definition of the word, a "Happening" on Kaprow's two most important metrics: audience participation and art-life blurring.

I want to introduce the possibility that, in terms of his historical importance to the genesis of participatory art, Cage's key act during the 1950s might not have been his compositions, but was rather his pedagogy. In particular, by welcoming "those with or without musical training," Cage *passed on* the responsibility and permission to compose music to individuals who radically fell short of the traditional qualifications. Thus, it is a curious feature of Cage's chronology that he welcomed people unskilled in Western art music to participate in musical *composition* before he moved to welcome similarly unskilled people in the performance of *his* own compositions. The obvious irony is that, for those proceeding up the conventional ladder to mastery in nearly all Western art music pedagogical contexts, instrumental performance skills precede performance, which long precedes any opportunity to study and practice composition. Thus, Cage's initial

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 101-4. Further evidence of the unquestioned authority of the artists in their media: All but Rauschenberg were, in fact, faculty, visiting or permanent, of the college; many in the audience were students.

“deskilling” of experimental music is less an opening up of musical performance than it is a deskilling of notation, score-making and musical ideation.

Thus, I am suggesting that the task of trying to teach “composition” to a class full of artists in diverse media might militate for broadening the scope of composition activity beyond the sphere of sound. It might also discourage, if not preclude, the use of the Western art music notational conventions and the concomitant expectation of performance by music-trained performers. Yet the fact is that such conventions remained, well into 1958, at the center of Cage’s notational practice. It wasn’t until after the famous cohort of Cage’s New School students, including Allan Kaprow and George Brecht (close associates in New Jersey), assembled in 1957-1958 that Cage’s own notational practice would shift predominantly towards graphics with ambiguous relation to the Western staff, and even later towards text only. And, with the exception of *Radio Music*, it wasn’t until after his former students had built the Event score and Happening into developed, thriving genres that Cage would score another ensemble work that could be played by people without instrumental proficiency or knowledge of Western staff notation, let alone create works which render the audience as “participants” in the way that Kaprow did from 1959.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> When I refer to “scores,” I am thinking primarily of notational communications designed for interpretation by another person. Tape compositions (realized under the supervision of the composer in a controlled environment where his participation in the production process was key to shaping the work) and works written for the composer to realize himself are, in fact, Cage’s very earliest of works which fully abandon staff notation. Realizing 1958’s *Fontana Mix* required only a command of tape techniques and a disciplined observation of the graphic score. Two pieces from 1959, generated with the *Fontana Mix* score, are potential candidates for inclusion on a list of performed (as opposed to fixed media) works which could be realized by performers without instrumental training or notational literacy: in *Sounds of Venice* and *Water Walk*, the score amounts to a timed choreography of actions, usually on non-instrument objects. Both scores are written for “solo television performer,” which was Cage himself, performing his work on the Italian game show *Lascia o raddoppia*. Pritchett, *Music of John Cage*, 130-2.

I am not interested in overturning the dominant narrative that Cage was a decisive influence upon Happening and Fluxus. Rather, I want merely to point out that, in comparing the timeline of Cage's artistic output with that of his students, influence seems to have flowed in both directions, with Cage appearing to have followed as much as led his students towards an aesthetic of broader-based participation. Or, to put it differently: the presence of musically-untrained, multimedia artists in Cage's New School course (a situation he, of course, engendered through a *pedagogical* innovation that often goes unremarked) would facilitate the breaking down of assumptions about who is qualified to compose and to perform, and that this would in turn dramatically color Cage's own compositional output in the 1960s.

When speaking of their teaching methods, nearly all the experimentalists discussed throughout this dissertation express their antipathy towards hierarchy and tradition, often suggesting that they practice a pedagogy which denies pedagogy itself (a clear echo of Rancière, Illich, etc). Cage's recollection of his work in the New School course is exemplary of this attitude: "The principle of my teaching was not to teach... I wasn't transmitting information, I was trying to encourage the students to find their own way of doing things."<sup>41</sup> Still, Cage did try to offer his students something of his way of doing things, which was closely bound up with his music-notational strategies: "I was about to write the *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* [1957-58], so I already had the idea of space equal to time in terms of notation, so I explained that to them, and it made it very simple for people who weren't even musicians to write music."<sup>42</sup> However, Cage's

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<sup>41</sup> Cage, in Fetterman, *John Cage's Theatre Pieces*, 231.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

space-equals-time method didn't quite catch on with those who participated in Cage's class. Instead, beginning with George Brecht, most of the class (and later, Cage) moved towards all-text instruction as a means of notating increasingly "everyday" actions.<sup>43</sup>

Brecht, in conversation with Michael Nyman many years later, described the genesis of the "Event score" in response to Cage's unique style of pedagogy. Cage would give composition assignments each week "on some chosen topic. We'd work on it before the next class, bring it back and perform it. Some pieces were made on the spot...each person did a piece practically every week."<sup>44</sup> Cage's recollection of the structuring of the course confirms Brecht's: "We did whatever the students had to offer – and I told them not to compose something that could not be performed in that room by those people, but to compose something that we could actually perform."<sup>45</sup> In sharp contrast to Cage's work of the period, then, the expectation of the New School course is *no longer* that scores are transmissions aimed at music-trained performers. Instead, this development (soon becoming important to Cage's work) of writing for non-music-trained performers is an epiphenomenon of the class's all-non-musician make-up. This is to say that the contingencies and affordances of this particular pedagogical situation exerted important effects on artwork produced therein and subsequently—a neat encapsulation of one of my dissertation-wide observations.

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<sup>43</sup> Robinson, "From Abstraction to Model," 85-89.

<sup>44</sup> "George Brecht: Interview by Michael Nyman."

<sup>45</sup> Fetterman, *John Cage's Theatre Pieces*, 231.

### Durations and Text Notations

Initially, Brecht's student work seems to have focused, like Cage's of the period, on systems and processes for determining the placement of sounds in time. Yet, interestingly, Brecht describes this period of his work, the immediate precursor to his invention of the Event score, in terms that lay bear the constellation of disciplinary power and Western art music. In his *Three Colored Lights* (written 1958 for Cage's course), Brecht gave one performer a set of precise timings to turn on and off lights whose illumination would, in turn, cue individuals to make sounds. Though such a scheme is obviously quite indebted to Cage's hyper-specific temporal frameworks, Cage's own objection set Brecht on a different course. "Cage, who had played the piano, said 'I never felt so controlled before' or 'Nobody's ever tried to control me so much.' So I learned that lesson there, I realized that I was being dictatorial in that situation, which makes you think of an orchestral conductor."<sup>46</sup>

Thus, although Brecht had devised a scheme for triggering sounds that seemed to have avoided nearly all trappings of Western art music, the demand of *any* particular compositional arrangement of sounds still conjures a strong link between Western art music and its putatively hierarchic, even totalitarian controls. The very act of one person telling another when to make a sound is thus, in itself, a violation of the ideals of individual freedom and agency on which, this anecdote suggests, Brecht and Cage agreed in principle (even if Cage's notations remained, at this time, every bit as controlling as the situation Brecht describes).

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<sup>46</sup> "George Brecht: Interview by Michael Nyman."

Brecht's response, in the first of his "Event scores," penned the next year, would be to retain Cage's focus on duration and sound-making, but leave the determination of both elements up to the free choice of performers. This work, *Time-Table Music* (Summer 1959), was at least a triple achievement in the direction of broad-based participation: Brecht had discovered the brief and epigrammatic style that would mark so many Fluxus Event scores (the score fits on an index card). He had also pushed performance out of the classroom and into public space (it specifies "For performance in a railway station"), where it could hardly rely on specialized equipment and would necessarily blur with the stuff of everyday life. Finally, the work does not dictate in any way *what* sound performers should make; written for performance by the all-amateur New School class, it goes without saying that proudly "unskilled" sound-making with ordinary objects was expected.

Reflecting on his teaching in the course, Cage recalled his goal was "not to teach a body of information, but simply to lead the students, to tell them who I was in terms of what we were studying, which was composition – then the rest of the time would be spent with what they were doing – so there was a conversation."<sup>47</sup> Brecht's recollection largely bears this out; Cage led the students to the means he was using at the time, which included not only his procedural, notational, and durational schemes, but also specific sound-making tools, including the radio: "Cage would give a theme, for example a composition for five portable radios and the following week you'd come back with five radios and six different proposals. Afterwards we'd play them and everybody would

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<sup>47</sup> Fetterman, *John Cage's Theatre Pieces*, 231

discuss them.”<sup>48</sup> Yet, this assignment is subtly in contrast to Cage’s own work with these objects in *Radio Music* or *Imaginary Landscape #4*, in which the presence of radios and the use of chance procedures to determine durations are effectively the pieces’ sole and motivating ideas. Rather than emphasizing the act of composition as a particular arrangement of elements in time, Cage’s assignments demanded the generation of proposals for new ideas about how to use the objects. The prodigious quantity of ideas he requested (“six different proposals” rather than one single, carefully worked over realization) seems almost to demand the invention of a briefer form of composition. Event scores, after all, can be viewed as *proposals* for action as opposed to specific descriptions of how the action is to be done.<sup>49</sup>

What such proposals-as-works lack in size, they make up for in portability—and, perhaps, usability. Though we can think of the brevity of Brecht’s Event scores as a response to the demands of Cage’s New School assignments, the printing of instructions on index cards represents yet a further flight from Cage’s notion of the score object as a timeline on a page, into a blurred region of book arts, sculpture and mass production. Such cards (which Cage would first use in *Theatre Piece*, 1960) have immense performative affordances that seem to lead away from the music stand and into usage in everyday life. Portable, disposable, shufflable (to create a legible theatrics of randomness, as when the magician says: “pick a card, any card”), decks of instruction cards and other boxed collections quickly became one of Brecht’s (and later, Fluxus’) signature forms. The press release for his first solo show, *towards events: an arrangement*, in October

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<sup>48</sup> Marter, *Off Limits*, 39

<sup>49</sup> For more on Cage’s influence on Brecht, see Joseph, “Chance, Indeterminacy, Multiplicity,” 230-36; and Kim “In No Uncertain Musical Terms,” 143-160, though both scholars are focused on a completely different set of issues, predominantly related to the definition and exegesis of the notion of indeterminacy.

1959, offered that “Mr. Brecht’s latest work suggests that art is to become actively rather than passively existent, to be enjoyed as an unfolding experience.” In suitcases, arrayed on tables, or in wall-mounted cabinets, these were “whose elements may be moved about by the viewer in a manner determined by the nature of the work.”<sup>50</sup> One piece, called *Solitaire*, “is played with a unique set of set of 27 cards, based on the variables number, size and color.”<sup>51</sup> Where Cage threw the I-Ching in private, splitting chance procedures from the site of performance, Brecht offered to the public the ludic, generative, randomized activities that, as he had learned at the New School, Cage called “composition,” suggesting these artistic games of chance as an activity appropriate not only to composer’s studio, but also to the home.

In his first major participatory work, *18 Happenings in Six Parts* (presented in the Reuben Gallery October 1959, during the same month and in the same room as Brecht’s *toward events*), Kaprow also adopted the use of note cards as a kind of distributable score.<sup>52</sup> The program notes for this show betray several notable features: they introduce a “cast of participants” which includes not only artists, who are introduced by medium (among them “Allan Kaprow, who speaks and plays a musical instrument” and “Sam Francis, Red Grooms, Dick Higgins...-each of whom paints”), but right alongside the artists among the “cast” are “the visitors – who sit in various chairs.” The visitors have also been given a set of “Instructions” and a set of three note cards which govern which

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<sup>50</sup> Robinson, “From Abstraction to Model,” 87-8.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 78, whose figure 1 is a reproduction of an “Announcement and object instructions” from Brecht’s *towards events* show.

<sup>52</sup> It has been suggested that *18 Happenings* was the first participatory Happening. Frieling, “Towards Participation,” 33.

of the chairs they sit in, and when, with seat changes “signalled by a bell.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, *18 Happenings* combines two major notational themes of the New School course: Cage’s controls of duration and Brecht’s distributable cards.

Given the preponderance of such tight controls on duration, *18 Happenings* can, like *Time-Table Music*, be viewed as an extension of Cage’s redefinition of music as events in time. Here, time itself, precisely measured, is the crucial shared fabric uniting disparate sound sources or even disparate artistic media. But if Cage’s scoring of the *Black Mountain Piece* provided time intervals for artists in varied media to exercise their pre-existing practices (i.e. the performance practices of otherwise credentialed artists), Kaprow extended the compositional control of time intervals to the movement and experience of the performance attendees. Through the notational control of time, these visitors are fused together with the artists into a “cast of participants”—a new kind of concern with breaking down the boundaries between these groups. From my perspective, this transformation of the audience into “participants”—as it were, by a wave of the wand of semantic redefinition—is closely related to what I regard as Cage’s great achievement with regards to broadened participation: the simple inclusion of those “with or without musical training” in his New School course redefines what can be called a “composer,” and what can be called “composition.”

To describe such acts of transmutation-through-redefinition as “semantic” is not necessarily to impugn them as easily done. Rather, it is to call attention to this redefinition as an act of hope, one which expands conceptual boundaries *so that* more

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<sup>53</sup> Barbara Haskell, *Blam! the Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance, 1958-1964*, (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1984), 32.

people can take part. Or, to put it differently, first Cage, and then his students, invited the transgression of a Western-traditional interdiction (non-musicians can't compose/audiences aren't part of the performance), and thus each engendered a widening circle of participation. What I am proposing is a dissenting notion of avant-garde transgressions, one in which the transgression of prevailing artistic norms is turned towards the purpose of *communitas*.

By contrast, avant-garde shock tactics, those designed to “*épater la bourgeoisie*,” are often thought to alienate audiences, to differentiate the artist from others. Indeed, Piekut even holds that Cage and his associates of this era “expressed a certain scorn for the audience” in their use of avant-gardist transgressions.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps this may be true, but in Brecht and Kaprow's versions of deskillling-for-participation, I perceive no scorn—only the desire to forge the audience into a temporary, enacted unity, accomplished through acts that surrender the artist's privilege so that everyone may share in it. Thus, though Cage perhaps didn't go as far as his students in his direct elicitation of audiences, he set the tone and provided the technique for his students' pro-social transgressions of hierarchy, primarily through his *own* transgressive redefinition: the extension of faith that anyone can compose.

### **Rituals of Listening and Noisemaking**

Yet between Cage's pieces of the early and middle 1960s and those of his New School students Kaprow and Brecht, there remain differences of some significance. In Cage's work of the 1960s, more clear differentiations between performer and audience

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<sup>54</sup> Piekut *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 168.

are maintained, despite Cage's verbal assertions that his music is "made" by, or belongs to, the listener (and thus, that everyone is participating). *4'33"* provides a clear example of Cage's maintenance of the spatial and conceptual boundary between the audience and performer: at the debut performance, the performer is, after all, seated at his instrument, on a concert stage, opening and closing the piano lid and, thus in all these highly coded and ritualized ways, silently articulating the demand that the audience listen *to him*. But even in the 1960s, after Cage's abandonment of the type of concert hall staging on which *4'33"* relied, his ongoing use of loud amplification and his control over the sound system allows him to maintain a concrete pre-eminence in his pieces' sonic materiality.<sup>55</sup> Thus, while in the 1960s, Cage often quite dramatically "deskilled" himself and abnegated the pre-eminence of Western art music, he still remained very much in charge of what came out of the speakers, whether by amplifying himself doing everyday actions (as in *0'00"*) or exploring the potentials of amplified systems that would behave in an unpredictable manner or otherwise deny compositional control (*Cartridge Music, Variations IV-VII*). In all these works, Cage continued to *perform* these works *for* audiences, and to create scores that would enable committed interpreters (especially Tudor and other near associates) to do the same.<sup>56</sup> Very rarely was the audience granted the opportunity to participate in the action, except through the discursive allowance that *anything* that anyone does is "part of the piece," under the regime of the musicalization of aurality. Thus, in the final line of the performance notes to *Variations III* (1962-3), finally makes explicit what had long been assumed about the proper interpretation of *4'33"*: "Any other

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<sup>55</sup> See Piekut *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 42-43 for more on Cage's loudness as a tactic of shock and control.

<sup>56</sup> Pritchett, *Music of John Cage*, 138-146.

activities are going on at the same time.”<sup>57</sup> Note the passive construction that *nearly* but does not quite actually authorize audience members to do as they wish.

By contrast, Fluxus members would seem to have more directly confronted the patina of authority, specialization and musicianly difference than Cage, probing much further the social implications of “deskilling.” Where *4’33”* relies on the performer seated at the piano, Brecht’s *Solo for Wind Instrument* (“Putting it down”) literally removes the specialized tool from the musician’s hands. That many of Brecht’s instrumental works are solos, like *4’33”*, is hardly irrelevant; the instrumental solo is conventionally a place where the highest of virtuosity, the *ne plus ultra* of training, skill and socially differentiated professional musicianship, get their moment to shine and show off. Along with Brecht’s solos of silenced virtuosity, Fluxus artists developed many other ways of staging and dramatizing the deskilling of the traditionally skilled performer and of professional tools. Many other such works go even further towards abnegating the musician’s professional and performerly privilege, often by breaking down instruments, as in Brecht’s *Flute Solo* (“Disassembling. Assembling), or, more aggressively, by simply breaking them, as in Nam June Paik’s *One for Violin* (1961): “The performer raises a violin overhead at a nearly imperceptible rate until it is released full-force downward, smashing it to pieces.”<sup>58</sup>

Without denying the centrality of concert hall social critique (and even purposeful giving-offense) to Fluxus, I want to also suggest that, following the 1959 breakthroughs in audience participation described above, the New School alums and their Fluxus

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>58</sup> Paik in *Fluxus Performance Workbook*, Friedman et al., eds., 24.

associates would proceed much further into what we might label rituals of *communitas*, or, somewhat less bombastically, at least of “togetherness.” Brecht’s events are perhaps among the most effective in their poetic rendering of what a deskilled, horizontally participatory sound-making ritual might be. In the score to his *Motor Vehicle Sundown (Event)*, dedicated to Cage, Brecht makes possible the equal participation of everyone present (or at least of everyone who has brought their own vehicle). There is no reference to the presence of any audience: “Any number of motor vehicles is arranged outdoors.” As at *18 Happenings*, cards are shuffled and distributed to all participants; these give a series of instructions to activate each of the light- and sound-making features common to most vehicles (head lights, horn, wind-shield wipers, radio, etc), within a chance-determined time structure. Operating these functions on such an “everyday” and eminently non-instrumental object would seem to be the epitome of anti-virtuosity; honking and flashing are acts of triggering so impossible to nuance, so impervious to differences in human touch, that they would render the differences between “artists” and others rather moot. This was Brecht’s first work that he titled an “Event;” casting off “music” in favor of “event” may signal the rejection of one of primary assumptions of concert music: that some who are present perform, while others, the audience, do not. Adding to this ritual quality, the piece is performed at sundown (conjuring the trope of cars thus gathered at a promontory or make-out point), both enacting and spoofing the very American notion of the fundamental equality of all men (the score uses male pronouns), and of all motorists. He leverages the theatrics of car culture, a kind of obviously “participatory” folk or vernacular performance in a very different register, to

facilitate a sort of *communitas* ritual (like the one described by Turino in the introduction) that is nevertheless embedded in modernity and technology.

Yet the sense of “event” in Brecht’s work is slippery; it also seems to signal the retreat of instructive notation and compositional control itself, perhaps even the silencing of the *composer*. Later, when Brecht would retool and retitle two of his earliest and most important text scores, *Drip Music* and *Time-Table Music*, as *Drip Event* and *Time-Table Event*, he would reword each text in the passive voice, with the result that there is no longer any direct sense of instructing performers: “A source of water and an empty vessel *are arranged* so that the water falls into the vessel.”<sup>59</sup> [emphasis mine] Phrased as such, the score may simply be read as a description of a situation that already, currently exists. Brecht was fond of pointing out to people that performances of the piece were currently underway in their homes; any dripping faucet is a “realization.”<sup>60</sup> In this sense, Brecht’s Event scores (most obviously those whose texts were revised from earlier scores for “music”) continue to flee from the residue of “dictatorial control” that, Brecht discovered through Cage’s adverse reaction to playing *Three Colored Lights*, seems to stick to the very provision of musical instruction itself.

The endpoint of this trajectory, then, would seem to be simply *not* controlling performer actions—but wouldn’t this necessarily require that the score-writing composer also be silenced and stripped of their tools, like the musicians in Brecht’s solo pieces? One response, pursued by close Fluxus associate Henry Flynt, was to actually think this possibility through to its logical conclusions, as he did in his lectures and writings that

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<sup>59</sup> Robinson, “From Abstraction to Model,” 86.

<sup>60</sup> “George Brecht: Interview by Michael Nyman”

elaborate the concepts of “brend” and “veramusement.” To briefly gloss these fascinating and complex philosophical formulations only for what they offer my argument here, Flynt came to believe that one could simply attain something like Cage’s musicalization of aurality (and indeed, the aestheticization of all the senses) all the time, outside of the status and framing of the artwork. Thus, under the banner of “brend” as an alternative to art, Flynt effectively generalized, encompassed and critiqued all post-4’33” activities concerned with the bracketing of experiences of individual perception. Such artistic works are perhaps unnecessary because everyone has their own “just-likings,” which truly belong to them in a way that an artwork written by someone else cannot (even if this artwork claims to *be* an experience that “belongs” to listeners, as Cage claims for 4’33”). Indeed, as part of Flynt’s political awakening, he would articulate and expose such scores’ framing *as* musical works as a means of affiliation with Western art music and with institutional power writ large. Yet, in the New York avant-garde, Flynt’s more rigorously anti-art, anti-works solution would ultimately not displace Cage’s more equivocal balance. Evidently, Cage had cast a long shadow in his emphasis on disciplined and accurate performance of bounded works, even when these realizations edged towards the outer limits of what might be deemed performance, and towards the sort of solipsistic aesthesis that Flynt approved of, but thought it indefensible to deem “art.”<sup>61</sup>

One of the most widely performed pieces that sits on this edge, a Fluxus “classic,” was La Monte Young’s *Poem for Chairs, Tables, Benches, etc.* (1960). The

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<sup>61</sup> See Henry Flynt, “Art or Brend?,” which, though published in 1968, has been made available at <http://www.henryflynt.org/aesthetics/artbrend.html>. See also Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 80-84.

original score, since withdrawn by Young, is unpublished, but its earliest instantiation, as performed many times by Cage and others in his circle during the early 1960s, is described by Lucier:

The original score, written in prose, is very complicated: it includes random number tables, counting out numbers, putting them in a hat, taking certain ones out, deciding how many events you're going to do, determining the time length of the piece, in quarters of seconds if necessary. It's almost impossible to understand. La Monte gives you a task to accomplish, to make a piece whose durations and overall time length are determined by chance operations.<sup>62</sup>

The only element *not* tightly determined and procedurally micromanaged is the actual content of each durational envelope, which, at least in some versions, can be *any* action. Performing Young's *Poem* alongside Cage, Tudor, Christian Wolff in 1960, Cornelius Cardew recorded his chosen modes of realization of the score in his journal: "I had 2 durations to fill; in the first I smiled and in the second I changed my shirt."<sup>63</sup> Thus, though the title suggests that one make sounds with furniture, the original score does not preclude the performer from filling their given durations with soundless actions. This means that, as long as the procedure is followed, anyone can do anything at all, and, glued together by the durational structure, the work will be music. Young's *Poem* thus generalizes the notion of composition that Cage had taught at the New School. When Cage's twin guarantors of musicality, formalized generative process and temporal duration, are kept in the forefront, they can render any kind of experience—regardless of

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<sup>62</sup> Alvin Lucier *Music 109: Notes on Experimental Music* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2014), 127.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in John Tilbury *Cornelius Cardew: A Life Unfinished* (Harlow: Copula/Matchless Recordings, 2008), 86-87.

how non-performative—a type of activity heightened and separate from undifferentiated everyday life.<sup>64</sup>

In this sense *Poem* has much in common with Brecht's *Time-Table Music*. Anyone can participate in works like these; demanding no sound-making per se, they require no special skills of the performers. But despite being exemplars of deskilling, they do not exactly hail or engender a widening circle of participation. If you came upon a performance of either work, you likely would not realize that what you are witnessing is a performance of anything. Like so many Fluxus pieces, these might appear, for a heterogeneous and uninformed public, to be an inside joke. In this sense, both pieces belong to a Fluxus quasi-genre of secret pieces, which question the very idea of performance as public utterance by placing liminal performances where they might not be noticed. Here, "performance" and "participation" might seem to collapse into hyper-individuated perceptual experiences that all but preclude the possibility of *communitas*. For example, La Monte Young's *Composition 1960 #15* ('This piece is a little whirlpool out in the middle of the ocean') is a performative speech act which stages a "realization" (a felicitous double-entendre) that must occur *only* inside the reader/hearer/performer's mind.<sup>65</sup> For Brecht, Event scores are "like little enlightenments I wanted to communicate to my friends who would know what to do with them" and thus, as epistolary, teacherly texts (often literally mailed to friends), seem centrally concerned not with sound-making but with "ensuring that the details of everyday life...stop going unnoticed."<sup>66</sup> Thus, such

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<sup>64</sup> Young would revise the work to remove the latitude for such possible interpretations; the piece now calls for players to push furniture around on the floor, making continuous sounds, Lucier, *Music 109*, 127.

<sup>65</sup> La Monte Young, in his edited *An Anthology of Chance Operations* (New York: n.p., 1963), n.p.

<sup>66</sup> Ken Johnson, "George Brecht, 82, Fluxus Conceptual Artist, Is Dead," *New York Times* Dec 15, 2008, A33.

Fluxus text scores follow Cage in exhorting the audience to listen more deeply to the sounds of everyday life, but they do so by exiting the (communal) concert setting in favor of the (private) individual's head.

Thus, in revising *Time-Table Music* into *Time-Table Event* around 1962, Brecht removes all instruction of sound-making. Indeed, it is now simply a way of generating durations: “A tabled time indication is interpreted in minutes and seconds. (7:16 equaling, for example, 7 minutes and 16 seconds).” But, during the duration thus generated, there is no indication of *what* to do—the implication is that whatever occurs during the generated duration is the piece. In this sense, Fluxus Event scores can be viewed as pedagogical exhortations to come to awareness, to “wake up to the very life we are living,” as Cage had put it, by bracketing any selection of time, space, or life, and then asking people to attend to it with all the focus, attention, and expectation of pleasure that they bring to art experiences.<sup>67</sup> From my perspective, this seems to be a Pyrrhic victory for arts participation as socially constitutive ritual: no barriers to inclusion, but not much to be included in. Perhaps then these works represent the furthest reach towards egalitarianism of the two participatory gestures that, at the beginning of this chapter, I proposed were central to *4'33"*: the musicalization of aurality that turns listening into “performance,” and a deskilling that banishes “special abilities” from sound-making.

Yet if such Fluxus works are still legible at some level as rituals of “togetherness” in unifying, at the very least, group attention, Cage retained a greater degree of differentiation between the audience and the performer, the latter's preeminence often

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<sup>67</sup> Cage, *Silence*, xii, 49.

articulated through high amplification. As I've noted, he used traditional instruments and staff notation with vanishing rarity between 1962 and 1969, instead focusing his performative and compositional efforts on live-electronics performances whose most frequent source of sound material was the amplification of the stuff of deskilled everyday life. Thus, 1962's *0'00" (4'33" No. 2)* consists of "nothing but the continuation of one's daily work...done with contact microphones, without any notion of concert or theatre or the public." The only action which was not permitted in *0'00"* was the performance of a musical composition—hence the only thing the piece's performer could *not* (show themselves to) be was traditionally musically skilled.<sup>68</sup> Thus, it was perhaps through such louder enunciations that Cage could best proselytize his "deskilling"—potentially at the *expense* of involving those who are *truly* unskilled as participants in the actual realization of such scores.

Is there any further to go, beyond the amplified everyday, towards deskilling? In *Variations VII* (1966), Cage "tuned in" to whatever was happening in the air during the performance, with microphones pointed at the audience and radio receivers pulling in whatever was "on the air," from terrestrial transmissions to the natural radiation of outer space: just "making audible what is otherwise silence therefore no interposition of intention. Just facilitating reception."<sup>69</sup> In such efforts of the middle 1960s, I hear a straining to hollow out not merely performative skill, but all intention, all content from

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<sup>68</sup> Pritchett, *Music of John Cage*, 167-176. See Fetterman, *John Cage's Theatre Pieces*, 88 for more detailed descriptions of exactly what Cage did in *0'00"* performances.

<sup>69</sup> Kahn, *Earth Sound*, 116.

his work, until such gestures of removal could almost progress no further: The score of *Variations VIII*, (1967), the last in the series, reads “no music no recordings.”<sup>70</sup>

Yet, just as Cage’s sense of “silence” could slip from the quieting of traditional instruments to the amplification of modern life, the meaning and affordances of such nothingness could easily be transformed into the chaos of a music festival. From 1967-69, a period when Cage had a number of fairly substantial residencies at large public universities, Cage would develop the “musicircus”, a type of event which would substantially diverge from his prior works, which had so strictly tried to abjure and delete music as traditionally defined. Musicircuses from this period have no score; Cage instead acts almost as a curator, inviting numerous musical groups from around a university (University of Illinois in 1967, UC Davis in 1969) to perform all at the same time in a given space on campus. The first, simply called *Musicircus* (1967) included simultaneous performances by classical recitalists, multiple jazz bands and other performers, together with multi-media elements and refreshments for sale. The reference to a circus suggests the ecstatic possibilities of encirclement and overstimulation—a wholly modern, consumer-era ritual of merged and overwhelmed subjectivities that nevertheless would, as in Cage’s radio works, maintain a rather conventional split between music-listeners and music-performers—the latter were often amplified and on pedestals.

To me, this seems a sharp change relative to Cage’s prior views on the inclusion of any strains of extant music traditions within his pieces. By contrast, for Cage, all these different sorts of music made in the musicircuses should be seen as little different from that music that would have been heard in his multiple-radio works of the 1950s. As in

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<sup>70</sup> Fetterman, *John Cage’s Theatre Pieces*, 202.

those works, Cage had not selected the repertoires of the groups he had invited: “If we have done nothing, [the listener] will have everything to do.” As long as the audience remains, as in *4’33”*, the locus of perceptual agency, “composing” a new experience from multiple interpenetrating sound sources, the work remains unproblematically indeterminate, just another iteration of the “nothingness” sought by *Variations VIII*. In some sense, then, as in the radio works, musicircuses just combine, overlay, and “tune in” to musical activity in which Cage doesn’t intervene. Yet we could also see it as a transposition of his views on participation to a new key: he now leverages his institutional power to facilitate an enormous gig—for *musicians*, i.e. those traditionally trained, constituted, and defined.

In 1967, Cage would write of his desire to “Begin again, assuming abundance, unemployment, a field situation, multiplicity, unpredictability, immediacy, the possibility of participation,” and indeed, the musicircuses, first instigated that year, may represent Cage’s most obviously participation-concerned actions.<sup>71</sup> Yet here, Cage’s modernist slate-wiping mentality collides uncomfortably with the continued existence of traditions—these are the ways of making music in which most people are prepared to—and *want* to—participate. Perhaps this is why, in the musicircus, the old instruments, notations, and notions of “musicianship” thus, rather suddenly, re-enter Cage’s work—although these will, from 1969 forward, also creep back in to his subsequent compositions. Cage’s musicircuses are the high water mark of numerical participation in his pieces, and yet they also mark the end of his absolutist “deskilling” period—he would

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<sup>71</sup> Cage, *A Year from Monday* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), 157.

soon re-engage with historical music traditions and increasingly, write for traditional ensembles.<sup>72</sup>

I end my consideration of Cage here, on a college campus in 1967, in a dense agglomeration of musicians playing music within the traditions and using the means that Cage had spent so much of the prior years railing against. I leave off here in large part because the next chapter begins with other composers, a generation younger than Cage, in a site and situation that in some ways very much resembles Cage's. In 1967, composers Pauline Oliveros and Cornelius Cardew had also been, for the first time, hired to make and teach experimental music on university campuses. Similar forces will also pull them into radical experiments in musical participation, including the upheavals wracking campuses, the participatory demands of the New Left, and the thoroughgoing questioning and reversal of value hierarchies. But where Cage's approach to the question of participation, in *Musicircus*, was to simply combine the already-existing musics in which the community was already trained, invested, and skilled, composers of the younger generation would intervene into the guts of music training itself, articulating, as a response to the Cagean deskillling of composition, a keener focus on the nature and musical affordances of unskill itself.

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<sup>72</sup> This change happens in 1969, beginning with *Cheap Imitation* and *HPSCHD*. Pritchett, *Music of John Cage*, 159-66.

### **Chapter 3.**

## **Teach Yourself to Fly: Nature, Resonance and Autopoiesis in Pedagogies of Experimentalism**

In this long chapter, I begin by surveying post-Cagean interest in musical participation at the end of the 1960s. This provides the context for my narrowing focus, to one pedagogical site, a general music course at the University of California, San Diego, and to one composer, Pauline Oliveros, engaged in compositional experiments in unrestricted participation. The course facilitated non-musicians' composing their own music, and, while involved in designing this course, Oliveros composed the *Sonic Meditations*, a major work to be performed by non-musicians. However, in the interest of a broadened theoretical perspective on the aims of this work, I also dig into the deepest concerns of Oliveros' wider post-Cagean network, which in turn necessitates an extended reckoning with the extant literature on experimentalism and nature.

### **From Avant-garde Deskillling to Countercultural Participation**

As the wider culture changed over the course of the 1960s, it seemed that many of the aesthetic shocks with which the post-Cage avant-garde had begun the decade were shocking no longer. The ontological offenses to the arts—jogging could be dance, unscripted Happenings could be theatre, any sound you hear can be music—may have

simply paled before the many wider historical and cultural shocks: the war in Vietnam, urban uprisings, political assassinations, the Civil Rights movement, the counterculture. Moreover, avant-garde transgressions of the theretofore prevailing laws of performance were in many cases rapidly integrated into mass culture: Fluxus' instrument smashing would become part of the stage show of Jimi Hendrix and The Who, while "concrete" non-instrumental sounds would similarly make their way into the psychedelic rock of the Beatles. In some garage rock and especially in the performative extremes of proto-punk, proto-noise bands like the Stooges, it seemed that the deskillings of Cage's New School course had suddenly devoured, or been devoured by, popular music and youth culture.<sup>1</sup> Was there any further that "deskilling" could go beyond the sort of "zero degree" representations of the everyday that we find in Cage's *0'00*'? Could experimentalism continue to stay ahead of a rapidly transforming mass culture that was quickly integrating its insights? Given these changed conditions, was it still necessary to retain the stance of gatecrashing, argumentative dissent with an intractable Western cultural hierarchy? Or, might experimentalists be better served by taking a page from the New Left's Port Huron Statement and foregrounding the politics of mass participation?

A brief and unsatisfying answer that flows from the prior chapter, which perhaps serves as a kind of non-analysis of a non-work, is that in the notion of the "musicircus," Cage ceased trying to stay out in front of the young masses, deciding instead to join them and endorse the impulse towards the overwhelming, chaotic countercultural mega-event. Earlier in 1967, before planning the first *Musicircus*, and around the time of the epochal Monterey Pop Festival (widely considered the precursor and spur to the proliferation of

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<sup>1</sup> This collision is the subject of Piekut's Epilogue to *Experimentalism Otherwise*, see especially 196-97.

rock festivals of unprecedented scale in 1968-70), Cage was asked what he thought of rock music, and he replied “I like it—because it’s loud.”<sup>2</sup> In his own efforts, his musicircuses differ from rock festivals in that a) the various professional performances unfold in Cage’s framework of simultaneity, proximity, interpenetration, and non-interaction; b) this tweak makes somewhat plausible the music-ontological alchemy of the “musicalization of aurality,” such that the visitor “makes” the music of the total musicircus, instead of any given performer or group; and c) the entire event becomes a “work” (although without a score) with a single author. Yet to my view, the *Musicircus* engages, involves and includes audiences only to a similar degree as does a rock festival, and uses, by and large, the same means.<sup>3</sup>

What of more direct interfaces between experimentalism and participation—both political and music? Note, throughout the last chapter, that there seemed to have been a kind of attenuation or backing away from the allowance of untrammelled, uninhibited participation, which seems to clamor right on the other side the retaining wall of the dictates of the musical score. By this I mean that, in the very act of *notating* the actions of participants, Kaprow, Brecht, et al were not only requesting the participation of non-artists, they were also constraining the terms of that participation to the letter of the score. This is the implied demand of *werktreue*, or fidelity to the work, a notion which becomes particularly troubled in the case of scores that call out to universal participation. I will return to such problems at the end of the chapter.

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Fetterman, *John Cage’s Theatre Pieces*, 138.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-142

Thus, one obvious response here would be to abandon scored modes of organization. The growth of interest in free improvisation among Western art music-trained musicians, beginning in the late 1950s, has been much discussed and widely linked to a critique of the constraints of notation and of composition writ large.<sup>4</sup> Yet opening up participation beyond the ranks of previously authorized or trained musicians was hardly a necessary concomitant of the movement towards free improvisation; for only a few groups did these two forms of opening go hand in hand. Telling the story of Musica Electronica Viva's (MEV) radical combination of free improvisation and audience participation, Amy C. Beal has written of MEV's "basic challenges to the tenets of Western music" as they unfolded against the backdrop of group members' own politicization as well as of wider political upheavals in Rome, where they were based. In direct response to the violent clashes across Europe in 1968, MEV decided that "everybody should play."<sup>5</sup>

Gradually they also came to believe that music's potential as a catalyst for revolutionary action had yet to be tapped. Liberating music making—and thus music itself—could help intensify the struggle against elite institutions and their stronghold on culture. Alvin Curran's 1995 declaration that MEV believed "music is a universal human right" and "a form of property that belongs to everyone" underscores the notion that anyone, anywhere, could be a musician; everything, everywhere, could be a source of music itself...Emancipated from the constraints of their conservatory training, musicians would enter into a classless musical society where they were indistinguishable from—or at least equal partners with—nonmusicians.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950," 114-17, and, for a very recent articulation, Benjamin Piekut, "Indeterminacy, Free Improvisation, and the Mixed Avant-Garde: Experimental Music in London, 1965-75" *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 67, no. 3, (2014).

<sup>5</sup> Beal, "Music is a Universal Human Right," p. 108

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

Thus, throughout late 1968 and into 1969, MEV set up innumerable instruments in a large space and played for hours a night with whomever wished to join in on pieces called *Zuppa* and *Soundpool*. In Curran's account, "there were hundreds, and modestly speaking, a few thousand people had played with MEV at that time. There were singing, chanting, droning, drumming on chairs, tables, walls—there were masses of people simply being themselves in the protective and self-evolving community of improvised collective music."<sup>7</sup> To my reading, despite the ecstasy that drips from this and other participants' accounts, Beal's account of this participatory utopia is weirdly tinged with equivocality, perhaps because it was so short-lived, or because of its members' post-1969 retrenchment into playing ordinary concerts and composing pieces. She regards this experiment as having been primarily a form of "political therapy" that was not as "effective" a form of political work as MEV's direct actions and performances for prisoners.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, despite this skeptical eye on the utopian possibilities of participation itself (the "normal" way of doing politics seems to be her preferred alternative), Beal's article remains an essential introduction to what may be the most extreme articulation ever of what a participatory, experimentalist free improvisation might be.

With the case of MEV standing as a fascinating outlier, I remain focused here, as in the prior chapter, on more constrained modes of organizing participation, which have, perhaps unsurprisingly, predominated substantially over such proudly unconstrained ones across the breadth and history of the participatory arts. Continuing to trace the

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

entanglement of participation and pedagogy, I am interested in trying to understand how late-1960s ideas of uninhibited participation and deskilling might continue to shine light on (a substantially reformulated conceptualization of) musical skill. After all *a priori*s are wiped away, how do we go about thinking of “reskilling” future musicians?

This, at any rate, was the question that two influential groups of artists, on opposite edges of the Anglo-American, Cage-influenced musical world, were considering while MEV was reaching towards an apex of deskilled participation. The much lesser known of these, in San Diego, would convene upon the creation of a new research university to create an environment where non-musicians would be offered the invitation to create their own music from scratch, putatively without any necessary connection to any extant musical tradition. This pedagogical site, and particularly the involvement there of faculty member and composer Pauline Oliveros will be my analytic focus in this chapter, placed in dialogue with several of her closest composer peers. However, the other group, London’s Scratch Orchestra, bears a brief introduction, in large part because it represents far and away the best-known iteration of a participatory experimental music open to and solicitous of non-musicians.

The Scratch Orchestra, discussed in Nyman’s influential early survey *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, and the more recently subject of several dissertations, curatorial investigations, and periodic re-unifications, resonates with my larger project in innumerable ways—it is perhaps the best-known articulation of the purposeful inclusion of non-musicians in post-Cage experimentalism. Cornelius Cardew, a co-founder of the Scratch Orchestra and the figure who remains most associated with it, is the subject of two recently-released monographs, one a definitive biography by his

colleague John Tilbury.<sup>9</sup> Thus, since Cardew and Scratch have been so extensively characterized in the literature already, I am going to make just a few points that situate Scratch as representing an intermediate approach between MEV's scoreless participation and the American composer/educators who made scores (and curricula) for participation, upon whom I then spend the rest of the chapter.<sup>10</sup>

Firstly, the similarities: all these participatory projects coalesced at the same time, between 1967 and 1969, at the height of political upheaval and countercultural activity. All these groups made explicit that unrestricted participation, regardless of background, was the principle goal, subordinating all traditional musical competencies (including those of the groups' highly and conventionally trained founders) to the demands that no one be left out. Thus, the non-musician's contribution was framed to be utterly equal to (and in some cases, better than) the musician's: deskilling in its utmost form.

However, the three groups (MEV, Scratch, the Americans) represent a continuum when it comes to the issues of improvisation vs. score-making, textuality, and, as we'll see later, the implicit authorities stubbornly vested in *werktreue*. The Scratch Orchestra in itself, as a kind of meta-composition, was more "highly-authored" than MEV's *Zuppa*. Although there were situations in which Scratch also improvised freely à la *Zuppa*, Cardew more formally convened (or constituted, or "composed") the group when he

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 131-38. Tilbury, *A Life Unfinished*; Antony Harris, *The Legacy of Cornelius Cardew*, (London: Ashgate, 2013); Virginia Anderson, "1968 and the Experimental Revolution in Britain" in *Music and Protest in 1968*, eds. Beate Kutschke and Barley Norton. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Kathryn Gleasman Pisaro, *Music from Scratch: Cornelius Cardew, Experimental Music and the Scratch Orchestra in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s* (PhD Dissertation, Northwestern University, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Scratch actually collaborated with MEV on an unauthorized street performance, a "Music Walk" in October 1969, early in the group's life which bears future investigation. Like a kind of experimentalist charivari, members of the two groups walked through central London, making a huge racket in defiance of the police, suggesting again the potential connections between participation, deskilling and politics. Tilbury, *A Life Unfinished*, 407-8.

published a “Draft Constitution” for the group in the newspaper, which proposed the terms under which people would “assemble for action” as a musical group.<sup>11</sup> This Constitution proposed that everyone not only join together to play, but also to accept particular assignments: keeping a notebook in which to record musical notations called Scratch Music, planning a concert for the group (under inverted hierarchy, this responsibility would fall to the youngest member first), and undertake “research projects.”<sup>12</sup> Both Cardew and Tilbury speak explicitly and often of the group’s “educative” mission.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the fact *that* everyone became a literate composer, notating and sharing their “Scratches” no matter their form, (though most were graphical or textual) “exemplified the idea, the ideal, of collective music-making...within which the individual voice would gain confidence and blossom; it was aptly described as a kind of ‘training programme’ for those who wished to participate in the Scratch Orchestra.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, Cardew’s conception/composition of Scratch is an apt exemplar of the ways in which, after Cage, experimental composers instrumentalize participation to pedagogical end.

Like Cage, however, even while striving towards an alternative to the music-pedagogic “banking model,” a means whereby non-musicians could self-generate their *own* musical thought, Cardew also had his own lessons to teach. This is perhaps best seen through his enormous hours-long multipart work *The Great Learning*, a work—based on a sharply prescriptive text from Confucian scriptures—that calls for a mix of virtuoso

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<sup>11</sup> “A Scratch Orchestra: Draft Constitution,” Cornelius Cardew, in Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner, ed. *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 234-236.

<sup>12</sup> Cornelius Cardew, ed. *Scratch Music* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1974 [1972])

<sup>13</sup> Tilbury, *A Life Unfinished*, 361, 475.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 380.

soloists and amateurs, written with the Scratch Orchestra in mind.<sup>15</sup> The work, especially its most-performed, final section, the all-vocal *Paragraph 7*, is widely taken as a compositional attempt to forge a relational system or space of play that can reconcile the need for discipline with the anti-hierarchical imperative to not tell people what to do. Its brief textual instruction begins, “Each chorus member chooses his or her note (silently)...All enter on the leader’s signal. For each subsequent line choose a note that you can hear being sung...” Thus, the piece begins in anarchic, voluntaristic dissonance, but it bends towards consonance as everyone tunes to everyone else. While earlier “paragraphs” of *The Great Learning* are built from oppositional formal dialectics between the virtuoso performers and the unskilled mass, the work ends, in *Paragraph 7*, with all individual skill differences submerged (deskilled?), via an algorithm that attempts to guarantee attention and interaction. Where in its centrifugal, autonomist aspects, the Scratch Orchestra may resemble MEV’s *Zuppa*, it was just as much defined by the Cardew’s centripetal force, largely enacted through his grand-scale works for the group.<sup>16</sup>

At one point, I had aspired to a side-by-side analysis of Cardew’s *Paragraph 7* from *The Great Learning* and Oliveros’ *Tuning Meditation*—both all-vocal works have striking aural resemblance and, as we will shortly see, similar geneses at the interface of Sixties demands for participation, formal pedagogical sites and post-Cagean aesthetic challenges. However, while that task will not be undertaken here, I am not the first to suggest that Oliveros’ *Sonic Meditations* and Cardew’s *The Great Learning* may lie at the

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<sup>15</sup> See Brian Eno “Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts” in Cox and Warner, eds., *Audio Culture* 227-231.

<sup>16</sup> And indeed, the literature on Scratch and Cardew is knotted with attempts to untangle this imbrication of composerly control and anti-hierarchical egalitarianism. See Tilbury 333-511, but particularly 475-76.

center of a nascent canon of participatory experimental scores. Though it hardly articulates the numerous deep likenesses, I quote the lone published source that mentions these works together, an article on “Gebrauchsmusik,” which also suggests the (rather modest) extent of research on the topic of participation and pedagogy in interaction with experimentalism:

Originating in Germany during the early 1920s, the term *Gebrauchsmusik* can be translated as “music for use,” “utilitarian music,” “workaday music,” and “music for everyday life.” Gebrauchsmusik renounced art-for-art’s sake and embraced a socially conscious intention to compose music that is readily available—attractive, interesting, and even performable—for all people, not just musicians. A key figure in its dissemination was Paul Hindemith...Beyond pedagogical concerns, however, the composition of Gebrauchsmusik came to be regarded as old hat by the 1950s with the ascendancy of serialism, indeterminacy, and electronic music. Nevertheless, this approach speaks to a perennial concern for many artists in balancing aesthetic and social considerations. Certain avant-garde works, despite their intellectual aspects, can thus be regarded as having Gebrauchsmusik qualities, as with many pieces by the Fluxus composers, which were activities for nonmusicians, or the performances of the Scratch Orchestra or Portsmouth Sinfonia. Other examples include such scores as Christian Wolff’s *Prose Collection* (1968-1971), Cornelius Cardew’s *The Great Learning* (1968-1971), and Pauline Oliveros’s *Sonic Meditations I-XII* (1971)<sup>17</sup>

In an essay anthologized in the important *Audio Cultures* reader, Brian Eno writes admiringly of Cardew’s *Paragraph 7* (in whose early performances, alongside Scratch, he participated), describing it as having effectively solved the problem of compositional control and individual agency by likening the work to a ecological “system or organism” and drawing substantially on the rhetoric of cybernetics (which will reappear repeatedly throughout this chapter). For Eno, Cardew effectively transcends the “old” Western art music ways of scoring because he allows *people* to be themselves, just as Cage had

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<sup>17</sup> Nicole V. Gagné, *Historical Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Classical Music* (New York: Scarecrow, 2012), 112-3. The date for *Sonic Meditations* should probably be listed as 1970-1971, on the basis of Oliveros, *Software for People*, 149.

allowed sounds—a move that brings us closer both to “nature” (human and ecological) and egalitarianism. Western art music pedagogy trains a musician “to be capable of operating precisely like all the other members of his rank. It trains him, in fact, to subdue some of his own natural variety and thus to increase his reliability (predictability).”<sup>18</sup> By contrast, Cardew discovered how to write notations that would make “use of ‘hidden resources’ in the sense of individual natural differences (rather than talents or abilities).”<sup>19</sup> Thus non-musicians become elevated to the status of new musical resources. Deskilling has opened the door not only to a music of non-hierarchical participation, but through it, to a music of nature.

### **Oliveros and Cardew**

My analysis throughout this chapter traces through the music of Oliveros and her colleagues a similar set of concerns around the search for a music in which would exclude no one on the basis of musical competencies, which would (like Cardew) leverage this deskilled participation towards new musical ends, and which would balance freedom and control into the enactment of *communitas*. Pushing off from the concerns of the prior chapter with Cage’s *removal* of the lingering notational and instrumental resources of concert music, I first trace the personal entanglements and musical influences on the originators of this experimentalist *gebrauchsmusik*, and suggest why their engagements within the pedagogical site of the university might have pushed their concerns with and uses of participation beyond those of Cage.

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<sup>18</sup> Eno “Generating and Organizing Variety,” 227.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Parsons, quoted in *ibid.*, 230.

In the chapter that follows this one, I will engage with a very different intersection of musical participation, improvisation and radical politics, where, during the Black Arts Movement in the US, artists collectives coalesced experimentalist pedagogies coalesced that were concerned with neighborhood, community, and groups of young participants/pupils representing broader spectrums of age, ability, class, and ethnicity. However, in the present chapter, I remain with the pedagogical site of higher education; this is where nearly all of the post-Cage composers appearing in this chapter earned their keep.

Thus, because Cardew is so well entrenched as a major figure here, I preface my investigation of Oliveros with a brief, comparative sketch that suggests some of the biographical and historical forces that might have brought Oliveros and Cardew towards such similar articulations of a participatory experimentalism at the end of the 1960s. The many biographical similarities may help explain their convergence on strikingly similar terrain in both music and pedagogy, despite the fact that they were not in any direct contact with one another at all during this period.<sup>20</sup>

Born 4 years apart, Oliveros (1932) and Cardew (1936-1981) were, among classically-trained composers, some of the earliest adopters of group free improvisation. Cardew joined AMM in 1966 (other members of which were jazz-trained), while Oliveros had first begun to improvise freely with fellow composers Loren Rush and Terry Riley in the KPFA radio studio in 1957.<sup>21</sup> Both had undertaken significant formal

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<sup>20</sup> Oliveros, personal communication 4/23/15.

<sup>21</sup> She later co-forming the improvisation group Sonics, whose membership and electronic gear formed the backbone of the San Francisco Tape Music Center, at the urging of their composition teacher, and UCSD Music Department co-founder Robert Erickson. Heidi Von Gunden, *The Music of Pauline Oliveros*. (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1983), 32-33.

studies in modernist composition, and both had experienced significant, more-or-less career-making successes with works at the interface between notated complexity and Cagean indeterminacy at the very beginning of the 1960s. The Cardew's early 60s, semi-conventionally notated works got him international prizes and led to increasingly close connections to Cage and his circle. Building these relationships with New York composers into a reputation as *the* British interpreter and advocate of American experimentalism, he would plan, produce and perform on numerous of these composers European engagements throughout the decade, taking an increasing interest in performing the "deskilled" Fluxus action music and Event scores of La Monte Young and George Brecht after 1963.<sup>22</sup>

Oliveros' *Sound Patterns* (1961) won the Gaudeamus Prize, and immediately afterwards, she joined the San Francisco Tape Music Center. In 1964, Oliveros instigated Cage and Tudor's first visit to the Tape Music Center, which became the essential Bay Area outpost for Cage-affiliated New York experimentalists.<sup>23</sup> There Tudor performed not only his virtuosic renderings of 1950s Cage and *Variations II*, but also anti-virtuosic card pieces by Brecht. Oliveros wrote a duo for herself and Tudor to premiere at this galvanizing visit; Von Gunden, Oliveros' biographer, considers these interactions with Tudor and Cage to be a crucial turning point. Though Oliveros had initially made a score that combined Western notation and text for guided improvisation, they decided in

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<sup>22</sup> Tilbury, *A Life Unfinished*, 177, 181.

<sup>23</sup> Von Gunden *Music of Pauline Oliveros*, 68. David W. Bernstein, *The San Francisco Tape Music Center: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-garde*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 25-6. SFTMC has hardly just an outpost of Cageanism, however. It developed its own political, aesthetic and technological program, which included a focus on community media access, the birth of the multi-projector psychedelic light show and, in the early works of Riley and Steve Reich, the development of West Coast minimalism. SFTMC also shared a space with Anna Halprin's dance company, which in turn acted as a sort of feeder for New York's Judson Dance group. This meant that, along with Oliveros' direct link, there were several other points of at least secondhand connection to Cage and Fluxus.

rehearsal to abandon the notation altogether in favor of an all-text structure which could be more easily memorized.<sup>24</sup> Subsequently, her scores turned away not only from staff notation and towards text instructions, but also increasingly call for electronic modifications, amplification and improvisation.<sup>25</sup> When not composing for her *own* improvisation, usually along with an electronic tape delay system, her ensemble works of the period explore sound-making on amplified everyday objects. During the same years, Cage, Tudor, and Cardew were exploring very similar terrain, writing works that *demand* interpretation by improvisers (Cage's later *Variations*,<sup>26</sup> Tudor's *Bandoneon!* and *Rainforest*, Cardew's *Treatise*, *Tiger's Mind*, and AMM music), and were almost invariably, in practice, explorations of the affordances of amplified and electronic sound-making.

In this capacity, as performers and impresarios of both indeterminacy and Fluxus, and as composers moving speedily away from the staff-based notations that had won them regard early in the decade, Cardew and Oliveros underwent a period of intense questioning in the middle 1960s, rethinking the very organization and necessity of musical instruction and communication and moving towards improvisation, electronics, text instruction and “asemic” graphic notation, all of which decenter or abrogate the need for conventional instruments and almost completely push the musical staff out of their scores altogether. They were hardly alone in this—we could add Cage, Tudor, Christian Wolff, Max Neuhaus, MEV, and many others who would all, during this same period,

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<sup>24</sup> Von Gunden, *Music of Pauline Oliveros*, 69.

<sup>25</sup> As in *Pieces of Eight* (1965), a commission and one of her last chamber ensemble works, which is nearly all text; it “reads like a play.” Ibid., 71.

<sup>26</sup> James Pritchett, “David Tudor as Composer/Performer in Cage's *Variations II*,” *Leonardo Music Journal* 14, (2004), 11-16.

begin to explore similar alternatives and replacements for traditional instrumental and notational resources.<sup>27</sup> This is the wider echo of the prior chapter’s “deskilling,” ramifying across the same historical moment in the careers of numerous leading experimentalists.

Then, in the fall of 1967, near the beginning of a tremendous period of upheaval wracking university campuses around the world and coinciding roughly with the full-scale arrival of the counterculture as a generational force, both Cardew and Oliveros would be offered university teaching jobs. Cardew’s teaching—first at the Royal Academy of Music and then later at Morley College (an adult-education institution with a similar brief to the New School)—led directly to his composing *The Great Learning* and forming the Scratch Orchestra with many of his students. (He also urged many of his pupils to quit the Royal Academy to instead take part in the radically mixed-skill Morley course.)<sup>28</sup> As we will see, Oliveros’ path to her major participatory opus closely resembles this story in many regards, not least of which is its timing, almost year for year. Could this change—from composer to composition teacher, from rebellious artist to institutionally ratified authority—have been the trigger to the similar developments in both composers’ musical activities at the end of the decade? How can the site and the demands of pedagogy help us understand the forces which, between 1969 and 1971, brought both composers to focus their efforts on major opuses that require no musical

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<sup>27</sup> In contrast to semantic graphic notations like Cage’s *Variations I*, which are made to be decoded into a range of correct interpretation through a given algorithm, “asemic” graphic notation, as in Cardew’s *Treatise* or Earle Brown’s pioneering *December 1952*, has no rules for making a realization and privileges no mode of interpretation.

<sup>28</sup> Tilbury, *A Life Unfinished*, 352-8.

background or skill? What do make of the schoolmaster whose instructions, in effect, elevate the non-musician above the musician?

### **“The Nature of Music” on the (Pedagogical) Frontier**

In 1967, while serving as director of the San Francisco Tape Music Center, Pauline Oliveros was recruited to be the specialist in electronic music for the nascent department of music at the University of California, San Diego, which was being assembled in tandem with the university’s second residential college. As Obrecht relates, working from interviews and university archives, administrators tasked with establishing this new college, named for naturalist John Muir, planned to have it “embody Muir’s creative and exploratory spirit by requiring a hands-on involvement with the arts as part of the core curriculum—an ecological approach to education.”<sup>29</sup> Selling new and experimental music as a perfect fit for such an ethos, Robert Erickson (Oliveros’ former teacher) and Will Ogdon had managed to acquire an impressive degree of influence and autonomy in structuring the music department of which they became co-founders, which opened alongside Muir College in Fall 1967. Nature, rugged individualism and exploration of frontiers all were, Obrecht suggests, not only themes of the plan for Muir College, but ideals that suffused the nascent university, located “at the end of the Western frontier, a place described as a desert landscape at the time of the university’s establishment. Such a ‘blank-slate’ kind of environment [was] ideal for the establishment of a new school without the prejudices and social pressures that develop over time...the

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<sup>29</sup> Guy Obrecht “The Crystallization of the New, New Music at UCSD” *College Music Symposium* 51, (2011).

ideal condition for a department dedicated to the ever-newness of new music.”<sup>30</sup> Such a “blank-slate” approach to music-making resonates strongly with Cage’s polemic about severing the relationship with tradition and history, and suggests the desirability of rethinking music pedagogy from a similarly “blank-slate,” with no necessary link to Western art music traditions—what I have referred to as a “deskilling.”

Yet, in this case, the initial call for a pedagogy of active, inclusive participation would come not from the composers, but from the first Muir College provost, John Stewart. Stewart believed (and convinced upper administrators) that “in order to learn something about something, one had to experience it from the ‘inside.’ To accomplish this meant the study of art should have a laboratory-like setting in which the student can learn material by direct observation, much like in the material sciences.”<sup>31</sup> Formulating a course that would fulfill the core requirements of lower-division students in the new Muir College, the music department created its “experimental General Music Program,” a course open to all regardless of prior musical experience or skill. Inspired, perhaps, by Muir’s naturalism and Stewart’s ethos of art as scientific discovery, the course was named “The Nature of Music,” and was the first course that Ogdon and Erickson taught, in Spring 1967, before the department had even opened or other faculty had come on board.

Oliveros has recalled that The Nature of Music, also known as Music 1, “was a replacement for the standard music appreciation course;” it was referred to elsewhere as

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

an “experimental general music program.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, in its early years, the department trumpeted its iconoclastic unseating of Western art music from their “general music” (that is, all-college core) curriculum. In a 1968 article entitled “A New Music Education for Everyman?,”<sup>33</sup> department chair Ogdon had vigorously assaulted the premises of “music appreciation” which made music into a “spectator-sport,” juxtaposing it to “participation” in rhetoric that would closely mirror that of Students for a Democratic Society.<sup>34</sup> Nor could the participatory project be a mere supplement or enrichment of the old ways. In accordance with the revolutionary logic of the era, traditional music education needed to be overthrown, not revised: “A course of this nature could flourish only in an environment of experiment and creativity; it could not be grafted onto a traditionalist commitment.”<sup>35</sup> Invective against the centering of European music history and tradition continued to be a hallmark of the department’s official documentation and celebration of Music 1, through at least 1972, in statements (attributed to anonymized “faculty”) such as: “Germanic music has had its day.” “The business of teaching culture is through. We have to teach fundamentals.” “Who knows what the kids are going to need to survive out there. The old training doesn’t seem to be working any more.” “I don’t listen to music much anymore. I listen to sound.”<sup>36</sup> Such inversions, wholly in tune

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<sup>32</sup> “Pauline Oliveros on Deep Listening” *Sound American* 7, (The Deep Listening Issue) <http://soundamerican.org/pauline-oliveros-on-deep-listening>

<sup>33</sup> Wilbur Ogdon, “A New Music Education for Everyman?” *Experiment and Innovation* 1,2 (January 1968), np.

<sup>34</sup> Miller *Democracy is in the Streets*, 85.

<sup>35</sup> John Silber “Preface” from “A Report on an Experimental General Music Program,” (January, 1969) Mandeville Special Collections RSS1225, Box 4, Folder 16, hereafter abridged as REGMP

<sup>36</sup> No Author, “Four Views of the Music Department at the University of California San Diego” (1972), Mandeville Special Collections RSS1225, Box 4, Folder 13, hereafter abridged as FVMDUCSD.

with the wider ideological naturalisms of the Sixties, unapologetically place “nature” above history and culture.

What would it mean focus on music’s “nature” rather than its history? The faculty found it possible to align the idea of music’s “nature” with experimental music (a discursive formulation which, as we will see in the next section, Cage also used with frequency): “the unfamiliar world of new music would put the student in direct touch with the essential characteristics and processes common to all music.” Reversing the standard discourse of experimentalism as noisy, avant-garde and essentially oppositional, Western art music is cast here as the deviant practice, while experimentalism becomes “common” and “essential.”<sup>37</sup>

Such reversals, castigating or suggesting overthrow of “civilization” in favor of a “nature” without invidious social distinctions were *de rigueur* in those years, cutting across art and politics and frequently joining them. Cage’s words in 1967 – “Begin again, assuming abundance, unemployment, a field situation, multiplicity, unpredictability, immediacy, the possibility of participation”—could well be read as an Event score which the UCSD music department realized in designing the Nature of Music curriculum.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Cage’s words could also be imagined as a “score” for the May 1968 events in Paris, during which appeared the graffiti “*Sous les pavés, la plage!*”, or “Underneath the paving stones, the beach!”<sup>39</sup> “Begin again,” sometimes taken, as in the title of a recent biography, to be Cage’s motto, seems to authorize destruction to get back to the blank-

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<sup>37</sup> Ogdon, “A New Music Education for Everyman?”

<sup>38</sup> Cage *Year from Monday*, 157

<sup>39</sup> Though potent as metaphor, protestors also literally pried up the cobblestones to throw at the police. Steve Erlanger, “Barricades of May ’68 Still Divide the French” *New York Times*, April 30, 2008. A6.

slate of nature. For Ogdon, the deviant domination of Western art music was the pavement; beneath it was the Nature of Music.

Once underway, the course's content and format followed the rhetoric of Stewart (who had suggested that music should, like the physical world, be investigated through direct sensory engagement and hands-on experiment), but in practice, what seems to have occurred is that faculty mined the playbook of extant experimental music techniques for activities in which those without music training could easily participate (graphic notations, field recording, found objects as instruments).<sup>40</sup> Thus arose a pedagogical situation in which literally thousands of students would, over the course of Music 1's lifespan, fulfill their general education requirements by making music in the mode of American experimentalism. Describing Music 1 in 1972, Ogdon writes:

Some four hundred University of California students, most of them freshmen, participate each year in the creative process as it relates to music. They improvise together, they construct tape pieces, they record the peculiarities of their environment, they devise notation systems, and they plan, rehearse, and present to their colleagues performances of sound structures of several minutes duration and of considerable complexity.<sup>41</sup>

Earlier in this same department-produced pamphlet, "Four Views of the Music Department at UCSD," Ogdon locates Music 1, the department's offering for musical amateurs, at the core of the department's "radical innovation in the undergraduate curriculum." This Ogdon contrasts with the undergraduate music major curriculum which, to a much larger degree, "reflect[s] the faculty's concern for developing...traditional musical abilities and values." Perhaps this represents a rear-

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<sup>40</sup> I don't mean to imply that these activities *do not* embody Stewart's vision, only that reliance on already-extant post-Cage techniques may represent a narrowing of the sense in which Stewart imagined "experimentation."

<sup>41</sup> Ogdon, FVMDUCSD, 4

guard defense from the accusation that the department was “deskilling” *everyone* in a totalitarian exclusion of traditional repertoires or competencies.<sup>42</sup> But Ogdon’s language suggests that new music is a dismantling of musical sophistication and semantics in pursuit of the real, a getting back to basics, or perhaps, in tune with varied late-counterculture ideological currents, back to nature: “The present condition of music’s creative language has unsophisticated the art to an extent makes available to *everyman* musical uses of imagination and intuition, perception and judgment.”<sup>43</sup>

Yet if the counterintuitive notion that newness-obsessed, high-tech experimental artmaking in a university could be called “unsophisticated” conjured the ethnopoetic aesthetics of Jerome Rothenberg (who wrote, in 1968’s epochal *Technicians of the Sacred*, that “‘Primitive’ means complex.”<sup>44</sup>), the paradoxes redouble with the department’s affiliation to the language of scientific discovery and progress: “We may be able to come up with a theory that will apply to all music,” suggests the “Four Views” from 1972. Many of the faculty in these early years *were* involved in research collaborations with scientists from the Medical School and Psychology Department. Von Gunden notes that, at this time, the whole faculty was energized about leveraging such interdisciplinary efforts towards the funding a research center on campus, which bore fruit in 1972 as the Project for Music Experiment, a major source of funding and teaching relief.<sup>45</sup> Did these musicians believe that, by subjecting the “nature of music” to the methods of science, they could in fact arrive at a universal theory of music? Or were they,

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<sup>42</sup> Which, in fact, it was not guilty of. Majors participated in orchestras, chamber groups, etc. See Ogdon, FVMDUCSD, 3.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> *Technicians of the Sacred: A Range of Poetries from Africa, America, Asia, Europe, and Oceania* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, [1968] 1985) p. xxvi.

<sup>45</sup> Von Gunden, *Music of Pauline Oliveros*, 88.

more pragmatically, simply trying to attract some of the prestige of science, as a means towards sustaining them as they travelled their idiosyncratic paths, beyond music's established channels of critical, commercial and institutional ratification?

Whatever their intentions, the early UCSD music faculty had, through assembling an odd and hybrid ideological constellation (the emulation of science, a "blank-slate" frontier ethos, the alignment of "deskilled" participation with the politics of the counterculture), managed to get a major institution to ratify and buy into the anti-traditional, anyone-can-compose iconoclasm of John Cage's New School pedagogy, and, in the process, they expanded its reach by orders of magnitude. Both courses adopt a stance on "participation" at extreme variance with any Western art music pedagogical approaches. Even the most humanist and reformist of such pedagogies, such as Dalcroze, Orff, Suzuki, or El Sistema, advocate "participation" but only in the service of the maintenance of the Western literature and tradition. Both at the New School and at UCSD, widening the circle of musical participation meant welcoming those without music performance competencies not only into musical creation, but into musical *invention*; students not only authored their own original music, but more boldly, were assigned to create their own ways of *organizing* music, as in the construction of new sound-making tools and the devising of new notational systems. Still, beyond any of the particulars of Music 1's course assignments, surely its most radical aspect was its very existence within an academic institution as the replacement for Western art music "appreciation," and, on this basis, there seems little reason to doubt Obrecht's assertion that the course "was no doubt the only one of its kind in the United States." By situating the European tradition at the center and font of musical knowledge, wider American

institutional life had established this tradition, explicitly or implicitly, as the natural form or root case of music. Thus, beyond its experimentalist particulars, UCSD's Music 1 must be understood first and foremost as a challenge to the very predominance of history over innovation, almost identical to the challenge which swept Anglo-American visual arts education in the 1960s, but which, aside from the case of Music 1, made few inroads into the teaching of music.<sup>46</sup> Thus, Music 1 represents a kind of abortive alternate reality for the teaching of music: what if the postmodern critiques that transformed the art schools had similarly refigured the teaching of music?

### **Cage's "Natures" of Music: from imitation to cybernetics**

The UCSD faculty was hardly alone in articulating a conjunction of nature and experimental music. In recent years, there has been a small flood of scholarship on the centrality of rhetorics of "nature" in experimental music, particularly, but not exclusively, in Cage's work.<sup>47</sup> Scholars agree that experimentalists have widely idealized "nature" at the expense of "culture," even as they have sometimes failed to question the conventional meanings of these terms, or bent them, as empty signifiers, to their own ends. To

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<sup>46</sup> This change in visual art education is deeply tied to the institutionalization of deskilling as almost the official position of contemporary art. This is not to say that manual skills are not permitted, but rather that their presence must be justified, as opposed to assumed. Lisa Tickner "Horney 1968: The Art School Revolution," in Felicity Allen, editor, *Education* (Documents of Contemporary Art), (London/Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel/MIT Press, 2011), 141-45, although in fact vast swathes of this collection speak to this transformation in visual arts education during the Sixties.

<sup>47</sup> Matthew Rogalsky, "'Nature' as an organizing principle: Approaches to chance and the natural in the work of John Cage, David Tudor, and Alvin Lucier" *Organised Sound* 15, no. 2 (2010), 133-36; Benjamin Piekut "Chance and Certainty: John Cage's Politics of Nature" *Cultural Critique* 84 (2013), 134-163; David Ingram, "'The clutter of the unkempt forest': John Cage, Music and American Environmental Thought" *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 51, no. 4 (2006), pp. 567-579. You Nakai. "Hear After: Matters of Life and Death in David Tudor's Electronic Music." *communication +1*: Vol. 3, Article 10. <http://scholarworks.umass.edu/cpo/vol3/iss1/10>

understand just how much is at stake in a pedagogy, like Music 1's, that articulates experimentalism as "natural," I survey this recent literature, and then move from past scholars' focus on Cage into the consideration of some of his associates. Increasingly, David Tudor and a younger generation of composers would develop their own ideas about nature and music, particularly by linking the two via intense focus on the phenomenon of acoustical resonance.

It's no secret that Cage's fixation on "nature" has cast a long shadow over much of the American experimentalism that has followed. According to Piekut, "Chance operations were a targeted therapy that removed unnatural impulses toward order and expression...sounds alone, without human interference, were natural. For the Cage of the 1950s onward, *anthropos* became an entity to be eliminated."<sup>48</sup> Most famously, in *4'33"*, Cage attempts to eliminate *anthropos* by silencing the piano in order to direct aural attention to the music of environmental sounds. For Gann,

The place of the work's premiere seems particularly Romantically chosen: an open-air space in the woods, half of its seats under the sky, in which rural nature—rather than the traffic and machinery of an urban area—was pretty much guaranteed to assert itself. In setting *4'33"* for the first time in the sylvan deciduous forest of the Catskill mountains, Cage asked his audience to listen to the murmur of American nature as music, much as Frederic Church, Jasper Cropsey, and others had created a newly luminous aesthetic by capturing that same landscape in paint.<sup>49</sup>

Gann suggests that for Cage, "the imitation of nature [was] a way of locating an indigenous American aesthetic," a rough-hewn, untutored, frontier authenticity, as in the legend of American "naturals" like (among many others) Daniel Boone or self-taught

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<sup>48</sup> Piekut, "Chance and Certainty," 131.

<sup>49</sup> Kyle Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage's 4'33"* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 28.

shape note composer William Billings.<sup>50</sup> Similarly conjuring such frontier myths, and perhaps more relevant to Cage's identity, is the representation of the great American naturalists (Thoreau, Muir) as folk scientists: woodsy and self-taught, these men could switch codes and shift between worlds, slipping into quasi-"primitive" lifeways for months at a time, but who can nonetheless emerge from the forest to reap the regard and rewards of the intellectual and cultural aristocracy.<sup>51</sup>

But how can this schema explain the plugged-in, switched-on 1960s Cage? When Cage's human body noisily reasserted itself, in the performance of a highly amplified everyday action that constitutes *0'00" (4'33" no. 2)*, isn't *anthropos* eliminating its own elimination? Standing at the apotheosis of Cagean "deskilling," *0'00* consists of "nothing but the continuation of one's daily work...done with contact microphones, without any notion of concert or theatre or the public." The implication is clear: artfulness, presentability, performativity, all on the side of "culture," are to be expunged from art. "The highest condition of art is artlessness," wrote Thoreau in his *Journals*, a text which would come to intensely interest Cage.<sup>52</sup> In the introduction to "Where are we going? What are we doing," Cage addresses the proper place of the human, subordinate to nature:

Is man in control of nature or is he, as part of it, going along with it? To be perfectly honest with you, let me say I find nature far more interesting than any of man's controls of nature. This does not imply that I dislike humanity. I think that people are wonderful, and I think this because there are instances of people changing their minds. (I refer to individuals and to myself)<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence*, 22.

<sup>51</sup> Cage's mycological activities are clearly related to this trajectory of amateur naturalism.

<sup>52</sup> Thoreau *Journal*, June 26, 1840. For the many uses of Thoreau in Cage's post-1967 scores, see Pritchett, *Music of John Cage*, 167-178.

<sup>53</sup> Cage, *Silence*, 193.

Nonetheless, Piekut suggests that “as much as Cage may have wished to see an integration of humanity with nature, he continually fell prey in his thinking to a modernist ontology that separated social affairs from natural ones, and that recapitulated an uncritical understanding of nature” linked to the emergence of Western experimental science.<sup>54</sup>

However, others suggest that it’s not quite fair to view all of Cage’s work as so wholly plagued by such an exclusion of human and social life. Along with the control of nature, the prestige status of Western art music and the rejection of its skill hierarchy would presumably all be among the issues on which, over time, “people change their minds,” and so, in his most deskilling-oriented works, we see the tight controls of chance (the “targeted therapy” against unnatural order) lapse into a looser allowance of bodies being themselves, bound up in the social and the everyday. Perhaps then, *anthropos* is not the problem, per se. For Cage, the “artless” human standing on the side of “life” in the art/life dichotomy is perhaps not so far from “nature,” as Lydia Goehr has suggested. Goehr, who is in turn unpacking philosopher Arthur Danto, expounds on this connection in Cage’s music, suggesting how his uses of nature are completely aligned with his elicitations of everyday sound. Centrally, both are ways of opening music to the world at large, of re-presenting the real: “art should reproduce the world by actualizing what is already going on in the world.”<sup>55</sup> Not merely taking inspiration from the birds’ song (as numerous composers have long done, filtering them through their own sensibilities), Cage wants to open up space “*for* the birds” themselves in the domain of music, just as,

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<sup>54</sup> Piekut, “Chance and Certainty,” 135.

<sup>55</sup> Lydia Goehr “For the Birds/Against the Birds: Modernist Narratives on the End of Art” in *Elective Affinities: Musical Essays on the History of Aesthetic Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 93.

in *0'00''*, he allows an unbounded arena for the everyday action of the non-artist, whom, like a zoo animal, Western art music had caged into a socially pernicious, unnatural state of motionless non-participation:

Through the passage of the concept of natural song or everyday sound into the concept of music, the concept is brought to self-understanding by being shown no longer to need its artificial or deadening aesthetic history. In this passage, music meets its natural maker, finds its concept and identity, and, as paradoxical as it sounds, is liberated from its cage.<sup>56</sup>

While it is well known that, in the 1950s, Cage aspired to “imitate nature in its manner of operation” through chance procedures, Ingram’s work shows how his conceptualization of nature became more scientifically literate in the 1960s.<sup>57</sup> Through his reading of and enthusiasm for Buckminster Fuller and Marshall McLuhan, Cage introduced the idea of ecology into experimental music discourse.<sup>58</sup> Tudor and others in Cage’s immediate circle seem to have speedily picked up the enthusiasm for ecology, and with it, its closely linked sibling discipline, cybernetics, also known as systems theory. Cybernetics was concerned with the control and the self-regulation of systems of all sorts at varied scales, from the cell to the ecosystem and from computers to economies, specializing particularly in analogies between biological and electronic systems. And, as Christina Dunbar-Hester has written, artists, relatively unfazed by the discipline’s roots in the military-industrial complex, took cybernetics’ founding goals of “command and control” and transfigured them into an aesthetic of “openness and indeterminacy.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Goehr, “For the Birds,” 83.

<sup>57</sup> Ingram, “Unkempt Forest,” 570-72.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 570.

<sup>59</sup> Christina Dunbar-Hester, “Listening to Cybernetics: Music, Machines, and Nervous Systems, 1950-1980” *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 35 No. 1 (2010), 113-14.

Crucial to cyberneticists' ideas of systemic self-regulation was the notion of *feedback*, where information, control signals, or energy from one part of the system loops back into that system, often reinforcing and amplifying the system's essential nature, and potentially giving rise to autopoiesis, or self-creation.<sup>60</sup> Audio feedback, as some in Cage's circle would soon explore, is an apt example of autopoiesis, and was unsurprisingly, often at the center of post-Cagean enthusiasm for cybernetics.

Thus, in the mid-1960s, especially in the most obviously cybernetics-inspired works produced by Cage and Tudor under the aegis of Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.) and with the help of Bell Labs engineers, Cage's longstanding preference for listening to and amplifying sounds that are already there over the introduction of new sound material (what Kahn describes as his "predilection for audition over utterance, for the centripetal forces of listening over the centrifugal broadcasts of expression."),<sup>61</sup> collides with a new, ecology-inspired enthusiasm for linking his gadgets together and making one process depend on another in what Nyman admiringly called "contingency systems."<sup>62</sup> But when this ideal of "audition over utterance" is transposed from the human ear to an amplified microphone, quiet Cagean listening can turn into howling feedback, and silence into earsplitting noise. Interviewed in 1966, the year he became involved with E.A.T., Cage redefined silence as "all of the sounds we don't

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<sup>60</sup> Nakai's "Hear After" exhaustively works through the sense in which Tudor's feedback-based music of the era is exemplary of autopoiesis. Interestingly, however, the term "autopoiesis" did not exist in the 1960s--it was coined early the following decade.

<sup>61</sup> Kahn, *Earth Sound*, 116.

<sup>62</sup> These works were Cage's *Variations VII* and Tudor's *Bandoneon! (A Combine)*, see Catherine Morris, ed. *9 Evenings Reconsidered: Art, Theatre, and Engineering* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006). For "contingency systems" defined, characterized, and linked forward to the activities of SAU, see Nyman 96-103.

intend...Therefore silence may very well include loud sounds and more and more in the twentieth century does.”<sup>63</sup>

Yet an even earlier work to use audio feedback in such a musical context was Robert Ashley’s *The Wolfman*. Ashley had worked as a Research Assistant in Acoustics at the University of Michigan Architectural Research Laboratory, as well as in its Speech Research Laboratory. In his performances of *The Wolfman* from 1964, he controlled the wailing feedback of his vocal microphone by positioning himself directly in front of the microphone and using his vocal cavity as a filter. Thus, as a scientifically literate alum of two laboratories where he studied both acoustical, architectural cavities, and the sounds produced by vocal cavities, Ashley evidently discovered that the acoustical fact linking these two volumes was the fact that both types of chambers have a characteristic quality that comes from their resonant frequencies. Phonation (e.g. shifting the vocal formant, as between “oo” and “ah” vowels) is an adjustment in the resonant frequencies of the mouth. And feedback is the result of the buildup, usually in a situation of high amplification, of the resonances belonging to the acoustical volume (e.g. in the differences between a “bright” and “dark” room acoustic) as well as of the electronic system (i.e. what is ordinarily referred to as the “frequency response” of the microphone, signal path and speakers).<sup>64</sup> *The Wolfman*’s animating idea is the surprising equivalence of these seemingly disparate forms of resonance, the possibility of superimposing those resonances we can control (vocal, musical, agentic, subjective) upon those that come to

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<sup>63</sup> Michael Zwerin, “A Lethal Measurement,” *Village Voice*, January 6, 1966; repr. in *John Cage: An Anthology*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Da Capo, 1991).

<sup>64</sup> Andrew Raffo Dewar, “Handmade Sounds: The Sonic Arts Union and American Technoculture” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Wesleyan University, 2009), 191-200. Robert Ashley, untitled biographical note, <http://www.robertashley.org/biographical/biography.htm>.

us as given and Other (architectural, acoustical, structural, objective). Both kinds of resonances are just preferential tendencies to oscillate with greater energy at some frequencies than all the others. When that energy is allowed to build up, we hear tones at the system's resonant modes. Ashley thus offers an early demonstration of what we might deem a cybernetics or an ecology of acoustical resonance, suggesting both the electronic sound system's points of control and its irreducible interrelatedness and contingency. It also finds room for agency within the system: we are endlessly subjected to resonance (we are its objects), but we are also subjects of resonance. As should be clear from my formulation of the ecology of resonance in the terms of ontology, I regard such a work as exemplary of the sort of mutual imbrication and entanglement of actors and agency that Piekut calls for, as an antidote to the modern era's specious split between subjects (observers, on the side of "culture") and objects (the observed, on the side of "nature").<sup>65</sup> My attempts at an ontological reading of resonance and feedback will recur repeatedly throughout this chapter.

In another of the earliest and most influential cases of *biofeedback*, Alvin Lucier's *Music for Solo Performer* (1965) offer an even clearer exemplar of the potent metaphors and models that experimentalists began to see in cybernetic and ecological systems. In this piece, the performer's own bioelectricity, a subaudio band of brainwaves known as alpha waves, is read off of electrodes and amplified enormously (but otherwise unaltered) so that it can be transduced by loudspeakers and articulate the brain's signals directly onto drums and other resonant objects. This acoustical amplification, in turn, sends the body's electrical signals further out into the performance space and makes them audible.

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<sup>65</sup> Piekut, "Chance and Certainty," 151-53.

But, while the performer is trying to achieve a state of “relaxed resting,” he cannot help be influenced by the sounds he is, by electronic extension, himself making.<sup>66</sup> Thus, the performer becomes a node in a feedback loop; his brain activity (a region where mentation and intention are inextricably linked with electrical activity) providing an almost unwilled flow of found (not made), elicited (not articulated) wave energy. The fact that the performer sits on stage, impassive, seeming to do nothing, seems to one-up even Cage’s attempts (as in *0’00’’*) at an unperformed music as the apotheosis of deskilling. Cage was so influenced by the piece, he quickly wrote brainwaves into the E.A.T.-produced *Variations VII*, crediting Lucier.<sup>67</sup> Through such moves, what had been only a *metaphor* of “electronic ecology” in cybernetic science became, in cybernetic art, a *reality*, through the actualization of an entanglement of electrical signals and biological beings.

Quickly in the middle 1960s, perhaps echoing *The Wolfman*’s sensational debut at the 2<sup>nd</sup> New York Avant-Garde festival, this powerful conjunction—the sonic investigation of acoustic spaces and the modeling of cybernetic systems through the use of feedback loops and the evocation of resonant frequencies— became a key region of concern for many in Cage’s circle: Cage’s favored interpreters Max Neuhaus and Tudor would pioneer performances made solely out of feedback, with no sound generators, works whose emergent and seemingly-unactivated sounds they would simply mix and not, as at a traditional instrument, directly articulate. Finding they could make music simply by listening to the autopoiesis of their electronic systems, both performers, lauded

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<sup>66</sup> From the score, Lucier and Simon, *Chambers*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1980), 69.

<sup>67</sup> Kahn *Earth Sound*, p. 115.

virtuosos, would ultimately “silence” their instrumental performance careers to instead pursue this gentler approach with electronics—quite a dramatic case of the “audition over utterance” Cage had called for.<sup>68</sup>

The same shared region of investigation seems to have been what brought together the four members of the Sonic Arts Union (or SAU, comprising Ashley, Lucier, David Behrman, and Gordon Mumma, initially called Sonic Arts Guild, or SAG), each of whom made feedback-related pieces as the group was coalescing.<sup>69</sup> As Dewar has suggested in his dissertation on SAU, the group’s shared core concerns were acoustical space, resonance, and the use of feedback systems, all tied together via the metaphors and emulation of cybernetics. Like Cage, his favorite writers Buckminster Fuller and Marshall McLuhan, and numerous others newly enthused with the cyberneticists’ understanding of “nature” and interdependent ecologies, SAU explored how cybernetic systems might “mimic the behavior of social and biological systems.”<sup>70</sup> But those in the Tudor-SAU circle both followed and moved beyond Cage’s conceptualization of nature; theirs was not only ecology as utopian model for society and human life. Working with

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<sup>68</sup> On Neuhaus’ early work with resonance and feedback in *Fontana-Feed*, see Megan Murph “Max Neuhaus and the Musical Avant-Garde” (M.A. Thesis, Louisiana State University, 2013, 54-60). 1966’s *Public Supply* is another of Neuhaus’s important early feedback works. For more on Tudor’s articulation of his no-input feedback practice as a form of “listening” and not “playing” see Nakai, “Hear After,” Rogalsky, “Nature as Organising Principle,” and Teddy Hultberg, “I Smile When the Sound is Singing Through the Space: An Interview with David Tudor.” May 17, 18 1988. [www.davittudor.org/Articles/hultberg.html](http://www.davittudor.org/Articles/hultberg.html)

<sup>69</sup> E.g. Behrman’s *Wave Train* and Mumma’s *Hornpipe*. I consider *Music for Solo Performer* Lucier’s first feedback work; *The Wolfman* is obviously Ashley’s, although that piece contained a tape part as well as very quiet vocal sound-making; it did not consist *solely* of feedback. Dewar, “Handmade Sounds,” 169-215.

<sup>70</sup> Note that Gordon Mumma, who was a key influence on the advancement of Tudor’s and Cage’s implementations of technology, called his homemade circuits “cybersonic” modules. See also Dewar, “Handmade Sounds,” 170-4.

resonance, the “nature” of phenomenal reality could also be directly probed, activated, demonstrated, made to self-oscillate and self-actuate.<sup>71</sup>

### **Lucier and Oliveros: from resonance to participation**

Though there is perhaps some inherent interest in the topic of experimentalism and “nature,” as well as in its varied links to the idea of the “nature of music” behind the UCSD Music 1 course, I have recounted the above genealogy of relationships and concerns with “nature” primarily to set the stage for the discussion of compositions by Alvin Lucier and Pauline Oliveros that permit and foreground participation by non-musicians. Little has been written, beyond the composer’s own words, about Lucier’s early works involving large-scale, deskilled participation. Little has been written, beyond Oliveros’ own words, on connections between her early electronic music and her subsequent scores written for skilled or unskilled participants. Thus, my historiographic intervention here is necessarily multipart and admittedly ambitious. In what follows, I will 1) Document the personal ties and shared artistic investigations linking Oliveros to Tudor and the Sonic Arts Union composers; 2) Identify the shared concerns of Oliveros’ and Lucier’s strategies for unrestricted/deskilled participation around 1967-70, and their connections to UCSD’s course for non-musicians, *The Nature of Music*; 3) Argue that these participatory strategies’ aim is to transmit a new insight to the participants, such

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<sup>71</sup> It’s not clear, however, whether this position moves past what Piekut has described, following Latour, as “The modest witness [who] is a scientist who does nothing more than create situations in which the natural realm can speak for itself, thereby supposedly eliminating the uncertainties and disputations of the social realm” Based on his stated preference for “non-interference” in the course of performance, Tudor seems to still uphold it, though by contrast, his “inside electronics” stance suggests not witnessing but imbrication. Benjamin Piekut, in “Sound’s Modest Witness: Notes on Cage and Modernism.” *Contemporary Music Review* 31, no. 1: 3–18.

that the pieces themselves are pedagogical, promising to “reskill” us through our participation; 4) Attempt to characterize the goals of this “reskilling” in terms of fundamental ideas of nature and the human relationship to it.

Here, I identify a particular formulation of nature which foregrounds acoustical resonance, in a project of musical exploration that linked Oliveros to her close compatriots in her artistic community. This leads me to the first performance of Lucier’s *Chambers*, hosted on the UCSD campus by Oliveros in her early days as a faculty member. Though very different from Cage’s *Musicircus*, *Chambers* offers a contrasting articulation of an experimental music college campus “Happening.” Thus, I move towards locating, first in Lucier’s work, and then in Oliveros’, a particular articulation of the concept of “nature” that moves beyond (what Piekut has critiqued as) Cage’s reductive binary opposition of “objective matters of fact in the natural world and subjective matters of value in the social world,” into a more entangled articulation of humanity, animality, sound and resonance.<sup>72</sup>

Though scholars are quick to assert SAU’s connections to Cage and especially to Tudor, much less frequently remarked is that Oliveros was also very closely linked to this group; Mumma wrote to Tudor as the group was coalescing in August 1966 that Oliveros was “the SAG representative for the west coast.”<sup>73</sup> Indeed, she was among the first artists to take up the concern with amplifying the latent resonances of spaces and objects; she wrote *Applebox Double* as a duet for her and Tudor, which they played at the 1965

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<sup>72</sup> Piekut “Chance and Certainty,” 135.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Dewar “Handmade Sounds,” 52. Dewar has extensively documented the many and varied uses of resonance and feedback in SAU’s music, and finds that, though it became a touring group of four, it was initially conceived as potentially including both Tudor and Oliveros as members.

ONCE Festival (an event planned by a group that included Ashley and Mumma);<sup>74</sup> several of her pieces during that period involved amplifying the wooden boxes she used for furniture and then making sounds on the boxes with kitchen implements—a compelling and little discussed interface between amplified resonance and anti-virtuosic, “deskilled” performance and means.<sup>75</sup>

Especially in her first years at UCSD, Oliveros’ work in this arena would continue to develop in close proximity to Tudor, Lucier and the other Sonic Arts Union composers. When Cage’s partner Merce Cunningham, whose touring musicians at the time were Tudor and SAU’s David Behrman, commissioned her to write a composition to accompany a piece by his dance company, the score she produced, *In Memoriam Nicola Tesla, Cosmic Engineer* (January 1969), specifies the actions of Behrman and Tudor by their first names. She knows the gear they use and their interests intimately; the text-notation is very nearly a personal letter. The piece calls for the performers to “explore the acoustic environment physically. Use cap pistol, bugle, or slide whistle to test the environment...search for the resonant frequency of the space.”<sup>76</sup>

Oliveros’ connection to Tudor and SAU would culminate in 1970 with her involvement in the production of works for the E.A.T.-produced Pavilion at Expo ’70 in Osaka, whose sound system, designed by Tudor and Mumma, included an ambitious multi-channel routing scheme and a hyper-reflective acoustic calling attention to its

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<sup>74</sup> Mumma regards this experience to have been among “the most important motivation[s] for Tudor’s flowering as a composer...Tudor was also VERY much influenced by the milieu of the San Francisco Tape Music Center activities, with his participation there from 1964 onwards.” quoted in Dewar, “Handmade Sounds,” 87 This was also around the time Oliveros developed the reel-to-reel tape delay techniques that would allow her to improvise within feedback-prone systems much like those most associated with Tudor’s post-1966 work. Von Gunden, *Music of Pauline Oliveros*, 55-7.

<sup>75</sup> Alan Baker, “An Interview with Pauline Oliveros” *American Mavericks* (San Francisco: American Public Media, 2003), [http://musicmavericks.publicradio.org/features/interview\\_oliveros.html](http://musicmavericks.publicradio.org/features/interview_oliveros.html).

<sup>76</sup> Pauline Oliveros Papers, MSS 102, Box 4, Folder 6. Mandeville Special Collections Library.

architectural resonance.<sup>77</sup> Efforts around the Pavilion (sponsored by Pepsi, whose promotional consideration wended its way into the titles of several of the works that Tudor created for it) would, in many ways, epitomize the interlinked concerns of feedback and resonance, concerns which also linked Oliveros, SAU, and Tudor into a tight-knit creative community. The Pavilion was an explicit attempt to create a multimedia environment inspired by the conjunction of cybernetics and ecology: it would be “symbolic of an organism constantly in a state of subtle change and flux.”<sup>78</sup> Working in the Pavilion, Tudor would create the first of his pieces consisting of nothing but audio feedback, which “dealt with trying to make the whole system oscillate...without any sound input.” Removing the performer and extending the idea of Ashley’s *The Wolfman*, Tudor’s feedback piece would be a pure and disembodied activation of the resonant potentials of the Pavilion’s architecture.<sup>79</sup>

Oliveros’ little-documented contributions to Expo ’70 manifested her growing distance from her peers’ emphasis on electronics, while maintaining the shared interest in resonance. Her works for the Pavilion included instructions for visitor participation: hostesses would “guide the visitors in exploring the sound reflective qualities of the dome.”<sup>80</sup> Thus, in a manner that I will argue is closely linked to the *Sonic Meditations* (and probably already reflects her 2+ years of teaching Music 1 at UCSD), Oliveros activates the same ultimate source of material as Tudor, but elicits these resonances

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<sup>77</sup> Billy Klüver, Julie Martin, and Barbara Rose, eds. *Pavilion* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1972), 304-7. Klüver, Billy. “The Pavilion” in Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort, ed. *The NewMediaReader*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 223-26.

<sup>78</sup> Barbara Rose, “Art as Experience, Environment, Process” in Klüver et al, *Pavilion*, 61.

<sup>79</sup> Hultberg, “Interview with David Tudor.”

<sup>80</sup> Klüver, “The Pavilion,” 224.

*acoustically*, using scored visitor participation, instead of using Tudor's all-electronic means to draw out the latent sonic potentials of the architecture.

Appropriately, given all this activity around acoustical resonance and reflection, Alvin Lucier was slated to do a program at the Pavilion that would have involved combined realizations of *Chambers*, *Vespers*, and *I Am Sitting in a Room*, and also involving, to various degrees, visitor participation (plus costumes!) but, perhaps because Pepsi pulled the plug on the Pavilion just a short time into the Expo, Lucier's contribution would not come to fruition.<sup>81</sup> *I Am Sitting in a Room*, "one of the archetypal process pieces of the late 1960s," is also widely viewed as the canonical articulation of musicalization of room resonances, which, over time, overcome the sound of speech when a recording is played back into a room and re-recorded, again and again.<sup>82</sup> In his article on rhetorics of "nature" in experimentalism, Rogalsky links Lucier's project to his older mentors Cage and Tudor, especially to the latter, with whom he shared "reliance on the acoustically transformative power of objects and spaces, and focus on exposition of natural processes."<sup>83</sup> This is not "nature" in the sense of the wild, green outdoors, or even the signals of biological life mined in *Music for Solo Performer*. Instead, we are now speaking of the essential nature of things in the world, their irreducible actuality, expressed in their resonant modes. These features of (every) things' physical materiality

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<sup>81</sup> Lucier, in Klüver et al, *Pavilion*, 299-300, see also Lucier and Simon, *Chambers*, 38.

<sup>82</sup> Rogalsky, "Nature as Organizing Principle," 135. Brandon Labelle *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*. New York: Continuum, 2006), 124-132; and Seth Kim-Cohen *In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2009) 185-93 both provide more in-depth readings.

<sup>83</sup> Rogalsky, "Nature as Organising Principle," 135.

implicate and may produce sound, as when *I Am Sitting in a Room* reveals that “every room has its own melody, hiding there until it is made audible.”<sup>84</sup>

For Cox, Lucier’s interest during these years in thus turning speech into resonance is central to a weighty philosophical program calling for renewed collective discovery (read: pedagogy) of what is held in common, underneath all contingent cultural inscriptions (read: deskilling):

This dismantling of the symbolic order (the domain of language, meaning, signification, and communication) is not gratuitous or nihilistic. It delights not so much in the destruction itself as in the discovery that follows. For Lucier's project is aimed at uncovering what undergirds the symbolic order but is disavowed by it: what Jacques Lacan called "the real," the perceptible plenitude of matter and nature.<sup>85</sup>

Thus, to summarize, Oliveros and Lucier, along with Tudor and the other members of SAU, took up and extended the program that Cage had influentially linked to “nature”: that audition should trump utterance and that sounds of the environment and the everyday should replace the sounds of Western art music. With the discovery of the musical potentials (and potent cybernetic metaphors) of feedback and acoustical resonance, Tudor, Lucier, et al could elicit a music that came even more directly from the font of “nature.” Rather than “imitating nature in its manner of operation” through a particular compositional procedure or a “natural” performance ethos (the artless everyday of *0’00*”), Lucier et al actually *activate* objects to hear the unique melodies hidden in their essential nature through the elicitation and amplification of musical autopoiesis—a system that when “activated composes itself out of its own composite instrumental

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<sup>84</sup> Lucier and Simon, *Chambers*, 37

<sup>85</sup> Christoph Cox, “The Alien Voice: Alvin Lucier’s *North American Time Capsule 1967*” in Douglas Kahn and Hannah Higgins, eds., *Mainframe Experimentalism: Early Computing and the Foundations of the Digital Arts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

nature.”<sup>86</sup> In case it’s not already clear, I regard this formulation of “nature,” as physical resonance, to be already more satisfying than (what Piekut suggests is) its use in Cage: a misguided category error that mistakenly, accidentally *separates* us and all matters of humanity and society from the vaunted, valorized otherness of “nature.” But is the newer notion of nature-as-resonance any more practicable a basis for a notion of music pedagogy, or for broader-based musical participation?

Returning at long last from the thicket of “nature” to my keynote themes, I want to explore how the notion of nature-as-resonance might engender new possibilities for a participatory experimentalism. As good luck would have it, this question brings us right back to the UCSD campus around 1968, where one of the earliest and purest articulations of Lucier’s notion of resonance-as-nature would meet the amateurs in Oliveros’ Nature of Music course. In the debut of Lucier’s *Chambers* on the campus in 1968, we find the new, decisively *post-Cage* discourse of nature-as-resonance emerge in a situation of broad-based, skill-agnostic participation (as well as in a site of anti-traditional/ “deskilling” pedagogy).

As a verbal notation, realizable by anyone regardless of musical background, and performed in public space, *Chambers* bears comparison to the deskilling techniques of Fluxus and Happenings, whose shocks had, by that point, been digested by the no-longer-outraged wider culture. Thus, *Chambers* (and the rest of the works discussed in this chapter) doesn’t channel the deskilling, participatory impulse so much towards the novelty and transgression of these early 1960s movements. Instead, I want to suggest that the new formulation of nature-as-resonance, while still demanding severance with

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<sup>86</sup> Rogalsky “Nature as Organising Principle” 134.

Western art music competencies, is actually more focused on participation *as* a form of pedagogy. Here, through participating *in* the activation of nature's resonant potentials, one ineluctably comes to knowledge of the phenomenal world. Clearly, this seems a far cry from Cage's pedagogy of listening, which offers, almost as a matter of faith, that acceptance and enjoyment of whatever is happening, as in the "musicalization of aurality," will result in "Happy New Ears," an awakening, a changed life.<sup>87</sup>

A bit more history on Oliveros and Lucier's prior artistic dialogue suggests that the two composers were already becoming acquainted with the conjunction of experimentalism and group participation through their collaborations in a type of music-making that might seem a sharp contrast to the hallmark Tudor/SAU concerns (solo electronic performance, contingent control systems, natural resonance and autopoiesis). Since the early 1960s, Lucier and Oliveros had worked with vocal choirs in idiosyncratic ways which already begin to suggest "deskilling," or, at any rate, the replacement of schooled vocal techniques with "ordinary," unschooled ones. In sharp contrast to the aesthetics of live electronics, where performances (usually solo or small group) on inscrutable, unfamiliar devices conjured little historical baggage, choral singing comes freighted not only with a literature and history in Western art music, but also associations of ritual practice across global cultures (significations which, in their subsequent participatory works, both Lucier and Oliveros would draw upon). So, when, at the end of 1967, Lucier took the Brandeis University Chamber Choir, the student ensemble he directed, into the studio to record the LP *Extended Voices*, he essayed a few experiments

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<sup>87</sup> Cage *A Year from Monday*, 30. See also my "Sound Pedagogy," 222-25 for further unpacking of the thesis that Cage (and many since him) have believed that changed listening would mean a change in the very life of the subject.

in what we might deem a sort of “deskilling” of the choir, recording as the LP’s lead track Oliveros’ *Sound Patterns*. This piece instructs the (all acoustic) choral ensemble to imitate the sounds of the classical electronic music studio, predominantly “filtered noise” sounds produced through varied phonation on a “sh” sound. Though it is precisely notated, it suggests childlike play with sounds anyone can make.

The album’s next track is Lucier’s own *North American Time Capsule 1967*, swaths of which sound like *Sound Patterns* run through one of SAU’s noisy, “cybersonic” sound-modifying circuits, although in point of fact, the piece actually runs the choir’s voices through a mainframe vocoder prototype at Sylvania Applied Research Laboratories. As a technology, the vocoder is entirely apropos of the resonance obsession of the SAU circle—it analyzes the resonances of speech and can synthesize new resonances in the vocal bandwidth (a sort of digitalization of Ashley’s analog *Wolfman* procedure, recalling its similar genesis from the Michigan Speech Research Lab). To prepare for their date with the vocoder, Lucier told the choir members to visit an environment and try to remember its sound so that they could replicate it, using any sound-making means. Because the task almost certainly precludes normal trained singing, but demands a new feat in relation to sound recollection and reproduction, the choir is thus both “deskilled” and then must “reskill” themselves.

But as Cox suggests, Lucier’s use of the electronic processing then imposed on the choir’s sounds intends the very dissolution of all individual and enculturated aspects of human sound-making: “In Lucier’s hands, the vocoder becomes a machine with which to liquidate speech and to abolish the identity of the speaking subject, shattering all syntax and pulverizing every syntanteme, morpheme, and phoneme into fluid sonic

matter.”<sup>88</sup> Or in Lucier’s own words, “you could imagine that you had something to do with all the vocal utterances that were ever made and that you might bring yourself back through time to when you were a small animal.” Deskillling the choir is just the beginning, it can take us “back” only so far, whereas the electronics can take us even further, to the “single source of life, the idea of a single-cell splitting into two and then four and then eight, geometrically. This piece, however, would work back the other way...going back to where [everyone] had a connection.”<sup>89</sup> The implications of *communitas*, albeit through the “pulverization” of individuality and humanity, are clear.

Thus, Lucier and Oliveros worked side-by-side, in their different ways, meditating on the distance between group singing—perhaps the quintessential form of musical participation—and electronic sound. Could the futurist electronic resources of experimental music have anything to do with the old-fashioned activity of music as communal practice? Could electronics be the necessary adjunct to “deskilling” that finally get us all the way forward to the past (or was it back to the future?), where social differentiation, as much as the differentiation of music from nature, would be no more?

### **Lucier’s Chambers and Vespers: studies in a pedagogy of resonance**

Perhaps reciprocating the favor of recording her music, Oliveros would host Lucier on the UC San Diego campus just a few months later.<sup>90</sup> His main purpose there, as he related later, was to collect the sounds of another sort of natural resonance, the natural radio of the ionosphere. Setting up his antennae and amplifiers all over the still-quiet and

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<sup>88</sup> Cox “Alien Voices,” 176.

<sup>89</sup> Lucier, quoted in Cox “Alien Voices,” 182.

<sup>90</sup> This would be among Oliveros’ highest profile releases, on the Music of Our Time series, produced for Columbia Masterworks by David Behrman. See Von Gunden, *Music of Pauline Oliveros*, 26.

mostly wooded campus, Lucier was unable to get far enough away from the hum of power lines to hear these fugitive sounds.<sup>91</sup> But the trip to La Jolla was far from a bust, yielding one unplanned premiere. Driving down from Oliveros' home each day, Lucier saw a shop along the highway selling conch shells. He bought a number of these shells, and then, with the help of several of Oliveros' students (some of them almost certainly the undergraduates from the first Music 1 cohort), debuted the still-untitled piece that he would come to call *Chambers*.<sup>92</sup>

Giving one conch shell to each student, Lucier had everyone simply blow into their shell, which would “let the natural pitches of each horn, of each shell, be themselves. ...I was perfectly delighted to let the chords or simultaneities that the shells produced when played together depend on the pitches of the shells themselves and not on anything I did.” Performing the work on campus, “outside without any announcement but in an environment with people going here and there,” Lucier had the group “dispersing outward from [a] central circle to outer points in the environment, moving as far as they could from one another until they reached the threshold of hearing at least one other shell.”<sup>93</sup> With regard to the larger issues of this chapter, the core point is that, as an early and classic articulation of the interest in the acoustical *activation* (not imitation) of “nature,” *Chambers* articulates a tight link between deskilling, participation, and nature-as-resonance: The phenomenal world is encountered as a given, and, because the simplest, most sparing means of activation are the best ones for bringing a system to

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<sup>91</sup> He would later (in the high Rockies) capture some such sounds and release them as *Sferics* in 1980. Lucier, *Music 109*, 150-3.

<sup>92</sup> Oliveros' papers suggests that, along with her studio responsibilities, this was the only course she taught that term, and there seem not to have been majors or graduate students at this early stage.

<sup>93</sup> Lucier and Simon, *Chambers*, 9.

resonance (as in the autopoiesis of audio feedback), no special skills are required to participate. In fact, as we will see, traditional musical competencies might only get in the way.

As in a musicircus, sound-making is allowed to interpenetrate with the stuff of everyday (campus) life, but unlike a musicircus, there is a clearly defined purpose to the conjunction of the particular activities, which is where the piece takes on its pedagogical character. Rather than *containing* the diverse, interpenetrating sounds, as the University of Illinois Stock Pavilion did, the UCSD campus (regarded in those days, as we have seen, as wild, quiet, and frontier-like) becomes, in macrocosm, its own sort of natural space to be probed, sounded, activated, and known. Lucier recalls that “the whole area through which [the players] had moved had been described by the sounds of the shells. By the end of the performance, the players must have moved almost half a mile apart” before the piece’s ending—determined by mutual inaudibility—had finally been reached. The piece combines individual discovery (self-teaching) and public, potentially pedagogical demonstration that everything is a chamber; everything is subject to resonance.

The concerns of the UCSD *Chambers* performance clearly anticipate the concerns of Lucier’s next composition, *Vespers*, which is also an all-acoustic “audience participation” piece requiring no traditional musical competencies. In fact, Lucier describes the piece’s genesis at a time when he was “looking for something outside of music,” which led him to a scientific text on echolocation.<sup>94</sup> Like *Chambers*, *Vespers* demands an austere and spare activation of the found resonance of an acoustical volume.

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<sup>94</sup> Lucier, *Music 109*, 84.

*Vespers* takes the idea of such “probing” activations to a further extreme; it uses actual scientific test equipment, a device designed to communicate with dolphins called the Sondol. Using this pulse generator, performers must echolocate around the performance space by bouncing clicks off the walls while blindfolded or in darkness.

If the text score to *Chambers* (written after the UCSD debut) frames the exploration of resonance as play (“Collect or make large and small resonant environments...find a way to make them sound,” preceding a long, ludic catalogue of possible excitations and volumes that suggests that everyone choose their own adventure) *Vespers* frames a similar activity as work: “Accept and perform the task of acoustic orientation and scanning the environment and monitoring the changing relationships between the outgoing and returning clicks....Discover routes to goals, find clear pathways.”<sup>95</sup> The stakes here are higher: over the course of a *Vespers* performance, the players must acquire a new listening-based *skill*, dramatizing and sonicizing a pedagogical injunction that recalls those of Cage: Listen beyond what you think is “music,” and learn to listen anew. The sound of *Vespers*’ music is the sound of the players *learning* to use their audition in a putatively nonmusical (that is, functional) way. The passage from unskill to skill is thus the very form of the piece. In this sense, *Vespers* is a drama of reskilling, premised on the Cagean exclusion (or deskilling) of Western art music (catalogued in the previous chapter). After having utterly banished traditional musical training from the arena of performance, and bracketed an area of sonic competency (acoustical navigation) wholly unlinked to traditional musicianship skills, Lucier hopes to teach us a new way to listen. His stated goal in such works is to “open up

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<sup>95</sup> Lucier and Simon, *Chambers*, 3-4, 15-17

[people's] ears to their environments," the same sort of revelation through sensory experience that Cage is so concerned to engender: a learning to listen differently, whose value overflows the bounds of music to ramify out into everyday life and the inner life of the subject.<sup>96</sup>

Yet unlike the UCSD *Chambers*, a wholly participatory public event for which no audience was purposely assembled, *Vespers* is typically performed for an audience, albeit one who, in Lucier's preferred realization, is ultimately dissolved into a group of participants when the composer passes out small toy clickers to everyone towards the end of the piece. Twice, in print, Lucier has described one such *Vespers* performance where he passed out hundreds of such click-generators. "Three hundred or so people began playing their crickets. The hall was ringing! The sound image of that room was marvelous. The room was being used as an instrument."<sup>97</sup> The audience, Lucier hopes, has "learned" the piece through the example of the performers (who are following the score), and are liberated to perform without a score. As in oral traditions, the performance *itself* constitutes a kind of scoreless instruction for how to participate, a leading-by-example.

In its "audience participation" version, the piece can be analyzed as enacting three phases or sites of pedagogy. First, the performers teach themselves to echolocate. Meanwhile, a naïve audience must solve the mystery of what the piece is about, straining both ear and understanding to try to figure what the performers are doing and how they

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<sup>96</sup> Lucier and Simon, *Chambers*, 11.

<sup>97</sup> Lucier, *Music 109*, 88.

are doing it. (Some, Lucier is well aware, never do.<sup>98</sup>) Finally, audience members are allowed to break this tense though functionally necessary quiet, and are given the chance to learn and play with the materials of the piece: percussive impulses and acoustical reflections.

If each realization were to proceed like this, it would be a beautifully harmonious model of the interaction between performers and audiences, in some distant way recalling the process of integrating audiences into performance in a sing-along. The ratified performers articulate their music for long enough and with sufficient repetition that the audience learns it. Finally, the audience is asked to participate, and they are able to do so, not only contributing to the performance and sound, but also by simultaneously breaking the social and ontological division between audience and performer. Perhaps Cox's observations about Lucier's *North American Sound Capsule* might come in handy here, as the participatory version of *Vespers* also enacts, over the course of its unfolding, a dissolution of (echolocative) signals such that, at the end, all that remains is dense, unparsable sonic materiality in which everyone's liquefied signals are joined.<sup>99</sup>

However, in Lucier's narrations of participatory *Vespers* performances, classical musicians tragically disrupt the near-success of the audience's participation, ruining the piece, reinserting pernicious social differentiation, and spoiling the possibility of merged subjectivity in *communitas*. In the telling published in 1980, "Some students from the conservatory who were there began making banal rhythmic figures. Instead of trying to hear the room, they played childish patterns." In short, they didn't understand, or didn't

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<sup>98</sup> Lucier and Simon, *Chambers*, 27. Trained musicians, Lucier believes, are *especially* likely not to "get" the piece, and to misinterpret it to be about intentional rhythmic patterns, not about acoustical reflections.

<sup>99</sup> Cox, "Alien Voice," 178.

accept the piece's basis in the Cagean "predilection for audition over utterance," a fact certainly not unrelated to the fact that, as conservatory students, they were studying to become professional "utterers." In a much later recollection, Lucier attributes the mischief to a music professor, who "went out and got his violin [and] started playing it in the middle of the performance," thus *inciting* other audience members to make "vulgar vocal sounds and banal rhythms."<sup>100</sup> In this second telling, an even more authoritative representative of Western art music traditionalism has entered the story to become a Pied Piper-like villain. The professor leads others astray and mis-educates his own students by inserting "vulgar" music (i.e. what *most people* think of as music) into Lucier's demonstration or imitation of nature, a space where the old music doesn't belong.<sup>101</sup>

Thus, *Vespers* clearly does not call for players with any particular skills, but it does demand those with a particular temperament. It is subtitled, "for any number of players who would like to pay their respects to all living creatures who inhabit dark places and who, over the years, have developed acuity in the art of echolocation..."<sup>102</sup> (It's not clear whether these words are meant as instrumentation, dedication, or both.) Evidently, such players who are capable of simply "paying their respects" are more easily found among musical amateurs: "Often I find that people who have never played a musical instrument before, people I get off the street, so to speak, a few hours before the concert, do the best job because they don't have preconceived ideas." For Lucier,

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<sup>100</sup> Lucier, *Music 109*, 88.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 88. In both versions, however, the story has a happy ending: In the middle of the night, Lucier hears people using the crickets to sound out the echoes of the city: "Some people finally got the point of the piece." Lucier assesses the success of his music by whether he has been able to alter his audience's listening out in their everyday sensory experience. Put differently: the music will only have been successful if its pedagogy "sticks," if it transmits new ideas, practices, and ways of being into the life of the subject.

<sup>102</sup> Lucier and Simon, *Chambers*, 16.

extending the discussion of American “natural” earlier, the “cultivated” Western notion of music seems to be a kind of false consciousness, if not a pollutant: “You see, I want to make the space be the interesting thing, not the personalities of either myself or of the people playing it. What goes out into the space, therefore, has to be neutral.”<sup>103</sup> Music, it seems, is a poor test signal for the phenomenal world; in the apotheosis of the resonance explorations of SAU, Tudor, et al, Lucier suggests that the world returns a much more interesting music when we empty ourselves of our music and allow “nature” to speak for itself.

Even when they have the desire to participate, most people have a hard time liberating themselves from their embeddedness in their music culture to access the revelations of *Vespers*:

After performances, people come up and play with the Sondols, a situation that I like very much, but one of the first things they do is put their hands over the loudspeaker and pretend they’re playing a trombone or some other brass instrument. They make wah-wah sounds or speed the pulses up and slow them down in rhythmic effects; they’re try to do old things with new means. Perhaps that’s strange for me to say because I’m tuning in to a very old activity, bats and other nocturnal creatures have been using echoes for years, so I’m more old-fashioned than anybody.<sup>104</sup>

On the one hand, these notions recall an oft-noted insight about music made from resonance and feedback, e.g. in Tudor’s discovery of musical autopoiesis: “very simple inputs”—or no inputs—“make the most complex result.” When your goal is to probe a system and reveal its “nature,” the use of a complex (i.e. a traditionally musical) signal, “would become very predictable, but if you take something rather simple, then in the end

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<sup>103</sup> Lucier and Simon, *Chambers*, 20.

<sup>104</sup> Lucier and Simon, *Chambers*, 25.

the sound in the output becomes astonishing. It's like a revelation.”<sup>105</sup> Lucier would undoubtedly agree. However, by placing these issues of simplicity and complexity on a historical axis, he engages in a kind of anti-modern historical critique not unlike the one, as we have seen above, forwarded by Rothenberg, Ogdon, or the Parisian graffitist of May 1968. Resisting the imputations of contemporaneity that would seem to come with his new technologies and new music, Lucier positions his explorations of phenomenal nature as “old-fashioned” in its reach all the way back to the pre-cultural and the animal: Beneath the cobblestones, the beach; beneath the conservatory, the bat cave. Dismantling the former grants access to the latter. Begin again—preferably with participation.

Yet Lucier’s dismay at the violinist’s defilement of *Vespers* stands in notable contrast to Cage’s stance, which Kahn has characterized as his “argumentative tolerance.” Lecturing his friend Morton Feldman during a joint radio appearance (on WBAI in 1966) on the necessity of opening your ears and accepting what comes in—a lecture he was wont to give on many occasions—Cage argued that traditional forms of music can be recuperated into indeterminacy; we simply need to let them interpenetrate with one another and with the environment, just as was his approach to the recitalists and jazz bands he invited into the *Musicircus*. Thus, when Feldman complains of people bringing radios to the beach and thus spoiling “nature” with intrusions of “culture,” Cage effectively tells him that no one can ruin “nature” for the listener except listeners themselves. If, utilizing a non-preferential auditory stance, one instead hears the radio music as no different than anything else in the environment, traditional musical articulation is denied its pre-eminence, and becomes just another sound. The music of

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<sup>105</sup> Hultberg, “Interview with David Tudor.”

everyday life will remain always already Cagean in its ontology, if it stays located in the ear of the beholder.<sup>106</sup>

Lucier's suggestion, at least regarding *Vespers*, suggests a disagreement with Cage's stance.<sup>107</sup> If the goal is the revelation of the phenomenal *nature* of things (whether of the ionosphere, or of an acoustical volume, or, as Music 1's title would have it, of *music*), then most of the sounds of civilization, from AC power to Western art music, can easily become a kind of noise pollution.<sup>108</sup> As we saw in *Vespers*, trained musicians and conventional music endangered the possibility of both egalitarian participation and effective pedagogy; it's not just a distraction, or a disrespect—it blots out and covers over the aspects of the piece that facilitate coming to know the phenomenal world accurately. The traditionally “musical” is capable, then, of masking the phenomenal. Such a strong stance against Western music thus contrasts with Cage's weak stance, in which all sounds are simply equal.

Linked to Lucier's divergence from Cage's all-accepting tolerance his compositional use of what might be termed *functional listening*: as in Christian Wolff's “contingency systems” the form of the music depends on listening and response.<sup>109</sup> Recall not only that *Vespers*' echolocation requires that players hear the space between outgoing and incoming clicks, but also that *Chambers* ends only once “outer limits are

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<sup>106</sup> Kahn, *Earth Sound*, 116-17.

<sup>107</sup> On the other hand, I don't believe that there's anything in the score precluding a performer in *Chambers* from placing a traditionally musical source of recorded sounds inside a resonant environment, and calling that a performance of the piece—to some extent this is precisely what occurs in *Nothing Is Real* (1990) At any rate, Lucier's stance on such matters seems to have mellowed at some point in the 1970s.

<sup>108</sup> It would be a worthwhile project to follow Ingram's lead and trace other experimentalists' nature rhetorics in light of the intellectual history of the environmental movement, which, at the end of the Sixties, had an apocalyptic tone. In my reading of Lucier, and in particular, reading the poetry of his text scores, is that he was fairly inflamed by such issues at that time.

<sup>109</sup> See Nyman, *Experimental Music*, 66-69 on *For 1,2, or 3 People*, which is there nominated as the classic articulation of such systems.

reached where minimum audio contact can be maintained by a player with at least one other player,”<sup>110</sup> Only if we listen hard and well and in relative peace do these pieces work as they are meant to. Cagean interpenetration, simultaneity and noise-as-silence would render such sonic exploration null. Lucier’s project has a more tightly focused (pedagogical) purpose: not just “opening” the ears to everything, but extending them towards *specific* realities. The “rules” for ludic participation in these pieces depend on *hearing* those realities, so there’s no game without a quiet backdrop. Thus, Lucier *instrumentalizes* listening, where Cage advocated “purposeless play”<sup>111</sup> in which “nothing is accomplished.”<sup>112</sup>

Embedded in these contrasts are a tussle over the meaning of participation. In Cage’s formulation, participation seems to just mean that everyone is free to construct their own music out of the sounds they hear wherever they are. In Lucier’s formulation, participation might require subjugating individual freedom to concentration and discipline for the sake of new sonic rituals of *communitas*. These we must arrive at not only completely deskilled but with an attitude of reverence, “paying our respects”, as the *Vespers* score has it, to the animal and the natural. Through our participation, such rituals promise to reskill us with the sorts of sonic competencies we might require to hear and play the music of the spheres, rather than the music on the radio. Stretching this comparison between Cage and Lucier’s notions of participation to its limit, might this be a tension between *being* (yourself, as you are today) and *becoming* (someone new, through internalizing a profound new insight about sound)?

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<sup>110</sup> Lucier and Simon, *Chambers*, 6.

<sup>111</sup> Cage, *Silence*, 12.

<sup>112</sup> Cage, *Silence*, xii, 17, 39. A favored formulation, the phrase appears thrice in *Silence*.

### **Oliveros and the Challenges of a Pedagogy of “Nature” (of Music)**

Proceeding from the discussion of Cage, Tudor and Lucier, experimental composers whose ideas about “nature” are well documented and widely discussed, I now move, as promised, towards the side-by-side investigation of Oliveros’ *Sonic Meditations* and the UCSD Nature of Music course which she has often suggested was a crucial spur to the composition of that piece. The preceding discussion has had two main aims that set up my discussion of Oliveros. First, I linked her activities and concerns to those of her immediate artistic circle, finding numerous overlaps almost completely unremarked in the literature. In this way, I not only argue for her discursive inclusion as a core member of the Tudor-SAU axis, but more importantly, I locate their focus on resonance as a shared crux in *her* conceptualization of the “nature of music.” Secondly, the lively scholarly debate about “nature” and experimental music that I rehashed sets up my further analysis of the innovative UCSD Nature of Music course and of the *Sonic Meditations*.

In what follows, I use both “texts” (the work and the UCSD course) as a lens through which to problematize and extend this debate on experimentalism and nature, asking, in particular, what the situation of amateur-accessible, skill-agnostic participation can tell us about the nature, and the rhetorics of “nature,” of experimental music. I use this literature not only to open the discussion of experimentalist aesthetics onto important underlying issues of ontology and ethics, but also because, as I have already lamented, a literature specifically focused on issues of participation and pedagogy in experimental music does not yet really exist. Luckily, as we have already seen, there is good reason to

consider many post-Cagean deployments of “nature” as proximate and deeply linked to these issues, because of how this slippery word functions to designate both non-human phenomenal reality *and* the essential, innermost qualities of the human prior to or outside of enculturation. At the interface of these two senses of “nature,” experimentalists locate an “uncultivated” notion of music to which, I will argue, the notion of the musical amateur (who is also the unskilled/deskkilled participant of many of these participatory works) is central.

Why center my analysis on this chapter on the *Sonic Meditations*? First, they have been recognized as among the major opuses, across the entire literature of American composition, written specifically with mixed-skill and amateur accessibility in mind.<sup>113</sup> As Oliveros’ most performed, most written-about score, the place of the *Sonic Meditations* in the experimentalist canon has been further cemented by a number of scholarly analyses.<sup>114</sup> Yet, while it’s an oft-mentioned fact that they were composed while Oliveros was teaching a music course for non-musicians, it’s curious (if characteristic of a more general disciplinary inattention towards the consideration of pedagogical labor’s art-historical effects) that no scholars have granted much critical consideration to the *Sonic Meditations*’ development in light of Oliveros’ work and teaching at UCSD.<sup>115</sup>

In addition to containing several of her most frequently performed and discussed compositions among its twenty-five individually numbered pieces, the *Sonic Meditations*

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<sup>113</sup> See Gagné “Gebrauchsmusik”, 113, and Steve Smith “Strange Sounds Led a Composer To a Long Career,” *New York Times*, August 12, 2012, AR10, which specifically addresses the work’s entry into the canon.

<sup>114</sup> Martha Mockus, *Sounding Out: Pauline Oliveros and Lesbian Musicality* (London: Routledge, 2011), 35, 44-6.

<sup>115</sup> Oliveros mentions the course yet again in an interview with Mockus, *Sounding Out*, 157.

provided much of the seed material for the rest of her subsequent career. The ideas that first appeared in these works would recur and develop in the vast majority of her scores and performances since, particularly as her ideas around sound and meditation have been refined and expanded into the extra-compositional sound practice called Deep Listening.<sup>116</sup> When asked about the genesis of her Deep Listening practice, which has in the past three years alone been the focus of music journal issues, art museum expositions, and a new research institute, Oliveros positions the *Sonic Meditations* as the wellspring of Deep Listening.<sup>117</sup> In turn, she also typically locates her teaching, and particularly her teaching of non-musicians in Music 1, as central to the genesis of her signature work and ensuing life practice. Such issues were at the forefront in a recent interview, in an issue of the journal *Sound American* devoted to Deep Listening:

Sound American: I'm fascinated, in my reading, by how many non-musicians are involved in Deep Listening, since my experience is solely through the lens of music. Was Deep Listening conceived as a life practice initially, or did it come out of your musical experience or necessity?

Pauline Oliveros: Well, first of all, I started writing *Sonic Meditations* in the early 1970s. This came about because of my own practice. I began, around the end of the 60s, to do a listening practice; listening to long tones for example, and listening not only to what I was sounding, but also to how it was affecting me, both physically and mentally. Then I began to understand some things about attention.

I was teaching at UCSD at that same time, and there was a large course that we had called "The Nature of Music". This was for general students, so the class was populated with a lot of non-musicians. What we wanted to do at the time was to engage all of the students in making music, so we had things like recording a number of samples on magnetic tape. You could hand the tape to the student with a splicing block and razor and they would cut up the tape and put it back together in their own version to make a piece. Anyone could participate in that. The class had something

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<sup>116</sup> See *Sound American* 7, and Pauline Oliveros, *Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse/Deep Listening, 2005).

<sup>117</sup> See *Sound American* 7, Mockus *Sounding Out*, 157-8.  
<http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/2014Biennial/PaulineOliveros>.

like 150 students so we had teaching assistants and provided laboratories for them to work together on things like graphic notation; having the students draw a picture or a graph and telling us what it means and then play it. They would have instruments around or found objects that anybody could activate, and so they got an experience in improvisation and in making pieces. This was a replacement for the standard music appreciation course.

So, I became interested in how I could engage the students into performing and started the Sonic Meditations. It was really my attempt to engage any level of ability through those pieces.

The causal chain here is clear: the UCSD course created a milieu in which it became practical and convenient to compose for non-musicians. In the students enrolled in Music 1, she discovered a heterogeneous and skill-diverse ensemble, almost as a “found object.” Perhaps the Music 1 students became an instrument of convenience, one easily accessed where she lived and worked. Not unlike Cage’s transmutation of the conveniently omnipresent piano into a percussion ensemble via his “preparations,” Oliveros had discovered another near-omnipresent situation (heterogeneous humanity in its found state of diverse experience and musical ability) and learned how to prepare this “instrument” such that it would be a suitable sonic and compositional resource for experimentalism.

Music 1 archival materials suggest how the demands of pedagogy influenced the *Sonic Meditations*; some of her teaching materials even seem to be “sketches” for the piece. Yet Oliveros’ narration of a smooth progression from classroom to concert work elides some of the fractures and divisions around the core issues of participation with which UCSD faculty were clearly struggling. Their problem was one that was widely shared in the late 1960s: once all barriers to participation have been torn down, what, exactly, is to be done? Where is the source of authority, truth, and meaning? Once UCSD administrators had determined that music should be taught in way that was hands-on,

laboratory-like, “experimental,” and without *a priori*s, how would instructors determine *what* students would actually do, and *why*?

### **On the Nature of “The Nature of Music”**

We have already seen the varied ideological and intellectual forces that buffeted the Music 1 course into existence. But what did the course consist of in practice, and what were Oliveros’ particular contributions to the collaborative effort of creating and delivering it? I quote from an unpublished “Report on an Experimental General Music Program” (some of it unsigned, much of it evidently by faculty member John Silber), which anthologized and reflected on a number of the exercises, materials and assignments generated by the half-dozen or so faculty involved in teaching the course:

In the beginning we purposefully took an unstructured position—a position which said that music was an open-ended affair of sound, time, intuition, the senses and human imagination. At that point in the course, to have felt and embodied music through free improvisations and simple sound games was more important to us than to know music in any abstract analytic or "models of" manner. It was to be the responsibility of each student to enlarge himself through his own thoughts, actions and invention; he was to be his own sensory and pedagogic system, not ours. At the same time free improvisations and sound games were presented, the class was exposed to music of a non-doctrinaire, provocative nature. This was done to let the student know at the very outset the commitment to new ideas and technology, to invention and exploration, to the need to think freshly. The student was not to be just a reflective analogue of his present musical understanding or culture; he was to create, to invent, to rethink, to realize.<sup>118</sup>

Clearly, the faculty wanted students to generate their music, as it were, from scratch. As in the dialogical imperatives of Freirean or Rancièrian pedagogy, the professors speak of abnegating their authority so that students may *teach themselves*.

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<sup>118</sup> Silber, REGMP, i.

To make a leap across domains, I want to suggest the similarity between such pedagogical ideas and the Cagean musical discourse of emptying music of the composer's authority, as well as to the discourses of emptiness and autopoiesis behind Tudor's and SAU's feedbacks and resonances. As I have suggested, these post-Cage experimentalists were, especially in the latter half of the 1960s, centrally concerned with creating, in their music, a vacuum of intentions, cultural accretions, and known musical materials, so that, when this empty vessel or system is activated, it yields an authentic rendering of its "nature"—a music that *makes itself*. Can this ideal of a "music of nature" be linked to The Nature of Music, across a conceptual bridge between sonic autopoiesis and dialogical pedagogy? Under both paradigms, as we've seen, the hegemonic music traditions must be countered, challenged, and often excluded. But even if we accept that, as "foreign substances," such musics should not be placed into students' heads as in Freire's "banking model," does it therefore follow that *no* music may be transmitted from a position of pedagogical authority?

In Music 1, students *were* offered some music to at least cogitate on, but Silber is explicit that these were *not* models to emulate—students are to be *their own* "pedagogic system." The faculty's performances "of a non-doctrinaire, provocative nature" state a commitment "to invention and exploration, to the need to think freshly"—framed as a kind of negative critique, rather than as positive (transmissible) musical content.<sup>119</sup> It's hardly that I object to such mild-mannered information sharing, which on the spectrum of pedagogical approaches, is a comparatively gentle one.

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., i.

What is more conceptually troubling, certainly bordering on paradox, is the simultaneous refusal of pedagogical authority, crossed with the Cagean missionary project (and indeed, the missionary imperative of all education that aspires to transform). Students are not to be “reflective analogues,” copying the tastes of their “present musical understanding or culture”—instead, the teacher wishes them transformed into individuals, beyond the mimetic hordes. Of course, the choice to transform, and the content of the new subjectivity chosen, may not be imposed from a position of authority; it must come from inside the student. But authorities (Cage, the Music 1 faculty) can *model* freedom for the student and at least demonstrate what it’s like. Silber continues: “Composed pieces presented to the class were primarily of an experimental mode. Little of what could be termed traditional was pumped into the course. This was done not to demean traditional music but to alert the student to the very real musical materials of his time.”<sup>120</sup> Students were given the freedom to choose and chart their own musical destiny; yet the foregone conclusion was that they would choose experimentalism, because any other choice would suggest that they were never free to begin with, that they were still mimetic, “reflective analogues” of prevailing, received taste, or at the very least that they were behind “their time.”<sup>121</sup>

As Piekut has written, in regards to Cage’s conflict with the musicians of the New York Philharmonic over similar such issues (whether, for example, it is acceptable to

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., ii. Silber himself was an avid proponent of a number of musical traditions (among them Dixieland and medieval music, as well as free improvisation). Knowing little else about him, I don’t want to tar him with too broad a brush. It’s also possible that the words to which he signed his name (as well as the techniques described therein) represented a broader swath of faculty consensus, rather than his personal stance on the matter of “traditions.” See Jack. Williams “Dr. John J. Silber, 82; incubated UCSD music department” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, March 14, 2005, <http://legacy.utsandiego.com/news/obituaries/20050314-9999-1m14silber.html>.

<sup>121</sup> My argument here bears substantial relation to and is inspired by Piekut’s argument about Cage’s latent liberalism, see *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 24-25, 61-64.

improvisationally “quote” from the symphonic repertoire during the performance of an indeterminate work): “If the hallmark of a liberal subjectivity is the will to separate or abstract itself from context, then this formulation of the subject also presupposes a nonindividuated other who *fails* to manifest such a will.” Silber’s rhetoric above seems thus to partake of what Piekut calls Cage’s “optional relationship to culture;” those who didn’t “rethink” their “present musical understanding or culture” are exactly such “nonindividuated others,” members of an unreflective “masses.” As Piekut rightly points out, however, “the matter of substantial cultural belonging” is one that experimentalists have been known to ride over roughshod, giving little account to those for whom “culture was authoritative, not something to be ‘entered into’ or chosen.”<sup>122</sup> Within an institution committed to the pedagogical/spatial frontier, Music 1 demanded that liberal subjects plant their flags on virgin soil; uprooting from their “cultural belonging” to join in this explorative project was the only available route to true freedom.

Yet despite this paradoxical demand that students exercise a freedom already foreclosed, there are aspects of Music 1 that remain enormously attractive and extraordinarily contemporary, many of which would fit in well with recent participatory art. Thomas Hirschhorn, one of the most influential of contemporary participatory artists, would approve in particular of Music 1’s decentering of product in favor of process, resulting in an enthusiastic ratification of the heterogeneity that comes with mixed skill and background, displacing an “aesthetics of failure” with a sublimation of the very concept *of* failure. Hirschhorn’s well-known motto, “Energy:Yes! Quality: No!”<sup>123</sup> would

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<sup>122</sup> Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 49.

<sup>123</sup> Thomas Hirschhorn, interviewed by Abraham Cruzvillegas, *BOMB* 113 (2010) <http://bombmagazine.org/article/3621/thomas-hirschhorn>.

seem to fit the ethos of the following passage in particular, again from the 1969 reflection on Music 1's first year:

The faculty in turn would have to content themselves with student works which would not be compositional monuments, but then not all music is great, and it would be unfortunate if we were denied a little mediocrity. Creativity could claim, however, that the student would extend himself; he would have to think and rethink, to be engaged and sense; he would not be a mindless receptacle and that isn't bad.<sup>124</sup>

Better to thoughtfully make bad music, therefore, than to be a thoughtless receptacle for good. The (non)musician can no longer be assessed on the sounds they make; only on the ideas, creativity and intention behind those sounds.

The sequencing of the course also would seem to successfully encode the logic of process-based, iterative, experiential pedagogy which Ogdon and Silber trumpeted. It began with clearly stated sound-making games, moving on to free improvisation with instructor-imposed guidelines that loosened over time. Both games and improvisations were invariably tape recorded, and one major focus of instruction seems to have been to get students to describe, critique, assert preferences, and suggest improvements while listening to the playback. In this, one must credit the instructors for following through on an anti-authoritarian, dialogic notion of pedagogy which allows knowledge to emerge from the lived experience of the students (albeit experience captured and replayed), rather than being imposed from without.

Then, the course would culminate in composition projects of two main types: works made from splicing and mixing on tape, and scores for live performance using notations that every student had to invent. The 1969 report discusses the course's

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<sup>124</sup> Silber, REGMP, i.

disapproval of rule-less or “asemic” graphic notations, i.e. those which, like Cardew’s *Treatise*, would leave their interpretative matrix entirely up to the performer. A key or legend, establishing the graphic score as a language, was a requirement of the assignment, and the placement of self-invented icons on a time-line was the compositional norm:

The nature of this composition assignment required *explicit* graphics to assure us that 1) the student had reflectively interacted with and formed his materials, 2) he was not relying on a happy accident or the performance ability and imagination of others—*it was his composition* for better or worse. Indeed the delight of forming your own materials was an experience every student was to have in this course.[emphases mine]<sup>125</sup>

Thus, a course that began with collective, process-focused music-making ended with an exercise in musical reification. The Western art music model of the individual composer, whose score describes and represents a sequence of sound-events on a timeline, was maintained, with two idiosyncratic tweaks: most of the composers had had no conventional musical training, and each was expected, even required, to develop and transmit a wholly personal vocabulary of symbols, instead of relying on a tradition-transmitted one.

Thus—despite the laudatory descriptions, found throughout these documents, of communal and collaborative musical discovery—when rubber meets road, the course’s demand for “creativity” narrows the concept in a manner that makes it fundamentally a property of individuals. Perhaps this emerged from the unavoidable necessity of assigning individual grades. Whatever the genesis of this view, it is evidently a pre-echo (an “early reflection”?) of today’s neo-liberal reformulation of purpose and ends of arts

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<sup>125</sup> Silber, REGMP, 16.

participation. According to the most recent iteration of this ideology, often dubbed “STEM to STEAM,” arts experiences are valuable primarily because they inculcate creativity; creativity begets innovation, which in turn drives economic competitiveness.<sup>126</sup> Though no such language occurs per se in any of the Music 1 archives, Ogdon does proclaim the *socially instrumental value* of the music department’s iconoclastic, yet forward-looking, centering of creativity and ceaseless exploration:

Art institutions in America with occasional exceptions continue to exhibit a lack of constructive influence on our society as well as a posture of timidity in relation to the new and experimental. Yet there is beginning to emerge a belated but determined intent among progressive artists and educators to counter this culturally anachronistic stance.<sup>127</sup>

Centrally, because experimentalism has “unsophisticated the art” to the extent that creative expression is now “available to *everyman*” [sic, emphasis in the original], such egalitarian experiences can now travel, disembodied, like a meme or a text-score, bringing new art-making experiences, ones you can teach yourself, into your home. “That availability, when fully realized, could modify *everyman’s* present value priorities as well as his more anachronistic views of art in the world. It could impress upon *everyman* the social value of creativeness: if it would, we might dare hope for more constructive social and cultural environments.” In this official statement of the department’s mission, the unsophisticated art of experimentalism is a transmissible virus. Should it grow to a pandemic, a creative, constructive utopia might result.

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<sup>126</sup> For more on this connection, see my “Experimental Music With Young Novices: Politics and Pedagogy” *Leonardo Music Journal* 25 (2015, in press).

<sup>127</sup> Ogdon, FVMDUCSD, 3.

### The Sonic Meditations: readings

It was under such a utopian flag, then, that Oliveros would develop her work with mixed skilled groups. In a manner that recalls Cage, Tudor, and Neuhaus' growing interest, throughout the mid-1960s creating situations and systems for *hearing*, rather than making, sounds, Oliveros recalls that, during the early UCSD period, her composition became focused on “how to *direct attention*. Rather than compose notes, I was getting to compose on this different level,” a sort of meta-composition of the flows and trajectories of aurality itself.<sup>128</sup> In her essay “On Sonic Meditation,” Oliveros recounts the coalescence of the interests leading to the *Sonic Meditations*, discussing how the practice of meditation is, for her, primarily a means towards clarifying the objects and trajectories of her own aurality. Differentiating between two modes of (primarily aural) perception, (focal) attention and (global) awareness, Oliveros refines Cagean listening beyond its indivisible monism.<sup>129</sup> She highlights such educative purposes of meditation and of the *Sonic Meditations* in particular early and throughout her essay (“the development and enhancement of aural sensation is one of their goals”<sup>130</sup>), just as the educative, transformative intent of her larger project, including the Deep Listening practice, has remained central in interviews and texts throughout the subsequent decades. Here, I return to one of the core arguments of the dissertation at large: innovative music-participatory practices and works have historically arisen from music-pedagogical situations—like Music 1—that call for a revision of Western art music norms of skill. The rhetorics of the UCSD course have suggested how experimentalist notions of musical

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<sup>128</sup> Mockus, *Sounding Out*, 158.

<sup>129</sup> Oliveros, *Software for People*, 138-141.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

participation demand deskilling (Ogdon’s “unsophisticating” of the art) and what we might label an impulse towards deschooling or dialogical pedagogy (the notion that pedagogical authority is illegitimate, and students must free themselves from conformity, norm and tradition by teaching themselves). However, Oliveros’ compositional project represents what we might deem a dialectical synthesis of such a view with the one it assailed (i.e. older notions of musical skill, which, after all, were the ones under which Oliveros was trained and attained her position): After deskilling, how can we “reskill” ourselves to return to satisfying collective music-making?

When other scholars have pointed out the innovations and iconoclasm of the *Sonic Meditations*, some have noted the connection to the UCSD Nature of Music course with its non-musicians, and none have failed to note the openness to participation declared in the score’s introduction: “No special skills are necessary. Any persons who are willing to commit themselves can participate.”<sup>131</sup> However, past writers on the work have failed to place her in dialogue with the longer history of experimentalist engagement with questions of skill, ability and participation, a part of which the previous chapter tried to begin to trace. The imputation of such an acontextual analysis is that the *Sonic Meditations* are *sui generis*, their participatory strategies emerging *ex nihilo*. My analysis seeks instead to uncover their continuity with the deskilling techniques of Cage, Happenings, and Fluxus (work which Oliveros knew intimately, and which bolsters my overarching argument, given the numerous pedagogical overlaps between UCSD’s Music 1 and the New School composition course), as well as to disaggregate what *is* new about the piece, what moves *beyond* the early 1960s conceptualization of “participation.”

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<sup>131</sup> Pauline Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations* (Baltimore: Smith Publications, 1974), 1.

Thus, Mockus summarizes in four points the forms of radical “accessibility” in the *Sonic Meditations*, as follows: 1) Past musical training or lack thereof is (claimed to be) immaterial to performance of the work. As the introduction to the score clearly states, “No special skills are necessary.”<sup>132</sup> Mockus elaborates, “all members of the group are equally valuable and necessary...sounds that are made will not meet normative expectations of virtuosity” 2) “‘Meditation’ replaces ‘performance’ and its goal oriented conventions of learning and rehearsing music to be played, eventually in a concert”; 3) *Everyone* present participates. “There is no audience...all are participants are both creative and responsive, sounding and listening;” 4) The pieces specify unconventional performance sites or choreographies that make impossible the traditional spatial differentiation of audience and performers.<sup>133</sup> Yet as the prior chapter’s survey of post-Cagean artistic practices makes clear, none of these features is new or unique to the *Sonic Meditations* per se. Mockus’ first, third and fourth argument characterize nearly every Kaprowian Happening, as well as Neuhaus’ soundwalk, *LISTEN*. If, in her second argument, we replace “meditation” with “Event,” it would equally apply to most of Brecht’s works from around 1960-62.

Miles’ analysis of the piece, while useful, is no more attentive to the particularities of context or to art historical comparison than Mockus’. Key to Miles’ analytic schema are three categories of perception he suggests performers must use in the various meditations that make up the piece: subjective, objective, and intersubjective listening. Thus, some of the *Meditations* emphasize attention to an internal (subjective)

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<sup>132</sup> Oliveros *Sonic Meditations*, 1.

<sup>133</sup> Mockus, *Sounding Out*, 43-4.

experience, others to an experience of the world (objective), and a few emphasize listening to other people (intersubjectivity). Yet, beyond the obvious flaw of being an “etic” as opposed to an “emic” analysis (that is, it imposes terms foreign to Oliveros’ own analysis of her work, and, in fact, employs a positivistic division of “real” and “unreal” sounds that she would almost certainly reject), Miles’ analysis also misses an opportunity to suggest the deep links with a lineage of participatory and quasi-participatory experimentalism. Were one to supplement his analytic division with its proper history (with which Oliveros was intimately familiar), Fluxus and the New York School would provide useful reference points: “subjective” listening (i.e. to imagined sounds or the inner voice) suggests La Monte Young’s *Composition 1960 #15* (“This piece is a little whirlpool out in the middle of the ocean”).<sup>134</sup> While this subjective mode has been, Kahn suggests, somewhat suppressed by Cage’s view that imaginary/subjective sonic experiences like inner voices are “quasi-sounds...antithetical to Cagean listening by being in competition with sounds themselves,” the experimentalist canon is, by contrast, crammed with injunctions to “objective” (that is, outer-world-directed) listening, going back to *4’33”*. And regarding “intersubjective” listening (which is in its many forms, after all, foundational to ensemble music-making the world over), Nyman’s suggests Christian Wolff’s *For 1, 2, or 3 People* as the key originator of works whose sound and form are constructed from “contingency systems,” that is, from scored responses, in the moment, to “intersubjective listening.”<sup>135</sup> Though the *Sonic Meditations* do combine and

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<sup>134</sup> Young, *An Anthology*, 1963.

<sup>135</sup> Nyman, *Experimental Music*, 66-9.

intersperse these varied ways of listening, it hardly seems that this is the core of their innovation or importance.

For Miles, “the most innovative” of the *Sonic Meditations* are the most “intersubjective” ones, those “in which the actions of other participants fundamentally limit the choices available to subjects.”<sup>136</sup> (This was also the key insight in Brian Eno’s analysis of Cardew’s *Paragraph 7*, see above.) Among these, Miles is particularly keen to explore the unique traits of the first of the *Sonic Meditations*, “Teach Yourself to Fly,” and of the untitled *X* and *XVI*.<sup>137</sup> Performances of these sung pieces “resemble conventional music more closely than any other piece in the *Sonic Meditations* collection,” and perhaps this helps to explain why these works in particular come in for special praise and deeper exegesis by nearly every scholar who has worked on Oliveros. In some such works, participants are asked to sing tones that bear some relation to the other tones being sung, as in *Sonic Meditation XVI*, which reads, in part: “Sing any pitch... Listen to the group. Locate the center of the group sound spectrum. Sing your pitch again and make a tiny adjustment upward or downward, but tuning toward the center of the sound spectrum.”<sup>138</sup> For Miles, the interest in these tuning-focused works comes from “the mutually constraining impact of participant decision-making.” His admiring exegesis suggests that the works are capable of ushering us into a participatory utopia:

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<sup>136</sup> Stephen Miles, “Objectivity and Intersubjectivity in Pauline Oliveros’s ‘Sonic Meditations’” *Perspectives of New Music* 46, No. 1 (2008), 17.

<sup>137</sup> Both of which can be viewed as early versions of the “The Tuning Meditation,” a work which, so-named some time after 1974, has been repeatedly re-worded and reworked for various occasions, becoming perhaps Oliveros’ most-performed work. Interview with the author, September 1, 2014.

<sup>138</sup> Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations*. 5.

There are virtually no barriers placed between music and performer, between performer and audience. Like the dissolution of the subject-object duality in meditation, Oliveros's music negates these dualities as well. ...[I]n contrast to fully notated compositions, the *Sonic Meditations* require decision making on the part of participants. This invites to the performers to participate with Oliveros in the creative process.<sup>139</sup>

I find Miles' imputation of the dissolution of all barriers and dualities more than a bit overheated, as though the mere appearance of participatory choice-making, in itself, automatically engenders an ecstatic negation of all difference. If the mere fact of co-creative participation with "no barriers" was all it took to achieve such an intense experience of *communitas*, why make a score?

Instead of crediting the work with "solving" the overarching, trans-contextual problem of participation via such a *fait accompli*, I am more interested in thinking about how the *Sonic Meditations* address, in a much more contextually specific way, the problems which preoccupied her immediate artistic and professional colleagues at the time of their writing. Mockus' careful attention to one aspect of the work's historical context is a useful model; she carefully charts Oliveros' many points of intersections with the second wave feminist movement, and especially with the lesbian community. Mockus' project is essential and unique, especially because (perhaps following Cage's silence and circumspection on such issues) the scholarly study of experimentalism has largely allowed overt discussion of its many homosexual or queer practitioners to remain, as it were, closeted.<sup>140</sup> But Mockus' reading is also, in some ways, a reading of Oliveros

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<sup>139</sup> Miles, "Objectivity and Intersubjectivity," 20.

<sup>140</sup> For a recent review of the status of queer theory in experimentalism, see Ryan Dohoney "John Cage, Julius Eastman, and the Homosexual Ego" in Piekut, ed. *Tomorrow is the Question*, 51-57.. For the classic articulation of Cage's "queer silence," by a leader in the field of queer studies, see Jonathan D. Katz, "John Cage's Queer Silence; or, How to Avoid Making Matters Worse" in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (1999) 5(2): 231-252;

“against the grain.” She rarely brings up her gender or her sexuality unless prompted, and, when asked about their impact on her art, emphatically refuses to be defined by them.<sup>141</sup>

Instead, I place my analytical focus on the context that she *does* foreground when discussing the formative influences on her work. Here, my extended discussion of UCSD’s Music 1 and of “nature” in Cage and Lucier’s experimentalisms thus bear fruit in pointing the way towards the specific and interlinked issues of experimentalist aesthetics and pedagogical ethics, indeed, the very real and unsolved *problems* which, I argue, Oliveros directly addresses in the *Sonic Meditations*.

### **The Sonic Meditations: pedagogical sources**

Recall the challenges of Music 1. Faculty had to develop a whole new set of exercises, and, confident though they seem in their innovation and iconoclasm, there was clearly, and unsurprisingly, ongoing questioning of the project. Silber’s 1969 report begins on just such a note (in notable contrast to Ogdon’s unflappable tone of certitude, both in 1968 and 1972): “It should be noted that at the time we began this course we had certain reservations about creativity as an instructional mode for general music. It could spawn the worst kind of amateurism with little musical merit or substance.” Silber’s introduction ends with equal uncertainty: “Indeed, if you were to ask us, what is your

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<sup>141</sup> Mockus *Sounding Out*, 8. Oliveros’ strong public stance against filing artists under identity categories goes back at least to the 1970 article “And Don’t Call Them Lady Composers”, anthologized in Oliveros *Software for People*, 47-51.

program? your present course structure? we could only reply that we are still in the laboratory, we are still inventing, we shall continue to improvise.”<sup>142</sup>

The *Sonic Meditations*, begun in 1969 and used in Music 1 soon after, would be among the inventions and improvisations that would shortly follow the publication of the department’s report. Yet many of the assignments anthologized within that collection, particularly the games (of Ogdon’s invention) which were to start the course, would seem to be plagued by questions of purpose—what exactly is the goal of making sounds, all together as an unskilled, uncommitted group? A representative game created by Ogdon, which carries the dramatic title of “Total Group Sound Game No. 1,” is reprinted in the 1969 report as follows:

Situation: Group sits or stands in circle facing microphone(s) (omnidirectional preferable) connected to tape recorder.

Objective: To record for immediate playback an extemporaneous sound-piece formed of only vocal (sung, spoken, whistled, tongue-clicked, screamed, etc. etc. and body (hand claps, finger snaps, foot shuffles or stomps, etc.) sounds.

Rules of the game:

- 1) Each person extemporaneously performs only one vocal or body sound.
- 2) The sounds are produced in rotation beginning with the designated leader and ending with the last person in the rotation.

While such an activity aptly points out that anyone can extemporize a sound from “degree zero,” it plainly fails the test of “flow”—it’s too easy to be engaging.<sup>143</sup> Though there are clear procedures, there are no metrics to differentiate comparative degrees of success, and thus no room to improve.<sup>144</sup> More to the current point, this “make a sound,

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<sup>142</sup> Silber, REGMP, i-ii.

<sup>143</sup> See Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 4-5 This notion of “flow,” borrowed from Csikszentmihalyi, is, Turino suggests, fundamental to understanding how participatory music traditions manage to be both hard enough to keep the skilled interested and the prevent the amateurs from getting too discouraged.

<sup>144</sup> Perhaps we should give Ogdon credit for intellectual consistency, however: by making the game so easy that “everyone wins,” Ogdon is following the dictate of no hierarchies to its logical conclusion.

any sound” approach lacks in the conceptual glue and the missionary zeal that binds (post-)Cagean experimentalism into an exploration of nature-as-the-real. In contrast to Lucier’s impassioned specificity, Ogdon’s exercise suggests a deskilling all dressed up with nowhere to go.

Oliveros’s personal archive of materials that relate to her teaching of “The Nature of Music” goes all the way back to early 1968, her second term on campus and the first term that the course was offered by the newly formed department. The department’s 1969 report on Music 1 anthologizes one broadside in Oliveros’ hand, entitled “What Am I Doing Here”<sup>145</sup> (reprinted here, both sides, as Figures 1 and 2) and describes its use in a sound game in Music 1: “Each group responded in its own way to the material on the broadside; sometimes whispered, shouted, distorted, muted, falsettoed, acted, repeated ...create a new verbal element, accent, sing, play; indeed whatever their sense of invention and joy could produce.”<sup>146</sup> It’s notable that, while Ogdon’s game has clear and comprehensible procedures, Oliveros’ has none. The broadside is more like an “asemic” notation, a game without rules (the kind that Music 1 faculty evidently decided to ban). Cardew’s words regarding *Treatise*, among most famous of asemantic notations, seem apropos: “each musician will give of his own music - he will give it as his response to my music, which is the score itself.” [male pronouns sic]<sup>147</sup> The obvious content of the broadside is, of course, the nature of music/sound itself. One can read the four texts, emanating from all four edges of the paper towards a silent center, as four different

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<sup>145</sup> Bound in REGMP, 5-6, but also found in the Pauline Oliveros Papers, Box 17, Folder 8, Mandeville Special Collections Library.

<sup>146</sup> REGMP 5.

<sup>147</sup> Cornelius Cardew, *Treatise Handbook* (London: Peters Edition, 1971), x.

perspectives on this question, each seeking, but none authoritatively answering the titular question: "What am I doing here?" Each student would have to find their own answers, just as they would have to determine, through their own creative agency, how to turn the page itself into music.

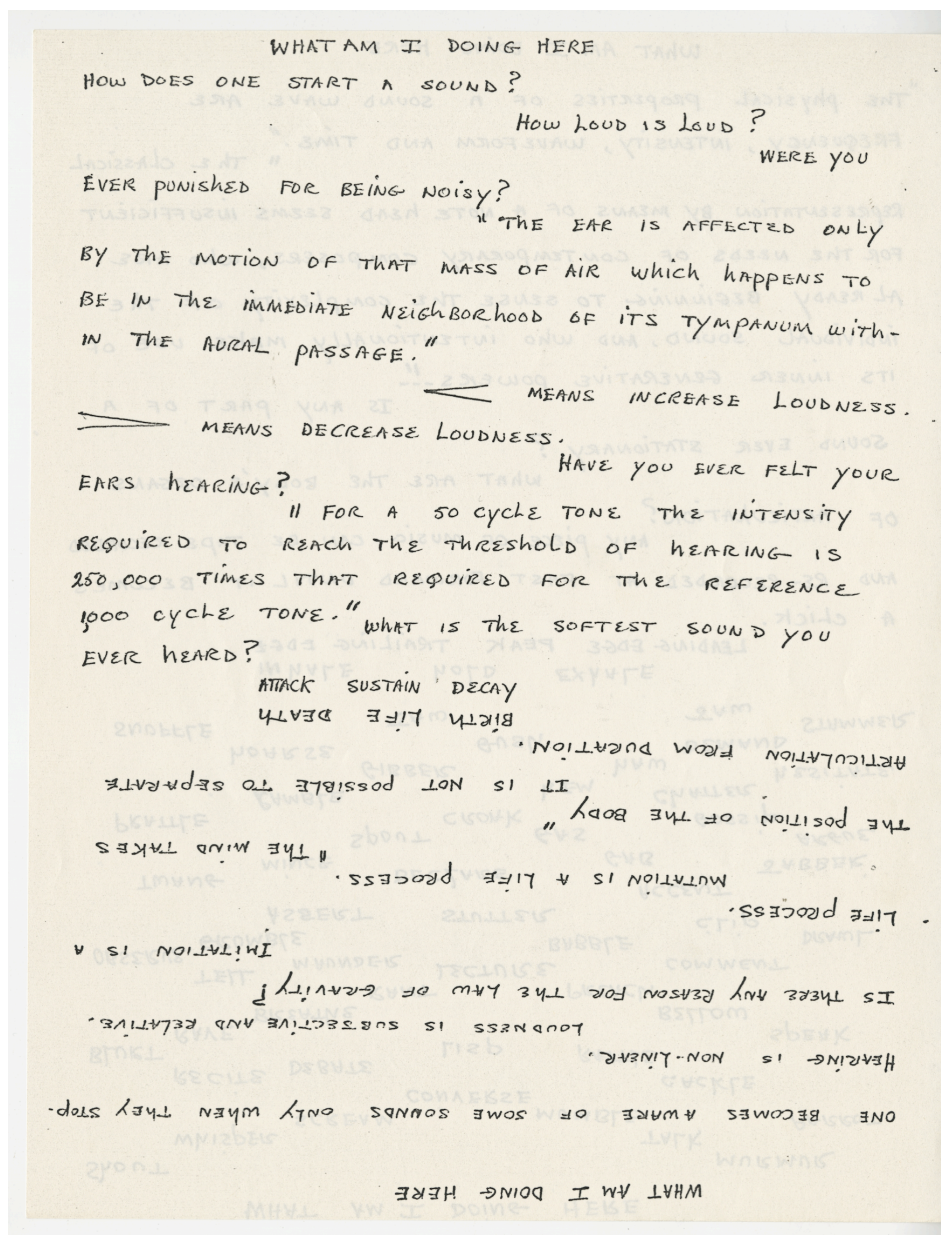


Figure 1: "What Am I Doing Here" (Front?), Pauline Oliveros. Teaching Materials for The Nature of Music, UCSD, 1968. Mandeville Special Collections Library.

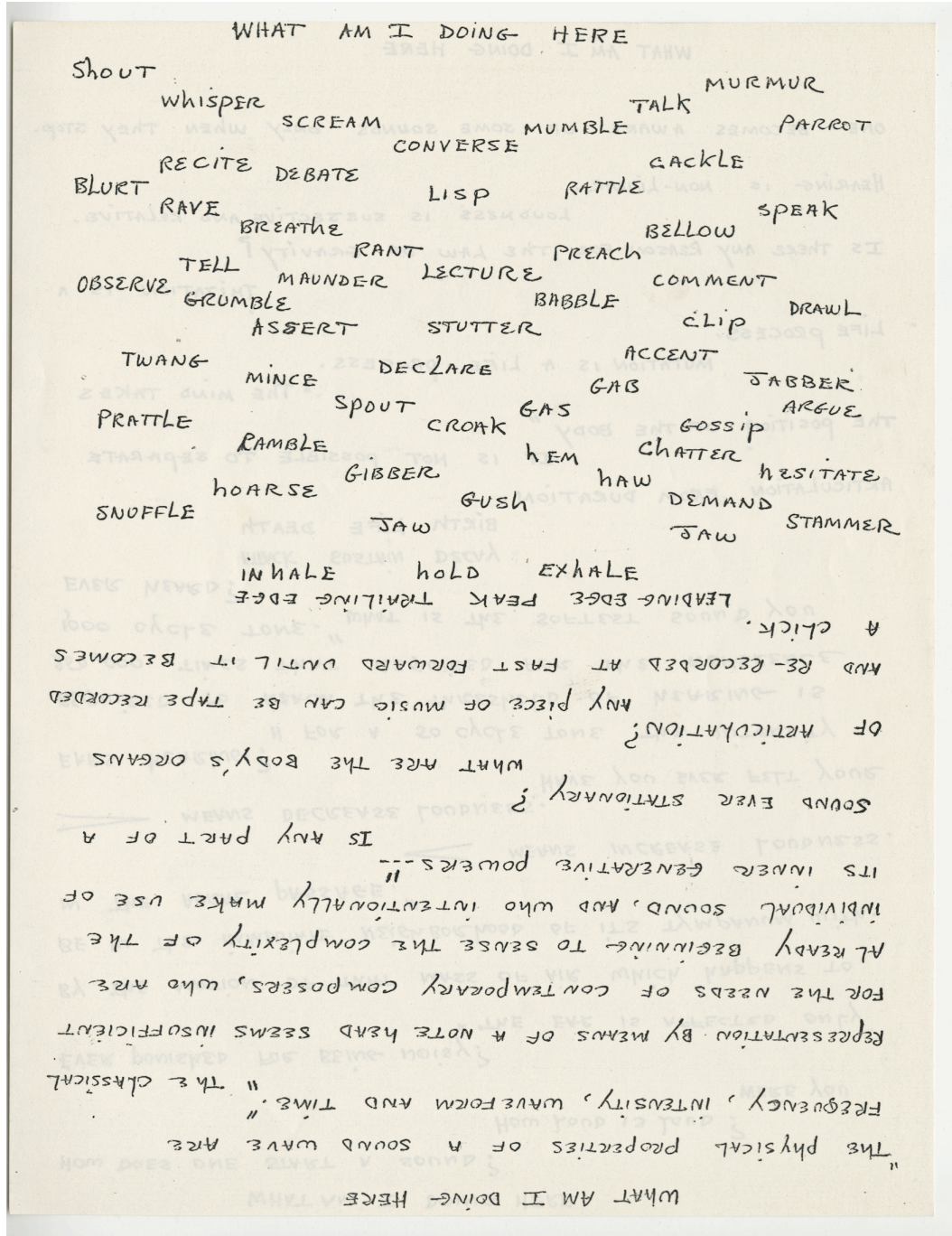


Figure 2: "What Am I Doing Here" (Reverse?), Pauline Oliveros. Teaching Materials for "The Nature of Music," UCSD, 1968. Pauline Oliveros Papers, MSS102, Box 17, Folder 8, Mandeville Special Collections Library.

The texts seem to be pointedly in mutual contrast, the one creeping from the bottom of Figure 1 suggesting an “objective” view of sound (“frequency, intensity, waveform”), while the reverse side features “subjective” questions that stretch beyond psychoacoustics into phenomenology: “How loud is loud?” Yet the feature of “What Am I Doing Here?” that most closely recalls Oliveros’ early 1968 artistic milieu is the quadrant that features simply a catalogue of verbs related to vocal sound-making. The attentive experimental music obsessive will immediately recognize this list as being similar in form and content to the score to Lucier’s *Chambers*, which he wrote down in a generalized form some time after returning east from his May 1968 UCSD visit. His score consists of a long list of resonant environments (“seahshells, rooms, cisterns, tunnels...”) and then an injunction to “Find a way to make them sound,” followed by a similarly lengthy catalogue of means of sonic excitation: “Blowing, Bowing, Rubbing, Scraping...” The obvious terrain that *Chambers* shares with “What Am I Doing Here” (besides place and time of origin) is that both, in sheer enumerative extensity, suggest that any mean of sound-making can be music, and that limitless sonic resources, in endless combinations, are to be found in the non-instrumental world of everyday objects and gestures. But where Lucier emphasizes sound-making on objects found and exterior to the body, Oliveros catalogues the sound-making potentials of the voice.<sup>148</sup>

The open-endedness of the questions comprising “What Am I Doing Here?”, along with the excess of suggested means of sound-making both suggest a centrifugal

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<sup>148</sup> One might or might not want to make too much of the fact that, in 1968, Lucier was employed as a choir director, but was about to embark on years of exploration of electronics without any traditional instruments, whereas Oliveros had been hired as a specialist in electronics, but would soon be distancing herself from electronic sound and working almost exclusively with the acoustic resources of human bodies, and particularly voices.

force, a casting of people outwards from a central point; recall that this was the spatial logic of the UCSD *Chambers* performance with the conch shells. Yet, simultaneously, the unusual typography of the page suggests a focusing towards a meaningful spatial center, a centripetal force towards which, between the words “leading edge”/inhale and “trailing edge”/exhale, a “peak” is defined. These two coexisting spatial logics in “What Am I Doing Here” seem to mirror the principles of “global” and “focal” awareness, which Oliveros has represented with a dot in the center of a circle, an important generating image in her work since at least 1969.<sup>149</sup> Similarly, the *Sonic Meditations* all are meant to be performed in a circle, with all of its metaphors of *communitas*.<sup>150</sup>

### **The *Sonic Meditations*: questions and resonance**

Thus, Oliveros’ unique and provocative teaching materials from Music 1 set the terms, in a variety of ways, for her own *Sonic Meditations*, works which she would begin to compose the next year. In its’ correlation and comparison of biological and social life with the life of sound, it closely anticipates the concerns of the *Sonic Meditations*, as when it equates “Attack Sustain Release” with “Birth Life Death.” Perhaps even more important, it instigates the open-ended question as a form of verbal notation, a technique which would reappear throughout Oliveros’ oeuvre, as in “Sonic Rorschach,” (*Meditation VI*), which asks “Have you ever heard the sound of an iceberg melting?” Such a questions about the limits of the audible also re-engage the flow of water in texts like Brecht’s *Drip Event* or Young’s “little whirlpool,” yet with a new focus on the Other, the person to

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<sup>149</sup> Mockus, *Sounding Out*, 39.

<sup>150</sup> Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 18-20.

whom the question is directed. If the tone of Cagean (and, latently, most Western) notation is imperative and fixated upon the moment of activation (“Make a sound at exactly 26’15.45!” “LISTEN!”), and shifts to the passive voice in Brecht’s Event scores (“The situation is arranged such that x is occurring”), Oliveros’ adoption of the question-as-notation suggests that realization is fundamentally an intersubjective encounter. *Teachers with nothing but questions and no answers* obviously suggests a dialogical pedagogy. (In fact, Rancière’s ignorant schoolmaster did nothing but ask questions, thus avoiding “explication.”)<sup>151</sup> It’s not hard to imagine, since questions like these show up on Oliveros’ teaching materials, that they were questions that students, investigating the “nature of music,” were actually expected to try to answer as part of their coursework.

Thus, the questioning tone of Oliveros’ text scores suggests an evolution in the techniques of participation beyond Kaprow’s *18 Happenings*, Neuhaus’ *LISTEN*, and Cage’s *Musicircus*—all works in which the audience’s mobility and perspectival/perceptual agency in “constructing” the performance is key to their elevation to “participants.” Oliveros’ questions, by contrast, invite the participants to contribute, to co-create, to produce a realization whose very content the composer could not know, but seems to *want* to know. Moving decisively beyond a conceptualization of sound as external stimulus with objectively observable qualities, Oliveros’ questions demand personal introspection: what do *you* hear? Participation here means not merely having ones’ actions scored, but rather participating in a conversation where one’s input, one’s

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<sup>151</sup> “To teach what one doesn’t know is simply to ask questions about what one doesn’t know. Science isn’t needed to ask such questions. The ignorant one can ask anything, and for the voyager in the land of signs, his questions alone will be true questions compelling the autonomous exercise of his intelligence.” Rancière, *Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 30.

voice, is valued. *Meditation XX*, “Your Voice” is exemplary of this making-intersubjective of the Brechtian Event.

Think of the sound of your own voice. What is its fundamental pitch? What is its range? What is its quality? What does it express no matter what you might be verbalizing or singing? What was the original sound of your voice before you learned to sound the way you sound now?<sup>152</sup>

The linguistic art of the text-score remains here, as in Fluxus, a consideration of the ways that language “performs,” but language’s “performance” can no longer be contained within a clever postcard that can be mailed one-way. The stakes remain no less high: we are still speaking of pedagogical interventions in the life of the subject. But Brecht’s notion of idea-artworks as “little enlightenments” moves (further) out into what we might deem, after Rosalind Krauss, “the expanded field.” For Oliveros, as for today’s relational and collaborative artists, the demands of intersubjectivity once again break the existing “frame” of what a score can be.<sup>153</sup> This increasing co-constructedness of the work (which places it merely at a further position on a spectrum, since all notation/realization models rely on a degree of co-creation) certainly places the Other in a more central role than it ordinarily occupies, but, even when at their most questioning and least “instructive,” Oliveros’ scores remain fundamentally within the sphere of notation: an invitational instruction given by a composer to open a field of possible realizations that, through the “spooky action at a distance” made possible by language and by the concomitant literate transmission of scores, remains facilitated and circumscribed by an artist’s absent presence.

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<sup>152</sup> Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations*, 6.

<sup>153</sup> Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” *October*, Vol. 8. (Spring, 1979), pp. 30-44. See Tom Finkelpearl, *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), as well as Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, esp. 30-39.

However, like other critics, I am most interested in, and will heretofore focus in on the sung meditations, the ones which, because of their inclusion of concerted sound-making, seem to more closely resemble “traditional” music. Recall that, in 1967, concerted sound-making was carefully and long abjured by Cage and most of those he influenced. Simply asking everyone to do something together would seem to be violate Cage’s dictate about “imitating nature,” a “nature” which was figured as a “targeted therapy that removed unnatural impulses toward order.”<sup>154</sup>

However, if we look towards Lucier’s approach to participation in *Chambers* and Oliveros’ around the same time, a shared approach to participatory experimentalism emerges between their mutually sympathetic projects. I have suggested that, during this period, Oliveros and her closest colleagues were, under the influence of cybernetics, moving from an interest in *imitating* nature to one of *activating* nature, an approach perfectly embodied by *Chambers*, which in its scored form offers is a generalized tool for collecting resonant objects and then “find[ing] a way to make them sound” through any means of excitation.

Perhaps because her *Sonic Meditations* represented a move away from the male-identified and science-linked world of electronics within which Oliveros had initially gained prominence, writers have simply not discussed her work from this period as exemplifying the “cybersonic” aesthetics of her nearest artistic colleagues, such as Lucier and Tudor. Yet, recall that the works she was making around the same time as the *Sonic Meditations* (*In Memoriam Nicola Tesla* and the works for the Pepsi Pavilion, see above) are direct collaborations with its more widely recognized proponents Tudor and SAU

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<sup>154</sup> Piekut, “Chance and Certainty,” 135.

members Mumma and Behrman, are obviously exemplary of this “school” of experimentalism, and are nearly as monomaniacal in their pursuit of acoustical resonance. It is on this observation and this context that my novel interpretation of the first and most famous of the *Meditations*, “Teach Yourself to Fly,” relies.

However, prior to offering my interpretation, I want to allow in the composer’s voice, to explain, in her own words, how this piece arose, and what she saw as their relationship to her artistic peers and her pedagogical work:

Well, when I started my work at UCSD, I established the electronic music program... the department was very active, and the music was on the trajectory of complexity, which has probably reached a peak in Western art music. What happened to me was I was alarmed, as many were of course, with the Vietnam War. I began to seek some ways of working with sound so that I could discover more inner peace amidst the violence and unrest of the time. That was one part of it. The other part of it was a course that we had for the general student called "The Nature of Music". Instead of just playing records during class, we had the students engage in making music. They would make tape pieces, and they would make graphic scores and play them with them with whatever instruments they could find. I wanted to compose some vocal music with them so that they could do this without having to read music, because many of them were not readers—music readers. So I composed my first sonic mediation for that purpose right around 1969. It was called "Teach Yourself to Fly", and was very much focused around the observance of breath. You had to make your breathing audible and then allow the vocal chords to vibrate, so that you weren't trying to become a singer, or place a sound, rather, you simply observed how your vocal chords worked. This produced a texture of sound that really sounded kind of like airplane engines. So I called it "Teach Yourself to Fly", and I practiced it first with a group of women that I was working with and then with a very large class of mine. It was pretty amazing. ...[In 1974] I then left on a tour and went to the East coast to present some of my sonic meditations. I would arrive on the stage with nothing and ask the audience to do the sonic meditation, which was outrageous, but it was what I was interested in doing at the time and in fact I'm still interested in it now.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Alan Baker, “An Interview with Pauline Oliveros” *American Mavericks* (San Francisco: American Public Media, 2003), [http://musicmavericks.publicradio.org/features/interview\\_oliveros.html](http://musicmavericks.publicradio.org/features/interview_oliveros.html).

### **Teach Yourself to Fly: towards autopoiesis of the natural voice**

At the core of my reading, “Teach Yourself to Fly” refigures the discourse of “emptying” and emptiness as prefatory to autopoietic emergence, an aesthetic principle to which I have repeatedly called attention in her colleagues’ work. “Teach Yourself to Fly,” however, resituates such “emptiness” as a laudable property particular to the bodies of non-musicians, and thus creates perhaps the most radical inversion yet of musical skill and unskill. In an essay on the piece, quoting a Zen proverb on a cup of tea which can be filled no more, Oliveros cites the master who tells the student who comes seeking knowledge, “you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?” Thus, she continues, “as a composer, I had to empty my cup,” via attention to the long drones that surround us, writing such drones into her music and seeking them out as the subject of conscious, mindful attention, rather than being subject to their unconscious, “adverse effects.”<sup>156</sup>

What new illumination does all this provide? I quote the score of “Teach Yourself to Fly”:

Any number of persons sits in a circle facing the center. Illuminate the space with dim blue light. Begin by simply observing your own breathing. Always be an observer. Gradually allow your breathing to become audible. Then gradually introduce your voice. Allow your vocal cords to vibrate in any mode which occurs naturally. Allow the intensity to increase very slowly. Continue as long as possible naturally, and until all others are quiet, always observing your own breath cycle.<sup>157</sup>

Note first that the score begins with an exhortation to attentive listening. As in 4’33”, in so many Fluxus events, and in Neuhaus’ soundwalk (with its “LISTEN” handstamp offering perhaps the best and briefest exemplar of the injunction to aural attention),

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<sup>156</sup> Oliveros, *Software for People*, 147.

<sup>157</sup> Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations*, 2.

Oliveros' brief text reminds the participant not once but three times to "observe" one's breath. The breath turns from a somatic or proprioceptive experience into a sound ("Allow your breathing to become audible"), and thus becomes both something that you *hear* and *do* (and in fact can't help *but* do)—as when Cage heard the sound of his blood and nervous system in the anechoic chamber and first learned that there was no way for a body to experience a true absence of sound. In other words, the piece begins with the revelation that the phenomenal world to which Cage exhorts us to listen is not separate from us; we are part of it, contribute to it and ineluctably change it. Oliveros suggests, for this reason, that to participate in this piece "is to experience Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty."<sup>158</sup>

Yet where Cage obviously already recognized that he could not "empty his cup" beyond the point of biological life, Oliveros' next step in the piece goes beyond all prior experimentalist injunctions to listen. Here, the piece moves in the direction of the resonant, phenomenal real as essayed by Lucier et al: the activation of the latent potentials of volumes and systems which, like sea shells, autopoietic feedback systems, and other "empty cups," contain their own melodies, waiting to be made audible through activation and amplification. Where *Chambers* requires that performers "collect or make... resonant environments" and then "find a way to make them sound," Oliveros asks us to find, literally within our bodies, a resonant environment (the vocal cords), and then, sounding this empty chamber as passively and non-interferingly as possible, allow the latent, found resonance therein to sound: "Allow your vocal cords to vibrate in any mode which occurs naturally." Clarifying her meaning of "naturally," she even utilizes

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 150.

the scientifically appropriate terminology borrowed from the physics of oscillating systems, “mode,” which designates one of the predominating frequencies at which a system prefers to vibrate. (Thus, the set of pitches into which the voice transforms by the end of *I Am Sitting In a Room* would be most accurately described as the room’s “resonant modes.”) Lucier refers to this pitch collection, as we’ve seen before, as a room’s “own melody, hiding there until it is *made audible*.” This use of the passive voice recalls Oliveros’ repeated use of “allow,” the shared emphasis on passive activation seeming, again, to signal the “audition over utterance” stance.

The only manipulation of this system is to “allow the intensity to increase,” not a word about pitch or any other willed or willable dimension of sound. This suggests a parallel with the feedback works of Neuhaus, Tudor, and SAU (often framed, particularly by Tudor, as performances of amplified *listening*, not playing): the primary or sole axis of manipulation is simple gain, or degree of amplification. My suggestion is that the music of “nature” (if we accept the nature-as-resonance hypothesis, above) could be defined, for this group of artists at this particular time, as the passive amplification, into resonant oscillation, of the latent frequency modes of found systems. Oliveros’ great insight, distinguishing this piece from anything by the other composers I’ve been discussing, is to find such a system inside the body. This system can only be “emptied” through meditative listening, and so the piece begins as, but ultimately exceeds, an instance of contemplative individual perception. Oliveros thus finds a participatory chorus of singers (the ur-sound of participatory art, the ur-participation in culture) at the heart of the Cagean (listening-focused) and post-Cagean (resonance-focused) projects.

Thus, to summarize the core of my analysis, Oliveros' "Teach Yourself to Fly" is built on a very similar set of concerns with how (and how *not*) to make sounds as others within her artistic community, who were the leading figures in post-Cage live electronics. By emptying ourselves, by introducing no intentional or contentful utterance, we create a situation where autopoiesis or bare acoustical activation allow us to learn about the phenomenal nature of a system or volume and about the natural behaviors of sound—a *realization*, suggesting the revelation of the *real*. However, where nearly all the others in this community (Lucier, in his audience participation pieces above, standing as perhaps the other major exception) were working rather single-mindedly with amplified and electronic means, Oliveros alone transposed this experiment, in a kind of cross-domain mapping, onto the resonant volume we all carry with us, our bodies.

If one is concerned about participation and pedagogy—or indeed about *realization* in its double sense, it's obvious why this represents an achievement that moves beyond the electronic tinkering with resonance, because, satisfying and joyful as the experience of exploring the inner life of circuits was for someone like Tudor, he as lone performer had a privileged access to the dynamic experience of the functioning of that system. Audiences get to hear just a single tap from the churning interdependent system. Only the performer gets the privilege of experiencing the delicate network of cause and effect, only the performer gets to *play* with and inside the resonant potentials.

Tudor's autopoietic method, with its suggestion of an "electronic ecology"<sup>159</sup> and reliance on natural resonance for its actual pitch content, has been celebrated rather

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<sup>159</sup> Tudor describes his *Rainforest* thus, as well as in a number of related formulations that signal the biological and environmental, all quoted in Rogalsky, "Nature as Organising Principle," 135.

substantially—though, as I have suggested, Robert Ashley’s use of mouth-modulated feedback in *The Wolfman* may provide an even clearer and earlier exemplar of how the entanglement of resonances (and, distinct from Tudor, to the resonances of the human body) suggests an ethically and ontologically provocative “ecology” of resonance. I use this term to suggest an entanglement of subjectivity and objecthood, which can induce a blurring of cause and effect. If we are ourselves are composed and contain resonant chambers, are we, in performing “Teach Yourself to Fly” activating those chambers, or are we *being* activated? During a period when Oliveros was convening with the ♀ Ensemble each week to do the *Sonic Meditations*,<sup>160</sup> she kept a diary, from which Mockus presents two extracts, relating to two realizations of “Teach Yourself to Fly”: “Got to a very resonant place. Could feel sternum vibrating. ... Wished for more intensity from everyone else.” Then, the next week, the same piece “had marvelous sonorities tonight. I had many sensations of *other persons vibrating my vocal cords*. I think the group is truly tuning.”<sup>161</sup> [emphasis mine] This observation is hardly illusory. A core, constituent feature of resonance is resonance-in-sympathy: bodies in proximity, especially those with similar or harmonically-related modes, do vibrate one another. Tuning is an apt exemplar of the confusions of source and receptacle that may ensue from sympathetic resonance.

In linking such insights to the electronic music heretofore most associated with Tudor and SAU, I am following Oliveros’ own lead in her writings and activities leading up to the composition of the *Sonic Meditations*. In a well-known essay from 1968, “Some

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<sup>160</sup> This was all-female group initially formed in 1969 to accompany Tai Chi classes, but later somewhat re-imagined as a kind of workshop specifically for the *Sonic Meditations*, see Mockus, *Sounding Out*, 38-46.

<sup>161</sup> Quoted in Mockus 42

Sound Observations,” (in which she also shares that she is reading the very same book on bats and echolocation that would inspire Lucier to write *Vespers* the next year), she repeatedly mentions “a magnificent performance of Bob Ashley’s *Wolfman*,” Describing it in terms of resonant volumes inside the body (the core of my joint analysis of the two pieces) she writes,

My ears changed and adapted themselves to the sound pressure level. All the wax in my ears melted. After the performance, ordinary conversation at two feet away sounded very distant. Later, all ordinary sounds seemed heightened, much louder than usual. Today I can still feel *Wolfman* in my ears. MY EARS FEEL LIKE CAVES.<sup>162</sup>

Thus, a music made out of resonance, that is to say built from the amplified entanglement of the resonances of bodily and architectural cavities, “opens” the ears, not in the metaphorical sense of dismantled prejudices that Cage, and later R. Murray Schafer (“ear-cleaning”) would use, but rather in a more literal sense. Such a music teaches us that our bodies *are* chambers (ears, mouth, chest, etc).<sup>163</sup>

Thus, in Oliveros’ work, when we *voice* our resonances together in a group, others are equally capable of resonating us. I want to reassert here that the *Sonic Meditations* are meant to be, in themselves, educative and even transformative experiences, but also that they are demonstrative of my larger argument: a deskilling that admits everyone to participate, which is prefatory to a reskilling. Countermanding the old pedagogical goals of “skilling” the pupil with the gift of musical culture and cultivation,

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<sup>162</sup> Oliveros *Software for People*, 18-19. A few months later, Oliveros would write to Ashley, suggesting that she and he do a joint performance called “Big Mother Meets the Wolfman.” Her proposal, seemingly never realized, is in her papers at MSCL, Box 1, Folder 16.

<sup>163</sup>R. Murray Schafer *Ear Cleaning: Notes for an Experimental Music Course*. (Toronto: Clark & Cruikshank, 1967). Schafer and Oliveros had spent the summer of 1966 working side-by-side in the University of Toronto electronic music studio. Personal conversation with the author.

the subject and object of this reskilling pedagogy is “nature,” on at least three interrelated levels: First, in sympathy with Lucier, Tudor, et al, natural resonance is the proper locus of exploration for experimental music, because it is a way of getting beyond cultural traditions and accessing the real. Secondly, in a revelation that moves beyond her colleagues, she links “human nature,” i.e. the proper ground of musical behavior, to the shared concern with natural resonance, because *our bodies* are resonant volumes. And finally, once all this is understood, musical co-action can finally recapture its proper, “natural” condition of *communitas* (as in Nettl’s primal/primitive scene), without any pernicious social differentiation. On the basis of these insights, the *Sonic Meditations* would seem to be a workable starting point for a utopian music pedagogic method which people could learn, all together from degree zero, via the dialogical and experiential generation of embodied and individual knowledge largely replacing hierarchical transmission (although we can’t discount the pedagogical role played by Oliveros’ texts themselves).

### **Against Musicians, Beyond Culture**

In some sense, it would obviously be quite satisfying to leave off with my analysis here. Instead, however, I want to pry one last time, in advance of the concerns of the next chapter, at what I regard to be the most painful and problematic seam in what is otherwise an extraordinarily compelling and comprehensive case for a participatory experimentalism. This seam or gap is the problem of substantial cultural belonging, the problem of those pesky individuals who won’t or can’t renounce their culturally-embedded conceptions of “music,” and who, for this reason, seem to have a tendency to

spoil this utopian communion. One diatribe against trained musicians in Von Gunden's analysis of "Teach Yourself to Fly" merits extended quotation—recalling that it doesn't *necessarily* represent Oliveros' view, although it does appear in her authorized biography and was penned by Von Gunden who, as a UCSD graduate student, worked closely with Oliveros during a period when she was using the *Sonic Meditations* in undergraduate teaching. Note how closely it recalls Lucier's thoughts on trained musicians' sabotages of *Vespers*:<sup>164</sup>

These compositions are easily sabotaged. I have noticed that inexperienced musicians and nonmusicians perform [*Teach Yourself to Fly*] beautifully. They follow directions. The more sophisticated musicians find this difficult and frequently begin to manipulate. This is because musicians are taught to control sound, a tendency that is especially noticeable when trained singers are part of the group. Their manicured sounds are inappropriate and appear dissonant in this context. The difficulty lies in asking musicians to detach themselves from their training, so that they can accept certain freedoms: no parts to read, so that music notation is not a concern; generally no visual triggers for sound, so that there is no need to follow a conductor; no audience to delight, so that there is no opportunity to experience the nervousness or thrill of performing; no specific musical system, so that there is no prescribed time and pitch manipulations and no familiar and comfortable patterns; and no anxiety over anticipating what should happen next, so who can fail?<sup>165</sup>

The obvious answer to Von Gunden's question is: musicians, the trained ones, are the ones who can (and seem likely to) fail. Why?

This returns us to the notion of experimentalism's demand for a "detachment" from tradition and training, to facilitate an the "accept[ance of] certain freedoms." However, we are not just speaking of thoughts, choices and decision-making; we are speaking of bodies, putatively wrecked—at least for this task—by enculturation and

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<sup>164</sup> See also the story of the New York Philharmonic's sabotage of *Atlas Eclipticalis* that Piekut subjects to deeper scrutiny and exegesis in *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 23-30, 37-42

<sup>165</sup> Von Gunden, *Music of Pauline Oliveros*, 113.

training. Having sanded all the grain out of their voice towards a Western art music ideal, such singers, Von Gunden seems to say, may no longer be as *capable* of simply allowing their vocal cords to resonate “naturally”; they can’t help but vocalize, as it were, “culturally.”

I want to counter this view by suggesting that culture shapes and cultivates our bodies in numberless ways, such that issues of our “substantial cultural belonging” are inextricably linked to what we will instinctively do when we are asked to do something “naturally.” This is because our habitus towards sound is always already embedded in cultures of listening and sound-making that cut across music, language and daily life. Those who have worked harder to “manicure” their vocality differ from the rest of us in degree, not kind. And won’t certain unconscious entrainments arise when handed a rhythm instrument like a clicker or Sondol? Can we be blamed for our enculturation, which teaches us the “vulgar,” “banal” tendency towards isorhythm and pulse whose intrusion into *Vespers* Lucier derides?

Yet those who too much “belong” to Western art music, who won’t renounce and “detach” from it, these individuals will be inevitably “dissonant” in such participatory-experimental contexts. Following the many discourses of emptiness, it certainly seems that untrained musicians (the ones who are most “empty” of musical training) are the ideal participants when the musical task at hand is the revelation of the phenomenal world and the activation of natural resonances. This seems to introduce the possibility of a perverse and inverted social differentiation wherein the trained musicians’ failure to

manifest a fidelity to the work is (as Piekut wrote of the New York Philharmonic) a result of “who they are, not...what they think.”<sup>166</sup>

Lydia Goehr concludes her *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* with a discussion of how Cagean music both challenged and confirmed the old Western art music concept of *werktreue*, meaning fidelity or faithfulness to the (musical) work. Thus, in a work like *4'33"*, Cage emptied the musical work of all content, but having nominated it as a musical work, it thus still retains the forceful injunction that people be faithful to the score.<sup>167</sup> The examples in this chapter have, I contend, taken Goehr's notion of an experimentalist challenge and confirmation to *werktreue* to yet a further extent, in the suggestion that those who can't separate themselves from their musical enculturation *cannot* be faithful to scores that ask them do something “naturally,” i.e. to act as those without such enculturation would. Thus, regardless of the obvious challenge this presents to the institutions of classical music, the underlying authority of works and their textuality—of literate score-making as a way of telling people what to do and how to be—*remains in place*. Perhaps such pedagogical-participatory text scores even represent an expansion of the demands of *werktreue*, because, in order to be faithful to the text, you need to *be* a specific way, not just *do* a specific thing. The 1960s impulse towards participation, as I've pointed out repeatedly, is in some sense an oppositional critique of the exclusions implicit in a hegemonic Western music culture that makes “the majority unmusical so that the minority may be more musical.”<sup>168</sup> But what do we make of the exclusion of the excluder?

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<sup>166</sup> Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 49.

<sup>167</sup> Lydia Goehr “Werktreue: Confirmation and Challenge in Contemporary Movements,” 261.

<sup>168</sup> Blacking, *How Musical Is Man*, 4.

Provisionally closing the book on such slippery questions, I move, in my next chapter, to consider a set of strategies around pedagogy and participation which seem to depend less on such textual strategies. Without a definitive constitutional text, there can be no violation of the law. Instead of seeking “natural” systems that demand everyone’s deskilling for the purposes of egalitarianism (making the minority *unmusical*, so that the majority can all make music together), subsequent chapters embrace a notion of participation somewhat closer to Turino’s: mixed-skill contexts permit the involvement of amateurs alongside masters, but more traditional notions of knowledge, skill, and mastery remain prized, and may in fact be the ultimate goal of amateur participation.

To review: Thus far, I have focused on a little-noted feature of the Cagean tradition of experimental music. My focus has been on understanding how and why artists in this tradition assembled musical events and practices that privileged and were meant to facilitate a broad-based participation that could be inclusive of non-musicians and other people without training in Western art music. I have placed substantial emphasis on the slippage, overlap and cross-talk between participation and pedagogy, arguing that participatory scores are, in themselves, an area of intense conceptual contradiction, largely because the goals and content of the activity (non-hierarchical, communal participation) seems to be in tension with very form or medium of the single-authored musical score. I have thus suggested the ways that participatory scores are bound up with the transmission of values around socio-political inclusion/collectivity (with the score itself as a kind of pedagogical text, as well as one that hails or calls out to elicit musical participation as a means towards *communitas*), even as they represent a slightly perverse evolution of the work-concept. This concept, whose attendant

commands—*werktreue*, or faithfulness to the score—demands that participants cede some of their individuality, alterity, and freedoms, including in some cases, their freedom to behave “musically” in the way that most cultures, and most people in Western culture, understand that term.

In my sympathetic reading of this tension, I want to suggest that the inclusive, welcoming, skill-agnostic stance on participation is important principally because it constitutes and is prefatory to new forms of arts pedagogy, to “reskilling” after and beyond the Eurocentric master narrative. Thus, if Chapter 2 traced Cage’s stance towards participants from his unquestioned assumption of Western art music’s traditions of skill and “skilling” into a near-total expurgation of those traditions, Chapter 3 traced a younger generation of composers who, intensely influenced by Cage’s position, found a way forward from such “deskilling” into the development of disciplined and disciplining practices through which everyone can join together in collective sound-making and collective learning. I view this trajectory as a pendulum swing back towards many of the experiential and sonic features of musical performance as ordinarily conceived. But, given their basis in a Cagean clean-wiped slate, these “reskilling” pedagogies and disciplines claim little continuity with the competencies and pedagogical traditions of Western art music; they strive towards hearing, understanding and activating the very nature of sound and the sound of “nature,” a quest through which they seem to raise the stakes, perhaps even beyond Cage, in their promise of a transformation to the very life of the subject.

## Chapter 4.

### Towards Human Art: Pedagogy Beyond Binaries in the Creative Music Collectives

#### Black Experimentalism and the Creative Music Collectives

In this chapter, I turn my attention to the consideration of the experimental music tradition associated with African-American improviser-composer-performers, many of whom, since the mid-1960s have labeled their work *creative music*.<sup>1</sup> Tracing alternate formulations of pedagogy and participation through the activities of several well-known creative music collectives that emerged during the 1960s, explicitly committed both to experimentalism and to labor in and for their communities. I subsequently follow some members of those collectives into the 1970s — saxophonist Oliver Lake and his associates in the Black Artists' Group in this chapter, and then, in the next chapter, the AACM's Anthony Braxton. Though I begin by situating the collectives within the Black Arts Movement, this is mainly to set up how strikingly my subjects differentiate

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<sup>1</sup> Terminological issues arise here at every turn: this music has been labeled “free jazz,” but most of its exponents reject the term, despite continuing to be associated with and sometimes getting “filed under” jazz. We might consider Lewis’ “Afrological” improvisation, but in fact much of the much I am dealing with exists in scored form. “Creative music” is most felicitous here, because it was used by the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians and by the Creative Music Studio, two institutions to which most of the actors I discussed were intimately tied. See Lewis, *Power Stronger Than Itself*, xl. Sonderegger delves into much greater detail about why “creative music” is becoming an accepted label within musicology, having also been used in recent dissertations by Scott Currie and Jason Robinson. See Sean Sonderegger “‘It’s more personal than we think’: Conducted Improvisation Systems and Community in NYC” (M.A. Thesis, Wesleyan University, 2014), 2-10.

themselves from Afrocentrism, developing more complex articulations of universalism that are interesting for my purposes here not primarily for their racial connotations, but rather for how they balance an idealization of musical virtuosity with simultaneous and potentially contradictory assertions of the value of untrained musicians—a kind of further synthesis that again hybridizes a “deskilling” perspective with its seeming opposite.

However, to do this, I must first introduce a literature and set of historical markers and critical terms here that establish the very different socio-political context of African-American music in the long Sixties. As Lewis and Piekut have influentially noted, black experimentalists’ stories, often filed under a “jazz” label that they themselves reject, have tended to be told separately from those of white experimentalists.<sup>2</sup> In this way, experimental music studies has, with a very few exceptions, reinscribed and extended the racialized barrier that has persistently divided the presentation and criticism, if not the lived practice, of the musical forms associated with white and black cultures. Recognizing that the chapter structure of this dissertation partially recapitulates that division, I hope that my inquiry in its entirety works rather, in a small way, towards redress of the scholarly lacuna of evenhanded comparative analysis of “Afrological” (that is, self-consciously extending the tradition of Ellington, Coltrane, Coleman, Taylor, Ayler, et al) and post-Cagean experimentalisms.<sup>3</sup> Because recent scholarship has done so much to trouble the categorical boundaries of experimentalism, it is now possible to simply cite the work of Lewis and Piekut, acknowledge that “other”

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. xxvi-xxxiii. Piekut *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 3-5.

<sup>3</sup> I owe an immense and obvious debt to Lewis and Piekut for pioneering this comparative field. For another articulation of the “two avant-gardes” story, see Lewis, “Experimental Music in Black and White: The AACM in New York, 1970-1985.” In *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies*, ed. O’Meally, Griffin, and Edwards, 50-101. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.)

experimentalisms exist beyond the previously ensconced canon of Nyman's "Cage and beyond" version of experimentalism, and then get on with the task of trying to understand the particularities of the connections and cleavages between these multiple experimentalisms.<sup>4</sup>

Since my concern is with exploring the relationship between aesthetic experimentation and the interlinked issues of musical transmission, inclusion, and skill, the creative music collectives make for an obvious test case. Any hunt for aesthetically radical musicians engaged in projects that foregrounded pedagogy and participation naturally leads to the literature on socially-engaged artistic collectives formed under the banner of Black Power, community self-help, and, in to varying degrees, a "black aesthetic," in the 1960s. A number of important articles and monographs released in the past several years have recently moved the stories of some of these collectives — AACM in Chicago, BAG in St. Louis, UGMAA in L.A, along with lesser known others — towards the center in the historiography of both experimental music and of African-American music. While scholars' approaches across this literature are somewhat varied, we might gather them all under the big tent of a major shared historiographic revisionism: debunking what George Lipsitz has criticized as the narrow, nationalist, fabulist narrative of jazz history, most publically promulgated by documentarian Ken Burns.<sup>5</sup> In attempting to dismantle this formalist, teleological "great man" history of jazz (which mirrors the standard formulation of the Western art music canon), most of the work on the creative music collectives is heavily invested revealing the centrality of collaboration,

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<sup>4</sup> See especially Lewis *A Power Stronger than Itself*, 29-50, 353-388; and Piekut *Experimentalism Otherwise* 4-5, 11-14.

<sup>5</sup> Lipsitz, "Jazz: The Hidden History of Nationalist Multiculturalism," in *Footsteps in the Dark*, 79-106.

showing the importance of intermedia and interdiscipline, exposing the marginalization and exclusion of black experimentalism, documenting how differences in institutional access and resources directly impacted musicians' lives and careers, and, perhaps most centrally, in charting the music's embeddedness within, and the musicians' centrality to, a wider history of political engagement and social struggle.<sup>6</sup>

One absolute commonality across this literature is an engagement with the thought of author/aestheticians, such as Amiri Baraka, Larry Neal and A.B. Spellman, whose 1960s writings essentially defined the terms of the Black Arts Movement. While these writers often supported black musicians' aesthetic experiments as representing a "black aesthetic" and heralded their efforts to operate autonomously from the white-dominated music business, they consistently exhorted the first generation of New York free jazz pioneers to connect more deeply with the black audience, to operate in and for the benefit of that community, as opposed to in the interracial avant-garde scene. As Neal put it in a review, published in *Negro Digest*, of Spellman's *Four Lives in the Bebop Business*: "In order for this music to become revolutionary, it must extend itself into the Black community in a manner which, heretofore, it has failed to do."<sup>7</sup> But this imperative toward racial solidarity, oft-expressed by the musicians as well as their sometime critical backers, came into frequent tension with the uncomfortable reality that this challenging music seemed to attract highly educated, and increasingly white, audiences.

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<sup>6</sup> Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?: African-American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 207-239.

Steven L. Isoardi, *The Dark Tree: Jazz and the Community Arts in Los Angeles*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: UC Press, 2006), 1-19, 117-122; Saul, *Freedom Is*, 126-129, 314-320;

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Iain Anderson *This is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 149.

Implicitly or explicitly, all the scholarship on the collectives contests Neal's assertion that the most adventurous black musicians were not sufficiently contributing to the cause. Isoardi's work extensively documents the work of Horace Tapscott and the collective he founded in South Central Los Angeles: the Underground Musicians Association (UGMA, later UGMAA), cataloguing close and myriad connections to a wide range of black community organizations. Widener, in his social history of L.A.'s Black Arts Movement, focuses on UGMAA's interface with the Black Panthers, whose minister of information Elaine Brown they backed up on her 1969 album of explicitly political songs called *Seize the Time*.<sup>8</sup> Looker focuses substantial attention on the Black Artist Group's (BAG) activism, e.g. in its support of rent strikes in St. Louis housing projects. Porter is similarly attuned to the community work of Collective Black Artists (CBA), an organization founded in New York in 1970, with AACM and BAG as its direct inspirations.<sup>9</sup> Yet dwarfing any particular instances of engagement in direct action at the level of parties and policy, the overwhelming take-away from this literature is that all these collectives engaged in myriad forms of organizing and action on what we might term the "cultural front" of ongoing struggles for civil rights and Black Power in countless performances in schools, parks, community centers and in the streets.

Despite these well-documented efforts, the scholarship on this period remains deeply mired in recounting and assessing the ideological conflicts that raged at the time, particularly about whether the aesthetic experiments and "freedoms" of "free jazz" were at cross-purposes to the political demands of the Black Arts Movement and its attempt to

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 149-152.

<sup>9</sup> Looker, *Point from which Creation Begins*, 81-84; Porter, *Thing Called Jazz*, 207-239.

unify the black community under a shared cultural framework. Did the leading black experimentalists of the 1960s engage with the black audience, or disengage from them? Scholars like Lewis, Piekut, Anderson, Saul, and Porter have, in aggregate, produced hundreds of pages of writing on this question.<sup>10</sup> The short answer seems to be: yes, to a degree, but certainly not as much as Baraka would have liked them to. For all these scholars, as well as nearly all those who have worked on the collectives, Baraka's 1966 essay "The Changing Same (R&B and the New Black Music)" represents the high-water mark and classical statement of hope for a convergence and reconciliation between radical black music and radical black politics, as well as "an attempt to reconcile disparities in musical styles and audience tastes"<sup>11</sup> into what Baraka dubbed an "all-inclusive whole" (note the resonances with Turino's *communitas*).<sup>12</sup> Anderson, who devotes an entire volume to the question of who free jazz "belonged to" and who it was "for," argues that the leading experimentalists like Archie Shepp and Cecil Taylor were stung by the disinterest of both black mass audiences and of white-controlled commercial channels and, retreating into academia around 1969, came to view their work as above commercial and popular ratification.<sup>13</sup> Yet, at the same time, they imbibed African-inspired ideals of the artist's role as a repository of community wisdom, as teacher and even *leader*, suggesting an alternative model of engagement with community, beyond that of attempting to please an audience. He suggests that "free improvisers' professional self-conception increasingly drew upon the legends of both the African griot and the

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<sup>10</sup> Anderson, *This Is Our Music*, 93-152; Saul, *Freedom Is*, 302-336.

<sup>11</sup> Porter *Thing Called Jazz*, 197-8, see also Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 130-1, and Lewis *Power Stronger Than Itself*, 206-7

<sup>12</sup> Baraka, quoted in Lewis, *A Power Stronger than Itself*, 209.

<sup>13</sup> One of Anderson's major theses is that "battles of ownership and identity politics...threatened the music's newfound status" during the early 1960s; *This is Our Music*, 13. See also 126-132.

alienated artist. Yet at its center, a fundamental contradiction existed between these two models. The romantic posture implied a distance from the masses, while cultural nationalists theorized black music as a repository of the community's values."<sup>14</sup>

So, while this intellectual history of artists' traffic with this notion of an idealized (though perhaps somewhat simplistic and monolithic figuration of) "community" is now well-documented, what is too often undersold in this discussion is the substantial labor that some musicians—especially those in collectives like AACM, BAG and UGMAA—devoted to their immediate local communities, and, more narrowly, for my purposes, to pedagogy. In the extant literature on these collectives, there is ample evidence that calls into doubt the veracity of Anderson's "fundamental contradiction."<sup>15</sup> Certainly, some tension exists between Baraka's notions of the community artist and the European-Romantic notion of the autonomous artist, but, through the collectives' pedagogical labors, this very tension is dramatized and transformed into a productive dialectic. After all, a desire for autonomy from mass *taste* hardly implies a lack of *care* for other people, let alone inattention to the broader problems of the artist's relation to society. The historical exemplar of the 1960s collectives, particularly their interactions with and approaches to non-artists of varied stripes (pupils, audiences, novice musicians), is all of great relevance to my project of constructing a useable, more musical past for today's participatory art, as well as more participatory set of referents for today's experimental

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<sup>14</sup> Anderson *This is Our Music*, 152.

<sup>15</sup> Although Anderson's focus is on New York, which may partially explain his divergence from the clear implications of the studies on the collectives.

music. It is but one small goal of this dissertation to intervene in both fields' near-exclusions of black music history.<sup>16</sup>

### **Locating the Collectives and their Pedagogies**

Thus, I now survey a few salient common features in the collectives' approach to pedagogy and participation, suggesting these musicians blurred the borders of communitarian, pedagogical, and performative practice, facilitating novices and beginners' agency and authorship in musical creation, often in strikingly different ways from the post-Cageans—despite what seems an overall congruence of purpose. To try to understand what underlies these differences, I chart the background of pedagogy in jazz, and its structural transformations up to the moment of the collectives' decision to create and devote themselves to a radical reformulation of the pedagogical. I then chart some shared tendencies across the collectives' pedagogies and tie them to the music being made by the collectives' members, links which suggest, in parallels with prior chapters, the imbrication of pedagogy with “professional” art-making. Then, I focus in on a narrow and tractable case study, an examination the earliest recordings of Oliver Lake and some of his colleagues in the Black Artists' Group, against the backdrop of BAG's substantial commitments to pedagogy and participation.

In my insistence on close readings of music, my approach both complements and contrasts with the extant literature on the collectives, in which the musicians' words and their intersections with their cultural context often seem to somewhat crowd out attention

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<sup>16</sup> See, again, the foregrounding of Cage et al in the historical roundup of proto-participatory artists, in Chapters 1 and 2.

to musical sounds. I follow the same approach here as in the prior chapters, trying to chase down ideals and implementations of participation and pedagogy which actually play out not merely in classrooms, but in scores and performances. As I have written before, this opening *of* these ratified musical sites *to* wider participation is a core and under-appreciated facet of the experimentalism(s) of the 1960s and 70s. This widening circle, bringing broader participation into the center of musical art, may be a key strategy uniting the experimentalism of Lake and Braxton with that of Fluxus, MEV, or Oliveros. Thus, I want to suggest that the participatory/pedagogical art *work* (whether a public performance, recording, or score) is constituted through a *strategic reification*, wherein the fluid engagements of teaching, learning and community-building get transformed, through the efforts of more traditionally ratified cultural workers, into something more widely legible as Art. The composers who interest me here are engaged in widening this circle of participation for a variety of compelling social, political and aesthetic reasons. However, I am most interested in the participatory injunction as a conceptual breakthrough, under the flag of post-modern “critique of mastery.” Far from being simply a negative critique of Western art music, I see these examples as ways of granting aesthetic credence and social capital to the amateur/non-musician, establishing a frame for their performance that allows their alterity to be seen as a form of inspiration—a contribution and not a disruption.

In this, as should be clear by now, there are clear parallels between the members of the collectives and the post-Cage white experimentalists under consideration in the prior chapter—recall, for example, Eno’s admiring critique that, in Cardew, the non-musicians’ “naturalness” is a new musical resource. And, as in the prior chapter, I want to

suggest that we can better understand the emergence of novel/experimental musical participation strategies through their imbrications with the explicitly pedagogical situations through which musicians encountered non-musicians. In their pedagogical interactions, we can surmise that musical artists were inspired to create artworks that did not depend on the traditional skill hierarchy of Western art music; perhaps they recruited themselves into creating a more participatory art as a result of their lived encounter with the problem of the non-musician-as-Other. Whatever the causal forces, it remains a striking—though perhaps not surprising—historical fact that the artists who most innovatively rolled pedagogy and participation into their artistic oeuvre were simultaneously teaching in unusual situations that required creative responses to a situation of mixed skill.

Yet, engaged and employed as they were at institutions like the New School, Rutgers, Morley, and UCSD, the composers of the prior chapters forged both new curricula and new artworks that critiqued the assumption of the need for Western music training *from* within the institutional matrix of academia, which remained overwhelmingly committed to such training. By contrast, structurally excluded from such institutions through the long history of white supremacy and racism at every level of institutional life in the US, many of the members of the Black Arts-era collectives worked in a situation of substantially greater material privation. As a result, as we will see, the collectives did not explicitly thematize the disruption, deletion and of traditionally defined musical skill, largely because they found themselves already in a situation where the distribution of arts training was a keenly felt problem. So, where Cardew had to advertise in the newspaper to attract the non-musicians with whom he

sought to form a Scratch Orchestra, the collectives had no shortage of novices; the schools of AACM and BAG are described as filled to capacity, with young non-musicians “lined up outside their doors” for music lessons.<sup>17</sup> In short, where post-Cageans had to work to produce a situation of “deskilling” within the academy, it would have hardly have made sense for members of the collectives to do the same. In the 1960s, they found historical and socio-economic forces arrayed against them were already “deskilling” their local communities. In some sense, the collectives had to create their own institutions in a struggle *for* the availability of music pedagogy, while the academically ensconced experimentalists of prior chapters were engaged in a struggle against traditional notions of the pedagogical.

### **Tradition, Crisis, and Innovation in Jazz Pedagogy**

Before the 1960s, most jazz musicians “came up,” as musicians often put it, “on the bandstand,” through a system of economically sustainable learning-through-doing, e.g. in paying engagements in entertainment venues, as well as apprenticeships whereby younger musicians played as sidemen to established “name” musicians. In their effort to propose a non-Eurocentric typology of music systems, Booth and Kuhn suggest that these are the exactly the forms of musical transmission that constitute “popular music” systems and facilitate their reproduction. Apprenticing in a commercially viable music genre is understood both to pay and to pay off, features which enable those born without substantial resources to imagine and pursue a career playing such forms of music.<sup>18</sup> This

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<sup>17</sup> Looker, *Creation Begins*, 74.

<sup>18</sup> Gregory D. Booth and Terry Lee Kuhn. “Economic and Transmission Factors as Essential Elements in the Definition of Folk, Art, and Pop Music” *The Musical Quarterly* 74, No. 3 (1990), 424-29. Booth and

is an obvious point of contrast with “art music” systems around the globe, which are often characterized by formal enculturation, a bright line between students and professionals, and ensuing exclusions from participation mediated by class and wealth.<sup>19</sup> For many black musicians emerging around mid-century, credentialing (pre-) professional gigs were often preceded by more formal and traditional pedagogical experiences in segregated black high schools and at black colleges and universities. Few such schools focused their curricula on jazz or improvisation (some explicitly spurning or banning it, as in Oliver Lake’s experience, see below), but rather focused on Western art music-derived reading, instrumental and ensemble playing skills that might allow graduates immediate access to gainful professional work in military bands or dance orchestras.<sup>20</sup>

So, for a generation of musicians who increasingly saw themselves as practitioners of a somewhat more autonomous “high art,” and not as entertainers, the existing pedagogical arrangements were sometimes stifling (even before they frayed and disappeared under de-industrialization and white flight). Lewis notes that this was felt even by Muhal Richard Abrams’ cohort at the turn of the 1960s: although “the ad hoc

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Kuhn are concerned to make clear that no hierarchy is being used to differentiate “popular” from “art” musics—their schema attempts to be descriptive of material realities, and value neutral about music thus produced.

<sup>19</sup> Booth and Kuhn 422-24. Of course, public education and scholarship programs are often used to intervene against such rigid class sorting, and have resulted in instances of class mobility through art musics, despite the underlying structures that seem to militate against it.

<sup>20</sup>Some of these high school bands have become almost legendary in jazz historiography because of the prodigious number of famous musicians for whom these high schools were their final formal music training. Two of the most famous, with immediate connections to AACM and UGMAA respectively, were the bands directed by Captain Walter Dyett at DuSable High School on Chicago’s South Side, and Samuel Browne’s band at Jefferson High School in South Los Angeles, led by Samuel R. Browne. Lewis *Power Stronger than Itself*, 11-15; Isoardi, *Dark Tree*, 20-23, Looker, *Creation Begins*, 4-9 These authors’ discussions in particular have substantially influenced how I understand the mid-century transformations in the music transmissional structures in black communities.

informal educational system of jazz, combining high-school band training, informal jam sessions, home schooling, and autodidacticism, had already produced some of the world's most influential music, ...musicians were seeking ways to address the limitations of this model of learning." Of particular and increasing urgency for the collectives was absence of venues for musicians to learn music theory or explore composition.<sup>21</sup>

In telling the stories of AACM, BAG, and UGMAA, scholars have, almost without exceptions, begun their narratives with detailed depictions of jazz's older "alternative academy," the system of informal musical transmission in the community and on the bandstand as it had pertained up until about 1960, staging its precipitous and ironic disintegration as a direct result of Civil Rights and desegregation, as well as de-industrialization and white flight.<sup>22</sup> Thus, for these jazz-rooted black experimentalists in the mid to late 1960s, the modes of musical transmission which had pertained just a few years before were gone, but the fruits of recognition as an art music (e.g. the academic appointments offered to many of the leading lights of the music) were still a few years in the future. The pedagogical efforts of the collectives can thus be understood as representing a moment of transition: between the community-based transmission system through which jazz was learned before 1960, and the formally-mediated mode of transmission that, especially after 1970, would find foundations and universities willing to fund and support jazz and other black experimentalisms.<sup>23</sup> Members of the collectives

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<sup>21</sup> Lewis *Power Stronger Than Itself*, 60.

<sup>22</sup> The "alternative academy" is an oft-mentioned pedagogical site in these studies of black cultures. Lipsitz credits Robert Farris Thompson for this theoretical construct: see *Footsteps in the Dark*, 109, and Lewis, *Power Stronger Than Itself*, 55-58.

<sup>23</sup> Anderson (*This is Our Music*, 153-4, 159-167) surveys the academic appointments achieved by free improvisers that followed the speedy growth of African-American Studies on college campuses after 1969, and Porter (*Thing Called Jazz* 234-38) examines the balanced integration of academic appointments and

thus walked a tightrope above a spreading chasm between the black popular arts and institutionally ratified “high art,” operating in an economically unsustainable and aesthetically liminal gap and improvising, as Fred Moten might put it, “in the break.”

As thus narrated, history almost demands the emergence of new forms and practices of musical transmission and pedagogy, in direct response to the double disintegration of the black high school bands and of paying apprenticeship in the faltering commercial jazz scene. Describing a kind of pedagogical vacuum engendering a pent-up demand for music pedagogical experiences, Looker describes “children lined up outside [BAG’s] doors on summer evenings, eagerly waiting to get into the group’s headquarters” for free music instruction.<sup>24</sup> Answering Black Arts-era critiques that black experimentalists were insufficiently socially engaged, my reading of the historiography of the collectives suggests instead that these musicians were engaged with social action of the most important kind: the very survival, continuation and transmission of musical knowledge.

This is not to undersell the multiplicity of determining factors behind the self-creation of community-based structures for pedagogical transmission, which ranged in formality from the open rehearsals and public school performances of UGMAA to the more formalized music schools of AACM and BAG. A convergence of local forces, including Black Power ideologies of self-determination, Great Society-era policies that sponsored the musicians on the understanding that their art salve the wounds of marginalized urban communities (and thus “inoculate the cities against urban unrest”),

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community work (supported and presented by many large and mainstream cultural institutions) that members of the Collective Black Artists (CBA), an AACM-inspired group managed to attain in 1970s New York.

<sup>24</sup> Looker, *Creation Begins*, 74.

and the collapse of the formerly pertaining modes of musical transmission were all, as Looker writes, “symbiotic” in determining the forms and methods of community work that collectives employed.<sup>25</sup> Different paths led to widely divergent outcomes—BAG was dependent on a single major grant, and when that grant disappeared in 1970, so too did their weekend classes for children. While the AACM’s 1965 founding charter called for the creation of a “free training program for young musicians,” the group worked more incrementally, scaffolding their outward-facing efforts on what Abrams called an “internal training program in order to raise up some teachers” which would “strengthen this organization, through helping to bring each other up musically.” Thus, the AACM School finally opened, with no grants, in a community center basement in 1967.<sup>26</sup>

Undertaking these pedagogical labors *and* creating their own avowedly experimentalist artwork in the same self-fashioned spaces, the collectives’ teaching methods unsurprisingly included some radical experiments that took them far from Western art music norms. In this, these groups’ innovations bear out many comparisons to the post-Cagean pedagogies of the prior chapter, particularly with regards to the valorizing of radical individualism as a corrective to excessive hierarchy and reliance on traditionalism, in pedagogy as much as in musical creation. In recent statements, various AACM members, including George Lewis, Roscoe Mitchell, and Muhal Richard Abrams have characterized the AACM’s school in terms which recall critical pedagogy, partially in that they are rather equivocal about the very notion *of* pedagogy itself. Mitchell, who

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<sup>25</sup> Its lifespan nearly coinciding with the disbursement of a major grant from the Danforth and Rockefeller Foundations, the school operated by BAG was by far the most dependent on such funding, but AACM and UGMAA’s teaching initiative were also sporadically intermeshed with similar anti-poverty programs. Looker, *Creation Begin*, 35; Lipsitz, 119-120.

<sup>26</sup> Abrams quoted in Lewis *Power Stronger Than Itself*, 176.

served as the first dean of the AACM School, recalled that on his watch, no effort was made to unify the efforts the various teachers; as in their members' disparate efforts in music-making, the AACM's ethos of radical individualism held it to be better if everyone followed their own muse and taught what was interesting them.<sup>27</sup> For Lewis, "we may not need to talk about pedagogy, we can talk about communication, dialogue, the exchange of information." "Who's teaching who...the younger person or the older person?" asks Muhal, underscoring Lewis' point, "everyone has a piece of the puzzle...all the information was not put in one place, that's why we have individualism."<sup>28</sup>

Despite what we might regard as this strategic disavowal of the word "pedagogy" (because the word already might seem to carry negative baggage, connoting hierarchy and perhaps the cultivation of sameness), the AACM School certainly facilitated the development of unique, explorative and experiential teaching techniques, many of which would resonate with those discussed in prior chapters. Lewis characterizes the AACM school as "an alternative institution operating in the black community, facing issues of creativity and innovation through the development of pedagogical methods that combined literature with orature."<sup>29</sup> Ann Ward, who led the AACM school for decades, recalls, "We would play repeat-after-me games, singing at first, and then with instruments. It grew from that...It was all exploratory...That was my key, helping children learn through experience as opposed to spoon-feeding."<sup>30</sup> Moreover, such experiential and embodied

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<sup>27</sup> Roscoe Mitchell, personal conversation with the author, 8/19/14.

<sup>28</sup> "AACM at 50" Abrams-Lewis-Mitchell joint interview, *Clocktower Radio*  
<http://clocktower.org/show/aacm-at-50-muhal-richard-abrams-george-lewis-roscoe-mitchell>

<sup>29</sup> Lewis, *Power Stronger Than Itself*, 177

<sup>30</sup> Ann Ward, from unpublished and published portions of interview transcript prepared by Catherine Despont and Jake Nussbaum for their article, "Ecstatic Ensemble: Original Music and the Birth of the AACM," *Intercourse* 3 (New York: Pioneer Works, 2014).

ways of learning music were explicitly juxtaposed with Western notation, lurking here, as it often seems to have done in the post-Cagean pedagogical discourse, as a distant, exclusionary, sclerotic abstraction:

I insisted that my children learn the qualities of each sound in the musical alphabet. Each letter can be flat or sharp, obtuse or narrow which to me means augmented or diminished. We knew that language but we didn't say it like that, we'd say is it tight? Is it wide? Is it thick? Is it thin? Is it low and deep? Those were the words we used. And we threw out musical notes, because when they see notes it intimidates them right away...Symbols are simply a shortcut, which you can apply to sound. If I give you a wiggly line and I give you a point to start, you figure out what to do. If I give you a sawtooth line, a pointy line, I want it to sound pointy. That's how we got the students to read our notation. The AACM notation was as far-flung as the sounds we made.<sup>31</sup>

Yet where, in Music 1 or other post-Cage contexts, such invented notations are the route to individual creativity and personal style, in the AACM school, they were, at least in part, a path to an intersubjectively comprehensible musical *lingua franca*, which, because of its global dominance, leads inexorably back to the Western staff. Ward explains, “We taught them traditional notation of course too, because you have to give them connectivity to students in Europe and Asia. But you do it through patterns and logic.” Thus, the AACM pedagogy bends towards a notion of universalism that operates in at least two distinct registers: “patterns and logic” trump the culturally embedded contingencies of any particular music system, but at another level, music is recognized as a potential source of “connectivity” to people in other places who might not have been trained so broadly. As we will see in the next chapter, the resonances between Ward's descriptions and the pedagogies of the Creative Music Studio suggests that there might have been ongoing dialogues between the two schools; numerous AACM members

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<sup>31</sup> Ward.

taught at CMS, and it was, at various points, a requirement of AACM membership to teach in the AACM school.<sup>32</sup> One of the most tantalizing connections, linking Ward's characterization both to CMS and to the musical thought of AACM alum Anthony Braxton, is the notion of teaching music *as* a language with universal features (a musical alphabet of fundamental building blocks) and utility in intercultural communication. To this notion, I will return in the next chapter.

### **Liberation Through Music Theory?**

As earlier chapters showed, post-Cagean composers generally deemphasized Western music theory, often denigrating it as a restrictive and contingent set of mere “rules,” abandoned in favor of supposedly more “natural” ways of generating and organizing music. Lewis similarly attributes this slate-clearing mentality, “the elimination of memory and history from music, emblematic of the Cagean project,” placing it in direct contrast to the attitude he imputes to black experimentalists: “the African-American improviser, coming from a legacy of slavery and oppression, cannot countenance the erasure of history”<sup>33</sup> Indeed, insofar as “history” is here equated with ongoing use (in contrast to Cagean disavowal) of Western instruments, music theory and notational conventions, my reading of the collectives certainly bears out and confirms Lewis’ assertion that these musicians strongly prioritized “technical knowledge of music theory and of one’s instrument as well as thorough attention to the background, history, and culture of one’s music.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Mitchell, personal conversation with the author, 8/19/14.

<sup>33</sup> Lewis “Improvised Music Since 1950”, 109-110.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

But, under the demands of a “black aesthetic,” what *is* “one’s music?” Did the intellectual currents of Afrocentrism modulate beliefs about the issues of ownership and affiliation bound up with European-derived instruments, notations, and theories? In a case that suggests a contrast with Lewis’ characterization of the AACM, poet Ajulé Rutlin, teaching at the BAG school, “dedicated the first portion of his children’s course to challenging the privileging of Standard English over the vernaculars spoken by many inner-city African-Americans,” ultimately inviting the students to invent “their own ‘language’ from scratch.”<sup>35</sup> Compared to this more radically anti-Eurocentric writing instruction being offered by as an alternative to writing in the “master’s tongue,” it might come as somewhat of a surprise that, at BAG, “courses in music theory...were by far the most popular.”<sup>36</sup>

Muhal Richard Abrams set the tone in the AACM as one of openness to and interest in theoretical and compositional approaches of European and Euro-American origin; a devotee of the Schillinger system of theory and composition, he taught a version of this system to adult AACM members and young students alike. He notes that, with the aid of this system, he first taught chord and scale theory on graph paper, and soon had young students composing their own music on the Western staff within their first week or three of music training: “They have music paper by now, and they take this scheme and transfer it back to notation, so they can see it. We’re heading toward composing, personal composing...So in about the third session, we’re composing melodies. Here’s a person who didn’t know anything in the first session, and they’re creating with full

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<sup>35</sup> Looker, *Creation Begins*, 75.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

confidence...<sup>37</sup> At one level, Abrams' method would seem to stand utterly opposite the post-Cagean trajectory on this matter, where Cage (at the New School) and the founding UCSD faculty banished the Western staff from the classroom precisely *so that* everyone could compose.<sup>38</sup>

Yet perhaps this is really only a disagreement at the level of means. The AACM and the post-Cageans of prior chapters clearly shared a similar ultimate end, namely that everyone should be urged to compose as early and as unrestrictedly as possible. Where Cage and others had come to see the Western staff as prison bars, for Abrams, its lines clearly pointed the way to personal expressive freedom, which led, for AACM members, towards other freedoms. When interviewed in the early 1970s, the AACM's Lester Bowie and Joseph Jarman expressed the centrality of the AACM's pedagogical efforts in actually delivering the AACM's program, an aesthetic functionalism pointing towards liberation. For Bowie:

Our curriculum is so designed as to elicit maximum development of potential within the context of a training program that exposes youngsters to constructive relationships with artistic adults. Widest encouragement is given to music for leisure and educational purposes; and we are continually seeking new ways of relating music to the needs of individuals and the community for enriched skills, improved study habits and cultural enrichment.<sup>39</sup>

In no tension with its goals towards community-cohesion, the AACM school also helped students “develop the ability to value *self*,” through its streak of radical individualism,

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<sup>37</sup> Abrams, quoted in Lewis, *Power Stronger Than Itself*, 177-8.

<sup>38</sup> The AACM school upheld Abrams' position on the centrality of music theory: it was the only course that all students, regardless of whatever other instruments they wished to study, were required to take. Ward, interview transcript, Despont and Nussbaum.

<sup>39</sup> Rob Backus, *Fire Music: A Political History of Jazz* (Chicago: Vanguard Books, 1976), 75.

both at the level of pedagogical technique and in the injunction that every student immediately become a composer.<sup>40</sup>

But as we've seen, the AACM's music pedagogy did *not* rely, as the post-Cage pedagogies of past chapters did, on a banishment—either actual or discursive—of European-rooted musical practices (although some scholars, perhaps overselling the “Afrocentrism” of the AACM, have made the opposite claim).<sup>41</sup> For Jarman, “the school was probably the most beautiful thing” about the AACM, “because all these poor, black children that did not have anything going on were given the opportunity to express themselves and direct their energies into a positive thing without being controlled by all the bullshit going down in the white power-structure educational system of this country.”<sup>42</sup> Clearly, despite its occasionally fiery rhetoric, the AACM School seems hardly to have advocated ideological cohesion around Afrocentrism: Jarman's mention of race is solely an observation about social power--rather than, as in Rutlin's example, cutting to the level of the constitutive “language” of music. Instead, Abrams' idea that anyone can compose (even if this idea takes the student through practices obviously imbricated with Europe) seems to be among the core interventions against Eurocentric, white supremacist logics. Through the revaluation of the novice as an authentic source of inspiration, value and creativity, AACM students “were given an alternative to being

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<sup>40</sup> Backus, *Fire Music*, 75.

<sup>41</sup> In his depiction of the AACM School's pedagogical technique, Porter extends Radano's rather simplistic juxtaposition of Braxton (synthesizing European composition with black music and thus a laudable exemplar of polystylism and postmodernity) versus the AACM, and particularly the Art Ensemble of Chicago, (touting an “African-inspired cultural nationalism” that places them fairly rigidly against European music) See Porter 212-14 and Ronald M. Radano, *New Musical Figurations: Anthony Braxton's Cultural Critique*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 99-112.

<sup>42</sup> Backus, *Fire Music*, 76.

brainwashed” by Eurocentrism.<sup>43</sup> But in my reading, the value and source of their creativity seems *not* to depend on some essential conceptualization of their blackness—and if it did, Abrams’ focus on the Schillinger method certainly becomes much more difficult to understand.

If Lewis and Porter have each devoted a few pages to the AACM school while insisting on its centrality to the mission of the organization, Isoardi pays rather more substantial and focal attention to Horace Tapscott’s remarkable and idiosyncratic teaching methods as the founder and leader of UGMA (Underground Musicians Association), later UGMAA (Union of God’s Musicians and Artists Ascension), as well as of the associated performing ensemble the Pan-Afrikan People’s Arkestra (PAPA), among his numerous community efforts. Completely blurring the boundaries between pedagogical and professional contexts, Tapscott became well known for allowing youngsters and near-novices to play with the Arkestra, extending the older jazz apprenticeship model almost to the point of inverting it. In a photo reproduced in Isoardi’s book, from the 1979 Watts Jazz Festival, nine-year old Zeke Cooper stands onstage at a microphone, playing an alto saxophone solo in front of a large ensemble of adults.<sup>44</sup> In his autobiography, Tapscott explains,

“A lot of cats were trying to get in the Arkestra, and many thought, at first, that because they couldn’t read, they’d be turned down.

‘I can’t read.’

I’d say, ‘Well, you’re the first one we want.’”<sup>45</sup>

Tapscott’s pedagogical inversion of novicehood and skill echoes both the Scratch Orchestra’s anti-hierarchical model (in which the youngest member was the first to curate

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<sup>43</sup> Backus, *Fire Music*, 76.

<sup>44</sup> Isoardi, *Dark Tree*, 200-1.

<sup>45</sup> Horace Tapscott, *Songs of the Unsung: The Musical and Social Journey of Horace Tapscott*, ed. Steven Isoardi (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 163.

an event) as well as a New Testament rhetoric in which “the last shall be made first.” Moreover, Tapscott made his Arkestra available to read the earliest compositions of the students that UGMAA members were teaching in a free after-school program (much like the AACM’s), further actualizing the injunction (which we have seen before through Cage, Music 1, and Abrams) that amateurs compose as early as possible: “That’s how our classes went. A cat would write something one night and the next day he’d hear it in our classes with the Ark.”<sup>46</sup>

In some sense, the central message which Isoardi tries to draw out of Tapscott’s life is that broad-based musical participation, cutting across lines of age and ability, is a means towards community cohesion, certainly an idea that Turino and other ethnomusicologists would recognize: “By inextricably tying his family with his fellow artists and the community at large, he evolved an ethic of community activism and cultural practice that would focus his artistic and social energy and provide a unifying force in his life.” But, reading Tapscott’s work, with its frequent and radical inclusion of children and novices, in the light of “other” experimentalisms, certain tantalizing connections emerge that suggest that an experimentalist reading of participation is less about an ordered pedagogical transmission of cultural knowledge and is more about harnessing the alterity of the non-enculturated body: humanity at its closest to its “nature” as characterized in the prior chapter.<sup>47</sup> While for Cage, “a baby crying will not/ ruin a good piece of modern music,”<sup>48</sup> Tapscott extends his own strategy of framing amateurs’ work within in a professional music-performative context, saying, “Man, I don’t get

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<sup>46</sup> Tapscott, *Songs of the Unsung*, 162.

<sup>47</sup> Recall, in particular, the “individual natural differences” that Cardew harnessed, according to Michael Parsons, quoted in Eno, “Generating and Organizing Variety,” 230.

<sup>48</sup> Cage, *Silence*, 161.

comfortable playing until I hear a baby cry.”<sup>49</sup> The baby’s interruptive cry, practically the symbol of concert disruption, seems to function in both experimentalist narratives to represent the sonic and musical potential at the raw interface of human culture and its negation or absence.

With this in mind, other links emerge between the collectives’ experimentalist aesthetics and their tolerance—even esteem—for the alterity and noise of the novice, non-musician, or child. Inspired by the Art Ensemble of Chicago’s work with small percussion and assorted soundmakers, with which they often played in procession into or around performance venues, the AACM school put similar such instruments in children’s hands. This way, Ward recounts, children could improvise in the textural and open “little instruments” modality in concerts and “become part of the procession.”<sup>50</sup> As in UGMAA, the school thus facilitated amateurs performing right alongside AACM artists, enacting an age-diverse, skill-diverse participatory music-making community that recalls Turino’s descriptions of Shona music, but with much elevated value and privileges granted to the amateur, and, indeed, to the very “failures” marking them as such.<sup>51</sup> Ward explains:

What the[se] instruments allowed the children to do is be and play with the adult musicians, the Roscoe Mitchells and Joseph Jarmans of the world. Joseph would be brought to tears listening to that, because these children could play on this level just as well with the masters. The true percussionists would play the “other side” of the rhythm, and we’d say go ahead, because we got this side! As long as we got a side, I don’t care. That was the inclusion, it didn’t matter how old the child was, if they could hold the instrument and keep a steady pulse they were ok. Even if they didn’t keep the beat we’d call those “funny notes,” and they were

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<sup>49</sup> Isoardi, *Dark Tree*, 268.

<sup>50</sup> Ward, interview transcript, Despont and Nussbaum.

<sup>51</sup> Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 131-133.

acceptable. They might create a little diversion for someone to move on to something else.<sup>52</sup>

Yet, perhaps mirroring the polyvocality of groups like the Art Ensemble, this “no wrong notes” philosophy was clearly counterbalanced by elements of the more traditional musical discipline which so many AACM members had experienced either in military bands or in the quasi-military environment of Captain Walter Dyett’s band at DuSable High School.<sup>53</sup> As Roscoe Mitchell put it to me, the AACM school was primarily a nexus for students to learn from the example of the committed member-musicians who were practicing for hours each day in the same spaces where the school operated, thus somewhat distancing himself from Ann Ward’s description of AACM pedagogy. Perhaps, as with the seeming gulf or dialectic between the on-stage self-presentation of Jarman and Mitchell in the Art Ensemble (pre-modern and modern, instinctual and professional), the school could be an arena for the presentation and resolution of such dynamics.<sup>54</sup>

### **The Black Artists’ Group**

Looker’s monograph on the Black Artists’ Group is a model social history, narrating the group’s life directly from primary documents and oral histories. However, the nature of BAG’s pedagogical work remains largely absent from the archive. I asked Oliver Lake about the BAG school, and he recalled that, in its brief, one-year lifespan, any student, of any ability level, was welcomed, and these students, especially the more

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<sup>52</sup> Ward, interview transcript, Despont and Nussbaum.

<sup>53</sup> Lewis, *Power Stronger Than Itself*, 12.

<sup>54</sup> Sweet’s account of the Art Ensemble’s pedagogy at CMS, in *Music Universe*, 78-81, further bears this out: Mitchell’s focus was “technical proficiency,” while Jarman emphasized that “anyone with ideas can compose.”

advanced ones, were folded into BAG's public performances as a matter of course. If it were possible to hear and see such collaborations in action, perhaps we could evenhandedly compare their methods of integrating musicians of mixed skill with similar such work from UCSD or the Scratch Orchestra. Sadly, I have not been able to locate recordings of the members of BAG (or of any the collectives) performing alongside such young learners—with one exception: a 1972 LP, long out-of-print, that features Oliver Lake and five other members of BAG performing with a closely linked multiracial group called the Human Arts Ensemble, a group which, on this recording, includes Lake's six-year old son, Gene.

Looker, Lipsitz and Lewis have all published detailed, incisive and congruent narrations of BAG's brief, extraordinary lifespan. Lipsitz, in particular, is keen to extract a message from their history: rising from post-industrial devastation “like weeds in a vacant lot,” BAG made the most of a lucky infusion of anti-poverty funding that allowed them to briefly push their art up through cracks in the pavement. Then, when their foundation backers pulled the plug, deeming their activities too Afrocentric and insufficiently integrationist, the artists scattered like seeds from Missouri's “vacant” cultural periphery and into lauded international careers and major label deals: “A weed does not need to remain in its native soil to survive. It can be transplanted...and thrive elsewhere.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, Lipsitz's perspective contrasts somewhat with Isoardi's, in which Horace Tapscott's laudable iconoclasm is a direct function of his stubborn rootedness in his own soil, an immovable “dark tree.” Nevertheless, in both cases, a primary

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<sup>55</sup> Lipsitz, *Footsteps in the Dark*, 110. Evidence of such thriving is found in, for example, the World Saxophone Quartet.

commitment to community work over professional careerism adversely affected both BAG and UGMAA's recorded documentation. During their years of peak activity (1968-1970), BAG renovated a massive industrial space, operated the aforementioned free school for the arts, and presented a performance series for which they created new, intermedia works, featuring the talents of actors, dancers, poets, and painters as well as the core musical artists, almost each week. However, almost none of this work has entered the historical archive, and the musicians who made up the core of BAG made an scant few recordings before leaving for Paris in 1972, despite having maintained several performing groups, including a never-documented big band.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, we can surmise that some of BAG's sessions *might* have sounded like *NTU: Point From Which Creation Begins*, an album, credited to Oliver Lake, that represents the recording studio debut of most of the core BAG musicians. The players included Baikida Carroll, Floyd LeFlore, Charles "Bobo" Shaw, Joseph Bowie and Oliver Lake, a quintet who were, at the time of recording, already planning a move to Paris at the urging of members of the Art Ensemble of Chicago (Joseph's brother was the AEC's Lester Bowie)<sup>57</sup> Lake, who wrote most of the music for the album, had hoped this recording

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<sup>56</sup> For a listing of all the BAG-associated recordings made in St. Louis during this period, see Looker, *Creation Begins*, 255-259. For a description of BAG's travails in distributing its music and members' halting experiments in self-release on labels Universal Justice and Mbari, see *Ibid.*, 162-165. All of these recordings are out of print and difficult to come by. Luckily, a performance filmed for French television has recently surfaced on YouTube, and gives a sense of several facets of the Lake and his group's work. Much like the Art Ensemble of Chicago, who had met such a positive reception in Paris a few years before, the group works extensively with little instruments; each player has a percussion setup, and an all-percussion section occupies almost a quarter of the concert. Other portions of the concert reflect the tightly scored aesthetic of *NTU* and the wide-open meditative quality of *Whisper of Dharma*. See Black Artists' Group, Untitled live performance on French television program *Jazz Harmonie* n.d., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZQEcooUgk0>, accessed 4/19/15.

<sup>57</sup> See Looker, *Creation Begins*, 194-7 for details about these recording dates. LeFlore and Lake's only earlier appearance is on an even rarer live documentation of a BAG live event entitled *Ofamfa*, see *Ibid.*, 255

would serve as their calling card and advance publicity for their move to Europe; playing opportunities in St. Louis had dried up sharply that year, with the precipitous withdrawal of all foundation support for the BAG school and building. *NTU* is a focused debut, dominated by Lake's tightly rehearsed charts, with unified and crisply articulated four-horn arrangements floating above looping modal vamps, conga patterns, and grooving, polyrhythmic timekeeping.<sup>58</sup>

These musicians' next and last St. Louis recording date would starkly contrast with *NTU* in nearly every regard. On October 6, 1972, shortly before Lake and the quintet would leave St. Louis for Paris, the group would join J.D. Parran, Jim Marshall, and Lake's son Gene in the studio to record the first LP released under the name Human Arts Ensemble. The resulting album, consisting of two side-long edits culled from longer improvisations, would be self-released in a limited edition under the title *Whisper of Dharma*. In its narrow, self-funded release and its cast of players, *Whisper of Dharma* closely resembles *NTU*, yet in almost every other regard, these two albums are strikingly dissimilar.<sup>59</sup> In addition to their actual musical sounds and structuring devices (about which more below), the cast on the Human Arts Ensemble record is both racially integrated and radically age-diverse, whereas the group on *NTU* is all black and all adult.

Human Arts Ensemble was the musical group associated with the Human Arts Association, an "interracial twin" organization of BAG that was similarly active both in music and across varied intermedia. As Looker and Lake both tell it, the spirit of high Black Power demanded that BAG's membership be all black (as AACM's was), although

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<sup>58</sup>Oliver Lake, *NTU: Point from Which Creation Begins*. Arista-Freedom, AL 1024 (LP), [1971] 1976.

<sup>59</sup>Human Arts Ensemble, *Whisper of Dharma*. Arista-Freedom, AL 1039 (LP), [1972] 1977. See also Looker, *Creation Begins*, 194-7.

BAG's school admitted white students and BAG groups had manifold connections and working relationships with various white-dominated institutions, particularly in and around the local universities.<sup>60</sup> Lake recalls visiting a music venue in Brooklyn called The East, early in BAG's lifespan, "where no white people were permitted to come into the building. That was also discussed when we were forming the Black Artists' Group, about separation...we decided we wanted to keep it open and not have a discriminatory policy about who could come into the building and who the audience could be."<sup>61</sup> Thus, Lake regards BAG as occupying a more centrist position along the spectrum of black nationalism, a perspective largely confirmed by his and other BAG-members close working relationships with a few white artists, largely through the Human Arts Ensemble and Association.

The Human Arts Association was co-founded by BAG members together with Jim and Carol Marshall, white artist/activists who channeled some of their evident monetary resources into Human Arts Ensemble projects while simultaneously launching an arts colony in rural Oregon. This Human Arts colony, whose setting and style seem to have closely resembled the prototypical countercultural communes, would attract many ex-BAG artists over the course of a decade. Looker's brief, tantalizing description suggests evident points of similarity with the Creative Music Studio (see next chapter): "based around a set of large trailers on a mountainside...visitors spent their time in meditation and constant outdoor rehearsals...The serene outpost gave several of the performers [associated with BAG] an opportunity to play out the more ascetic, reflective,

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<sup>60</sup> Looker, *Creation Begins*, 85-92.

<sup>61</sup> Oliver Lake, interview with the author, 4/21/2015.

and spiritual impulses at work in the Human Arts Ensemble.<sup>62</sup> While BAG and HAE shared an interest in what I have called, after Jerome Rothenberg, the “ethnopoetic,” their formulations of this notion are interestingly divergent. Where Looker quotes BAG member Julius Hemphill expressing his interest in “the ‘natural’ sounds, the primitive sounds of man,” we can, utilizing Rothenberg’s contemporaneous formulation that “primitive means complex,” assume that Hemphill meant these words to imply no slander.<sup>63</sup>

But where BAG projects turned “to Africa, real or imagined, for inspiration,” the interracial Human Arts Ensemble investigated what we might term “other Others” as ethnopoetic reference points. Thus, early Human Arts Ensemble productions took inspiration from an Afghan folk tune, a Hopi creation myth, and particularly on *Whisper of Dharma*, South Asian Buddhism.<sup>64</sup> Could this have been a means towards diffusing the charged binary opposition of black and white, African and European?

Lake’s work from the period demonstrates a keen analysis of such dialectics and divisions operating at the interacting levels of race, genre, and tradition, more often characterized by ironic reversals than by stable binaries. The liner note for *NTU* is a poem by Lake entitled “Separation,” which riffs on the need to extinguish invidious distinctions and needless dualisms, as, for example, between genres: “What kinda music you play?/ “GOOD KIND”/ Aretha franklin & Sun Ra is the same folks/Coltrane & the Dixie

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<sup>62</sup>Looker *Creation Begins.*, 88-90, 190-1. Jim Marshall met BAG leader Ajulé Rutlin in the civil rights organization CORE early in the 1960s. Looker refers to Carol’s trust-fund as a source of support for BAG projects, and Lake (interview with the author) similarly alluded to the fact that the Marshalls financially supported some unnamed BAG members. It also seems that most of the numerous instruments and soundmakers used on HAE records were acquired and shipped back by the Marshalls during their 1971 trip through India and Nepal.

<sup>63</sup> Hemphill, quoted in Looker, *Creation Begins*, 174

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-90, 174.

humming birds same folks.” In addition to expanding upon Ellington’s oft-repeated *bon mot* that “there are two kinds of music. Good music, and the other kind,” the poem also reflects the influence of Baraka’s concerns about the unfortunate divergence between commercially successful and aesthetically experimental black musics in “The Changing Same.”<sup>65</sup> So, for that matter, does the actual music, which seamlessly blends free improvisation with funky, electrified beats.<sup>66</sup>

But as I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, the concern with the gap between radical black artists and their “others” is not reducible to a tension with the tastes of the black listening public. Questions of musical transmission and of pedagogy were, if anything, even more charged and central to Lake’s conceptualization: “LABELS DIVIDE! SEPARATE/ THE ORAL AND THE LITERARY/ THE HISTORY OF AFRICA WAS MEMORIZED, LIVED, EXPERIENCED, NOWED!/ “WE DIDN’T READ IT WE DID IT!”” While this final line resonates with a certain critique of Western notation seen across in prior chapters, the passage as a whole suggests some of the tensions which pulled on Lake in his own recent life at the time of writing. In 1968, he had graduated from the historically black Lincoln University with a bachelors degree in music education. Yet, when I asked if any of his academic training as a music educator had influenced him at all in his teaching at the BAG school, he practically chortled:

“Not at all! The music that is called jazz...was not highly regarded in that music department. The musicians at Lincoln University who wanted to play jazz, we had to actually, literally sneak to play jazz when the instructors were not in the music building, because none of the students there were permitted to study jazz—or play jazz, actually. And you would be reprimanded if they heard you practicing jazz, or having a jam session.

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<sup>65</sup> Lake, interview.

<sup>66</sup> See Looker, *Creation Begins*, 171 for a contrasting interpretation of the poem.

So what we applied in the Black Artists' Group had *nothing* to do with my experience at Lincoln University, other than the associations I had with other musicians who were likeminded.”<sup>67</sup>

Perhaps some of Lake's evident antipathy towards what he calls, in “Separation,” the “literary” modes of musical transmission might stem as much from an experience of aesthetic suppression within an institution that valued only notated music.<sup>68</sup> Still, the final portion of the poem bears reproduction in its original typography to capture some of the force of Lake's critique.

“oral-literary;  
                   oral-  
                   do  
                   experience,  
                   improvise,  
                   adjust,  
                   create

literary-  
                   catalog,  
                   label,  
                   divide,  
                   read,  
                   interpret,  
                   criticize,

NO SEPARATION-Yeah, don't put me in no bag...  
 i'm open, may do anything    PUT ALL MY FOOD ON THE SAME PLATE!  
 ...  
 read da music! play the music! create the music, read the music  
 Can u read music? naw, it's best jest to create it & play it  
 that's more direct-t-t-t-t-t-t”<sup>69</sup>

Such vituperation against a kind of repressive, overcivilized notion of notation and literacy obviously resonates strongly with flipped hierarchies seen across this dissertation. In nominating the “oral-literary” as superior to the “literary,” it's clear that

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<sup>67</sup> Lake, interview.

<sup>68</sup> That meant, Lake clarified to me, both Western art music and Western-notated versions of African-American gospel music.

<sup>69</sup> *NTU* (liner notes).

Lake's critique of Western art music bears at least a family resemblance to those of Keil, Blacking, and Cage.

Yet viewing *NTU* in the comparative light of *Whisper of Dharma*, it's difficult not to view their very different musical approaches as reflecting important differences of approach (if not quite dualistic separation), which seem to center precisely on the orality/literacy issues raised in Lake's poem.<sup>70</sup> The tracks on *NTU* have obviously pre-composed elements, crisp starts and stops, and an orderly progression of individual virtuoso solo turns. Lake confirms that, while there were written charts for *NTU*, none were used for *Whisper of Dharma*, and indeed, that Human Arts Ensemble rehearsals consisted solely, during the time of his involvement, of score-less free improvisation.<sup>71</sup>

HAE's *Whisper of Dharma* is wholly unlike *NTU*'s propulsive, deftly arranged, jazz-rooted and soul-inflected music. Opening with the strike of a gong, the album's first side is an exploration of extreme and unfamiliar timbres against a backdrop of expansive silence. While the sounds of the musicians' trumpets and saxes surface occasionally, they are dwarfed by bird calls, bells, whistles, wooden flutes, and unidentifiable percussive clicks in varied shades of wood and metal. The overwhelming canvas of silence against which these sounds stand out provides a sense of extraordinary aural depth of field, with the varied sounds' loudness and degree of reverberation varying across all extremes. Nearly all sense of harmony, vertical or horizontal, is absent; two Western instruments are almost never heard simultaneously. The radong, a long Tibetan ceremonial trumpet, provides fleeting ground with a microtonally shifting quasi-drone. Nothing approaching

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<sup>70</sup> Perhaps, we can judge this just an operational separation carrying no ontological weight, and more positively reframe the differences between the two records in terms of a postmodern multivocality which finds different expressions on different recording dates.

<sup>71</sup> Lake, interview.

the extended personal narrativity of a jazz solo occurs. One of the musicians heard in the *NTU* horn section, Baikida Carroll, doesn't even play trumpet on *Whisper of Dharma*; according to the liner notes he sticks to gong and small instruments. Indeed, every player is credited with "small instruments."

But it's not simply the presence of so many non-normative "jazz" timbres on *Whisper of Dharma* that provides the contrast with *NTU*. Indeed, on *NTU*'s opening track, entitled "Africa," each melodic horn section statement is answered by the glissing interjections of what sound like a West African talking drum and perhaps some sort of friction drum. Both albums trade in a degree of what we might deem musical exoticism. Like all the collectives, BAG was intensely invested in representing and reconstructing a proud and positive black history and cultural identity.<sup>72</sup> But if the cross-cultural referent of *NTU* was obviously African, *Whisper of Dharma* is no less upfront in its acknowledgment of South Asia. The liner note is a quotation from the Buddhist scriptures, the *Dhammapada*: "We are what we think/having become what we thought." If *NTU* suggests that BAG members associated Africanness with virile power, a unified ethos, personal expressivity and the rhythms of dance, *Whisper of Dharma* seems to link Buddhism with many of the same features that Cage would ascribe to it: an impression of non-interactivity, sound events appreciated in their singularity and allowed to "be themselves," and extensive use of silence and space. Interpenetrating in the absence of a rhythmic grid, the small sounds take on the character almost of a field recorded soundscape.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Looker, *Creation Begins*, 175-79.

<sup>73</sup> For a tidy review of appropriations of Asian music and spirituality by white experimentalists, see John Corbett "Experimental Oriental: New Music and Other Others," in *Western Music and its Others*:

### **Whisper of Dharma: improvising with “beginner’s mind”**

HAE’s references to South Asia and to Buddhism, placed in the musical context of a virtuosity carefully abjured, conjure not only Cage’s many appropriations of related spiritual traditions, but, perhaps a more likely direct influence, the notion of “beginner’s mind,” first popularized in the West through Shunryu Suzuki’s best-selling 1970 *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*. Suzuki’s concepts resonate strongly with the “deskilling” to which I have repeatedly returned—Suzuki urged people to encounter the world from a place of unknowing and critiqued the assumption that attaining (a Western ideal of) mastery actually elevates us. Mastery is, for Suzuki, both a paradox and an impossibility, because pursuing it undoes it. Among the book’s well-known homilies is one that would fit in quite well with certain post-Cage perspectives on improvisation: “If your mind is empty, it is always ready for anything, it is open to everything. In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s mind there are few.”<sup>74</sup> For BAG musicians, withholding their traditional virtuosity for one album side is certainly a momentous commitment and a risk, especially given their scant opportunities to record and “prove themselves” by the standards of jazz mastery. Perhaps the Marshalls’ willingness to put their own money into Human Arts projects engendered a freeing situation where the BAG musicians felt they didn’t have to assess whether the recording time and session would “pay off” in as hard-nosed or parsimonious a manner. As Looker puts it, Lake intended *NTU* to be “the musicians’ ticket out of St. Louis.” By the time of

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Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music, ed. by Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). However, this article studiously avoids any mention of black experimentalists’ interest in and uses of such Asian inspirations.

<sup>74</sup> Shunryu Suzuki *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*. (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2010 [1970]), 2.

the *Whisper of Dharma* date, those tickets had already been purchased; Lake et al. left for Paris ten days after its recording.<sup>75</sup>

In pointing out these clear and wide differences, I am in no way trying to suggest that one album is superior. Instead, I point out these material realities to suggest that Lake probably had a clear eyed view of the reception and comprehension likely to greet his group, in their varied guises across a range of articulations of identity, with differential congruences to jazz critics expectations and to stereotyped ideas of blackness.<sup>76</sup> I don't want to undersell, for example, the fact that the exploration of multi-instrumentalism on *Whisper of Dharma* can also be viewed, following Lewis, as a kind of *expanded* virtuosity; even if taking up the little instruments may constitute a momentary, personal "deskilling," the long-term consequence is in some sense an expanded domain of instrumental mastery that enables musicians to work with numerous instruments.<sup>77</sup> Still, it's hard not to feel that such little instruments nevertheless pulled at least *some* AACM and BAG musicians in the direction of "beginner's mind," "deskilling," and a more thoroughgoing critique of the notion of mastery itself. The words of Josphe Jarman, cited in a related discussion by Lewis, are of enormous relevance here: "Why please tell me/ must I limit myself/ to a saxophone or clarinet! ...why must I become/ 'a master'—of anything/ when all sound all movement/ springs from the same/ breath."<sup>78</sup> And indeed, the aesthetic texture and types of playing on *Whisper of Dharma* undoubtedly belong to

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<sup>75</sup> Looker, *Creation Begins*, 194.

<sup>76</sup> One album of somewhat similar aesthetic texture to *Whisper of Dharma* that has more successfully entered the creative music canon is Marion Brown's *Afternoon of a Georgia Faun* (1970). Evidence that such an aesthetic would have elicited few plaudits in the jazz press of the day is found in Porter, *Thing Called Jazz*, 248-51.

<sup>77</sup> Lewis, *Power Stronger than Itself*, 362-5.

<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Lewis, *Power Stronger Than Itself*, 363.

an already-established aesthetic trajectory, including Jarman's contributions to the Art Ensemble of Chicago, as well as other "small instrument"-dominated recordings of the period, such as Marion Brown's *Afternoon of a Georgia Faun* (1970), which also included percussion performances by non-musicians "to reproduce traditional Ghanaian practices, in which music is performed by a nucleus of skilled musicians, with help from community members of lesser ability"<sup>79</sup>

Thus, any binary distinction between the two groups—"Afrological and Eurological"—can seem a tenuous one, even where Lewis himself places Cage's thoughts on mastery next to Jarman's. Late in his career, after having ceased to flee the word "improvisation," Cage describes it as a way of "discovering something you don't know at the time" as when you "play an instrument over which you have no control, or less control than usual." Indeed, both experimentalist communities expanded their sonic resources through such critiques of mastery, whether in the use of less-than-fully skilled performers, by deskilling themselves through playing virtuosity-resistant found objects, or in any of the other attempts at decentering European-derived notations, musical concepts, and instruments. Braxton describes his first, shocking encounter with Jarman's utter undressing of jazz virtuosity, a critique already in full swing as early as Braxton's first sessions with the AACM Experimental Band in 1965:

I say, I'm gonna show these motherfuckers what it's all about—thirty-second notes, Coltrane, Cecil Taylor. I finished my solo and Jarman stood up and said [sings] *Bwaaaah!* [silence], *Oom* [silence], *Pffff!* I said this

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<sup>79</sup> Porter, *Thing Called Jazz*, 250. Though there is probably no real reason to apply a label to this micro-genre, Lewis has suggested that, had it been produced in a later decade, music like this would be given the label of "reductionist" improvisation. "AACM at 50" interview. See Porter 246-54 for more on Brown's *Georgia Faun*, which is also linked to the "therapeutic and transformative aspects of improvised music" in ways that closely resonate with Jarman, CMS and other "Asialogical" moments in creative music.

motherfucker is totally out of his motherfucking mind and this is the baddest shit I've ever heard in my life.<sup>80</sup>

At some level, Braxton's response to Jarman's obvious "deskilling" of the instrumental solo already contains both the stereotypical perspective (Jarman's "solo" is "mindless," with its connotations of anti-intellectualism and primitivism), as well as Lewis' corrective: Jarman's frame-breaking inversion actually *expands* his "virtuosity," establishing *him* as the "baddest."<sup>81</sup>

Given the links to between such forms of deskilling and Buddhist references in HAE and Cage, it's likely no coincidence that, of all the members of the AACM, Jarman was among the most avid explorers of Eastern spiritualities, theatrical representations of primitivism (he was known to appear nude with the Art Ensemble, while Lester Bowie wore a labcoat and Mitchell a suit), and linked to both of these per Braxton's story, an interest in the deconstruction of concepts of musical virtuosity. Indeed, like Oliveros, Jarman would, as the years went on, subsume aspects of his professional musical career to the pursuit of meditation and martial arts.<sup>82</sup> But, for most musicians from both scenes, such practices are used to enhance, not supplant, the making of music. Oliveros' Deep Listening is perhaps the most obvious example here, but free jazz legend Milford Graves' self-created martial art *yara* (from the Yoruban for "nimbleness") and some of his other medicinal and spiritual activities are equally good examples of what might I might

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<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Lewis, *Power Stronger than Itself*, 148.

<sup>81</sup> Should we even refer to this as "virtuosity?" Perhaps Lewis is breaking the frame of the *concept's* prior definition and bounds, recapitulating, using language, the break he is describing.

<sup>82</sup> He is the founder both of the Brooklyn Zen Center and an Aikido dojo with which it shares space, and left the Art Ensemble for many years to focus his efforts on these practices See Joseph Jarman, Interviewed by Jason Gross. *Perfect Sound Forever* (October 1999) <http://www.furious.com/perfect/jarman.html>.

venture to term experimental music's contributions to a therapeutic culture that hovers in a blurry region between the domains of art and ritual practice.<sup>83</sup>

Without trying to impose this theoretical perspective on these artists, my notion of the imbrication of art, spirituality and therapeutic culture is rooted in my understanding of historian T.J. Jackson Lears' notion of *therapeutic antimodernism*—"the recoil from an 'overcivilized' modern existence to more intense forms of physical or spiritual experience." In some corners of American Studies, Lears' work has become a dominant explanatory paradigm for the adoption and influence of numerous and varied forms of Romanticism, naturalism and Orientalism during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>84</sup> Lears himself analyzes the earliest phase of American interest in Buddhism, meditation and martial arts at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through exactly this lens, showing how these practices were sheared of many of their devotional connotations and enculturated concomitants, in order to make them more useful and palatable to the American individual.

Is this analytical perspective useful to the study of musical experimentalism? Oliveros and Graves, like most musicians in this study, seem to have no problem with modernity itself, as long as it is decorrelated from the assumption of the superiority of Western culture. Perhaps, then, this strand of experimental music might be better termed a therapeutic anti-Westernism? Throughout, we have seen how experimentalists have aimed to enrich and improve musical culture by freeing the musician from the unhealthy

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<sup>83</sup> Marc Jacobson, "The Jazz Scientist" *New York Magazine* November 12, 2001, <http://nymag.com/nymetro/news/trends/columns/cityside/5380>.

<sup>84</sup> Jackson's analysis has been overwhelmingly associated with the white middle class, however. There seems to have been little work done on the possible relationships and differences between white and black searchers for more authentic experiences outside the confines of the modern West, and certainly little that I T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (

constrictions of Western notation and ideals of virtuosity, as well as through the adoption of pedagogical programs which thematize “nature” through the inspiration of the environment, the everyday, and the body. And, as we will see below, the Creative Music Studio would even more heavily invest in such discourses, a pedagogical nexus for joining all the world’s musics under the banner of a strategic universalism that, like *Whisper of Dharma*, collapses and denies the determinateness of racial and cultural origins. Perhaps both “deskilling” and “reskilling” can be viewed as both flying the same flag of therapeutic anti-Westernism, where the therapeutic function is aimed both at the individual and at a larger intercultural *communitas*.

### **Improvising With(out) Beginners**

Suzuki’s “beginner’s mind” is of particular relevance for *Whisper of Dharma* not only because on it, wind players elect, by and large, *not* to play the instruments on which they are most practiced and which best channel their (traditional) virtuosity. (We could even describe Carroll’s performance on the record, or indeed, Jarman’s solo as narrated by Braxton, as realizations of Brecht’s *Solo For Wind Instrument*: “Putting it down.”) Even more strikingly, the album includes the performance of Gene Lake, Oliver Lake’s then six-year old son, credited with drums and small instruments. This startling fact on its own should establish the album as a singular episode in improvised music—has another album with such a well-known and lauded group of musicians *ever* featured a performance by a musician so young? One might expect this fact to be highlighted by the additional liner note, written for the album’s 1977 reissue on Arista/Freedom, by Michael Cuscuna, who as Arista’s resident expert on the creative music scene, had signed

Anthony Braxton to one of the biggest record contracts that any experimentalist saw that decade. Yet, despite the mention and description of every single other musician on the record by name, Gene Lake alone goes unnamed and unmentioned in the note. Why?

Cuscuna's note tells us that the album finds the Human Arts Ensemble "at one of its creative peaks," a group of "exceptional and creative musicians" that "continues to distinguish itself in the new music in many places and many contexts." It offers that, prior to Arista re-issue, the album was a collector's item "constantly discussed in musicians' and hard core fans' circles." Given the spaciousness of the music and its abjuring of standard virtuosity, one feels Cuscuna struggling to convince the listener/reader of the album's value, based on a vocabulary of jazz-journalistic standards of individuality and obvious virtuosity that this particular record does not really embody: we are told, for example that J.D.Parran "was in the all-star New York horn section that joined The Band for...their live *Rock of Ages* album" and now "lead[s] a powerful group of his own." This is of course standard jazz writing, but its overheated adjectives seem to cast the discursive exclusion of six-year old Gene Lake in an especially hard light. The music on *Whisper of Dharma*, gentle and open, couldn't be further from the traits with which Cuscuna associates the players. In fact, he doesn't describe the music on *this* record at all.<sup>85</sup>

To me, it seems clear that Cuscuna cannot figure out how to raise the issue of the presence of a child's playing on the album without treading on unstable, potentially offensive terrain. "Child's play" is, of course, an appellation of scorn for something easy, a task which requires no thought. Once you know that this is music that a child can play,

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<sup>85</sup> Michael Cuscuna, liner note, *Whisper of Dharma*.

it not only threatens to devalue the music on this particular record as less-than-“professional” in quality, but this devaluation would seem to have the ability to spread like a virus, infecting the perception of the other musicians, and potentially spreading beyond them into the perception of the entire genre, the very activity of free improvisation: If a child can play this sort of music and not stand out, what does it seem to say about the other musicians? In my reading, Cuscuna “protests too much” in an attempt to inoculate the listener against such a reading, preempting their low regard for the music and musicians that he expects would result if they learned the truth of Gene Lake’s identity, or had his presence on the record called to their attention.

In my view, the deep conceptual challenge that *Whisper of Dharma* represents is that, on such spacious, free and explorative music, a kindergarten-aged child (albeit one who had had a high degree of musical exposure) is literally inaudible as such. This is to say that, while one might assume that the presence of a six-year old would leave a sonic signature of some sort, whether of physical incapacity, excessive exuberance, or improvisational injudiciousness, a listener *cannot discern* any such residue of “unskill” that we might assume would inalienably adhere to such a body. Nor does it seem possible that Gene’s playing was simply “buried” in the mix—vast open spaces in the music allow even the tiniest of sounds to be clearly heard; Gene is audibly leaving space for the adult musicians, and they are evidently doing the same for him. Though no score was used in this session, we can imaginatively suggest that, if the terms and conditions of the Human Arts Ensemble’s interaction here constitutes a kind of (non-notational) instruction, it is one that seems to admirably facilitate both maximum personal freedom and the

possibility of mixed skill participation.<sup>86</sup> The take was, to Lake's recent recollection, a completely free improvisation. All the group's prior rehearsals had also consisted similarly of entirely open playing—though Lake doesn't remember specifically whether or not Gene had been present at any of them.

It probably comes as no surprise to learn that, in point of fact, six-year old Gene Lake was not, strictly speaking, a raw musical novice. As his father recounts:

He was a drummer from six months old, which was amazing to me, and when he was two or three years old, I got him his first drum set....And he got really good at it, and he was with me all the time, and he ended up playing with us quite a bit, even in Paris....He was with me in a lot of musical situations...at a lot of the jam sessions. And the fact that Bobo Shaw was helping him quite a bit, and the fact that [Gene] had chosen his...vocation at such a young age was amazing to me.<sup>87</sup>

Thus, by welcoming Gene to play the *Whisper of Dharma* session with them, Lake and HAE were not exactly valorizing inability or instrumental incompetence as such (as in some readings, Cage or Cardew might be seen to). Quite to the contrary, while accepting the reality of mixed skill, they were actually conducting their pedagogy “in the expanded field” of fully professional and presentational musical performance.

Nor was Gene's status and presence totally unique in this regard: Lake recalls that BAG would invite some of the more advanced students from the weekly school to perform with their teachers; this fluid continuum between pedagogy and apprenticeship was a feature of AACM and UGMAA as well (see above). Such congress between pedagogy and performance led to Marty Ehrlich—who was barely teenaged when he first began taking lessons at the BAG building—appearing on the second Human Arts

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<sup>86</sup> Lake, interview.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

Ensemble LP, *Under the Sun*, effectively taking the alto saxophone chair from Lake (who was by then in Paris).<sup>88</sup>

Perhaps we can partially attribute Gene's presence on the record to Lake's stated aversion to needless "separations," an experiment with the isomorphism of family and musical ensemble (as in the work of Horace Tapscott). While ensembles comprising individuals of mixed skill is an idea that appears prominently in the music cultures surveyed by Turino, such structures seem not to fit in easily amidst the norms of Western art music. By the 1970s, amidst its rising academic acceptance and the professionalization of the high school jazz educator, the pedagogical culture of jazz was being re-made on the pattern of Western art music.<sup>89</sup> Concomitantly, student jazz ensembles (like youth orchestras) would come to occupy performative arenas that rarely overlapped those of "fully skilled" professionals.<sup>90</sup> The arrival of jazz in the academy was, at Anderson is at pains to argue, deeply bound up with the most experimental musicians' assertion of their work as art, not entertainment. Thus, though black experimentalists musicians were under frequent attack from jazz "traditionalists" for not knowing "how to play," they leveraged some aspects of modernist sensibility about art's autonomy to position free jazz and "creative music" *above* traditional jazz, in ways that at least the academy could recognize. With these modernist assumptions come the acceptability of dissonance and the concomitant allowability of the music's difficulty.

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<sup>88</sup> Looker, *Creation Begins*, 78, 89.

<sup>89</sup> Anderson, *This is Our Music*, 159-165.

<sup>90</sup> This would be the pessimistic argument, that over the course of its institutionalization, jazz was changed by Eurocentric pedagogical norms more than it changed them. For a more optimistic reading, that suggests how jazz did or could change these music-pedagogical norms, see Patricia Shehan Campbell, *Lessons from the World: A Cross-Cultural Guide to Music Teaching and Learning* (New York: Schirmer, 1991), 177ff.

Indeed, when what is at issue is Cecil Taylor's suitability for an academic appointment at Antioch, philistine assaults on his music's unlistenability come, no less than for Milton Babbitt, to actually reinforce his prestige: who cares if *you* listen?<sup>91</sup>

Yet, where Babbitt's "terminal prestige" is bolstered by his associations with European compositional legacy as well as the scientistism and positivism of pitch-class set theory and the university electronic music studio, the 1970s black experimentalists' very musical abilities (to say nothing of their prestige) was rarely free from miscomprehension, question and threat. Thus, as Anthony Braxton's record producer, Michael Cuscuna would doubtless have been painfully aware of the 1971 *Downbeat* blindfold test in which the white bebop altoist Phil Woods said of a track from Braxton's *For Alto*:

That was terrible, I can't imagine the ego of a person thinking they can sustain a whole performance by themselves, when they can't really play the saxophone well...you should have the training to carry it off...it's not well done, he doesn't breathe properly. I'm sure his fingers wave off the keyboard. I'm sure he hasn't studied the saxophone. There's a lot of primitives that play and get a lot of exciting music; but this is such an ego trip, that you think you're that much of a bitch that you can do a solo album.<sup>92</sup>

Woods' words have been reproduced in nearly every scholarly consideration of Braxton; they have come to represent, in this literature, both the explicit threat to the black experimentalist (which warns, don't go too far in expanding your ambition, or you will be accused of lacking musicianship) as well as the laughable shortsightedness of jazz "traditionalists" (since Parker and Coltrane were at times also victim to similar

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<sup>91</sup> Anderson, *This is Our Music*, 156-65.

<sup>92</sup> Leonard Feather, "Blindfold Test—Phil Woods," *Downbeat* Oct 14, 1971.

accusations).<sup>93</sup> Graham Lock, expanding upon Braxton's own formulation, suggests that the black musician's prestige and value is always circumscribed by white supremacy in a "grand trade-off." According to Lock and Braxton, black musicians can earn fame, renown and success, as long as they remain within the sphere of popular culture, and don't transgress the boundaries of "blackness"—primitivity, natural talent and minimal intellectual content—as set by a white supremacist imaginary. From this "grand trade-off" emerges the threat that improvisation itself may be paradoxically both valued (as a natural emanation of more "authentic" black bodies) and simultaneously devalued as mere impulse and misconstrued as not reflecting thought and work.<sup>94</sup>

It would be no wonder, then, if Cuscuna were to have made the calculation that Gene Lake's presence on *Whisper of Dharma* would simply evoke too many racialized prejudices or generate new fodder for those who might spray invective upon music which transgresses the supposed limits of blackness. As I have suggested, the idea that a "child's play" could have an equal place within the space of an experimentalist free improvisation might be misconstrued to bolster the claim that *no one* within that arena has, or needs to have, a refined skillset, which is precisely what Woods has already suggested. Those who make records without having "studied," Woods claims, are uppity and ego-inflated, and must be discursively put in their place. Though it's not clear whether Woods knew whom he was listening to (or of what race) during the blindfold test, his reference to "primitives" is undoubtedly negative, and minimally conjures images of imperialism and the colonial project.

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<sup>93</sup> See Lewis *Power Stronger than Itself*, 327. Radano, *New Musical Figurations*, 181. Graham Lock, *Blutopia: Visions of the Future and Revisions of the Past in the Work of Sun Ra, Duke Ellington, and Anthony Braxton*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 146-53.

<sup>94</sup> Lock, *Blutopia*, 175-81.

Yet, here we enter a delicate semantic terrain when we recall that BAG members explicitly sought and ratified “the ‘natural’ sounds, the primitive sounds of man,” and note that *Whisper of Dharma*, at least as much as any other document of the St. Louis musicians, seems to embody this search.<sup>95</sup> Given this, I regard both the album’s adult and sub-adult performances (the categorical separation of which, the album seems to argue through its very sonic materiality, is unsupportable) as evidence of the importance of “beginner’s mind” strategies—whether as strategic ignorance (perhaps recalling that of Rancière’s ignorant schoolmaster?), or as universal oneness that necessitates a critique of wrongheaded ideas of mastery (as in Jarman). Rather than aligning such strategies *either* to a “Eurological” and “Afrological” experimentalism, I want suggest that they help to evade such a binary altogether, as well as pointing beyond other such binaries raised across my entire account thus far. In deference to the predominance of South Asian references on *Whisper of Dharma*, one might even dare to raise a third term, “Asialogical.” Doing so would also be a sort of tribute to the philosophical concepts of Anthony Braxton, who, beginning in the 1970s, would frequently refer to his musical interests in terms of the triad of “Europe, Africa, and Asia,” often linked to other, related triads, e.g. “abstract, concrete, and intuitive” musical realizations.<sup>96</sup> I take this triadic formulation not only to be characteristic of Braxton’s “tri-axiomatic” or “tri-centric” philosophical orientation, in which thinking “in threes” is a way of training the mind out of the habit of pernicious dualisms.<sup>97</sup> Just as Human Arts Ensemble seek, in the figure of exoticized, Asian intuition, a way beyond the black-white binary, they may also have

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<sup>95</sup> Looker, *Creation Begins*, 174.

<sup>96</sup> Anthony Braxton, “Introduction to the Catalogue of Works,” <http://www.restructures.net/texts/Braxton-IntroCatalogWorks.htm>

<sup>97</sup> Radano, *New Musical Figurations*, 229-237.

located, in mixed-skill collective performance, a way beyond a forced choice of virtuosity versus deskilling, mastery and its abnegation.

Returning to my dissertation-wide goals, in particular the notion of the “useable past,” I want to suggest that the Human Arts Ensemble’s specific achievement and offering on *Whisper of Dharma* is the creation of a certain sort of platform for extremely open improvisation which can include the participation of participants of mixed skill and potentially very modest playing experience. Yet unlike the scores of past chapters, it does so *without necessarily demanding the deskilling* of the more experienced and able players. By this, I mean that no rule, norm or structural device explicitly constrains the highly skilled members of the group from expressing themselves, with relative freedom, at the height of their musical abilities. Where many scores in chapters 2 and 3 called for participants supposedly irrespective of skill, these scores only allowed for the expression of those behaviors assumed to be common faculties of all human bodies (singing, hearing, mimesis)—no “special abilities” aloud. That is, a highly trained performer might be as welcome *join* the group as is a novice, but only so long as they were willing to come “deskilled,”—that is, to obey the notation’s constraints that necessarily flattened the possible range of their activities into an area held to be more or less universal.

If we similarly take *Whisper of Dharma*, as I suggested above, as a kind of “score,” how does it compare with prior chapters in its address of humans’ nature, experiences and capacities? It’s clear that while some implied constraints on performers’ self-expression *are* present, these function primarily to keep the space clear enough for all to act in the absence of any other structuring constraint. We might regard these constraints—the undeclared and implicit “score”—as representing the absolute minimum

of structuring rules that in turn enable all musicians to fulfill the one positive “rule”—that is, that everyone make sounds on an equal footing, with nothing confined to background or foreground. Even the percussionists are not impelled into a time-keeping role; the extremity of silence and constantly shifting instrumental resources create a situation where all sounds seem to have utter equality with those made by the other players.

These music-making constraints little resemble any of Turino’s exemplar cultures in which mixed-skill ensemble is the norm. In all his examples, as in a wide spectrum of other folk musics with informal modes of transmission, master musicians take on clearly defined roles that necessitate and demonstrate their mastery, and frequently are authorized more latitude to improvise as a result. The novices and youngsters must stick to repeated patterns and, in so doing create the foundation upon which the masters may take liberties. This sort of participatory yet hierarchical heterophony could be viewed, using Turino’s music-as-social-life model, as a certain kind of gerontocracy, governance on the basis of seniority.

By contrast, the situation on *Whisper of Dharma* seems to grant exactly the same responsibilities, privileges and constraints to *all* musicians, regardless of skill. What each player does is a matter of their improvisational free choice, not their earned seniority. To my ear, no one is heard to “lead,” and thus no one pulled to “follow.” Gestures congruent with those ordinary skill-differentiating features of Turino’s most favored participatory musics would invariably endanger the delicate coexistence of shifting and singular sounds and silences created by the Human Arts Ensemble. It would be a very different record indeed if Gene Lake’s inexperience necessitated that he play time on the cowbell, or that his father’s frequent status as bandleader necessitated that he “lead” others

through the music via more prominent or outgoing articulation. One of the most attractive features of “creative music,” both as aesthetic texture and socio-political model, is exactly this quality of mutability and indeterminateness of musical role-taking. Built upon a foundation of mixed-skill, *Whisper of Dharma* points the way to the practice of a kind of provisional or operational equality of sound-making, regardless of identity or past attainments. But unlike the verbally-notated participatory scores of past chapters, it does not define a skill-agnostic “equality” in trans-contextual or universalizing ways—it does not assume in advance what an abstracted individual can and cannot do.

Of course, in at least one crucial way, this comparison is a wholly unjust one, juxtaposing explicit notational instructions with my own imaginative analysis of what HAE’s implicit terms of engagement might have been. *Whisper of Dharma* was, of course, *not* a scored affair, and articulating its affordances as a model of social relations at the expense of works that *do* exist as a set of instructions is unfair, because, scores are, in some sense, requests to be re-enacted. They don’t just embody a set of relationships or activities, they motivate the re-articulation of those relations. If a recording is a documentation of movements already concluded, notation is by contrast, as Cardew wrote, “a way of making people move.”<sup>98</sup> Thus, I move, in the next chapter, back towards musical scores, in large part as a way of locating more explicit articulations of an Afrological experimentalist approach to broad-based participation and pedagogy. Here, as in the case of the Human Arts Ensemble, the dynamic interactions of skill, agency, and participation move firmly beyond binaries, and resultantly, my analysis must move

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<sup>98</sup> Cardew, 1971, *Treatise Handbook* (London: Peters Edition, 1971), p. iii.

beyond a dialectical conception of an obdurate Eurocentric musical hierarchy and its absolute denial or reversal.

## **Chapter 5.**

### **The (Strategic) Universal Languages of Anthony Braxton and the Creative Music Studio**

In this chapter, I trace two related articulations of teaching “creative music” from the 1970s, extending the prior chapter’s formulation of mixed-skill improvisation as a space for dialogical pedagogy and broadened participation, which can nonetheless be balanced with a commitment to a more conventional notion of musicianship, skill, and virtuosity. Beginning with AACM alum Anthony Braxton’s move to Woodstock, NY in 1974, I trace Braxton’s intellectual affinities and attachments with Woodstock’s Creative Music Studio, a unique pedagogical site bearing numerous comparisons with the classrooms of prior chapters. In Woodstock, Braxton created scores that offer a case study in the notation of improvised participation, a sharp contrast with the scores of prior chapters which moves beyond notions of nature and system into alternative motivating ideals: language and the universal.

Following the career arcs of leading proponents of “creative music,” out of the collectives they founded and into the middle 1970s often leads to Woodstock, north of New York City. Here, in 1972, Karl Berger, Ingrid Sertso and Ornette Coleman incorporated the Creative Music Studio (CMS), a crucial and understudied pedagogical

site and nexus of musical creation and collaboration.<sup>1</sup> CMS brought many of creative music's leading voices into a pedagogical context, albeit a very different one from those that the collectives forged in the crucible of Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Black Arts Movement. Oliver Lake and several other BAG members would frequently appear as guiding artists, as would AACM members like Anthony Braxton, Joseph Jarman, Roscoe Mitchell, George Lewis, and Wadada Leo Smith.<sup>2</sup> It was while living in Woodstock and affiliated with CMS that Braxton would compose the unpublished, unrecorded participatory/pedagogical scores whose analysis will conclude this chapter.

I turn to Anthony Braxton's work for a few reasons. Firstly, as his former student, I know his work relatively well; in playing and studying with him, his pedagogy exerted a major influence on my sense of what a "pedagogy of experimental music" is or could be. More narrowly, however, in his oeuvre, I discovered a pair of scores that permit me, in what follows, to maintain a degree of methodological parallelism may perhaps have been missed in chapter 4. In chapter 2, I linked the concerns, activities and historical traces of Cage-the-composer to those of Cage-the-pedagogue at the New School, and strove to maintain this same sense of the co-imbrication of pedagogical labor (the "day job") and compositional art by tracing Oliveros work on the *Sonic Meditations* through her involvement in UCSD's The Nature of Music course. In chapter 4, I broadened my focus substantially and attempted to synthesize the efforts of three disparate pedagogical sites, to the possible detriment of such historical specificity. I tried to point out what seem to me to be, across a diverse arena of practices, core tenets of the pedagogies of the AACM,

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<sup>1</sup> Coleman, with whom Berger had performed and whose high profile certainly seems to have aided CMS, agreed to be co-founder because he believed in the cause, although Berger and Sertso lived there and ran all day-to-day operations. Sweet, *Music Universe*, 26.

<sup>2</sup> At the time, he was known as "Leo Smith," which is how I refer to him hereafter.

BAG, and UGMAA collectives, which were strongly focused on *younger* amateurs in the neighborhoods where the collectives operated. I admit some structural sleight-of-hand, however, both in linking these collectives' pedagogies to the fact of six year-old Gene Lake's performance on *Whisper of Dharma*, as well as in drawing out of my aural analysis several prescriptive features that veered close to imputing a composition-like model to this recording of unscored free improvised music—whose instructions or framing, such as they were, are in reality somewhat more lost to history than were the prior chapters' scores. Recalling that my overall aim is the marshaling of a useable past, could the documentation of an unscored, improvisatory encounter really be as “useable” as is an actual score?

Given these questions, in this section I return to my earlier methodology, focusing on Braxton as a single example of a score-writing composer in his relevant interactions with a single pedagogical site. Thus, I attempt to tie the creative music collectives' members' wider trajectories more directly to the dissertation's core notion: the collection and analysis of compositional and pedagogical *resources* designed to help make experimentalism more participatory (and help participatory art methodologies draw better on experimental music). This is not necessarily to assert a preference for scored organization over implicit, oral, or improvisation organizations. For example, it's painful to have to bracket the entirely unscored participation in MEV's *Zuppa* (mentioned in the beginning of Ch. 3), simply because it's so difficult to properly analyze, at this distance, what unfolded there in terms of the dynamics of participation. Despite the many shortcomings of my focus on notational modes of organization, scores grant some semblance of confidence that we know what it is we are looking at; the score represents,

at least, the intention of specificity. Could you re-make *Zuppa*? What about *Whisper of Dharma*? How would you know if you had done so?

Luckily, given these methodological concerns, my discovery of *Comps. 42* and *78* in the archive of Braxton's non-profit must be described as a happy accident, because these works allow me to extend my consideration of the contrasting articulations of pedagogy and participation between the "two experimentalisms," black and white, beyond the score-less implicit "instructions" of the last chapter and into a more evenhanded parallelism.<sup>3</sup> In all the collectives, but perhaps for the AACM in particular, scoring and notation were practices notably foregrounded alongside improvisation and oral tradition. The very term "creative music" can be read as an attempt to collapse the distinction between pre-composed and improvisational strategies for creation.<sup>4</sup> For some Chicago musicians, the centrality of notated composition as a creative strategy deserving equal merit to improvisation was the key feature differentiating the AACM and other practitioners of "creative music" from "free jazz," which was understood to be the most spontaneous, the least precompositionally constrained, form of jazz yet. Following the example of AACM *pater familias* Muhal Richard Abrams, this meant integrating the new jazz-rooted improvisatory strategies with the vanguard compositional tactics of 20<sup>th</sup> century Western art music with, as well as reaffirming Ellington and extant "black classical" traditions. Documenting these integrations, Lewis convincingly argues for the exceptionalism of the AACM in facilitating its members' expansion of the very notion of

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<sup>3</sup> Although, at least at CMS, the "two avant-gardes" would increasingly be seen to merge somewhat over the course of the 1970s, see below.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis *Power Stronger than Itself*, 99-100, 123-24.

the black composer.<sup>5</sup> Of these composers, few have been as prolific or as widely discussed in published scholarship as has Anthony Braxton.

Braxton's work is far too multifarious to summarize or even properly introduce for the purposes of the limited context in which I intend to discuss his work. In addition to Braxton's own theoretical writings and his analytical writings on his first hundred or so compositions, there are several introductions to his oeuvre ranging from the musicological to the journalistic.<sup>6</sup> However, just a few scant words in the Braxton literature discuss his work as a teacher, and indeed, as the composer of scores specifically for workshops of music learners in mixed-skill groupings—a sort of post-AACM *gebrauchsmusik* or intentionally simplified music-for-use that is, to my knowledge, somewhat unique among his peers.<sup>7</sup> Thus, in what follows, I analyze a portion of this composer's work that has received nearly no consideration, and link it back to an overarching assertion of the dissertation at large: Experimentalism creates contexts for broader-based participation in music-making than has Western art music, by stabilizing and bounding this participation into the identity of artworks (the “strategic reification” hypothesis of the prior chapter). As in the past chapters, my interest is in the generative interplay and overlap between the creation of such works and composers' labor within pedagogical sites that invited students of diverse skill. Thus, after a rather substantial investigation of the Creative Music Studio's larger pedagogical strategies, I will describe

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 360-2.

<sup>6</sup> See Graham Lock, *Forces in Motion: The Music and Thoughts of Anthony Braxton* (London: Quartet Books, 1988); Lock, *Blutopia*, Radano, *New Musical Figurations*; Broomer, *Times and Anthony Braxton*; Mike Heffley *The Music of Anthony Braxton* (New York: Excelsior, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> See Ted Reichman, “What Braxton Teaches,” in *Mixtery: A Festschrift for Anthony Braxton* (np: Stride Conversation Piece), 159-162.

Braxton's intersections with CMS and analyze the unique participatory strategies of his *Compositions No. 42* (1974) and *78* (1977).

For Braxton, 1974 was, by almost any yardstick, a signal year in the flowering of his career and musical ideas. During this year, he signed a large recording contract with Arista Records (his producer, Michael Cuscuna would oversee the Human Arts Ensemble reissues and author the liner note that fails to mention Gene Lake). This meant that, for the first time, he would have the resources to rehearse, record and release many of the ambitious concert works he had composed over the past several years. It also meant an almost unprecedented (for a black experimentalist) record distribution and publicity campaign in coordination with his first Arista release, *New York 1974*, including a half-page ad touting "Braxton. A new name half the world already knows."<sup>8</sup> This recording contract brought him back to the United States from France, and he settled in rural Woodstock, where many musicians, such as his frequent collaborator Dave Holland, also lived. The town's longstanding artistic community had also drawn Berger and Sertso, who, with the support of New York City-based musicians like Coleman, were in the early phases of building the Creative Music Studio (CMS). Braxton's 1974 arrival coincided with CMS's earliest regular instructional sessions. As a Woodstock resident, he would become one of the school's earliest and most frequent teachers, or, in CMS parlance, a "guiding artist," playing and sharing his music with participants each afternoon for one or two weeks at a time.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Radano, 252.

<sup>9</sup> Panken, Ted. Interview with Karl Berger (WKCR, Oct. 24, 2008), posted July 19, 2011, <https://tedpanken.wordpress.com/2011/07/19/karl-berger-and-ingrid-berger-interviews>.

### **Reskilling for World Music: new disciplines at CMS**

CMS is described in great detail in Robert Sweet's personal and journalistic account and in various interviews with Berger and Sertso, but has otherwise been unjustly neglected by scholars. CMS never operated as an accredited music school on the model of a conservatory or academy. It more closely echoed, in spirit and structure, the many countercultural communes and spiritual centers then being established in the rural Hudson Valley and Catskill regions. Just as there were no "teachers," there were also no "students," only "participants." As in so many earlier examples of discomfort around the hierarchy of traditional pedagogies, Berger attempted to create a more horizontal set of interactions in which "everyone could learn from everyone."<sup>10</sup>

Once CMS found a permanent home and solidified a year-round existence, it operated almost as an intentional community in a former motel, with shared cooking responsibilities, early morning yoga and many participants working on the premises to pay their way.<sup>11</sup> Berger delights in recounting stories of participants like Brazilian saxophonist Paolo Moura, who showed up unannounced, having travelled thousands of miles, and then stayed for years. Other participants came and went out of phase with the nominal semester structure.<sup>12</sup> Participant John Lindberg dropped out of high school to come to CMS; he made a deal with his parents that he would continue high school up to graduation in Woodstock, but, soon after arriving, he reneged on this agreement and went full-time at CMS.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Karl Berger, interview with the author, 4/19/2015.

<sup>11</sup> Sweet, *Music Universe*, 48.

<sup>12</sup> Berger interview.

<sup>13</sup> Sweet, *Music Universe*, 57-8.

Still, despite such strands of apparent freewheeling indiscipline, CMS was undoubtedly host to serious musicianship. Many student-participants left CMS poised to for professional careers in improvised music, among them Peter Apfelbaum, Marilyn Crispell, and Lindberg. Especially apropos of earlier arguments about the affordances of fluidity between pedagogical and performance contexts is the fact that Braxton recruited Lindberg and Crispell into his working quartet after meeting them at CMS. Thus, in the second half of the 1970s, CMS functioned, much as the collectives had in the 1960s, as an extension of jazz's informal pedagogical and pre-professional nexus memorialized and mourned by Lewis, Isoardi and other historians.<sup>14</sup> However, CMS differs sharply from any other such transmissive networks in innumerable ways, including its residential commitment, its interracial integration, its explicit foregrounding of auto-therapeutic bodywork and spiritual disciplines, and its impressive longevity as a not-for-profit operating in the margins between academia and the professional music scene of the day.<sup>15</sup>

Levels of musical ability and experience seem to have ranged very widely. Players like Crispell represented the most highly experienced and Western art music-trained of CMS participants, not the norm.<sup>16</sup> As Berger told me, “we never turned anyone away...we told people, ‘the better you know your instrument, the better off you’ll be.’ We had lots of people from Berklee [School of Music]...but amateurs came in too, spiritual seekers wouldn’t be turned away.”<sup>17</sup> The openness to raw amateurs is certainly the unequivocal stance of CMS in its current instantiation as a series of occasional

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<sup>14</sup> Isoardi, *Dark Tree*, 18-51.

<sup>15</sup> Sweet, *Music Universe*, 30, 69-73.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-4.

<sup>17</sup> Berger interview with the author.

weeklong workshops.<sup>18</sup> However, in an earlier radio interview, however, he emphasized that most students were recent college graduates: “Usually, we wanted to make sure people knew how to play their instrument well enough not to worry about that.”<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, mixed ability was both a badge of honor and a source of some internal tension. Sweet recounts that “seasoned players [were] disappointed at the level of musicianship of some of the students.” But, on the other hand, echoing Gene Lake’s early career, the Bergers included their school-aged daughters Savia and Eva as instrumental performers with the CMS’s Woodstock Workshop Orchestra on its four-week European tour in 1979 (a group that also featured Oliver Lake himself).<sup>20</sup>

Though an instructional program existed, Berger stresses that music was practiced as much outside the formal contexts provided by himself and the guiding artists as it was inside. Berger now describes the musical activities of CMS as having had a tripartite structure: his own teaching in the morning, 4-5 hours with the guiding artist working with the entire group in the afternoon, and then hours of unstructured, participant-initiated music-making after dinner, often continuing late into the night. Participants presented their own music each Friday, while guiding artists presented a concert on Saturdays. Very frequently, these Saturday concerts would feature the guiding artists leading the entire group of participants as the “CMS orchestra.” As Berger recounts it, most guiding artists

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<sup>18</sup> See current CMS website, <http://www.creativemusicfoundation.org/cms-spring-2015-workshop.html>, accessed 3/12/2015.

<sup>19</sup> Berger, interview with Panken.

<sup>20</sup> Sweet, *Music Universe*, 87.

were eager to enlist the talents of participants because they rarely had a chance to lead such large groups.<sup>21</sup>

Mornings at CMS were devoted to the “basic practice” that Berger had begun developing while teaching a class on improvisation at the New School for Social Research in New York City in 1968. Arising from his desire to find a common ground between the musicians who enrolled in that class (again, like Cage’s, without prerequisite), whose backgrounds ranged from rock to classical, Berger started to develop the elements that would become the core of the CMS pedagogy. He felt that all these musicians were lacking in “time feel,” so he initially placed his emphasis on rhythmic exercises that he derived from his ongoing professional work with trumpeter Don Cherry, famed for his work with Ornette Coleman and increasingly active, in those years, in intercultural collaborations. Berger’s “basic practice” involved “counting” asymmetrical rhythmic groups using language and physical gesture, rather than on instruments or with numbers. Berger describes its early genesis and goals:

All this additive rhythmic stuff intrigued to a point to create a practice system called the “gamala taki.” Those two words came from Don Cherry, but he wasn’t thinking of them [as a] rhythmic system. He just had heard them on the shortwave radio. They are part of the tabla language in Pakistan, for example. So I would take it out of that context altogether, and just create an additive rhythmic training. Because you go into that kind of place where you’re no longer thinking bars or forms of that kind, but you are just adding odd and even, and you use language as a tool rather than counting, you’re going into a new world of...you create a sense of freedom for yourself, for beat-for-beat attention, as I call it. That led me also to the fact that we not only could study something for the

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<sup>21</sup> Berger, interview with the author. See also the “Guide to the Creative Music Studio Tapes and Files, 1974-1984.”, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library, [http://findingaids.cul.columbia.edu/ead/nnc-rb/ldpd\\_10993246/summary](http://findingaids.cul.columbia.edu/ead/nnc-rb/ldpd_10993246/summary)

reason of learning new material, but also to train our mind. Like, to train our mind to listen for each beat.<sup>22</sup>

As CMS blossomed, Berger's early rhythmic practice evolved into a much more thoroughgoing set of bodywork, vocal, attentional, and meditative exercises that he has referred to as CMS's "basic practice," or, occasionally, as the "Music Mind" practice. CMS had various links to nearby Buddhist institutions (it even competed with Tibetan monks to purchase a space), and was hosted in residency by Naropa University, the foremost Buddhist academic institution in the Americas, in 1975 and '76.<sup>23</sup> Berger's translation of such religiously grounded practices of mindfulness into a practice of musical training certainly merits further scholarly attention.<sup>24</sup> Ideally, such consideration would fold in comparisons with the many mindfulness-based arts practices (or are they arts-based mindfulness practices?) to have emerged from the crucible of the 1960s intermedia avant-garde, including Pauline Oliveros' Deep Listening, Steve Paxton's Contact Improvisation and Elaine Summers' Kinetic Awareness (both Judson Dance alums) as well as Milford Graves' multifarious (and, in contrast to the abovementioned practices, trademark-less) forms of spiritual, sonic and somatic practice.

For the purposes of my more limited, primarily historical investigation in this context, it seems worthwhile simply to point out again, as I did with regards to the Human Arts Ensemble, that Asian wisdom traditions, an ethnopoetic source of "other Others" acts in the CMS context as a kind of intermediate term, neither Afrocentric nor Eurocentric, to undergird a discourse of musical naturalization and universalization.

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<sup>22</sup> Berger, interview with Panken.

<sup>23</sup> Sweet, *Music Mind*, 51-3.

<sup>24</sup> To a degree, such a project is already underway via the scholarship and advocacy of CMS participant Ed Sarath, now head of jazz studies at University of Michigan, where he teaches Gamala Taki practice and writes on the applicability of consciousness studies to jazz and vice-versa. Sweet, *Music Universe*, 36.

Similar dynamics in play, throughout this dissertation and throughout experimentalism, might be reflexively labeled as “orientalist,” but that word’s connotation of dilettantish flirtation likely misrepresents the seriousness of many artists’ engagement with actual spiritual traditions and practices of South and East Asian origin.<sup>25</sup> In Berger’s forthright assertion that music training is not only good for “learning new material,” but also aids in “training the mind,” we again find an aurally-centered mindfulness (that is, the thematization of individual and embodied listening itself) as an ideal that operates and mediates between musical art and much broader therapeutic ends. As in Cage’s claim that accepting the musicalization of aurality might allow us to “wake up to the very life we’re living,” a practice of listening to the present moment permits the elevation of music from the merely aesthetic to a matter of the very life of the subject.<sup>26</sup>

In light of commonalities linking all past chapters, it will come as no surprise to learn that Berger’s pedagogical practices also de-emphasize notation in favor intuitive, embodied, and oral ways of knowing and encoding music: despite a classical piano background and a rather storied career as an orchestral arranger in popular music, Berger told me that he has long preferred and still prefers to play and to lead his ensembles entirely without the aid of notations. When asked, he explicitly distanced himself from the approach of Anthony Braxton, whom he called (with affection) “a writer, someone

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<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Jarman’s decade-long abandonment of music for martial arts and meditation, disciplines in which he has since become a recognized master and leader. Jarman, interviewed by Gross, *Perfect Sound Forever*. A rather hostile introduction to such Asian appropriations in white experimentalist contexts can be found in Corbett, “Experimental Oriental.”

<sup>26</sup> Cage, *Silence*, 12, 95.

who loves to write,” in sharp contrast to his own identity as someone who does not share this great love for the literate.<sup>27</sup>

As so-called “world music” (provisionally defined most easily and neutrally as collaborations between those from different music cultures) became increasingly central to CMS over its lifespan, more and more musicians arrived—both as participants and guiding artists—who had substantial musical skill and experience, but not necessarily with Western art music. This development likely pushed Western notational forms of musical instruction and transmission even further to the margins at CMS. However, a certain aversion to notation was a longstanding part of Berger’s program, along with a concomitant centering of aural awareness, oral transmission and their links to the body. It’s better, he told me, to “learn by heart first, not learn from paper.” Berger credits Wadada Leo Smith, a CMS guiding artist nearly every term, as a major influence on such matters, and Sweet duly quotes Smith in a description of the CMS basic practice: “The music doesn’t come from the instrument. It comes from the mind behind it.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, the particularities and technical dimensions of particular instruments, on the side of “paper,” are obstacles to be overcome, as a route to get to the underlying “mind” and “heart” underneath.

While this in some way echoes prior chapters’ experimentalist theorizations of “nature”—as artlessness, as everyday-ness, as emptiness, and as resonance—CMS’s pedagogy seems to have been more invested in the sorts of personal narrative—the linkage of autobiography, selfhood, story and sound—that Lewis deemed central to

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<sup>27</sup> Berger, interview with the author.

<sup>28</sup> Leo Smith, quoted in Sweet, *Music Universe*, 38.

Afrological improvisation.<sup>29</sup> Still, under what we might deem a naturalistic philosophy of education, such a notion of the authentically personal source—the heart and mind to which paper is but an encumbrance--slips towards an ideal of “nature” bearing something in common with that of Oliveros and Music 1 (Chapter 3).<sup>30</sup>

Exemplary of this naturalism and parting ways from most jazz pedagogies similarly invested in finding that personal sound *on your chosen instrument*, Berger’s “basic practice” returned to another of the forms of “deskilling” that has been central to my arguments so far: putting down the instrument.

It was always about composition and improvisation. It was not about the instruments. We actually [told] everybody that wanted to come, “You are not going to have training in your instrument.” It’s all about concepts. It was a conceptual situation.

So in the morning I would do what I call “basic practice,” which was a rigorous rhythmic training, then a training in overtone awareness, like getting really into sound, so that you would get away from the idea of a tone and get into harmonics. Then the rhythmic training would be about beat-for-beat dynamics, so dynamics was a big issue. And I would do all of these non-stylistic, I’ll call them, exercises in the morning. There would be also body practice, body awareness...at 9 o’clock.<sup>31</sup>

As in the prior chapter, the “nature” of sound, its acoustical reality, is juxtaposed with genre and style; investigating such objective realities beyond the particularities of contingent musical cultures is a way of getting closer to the essential, universal, and interculturally valid (or at least useful) aspects of music. Echoing a certain Platonism or dualism, these “conceptual” matters exist on a higher plane than the physical and practical matters of particular instruments or particular “styles.” Yet this is not a dualism

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<sup>29</sup> Lewis, “Improvised Music After 1950,” 118-9.

<sup>30</sup> And thus, quite appropriately, at the tail end of CMS’s activities in 1981 and immediately upon retiring from UCSD, Oliveros would come to CMS both to teach sonic meditation, and to try to pull the organization out of its dire financial straits. See Sweet, *Music Universe*, 141-3.

<sup>31</sup> Berger, interviewed by Panken.

of mind and body—both of the former are implicated with the “basic,” “conceptual” practice, which seeks to unite them. Rather, this is a dualism that juxtaposes a notion of human universals against culturally embedded distinctness, i.e. with those particularities and divergences *from* the universal.

### **Counter-anthropological Universalisms**

Yet, at CMS, the notion of music beyond style and genre managed to coexist with a deep regard for the world’s music cultures, perhaps even for that lone tradition which has been almost universally excluded and panned throughout this dissertation up to this point: Frederic Rzewski could perform Beethoven’s *Hammerklavier* sonata at CMS one night and then go and play bass drum in Anthony Braxton’s Creative Orchestra Music rehearsals; these engagements might have overlapped the presence at CMS of Abdullah Ibrahim, Kalaparusha, or an all-percussion ensemble.<sup>32</sup> The breadth and intensity of such polystylism obviously far outstrips anything that would have been possible at either UCSD or within the Black Arts-era music collectives during the previous decade.

On this point, Berger is quick to mention the example of his mentor (and frequent CMS instructor) Don Cherry, a world traveler who was among the first musicians to foreground actual intercultural collaboration in his work.<sup>33</sup> When Cherry was *not* able to actually go perform with such musicians, he “used to walk around with a shortwave radio on his head 24 hours a day—probably even in his sleep,” listening to folk and traditional musics from around the world and transcribing them for his band:

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<sup>32</sup> “Guide to the Creative Music Studio Tapes and Files.” All these musicians were at CMS in 1976; there are few precise dates, beyond years, in the CMS archive.

<sup>33</sup> As opposed to intercultural *appropriation*.

[H]e would come and play on the piano the most recent stuff that he had heard on the shortwave radio. ... He wouldn't even know where they were from, whether they were from India or Egypt or wherever. We used some of those melodies in the concerts, and he would just like use them, not thinking about any stylistic considerations or anything. So that was startling for me. It was new for me that you can just go and take any music coming from anywhere, and *look at it as if* it was all the same.<sup>34</sup> [emphasis mine]

Loosing themselves from the inhibitions of anthropological reason, Cherry and Berger viewed traditional musics like transmissions on a shortwave radio, free—or, more properly, easily freed—from their context and culture of origin. I want to retread Berger's words to insist that he is differentiating here between a kind of confused belief about the facticity of the universal, and an intentional, self-aware *strategy* that brackets anthropological reason: one can “look at music *as if* it was all the same,” a provisional epistemology that, at CMS, slipped into a prescriptive ethics: play together, be together, *on the assumption that* something universal is shared.<sup>35</sup> In attempting to bind the utopian possibilities of such polystylistic diversity into a unified pedagogical program (that could in turn nourish a unified yet intercultural musical community), Berger, Cherry and others at CMS discursively invested in various forms of what has been labeled, in a very different context, a *strategic universalism*.

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<sup>34</sup> Berger, interviewed by Panken.

<sup>35</sup> This perspective could be usefully contrasted with the means towards a “fourth world” music critiqued in Corbett “Experimental Oriental,” 175-78, 181-83. Corbett is attuned to white experimentalists’ (both composers and improvisers) appropriations of Asian and other non-Western musical sources, but, for reasons not altogether clear, Corbett studiously avoids mention, in this article, of any black experimentalists, electing to write about John Zorn and British improvisers to the exclusion of black musicians engaged in similar musical projects. Corbett’s avoidance of these issues in the careers of black experimentalists may register some of the difficulty in accounting for the musical strategies of a figure like Don Cherry: because an anti-Orientalist critique of a black musician would be a questionable scholarly tack (at best), Corbett thus decides, in effect, to simply silence the rich intercultural tradition in black experimental music because the standard take-down of white Orientalism doesn’t stick.

“Strategic universalism,” a term coined by the important cultural studies theorist Paul Gilroy and absent from the extant musicological literature, can be viewed as a kind of rejoinder to the widely used notion of *strategic essentialism*. Various scholars have used the notion of strategic essentialism to theorize aspects of the Black Arts Movement, such as the AACM’s putative “African-inspired cultural nationalism” (asserted by Radano, denied by Lewis).<sup>36</sup> In some sense, by judging an essentialism “strategic,” scholars seek to declaw and contextualize some of the aspects of the 1960s “black aesthetic” which are either logically inconsistent or otherwise troubling, such as Amiri Baraka’s assertions that black bodies have a privileged set of abilities vis-a-vis the creation of an authentic improvised music (a position deconstructed fascinatingly and at length by Moten).<sup>37</sup> Summarizing some of this debate, Piekut writes that the Black Arts Movement stood “for community, strength and unity through the naturalization of racial difference—a strategic essentialism.”<sup>38</sup> This counter-factual naturalization can only be swallowed, Piekut and others seem to say, if we recognize them as part of a larger, historically necessary strategy of resistance to white supremacy.

In sympathy with this end, but utilizing diametrically opposed means of argumentation, Gilroy points out the *most* troubling implications and results of an Afrocentrist focus on a transhistorical notion of the naturalization of shared racial characteristics. He shows not only how it has been bent to the ends of a patriarchal and authoritarian vision of black unity (a “tyranny of unanimism” he finds in Garveyism and the Nation of Islam), but also dares to think through the wider implications of certain

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<sup>36</sup> Radano, *New Musical Figurations*, 97-99, Lewis *Power Stronger than Itself*, 209-13.

<sup>37</sup> Fred Moten *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 122-49

<sup>38</sup> Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 131.

Afrocentrism's family resemblance to white ethnocentrism, such as Nazism (which Marcus Garvey claimed to have influenced). As an alternative, Gilroy advocates the wider recognition that race is an unreal, historically constructed and perhaps falsified notion, and asks those invested in anti-racism to drop all essentialisms "in an explicitly utopian spirit...in the interest of a heterocultural, postanthropological, and cosmopolitan yet-to-come." Pitching this "strategic universalism" as a visionary "planetary humanism" where our shared "species being" will trump both culture and race, Gilroy invokes the imaginative flights of Afrofuturism, through which artists like Sun Ra ultimately denied both the facticity of race and a number of other "facts" imposed on them by structures of power/knowledge.<sup>39</sup> "Barred from ordinary humanity...artists seek, like Sun Ra, another mode of recognition in the most alien identity they can imagine. The momentum they acquire in moving from the inhuman to the superhuman finally carries them beyond the human altogether. You will believe a man can fly."<sup>40</sup> Thus, covering some similar territory as Graham Lock's *Blutopia*<sup>41</sup> (which, not incidentally, situates Braxton as heir to Sun Ra's Afrofuturism), Gilroy is understandably attracted to such extreme cases, as they seem to him to dramatize what a fully post-racial, anti-racist cultural logic might look and sound like (Hint: synthesizers!).<sup>42</sup>

However, my work in this chapter suggests the existence of an alternate trajectory of strategic universalism, where black experimentalists assert a "counter-anthropological"

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<sup>39</sup> Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 96, 220, 327, 333, 348-9.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 348-49.

<sup>41</sup> Lock, *Blutopia*, whose notion of the "Blutopian" aesthetic is a blend of "revisions of the past" and "visions of the future," places more focus on Afrofuturist uses of the anthropological past, which seems to be a reading that better supports a thick description of the music he considers, and at any rate, his work is one of description, not—like Gilroy—counterfactual prescription.

<sup>42</sup> Gilroy, *Against Race*, 342.

view of culture not merely by denying the importance of culture or inventing an identity from scratch, but partially by asserting themselves in the role of the empowered *subject* of anthropological knowledge, as opposed to its disempowered object. From this perspective, Don Cherry's decontextualized plucking of foreign melodies off of the radio becomes not simply a violation of the injunction to proper anthropological reason and its due process ("Go to graduate school, do fieldwork and then understand this music as it functions in culture, or else back off!"). Viewed as strategic universalism, Cherry's method becomes, instead, a black man grabbing away the authority of the anthropological "gaze" *from* those who might otherwise direct it at *him*.

Perhaps then, the counter-anthropologist must go further than simply re-appropriating the tools of anthropological looking, listening and knowing, with its ethic of maximal contextual knowledge towards maximally "thick description." Perhaps the *counter-anthropologist* must counter this *method* as well. Perhaps, following Rancière, *ignorance* of the cultural context that would "explicate" musical meaning allows the counter-anthropologist to both "teach themselves" as well as to repair the fissure, imposed by the anthropological gaze, between the one who has the knowledge and the object of that knowledge, that is, the fissure between Self and Other.

However, yet again undoing the primacy of binarized thinking, *either* Afrofuturism or Afro-nostalgia, universalism *or* essentialism, we can thus look back to the prior chapter and the related case of the artists active in both the Black Artists' Group and the Human Arts Ensemble. As I've suggested, these multivocal musicians can express clear affiliations to an imagined Africa on one LP, but assert their shared human "species being," with the mediating assistance of "exotic" references to Asia, on another.

It is of obvious import to my larger thesis that the *latter* record is the one featuring an explicitly interracial coalition and the performance of a child, whose presence represents still another facet of universality on the basis of a shared humanity or “species being” that cuts completely across the lines of age and ability. On *NTU: Point From Which Creation Begins*, the more “Afrocentric” document, the musicians present themselves as a forceful, disciplined, all-black regiment, the brass players’ utter unanimity and concordance on “Africa,” the opening track, conjuring the history of these instruments in military marching music. On “Whisper of Dharma,” such brass timbres are rarely heard; small instruments and small humans instead practice spontaneous, consensual self-organization and coexistence. The possibility of operating in multiple simultaneous registers, both in and out of essentialisms, could hardly be clearer: black arts and human arts—both necessary, neither taking precedence. Occasionally expressing its pan-cultural, post-stylistic philosophy as “Music Universe,” Berger et al. clearly made CMS home to another variant of Gilroy’s “planetary humanism.” Like the Human Arts Ensemble, CMS was characterized by a similarly counter-intuitive reverence for the world’s many music traditions that managed to co-exist with (and perhaps even depended upon) the untroubled removal of those musics from their cultural context.

However, Berger was equally attuned the fact that such putatively liberatory “rule-breaking” characteristic of the Sixties, whether of “free” jazz or of the aforementioned acontextual interculturalism, threatened to lead to a kind of mutual incomprehensibility, a Babel of musical non-communication:

One of the things that was leading to my giving workshops...was to find out what now? ... What’s next? What can we do with all these pieces we just broke apart? I realized that what needed to be done was for everyone

to personally decide: What do you want to do? And to develop disciplines. And so for me it was how do we develop disciplines that are not just guided by stylistic considerations?<sup>43</sup>

Berger thus closely echoes my larger argument, in miniature: the deskilling of the avant-garde demands and produces the seeds of its antithesis and corrective, a new form of discipline beyond “style,” and outside of already-extant traditions. This “reskilling” takes no underlying musical culture as authoritative; like Music 1, this would have to be a pedagogy built upon a blank slate. But, although I’ve already suggested Berger’s investment in the phenomenal nature of sound and the shared resource of the unaugmented body, in this quotation, he echoes the side of Music 1 (and, for that matter, of Cage’s New School course) that was more interested in the radical freedom, opened up “after” culture, for the individual to self-define and self-create, which might be regarded as a point of contrast to an interest in discovering (as in the laboratory sciences), and then playing by, the already-set rules which we can find inscribed in the book of exterior nature.

Ultimately, however, the line between these two positions may be undecidable; once we regard ourselves to be “underneath” culture, “nature” and individual freedom may just be two ways of rationalizing the same void at “degree zero,” yawning below the nadir of “deskilling.” In Berger’s notion of the post-stylistic discipline (i.e. the CMS “basic practice”), what interests me most here is simply the focus on inclusivity and accessibility: just as much in yoga or meditation, at least in their Western uses, Berger’s basic practice is open to all. The resonances with the *Sonic Meditations* should be obvious: the elements of various cultures (and there’s no denying the prevalence of Asian

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<sup>43</sup> Berger, interviewed by Panken.

and Buddhist sources), “broken apart” by the upheavals of the sixties, are then reassembled not “for culture,” but rather for the use of the individual.<sup>44</sup> In one sense, it would be easy to discount such baldly auto-therapeutic responses to the crisis of authority, deeming these practices to parallel the rise of yoga as exercise and mindfulness as productivity technique. But even if an orthodox Marxist might deign this a retreat from politics into the concerns of the self, I think that such a reading undersells the degree to which such practices are, in aim, mainly *prefatory* to the improvement of a fundamentally communal practice: that is, actually playing music, together, better. Considered as means and not ends, such invented disciplines complete the pendulum swing back from deskilling. In some sense, we have returned, having taken a convoluted detour through anti-pedagogies of anti-art, to the workaday concerns of music pedagogy.

### **Music as Language**

For our purposes here, along with Sweet’s many citations of CMS alums discussing the “universal” musical principles that were taught there, among the most important of Berger’s discursive investments in strategic universalism is his forwarding of the notion of music as language, and particularly, as an improvisation-based “universal language.”<sup>45</sup> This purpose of this system of “world-music communication,” as Berger would come to describe it, is to mediate between the world’s various traditions, but

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<sup>44</sup> This argument closely mirrors Lears’ argument about the flow of therapeutic antimodernism into an early 20<sup>th</sup> century culture of personal fulfillment. I want to make clear that, in drawing this structural parallel in no way implies that I believe or have any evidence that members of these 1970s experimentalist circles were necessarily devoted to self-gratification in the ways that Lears means—indeed, there was, if anything, a somewhat ascetic strain at CMS, as well as a yearning for transcendence of the self through communalism. Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 300-309.

<sup>45</sup> Sweet, *Music Universe*, 30.

claims not to be *of* any of them.<sup>46</sup> This linguistic and communicative aspect of music arises from what is held in common, not only in terms of the elements of music putatively common to all music traditions (time as measured in countable beats, the overtone series), but also in terms of what is common to human “species being,” such as the voice and unaugmented body. So, just as the “basic practice” begins by stripping the musician of their instrument and traditions to encourage a “non-stylistic” *basis* for music-making, music-as-universal-language is another bid for an “optional relationship to culture,” another search for the natural form or ground of music. By this logic—note the partial contrast with Cage—enculturated stylistic traditions are *good*, but not *essential*.

Thus, in order to be plausibly comparable to language, it would seem that such a music must be able to facilitate communication not only between masters in disparate stylistic traditions, but also to be learnable by novices—an independent language, and not just a nexus of translation amongst extant languages that belong to traditions. Thus, this language-as-music aspires to be something like the widest-possible articulation of the fully-participatory experimental music that I have been seeking throughout this dissertation. Like language (in Rancière and Freire), you can (only) teach it to yourself, and perhaps unlike a score (at least unlike one that demands *werktreue*) it offers an unbounded platform from which anyone can create an infinite number of unique utterances.

Moreover, the foregrounding of the *communicative* function of language bids, in rather obvious ways, for music-as-language’s privileged ability to create *communitas* and community. Berger described to me an element of the “basic practice” which he calls

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<sup>46</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 40.

“harmonizing sound” or “spontaneous harmonization” (Note how closely this exercise resembles what I called, in my introduction, the “space chord”): On a cue, all participants sing or play any long sound, the first to come to mind, without any pre-planning.<sup>47</sup> Then, everyone is instructed to gradually and minutely change their own sound either by dynamics or intonation, “without thinking about it,” to “harmonize” or “tune” the total sound. Berger describes this activity not as a piece of music, but as “a discipline, to listen more and more deeply.” For him, this sound-making activity is “more interesting than writing” and gives “a whole new feel of togetherness, because everyone is composing together.”<sup>48</sup>

The conclusion will occupy itself substantially with parsing the ethical and aesthetic ramifications of such claims, suggesting that Berger’s “harmonizing sound” is a member of a “family” of participatory and pedagogical approaches to group sound-making, which I group under Sun Ra’s term: the space chord. However, to really justify what interests me so deeply about all these variations on the “space chord,” I must again insert my personal experiences with them into this account. When Berger told me that he starts every rehearsal with the “harmonizing sound” exercise or event, I had the slightly uncanny feeling of having finally connected a series of dots that solved a small mystery. Or perhaps it was merely the narcissistic feeling of recognizing oneself in a group photo: I had hit upon an important link in my own musical genealogy. In my recollection of the years, from 2005 to 2009, that I played Anthony Braxton’s student ensemble at Wesleyan University, he had also started nearly every rehearsal with exactly such a “space chord,”

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<sup>47</sup> As the conclusion will remind the reader, this is also extremely similar to the opening gesture of Oliveros’ *The Tuning Meditation* and of Cardew’s *Paragraph 7*.

<sup>48</sup> Berger, interview.

as the initial gesture of the “language music” improvisations that would usually start rehearsals. With Berger’s help, I had located a point of probable historical connection to one of the key pedagogical practices that had pulled me into a life in experimental music.

The connections with CMS suddenly seemed manifold. No one was turned away from Braxton’s ensembles during the time of my involvement. Graduate students sat alongside undergraduates of widely varying ability and commitment, and only a handful out of the 10-40 players in the group would have been capable of correctly executing the most challenging notations that were placed before us: nested tuplets, atonal bebop licks peppered with wide registral skips. Braxton would say, “Try your best.” Some players couldn’t read much Western notation at all; most people played instruments of European origin, but some performed on electronics, or on assorted objects. One such player, whom I definitely scorned as a dilatant at the time, played a single floor tom, often looking too spaced-out for me to have believed that he was reading anything. (A few years later, he had sold millions of units as a Columbia recording artist, the parent company of Braxton’s former label.) Because Wesleyan is a liberal arts school whose music department has long cultivated an unusually anti-Eurocentric stance, it was even possible to be a music *major* and not be a particularly proficient reader of Western notation—one could simply pursue Javanese music or electronic music instead. There were no auditions, nor even entrance interviews for Braxton’s ensemble. Assorted players with no university affiliation would also drop in unannounced—Braxton would simply hand them a pile of scores, including a copy of the spiral-bound “System Notes” which explained the language music conducting gestures he used in rehearsals. Despite the demands of some of the notation, this was, in some sense, a truly participatory music-making situation. It

was also a for-credit course called “Materials and Principles of Improvisation.” It was offered every term.

In my time performing in Braxton’s ensemble, I never properly appreciated the effectiveness of Braxton’s language music conducting system as a means for dealing with this mixed-skill situation. Though Braxton’s uses of language music in some of his own compositions have been exhaustively described and analyzed in the extant scholarship, I was never able to find out much about the history of his language music system for conducted improvisation.<sup>49</sup> (To some degree, this situation was recently rectified by Sondregger’s 2014 MA thesis.<sup>50</sup>) In part, the paucity of writing on conducted language music is owed to the fact that the conducting system seems to have been used almost exclusively in large ensemble contexts, and perhaps primarily in the context of large ensembles with whom Braxton was able to develop a more-than-fleeting relationship. Though he had penned scores for large forces from his Chicago days, Braxton had few opportunities to actually hear this work played, let alone lead his own consistent large ensemble. To a large degree, his arrival in Woodstock in 1974 would coincide with expanded opportunities to work with large ensembles. In addition to the groups of CMS participants with whom he worked numerous times between 1974 and 1979, Braxton’s *Composition Notes* make reference to the fact that, upon his return to the US, he began receiving invitations to give occasional workshops at universities.<sup>51</sup>

Outside of such pedagogical contexts, he would convene large groups only a few times each decade into the 1990s, let alone work at sufficient length with these groups to

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<sup>49</sup> Reichman, “What Braxton Teaches” in *Mixtery*, 159-62 contains a few words on this.

<sup>50</sup> Sondregger, “More Personal,” 34-56.

<sup>51</sup> Braxton, *Composition Notes C*, 162. At least one of these university workshops, at Harvard University in October 1975, was documented.

the point that they would have had a chance to learn Braxton's system. Indeed, before arriving at Wesleyan in the early 1990s, it seems that the only large group with whom he was able to rehearse, record, and tour was the group documented on *Creative Orchestra Music*, a number of whose personnel went on a European tour in 1978 with the same charts, resulting in the live *Creative Orchestra (Köln) 1978*. This group was comprised of numerous CMS affiliates, including two CMS student-participants, Lindberg and Crispell.<sup>52</sup>

Berger, who played on the former album, has asserted that this large ensemble music “was basically developed at the Creative Music Studio. Braxton had the opportunity at the Creative Music Studio to always have a large group with which to rehearse pieces, so a lot of the concepts of his orchestra music developed right at CMS.”<sup>53</sup> Leo Smith, who conducted half the pieces on Braxton's *Creative Orchestra Music 1976* before recording his own large ensemble debut with a very similar cast of players in 1979, concurs: “I was successful in teaching there [at CMS] and being able to work out how to look at what I was dealing with my system. I know the same was true with Anthony Braxton. All of us, everybody, instructors and so-called students, were able to get into a great deal of research that benefitted other musicians.”<sup>54</sup> Smith (who is a likely candidate for the first thinker to have placed terminologies of “world music” and “creative music” in dialogue, by at least 1973), around the time of earliest involvements

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<sup>52</sup> Jason Guthartz, “Anthony Braxton Discography,” *Restructures*.  
<http://restructures.net/BraxDisco/BraxDisco.htm>

<sup>53</sup> Berger, interviewed by Panken

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Sweet, *Music Universe*, 61. Also note Smith's early articulation of notions of world music and music-as-language, already in print by the time of the founding of CMS, many years before Braxton's. See Lewis, *Power Stronger than Itself*, 308.

at CMS, would also articulate a change from the idea of his music as a *system* to the idea that it was a *language*.<sup>55</sup>

Thus, though “who got there first” remains unclear, the early years of CMS seem likely to have been the crucial nexus for the earliest joint articulation of improvised-experimental “creative music,” conducting techniques, and the notion of music-as-language. Berger recalls that Smith, not Braxton, was the first person he ever saw conduct an orchestral improvisation where the conductor generated all material on the spot, using gestures to trigger sounds.<sup>56</sup> Sonderegger devotes extensive consideration to the novelty of this approach and to the (unanswered) question of who “invented” it, as well as its continuity with a much longer history of improvisational conducting involving the cueing of fixed (notated or memorized) material. By contrast, Braxton’s language music conducting system generates musical textures by cueing the group or members thereof to play not pre-defined material, but rather an improvisation within a specific language type. Thus, he gives a hand sign for the number one to indicate long sounds, the number seven for short attacks, etc. (See Figure 4, below.)

Though Braxton “exnominates” Berger as an influence on his conducting (a favor which Berger returns), asserting that he first developed his techniques in Chicago, and does not mention Smith on such matters, careful attention to the historical record and a diversity of voices suggests minimally that CMS and the large ensemble situations it

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<sup>55</sup> Wadada Leo Smith, interviewed by Taylor Ho Bynum, *Oral History of American Music*, Yale University, (Interview no. 409 a), 65.

<sup>56</sup> According to Radano, (*New Musical Figurations*, 225-229), the language music system, so named, is first documented in early 1974. While Braxton claims in an interview with Sonderegger that he developed something of his conducting concept in the late 1960s with the Experimental Band, nothing in the documentary record that I have encountered can directly corroborate such an early appearance. See Sonderegger, “More Personal,” 146, 152-3.

afforded were both undoubtedly crucial in the development of the now-widespread practice. In the work of such improvising conductors as Walter Thompson (who studied with Braxton in Woodstock from 1974 and explicitly credits him with the spur towards his Soundpainting) and Adam Rudolph (who was a CMS participant) such practices become the dominant generating and organizing principle of entire concerts and oeuvres, as opposed to just one technique used in coordination with notated and memorized composition (as is usually the case in Berger, Braxton, and Smith).<sup>57</sup> For additional evidence of the close links between Braxton's large ensemble work, CMS, and the genesis of conducted improvisation, Braxton's only recorded release, before 2002, of anything called simply "language music improvisations" is on the *Creative Orchestra (Köln) 1978* album, with the strongly CMS-linked group.

However, as past scholarship on Braxton rightly notes, this hardly means that Braxton did not use other notational means to provide for smaller groups' improvisation within the structures provided by his larger designs of his music systems. In some early ensemble works, Braxton had striven to directly translate some of the ideas he had developed in his solo playing into more explicit (that is, transmissible) notations, ranging from standard Western staff notations to graphical representations of elements taken from his solo.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Thompson studied with Braxton and other CMS stalwarts in Woodstock for nearly the entire lifespan of CMS, from 1974-1981, and forthrightly credits him with providing the impetus for the development of Soundpainting after 1984. For more on the connections between the geneses of Thompson's, Berger's, and Braxton's conducted improvisation languages to CMS, see Sonderegger, 2-6, 26, 29. Morris, who also refined his gestural conducting into a semantic "language" from the middle 1980s, also had manifold indirect connections to CMS. Morris was not at CMS, but many of the musicians with whom he would work most closely in the David Murray Big Band, during the period he was developing Conduction (the early 1980s), such as Oliver Lake and Anthony Davis, were CMS guiding artists. Sonderegger, 62-64.

<sup>58</sup> See Radano *New Musical Figurations*, 225-29. One might usefully compare such "translations" of the saxophone music to the notion of "realization" in the post-Cagean discourse, where what Pritchett has

But Radano's careful historiography of the period suggests that 1974 was the key year when Braxton formalized his compositional activity and discourse into a more explicitly systematic program which would bind his music's many facets into an organic totality under the banner of music as a language. Early that year, Braxton explained in *Downbeat* that he had come to view his solo music as "nothing more than language systems."<sup>59</sup> The identification of this principle underlying his solo music would then quickly feed back into his compositional activities, such that both the solo music and the ensemble music would become emanations of the underlying, abstracted language music *system*: "a formerly disparate and highly varied collection of methods and styles was now thought to express a unifying creative impulse that generated overarching formal linkages."<sup>60</sup> Moreover, language as "spoken" by the individual needn't become alienated from authentic personal utterance when converted into musical scores for others: the "internal coherences" in his solo language music "implied similar linkages in [Braxton's] entire repertory." Music-as-language could remain a naturalized mode of self-expression even over the rocky barrier of its translation into notation, with all the implications of hierarchy and control carried therein. Thus, implicitly answering certain Black Arts Movement-era critiques of literacy as tainted by association with Europe and concomitantly inferior to an "Afrological" orality (which I read as a theme of Lake's poem "Separation"), Braxton's joining both his improvisatory and notational utterances under the shared banner of "language music" allows him the latitude to explore the outer

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deemed Cage's "tool compositions" are abstract conceptual schema capable of generating "compositions" as more usually understood (e.g. the use of the *Fontana Mix* toolkit in the realization of *Aria*).

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Radano, *New Musical Figurations*, 225.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 224-5.

limits of notational possibility while reaffirming the centrality of orality in its most universal and human guise: language itself.<sup>61</sup>

By the time of his return to the US, later that same year, this system would be instantiated in lists of numbered “language types”: long sounds, trills, multiphonics, etc.<sup>62</sup> Braxton continued to develop this idea of a numbered catalogue of language types over the course of the next several years, sometimes penning instrument-specific versions, but ultimately settling, perhaps by the end of the 1970s, on the instrument-agnostic version he continues to use up to today. Thus, he winnowed the possibilities in these list from multiple (composition- or instrument-specific) *languages* (e.g. figure 3, a language types sheet for the bass, from *Comp.* 42) down into a single trans-oeuvre *language* whose elements, in infinite recombination, would be capable of generating any and all music (as in figure 4, the universal list of language types useable by any instrument, probably from the 1980s).<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> My analysis here of the motivating cultural forces that led Braxton to articulate language music in the way he did contrasts rather sharply with Radano’s, which foregrounds language music as “precompositional ‘laboratory work’ for the creation of a stylistically free, ‘scientific’ music.” I don’t believe these perspectives are irreconcilable, they just reflect two sides of Braxton’s typically complex, multivocal discursive formulations. *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>62</sup> However, from at least 1970, Braxton was already working with numbered lists of sound types as a notational modality. See, for example the discussion of *Comp.* 26B in *Composition Notes* republished in Guthartz’s *Restructures* site.

<sup>63</sup> These, and all of the subsequent figures, are from Braxton’s papers, held in a private collection by the Tri-Centric Foundation, New Haven, CT. Many thanks to Carl Testa and Anne Rhodes for aiding me in accessing these; all permissions, copyrights, and credits are held by the Tri-Centric Foundation.

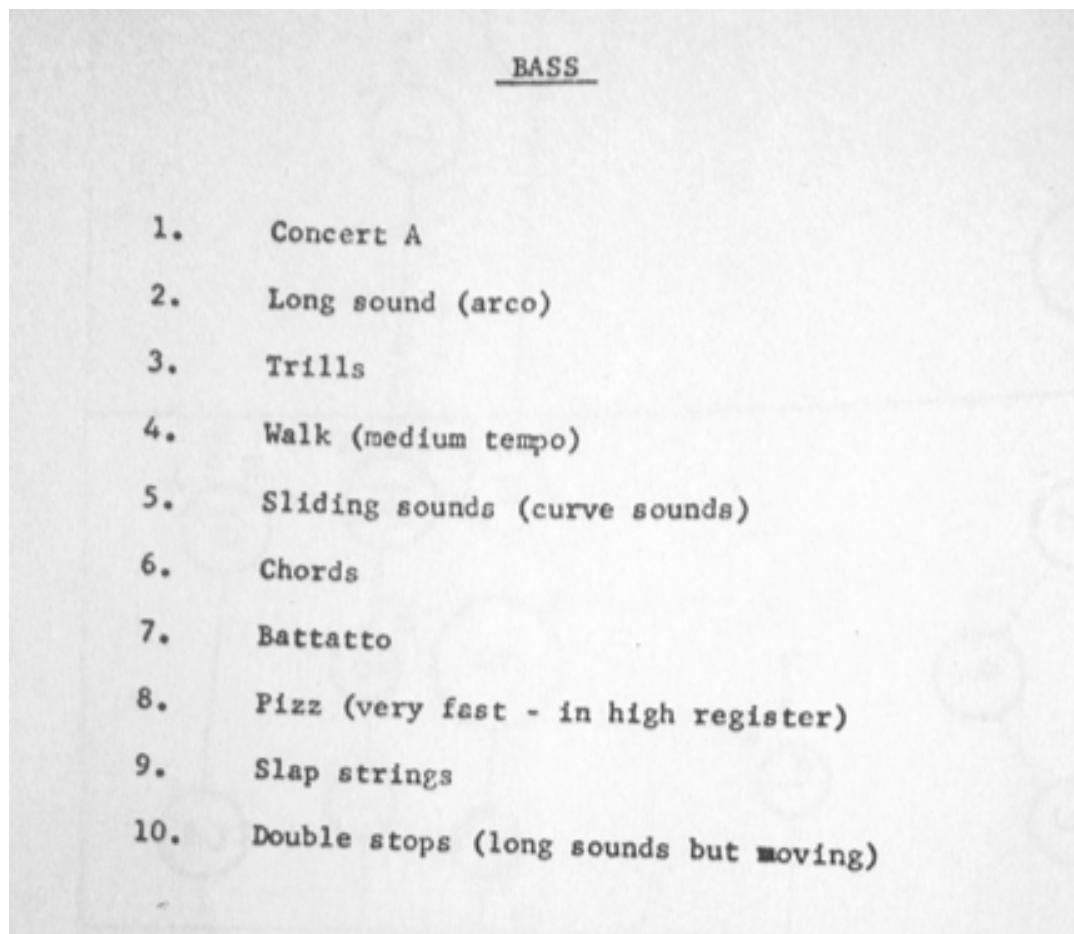


Figure 3: Early “language types” sheet, *Comp. 42*, Anthony Braxton. *Comp. 42* included unique language sheets specific to individual instruments. Copyright Anthony Braxton and the Tri-Centric Foundation.

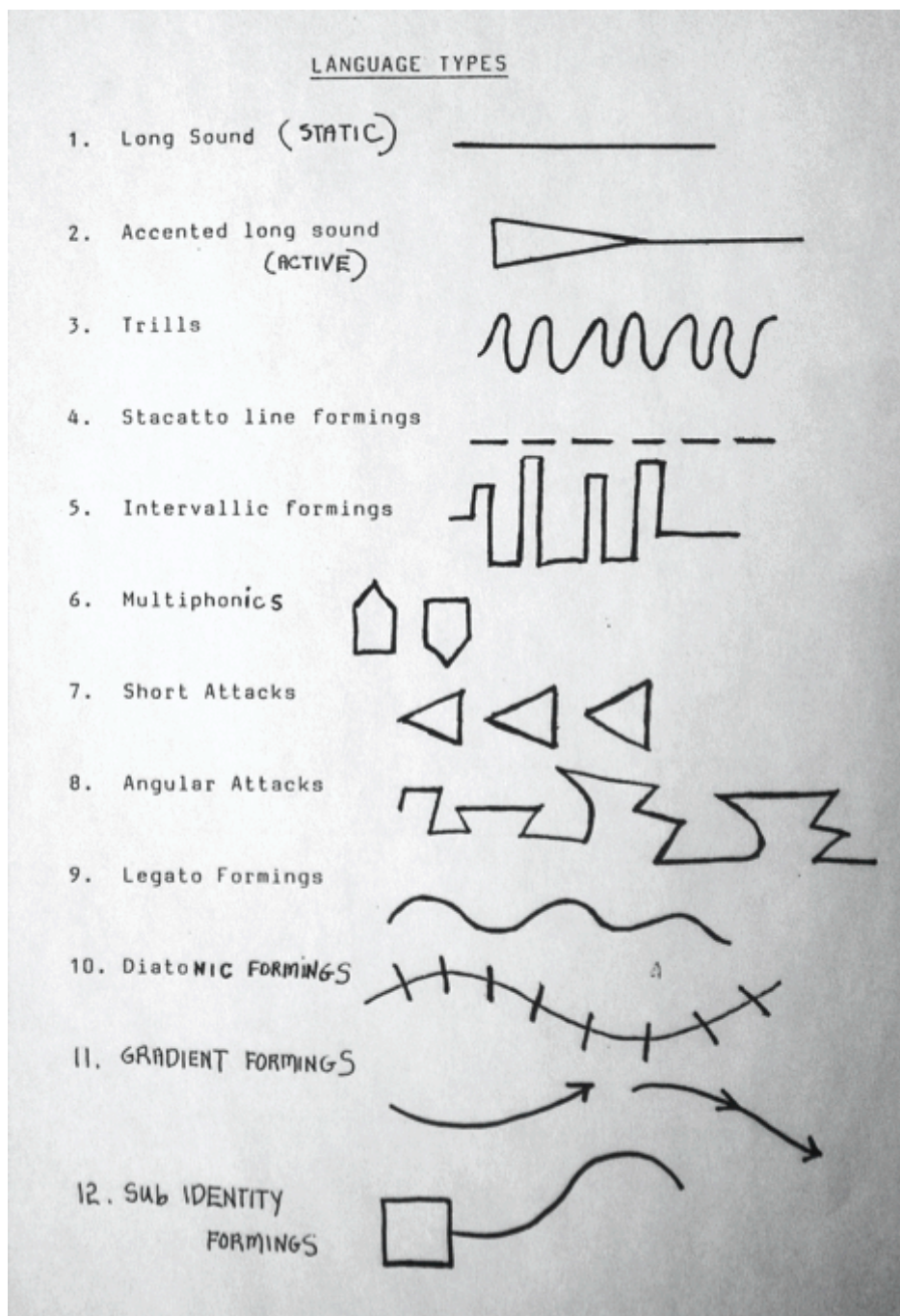


Figure 4: Later “language types” sheet, Anthony Braxton. This somewhat later version (date unknown) of Braxton’s language types sheet “universalizes” the languages types to embrace all instruments. Copyright Anthony Braxton and the Tri-Centric Foundation.

*Composition 37* (1974) represents one probable origination point (or at any rate, the earliest historical documentation) of such a mode of ensemble organization. In this saxophone quartet written during the productive months following his move to Woodstock (and immediately recorded on Braxton's first Arista LP), Braxton first introduces the idea of a "cell structure": an ordered sequence of language types within which he and fellow performers will improvise, just as he would implement in conducting as described above, except here, the language types and their assignment to specific players are precompositionally determined and arrayed on a visual timeline, where they are interspersed with sections of traditional notation. Braxton describes the interplay between cell structure and what he calls "regulated notation" (that is, Western staff notation) by analogy to traditional jazz practice: "The instrumentalist in *Composition No. 37* is given language music sheets to interpret cell structure notation—and this material serves the same purpose as "chord changes" (in vertical harmonic music)... The instrumentalist in this context is given new responsibilities—and new freedoms." This enacted dialectic of rote recitation and freer exploration bears out Braxton's analogy to bebop practice; those performing *No. 37* must alternate between playing pre-defined material concertedly (the "head") and improvising their own responses to the cell structures' structuring constraints (the "solo").

Radano similarly describes *Comp. 37*'s cell structures as "experiments with the opposition of control vs. freedom...in which notations of different regulatory specificity appear in a single composition." Here, we will recall that Cage, Lucier, Cardew, and many others also extended to other musicians the participatory injunction to become co-creators by penning compositions with intentionally insufficient "regulatory specificity"

to be played without substantial personal engagement bordering on co-composition. But where, for Cage, this often meant a necessarily pre-performative, fundamentally “literate” engagement (e.g. the kind of re-writing with which Tudor is most associated), Braxton extends the injunction to learn, embody, and “speak” his “language” to the moment of performance. Thus, for Braxton,

The composite experience of Composition No. 37 transcends the concept of one person’s creation. Instead this effort must be viewed from the context of Trans-African functional dictates, because to experience this work is to hear a composed improvised music—and by nature this combination must include the input of all of its contributors.<sup>64</sup>

In referencing “Trans-African functional dictates,” Braxton alludes to precisely those dynamics of musical participation and putatively resultant social cohesion that Blacking, Keil and Turino have attributed to so many African and Afro-diasporic music cultures. Braxton’s “functionalism,” a notion central to his thought, is the view that art is capable of exerting effects on the extra-musical world.<sup>65</sup> Yet, just as BAG members, Cherry, and Berger resist the pull of an anthropological reason that suggests that such dynamics only work in and as an integrated function of culture, Braxton asserts his ability to literally conjure such “functional” powers of music in and through his compositional art.

### **From Language to Participation and Pedagogy**

Thus, given Braxton’s emphasis on the “input of all its contributors” and the “functional” implications of such heightened performer engagement, such composing-of-improvising will take on heightened social implications which leads directly to his CMS-

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<sup>64</sup> Anthony Braxton, *Composition Notes C* (Synthesis Music, 1988), 30.

<sup>65</sup> Anthony Braxton *TriAxiom Writings I* (Synthesis Music, 1988), 11.

era pedagogical/participatory scores. In his *Composition Notes*, composed language music improvisations like those first found in *No. 37* appear as perhaps the foremost among his compositional techniques for engendering both “participation” and “pedagogy.” These twin keynote themes of this dissertation are words that Braxton uses in the *Composition Notes* overwhelmingly in relation to the language music system. He refers to a “language music pedagogy” first in relation to his solo music in the notes to *Comp. 26B* (a usage which I understand to mean that, in playing this music, he is teaching *himself* what his *own* language consists of, which is an uncanny echo of the “autopoietic” resonance of critical pedagogy discourses), but thereafter, the term is often used to denote the knowledge about improvisational structure and technique that he transmits by scoring, to a very limited extent, the learner’s improvisation through minimally regulative notations. In fact, this is reformulation of the argument that I have made with regards to a variety of forms of pedagogy, open scoring and text instruction throughout this dissertation: radical underspecification, which in turn demands of the performer an active and agentic commitment to the music, “is a means to open the participation dynamics of creative music.”<sup>66</sup>

In two scores from his Woodstock days, recordings of which have never been released and which have received no scholarly attention, Braxton created works which would “open the participation dynamics” far further. While any credible rendering of *Comp. 37*’s complex score would necessarily rely on excellent reading chops and improvisational skills (and Braxton unsurprisingly chose to record it with the very best players available: BAG alums Oliver Lake, Julius Hemphill, and Hamiet Bluiett, who

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<sup>66</sup> Braxton, *Composition Notes C*, 39.

would soon go on to co-found the influential World Saxophone Quartet), Braxton soon recognized that the combination of the language music system with the cell structures afforded an entirely new way of teaching and guiding the improvisations of larger, and potentially much less skilled, ensembles. Thus, in the same months that he would write *Comp. 37* and a flurry of other ambitious compositions, record many of these on his Arista recording debut, and initiate his relationship with CMS as a guiding artist, Braxton would also write his *Composition No. 42*, subtitled “Introduction to cell structure and language design.”<sup>67</sup>

Like the conducted language music I experienced at Wesleyan, *Comp. 42* directly translates the abstracted sound categories of Braxton’s solo language music into an explicitly pedagogical context where relatively little musical proficiency is required for participation. To my knowledge, this work is, along with its later companion piece *Comp. 78*, rather unique in the musical literature, a kind of notated *gebrauchsmusik* for improvisers, aimed at music learners and pitched for broad-based participation. Since these scores were worked out just down the road from CMS and were taught and played there, they also reinforce the structuring conceit of this dissertation: innovative pedagogical sites which welcome students of mixed skill beget innovative compositional responses to the problem of musical participation.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 162-176.

<sup>68</sup> The earliest record of an actual event in which Braxton delivered an event called “Introduction to cell structure and language design” is at Harvard in late 1975; other untitled tapes in the incomplete CMS archive feature Braxton working with an orchestra, and one, from 1979 has him delivering an “Introduction to Language Design.” Following the completion of the CMS archive’s digitization, more work on this subject, comparing scores and recordings, will become practicable. “Guide to the Creative Music Studio Tapes and Files”

Much of what Braxton has to say about his own composition bears repeating, especially since he is, until now, the only person to have reflected on the work in print:

Composition No. 42 is the introductory materials for the language music workshop course ‘Cell Structure and Language Design.’ The reality of this work was conceived as a platform to teach people about the material aspect of my language music pedagogy – in a theoretical and practical sense. It is important for new courses to be put together in this time period so that we can move to supply the largest possible information scan to our children. The concept of Cell Structure and Language Design came about as I began receiving opportunities to talk and lecture about my music. Rather than simply bringing notated compositions of the traditional nature to a given college or high school context – I decided instead to create a workshop forum that could integrate the dynamics of language material systems – for ensemble participation and vibrational dynamics.<sup>69</sup>

Though Braxton’s has a reputation for using a personal and somewhat abstruse vocabulary, his communication of his intent here could hardly be clearer. The score is, first and foremost, a set of teaching tools. Though Braxton was certainly not averse to the use of traditional notations per se as a way of getting his music played by more traditional ensembles, he nevertheless recognizes, in a manner very much in tune with the other composer/pedagogues discussed in prior chapters, that *if* the goal is revelatory understanding of music’s underlying dynamics, then the use of Western notation is an obvious problem. First, it introduces the possibility that some individuals will be excluded on the basis of Western music (il)literacy, but, more broadly, it throws up a mediating screen between the underlying musical idea and its inked instantiation. The piece was “purposely composed to be as easy as possible so that rehearsals would be relatively easy (and everyone could be included – ‘readers’ or not.)”<sup>70</sup> As in *No. 37*, Braxton craves a balance between more and less regulatory notations; he is not quite

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<sup>69</sup> Braxton, *Composition Notes C*, 162.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 172-3.

ready to let go of Western notated melodic lines that could provide a more unified tutti character as a polarity opposite the cell structure (that is, “improvised”) sections (Figure 5). However, as the unsyncopated foursquare melody shows, he is attuned to the need to make these notations (much) less demanding than would be his normal practice. (Figure 6.)

However, by 1977, at the height of Braxton’s involvements with CMS, he would write *Comp. 78* (Figure 7) as a companion piece (“Introduction to cell structure and language design number two”) which *completely* extirpates all Western notation. *Comp. 78* was written in between Braxton’s first recording and his subsequent tour with the *Creative Orchestra Music 1976* group, an ensemble which Berger’s recollections, and the inclusion of CMS participants, suggests was strongly linked to CMS. This group would record the very first (and, for almost 25 years, the only) version of a “pure” language music improvisation (that is, an entirely conducted group improvisation with no notated materials). Although Braxton understandably never elected to put his resources behind recording a CMS group that represented the true range of skills, down to beginners, that he claims *Comp. 42* and *Comp. 78* are meant to address, some still-inaccessible live tapes did capture Braxton’s “Introduction to cell structure and language design” workshops for eventual posterity.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Several of these are in the CMS archive, see “Guide to the Creative Music Studio Tapes and Files.”

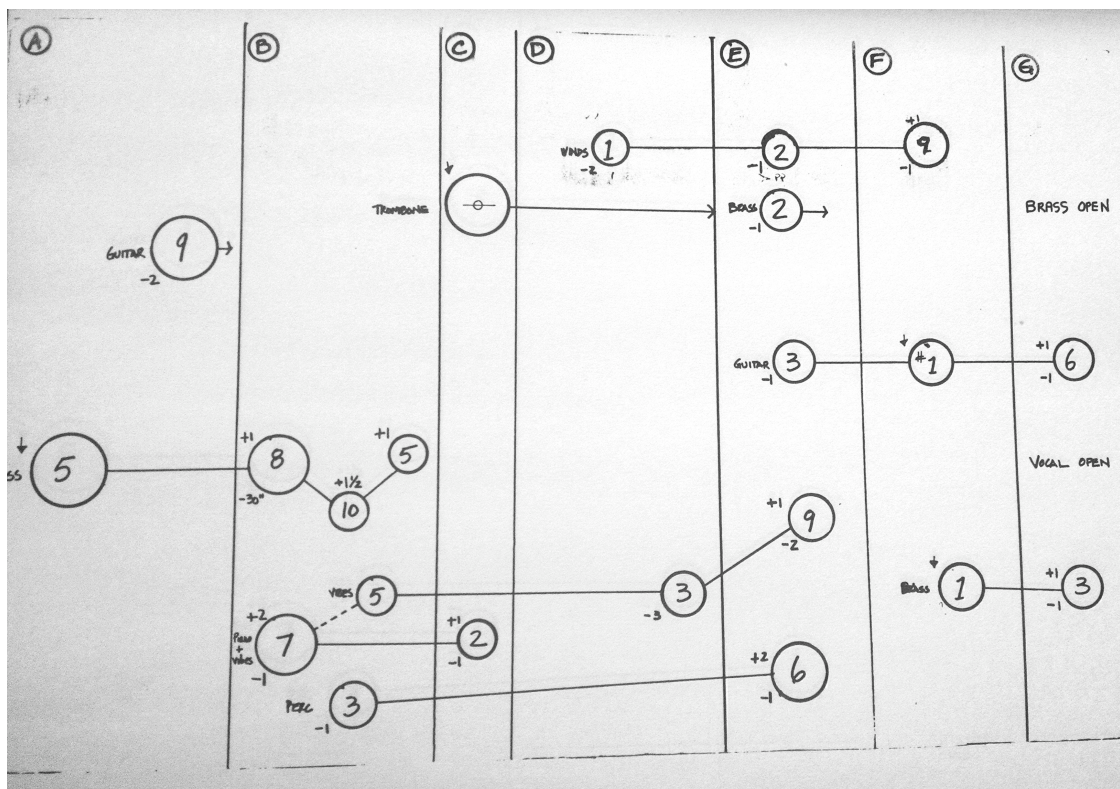


Figure 5: *Comp. 42* (Excerpt), Anthony Braxton. In this “cell structure” notation, numbers within circles correspond to language type sheets. Copyright Anthony Braxton and the Tri-Centric Foundation.

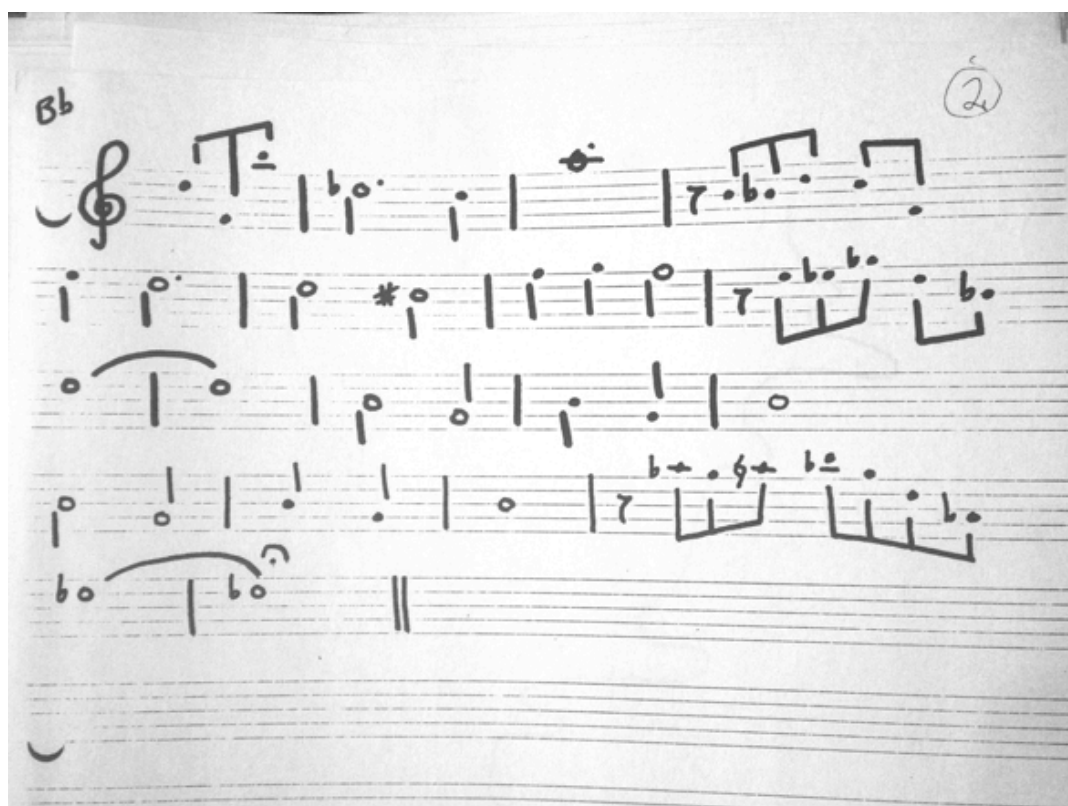


Figure 6: *Comp. 42* (Excerpt), Anthony Braxton. Traditionally notated portion which functions as contrasting material to “cell structures” in Figure 5. Copyright Anthony Braxton and the Tri-Centric Foundation

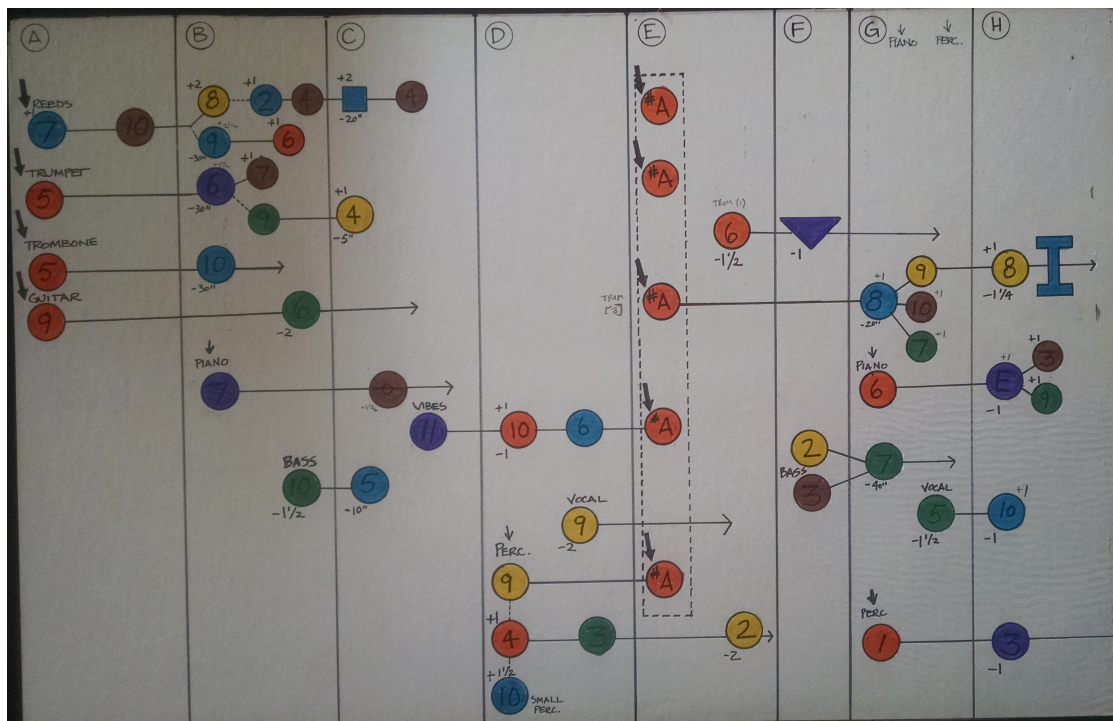


Figure 7: *Comp. 78* (Excerpt), Anthony Braxton. One (of six) large cards that comprise the score, showing cell structure notations. Numbers correspond to language types. Copyright Anthony Braxton and the Tri-Centric Foundation.

Did Braxton-the-CMS-pedagogue influence the output of Braxton-the-composer to the same degree that, I have argued, it may have influenced Cage or Oliveros? Almost certainly not. Until taking a job at Mills College in the late 1980s, his teaching engagements were much shorter term and less all-consuming, especially given that his involvement with CMS coincided with his years as an Arista recording artist. But like those other composers, he did produce scores, albeit little-known ones, that directly (and, given the trajectory from *Comp. 42* to *Comp. 78*, *increasingly*) addressed players of whom few specialized skills were required. Was the particular character of CMS, with its open-to-all policy and smattering of “spiritual seekers,” a decisive influence on, for example, Braxton’s reference to “non-readers” in the *Notes* for *Comp. 42*, or on his decision to ultimately exclude *all* Western notations from *Comp. 78*?<sup>72</sup> Regardless of the flows of causality and influence, the development of Braxton’s pedagogical thinking, as instantiated in the two “cell structure and language design” workshop scores, clearly suggests numerous congruences with the most pedagogically innovative and utopian strands of thinking at CMS.

Though Braxton certainly demanded of his players outside of his large ensemble music that they too “participate” and co-create his music under different degrees of notational regulation (including that of fully open improvisation with no notation), it’s striking that he writes some of his *least* regulative notations of the period specifically for less trained players. This is not to say, necessarily, that *No. 78* represents a simplification

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<sup>72</sup> Thus making *Comp. 78* perhaps his earliest ensemble work entirely in graphic notation, a modality he would return to three decades later; see the description of Falling River Music at <http://tricentricfoundation.org/musical-systems>, accessed 3/12/15.

of notational means, relative to *No. 42*—it *adds* color as a new factor to influence the interpretation of the varied cells. However, this appears to be a way to elicit from these players their *intuitive* responses, not a way to add a new vector of control per se: Color in *Comp 78* function “as an emotional and vibrational factor that affects each individual’s perception of a given interpretation.”<sup>73</sup> Like Cardew’s *Treatise*, these aspects of the notation are “asemic”—they demand not semantic translation, but are rather an inspiration, an invitation, a question.

That he *asked* for such a response suggests that, Braxton came, over the course of his CMS affiliation, to view the alterity of differential skill and unskill, along with their emergent correlate, non-coordination, as useful compositional resources. Decades later, after becoming a “full-time” teacher, this aspect of Braxton’s work—the emergent features of non-coordination in large ensemble settings—would come much further to the fore in his Ghost Trance Music, through which potentially numerous musicians, in voluntaristically self-organized sub-groupings of the larger ensemble, chart their own course through a folio of re-sequenceable notations.<sup>74</sup> This, in turn, set up the terms for Braxton’s even more expansive Sonic Genome project, in which musicians may play any material from Braxton’s oeuvre, while literally moving their locations throughout a vast space, alone or in sub-groups. Performances of the Sonic Genome sometimes enact a collective spatial trajectory away from a center point that recalls the Big Bang—the whole ensemble departing from the middle of a venue and then, over the course of an day-long marathon performance, reaching the far corners of the space.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Braxton, *Composition Notes D* (Synthesis Music, 1988), 252.

<sup>74</sup> Broomer, *Time and Anthony Braxton*, 120-127.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 139-145.

But the CMS-era scores for language music learners set the terms for this strategy of modeling and enacting such an expanding universe of musical participation. As in the CMS basic practice, the search for a language of the building blocks of music *also* helps already-skilled musicians to communicate with one another, and permits them to unify their efforts into grander, integrative designs (like the Sonic Genome, or the notion of a universal world music). Braxton's language music was not invented *for* the purposes of teaching, nor with the challenges of communicating with less-skilled musicians foremost in mind. Yet perhaps this is what makes it so appealing *in* teaching—it can address the novice as much as the virtuoso, and crucially, provide a mechanism or continuum that can link the uninhibited grandiosity of the experimentalist imaginary to the constraints of broad-based participation.

I am certainly not the first to laud Braxton's language music, but I may be the first to try to situate it within a lived network, a scene—in this case, a network where the demands of pedagogy, participation, and the improvising large ensemble were all intimately related. In Woodstock, Braxton was not alone in addressing these issues, and seems to have shared—with Berger, Cherry, Smith and perhaps many others—in the co-development of a re-thinking of experimentalism that could better balance the alterity of unrestrained individual imagination with communication, community, and co-action towards *communitas*. In tandem, these thinkers propounded a strategic universalist notion of music as a language, one in which experimentalists could utter the ineffable, and yet still be understood. Because I regard this joint research as at least as important as any one musician's articulation, I want to conclude not with Braxton's thoughts on his language music (which are easily found in print), but rather the unpublished words of Wadada Leo

Smith, reflecting on how, in the middle 1970s (the first years of his involvement at CMS) his conceptualization of *his* music also changed:

I dropped that notion about system and started employing the idea that it was a language. And the reason I decided it was a language: because it kept growing. Usually systems—you devise them, and they're fixed for that—that information is fixed for what it is. But they don't usually expand. You know, you go to another system from there. So if it's a language, it moves because it grows. The language, itself, grows. That is, the vocabulary of the language grows...<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Wadada Leo Smith, interviewed by Taylor Ho Bynum, *Oral History of American Music*, Yale University, (Interview no. 409 a), 65.

## **Conclusion.**

### **The Space Chord and the Gravity of Black Music Theory**

Throughout this dissertation, I have analyzed historical moments and places where experimental musicians decided that broadening musical participation was important. These musicians then set to work in determining *how* to reconcile and incorporate participation with their own aesthetic ideas, as well as with the particulars of their socio-musical worlds. I have largely bounded my investigation to pedagogical sites, partially because this is where I found the most interesting participatory activities—one could speculate that schools are simply where experimental musicians are most likely to encounter heterogeneous others whom they might *want* to recruit into musical participation.

However, the framework of pedagogical transmission is also a useful one in understanding what is at stake whenever someone gives a musical instruction to anyone else. By this logic, composition (and not only notated composition) is inherently pedagogical—it is a way of shaping and directing the musical behavior of another. With the blurring of art and life characteristic of experimentalism in the “long Sixties,” this shaping of others’ musical behaviors becomes rather more fraught: musical instruction becomes an instruction about how to live. And, particular to the participatory contexts I have been writing about, these musical instructions are aimed at a heterogeneous “mass”

of others (and not just at those self-identified musicians who have, through a series of presumably intentional life choices, elected to be subject to composers' instructions). Here, then, composing for such broad participation clearly becomes a project of world improvement, which, as Cage's 1965 "Diary" suggested, *might* only make matters worse.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, of course, all forms of music pedagogy, and all forms of enculturation, are ways of shaping people's behavior. Perhaps, keeping this in mind, we can be more sanguine about compositional projects of pedagogical world-shaping. Perhaps what comes to the fore about the experimentalists, then, in contrast to most Western music pedagogies, is just how *little* they try to shape participants, how open they remain to the alterity of the Other, how they refigure the noise of unskill as inspiration rather than disruption. If we exclude for a moment Cage's view that *listening itself* is a form of musical participation (for, on this point, I raised his position largely to show just how *unlike* the others' it is), then I find that nearly everyone else who appears in these pages seems to have been in accord on this point: they strive to *hear* the mass of heterogeneous humanity as they find it (an activation, an acceptance), and then to (compositionally or pedagogically) steer the collective towards a more positive, harmonious, benevolent form of mutual interaction—an attunement. First participation, then pedagogy. To my way of thinking, this actually represents quite a meaningful difference from the way that I came into music: first pedagogy, then participation.

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<sup>1</sup> Cage, "Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) 1965" in *A Year From Monday*, 3-19.

If this fails to convince on the basis of the evidence I've given so far, consider the space chord. Throughout these case studies, in and amidst my larger structuring concerns, I have stealthily been tracing an archaeology of a particular sonority or gesture that might bear out my activation/attunement, participation-then-pedagogy thesis. In the personal account with which I began, I mentioned this sonority, which Sun Ra named the space chord, because, throughout my research, I began to notice instances of this sonority everywhere. Was there something about this chord, or its means of generation, that was essential to the question of experimentalism and its overlap with participation?

Of course, no two space chords are the same. But they all seek a particular music that exceeds and evades the composer's design. Szwed describes their early use by Sun Ra:<sup>2</sup>

When he sensed that the piece needed an introduction or an ending, a new direction or fresh material, he would call for a space chord, a collectively improvised tone cluster at high volume which 'would suggest a new melody, maybe a rhythm.' It was a pianistically conceived device, which created another context for the music, a new mood, opening up fresh tonal areas.<sup>3</sup>

Yet in contrast to a tone cluster played by one person on the piano, a space chord is emergent and unknowable, until the moment it is articulated. From the perspective of the composer, space chords are otherness and inspiration; they are the chord that compositional authority can neither specify nor anticipate. But from the perspective of the performer, one's note within the space chord is a voluntary contribution, a pitch freely chosen. Thus, when Sun Ra or any leader cues a space chord, this moment occurs at the fulcrum between authorship and participation—it is an authorial request *for* participation.

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<sup>2</sup> Ra's Arkestra was, of course, not radically mixed in its skill levels, as in my case studies have been.

<sup>3</sup> John F. Szwed, *Space is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra* (New York: Pantheon, 1997), 214.

Defined thus, “space chords” also show up throughout the works and practices with which this dissertation has grappled. Cornelius Cardew’s *Paragraph 7*, which Eno lauds as an ideal cybernetic ecosystem for voluntaristic interaction that harnesses the resource of natural differences, begins, “Each chorus member chooses his or her note (silently)...All enter on the leader’s signal. For each subsequent line choose a note that you can hear being sung...”

Space chords are a particular practice of organized sound-making that challenges dominant notions of what it means to organize sounds at all. In this sense, they are the perfect activity for an ensemble that lacks the wherewithal to follow more specific directions: In one recorded audience-participatory realization of her *Tuning Meditation*, Pauline Oliveros tells the audience, “The first tone is a contribution of your own. And the second is tuning to someone else’s tone.”<sup>4</sup>

In these pieces, scored for universal participation by dint of excluding the need for any competencies other than singing, hearing, and imitating, Cardew and Oliveros strive toward the minimal program for musical interaction. The first sound is the space chord; what follows is space exploration. But ultimately, with its focus on mimesis and resolution of dissonances, this is a contracting universe: social interaction as a one-way ticket to group identification. The demand for recognition of and attunement to the other pulls the space chord to Earth, from complexity towards simplicity, from noise towards harmoniousness.

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<sup>4</sup> These are Oliveros’ words, spoken from the stage, in the recording of “Tuning Meditation” appearing on the CD recording *From the Kitchen Archives: New Music New York 1979*. (New York: Orange Mountain Music OMM-0015, 2004).

Karl Berger's "spontaneous harmonization" (described in the previous chapter) also starts with a space chord, but compared to Cardew and Oliveros' brief and explicit text instructions, he loosens the means towards harmonization to include intuition and improvisation. Thus, for Berger, harmonization of the space chord might not be modeling a cybernetic ecosystem whose behavior is governed by an algorithm. But it remains a way of mining participants' alterity and divergence, and, following Sun Ra, of propelling music forward into new inspirations by drawing on the resource of the unknown. Space chords do more than cede authority. They produce a world of the ensemble's emergent invention, a world that demands navigation and investigation. Thus, when conducting a large ensemble improvisation, Berger is loath to specify sound material to his participants, or even predefine any signals that might provide *a priori* rules for governing the system of interaction: "I'm interested in learning from them! I'll invent a signal from what *they* do...and we grow from that."<sup>5</sup> Exploring the ongoing, open "space" of undirected group improvisation, Berger is content to create an ad hoc, expanding vocabulary for communication, rather than articulate a unified, coherent, closed system. Smith's words on supplanting "system" with "language," which concluded the prior chapter, seem congruent with Berger's perspective.<sup>6</sup>

In my experiences with Anthony Braxton's language music conducting, Braxton would cue the large, heterogeneous student ensemble with hand signs that indicated one of the language types that appeared on a key he had distributed. Upon receiving such a cue, ensemble members would improvise within the given language types until Braxton

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<sup>5</sup> Berger, interview with the author, 4/19/2015

<sup>6</sup> This makes sense, given that Berger credits Smith as a crucial early influence on his conducting. Ibid.

gave them a cut-off or a new cue. Thus, when he gave the entire group the signal to play language type number one—a long sound— it meant that everyone would begin with a pitch of their choosing—a space chord. Very frequently, the rehearsals and concerts with his large ensemble would begin in exactly this way. Braxton would sometimes let this instruction stand for a long time, and other times would give other hand signals that might thin the texture or tell particular players to raise or lower their pitches. Either way, by intuitive emergence or by compositional control, the music would move from the initial sonority's state of unplanned contingency into one where this “found” chord became a platform for exploration, and a jumping-off point into the rest of the music.

Even Lucier's *Chambers*, in its debut at UCSD, might be called a space chord, although in this case, exterior, animal nature “decides” the sonority, not human impulse. On Lucier's cue, the piece began with all the participants activating “the natural pitches of each horn, of each shell, be[ing] themselves. ...I was perfectly delighted to let the chords or simultaneities that the shells produced when played together depend on the pitches of the shells themselves and not on anything I did.”<sup>7</sup> Then, when the players move apart from the performance's originating point, this sonority begets another kind of spatiality and space exploration.

Yet, to conclude on this note, and on this chord, hearing only the sympathetic resonances between my actors, would be a willful harmonization of a field riven by sharp differences of perspective. As I have repeatedly suggested, the will towards or desire to facilitate participation suggests a wish for such intersubjective harmonicity, a unity and oneness through music that suspends (though doesn't erase) difference—what Turino

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<sup>7</sup> Lucier and Simons, *Chambers*, 9

calls *communitas*. Perhaps then, it would be fitting to end by disregarding some of these differences so that the dissonances between perspectives could come into tune. Perhaps the “space chord” itself might be one figuration of a shared “species-being” that unites otherwise varied and conflicting articulations of participation in experimentalism.

Or, by contrast, I could end by insisting that the differences in approach might be incommensurable. Certainly, I have uncovered major cleavages of underlying conceptualization, often hinging, in my telling, on beliefs and assertions of the nature of “nature” and its supposed opposite, culture, at the site of their intersection: the human being. Often, in protestation against the claims of Western culture’s superiority, “nature” has been used as an antidote. Post-Cagean naturalisms seem to go particularly far in casting doubt upon the authority and usefulness of cultural traditions. Why not begin again? Paul Gilroy might put it differently, emphasizing that basing our conduct on cultural *identifications* might be the core problem. Asserting *essential* differences unnecessarily promulgates the *significance* of those differences. Instead, we could propose the greater significance of shared “species being,” of what we all have in common. Somewhat surprisingly, given that Gilroy considers his to be a “counter-anthropological” position, it appears to me that ethnomusicologist John Blacking, who appeared in the introduction, could agree on some points of Gilroy’s “planetary humanism.”

The question, “How musical is man” is related to the more general questions, “What is the nature of man?” and, “What limits are there to his cultural development?” It is part of a series of questions that we must ask about man’s past and present if we are to do anything more than stumble blindly into the future. ...There is so much music in the world that it is reasonable to suppose that music, like language and possibly religion, is a species-specific trait of man. Essential physiological and cognitive

processes that generate musical composition and performance may even be genetically inherited, and therefore present in almost every human being. An understanding of these and other processes involved in the production of music may provide us with evidence that men are more remarkable and capable creatures than most societies ever allow them to be. This is not the fault of culture itself, but the fault of man, who mistakes the means of culture for the end, and so lives *for* culture and not *beyond* culture.<sup>8</sup>

Can the non-musician make music? Blacking seems to me to be suggesting that we could answer this question through an observational inquiry into the facts of humanness. I want to suggest, on the contrary, that we could answer this question more simply by making music with non-musicians. By doing so, we will have already answered our question in the affirmative. This is at the core of what makes strategic universalism strategic. It is also the essence of Cage's and Kaprow's semantic magic tricks that I highlighted in Chapter 2 (calling non-musicians "composers" makes them so; calling audience members "participants" makes them so). These nominations willingly fly in the face of facts.

Forgetting facts, on the other hand, leaves us open to charges of erasure. If Lewis and Piekut have assiduously documented the numerous exclusions and slights that the Cagean avant-garde (among others) inflicted on the black avant-garde, my work has perhaps been less attentive to such issues. Both scholars incorporate into their stories the same searing quote from Fred Moten: "a black avant-garde exists, as it were, oxymoronicallly—as if black, on the one hand, and avant-garde on the other hand, each depends for its coherence upon the exclusion of the other."<sup>9</sup> By contrast, my story may have in some ways minimized or sought to resolve such essential frictions—perhaps

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<sup>8</sup> Blacking, *How Musical Is Man*, 7

<sup>9</sup> Moten, *In the Break*, 32; see also Piekut *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 194; Lewis *Power Stronger than Itself*, xxxi, 30.

simply by placing the “two avant-gardes” into the same useable past. But can any attempt at such “harmonization” be anything other than a masking or renewal of the underlying and ongoing racial antagonisms?

In his more optimistic moments, Moten posits that, in the study of black expressive culture, we can find lines of escape and flight, of “fugitivity,” that evade the exclusions and separations wrought by those (ex)nominative discourses (like the ones that Piekut and Lewis reference) which constrict and limit the meanings and possibilities of blackness:

What’s at stake is fugitive movement in and out of the frame, bar, or whatever externally imposed social logic— a movement of escape, the stealth of the stolen that can be said...to break every enclosure. This fugitive movement is stolen life, and its relation to law is reducible neither to simple interdiction nor bare transgression.<sup>10</sup>

In wrestling with Moten’s words, I’ve often wondered whether the escape flights he describes might be related to the metaphors of flight as airborne escape in black experimental musics, such as Charlie “Bird” Parker’s flights from the root-bound chord tones into the upper partials, or George Russell’s space age stratus-seeking of vertically-arrayed tonal orders (which depict the increasingly chromatic improvisational strategies of the post-Parker era as the “outgoing” orders that stretch up towards the heavens), as well as numerous references to space flight across the entire Afrofuturist constellation.<sup>11</sup> Such flights at the limit of Western harmonic practice *resist* both earthbound gravity and law, yet they are hardly atheoretic, and are certainly nowhere near as obdurately opposed to Western harmony as Cage was. Just as Moten says, the black experimentalist relation

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<sup>10</sup> Fred Moten “The Case of Blackness” *Criticism* 50, no. 2, (2008), 179

<sup>11</sup> George Russell, *The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization* (New York: Concept Publishing, 2001), 14. See also the diagrams of these tonal orders, reprinted from the book at Russell’s website: [www.lydianchromaticconcept.com/lccoto\\_2.html](http://www.lydianchromaticconcept.com/lccoto_2.html) (accessed 2/2/2015).

to those received European musical laws *cannot* be reduced “to simple interdiction nor bare transgression”—while arguably, at least at the mid-60’s apex of “deskilling,” Cage’s can. This is one central reason why, in Chapter 4, it felt necessary to go to such great length to balance the consideration of the ways in which the creative music collectives invested in liberation *through* music theory, before turning my analytic focus on those cases in which figures like Joseph Jarman and the Human Arts Ensemble would more readily harmonize with Chapters 2 and 3, and their more thoroughgoing, anti-theoretic critiques of mastery.

Yet returning to Sun Ra’s space chord, and to the other music theoretic innovations of black experimentalism, I want to suggest that, at least how I read Sun Ra through Moten, the gravity, the seriousness, of black music theory is its “outness,” its refusal to be bounded by tonality’s laws of gravity, and its resultant elaboration of its own anti-gravity. At the very moment of the elaboration of tonal gravity, in Rameau’s 18<sup>th</sup> century musical thought, this new theoretic concept pulls everything back towards simple harmonicity and the “fundamental bass,” which, Rameau argued (and many music cognitionists and biomusicologists continue to argue), are *determined* by the scientific observation of acoustical resonance and laws of (sound’s) nature. Thomas Christensen has shown how Rameau appropriated the mechanistic explanations of the new science of physics as a way of literally naturalizing tonality.<sup>12</sup> For Rameau, the fundamental bass (the tonic pitch) determines laws of consonance and laws of motion; it is, like the Earth, the source and center of gravity. The relation of musical laws to the scientific view of

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 7-18.

nature is thus not at all unrelated to such “fundamentalisms” either of tonality or of its more recent, still-observationally-driven extensions: we could speak here of just intonation, or of post-Cagean natural resonance, both expanding accounts of the musically possible that nonetheless derive their authority from the phenomenal, observable *reality* of sound.

But Moten’s fugitivity, refigured as flight principle and as anti-gravity, is certainly no less grave or serious than those post-Cagean laws of music-as-nature whereby world-phenomenal observations pull music inexorably back towards their fundamental basis in nature. But such an anti-gravity points the opposite way: up and out. Thus, by being seriously out, (and “as serious as your life”<sup>13</sup>), Afrological experimentalism’s flight principle and fugitivity denies the earth to be the closed system—a Spaceship Earth to which we are inextricably bound—that the cyberneticists and systems theorists assumed and asserted.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, Sun Ra’s self-creation of an identity (autopoiesis in a new key) alien to this world and on a temporary visit, is what he always said it was: a resistance of the domination of the reality principle, a flight from the real.<sup>15</sup>

In stretching up and out, away from the green earth and its “nature,” towards the black heavens, the Afrological experimentalisms surveyed in the previous chapters might

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<sup>13</sup> From the title of Valerie Wilmer, *As Serious As Your Life: The Story of the New Jazz* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill, 1980).

<sup>14</sup> “Spaceship Earth” was a favored formulation of Buckminster Fuller and those he influenced, including Cage. See Kenneth Silverman *Begin Again: A Biography of John Cage* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 213.

<sup>15</sup> In moving into the discussion of my own case study, I have to switch vocabulary here, from speaking, as Moten does, of blackness to using Lewis’ term for the music culture descending from and affiliated with black cultures and black people. This change is necessary in large part because a phenotypically white person with strong links to that culture, Karl Berger, was as key to my formulations in Chapters 4 and 5 as were his collaborator Don Cherry and the members two phenotypically black organizations, BAG and AACM. See Lewis “Improvised Music after 1950,” 93-4.

suggest a shift from the authorization of the experimental in science-fact (the investigation of the phenomenal world and its “nature”) towards a free play in science-fiction—in invented languages which must expand to describe an expanding universe. Linking his “strategic universalism” to the aesthetics of Afrofuturism, Paul Gilroy has suggested that focus on a shared human “species being” of indeterminate quality and extent may be used to deny the violence of racialization itself, which, after all, was a conceptual distinction made with the aid of European scientific thought which then premised numerous exploitations on categorical discriminations of what was seen to be a “natural” order.

Looking at the experiments in participation essayed in the last two chapters (especially those of the Human Arts Ensemble, the Creative Music Studio, and Braxton’s language music), I want to suggest that such a universalist perspective may resolve some of the paradoxical confinement of participating subjects that seems to trouble the scoring and notation of participation after Cage. Make no mistake, Lucier and Oliveros demand *werktreue* in utterly good faith. Yet when the goal is revelation of the real, there are necessarily sometimes right and wrong answers, approaches that succeed in revealing reality and others that fail. I read the troubled encounters between trained musicians and participatory scores in Chapter 3 as symptomatic of the failed approaches of musical cultures that are insufficiently attentive to the laws of nature. If nature is, as the cyberneticists thought, a system, then systems are governed by rules.

By contrast, if we follow Gilroy, and optimistically leave the question of our “natures” counterfactually open, then there is no reality that must be attended to. Given no reality, there is no constraining basis for law, and thus no lawbreakers. This might be

the difference between a closed system and an open one, or perhaps between systems and languages. As I quoted Wadada Leo Smith saying, language expands. So does the universe.

I began this dissertation with a personal account that contained an oblique reference to facts, facts to which I didn't want to grant additional authority or added facticity by re-printing them. These facts, about the students with whom I have worked and about the socio-economic realities some would use to define them, are the products of sociological observations which I can't and won't simply deny or contradict. But could practicing music with such students be a means of flight, a "movement of escape" from such "externally imposed social logics?" If so, such an art could take, as its starting point, science fiction as an alternative to the facts and observations imposed by the human sciences. Here, drawing from Sun Ra's insights, students might be free to speculate a larger universe of their own alternatives into existence, which might, or might not, have a basis in reality. The real, to put it mildly, is not ideal.

So, when given the opportunity to teach music, I will start off not by insisting that students get a grounding in solid fundamentals, but rather, will begin in outer space. There, perhaps, we can teach ourselves to fly not on the basis of recourse to a single determinant nature, or gravity, or law, but rather via the multiple gravities of numberless worlds.

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