UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Experimental Music: Redefining Authenticity

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Musical Arts

in

Contemporary Music Performance

by

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The Dissertation of Christine E. Tavolacci is approved, and is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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2017

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Frank J. and Christine M. Tavolacci, whose love and support are with me always.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Experimental Music: Redefining Authenticity

by

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Doctor of Musical Arts in Contemporary Music Performance

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This dissertation explores the notion of authenticity in relation to the performance practice of scores in the experimental music tradition. A wave of eight academic publications from 2009 to 2016 has firmly established a critical discourse on experimental music. However, in these publications, only one chapter of one book is written solely from the perspective of the performer, concerning performance practice. As a result, performers today who wish to

study experimental music are left with little guidance from this perspective. How can authenticity be defined so that performers, whether well-versed or inexperienced, can approach the performance practice of experimental music with confidence and a well-informed sense of creativity and purpose?

Experimental music arises out of a series of direct processes or experiments. Authenticity, then, is defined and manifested through six of the most common processes found in experimental scores: *indeterminate*, *contingent, social enactment*, *failure*, *impossibility* and *direct action.* A diverse array of scores spanning from 1964 to 2013 are used as examples, in addition to accounts from Alvin Lucier, James Klopfleisch, Alex Waterman, Pauline Oliveros, and personal accounts of the author's experience with these processes.

The conclusion of this examination brings forth the idea that experimental music is itself a catalyst to redefine authenticity, wherein the choices of the performer, their intellect and personal preferences, are in themselves authentic and sufficient.

Introduction: A Brief History and Definition of Experimental Music

"*Times have changed; music has changed; and I no longer object to the word 'experimental'."*
– John Cage[1]

A discourse surrounding the performance practice of experimental music must first be met with a clear understanding of the tradition and its origins. The term *experimental music* is one of the more nebulous categorizations in contemporary Western music. A simple internet search yields confusing, often humorous results, such as an article entitled "What Does Experimental Music Even Mean Anymore?"[2], associating the term with noise, pop music, free jazz, and electronic music. In the introduction to her book *Experimental Music Since 1970,* composer and scholar Jennie Gottschalk aptly stated that "The term 'experimental music' has itself been subject to false familiarity, in that there are many definitions but few correlations between them."[3] Major academic publications, too, have varying definitions of the term. Oxford Music Online loosely defines experimental music as "A diverse set of musical practices that gained momentum in the middle of the 20th century, characterized by its radical opposition to and questioning of institutionalized modes of composition, performance, and aesthetics."[4] In the seminal academic text *Experimental*

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[1] Cage, John, *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, Middletown, CT: Welseyan University Press, 1973, p7.
[2] The first result in a google search for the term "experimental music" - http://www.thefader.com/2015/05/08/system-focus-experimental-music, April 28, 2017.
[3] Gottschalk, Jennie, *Experimental Music Since 1970*, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016, p1.
[4] Sun, Cecilia, "Experimental music," Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, Web. 20 Mar. 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2224296>.

Music: Cage and Beyond, British composer Michael Nyman spends an entire chapter working towards a definition of experimental music, yet at the end of the chapter he declines to give any formal definition. What Nyman does clearly identify is the presence of two contemporary schools of Western music in the 20th century – experimental and avant-garde. Nyman states, "The distinctions between the experimental and the avant-garde ultimately depend on purely musical considerations… it would be foolish to try and separate sound from the aesthetic, conceptual, philosophical and ethical considerations that the music enshrines."[5] He goes on to conclude that "experimental composers are by and large not concerned with prescribing a defined *time-object* whose materials, structuring and relationships are calculated and arranged in advance, but are more excited by the prospect of outlining a *situation* in which sounds may occur, a process of generating action (sounding or otherwise), a field delineated by certain compositional 'rules'."[6]

At its very core, the term experimental relates to that which is innovative, uncharted, untested, and unexplored. As composer James Tenney stated in an interview, "It's more literally an experiment, like a scientific experiment. And in science, in scientific work, one experiment always does lead to another one… There is no such thing as post-experimental… My sense of 'experimental' is just ongoing research."[7] In music, this would translate to diverse methods of

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[5] Nyman, Michael, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond,* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p2.
[6] Ibid. p4.
[7] Gottschalk, p4.

notation, exploratory musical processes to unfold for the performer and listener that create specific states of mind when experiencing music. Tenney's view of experimental music aligns very much with my own. In my purview, experimental music is *music that arises out of a series of direct processes or experiments.* These experiments may involve, but are not limited to, sound, space, success, failure, human interaction, and action.

Experimental music is alive and flourishing today, just as it was in the 1950's and 60's. An account of the entire history and origin of the tradition would require the economy of a larger, specific text. For the sake of context in this writing, it is important to identify the moments when the tradition came into existence, as well as where it stands in the present day.

While the exact moment of origin is debatable, there are two compositions that are commonly referred to as instrumental in the formation and development of experimental music – Erik Satie's *Vexations* and Marcel Duchamp's *Sculpture Musicale*.

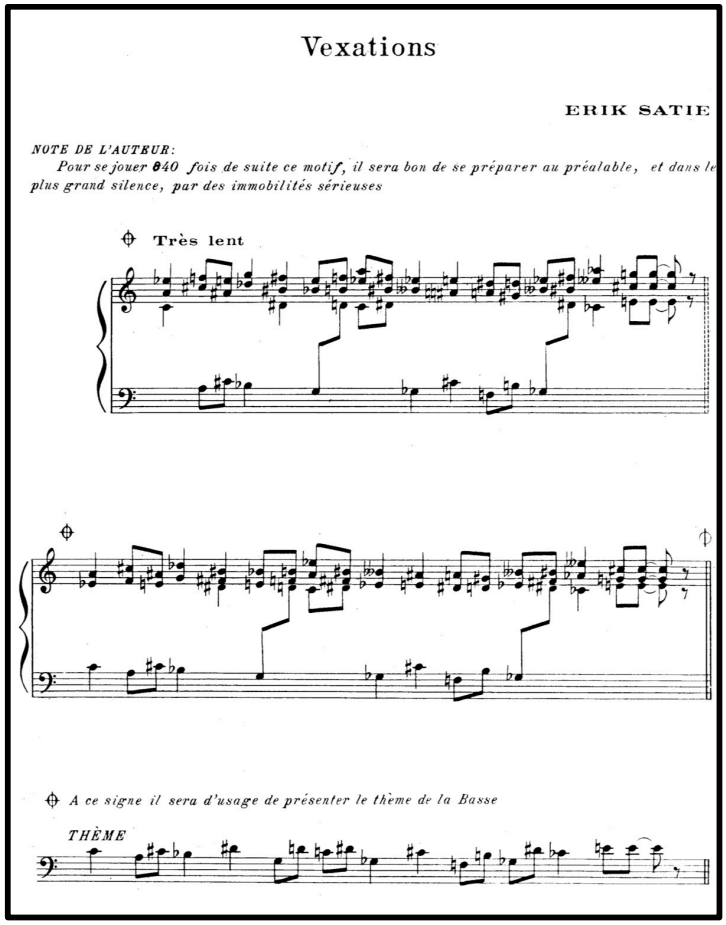

Figure 1: Vexations, Erik Satie

Vexations was composed by Erik Satie between 1893-1894. It is one page in length. Accompanying the brief motive on the page are the following instructions: "To play this motive 840 times, it would be good to prepare oneself beforehand in the deep silence, by serious immobility"[8]. There is no written documentation of Satie's intention as to composing this work; one can approach it either from a "Zen" perspective (being in the moment, allowing the repetitions to transform one's consciousness), or from the perspective of an impossible

[8] Translation from original instruction in French.

challenge (how many repetitions one human can perform before they are incapacitated). Either way, performance of *Vexations* was deemed impossible until John Cage attempted to realize the score along with several other colleagues in September 1963. Upon finishing a performance of the piece, Cage stated "I had changed and the world had changed."[9]

During his lifetime, Satie was associated with Dadaism (made most clear by his appearance in the 1924 Dadaist film *Entr'act*e, of which he also scored the music). The second score instrumental in the development of experimental music was composed by Marcel Duchamp, an artist also heavily affiliated with Dadaism. *Sculpture Musicale* (see Figure 2, page 6), composed in 1912, is little more than a sentence written on a scrap of paper, which translates into English as follows: "Musical Sculpture. Sounds lasting and leaving from different places and forming a sounding sculpture that lasts."[10]

Sculpture Musicale is one of the first scores that solely uses text to describe a musical situation that the composer wants to occur, whose results are grossly open to interpretation. *Vexations* is one of the first known scores that employs the use of excessive repetition and perceived impossibility to transform both the experiences of the performer and listener. Both compositional approaches helped to form the cornerstone from which the tradition of experimental music was built upon.

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[9] Sweet, Sam, "A Dangerous and Evil Piano Piece", *New Yorker, September 9, 2013, web, <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/a-dangerous-and-evil-piano-piece>.*

[10] Lotringer, Sylvere, "Becoming Duchamp", *tout-fait: the Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, May 2000, <http://www.toutfait.com/issues/issue_2/Articles/lotringer.html>.

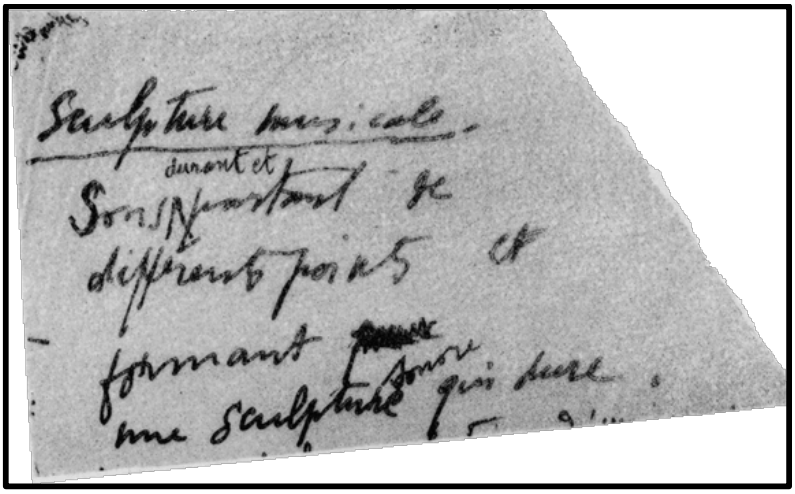

Figure 2: Sculpture Musicale, Marcel Duchamp

Duchamp and Satie had a profound effect on John Cage, one of the composers immediately associated with experimental music[11]. In turn, John Cage's lectures at the New School in New York City from 1956-1961[12] influenced many composers and artists, among them Allan Kaprow, George Brecht and Dick Higgins, to begin pursuing experimental artistic practices. Today, experimental music is thriving worldwide, with significant communities in Los Angeles, New York, London, Tokyo, Berlin and Zurich. Despite its longevity, experimental music has neither been unanimously identified as a musical tradition nor been the subject of a significant amount of critical writing and analysis until the most recent decade.

[11] Cage famously stated, "One way to study music: study Duchamp."
[12] For documentation of various syllabi, see http://johncagetrust.blogspot.com/2014/08/john-cage-at-new-school-1950-1960.html.

Critical Writing Thus Far

The first major publication discussing the whole of experimental music was composer Michael Nyman's book *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*. Published in 1974, this book discussed the scope of writing and compositional techniques from the late 1950's to the publication date, including but not limited to Indeterminacy, the Fluxus movement, developments in electronic music and the birth of Minimalism.

Between 2009-2016, there was a second wave of publications that now provide meaningful, critical discourse on various aspects of experimental music. In 2009, American composer Alvin Lucier wrote *Music 109*, an overview of works and compositional techniques that he considered to be groundbreaking; much of the material in the book is based upon lectures that he gave while serving as a professor at Wesleyan University (hence the book's title). In the same year, the *Ashgate Research Companion to Experimental Music* was released. Compiled and edited by British composer James Saunders, this publication contains chapters written by nine British and American composers on various compositional and theoretical topics as well as fourteen chapters consisting of interviews conducted by Saunders with various composers of experimental music from the United Kingdom, America, Germany and Switzerland. In 2010 art historian Liz Kotz's *Words to Be Looked At* was released; this book focused on the text and event scores that were composed between 1958-68 in New York (with a focus on work by George Brecht and John Cage), discussing their impact and influence on the work that was to follow. *Word Events*, also compiled by

James Saunders in collaboration with British composer John Lely, was released in 2012 and follows a similar format to *Ashgate*, save for the fact that the book specifically addresses text scores and verbal notation in the genre of experimental music. Canadian composer Eldritch Priest's book *Boring Formless Nonsense*, published in 2013, is largely devoted to the concept of failure as is integrated with chance and indeterminacy in experimental music; it is a unique and important contribution as none of the other sources specifically highlight work by Canadian experimental composers. Finally, in 2016, two important, forward-thinking, critical publications were released by relatively young American authors[13] – composer Jennie Gottschalk's *Experimental Music Since 1970* and composer G. Douglas Barrett's *After Sound: Towards a Critical Music*. Gottschalk's book seemingly picks up where Nyman's left off, identifying and analyzing the major compositional elements and theoretical components of experimental music from the 1950's up until the present day. Barrett's book forms a critical dialectic surrounding sound art and experimental compositions, examining them through the lens of the contemporary socio-political climate.

Performers of experimental music can use these texts for a more well informed performance, as well as the many written about or by experimental composers addressing their own work (examples include Robert Ashley's *Outside of Time* or Morton Feldman's *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*, for

[13] As of May 2017, both authors, G. Douglas Barrett and Jennie Gottschalk are under 40.

instance). It is of interest to the performer to take note of the types of voices that are writing about experimental music. Out of all the texts mentioned thus far, only one of them, the *Ashgate Companion to Experimental Music,* contains writing about performance practice from the sole perspective of the performer -- a chapter written by Philip Thomas entitled "A Prescription for Action". Thomas is a pianist and member of the British ensemble Apartment House, an ensemble devoted to the performance of experimental music that formed in 1995. His chapter examines different varieties of notation in experimental music from 1951 - 2007, and the corresponding actions that the performer must take to realize each score. Since Thomas is a pianist, all but one of the examples given in this chapter are works composed specifically for piano, which can be less helpful for performers of other instruments.

The most obvious explanation for the lack of critical writing from performers thus far is that many experimental composers have been active in performing their own music, as well as the music of their peers. This was an especially prevalent occurrence between 1950-1975, with composers such as John Cage, Christian Wolff, Robert Ashley, Pauline Oliveros and Alvin Lucier regularly participating in performances of each other's work[14]. Michael Nyman, in his assessment of experimental music up until 1974, observed that "Significantly only Tilbury and (in the earlier part of his career) Tudor[15]… are strictly performers only; all the others are composers who took up performance – perhaps to protect

[14] Refer to Alvin Lucier's *Music 109* for extensive accounts of composers performing their own work during this time.
[15] In this quotation, Nyman is referring to pianists John Tilbury and David Tudor.

their scores from the misunderstandings their very openness may encourage, or because they were attracted by the freedoms they allowed, or simply because the most direct way of realizing their performance-proposals was to realize them themselves."[16] All of the aforementioned authors of the recent texts on experimental music – Jennie Gottschalk, James Saunders, John Lely, G. Douglas Barrett, among others, also perform their work and the work of other composers frequently -- Saunders, with the ensemble Apartment House, Barrett as a guest performer with Object Collection in New York, and Lely with the experimental music series *Music We'd Like to Hear* in London.

Although many composers are active in the performance of experimental music today, performances without the composers present are increasing. By nature, experimental music has adopted a myriad of notational systems and practices to carry out the distinct processes contained therein. As many performers approach experimental music for the first time, explanations of performance practice and authenticity provide important information to make the novice a more informed performer, leading to more successful performances of this uniquely difficult music.

[16] Nyman, p22.

Authenticity – A Troublesome and Inevitable Term

As it applies to the performance of music, authenticity can be defined as "the objective of performing a work in accordance with the composer's believed intentions, or as other musicians performed it during his or her lifetime, or using the instruments and practices known to the composer."[17] In modern dictionaries (applicable to a variety of situations), it can be defined as "conforming to an original so as to reproduce essential features; not false or imitation; true to one's own personality, spirit or character"[18]. In her article, "The Meaning of Authenticity and the Early Music Movement: A Historical Review", musicologist Dorottya Fabian points out that "In the press, the word 'authentic' began to be used more regularly from the 1960's onward, indicating that the concern with performance style had reached a more public level of awareness."[19] One can apply this observation to all genres of western art music, experimental music notwithstanding. Increasing discussions on the concept of authenticity have seemingly brought about feelings on contention and anxiety amongst scholarly writers. The *Oxford Companion to Music*'s entry on "authenticity" states that the

[17] White, Bryan, "authenticity", *The Oxford Companion to Music, Ed. Alison Latham, Oxford Music Online,* Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e494>.
[18] "Authentic," Merriam-Webster.com, Merriam-Webster, n.d, Web, 22 Apr. 2017.
[19] Fabian, Dorottya, "The Meaning of Authenticity and The Early Music Movement: A Historical Review", *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2001, pp. 159-160.

term is “contentious and ill defined”[20], further elaborating, “The gap that exists between a strict dictionary definition of authenticity, with its connotations of ‘genuine’ and ‘original’, and the difficulties of realizing this ideal, have left many scholars and performers to reject the term in favor of ‘historically informed’, ‘historically aware’…”[21] In his writing, famed musicologist Putnam Aldrich has concluded that “true authenticity is obviously a chimera”[22], while equally significant musicologist Donald Grout has written that “an ideal performance is one that perfectly realizes the composer’s intentions”[23], alluding that such an ideal can be attained.

Recent texts concerning experimental music contain equally opposing viewpoints of authenticity. Pianist Philip Thomas has stated strong opposition to the concept, arguing that it has no place in the performance practice of experimental music: “I would argue that within experimental music, the score should not only be sufficient for all that the performer needs but should rule out external opposing factors such as matters of style and authenticity.”[24] Composer and performer G. Douglas Barrett postulates in his writing that the concept of authenticity has been passed on to the experimental tradition by default, in the lineage of Western art music[25].

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[20] White, Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Fabian, p159.
[23] Fabian, p158.
[24] Thomas, Philip and James Saunders, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Experimental Music, Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2009, p359.*
[25] See page 20 of Barrett’s book *After Sound: Towards a Critical Music.*

The concept of authenticity in any form of Western art music is inescapable. A performance of a work can either be aligned with the composer's intention and instructions on the page, or misaligned. In our current artistic society, performances of notated music are critiqued based on their adherence to these intentions and instructions. One can infer that Thomas' statements are also correct because the absence of style or concern for intentions unspecified in the score is in itself an interpretational stance, and thus connected to a greater authenticity.

Experimental scores use diverse methods of notation in combination with unique processes to fulfill a series of musical experiments. How does the concept of authenticity connect to the various processes contained in experimental music? How can authenticity be defined so that performers, whether well-versed or inexperienced, can approach the performance practice of experimental music with confidence and a well-informed sense of creativity and purpose?

Indeterminacy and Contingent Processes

"Whereas if I play music which doesn't have any such requirement, where I'm called upon to make actions, especially if the actions are undetermined as to their content, or at least let's say undetermined as to what they're going to produce, then I feel like I'm alive in every part of my consciousness."

- David Tudor[26]

A discourse on the performance practice of experimental music is remiss without an examination of the role of indeterminacy. In experimental music, this term is ubiquitously used to quantify the independent variables that exist within the experiment of each score. John Cage defined indeterminacy as "…the ability of a piece to be performed in substantially different ways."[27] Swiss composer Manfred Werder stated that "Indeterminacy has become an artistic strategy, and the resultant practice of producing musical situations (encounters referring rather to sound) reflects these efforts of the potentiality of the score."[28] Experiments in any medium contain both fixed variables (that which is known) and independent variables (that which is unknown, to be examined). In a literal sense, indeterminacy refers to that which is "not definitely or precisely determined or fixed, not known in advance, not leading to a definite end or result"[29]. In a musical tradition centered upon the concept of experimentation, it is critical that unknown or undefined compositional elements (independent variables) exist within a piece for its processes to be considered experimental.

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[26] Tudor, David, and John Cage. "O-Ton Im Interview", *David Tudor – Music for piano,* Edition RZ: ed.RZ 1018-19, 2007, CD.

[27] Pritchett, James, "The Music of John Cage", *Music in the 20th Century*, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

[28] Gottschalk, p9.

[29] "Indeterminate", *Merriam-Webster.com*, Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 27 Mar. 2017.

When discussing indeterminacy as a defining feature of experimental music, Jennie Gottschalk states that: “A piece of music is subject to the technique of the performer(s), their work with the piece, the properties of the instrument, the performance space, the attentiveness of the audience, and more. All of these factors influence the outcome, regardless of the style of music. All that is still true of indeterminate works, but what sets them apart is the openness of the end result.”[30] Indeterminate compositional elements have the potential to make it difficult to for the listener (audience member or one studying a recording) to measure the fidelity of performance in relation to the score. The performers may not simultaneously arrive at the “end of the piece”, or follow the same trajectory altogether. In his overview of experimental music notation, Michael Nyman observes that “A score may no longer represent sounds by means of the specialized symbols we call musical notation…”[31] If authenticity in performance practice can be defined as performances in alignment with a composer’s intentions, then it is imperative in experimental music, where the results may be unknown, that performers closely examine the scope of these intentions.

Consider the example of Christian Wolff’s composition *For 1, 2 or 3 People*, composed in 1964 (see Figure 3, page 17). This composition features a considerable degree of indeterminacy as well as a hybrid system of graphic, numeric and traditional notational. Wolff’s performance instructions are succinctly expressed in the score:

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[30] Gottschalk, pp8-9.
[31] Nyman, pp3-4.

> *Play all that is notated on the page, in any convenient sequence, not repeating anything… Players can use any ways of making sounds… One, two or three people can play. If one plays alone, he must realize all 'open coordinations' (lines with notes at only one end) to provide something to coordinate with; or, sometimes, he may use sounds from the environment… If two or three play, the material on a page should be distributed between them, in any way (in VII a distribution for two players is indicated); but no material marked off for one player should be played by another… Coordination, then, for each player can be either with his own material (as if he were playing alone)… or with whatever sound(s) he hears next from another player (or both).* [32]

Prior to examining Wolff's unique notation or contemplating the theoretical aspects of the composition, it is important for the performer to identify the direct, literal process existent within the work – what is this composition asking the performer to do? The answer can be found in the first sentence of the instructions: "Play all that is notated on the page, in any convenient sequence, not repeating anything."[33] Wolff's basic instruction in this sentence clearly outlines the dichotomy between fixed elements and indeterminate elements that comprise this composition. The gestures are fixed in their existence on the page, yet the order and context in which they are performed is an indeterminate element in the composition.

[32] Wolff, Christian, *For 1, 2 or 3 People*, New York: C.F. Peters Corp., 1964, print.
[33] Ibid.

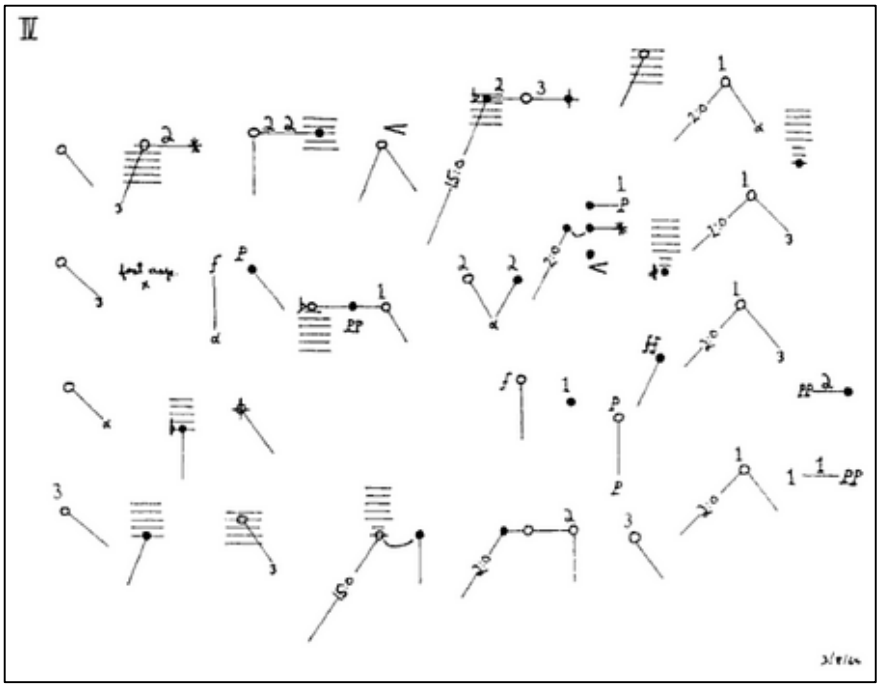

Figure 3: *For 1, 2, or 3 People, Christian Wolff*

It is clear that the only fixed elements in *For 1, 2 or 3 People* are the gestures printed on the page, and the need for all of them to sound at one point in the performance. The number of performers who may participate in a single performance, while no more than 3, is variable. The instrumentation is completely indeterminate. While Wolff's notation may loosely suggest register, the pitch material and harmonies that may ensue are indeterminate. Wolff has employed these elements together in his composition to create an environment wherein the performers focus primarily on the acts of listening, reacting, and coordinating sounds with each other and their environment.

Humorously, it has been recounted in several texts[34] that Wolff composed pieces such as *For 1, 2 or 3 People* as a reaction to his colleague, pianist and composer David Tudor's propensity to preordain indeterminate scores in advance of a performance. Wolff states that in composing the piece he aimed for "…a shift of focus to performance, somewhere in between improvisation and following prescriptions."[35] Authenticity in the context of *For 1, 2 or 3 People* is directly linked to this intention and shift of focus -- a staunch commitment to dwelling in a reactionary state. In a performance of this work, sounds are heard – sometimes singular, sometimes plural. These sounds are not the nexus of the work, however; it is the intention and environment with which they are made. This performance environment can certainly lead the performer(s) to uncomfortable places. Consider the possibility of an impasse, a certainty if one performs the piece often enough. Performers wait for each other to perform a gesture, stuck in a "catch 22"; a single performer waits to coordinate a gesture with a sound from her environment, yet it remains silent and still. Maintaining a sense of fidelity to the score's instructions assures that the performer will allow for these silent, uncomfortable moments to occur along with the raucous, reactive and coordinative ones.

Christian Wolff has referred to these states in his writing as "contingent processes" or "contingent pieces". In explaining the origin and necessity of this

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[34] Accounts can be found in *Cues: Writings & Conversations* by Christian Wolff, *Music 109* by Alvin Lucier, and *Experimental Music: Cage & Beyond* by Michael Nyman.
[35] Wolff, Christian and James Saunders, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Experimental Music,* Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2009, p359.

process, he explains, "…I believe they allow the possibility of a salutary kind of detachment, or a focus on each moment and sounds without too much anxiety about being expressive (or making continuities along straight lines, or narrative – beginning, middle and end, climaxes, etc.)."[36] In *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, Michael Nyman places scores such as *For 1 2 or 3 People* in the compositional category of "contextual processes", meaning scores which "…are concerned with actions dependent on unpredictable conditions and on variables which arise from the musical continuity."[37] Jennie Gottschalk discusses this process as the feature of *change*, stating that "In experimental music, real change occurs in the realm of human thought and experience. The experimentalist is not trying to change the musical world, but to change the thinking of one or more listeners during – and possibly after – the performance."[38] All three of these statements describe a non-linear shift of focus to sounds that occur in the present moment. Traditionally composed scores exist in the present, yet also exist simultaneously with the past and future moments on the page, ripe for speculation and anticipation. As analytical psychologist Carl Jung stated, "The matter of interest seems to be the configuration formed by chance events in the moment of observation, and not at all the hypothetical reasons that seemingly account for the coincidence."[39]

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[36] Ibid, p368.
[37] Nyman, p6.
[38] Gottschalk, p2.
[39] Nyman, p9.

In his book *Music 109*, Alvin Lucier gives several accounts of performing this work in the chapter "Rose Art Museum". He states,

> *When I play this work I mark up my score to remind myself what the coordinations are as well as what sounds to make. I don't want to make mistakes. I don't want to appear incompetent. As you wait for something to happen, you're attentive in a way that you're not in any other circumstance. It's not like jazz where you have to think fast, or orchestral playing where you follow a conductor. It's a different social situation: you playing and listening for another sound which may be a cue for you to make a sound, which in turn may be a cue for a third player.*[40]

He then goes on to iterate that "It's not the randomness or indeterminacy causing performance practice problems, it's the feeling of two or three players coordinating and being…attentive and responsive to each other."[41]

When he mentions "making a mistake", Lucier is not referring to the presence of a wrong pitch or inappropriate dynamic. He is referring to anything that encumbers the contingent process, and to a lack of fidelity to that process. For example, in an unfaithful performance would contain an alteration of the parameters of the work, such as the context for which an entrance may occur, thereby orchestrating the piece to their whims while the audience, even other performers, may remain unaware. Disengagement from a heightened state of attentiveness unravels the process and thereby the social situation and specific context that Wolff intended to create. He states, "…one cannot just go through the motions or play the notes, you must engage in the forthright mental

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[40] Lucier, Alvin. *Music 109*, Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2012, p49.
[41] Lucier, p50.

processes that occur simultaneously with the certain discipline to allow both of these things to coexist in one's brain at the time of performance."[42] An authentic performance of *For 1, 2 or 3 People* is directly linked to the performers' fidelity to the instructions in the score, as well as fidelity to maintaining focus on the present moment in performance.

[42] Wolff, Christian, *Cues,* Köln: MusikTexte, 1998, p52.

Social Enactment

"The performer behaves in a situation partly determined by the composer, partly by himself, partly by ambient conditions. There is an elegant consistency to the viewpoint which allows each of these elements to manifest its own nature, without imbalance, without opposition."
- George Brecht[43]

In their discourse on experimental music, both Nyman and Gottschalk have given credence to the presence of social enactments in various scores. Nyman coined the term 'people processes', stating that "These are processes which allow the performers to move through given or suggested material, each at his own speed."[44] Gottschalk, in a chapter discussing musical interaction, observes that "In a democratic musical state…there are no hierarchical structures (hence no leaders or followers, no agreed compositions, conductors….)… only the appreciation of a collective flux and the demands of its unknowable genetic structure."[45] One of the lexical definitions on authenticity is "true to one's own personality, spirit or character"[46]. In concordance with this, authenticity in experimental music is directly linked to an allowance for, and exploration of, the musical representation of social enactments.

In his recollections, Lucier also makes an important observation about the title of *For 1, 2 or 3 People*: "The first thing you notice about *For 1, 2 or 3 People* is the title. Why did he use the word 'people' and not 'players' or 'performers'? It

[43] Brecht, George and John Lely*, Word Events,* New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012, p74.
[44] Nyman, p6.
[45] Gottschalk, p193.
[46] "Authentic", Merriam-Webster.com, Merriam-Webster, n.d, Web.

is because the piece is for anybody to play, amateurs as well as professionals."[47] Wolf has mentioned on several occasions that many of his works were composed with a broad concept of who the performer(s) might be – artists, musicians of any background, poets, students, audience members, etc: "another thing to keep in mind is that the contingent pieces were so made in large part so they could be played by non-professionals… Because the contingent music involved new notations, you could say that everyone, pros and amateurs, sometimes even non-musicians, started off from the same place, at the same level."[48]

The word 'people' is also significant because contingent processes[49] are intrinsically linked to human interaction. One can certainly argue that most music involves varying degrees of human interaction, as music itself is a form of human expression. However, contingent processes in experimental music are unique in the way that they use indeterminacy and varied notational systems to express aspects of social relationships, those that have not been traditionally expressed in a musical sense.

For 1, 2 or 3 People has created a democratic musical environment free from hierarchy. In a performance given by two people, each is tasked equally; performers must rely on each other for sonic cues. There could be moments where one holds the other in the balance, waiting purposefully to make a sound that will then trigger the other's sound. In the course of the performance, this

[47] Lucier, p46.
[48] Wolff, Christian, and James Saunders, p363.
[49] See discussion of contingent processes on pages 19-20.

balance will shift; both performers will inevitably experience the roles of initiator and reactor.

There are experimental scores that move from an established communal democracy into the exploration of different co-existential states. *Dedekind Duos* (2003), a recent composition by Antoine Beuger[50], uses notation and instruction to highlight the possible relationships of two performers occupying the same physical and temporal space.

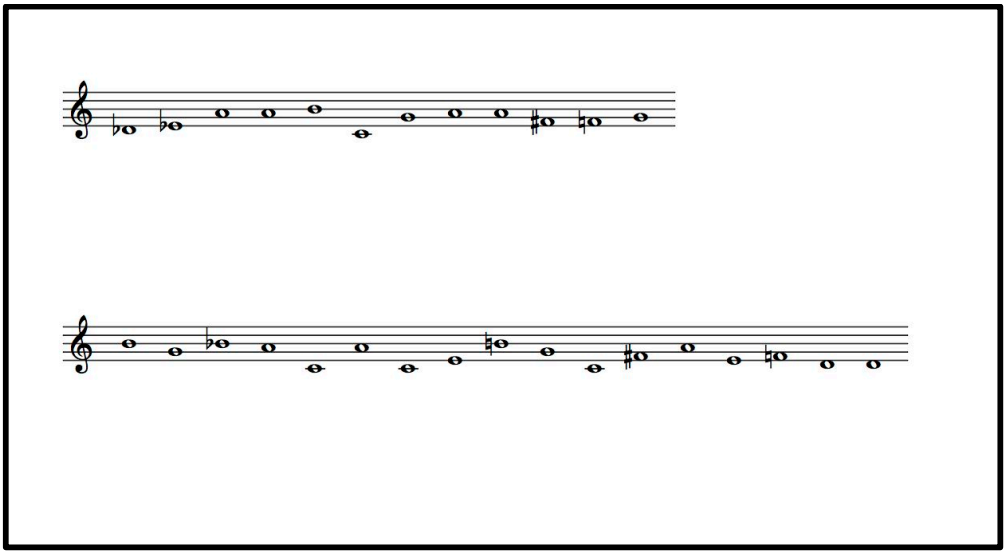

Figure 4: *Dedekind Duos*, *Antoine Beuger, page 5*

The image shown above is an example of one page of the score. The entire composition is fifty pages, each containing two lines, one for each

[50] Antoine Beuger is a flutist, composer, and co-founder of Wandelweiser, an experimental music collective based in Dusseldorf, Germany. For more information, see www.wandelweiser.de.

performer. A performance may consist of a single page, several pages, or all fifty pages. Beuger's instructions are succinct:

> *parts: independent from each other, listening to each other*
> *tones: very quiet; long to very long*
> *between the sounds: time (to breath or (much) longer)*
> *pitches: denote pitch zones (e.g. e=somewhere between f and e flat)*
> *the tones may be played in any octave*[51]

The score contains three fixed elements – the rests must be at minimum the length of one breath, the performers must always be independent from each other, and the dynamics must be "very quiet". *Dedekind Duos*, like *For 1, 2 or 3 People,* creates an interdependent, contingent performance environment. The instructions "independent from each other, listening to each other" are the most critical to realizing the work. The word "listening" denotes a continual state of awareness between performers; this state of awareness theoretically allows them to explore different states of togetherness. Independence can denote a state of separate-ness, but also a reactionary state, or even an aleatoric state of harmony, where performers happen to move together or begin/end their notes simultaneously.

In the spring and summer of 2010, I performed this piece several times while on tour with Canadian composer/violinist Eric KM Clark throughout the United States and Europe. Even if we were repeatedly performing the same selection of pages, each performance would be markedly different from the last. The state of awareness created by the piece allowed both of us to shift

[51] Beuger, Antoine, *Dedekind Duos*, Dusseldorf: Edition Wandelweiser, 2003.

momentarily between the varying states of togetherness. There would be moments, sometimes entire pages, of simultaneity (almost unavoidable if one is performing the piece with someone that they collaborate with often), followed by periods where both of us were following drastically different tempos, and so on. Before a performance, it was never discussed how we would interpret the pages - we would simply review Beuger's instructions independently.

There is a difference between allowing different states to occur and orchestrating their occurrence in a performance. Preordaining a performance of this piece in any way would undermine its exploratory intention; if one already knows the outcome of the experiment, the sounds that can occur, it cannot be categorized as such.

In an article discussing *Dedekind Duos*, Beuger coins the term "with-ness" to describe the work:

> *Just as in life not every relation of two people is a love relationship (eg. two people working together, two people being friends or sharing a train compartment, etc.), in music not every duo is automatically reflecting the intrinsic or ontological structure of 'two', which is disjunction. In these cases it might be more appropriate to speak about 'with-ness', the basic experience being with someone else, not being separated from someone else, as in a love situation. Probably most duo music is doing just that: two people being/playing together for a while.* [52]

Beuger is clearly seeking to replicate a specific social environment in this piece as described in the quote above. In performing *Dedekind Duos*, performers literally embody the lexical definition of *authenticity* -- "true to one's own

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[52] Beuger, Antoine, and James Saunders, "Antoine Beuger", *The Ashgate Companion to Experimental Music,* Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009, p241.

personality, spirit or character"[53]; they have only to be themselves, together in the space, listening and creating sound at will.

The concept of "with-ness" can be explored in a variety of different ways. *Real Hard Work*, composed by James Klopfleisch in 2013 (see Figure 5, page 28), uses both social disjunction and simultaneity to imitate and provide commentary on an everyday social occurrence. Akin to *Dedekind Duos*, the score contains succinct text instructions to guide the performers:

> *Find and collect repetitious, non-verbal actions associated with any type of work or labor. Performer 1 – choose between 2 and 4 actions; Performer 2 – choose between 3 and 6 actions; Performer 3 – choose between 5 and 10 actions. During each allotted time frame, perform only one of your actions. Change your action for each new time frame, using (about) half of your actions between 0:00-4:00 and (about) the other half between 5:00-9:00. Perform each action in a natural manner, un-stylized, unaltered.*[54]

The page of the score with timings for all performers is laid out like a grid. The structure of the piece is visibly apparent: a miniature model of the 9-hour work day, consolidated into 9 minutes. On the surface this is humorous, especially punctuated with the following instructions on the last page: "The seating of performers should somewhat resemble a factory. Snacks may be healthy, but that is not a necessary condition."[55]

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[53] "Authentic", Merriam-Webster.com, Merriam-Webster, n.d, Web.
[54] Klopfleisch, James, *Real Hard Work*, 2013, np.
[55] Ibid.

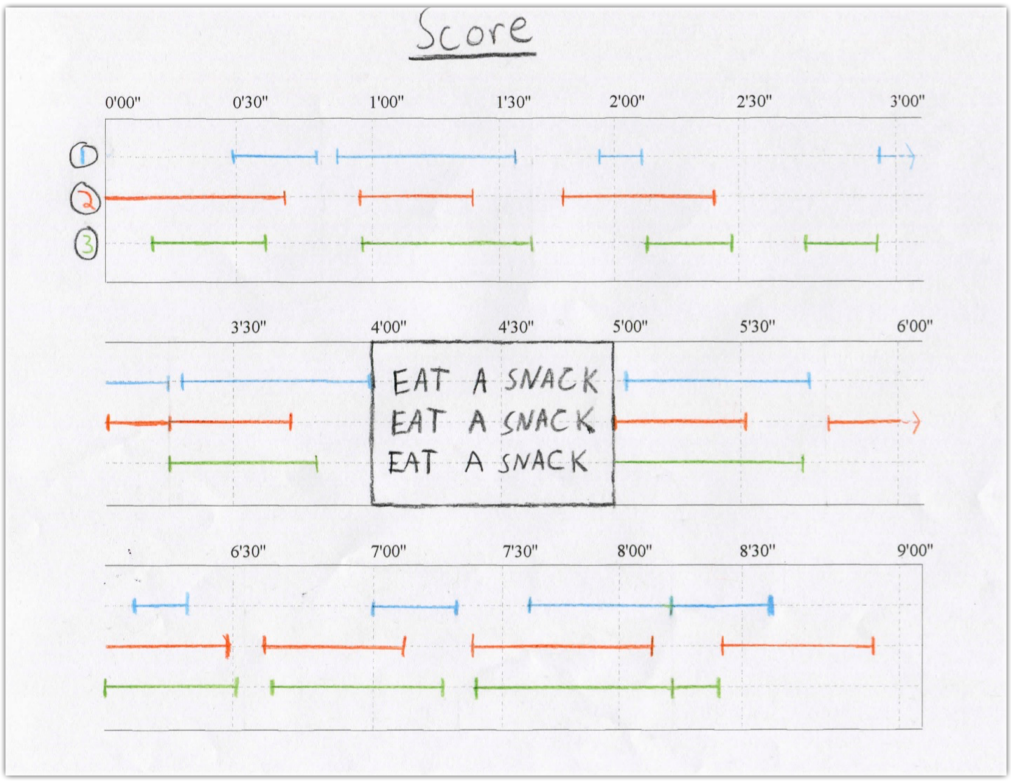

Figure 5: *Real Hard Work, James Klopfleisch*

In a recent interview, the composer spoke to his usage of this commonly known structure: “I also am fascinated by found structure, and it seems to me the industrial work day is a more relatable form of activity than anything else to us, especially classical forms of music. Plus, you can never really get away from structure, so why not use the most common form and flip it on its head? It seemed funny to me at the time.”[56] Looking past the humor, a realization of this piece provides interesting social commentary as well as difficulty for the performer in establishing a precise definition of the term “work”. Performers are

[56] Klopfleisch, James, personal interview, April 18, 2017.

to select actions that, in their purview, are associated with labor or work. For example, in its first performance on April 13, 2014 in Los Angeles at the wulf., an experimental music performance space, composer/performer Colin Wambsgans chose chopping garlic as one of his actions. This action would never be considered labor for those who use time in the kitchen as relaxation or meditation, denying some performers the opportunity of producing an exact replica of Wambsgans' performance by another person who would not consider that action "work." Composer Eldritch Priest stated in his writing on experimental performance practice that, "rather than try to efface the ego and ascend to a universal-immersive position outside the realm of discourse reality…the act of radical inclusion entails the matter of subjectivity."[57] In *Real Hard Work*, the concept of labor, hard work, is entirely subjective; the juxtapositions of these personal decisions against others presents a clear commentary on the concept of work and labor as illustrated by people of varying age, status and class. The performer must choose actions that they truly believe to be hard work, without regard to the sonic or dramatic quotient that the actions contain, or to the choices of the other two performers.

From a sonic perspective, Klopfleish incorporated the concepts of "with-ness" and personal choice to highlight the complex, unintentional polyrhythms that can arise from everyday activities. He states:

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[57] Priest, Eldritch, *Boring, Formless Nonsense*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, p61.

> *I consider any repetitious action a form of natural rhythm; not only that, it often seems more interesting to me (because of the small variations) than intentional and specific rhythms. If you were to transcribe them, they would be extremely complicated - quintuplets, septuplets, AND (sic) you do them without even thinking about it! That really excites me. I like to bring these rhythms out by pairing them up. If you have several actions, which would not necessarily but may go together in the same context, and you put them on stage, an audience is more likely to listen and hear the inherent rhythm.*[58]

Actions should not be dramatized. The simple act of "work" illuminates inherent structures, sounds and rhythms. As with *Dedekind Duos*, an authentic performance of this work is thoroughly entwined with the concept of being true to one's own character and personality in the interpretative choices that are made when performing an experimental score.

[58] Klopfleisch, Ibid.

Failure

"Such a composer would be a composer of human rather than musical situations (there is much to be discussed here: too much). This means devising a human notation rather than a musical one; that is to say, placing more emphasis on the human aspect of notations."
– Cornelius Cardew[59]

Throughout the tradition of experimental music, many scores involve "failure processes" – those that require the performer to make mistakes in order to carry out the realization of a larger experiment or process. In traditional Western classical instrumental performance practice, a skilled performer avoids or de-emphasizes mistakes (as is customary for experts in almost any craft or tradition). Acting against the instinct of avoidance can prove to be challenging; the performer must renegotiate and redefine the concept of failure to authentically realize these works.

A recent example, Laura Steenberge's 2010 composition *Sheep,* written for violin and flute, actively incorporates mistakes into its compositional process.

[59] Cardew, Cornelius, "Notation: Interpretation, Etc.", *Tempo*, no. 58, 1961, p21.

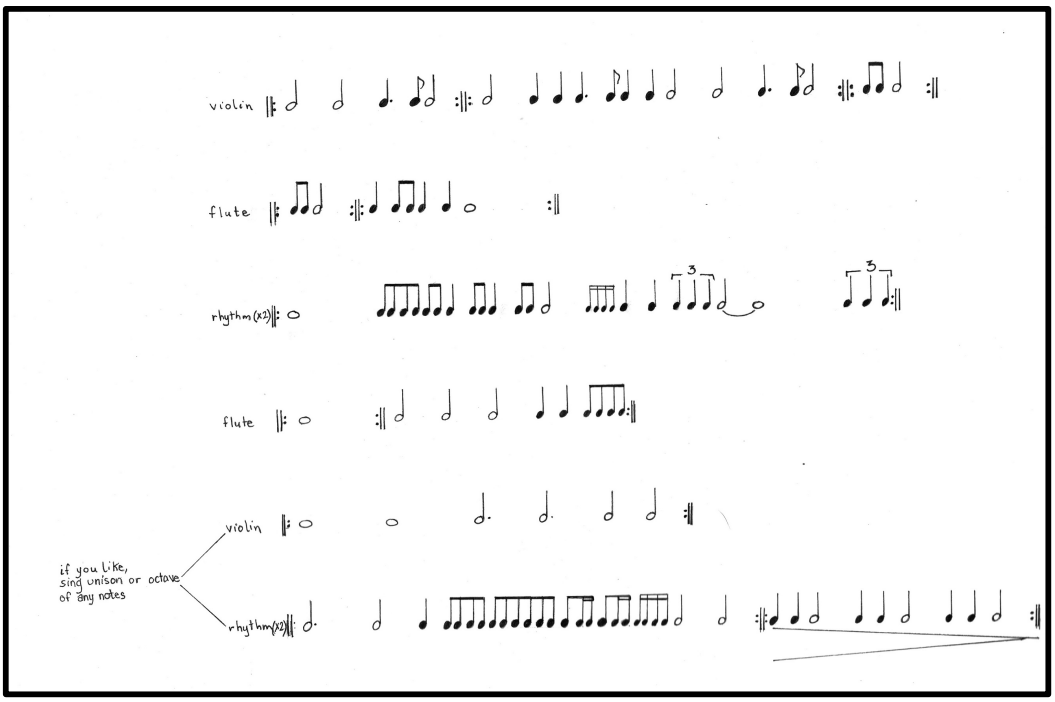

Figure 6: *Sheep, Laura Steenberge*

1	violin	The violin leads. Violin spontaneously selects notes to play in the rhythms designated. Number of repeats is flexible. Flute does any of the following, switching freely: Play in delayed-unison with violin- Flute comes in on a pitch as soon as possible after violin plays it, as though the two are playing in unison. If the flute plays a different pitch from the violin, do not adjust (but may adjust tuning if desired). Continue to hold a note beyond its duration- i.e. turn a quarter note into a whole note. Be silent.
2	flute	The flute leads. With roles reversed, instructions are the same as above.
3	rhythm	Neither instrument leads. Rhythmic unison, pitches chosen independently. Repeat only one time.
4	flute	Flute leads as before.
5	violin	Violin leads as before. In addition, the violinist can sing a unison or 8va equivalent of any notes he plays.
6	rhythm	As before. Violinist may sing.

Figure 6: *Sheep, Laura Steenberge,* performance instructions

There are two contrasting, alternating sections in this piece – one where performers try to instantaneously guess the other's pitch, and one where pitch is free and the performers play in rhythmic unison. As she points out in the instructions, "if the flute plays a different pitch from the violin, do not adjust (but may adjust tuning if desired)."[60] This implies that the act of making a mistake (guessing the wrong pitch) is integral to the overall process of the piece. The mistakes that can occur in the 'flute' or 'violin' sections serve to create a unique harmonic structure that differentiates between it and the 'rhythm' sections. They also create a tentative social environment that clarifies the section's outlined hierarchy. In her writing, Steenberge has made the following statements about the process of this composition:

> *It may be harder to match pitches with instruments than with voice. Letting go of the fear of playing the wrong note. Letting the instrument play melodies with little control of the melodic content. What influences the melodic decisions? A composite of all the years of notes ever played on the instrument? One's first childhood impressions of melody? The melodic contours of the culture's folk music? The Bach, Mozart, Chopin that was played as a young student of music? Randomness? A structure emerges from the changing of leadership from violin to flute to rhythm, etc., intended to create barely enough intentionality to seem like a piece or a song and not an improvisation.* [61]

Based on these statements, one can deduce that the overall process of this piece is threefold: to prove (or disprove) that "It may be harder to match

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[60] Steenberge, Laura, *Sheep*, (musical score, 2010), http://laurasteenbergeportfolio.wordpress.com/sheep/.
[61] Steenberge, Laura, *Notes*, <http://laurasteenbergeportfolio.wordpress.com/cd-information/>

pitches with instruments than with voice"[62], to explore the notion of structure based solely on varying musical hierarchies, and to explore the correlation to different performers' musical training and their melodic preferences when given the opportunity to improvise melodically. Unintentional mistakes (incorrectly guessed pitches) that performers may make are integral to this threefold process. They may or may not occur in a performance, however the performer must allow for them to exist.

In contrast, Cornelius Cardew's *Volo Solo* (1970) is a composition that is concerned with the sounds that result from the performer investigating their own physical limitations.

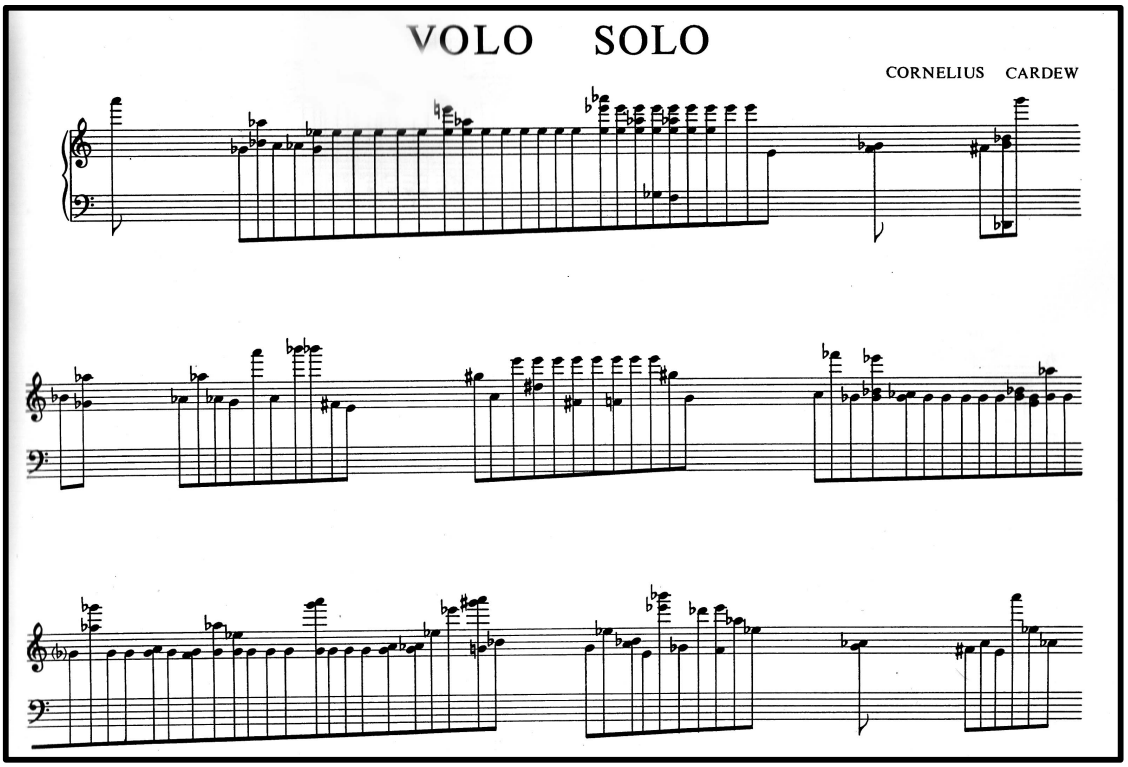

Figure 7: *Volo Solo, Cornelius Cardew*

[62] Ibid.

The instructions that accompany the score state the following: “The aim is to play as many of the written notes as possible, and to play them as fast as physically possible. The instrument should seem to be breaking apart.”[63] While it is unclear what the sound of an instrument “breaking apart” should be, one can infer that it involves the addition (or subtraction) of notes on the pages of the score. A lack of control is thus equated with a lack of precision. *Volo Solo* demands that the performer be made vulnerable via the public display of the limitations of their technical training. The exploration of these limitations is an entirely personal pursuit. Theoretically, two individual instrumentalists that perform *Volo Solo* could arrive at radically different tempi at which they “fall apart” – one considerably faster than the other. Cardew has worded the instructions to carefully illustrate this point, as he includes the phrase “breaking apart” yet does not include any indication of a performance tempo at which this may occur. In his article “On the Role of Instructions in the Interpretation of Indeterminate Music”, Cardew states that “… one must consider the implications in this piece of the words ‘as fast as possible’… the variation that is desired is that which results from the human (not the superhuman) attempt at uniformity.”[64] The composer uses the term “uniformity” in this context to refer to the act of maintaining the feeling of “breaking apart” throughout the entirety of the performance. He then goes on to state, “The notion of performing excessively

[63] Cardew, Cornelius, *Volo Solo*, London: Edition Peters, 1965.
[64] Cardew, Cornelius. *Treatise handbook*, New York: C.F. Peters Corp., 1971, vx.

fast is a relative one: an amateur's fast will be relatively slow, therefore slowness is not something alien to the piece." [65]

It is of interest that Cardew uses the term "amateur" when discussing the possibility for varied performance tempi, as the term stands contradictory to the subtitle of the composition – *for a virtuoso performer on any instrument*.

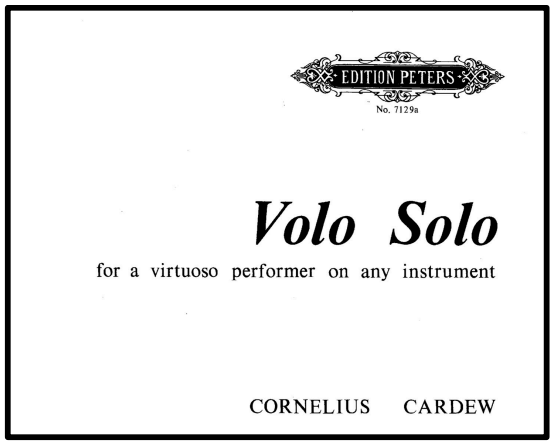

Figure 8: *Volo Solo, Cornelius Cardew, title page*

The fact that Cardew uses both the words *virtuoso* and *amateur* when discussing the performance of *Volo Solo* implies that an amateur musician could *be* a virtuoso in the context of this composition. In his *Treatise handbook*, Cardew stated that one who performs *Volo Solo* would "… have to be something of a mental virtuoso."[66] This syntactical contradiction further emphasizes what the composer values most – the action of reaching one's limitations, of maintaining a state of uncontrollable momentum and force. In recent discourse, Gottschalk notes that, "For a performer to transcend these demands would be to miss the

[65] Ibid, xiv.
[66] Ibid, xiv.

point. The drive and substance of the work lies at the point of physical encounter."[67] Cardew's intention to include amateurs into his performer base mirrors that of Christian Wolff's in composing *For 1, 2 or 3 People*, a score whose processes also put significant value on socio-musical interaction as opposed to traditional notions of technical virtuosity.

An authentic performance of a work involving physical limitations, and by association failure processes, must involve a commitment by the performer to carry out such processes despite any residual feelings of self-consciousness, doubt or insecurity. The sonic result of reaching one's breaking point might be shocking to both the performer and the listener, yet they must persist in maintaining the physical feeling (and sound) until the piece is finished.

In the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, it is stated that a virtuoso "…has always been prized not only for his rarity but also for his ability to widen the technical and expressive boundaries of his art."[68] Failure processes, over time, whether they intend to or not, contribute to the expansion of the technical boundaries of music. If one were to perform *Volo Solo* every day for one month, the point at which they feel that the instrument is "breaking apart" would shift along with their growing technical capability and memory of the notes and fingerings that lie ahead. Performers must consider that authenticity in this instance is not a formula or a fixed point. The mindset and physicality must be

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[67] Gottschalk, p77.
[68] Jander, Owen, "Virtuoso", *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* Oxford University Press: <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/29502).

approached anew with each performance to accurately carry out the process that Cardew intended.

Impossibility

"Self -exploration, and articulating. Finally, what the alchemist did do, what we see of all their elaborate diagrams, was to finally articulate in a way the course of human exploration, a process which then articulates the internal and almost spiritual like evolution of the species, which is like me as a species."
-Charlemagne Palestine[69]

There are scores that move beyond the concept of the failure process into the realm of impossible processes. These can be literally defined as processes which require the performer to realize that which is seemingly physically or mentally impossible.

Robert Ashley's *The Entrance* (1965-6) is a text score that is equal parts humor, impossibility and philosophical musing. The score consists of four sections: *Procedure, Conditions*, *Postscript* and *Eight Solutions Out of a Numberless Variety*. The first section (see Figure 8.1, page 38), *Procedure*, contains straightforward instructions directing the performer to arrange stacks of pennies, organized by heads or tails, and place them on the black and white keys of a double manual electric organ in a specific fashion. The second section, Conditions (see Figures 8.1 and 8.2, pages 38-39), addresses practical concerns that may occur when performing the piece.

[69] Palestine, Charlemagne and Walter Zimmerman, *Desert Plants Desert Plants: 23 Conversations with American Musicians*, (book), <http://home.snafu.de/walterz/bibliographie.html#A_B%DCCHER__BOOKS>.

The Entrance *Robert Ashley*

for two-manual electric organ

for Larry Leitch

Make thirty-six equal stacks of pennies; the number of pennies per stack is that minimum number that will cause any key on either manual to be activated. Eighteen stacks should be heads-up; the remaining eighteen, tails-up.

Procedure

Begin by placing one 'heads' stack on any key; then, place a 'tails' stack on the corresponding key of the other manual.
... thereafter:

1. Place a stack, of either denomination, immediately next to (chromatically), or among, the stack(s) of the opposite denomination; thus, producing a display in which all of the 'heads', but one – the most recently placed stack – (or all of the 'tails', but one) are on one manual, while the most recently placed 'heads' stack (or, 'tails' stack) is on the opposite manual.
2. Then, one at a time, move the stacks that were previously on the keyboard to their respective opposite manuals; thus, producing a display in which all of the 'heads' are on the one manual, while all of the 'tails' are on the other manual.
3. Continue in this manner (repeating items 1 and 2 alternately) until all of the stacks are on the keyboard.

... when all of the stacks are on the keyboard in a uniform display, and thereafter:

4. Remove any single stack, taking from that stack one penny, which will represent that stack thereafter. Invert that penny so that its denomination is opposite to that of the stack it represents and place it on the key from which the stack was removed; thus, producing a display in which all of the 'heads', but one (or all of the 'tails', but one) are on one manual, while all of the stacks or pennies of the opposite denomination are on the other manual.
5. Then, one at a time, move all of the stacks or pennies, except the most recently placed one, to their respective opposite manuals; thus, producing a display in which all of the 'heads' are on one manual, while all of the 'tails' are on the other manual.
6. Continue in this manner (repeating items 4 and 5 alternately) until all of the stacks have been replaced, on the keyboard, by single pennies.

Conditions

For some instruments, the standard stack of pennies will fully depress some keys, while other keys will be only partially or intermittently activated. In the process of placing the stacks on the keys, the point, of course, is to allow the weight of the stack to activate the key. Thus, it is contrary to the idea of the composition to depress a key before placing a stack on it.

Figure 9: *The Entrance, Robert Ashley*

In the process of moving stacks from one manual to the other (items 2 and 5) the 'intervals' described by the moves are irrelevant. The objective is always to 'fill' the displays chromatically.

The performance should be considered as one continuous action at a natural pace – a pace that may vary with the physical complexity of the situation; that is, caution should be exercised to avoid spilling the stacks. If a stack is spilled, it should be reassembled before proceeding.

Voicing is optional, except that added-octave distinctions between the two manuals should be avoided.

The dynamic level is optional, except that it should be unchanging for any one performance.

Postscript

What form should that work take?

Is it to be performed?

For whom is it to be performed?

Is the notion of presenting the work in a continuous span of time implicit in the idea of the composition?

What is the relationship between the work of producing the sounds and the sound world created by the composition?

Is the work more important than the sounds, or vice versa, or neither?

Can the sound world created by the composition be discovered without carrying out the work of producing the sounds?

How shall we prepare for a production of *The Entrance*?

What is the attitude of the person doing the work?

What is the relationship between the composition (sound and work) and persons who might hear the sound or observe the work and who may or may not be performing the work?

How shall we proceed?

Figure 9: *The Entrance, Robert Ashley, continued*

The first two sections of the piece give the performer the practical information that is necessary to perform the piece. Stacks of pennies are to be made and arranged. The stacks are placed on the manual chromatically, then

systematically removed and replaced with a single penny, until the entire keyboard has a single penny resting on each key. Stacks of pennies that are knocked over in the process should be reassembled before the process continues.

While there is no overt humor written into the score, the process of the piece contains overtones of absurdity – the spectacle of a performer placing stacks of loose change on an organ and the ominous sound that is resultant from the keys being depressed, one at a time, by the stacks. Ashley has explained in his writing that he composed this piece with a humorous, if slightly masochistic, precedent: "*The Entrance* was dedicated to my friend Larry Leitch, a wonderful piano player whose hands would sometimes tremble during a performance. The charm of this suggested piece, which is, in a practical sense, unplayable."[70] In theory, this score could be practically realized by someone with steady hands, especially if performance length was of no concern. However, the remaining two sections of the score provide an intriguing counterargument to *The Entrance*'s practicality.

Postscript is a series of questions that the composer has posed in relation to the process (see Figure 9, page 41). The final section, *Eight Solutions of a Numberless Variety*, much like *Conditions*, provides eight theoretical solutions to the questions posed by the previous section. For example:

[70] Ashley, Robert, John Lely and James Saunders, *Word Events: Perspectives on Verbal Notation.* London: The Continuum Publishing Group, 2012, p89.

1. *Assemble an audience and perform the work as though the idea of the composition and the audience's expectations were identical.*
2. *Eliminate the audience, but retain the notion of a performance.*
3. *Allow the audience (a body of people not directing the performance) to determine its own relationship to the performance, and retain the notion of a performance (David Tudor)….*

6. Eliminate the notion of a performance, and eliminate the audience: music as imagination (George Brecht). [71]

Even though the language used in these two sections is straightforward, the existence of self-reflexive questions in the score creates a layer of absurdity. The fact that Ashley is asking the performer "how shall we proceed?" can be construed as disconcerting when trying to conceive of an authentic performance. How is the performer to proceed if the composer is uncertain? In reflecting upon *The Entrance*, composer James Saunders states, "The Postscript destabilizes what is otherwise a straightforward instruction score."[72] To further add to the confusion, Ashley has stated in reference to the work that, "I have never understood what 'The Entrance' means. It was 'inspired'. I would guess that it means something like the way to get into another, different frame of mind – that makes the performance of the piece possible."[73] This quote, albeit cryptic, illuminates his intentions in composing the work - to transform the performer's frame of mind.

In *The Entrance*, as in all pieces that contain impossible processes, there is no single pathway to realizing the work. This is made evident in the title of the

[71] Ibid, p85.
[72] Ibid, p91.
[73] Ibid, pp89-90.

final section, “Eight Solutions of a Numberless Variety”. The composition journeys through a set of instructions in clinical language to a series of open philosophical questions, and finally rests on a series of proposed realizations that fuse the two. Saunders aptly stated, “…the score also encourages the reader to determine a strategy for engaging with the work as a performer (where relevant) or observer. The list opens up the possibility of a wide range of presentations, and serves as a starting point for countless others.”[74] It is the transformative journey in this piece that is of utmost importance, as Ashley’s statements about the impetus for creating the work imply.

Ashley’s long-time collaborator, cellist Alex Waterman has given what is to date the only published account of performing *The Entrance* in 2007. For this realization Waterman, along with pianist Anthony Coleman, chose a realization that journeyed from practicality to impracticality. The bulk of his written account is spent discussing the process of studying the score, gathering the necessary materials and getting them to the venue where the performance was to occur:

> *I read the score many times and copied the questions out by hand. I wanted to internalize them… I rented the organ from a place in mid-town and put out a notice to friends to gather pennies from their change drawers…I had amassed more than enough pennies when, on the day of the performance, Anthony Coleman showed up with a duffel bag full of plastic bags stuffed with pennies. The treasury was now overflowing… Anthony and I divided the labor of the piece between us…*[75]

[74] Ibid, p91.
[75] Ibid, p88.

As Waterman accounts, the performance occurred without an audience, yet retained the notion of performance (as in example 2 of "Eight Solutons of A Numberless Variety"[76]):

> *The performance lasted around three-and-a-half hours…The door was open so that passers-by could see the performance, but there were not that many people out on the street…Robert Ashley got stuck in traffic and showed up when the performance was already finished. The pennies were all stacked and the organ was droning when he arrived. When the audience showed up for the evening's performance, the organ had finally fallen silent.*[77]

Composer and performer James Klopfleisch discussed his own realization of *The Entrance* that was performed with Southland Ensemble on June 8, 2014[78]:

> *I remember that the preparation was clear - a certain number of stacks of pennies, half heads up half tails up, with enough pennies to depress the keys. We used Liam's organ that first time - I remember going to his place with the intention of figuring out how many pennies the stacks needed to consist of. The image of movement, then the mechanics of the environment. I don't remember offhand the number of pennies in a stack, but I do remember that it was more than they used in the analysis in 'Word Events'. I believe I was living at the wulf. at the time - I practiced using my keyboard for the top manual and the piano keyboard for the bottom manual. I never did the entire thing; it didn't seem as important to finish it, and I most likely never had quite enough time…I remember making all the stacks. I remember the space being small, and having to practice an economy of movement to make sure the stacks didn't fall over. I remember them tumbling over anyways, not at first but eventually. I remember my hands getting sweaty, and that I got tired. I probably should have taken the first part of the day off and tried to relax before performing it. It ate up a lot of my energy. I remember not finishing it, that I continued until the crowd kind of was thinning out after the performance.* [79]

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[76] See page 43.
[77] Waterman, Alex, John Lely and James Saunders, p88.
[78] For documentation of the performance, see https://youtu.be/ekgmzcHsP84.
[79] Klopfleisch, James, personal interview.

Unlike Waterman's account, Klopfleisch intended to perform the piece in a traditional sense (performer and audience members were present in a concert setting); however, the elements of time and resources, in this case the ability to physically occupy the space while performing the entire process dictated in the first part of the score, impeded the completion of a traditional performance. One could say that his account is most aligned with the third of Ashley's "Eight Solutions…"[80] -- the audience determined its own level of engagement with the piece, which was being performed simultaneously at the time with other compositions. When the other compositions had finished, a portion of the audience had decided that they were finished engaging as audience members with *The Entrance*.

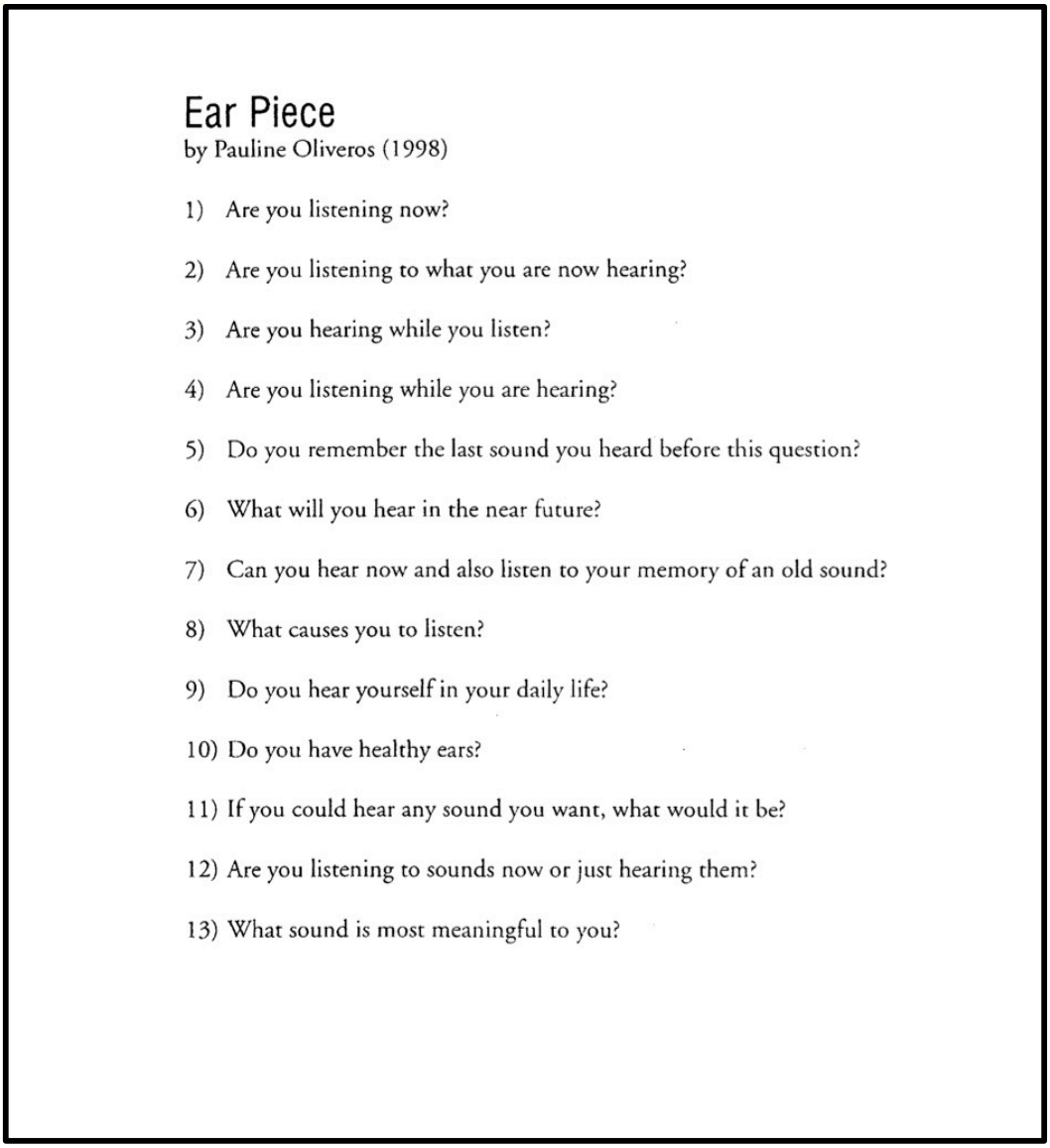
Both accounts by Waterman and Klopfleisch give details of the process of assembling materials for and preparing the event. The primary difference between the two accounts is Klopfleisch's use of the word "preparation", clearly separating the realization into two sections (preparation and performance), whereas Waterman, when asked about the performance began to lengthily discuss preparatory activities. Regardless, both accounts serve as physical proof that a realization of *The Entrance* extends beyond the traditional boundaries of performance, performer and audience. Conceptually akin to ritualistic practices, the moment that the performer begins the acquisition of pennies, their

[80] See quotation from the score on page 43.

arrangement, the negotiation of space and time to carry out the work, they have begun to perform *The Entrance.*

It is the intention of “impossible” processes for the performer to gain an expanded view of that which the process is centered upon. For example, the process contained within *The Entrance* expands one’s definition of the processes and contexts involved with the notions of performance and realization. In the last section of solutions proposed by Ashley, there is repeated mention of the “notion of performance” - the phrase is used a total of eight times. His use of the word notion suggests that the *belief* or *intention* that is put into a performance is what makes it actual, or real. A performance can exist without the presence of an audience if the performer is realizing the score with intention and thereby authenticity.

Another example of a composition transformative and impossible process, *Ear Piece*, composed by Pauline Oliveros in 1998, is a text score comprised entirely of questions that seeks to transform the performer’s concept of listening (see Figure 9, page 46). The score is comprised of two types of questions – closed (questions that can be answered with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’) and open (questions that illicit diverse responses and have no definitive answer):



Ear Piece
by Pauline Oliveros (1998)

1) Are you listening now?
2) Are you listening to what you are now hearing?
3) Are you hearing while you listen?
4) Are you listening while you are hearing?
5) Do you remember the last sound you heard before this question?
6) What will you hear in the near future?
7) Can you hear now and also listen to your memory of an old sound?
8) What causes you to listen?
9) Do you hear yourself in your daily life?
10) Do you have healthy ears?
11) If you could hear any sound you want, what would it be?
12) Are you listening to sounds now or just hearing them?
13) What sound is most meaningful to you?

Figure 10: *Ear Piece, Pauline Oliveros*[81]

It is common for many of Oliveros' scores to contain questions; other scores, such as *Listening Questions* (2005) contain vast amounts of questions to be contemplated and answered – 40 in this particular case. These questions are

[81] Oliveros, Pauline, John Lely and James Saunders, *Word Events*, p289.

derived from Oliveros' practice of *Deep Listening*, which she explains as "a philosophy and practice that explores the difference between the involuntary nature of hearing and the voluntary selective nature of listening. The result of the practice cultivates appreciation of sounds on a heightened level, expanding the potential for connection and interaction with one's environment, technology, and performance with others in music and related arts."[82] Oliveros' statements are clearly aligned with the aforementioned goals of impossible processes in experimental music, meaning, *Ear Piece* is a score that is intended to draw attention to, expand, and diversify the way that one listens.

Although Oliveros' intentions in composing *Ear Piece* are clear, the performative aspect of the composition is not straightforward. Unlike *The Entrance*, there is no parallel set of practical instructions to accompany the questions; the performers are left completely to their own interpretational devices. Is a performance of *Ear Piece* possible in a straightforward, performer-and-audience, sense? If so, how would a performer approach an authentic realization of this type of work?

Just as there were "solutions of a numberless variety" in *The Entrance*, there are many ways that a performer could construct a realization of *Ear Piece* and similar pieces. Questions are intended to be answered, yet the answers can be subjective. One very straightforward realization can proceed as follows: the performer asks a variety of individuals to answer all the questions out loud. The

[82] Ibid, p290.

answers are recorded, and played back in a manner predetermined by the performer. The audience listens to the results, which are mainly discernable. According to Oliveros, this method is akin to what she had envisioned upon creating the work: “There were people who went out and did interviews. At the WDR I was struck by all the sounds going on in the building, for example doors opening and closing and reverberating as well as a lot of other sounds that were below consciousness. I asked the recording engineers to record the building with all of the ongoing sounds. This, along with the interview material became part of the mix for *Hörspeil* called *Ear Piece*.”[83] The interview material that Oliveros mentions in this quote refers to the answers to the questions in the score that she recorded over a period of time. She also has directly stated in the same interview that “*Ear Piece* can be done just as a series of questions to a group of people for their mental contemplation or writing with a person asking the questions…Best though is the act of interviewing and recording on location then returning the material for editing and mixing.”[84]

Although this seems to be her preferred realization of the piece, the absence of additional performance instructions in the score signifies that multiple forms of realization are possible and welcome. It is conceivable that a performer could create a sonic environment for the audience to read and contemplate the questions in the score. A performer could read the questions aloud to the

[83] Ibid, p293.
[84] Ibid, p293.

audience. The performer could read the questions to themselves silently, on stage, unbeknownst to the audience.

While it may be impossible for this piece to be performed in a traditional sense, the creation of a realization that satisfies the performer actively shapes and transforms their thoughts and experiences surrounding the act of listening. The performer is confronted by the questions in the score – be it in reading them aloud, or listening to the answers of others and comparing them to his/her own answers. Oliveros has stated that she wished to use *Ear Piece* to "set an attention process in motion within a participant and among the group that can deepen gradually with repeated experience."[85] Authenticity as it relates to the realization of impossible processes involves a willingness to enter a transformative process by way of one's own intuition and creativity. It is the intention of the composer that the performer's and audience's experience of listening be transformed, but for that to occur, the performer must make personal decisions as to the form that the process will take. As with *The Entrance*, all decisions will, in the end, lead to the same result; the performer's view of the subject (performance, listening, etc) will be pushed beyond its boundaries, expanded and forever changed.

[85] Ibid, p293.

Direct Action and Simplicity

"The personality of the performer is revealed by their engagement with the work to be done."[86]
– Philip Thomas

The majority of the scores that have been discussed up to this point have placed significant emphasis on theoretically based processes and the performer's mental state. In contrast, there are compositions that call for the performer to take simple, direct action in concordance with the score. As John Cage famously stated in a 1992 interview, "I love sounds just as they are, and I have no need for them to be anything more than what they are. I don't want them to be psychological. I don't want a sound to pretend that it's a bucket or that it's president or that it's in love with another sound. I just want it to be a sound."[87] Compositions that require simple, direct interpretive actions highlight sounds just as they are, in both their simplicity and complexity.

Michael Pisaro's *New Orleans* (2007), a composition that is part of a larger work entitled *Tombstones,* is an example of a piece that utilizes clear, precise language in combination with traditionally notated figures to elicit direct action from the performers. *Tombstones* was composed with the intention to simultaneously highlight and deconstruct a handful of political songs from the canons of American and British popular music. *New Orleans* is a skeletal deconstruction of Bob Dylan's song "Blind Willie McTell" for voice, one melody

[86] Thomas, Philip and James Saunders, *The Ashgate Companion to Experimental Music*, p98.
[87] Cage, John and Miroslav Sebestik, *Listen*, Paris: JBA Production, 1992, DVD.

instrument, bass, and an unspecified number of harmony instruments. At first glance, the score resembles a kind of recipe:

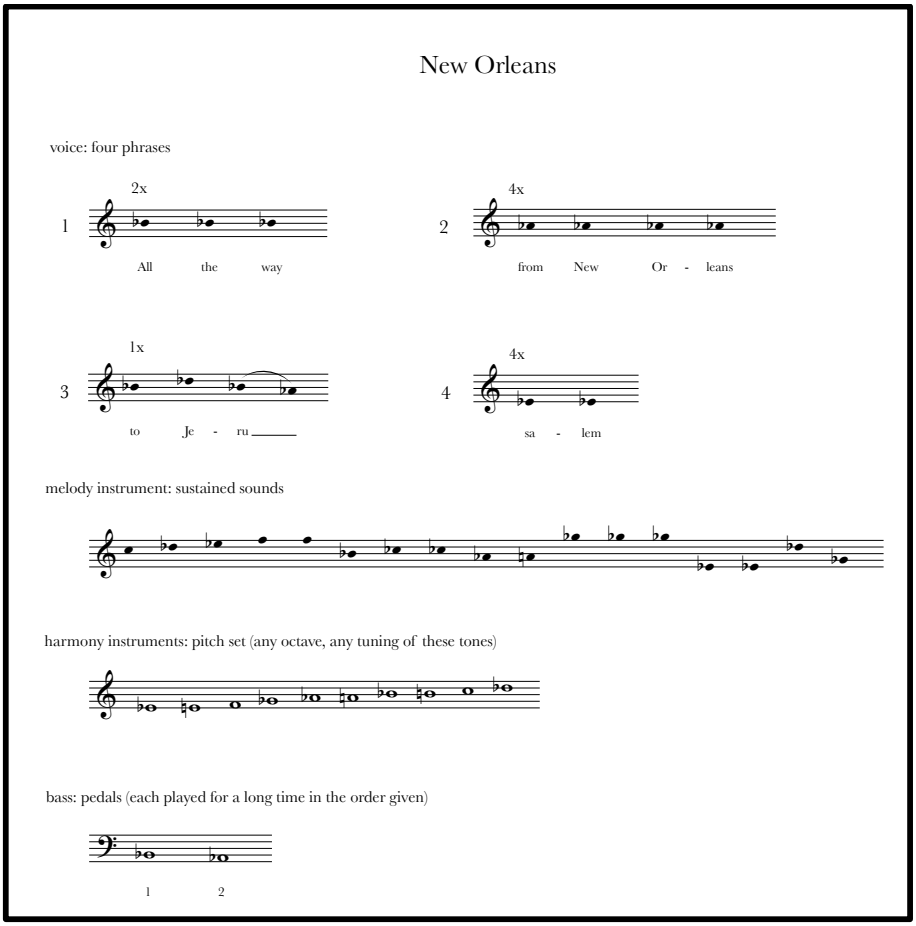


Figure 11: *New Orleans, Michael Pisaro*

The performers are presented with a series of numbered gestures (ingredients) which, when assembled, will yield Pisaro's skeletal re-imagining of the song. There is nothing extraneous that one needs to add to a performance of this piece. The process that produces Pisaro's specific impressions of Dylan's song unfolds out of the direct actions taken by the performers.

A score that elicits direct action, is not necessarily devoid of personal decision making. In *New* Orleans, the indeterminate elements warrant a significant degree of personal decision-making in performance. The possibilities of the orchestration of each performance are limitless. The melody and bass instruments are restricted to their notated octaves, but specific instrumentation is not specified; the material for the harmony instruments may be played in any octave. This implies that one could have a harmony instrument performing notes in the same range as the bass instrument, or notes higher than the melody instrument. The tempo at which all notes are played is also indeterminate and open to personal interpretation. The bass notes are to be "played for a long time", however, as in *Volo Solo* (see Figure 7, page 34), one performer's concept of this statement may be drastically different from another's; there is no specification of tempo, as time is solely conceptual. Similarly, the melody's direction to produce "sustained sounds" gives no specific indication of tempo. The option for the harmony instruments to play in any type of tuning lends possibility to a wide range of harmonic outcomes. A group of five performers could move through the material in different tunings, to dissonant effect. Similarly, the group could unanimously adopt the same tuning, and the piece would retain the consonant quality that appears on the page.

There is a fine line to be drawn between personal choice and subjectivity in interpreting *New Orleans* (and similar scores). Composer David Dunn has stated that experimental music has created a "paradigm that bifurcated away from the predominantly European 19th-century belief that music must express self

and emotion and instead employs active creative strategies that emphasize the materiality of sound, listening, environment, perception, and socio-political engagement."[88] In *New Orleans,* the decisions that the performers must make, both beforehand (instrumentation) and in the moments of performing (placement of phrases, transpositions, tempi), are in themselves representative of the self and a composite of each performer's musical experiences up until that point; the decisions create in themselves a passive form of subjectivity. *Apartment House* pianist Philip Thomas acknowledges this type of subjectivity in his writings on performance practice -- "Naturally, as soon as performers move in response to a score they are engaged in an act of interpretation. Any performance, no matter how transparent or void of 'ego' betrays the performer's presence – her touch, her sense of time and tone, her allegiances (to instrumental and/or compositional 'schools') and so forth."[89] Cornelius Cardew also acknowledges this in his article "On the Role of Instructions in the Interpretation of Indeterminate Music": "Very often a performer's intuitive response to the notation influences to a large extent his interpretation of the instructions…bringing with him all his prejudices and virtues…"[90] In being present, making decisions and acting upon them, the performer constructs an authentic representation of the self in conjunction with an authentic representation of the work. Decisions are made. Action is taken, with sound as the result. There is nothing more that needs to be done.

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[88] Gottschalk, p3.
[89] Thomas, Philip and James Saunders, p79.
[90] Cardew, Cornelius, *Treatise Handbook, pxv.*

There are experimental scores that do not require any personal decision-making and simply call for direct action. Manfred Werder's *Stück 1998* is a clear example as such (see Figure 11, page 55). The score is very uniform in appearance; forty pitches are evenly dispersed in eight rows of five on each page. The entire score is 4,000 pages long and consists of 160,000 individual actions spread out over the course of 533 hours and 20 minutes. No single performance of the piece is intended to be gargantuan in length. Rather, one can request a few pages at a time from the composer to perform. The pages of *Stück 1998* are to be performed in order from first to last; the entire piece has yet to be realized, and is currently at page 837[91].

There is no specification from the composer regarding instrumentation; the piece can be performed by one person or by many. The instructions that accompany the score are as follows:

> *to read from left to right and from top to bottom.*
> *one action: c1*
> *c1= middle c*
> *H, h (german) = B, b (english)*
> *one action consists of 6 seconds followed by 6 seconds of silence.*
> *groups read and play together.*
> *actions which can't be played by instruments are to read in time nevertheless (duration of each line is one minute)*
> *to itself, clear and objective. simple.*[92]

[91] The most recent performance took place on February 23, 2017 of page 837 for solo xylophone. Performance log can be found at http://www.stuck1998.blogspot.com.
[92] Werder, Manfred, *Stück 1998*, Dusseldorf: Edition Wandelweiser, 1998, print.

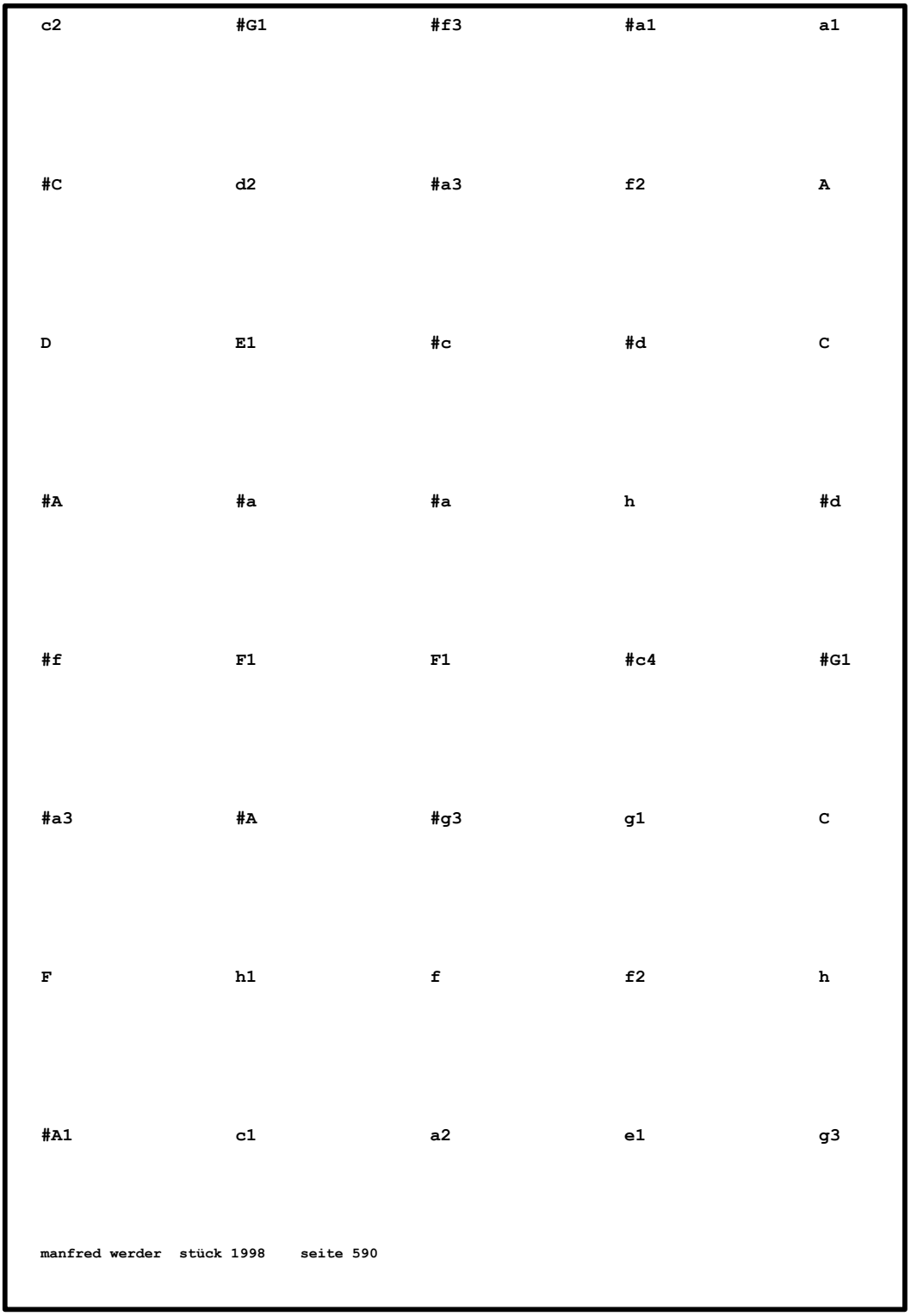

Figure 12: *Manfred Werder, Stück 1998, page 590*

Werder utilizes the last line of his succinctly worded instructions to clarify the essence of the work – *to itself, clear and objective. simple.* The process of *Stück 1998* is truly simple – performers proceed through the material in a uniform fashion (presumably with the aid of a stopwatch). Tones must be played in pitched unison, when possible, on the instruments available. A player is silent when they cannot play a tone on their instrument. This is the simplest form of direct action. There is nothing that the performer needs to predetermine or decide; they need only be present, play or be silent.

The result of this process is a series of performances with unique relationships of sound, silence and timbre – slightly shifting, ever evolving. James Saunders described the listener's experience of *Stück 1998* as such:

> *For me, one of the interesting things about the piece is the disparity between the extremely tight control of pitch and duration, and the relative openness of the sounding result (as a consequence of unspecified instrumentation, or uncontrollable sound production within certain boundaries for example). So when looking at the score or listening to the first few events in performance it seems to be completely about the structure…Gradually though the timbral fluctuations that result from sustaining these events for long periods of time reveal themselves and I find my listening focus gets drawn into the sounds: a note becomes a complex of micro-events.*[93]

Werder clarifies in a recent interview: "In general I wanted to write a music where the used material – sound and absence of sound – were just there as material (and not as an author's composed preferences). The used material could be seen then more precisely as context specific material (the accidental qualities of performers, the instruments, the site), as general conditions in a

[93] Saunders, James, *Ashgate Research Companion to Experimental Music,* p353.

world, and itself as part of the world."[94] Werder speaks further about the representation of the world in this work: "I see the score as a specific section of the world, a performance as a specific section of the score (and also the world), and context as support of a possible event."[95] The direct process of *Stück 1998* ensures that the performer is representing themselves as a human, in the world, creating a sonic landscape unique to that moment in time. Authenticity in this context means nothing more than simply being present, playing the notes, and being a part of the world, of something larger than oneself.

[94] Werder, Manfred and James Saunders, Ibid, p354
[95] Ibid, p354.

Concluding Thoughts: Towards A New Authenticity

The notion of authenticity in performance practice becomes problematic when it relates to the need to consult communications from the composer that exist outside of the score. This is true for obvious reasons when a composer is deceased or has provided little to no written insight on their work, however it is also true when considering the definition and purpose of scores in the tradition of experimental music. The musical examples given in this writing, despite any initial reconditeness, ask the performer to carry out the straightforward processes outlined in the scores' instructions or instructional notation. The composers' intentions are thus made clear, and maintain their vitality inside of the scores. One hundred years from now, those interested in performing Christian Wolff's *For 1, 2 or 3 People* would not need to consult the authority of any text other than the score.

With this knowledge, one can return to Philip Thomas' statement in "A Prescription for Action"-- "the score should not only be sufficient for all that the performer needs but should rule out external opposing factors such as style and authenticity."[96] Authenticity, as it is currently defined by musicologists[97], strongly implies the need to consult text, recordings or personal accounts to ascertain the true intentions of a composer and their work. In his 2012 essay "Ripe for Embarrassment: For A New Musical Masochism", composer and performance artist Adam Overton called this "a 'third level' of instruction—in a sense, an

[96] Thomas, Philip and James Saunders, p80.
[97] Refer to definition on page 11 of this paper.

unwritten meta-score"[98]; Overton argues that there are instances of performers (and composers) in the tradition of experimental music enforcing the concept of the "meta-score" in the performance of experimental music (for instance, some who have worked directly with John Cage). Like Thomas, Overton concludes that the presence of the "meta-score" or "third level" in experimental music is unnecessary, and goes on in his essay to propose a myriad of humorous solutions to "punish" composers who assume otherwise in their compositions[99].

The implication that there exists a "right way" and a "wrong way" to interpret a score in the current notion of authenticity is problematic in relation to the performance practice of a wide range of scores. German musicologist and conductor Wolfgang Gönnonwein, a scholar of music from the Baroque era, postulated:

> *Because music is an art expressed in time, the artwork exists in the numerous possibilities of interpretation; the fascination of interpretation lies in its uniqueness, for no interpretation can be repeated and, therefore, not one single interpretation may be regarded as the final, complete product…This also means that there is no such thing as an authentic interpretation, each is only a realization possibility.*[100]

While Gönnonwein's statements were referencing much older musical traditions, they relate seamlessly to the interpretation of experimental music scores. The diverse varieties of notation found in experimental scores, when combined with indeterminate compositional elements, ensure the possibility of multitudinous

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[98] Overton, Adam, "Ripe for Embarrassment: For A New Musical Masochism". Experimental Music Yearbook, Issue 4. 2013, web. <http://experimentalmusicyearbook.com/filter/Matador-Oven-_-Adam-Overton/Ripe-for-Embarrassment-For-A-New-Musical-Masochism>, p7.
[99] Refer to pages 11-17 of Overton's essay for examples.
[100] Fabian, p164.

interpretations. Is it then true, as Gönnonwein suggests, that none of them can be authentic?

Instead of eschewing interpretational variety as inauthentic, I propose a redefinition of authenticity as it pertains to the performance practice of experimental music. Authenticity*,* redefined in concordance with its non-musical definition – *interpreting a score in a manner that is both true to one's personality and character yet also in alignment with the composer's intentions as specified in the score.*

A new incarnation of authenticity elegantly allows experimental processes to continue beyond the lifetime of the composer, taking on legacies and lifespans all their own. This concept is illustrated in Pauline Oliveros' *Ear Piece* (see Figure 9, page 46). As discussed in an earlier chapter[101], *Ear Piece* was performed frequently by Oliveros and those that participated in Deep Listening Institute courses throughout her lifetime. The performers, in realizing the work, sought to address and answer the questions proposed in the score in a manner unique to them, while retaining the composer's intention of transforming their experience of listening. Oliveros recently passed away, in November of 2016. In the years following her death, performers interested in experimental music will continue to discover and create realizations of this score - both those who have been involved in the Deep Listening Institute and those who have had no previous connection with her work. According to this newfound authenticity, *all* future

[101] Refer to pages 53-54.

performances of *Ear Piece*, no matter the degree of association, have the potential to be authentic, providing that transformation occurs.

Experimental music and its processes place considerable emphasis on diverse representations of humanity -- through with-ness, personal choices, creative successes and failures. As Cornelius Cardew stated, it contains “a human notation rather than a musical one; that is to say, placing more emphasis on the human aspect of notations.”[102] Authenticity, redefined through its mediums, embraces a performance practice and culture of inclusivity, wherein the very being of the performer, their intellect and preferences, are in themselves authentic and sufficient.

[102] Cardew, Cornelius, “Notation: Interpretation, Etc.”, p. 21.

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