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American Music in the Culture of Self-Actualization: Performance and Composition  
in the Long 1970s

By

John David Kapusta

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

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Mary Ann Smart, Chair  
Professor James Davies  
Professor Scott Saul

Summer 2017

American Music in the Culture of Self-Actualization: Performance and Composition  
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John David Kapusta

## Abstract

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John David Kapusta

Doctor of Philosophy in Music

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Mary Ann Smart, Chair

This study explores how US concert musicians of the sixties, seventies, and eighties came to imagine the act of composing, performing, and listening as a transformative practice of “self-actualization.” I borrow this latter term from the influential humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow, whose contemporary writings helped popularize the notion that one’s true self was to be “actualized” not through the so-called “rational” processes of the ego-mind but in the throes of “intuitive” psychosomatic activity. Musicologists often treat the era as one of aesthetic fracture, but I show how composers as musically diverse as Pauline Oliveros, George Rochberg, and John Adams, along with a host of their performer-collaborators, all helped to foster an emergent culture of musical self-actualization that continues to shape performance culture and musicological inquiry today.

The history of US art music within the culture of self-actualization sheds new light on contemporary debates over the self and human nature—debates that still inform American studies and US culture more broadly. In a 1976 essay, the outspoken conservative journalist Tom Wolfe derided advocates of self-actualization as hopelessly (and irresponsibly) narcissistic—and famously christened the 1970s the “Me Decade.” Today even more measured scholarly accounts still tend to characterize the era as one of individualistic retreat from political engagement and social reform. My study challenges this view. Through their works and performances, I argue, musicians who adopted new “self-actualizing” performance practices and compositional styles became very public advocates for the new model of the self that their music was designed to express. Challenged to respond to these new modes of musical expression, critics began to think and write not just about the music they heard, but about the very nature of the self and the human body. The debates they stoked, our contemporary historiography suggests, have yet to abate.

## Table of Contents

List of Music Examples	ii
List of Figures	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
 Introduction	 1
Chapter 1	8
Making Music in the Culture of Self-Actualization	
Bodies in Revolt	10
Dance Revolution	15
Performing Self-Actualization	17
Me and My Music	22
Chapter 2	24
Pauline Oliveros, Somatics, and the Resurrection of the Musical Body	
MUSIC OF THE SIXTIES: EARLY DEATH	26
The Music of the Soma	31
Somatic Musicality, Somatic Feminism	37
Toward a Somatic Musicology	40
Chapter 3	44
George Rochberg, Intuitive Romanticism, and the Discourse of the Postmodern	
Troubled Modernist	45
A Romantic at Reason's Court	49
Intuiting Postmodernism	58
What Was Postmodernism?	64
Chapter 4	67
The Self-Actualization of John Adams	
Shake!	69
Altered States of Minimalism	74
"A Little Bit Like a Bordello"	78
Getting "Loose" with Minimalism	80
"Liberating" America: From <i>Harmonium</i> to <i>Nixon in China</i>	86
"I Am Not a Modernist"	97
Coda	102
Bibliography	104

## List of Music Examples

Example 2.1	Oliveros, “Teach Yourself to Fly” from <i>Sonic Meditations</i>	35
Example 4.1	Adams, <i>Shaker Loops</i> , “shaking” figure, module 1, m. 1	73
Example 4.2	Adams, <i>Shaker Loops</i> , module 20, mm. 7–10	73
Example 4.3	Glass, <i>Einstein on the Beach</i> , “Knee 1,” opening	83
Example 4.4	Adams, <i>Shaker Loops</i> , Part 3, “Loops and Verses [in the Presence of the Lord],” mm. 2–11	84
Example 4.5	Vocal “shakes” in Adams, <i>Harmonium</i> , “I. Negative Love,” mm. 1–4	87
Example 4.6	Adams, <i>Harmonium</i> , “III. Wild Nights,” mm. 289–93	88
Example 4.7a	<i>Grand Pianola Music</i> , “Part I,” opening	89
Example 4.7b	<i>Grand Pianola Music</i> , “Part II: On the Dominant Divide,” conclusion	90
Example 4.8	Adams, <i>Harmonielehre</i> , “Part III. Meister Eckhardt and Quackie,” opening	91
Example 4.9	The “News” aria, opening. Adams, <i>Nixon in China</i> , act 1, mm. 364–82	92
Example 4.10	Principal loop in the “News” aria, Adams, <i>Nixon in China</i>	93
Example 4.11	Hypothetical “modular” score for the “News” aria, Adams, <i>Nixon in China</i> , act 1, mm. 364–82	94
Example 4.12	Adams, <i>Nixon in China</i> , act 1, mm. 654–59	97

## List of Figures

Figure 1.1	Peter Angelo Simon, <i>Left Right Brain</i>	12
Figure 2.1	Oliveros at the November 2013 American Musicological Society meeting in Pittsburgh (photo by Ted Gordon)	24
Figure 4.1a	Reich, <i>Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ</i> , modules 1–2, composer’s manuscript score	81
Figure 4.1b	Adams, <i>Shaker Loops</i> , modules 1–2, published score	81

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## Introduction

“Change your body. Find your SOUL.”<sup>1</sup> Today promises of physical and spiritual self-transformation, here from a popular indoor cycling boutique, resonate across our cities and suburbs. But it was only in the late 1970s that formerly “far out” notions of psychosomatic self-cultivation became thoroughly “in.” “We are returning to our bodies in droves,” wrote the prominent American journalist T. George Harris in 1975.<sup>2</sup> And Americans were indeed exploring all manner of bodily pathways to a new, truer self—from yoga and meditation to jogging and tennis, and eventually, music-making.

The chapters that follow explore how US concert musicians came to imagine the very act of composing, performing, and listening as a transformative practice of “self-actualization.” I borrow this latter term from the influential humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow, whose writings of the sixties and early seventies helped popularize the notion that one’s true self was to be “actualized” not through the so-called “rational” processes of the ego-mind but in the throes of “intuitive” psychosomatic activity. (I introduce Maslow’s ideas more fully in the first chapter, and return to them frequently throughout this study.) Though little studied by musicologists, these ideas deeply influenced contemporary art music composition, performance, and reception. By “returning” to the body and its native “intuition,” composers and performers alike would seek to “actualize” their highest “potential” not only as musicians but as human beings.

As musicians invented new ways of making music in tune with the “intuitive” body they read about in popular magazines and experienced in their yoga classes, the aesthetics and ethics of participating in musical performance as composer, performer, or audience member changed in fundamental ways. Many musicians began to talk about the moment of musical creation not as an opportunity to render beautiful art objects but rather as a chance to “express” their authentic, “spontaneous” selves, the “performer within,” as the pianist and pedagogue Eloise Ristad would put it.<sup>3</sup> Some composers took to cultivating a similarly “intuitive,” bodily approach to composition, resulting not merely in new musical styles but in new understandings of what music could accomplish in the world. Pauline Oliveros’s “sonic meditation” technique claimed to transcend representation altogether, replacing usual “analytical” compositional habits with a “nonrational” method designed to actualize participants’ “intuitive” capacities. In the process, she ended up creating a musical practice whose only “content” was the “inner” music of the self-actualizing musician. Other musicians seized on the sensation of spontaneous bodily activity as the basis for a new musical language that would capture the affect of the self-actualized musician. In works from his string septet

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<sup>1</sup> “SOULCYLCE,” <https://www.soul-cycle.com/about/find-your-soul/>.

<sup>2</sup> T. George Harris, “Where East Meets West: In the Body,” introduction to *The Psychic Side of Sports*, by Michael Murphy and Rhea A. White (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978), xx.

<sup>3</sup> Eloise Ristad, *The Performer Within: A Workshop by Educator Eloise Ristad* (Burlington, VT: CCTV, 1985).

*Shaker Loops* to the operatic blockbuster *Nixon in China*, John Adams created a postminimalist musical language uniquely capable of rendering the “spontaneous” musical body in looping melodic and rhythmic gestures. Long concerned about the rising “rationalism” of contemporary music, George Rochberg eventually sought to engage his “intuitive” consciousness, and rescue a deteriorating musical culture, by “repeating” the works and styles of other composers on the model of the primitive rituals of supposedly more “intuitive” peoples. Though their musical styles are a study in contrast, Adams, Rochberg, and Oliveros all based their aesthetics on the notion of music as an “intuitive” medium of essentially “human” personal development and broader social change.

That music or music-making could have such effects was hardly a new idea in itself—one need only think of Wagner’s hopes for what the *Gesamtkunstwerk* might achieve for the incipient German nation. And indeed, both John Adams and George Rochberg have become known as key figures of the so-called “New Romanticism,” largely on the basis of their embrace of tonal musical languages. But all of the musicians discussed here could be considered part of a wider “new romanticism” not so much for the way they revived Romantic musical idioms but for their “Romantic” attitude towards the validity of musical “intuition” and its potential to reshape the individual self and US culture more broadly. The United States around 1970 was bursting with self-declared “romantics.” One, the historian and critic Theodore Roszak (who coined the term “counterculture” in the late 1960s) praised the “Romantic” fascination with “the non-intellective aspects of life,” “paradox and madness, ecstasy and spiritual striving,” and its revival in the new antirational sensibility of the sixties.<sup>4</sup> Rochberg, who like Roszak idolized the Romantic poet William Blake, labeled himself a “new romantic” as early as 1963 and specifically associated his musical idiom with the “Romantic” qualities Roszak identified.<sup>5</sup> Adams explained in an interview in the late 1980s that he had “stopped worrying about whether intuiting a structure is right or not,” because, “as far as [he could] tell, most nineteenth-century composers wrote on intuitive levels.”<sup>6</sup> In the early 1970s, Oliveros made similar comments on the compositional process of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century composers.<sup>7</sup> As I discuss in chapter 1, performers, too, looked to the “intuitive” body, rather than the “rational,” controlling mind, as a new source of self-expression. It was in this spirit that

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<sup>4</sup> Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 51, 91, 74n18.

<sup>5</sup> Graham Chedd, “Romantic at Reason’s Court,” *New Scientist and Science Journal*, March 4, 1971; Rochberg cited Blake in several of his published essays. See, for example, George Rochberg, “The New Image of Music (1963),” in *The Aesthetics of Survival: A Composer’s View of Twentieth-Century Music*, ed. William Bolcom (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004); Rochberg, “No Center (1969).” For more on Rochberg’s self-ascribed “romanticism,” see chapter 3.

<sup>6</sup> K. Robert Schwarz, “Process vs. Intuition in the Recent Works of Steve Reich and John Adams,” *American Music* 8, no. 3 (1990): 247.

<sup>7</sup> See Pauline Oliveros, “The Contribution of Women as Composers,” in *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963–80* (Baltimore: Smith Publications, 1984), 132–33.

musicians of the self-actualization culture looked to their Romantic forebears as a source and precedent.

For some, the utopianism of this countercultural “new romanticism” has been easy to dismiss (as we shall see, Richard Taruskin has figured among the movement’s loudest musicological critics). I will argue, however, that the new currency such utopian musical imaginings gained in the United States around 1970 bears closer attention. The renewed interest in music’s capacity to transform individuals and society was of utmost importance to musicians themselves, especially because it helped many of them articulate what set them apart from the so-called “rational,” “modernist” musical culture they imagined themselves to be leaving behind. We simply cannot understand the history of art music in the late twentieth century without understanding the motivations and the results of contemporary musicians’ urge to self-actualize.

*American Music in the Culture of Self-Actualization* attempts to accomplish this by looking not only at key musical texts of the period but also at the acts that produced them and the notions of music-making’s transformative power that inspired them. In the recent explosion of academic interest in the 1970s US, the decade when self-actualization went mainstream, physical and spiritual “seeking” has been an ineluctable theme. Most studies of the era, however, interpret the popularization of psychosomatic practices from yoga to participant sports as evidence of an increasingly quietist political culture more concerned with personal “liberation” than broad social change.<sup>8</sup> Musicians of the self-actualization culture focused a great deal of attention on their individual bodies and selves, to be sure. But this apparent self-centeredness was part and parcel of a broader movement for social reform—one that began with the transformation of the individual but that, many expected, would soon spread to the community at large. As the ideology of self-actualization became increasingly central to how musicians conceived of their work, musical performance became a venue for effecting that broader social change. In the view of many contemporary musicians, musical performance would spread the gospel of self-actualization, making converts of musicians and audiences alike.

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<sup>8</sup> In one of the most recent such studies, sociologist Sam Binkley attributes the rise of what he calls “loosened” bodily practices to the fact that “the youth movement turned its focus from mass mobilization and radical politics to more innocuous lifestyle issues.” Sam Binkley, *Getting Loose: Lifestyle Consumption in the 1970s* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 5. A number of other scholars make similar judgments. “Baby boomers in their twenties . . . turned inward. The result was self-absorption . . . a lack of social purpose and . . . disengagement from public affairs”; “Sixties radicals found it easier to build new homes for themselves than to rebuild American political culture. In the 1970s . . . the phenomenon of personal transformation became broader but also more inwardly focused”; “[In the 1970s, i]t seemed natural to turn within, to explore inner resources and needs. . . . Withdrawing from an increasingly dangerous world seemed eminently sensible.” Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 158; Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001), 78–79; Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 38.

Critics unable to stomach the self-actualization culture's inward-facing methods discounted the movement's reformist zeal or dismissed its leaders as shady characters eager to cultivate and profit from their acolytes' apparent hedonism.<sup>9</sup> In a 1976 essay, the outspoken conservative journalist Tom Wolfe derided self-actualization advocates as hopelessly (and irresponsibly) narcissistic—and famously christened the 1970s the “Me Decade.”<sup>10</sup> Today even more measured scholarly accounts still tend to characterize the era as one of individualistic retreat from political action.<sup>11</sup> *American Music in the Culture of Self-Actualization* challenges this view. Through their works and performances, I argue, musicians who adopted new “self-actualizing” performance practices and compositional styles became very public advocates for the new model of the self that their music was designed to express. Challenged to respond to these new modes of musical expression, critics began to think and write not just about the music they heard, but about the very nature of the self and the human body. Viewed as a microcosm of the contemporary US social climate, the musical culture of self-actualization—and crucially, its critics—can help us understand the era not as inherently narcissistic or liberatory, in the terms advocates and naysayers proposed, but as defined by a debate over the legitimacy of old and new notions of the self and social change.

The journalist Harris imagined that the bodies of American athletes (and, he might have added, musicians) had become the “meeting ground” of East and West: jogging, tennis, and even US experimental music had become “yogic”; Zen meditation had entered the Anglo-American mainstream.<sup>12</sup> But what enthusiasts often described as a neat cultural fusion actually involved a complex series of cultural transplantations and transformations. The tai chi that the influential Chinese-American dancer Al Huang taught composer Pauline Oliveros, for instance, was itself a product of Huang's study of both tai chi and modern dance (particularly with choreographer Ted Shawn), the influence of the British orientalist Alan Watts, and the countercultural ethos of the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, where Huang taught beginning in the late 1960s. The “shaker” ritual composer John Adams composed into his seminal 1978 work *Shaker Loops*, likewise, interpreted the quintessentially New England sect's famous “shaking” rite in terms of then-popular “ecstatic” dance practices both Western and non—from those of the Mevlevi Sufi order (the so-called “whirling dervishes”) to disco. Rather than rehearse the familiar narrative of postwar cultural “fusion,” this study aims to frame these practices for what they were: practices that drew authority from their purported cultural origins but were in fact utterly new techniques for the cultivation of an authentic, contemporary—and, as I will argue, often self-consciously “postmodern”—self.

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<sup>9</sup> Among the most well-known among such critiques is Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979).

<sup>10</sup> Tom Wolfe, “The Me Decade and the Third Great Awakening,” in *Mauve Gloves and Madmen, Clutter and Vine* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1976).

<sup>11</sup> See note 8 above.

<sup>12</sup> Harris, “Where East Meets West: In the Body,” introduction to *The Psychic Side of Sports*, xxi.

To understand a little better how practices of the self around 1970 are understood among historians today, we might juxtapose two recent perspectives from the fields of sociology and religious studies, respectively. In his account of “lifestyle consumerism” in the 1970s, sociologist Sam Binkley argued that what he calls “loosening”—efforts to cultivate a higher self by shaking off society’s physical, moral, and psychological constraints—“was essentially a story or set of stories one told to others and to oneself about one’s own development and transformation through daily lifestyle choices.”<sup>13</sup> For Binkley, these narratives of the “self-choosing self” helped to promulgate a growing consumer culture that would only expand through the 1980s and into our own day. At the other end of the spectrum, historian of religion Jeffrey Kripal has framed some of the very same “lifestyle” practices in a more deeply felt, even ecstatic light. In his history of the Esalen Institute, a major purveyor of self-actualization discourse and practice, Kripal coins the phrase “enlightenment of the body” to describe the transcendent unity of mind and matter practitioners of what Binkley would call the “loosened” life sought to achieve.<sup>14</sup> Kripal not only takes the stories contemporaries told about their personal liberations seriously, but even prophecies that the transformative potential of Esalen’s bodily enlightenments might yet be fully realized in American culture.<sup>15</sup>

*American Music in the Culture of Self-Actualization* aims to strike a middle path between these two approaches. Its chapters interpret the “enlightenments” self-actualizing musicians experienced in a way that neither reduces those experiences to mere stories nor necessarily endorses the transcendent truths they attached to them. I aim both to read my subjects’ musical activities for the musically “actualized” self they expressed and helped to engender, but also to uncover the contemporary debates those activities helped to crystalize, debates over the nature of self-expression, the role of music in society, and the matter of human nature itself.

Building on the recent work of Robert Fink, Benjamin Piecut and others, this study narrates the history of twentieth-century music beyond conventional stylistic boundaries in order to tell a coherent narrative about a “postmodern” era often considered inherently eclectic.<sup>16</sup> As Amy Wlodarski points out, “the pluralistic and

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<sup>13</sup> Sam Binkley, *Getting Loose: Lifestyle Consumption in the 1970s* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 15.

<sup>14</sup> On the “enlightenment of the body,” see Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 21–24 and 456–63.

<sup>15</sup> After arguing that Esalen’s unique brand of transcendental mysticism can be thought of as quintessentially American, Kripal asks, “Can we revision ‘America’ not as a globally hated imperial superpower, not as a ‘Christian nation’ obsessed with mad and arrogant apocalyptic fantasies abroad and discriminatory ‘family values’ at home, not as a monster consumer of the world’s ever-dwindling resources, but as a universal human ideal yet to be fully realized, as a potentiality yet to be actualized, as an empty and so creative space *far* more radical and free than the most patriotic or religiously right among us have dared imagine? . . . Are we really ready for such an affirming denial, for a radically American mysticism, for an ‘America’ *as* mysticism?” Kripal, *Esalen*, 465.

<sup>16</sup> See Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Benjamin Piecut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York*

anti-temporal nature of postmodern music . . . can make the assimilation of postmodernism into a cogent narrative of music history difficult. As a result, scholars working with postmodern music often adopt a case-studies approach to the repertory, allowing for micronarratives to be explored for their individual significance.”<sup>17</sup> The era was indeed artistically eclectic, even “promiscuous,” as Adams put it in an interview in the late 1980s.<sup>18</sup> But it was also more cogent than our recent historiography suggests.

For many participants in the counterculture, particularly within the culture of self-actualization, what made the new cultural eclecticism so attractive and exciting was the opportunity it offered to discover the deeper resonances between seemingly disparate traditions. “T’ai chi is Zen, is dhyana, is meditation, is yoga, is gestalt—and you have to put them all in a circle and start anywhere to know that,” wrote John and Barry Stevens in 1973 in their introduction to Huang’s primer on tai chi.<sup>19</sup> To this list of Eastern and Western psychosomatic disciplines the Stevens may well have added homegrown Anglo-American practices like Alexander Technique and somatics as well as empirical studies in humanistic and paranormal psychology and neurobiology, all of which could then be sampled at the Stevens’ beloved Esalen Institute.

Above all, *American Music in the Culture of Self-Actualization* seeks to add the music and performances of self-actualizing musicians to the Stevens’ circle. In so doing, it turns the narrative of late twentieth-century “eclecticism” on its head. On the one hand, each of the chapters presents a case study drawn (mostly) from within a particular musical scene or style: classical instrumental and vocal performance, experimentalism, neoromanticism, and pulse-based minimalism. On the other hand, by emphasizing musicians’ common motivations and preoccupations, I draw these disparate musics and musicians together under one umbrella, or into one “circle,” to borrow the Stevens’ metaphor, in order to make the culture of musical self-actualization legible.

Despite plenty of cross-pollination and collaboration, the musicians I examine here never offered a cohesive mission statement—they were, perhaps, too convinced of their own internal divisions, their own “eclecticism,” for that. This study attempts to achieve what musicians of the period, and historians since, largely failed to do: to

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*Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). As Fink has pointed out, the postwar era is often thought of as a time when the notion of a musical “mainstream” became obsolete. See Robert Fink, “(Post-)minimalisms 1970–2000: The Search for a New Mainstream,” in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Amy Lynn Wlodarski, “Cavernous Impossibilities: Jewish Art Music After 1945,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish Music*, ed. Joshua S. Walden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 245.

<sup>18</sup> Jim Berrow and Barrie Gavin, *John Adams: Minimalism and Beyond*, VHS, Films for the Humanities & Sciences: Princeton, NJ, 1992.

<sup>19</sup> Barry Stevens and John Stevens, introduction to *Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain: The Essence of T’ai Chi*, by Al Chung-liang Huang (Moab, UT: Real People Press, 1973), 8.

look beneath the surface eclecticism of the era's many art music genres and styles, to locate each musician on the circle of self-actualizing practices, and, finally, to understand the cultural logic that could sustain such a "circle" of musical practices in the first place. I invite readers to think of the table of contents of *American Music in the Culture of Self-Actualization* like a program for an imagined musical self-actualization Institute—something like the never-founded Esalen Music Center, the little sibling the actual Esalen Sports Center, established in San Francisco in the early 1970s, always wanted but never got.<sup>20</sup> At this musical self-actualization retreat center, "experimentalism is neoromanticism is minimalism is double bass, and you have to put them all in a circle and start anywhere to know that." So roll up your yoga mats, breath, find your center. And let's begin.

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<sup>20</sup> I discuss the Sports Center in chapter 1.

## Chapter 1

### Making Music in the Culture of Self-Actualization

“Play, just play,” the multi-Grammy Award winning opera diva Joyce DiDonato advised young singers in a 2012 YouTube post. Singers would get nowhere without excellent technique, she cautioned, but urged her acolytes to learn to transcend technique in a release of spontaneous creative impulse. “Just play.”

The ring of athletics advertising in DiDonato’s dictum is probably more than coincidental. Both the Nike brand, with its iconic slogan “Just Do It,” and DiDonato’s vocal practice are fruits of a revolution in attitudes towards the body and the self that would transform both sport and music-making alike.<sup>1</sup> I call that “liberatory” movement the culture of self-actualization: a still-thriving social project built on the belief that spontaneous psychosomatic activity was the key to true creativity and personal authenticity. DiDonato may well have borrowed her notions of “play” from one of her most important teachers, W. Stephen Smith, known to train singers in an explicitly Nikeesque performance practice.<sup>2</sup> According to Smith’s method, which he calls “the naked voice,” singing is a matter of learning to “undress,” to discover a level of uninhibited personal expression liberated from psychological and physical encumbrances. Today musicians like DiDonato transform a night at the opera into a spectacle of self-actualization.

It was not always so. As an aptly titled 1972 *New York Times* article, “Americans Spent More Money and More Time Just Playing,” suggests, some fifty years ago the rising popularity of recreational sports like jogging as a form of individual fulfillment was headline news.<sup>3</sup> And though little reported on at the time (or studied since), it was around this time that musicians began to adapt new models of the active body from their sporting colleagues. This first generation of self-actualizing musicians would forge a musical culture of liberated musical gameplay whose primary goal was to realize the spontaneous self. Previously, venerable postwar pedagogues had happily described musical performance as the art of imposing rational control over an often-unruly body. By the early 1970s, an expanding network of performers had begun to teach musicians to let that unruly body go.

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<sup>1</sup> This paragraph and the analysis that follows owes much to Sam Binkley’s discussion of the Nike motto in Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 242.

<sup>2</sup> In his 2007 book, *The Naked Voice*, Smith quotes one of his students who explains, “Like the Nike commercial, ‘Just Do It!’ vocal cords do not vibrate for thinking or worrying. All systems fire and go into action because we are about to express something—we are about ‘to do.’ This is true whether we speak in everyday conversation, speak for the platform or sing artistically. All aspects of technique fall under the umbrella of the intention to express.” DiDonato studied with Smith as a member of the Houston Grand Opera Studio program in the late 1990s. Stephen W. Smith and Michael Chipman, *The Naked Voice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 52.

<sup>3</sup> Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 228–29.



Although musicologists now regularly give performers their due, scholars have yet to lavish performance cultures of the late twentieth century with the same intensive attention afforded of late to those of the nineteenth.<sup>4</sup> Some of the performers I discuss in this chapter, like Jan DeGaetani, were widely admired in their time and remain so today; others, like Barry Green and Eloise Ristad, are perhaps best known in classical music performance circles. To be sure, the most famous of the self-actualizing musicians are to be found in the chapters that follow, which focus on composers. But fame should not be mistaken for influence. Together, composers and performers fostered an ever-expanding network of musicians who considered performance a medium of self-actualization above all else.

Today the growth of the field known as “ludomusicology” is testament to our continued desire to understand music as an exploratory, bodily activity, as individually and socially edifying as it is joyful and pleasurable.<sup>5</sup> Studies like Roger Moseley’s *Keys to Play* have expanded our understanding of musical “play” by documenting the long history of musicianly interest in the gamelike nature of music-making.<sup>6</sup> It bears remembering, though, that our current attachment to the concept of musical “play” is itself a part of that history—a history whose most recent turns can be traced to the long 1970s. Indeed, one of Moseley’s key theoretical sources, Johann Huizinga’s study *Homo Ludens*, was eagerly read and cited by leaders of the self-actualization culture like George Leonard, whose writings would inspire musicians like George Rochberg and help to popularize the new attitude towards the spontaneous body.<sup>7</sup> Investigating the early history of this most recent turn towards the “musically playful” can give us some critical distance on our own ludic musical culture.

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<sup>4</sup> For just a few recent studies focused on performance and performers in the long nineteenth century, see J. Q. Davies, *Romantic Anatomies of Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss, *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). One among the few recent studies of a major late twentieth-century performer—perhaps a sign of a changing tide—is Pamela Karantonis et al., eds., *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality* (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Roger Moseley, *Keys to Play: Music as a Ludic Medium from Apollo to Nintendo* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 17. See also William Cheng, *Sound Play: Video Games and the Musical Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Moseley, *Keys to Play*, 17.

<sup>7</sup> As Sam Binkley points out, Leonard, a key figure at the Esalen Sports Center (discussed below) cited Huizinga in his book *The Ultimate Athlete*, which restyled sport as a medium of self-actualization. See Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 233. Rochberg’s personal notes, held at the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel, Switzerland, indicate he read Leonard’s 1972 *The Transformation* as he prepared a 1973 essay on music entitled “The Fantastic and the Logical” (discussed in chapter 3).

*Bodies in Revolt*

“I want to report that the two easiest ways of getting peak experiences (in terms of simple statistics in empirical reports) are through music and through sex.”<sup>8</sup> Music to the ears, perhaps, of the crowd gathered for the Tanglewood Symposium on “Music in American Society” in July 1967—especially as “peak experiences,” the crowd had just been told, were essential to “becoming fully human.”<sup>9</sup> The speaker was Abraham Maslow, then president of the American Psychological Association, professor at Brandeis University, and leading spokesman for the revisionist school of psychoanalytic thought and social reform soon to be known as the Freudian Left.<sup>10</sup> Freud’s “one big mistake, which we are correcting now,” Maslow told the Tanglewood audience, “is that he thought of the unconscious merely as undesirable evil. But unconsciousness carries in it also the roots of creativeness, of joy, of happiness, of goodness . . . . We know that there is such a thing as a healthy unconscious as well as an unhealthy one.”<sup>11</sup> Accessing that healthy, higher unconscious, according to Maslow, opened the door to “peak experiences”—moments of “transcendent ecstasy,” “a great and mystical experience, a religious experience if you wish—an illumination, a revelation, an insight.”<sup>12</sup> Orgasm may have epitomized the peak experience, as the term itself suggested.<sup>13</sup> But, as Maslow was pleased to report, there was more than one way to “peak.”

According to Maslow, it was the sheer physicality—and indeed, carnality—of the musical experience that made it such a valuable and viable practice for “peaking.” “The rhythmic experience, even the very simple rhythmic experience—the good dancing of a rumba, or the kinds of things that the kids can do with drums,” Maslow mused to the Tanglewood crowd.<sup>14</sup> “I don’t know whether you want to call that music, dancing, rhythm, athletics, or something else. The love for the body, awareness of the body, and a reverence for the body—that kind of thing that gets mixed in there—these are clearly good paths to peak experiences.” For Maslow, the carnal, the mystical, and now, the musical had all merged into a single category of potentially “self-actualizing” experience.

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<sup>8</sup> Abraham Maslow, “Music Education and Peak Experience,” *Music Educators Journal* 54, no. 72 (1968): 167–68.

<sup>9</sup> Maslow, “Music Education,” 167–68.

<sup>10</sup> The historian of psychoanalysis (and more recently, opera) Paul Robinson coined this term to describe the radical Freudian political thought of Wilhelm Reich, Geza Roheim, and Herbert Marcuse. More recently, Jeffrey Kripal has applied Robinson’s phrase to a yet wider swath of influential social reformers of the 1970s who adopted “explicitly religious or poetic languages in order to embrace and celebrate the id as a mystical force of orgasmic bliss, social revolution, and . . . even bodily transfiguration.” I adopt Kripal’s usage here. Paul Robinson, *The Freudian Left: Wilhelm Reich, Geza Roheim, Herbert Marcuse* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969); Kripal, *Esalen*, 144.

<sup>11</sup> Maslow, “Music Education,” 167.

<sup>12</sup> Maslow, “Music Education,” 164, 167–68.

<sup>13</sup> Kripal points out that the very notion of the “peak” experience was itself a sexual metaphor. See Kripal, *Esalen*, 149.

<sup>14</sup> This and the following quotations are from Maslow, “Music Education,” 168–69.

“Self-actualization”—the process of “discovering what the self is like,” as Maslow put it, in order to fully realize one’s innate capacities—was the cornerstone of his social message and the point of peak experience. Too many Americans devalued the higher unconscious, Maslow contended. But he was convinced that his revised Freudianism pointed the way to a “new image of man”—one based on updated understandings of human physiological and psychological reality—and musicians, he hoped, would help spread his gospel. In Maslow’s United States, musicians would “peak” in the bodily act of music-making itself—and in the process, discover their most “actualized,” most fulfilled, most creative and expressive, and, as Maslow insisted, most fully “human” self.<sup>15</sup>

Maslow was hardly the only psychologist preaching new truths about the performing body around 1970. In a popular 1972 book, the prominent psychologist Robert Ornstein declared, “There are two major modes of consciousness. One mode is verbal and rational, sequential in operation, the other is intuitive, tacit, diffuse . . . less logical and neat.”<sup>16</sup> Similar dualisms had of course been proposed before, but the familiarity of the categories was part of the point.<sup>17</sup> What Ornstein had, or so he thought, was proof: new neurobiological studies of so-called “split-brain” patients—people whose left and right brain hemispheres had been artificially separated—seemed to confirm the physiological basis of Ornstein’s two distinct “modes.” Artist Peter Angelo Simon’s *Left Right Brain*, commissioned for a 1973 *New York Times Magazine* cover story on the new dual consciousness theory (and later used as the cover image for a 1975 edition of Ornstein’s book) drove the point home (fig. 1.1). To illustrate the “verbal” left brain, Simon plastered a dictionary definition of the word “to dance” over the left side of a human head. For the “intuitive” right, the artist portrayed a young ballerina in motion, achieving perfect coordination yet apparently without recourse to “rational” thought. An apparent long-standing truth of human experience was now a truth of human consciousness, a truth of the performing body.

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<sup>15</sup> Abraham Maslow, preface to *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences* (New York: Viking Press, 1970), xii.

<sup>16</sup> Robert E. Ornstein, *The Psychology of Consciousness* (New York: Penguin Books, 1975 [1972]), 11. Pauline Oliveros would quote these very words in her 1973 essay “Divisions Underground,” first published in *High Fidelity*. See Oliveros, “Divisions Underground,” 101.

<sup>17</sup> Ornstein drew up a long list of binary oppositions to distinguish the two “modes.” Drawing on both scientific and esoteric texts from around the world, he used the dualisms both to illustrate the array of metaphors used to describe the two conscious states and their experiential nature: day/night, intellectual/sensuous, time and history/eternity and timelessness, active/receptive, explicit/tacit, analytic/gestalt, Right (side of the body)/Left (side of the body), intellectual/intuitive, focal/diffuse, verbal/spatial, lineal/nonlinear, Yin/masculine, Yang/feminine. Ornstein, *Psychology of Consciousness*, 83.



FIGURE 1.1. Peter Angelo Simon, *Left Right Brain* (1973). Used with permission

It was an increasingly popular truth—one that was playing out, as Simon’s image seems to have acknowledged, in a new enthusiasm for so-called “nonverbal” bodily activities.<sup>18</sup> As the 1973 *New York Times Magazine* article that accompanied Simon’s image observed, the new interest in the “nonspeaking side of the brain” was “probably no accident at a time when Yoga, Arica, Tibetan exercises and other nonverbal disciplines are enjoying such a vogue.”<sup>19</sup> Other contemporary observers concurred. “For all over the western world people have commenced to do the most singular things with their bodies,” wrote Edward Maisel in his 1969 introduction to

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<sup>18</sup> Ornstein’s book won him fame in both the scientific and popular press and, as one contemporary observed, only further legitimized the growing cult of the nonverbal in the United States. See Stephen E. Wald, “Minds Divided: Science, Spirituality, and the Split Brain in American Thought” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Maya Pines, “We Are Left-Brained or Right-Brained: Two Astonishingly Different Persons Inhabit Our Heads,” *New York Times Magazine*, 1973, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/119820933?accountid=14496>.

Alexander Technique he entitled *The Resurrection of the Body*.<sup>20</sup> Noting some “sixty or more goings-on” in this new vein of “physical training,” Maisel marveled at how Americans “have begun to disport themselves through a whole spectrum of bizarre physical activity. For better or for worse they have taken a sporting plunge into the mysterious waters of the ‘non-verbal.’”

“Sporting” was more than wordplay. When the Esalen Sports Center opened in San Francisco in 1973, dedicated to cultivating what founder Michael Murphy described as the “yogic” side of sport, the event made national news.<sup>21</sup> Murphy, much like his mentor Maslow, believed athletic performance and spiritual transcendence were closer cousins than commonly thought.<sup>22</sup> Spurred by the presence of many prominent figures in US sport, including the former quarterback of the San Francisco 49ers, John Brodie, the *New York Times* coverage of the Sports Center opening went as far as to declare a “revolution” in US sports culture.<sup>23</sup> Jogging became a national fad as institutions like the Esalen Sports Center proposed to teach athletes both professional and amateur to find “peak” moments of spiritual transcendence, physical performance, and self-fulfillment in their exercise; new or newly adapted psychosomatic disciplines from yoga to Alexander Technique, along with various forms of massage and meditation, “loosened” the lives and bodies of increasing numbers of Americans; texts like *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1973) taught women that “learning to understand, accept, and be responsible for our physical selves, we are freed . . . to use our untapped energies”; and sexual self-help books, as Sam Binkley has argued, made erotic experience “an autonomous object of manipulation and creative play, a pleasurable end in itself, but also a technique of self-realization and mutual exploration.”<sup>24</sup>

For many, the rise of the “new body enlightenment,” as Maisel put it, signaled a sea change in American culture. Inspired as much by the new science as by contemporary geopolitics, Ornstein argued that the new truths of the “intuitive” body promised to correct a centuries-long overreliance on the “verbal” mode of consciousness in the West—a cognitive imbalance that had, by Ornstein’s account, brought the world to the brink of nuclear annihilation.<sup>25</sup> Not all who plunged into

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<sup>20</sup> This and the following quotation are from Edward Maisel, introduction to *The Resurrection of the Body: The Essential Writings of F. Matthias Alexander*, by F. Matthias Alexander, ed. Edward Maisel (Boston: Shambhala, 1989 [1974]), vii.

<sup>21</sup> For more on Murphy and the Sports Center, see Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 230–33; Kripal, *Esalen*, 285–86.

<sup>22</sup> See Michael Murphy, “Sport as Yoga,” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 17, no. 4 (1977); Marion Goldman, *The American Soul Rush: Esalen and the Rise of Spiritual Privilege* (New York: NYU Press, 2012); Linda Sargent Wood, *A More Perfect Union: Holistic Worldviews and the Transformation of American Culture after World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> William N. Wallace, “New Esalen Center Spurs a Sports Revolution,” *New York Times*, April 15, 1973, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/119619871?accountid=14496>.

<sup>24</sup> Introduction to *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1973) quoted in Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 214; Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 171.

<sup>25</sup> “The survival problems now facing us are collective rather than individual: problems of how to prevent a large nuclear war, pollution of the earth, overpopulation. And notice that in these

the nonverbal would have gone so far, but the salutary effects of the cultivated “right brain”—a term that entered the American popular lexicon around this time—was now common coin.<sup>26</sup> As Maisel noted, what he called the “new body enlightenment” was now being realized among the corporate elite, at the local Y, in schools and churches, and just about everywhere in between.<sup>27</sup>

But what enthusiasts like Maisel and the journalist T. George Harris, quoted in the introduction, labeled a “return” or “resurrection” of the body was, in fact, a new form of embodiment altogether—one in which the nonrational body-in-performance would be recognized as a legitimate source of knowledge and selfhood.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, for many the ongoing “resurrection” of the body signaled nothing short of a revolution in Western subjectivity. In his 1970 book *Bodies in Revolt: A Primer in Somatic Thinking*, the philosopher and inventor of his own method for “resurrecting” the body, Thomas Hanna, coined a new term for the revolutionary era.<sup>29</sup> “‘Soma’ does not mean ‘body,’” Hanna explained, “it means ‘Me, the bodily being.’”<sup>30</sup> While traditional cultural values had long held that the verbalizing form of “self-consciousness” was the seat of man’s identity, Hanna countered that this linguistic conception of self was a false one—a “phony” that when given free reign over behavior reduced human beings to mere machines.<sup>31</sup> The “somas” of America’s youth, to whom he dedicated his book, were “in revolt,” as his title claimed, in revolt against the “traditional culture” that would deny not only the validity but the primacy of somatic experience. It would only be a matter of time before musicians, following Maslow’s lead, began to see the liberatory potential of joining this “nonverbal,” bodily uprising.

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examples, a focus on individual consciousness, individual survival, works against, not for, a solution. A shift towards a consciousness of the interconnectedness of life, toward a relinquishing of the ‘every man for himself’ attitude inherent in our ordinary construction of consciousness, might enable us to take those ‘selfless’ steps that could begin to solve our collective problems.” Ornstein, *Psychology of Consciousness*, 156.

<sup>26</sup> *Merriam-Webster* traces the first usage of “right brain” to 1970. *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “right brain,” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/right%20brain>.

<sup>27</sup> “Conservative newspapers and reasonably cautious magazines, which a mere ten years ago went out of their way to poke fun at the inclusion of such stuff in college curricula, now—under the respectful heading of ‘Education’ and ‘Medicine’—pay unfailing and fastidious attention to it.” Maisel, introduction to *The Resurrection of the Body: The Essential Writings of F. Matthias Alexander*, vii.

<sup>28</sup> Binkley calls this the “experienced body.” Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 229.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Hanna, *Bodies in Revolt: A Primer in Somatic Thinking* (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1970). For a discussion of Hanna’s work see Kripal, *Esalen*, 229–31. For an overview of somatics practices edited by another of the movement’s major voices, see Don Hanlon Johnson, ed. *Bone, Breath, and Gesture: Practices of Embodiment* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995).

<sup>30</sup> Hanna, *Bodies in Revolt*, 35.

<sup>31</sup> Hanna, *Bodies in Revolt*, 44. “If self-consciousness seems to you to be your prize human possession,” Hanna taunted his readers, “tell me how often it has been in evidence during the reading of these last few pages. Ah, *now* you are suddenly self-conscious, by the fact that the previous *words* caused you to reflect upon and replicate your function of reading.” Hanna, *Bodies in Revolt*, 42.

### *Dance Revolution*

By the early 1970s the somatic revolution was well underway in the United States—as Simon’s *Left Right Brain* suggested, not least in the performing arts. While mid-century models of performance framed the performer as an artisan charged with bringing compositions to life—no matter the risk, as we shall see—now, musicians would reclaim musical performance as a medium of self-actualization. Under the new model, musical performance became a spectacle of self-actualization as much as the realization of the musical work. Even as musicians refocused attention on their musical “selves,” though, they often foregrounded the broader social implications of their work, arguing that their new musical practices could “liberate” not only individual musicians but their public.

Among the early somatic performing artists who would have an outsized impact on the musical culture of self-actualization was dancer and choreographer Elaine Summers, active with the Judson Dance Theater in the early 1960s, who turned to somatic disciplines only after painful encounters with the postwar professional dance world (a foreshadowing, as we shall see in chapter 2, of Pauline Oliveros’s own retrospectively injurious experience in the San Francisco experimental music scene). After studies with Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham as well as at the Juilliard School in the 1950s, Summers was diagnosed with osteoarthritis, a condition she would attribute to the rigors of her dance training. In a story she often told in workshops and interviews in the 1970s and 80s, one night she dreamt of a sailor on a vast ship and awoke screaming, “he doesn’t do two hundred pliés every day!”<sup>32</sup> While this vision was sinking in, on a friend’s recommendation Summers found herself in the New York studio of one of the most prominent “body awareness” teachers of the day, Charlotte Selver.<sup>33</sup> The experience led Summers to develop her own somatic practice, “kinetic awareness,” which she would soon pass on to musicians like soprano Jan DeGaetani and Oliveros.

While Summers was building a network of somatic performers in New York, another dancer was developing his own somatic approach to movement under the auspices of the Esalen Institute. Following a path that paralleled Summers’s turn to “kinetic awareness,” Al Huang came to tai chi through his own sufferings at the hands of modern dance (and like Summers, would impart his own anti-analytical bodily practice to Oliveros). Born in the early 1940s in China, Huang moved to California at seventeen to study architecture at the University of California, Los

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<sup>32</sup> Ann-Sargent Wooster, “Elaine Summers: Moving to Dance,” *Drama Review: TDR* 24, no. 4 (1980). Summers also told this story at a workshop hosted by Oliveros at the University of California, San Diego in 1973. For audio of Summers’s workshop, see Elaine Summers, “Movement, Energy Flow, etc.,” Center for Music Experiment Recordings Archives, University of California, San Diego.

<sup>33</sup> Summers would continue her “awareness” work in the 1950s with Selver’s student Carola Speads. See Wooster, “Elaine Summers,” 60. On Selver’s work, see Kripal, *Esalen*, 244–45. Selver’s husband and longtime collaborator published a book based on her workshops in 1974. See Charles Brooks, *Sensory Awareness: The Rediscovery of Experiencing* (New York: Viking Press, 1974).

Angeles. Intent on becoming a professional dancer, he joined choreographers Lotte Goslar and Ted Shawn at Jacob's Pillow, a festival Shawn operated in Beckett, Massachusetts in the early 1960s.<sup>34</sup> Huang was particularly struck—and, it would seem, stricken—by the physical demands of Shawn's athletic choreography. "I am recovering from the last two weeks—the anxiety, tension, joy, pain (muscles), excitement, peace, love, and tears," Huang wrote to Shawn in 1962 after a performance of Shawn's 1935 piece *Kinetic Molpai*, a heroic tale of physical struggle and apotheosis.<sup>35</sup>

At first the pain offered its own pleasures. Huang told Shawn that the experience had opened him up to "all the beautiful feeling of knowing that I am very much a part of this wonderful world of the love for dance."<sup>36</sup> But soon, for Huang, there would be no more joy or peace to match the anxiety and tears. As Huang recalled in 1980, reflecting on that time in his career,

I just wanted to achieve, achieve, achieve. . . . I became a performer with a lot of grinding and pushing, trying to match that standard of what I thought a concert artist-dancer was supposed to be. I practiced ten hours a day until my body felt exhausted. I had knee problems, hip problems, and ankle problems, like most dancers in this country. I kept saying to myself that if I work this hard, I must be getting better. I bit my tongue and said, "This is part of the game, you know. Nobody understands how we artists suffer."<sup>37</sup>

The somatics movement had offered both Summers and Huang an explanation and solution to modern dance's embodiment of extreme exertion. They had learned the hard way, it would seem to them, that the striving, "self-conscious" dancer's self was not only "phony," as Hanna might have said, but actively destructive. In her "kinetic awareness" sessions, later interviews suggest, Summers would seek to undo the damage, deepening practitioners' experience of their bodies through extremely slow movement.<sup>38</sup> For Summers, gaining "awareness" of the body in this way combatted the typical "self-conscious" approach to dance, the ever-tempting desire to control the body which Summers described as "the demon."<sup>39</sup> The demon, she taught her students, seduced dancers to "ignore what the body wants to do and

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<sup>34</sup> Al Chung-liang Huang, interview by Michael Robertson, "What T'ai Chi Is Doing For Dance." *New York Times*, September 21, 1980. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/121098964?accountid=14496>.

<sup>35</sup> Al Huang to Ted Shawn, 1962. \*MGZMC-Res. 31 273, Ted Shawn Collection, New York Public Library. Dance scholars Debra Craine and Judith Mackrell call *Kinetic Molpai* a "paean to male power and energy." Debra Craine and Judith Mackrell, "Kinetic Molpai," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Dance* (2 ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>36</sup> Al Huang to Ted Shawn, 1962.

<sup>37</sup> Huang, interview by Robertson, "What T'ai Chi Is Doing For Dance."

<sup>38</sup> See Rebecca Loukes, "Elaine Summers and Kinetic Awareness: Part 1," *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices* 2, no. 1 (2010); Wooster, "Elaine Summers."

<sup>39</sup> Wooster, "Elaine Summers," 67.



execute something spectacular.”<sup>40</sup> In “kinetic awareness,” by contrast, the goal was simply to become “aware” of the body in motion until it seemed to move of its own accord. This was the soma in action—the dancing right brain.

For Summers “kinetic awareness” functioned both as a therapy and a means to new choreographic ends. One of Summers’s earliest pieces to incorporate the practice, her 1973 *Energy Changes*, put the somatic body on full display. In a performance staged in the sculpture garden at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Summers had her dancers perform a simple action, like moving from standing position to lying prostrate, at a virtually imperceptible rate, as musicians improvised melodic fragments and spectators gawked.<sup>41</sup> The body “revolution” declared by people like Hanna certainly suited experimental performing artists’ taste for the radical and the new. And yet, *Energy Changes* also betrayed the inherent contradictions of transforming self-actualization into an art form. As Huang would often suggest in his tai chi workshops, self-actualization could not be “choreographed”—it was much too individual a process to be controlled by anyone but the practitioner.<sup>42</sup> Where Summers stood on this score is unclear. The abstract title, for one thing, seems to have called attention not to the individual performers but to the process to which they were subjecting themselves. *Energy Changes* may have staged the somatic body, but whether or not it entailed the self-actualization of the performers was ambiguous at best.

### *Performing Self-Actualization*

Many musicians inspired by somatics, meanwhile, looked to right-brained techniques to help them discover deeper levels of personal creativity and expressivity. For performing musicians operating in the mainstream classical concert scene, somatic techniques resonated with long-standing values of interpretive autonomy. Accessing one’s “intuitive” creative resources seemed to guarantee that musicians’ renderings of well-worn works would be truly individual. At the same time, self-actualizing techniques also offered musicians, as it had to dancers like Huang and Summers, a powerful critique of common perceptions of the performing body evident in contemporary composers’ works and pedagogical method alike.

As Huang’s testimony has already suggested, around midcentury the bodies of performers were often treated as so much collateral damage in a performing arts culture that demanded spectacular achievement in the name of rendering yet more

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<sup>40</sup> This quote is unattributed in Wooster’s text but apparently comes from Summers herself. Wooster, “Elaine Summers,” 67.

<sup>41</sup> Elaine Summers, *Energy Changes*, Video New York, 1973, raw footage of a performance at the Museum of Modern Art, New York City, September 21, 1973, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

<sup>42</sup> “T’ai chi is an individual discipline; it’s not the kind of unison movement you find in set choreography.” Al Chung-liang Huang, *Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain: The Essence of T’ai Chi* (Moab, UT: Real People Press, 1973), 15.

spectacular art objects. At one point in György Ligeti's late 1950s orchestral behemoth *Apparitions*, as a performance note explained, "the player hurls a metal tray full of porcelain as hard as he can . . . so that the porcelain shatters."<sup>43</sup> To avert the danger, the composer counseled the player to "possibly wear protective goggles."<sup>44</sup> The score might have read, "perform at your own risk." As Richard Taruskin points out, performers, composers, or audiences fared no better in avant-garde circles.<sup>45</sup> "The composer is perfectly well aware of the psychological difficulties which his composition may produce for some, if not all, of the audience," composer Dick Higgins wrote in 1966. "He therefore finds excitement in insisting on this, to the point of endangering himself physically or even spiritually in his piece."<sup>46</sup> In line with Higgins's "danger music" aesthetic, Nam Jun Paik's *Hommage à John Cage* had the performer destroy a piano with an axe.

Dangers threatened even where performance demands might have seemed less extreme. "Warning! This book could be dangerous to your vocal health," read an incipit to the acclaimed operatic baritone Jerome Hines's collection of interviews with noted opera singers of the sixties and seventies.<sup>47</sup> Even the secrets of a Pavarotti, if misapplied, threatened the performing body like a cancer. Such was the air of almost farcical danger the performing arts had acquired that in the early 1970s the British comedy show *Monty Python's Flying Circus* could satirize it for a popular audience.<sup>48</sup> The sketch featured none other than "Sviataslov Richter," who arrives onstage to not only play Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto but at the same time "escape from a sack, three padlocks and a pair of handcuffs" (as a voice-over announces) supported by a scantily clad woman named Rita. The sketch portrayed "Richter" as not only a virtuoso but a Houdini surviving his performances by the skin of his teeth. As we shall see in the chapters to follow, the sketch would have resonated with US composers as well. "Writing contemporary music is like a Houdini act," George Rochberg wrote to himself in a 1970 journal entry. "You let yourself get all bound up with ropes and chains and locks—and then prove that you still can escape somehow. Pure masochism."<sup>49</sup> In such a climate, it is little wonder somatic "resurrection" seemed to promise so much.

More broadly, the musical culture of self-actualization Maslow called for in the late 1960s extended to musicians a critique of contemporary understandings of the human body and the self writ large. At midcentury, analogies between human beings and machines abounded among intellectuals and musicians alike,

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<sup>43</sup> György Ligeti, *Apparitions: für grosses Orchester* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1964).

<sup>44</sup> B. F. Skinner, *Science and Human Behavior* (New York: The Free Press, 1953), 46.

<sup>45</sup> See Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Late Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 88–97.

<sup>46</sup> Higgins quoted in Taruskin, *Late Twentieth Century*, 93.

<sup>47</sup> Jerome Hines, *Great Singers on Great Singing* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982).

<sup>48</sup> Graham Chapman et al., "Sviatoslav Richter and Rita," *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, BBC, first aired October 26, 1972.

<sup>49</sup> George Rochberg, January 8/9, 1970 journal entry, Tagebuch [15] (8 Jan 1970–26 Apr 1970), Sammlung George Rochberg, Paul Sacher Stiftung.

particularly in the reigning psychological school of the day known as behaviorism. The leading behaviorist psychologist B. F. Skinner argued in his 1953 classic *Science and Human Behavior* that human beings were nothing more than complex mechanisms responding to external stimuli. “Man,” Skinner argued, “. . . has created the machine in his own image.”<sup>50</sup> In Skinner’s utopian vision, people would be programmed robot-like to create an ideal, engineered society. Some musicians embraced the view of man as machine. Composer Luciano Berio once described his frequent collaborator, soprano Cathy Berberian, as the “tenth oscillator,” an extension of the early synthesizer for which many of his works were conceived.<sup>51</sup> Other contemporary musicians embraced Skinner’s mechanical view of man more explicitly. The voice teacher William Vennard, who taught the superstar mezzo-soprano Marilyn Horne among others, quoted Skinner in a 1967 edition of his now classic vocal manual, *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic*. For Vennard, Skinner’s views worked seamlessly with his own self-declared “mechanist” pedagogy, in which the singer’s primary task was to learn control of the functional bodily machine.<sup>52</sup>

Somatics practitioners virulently attacked the man-as-machine metaphor. Too much “thinking” rendered the individual a “halting, inefficient, mechanical self-reflector” and made dancers into “people whose joints . . . go ‘click!’ . . . like mechanical dolls.”<sup>53</sup> Some athletes and musicians reimaged rather than rejected the man-as-machine model, but whether they reconceived the human person as a unique kind of “bio-computer” or a thoroughly unmechanical “soma,” the old Skinnerian vision was out.<sup>54</sup> Rather than focus on submitting the self to new levels of mechanical control, somatic musicians would seek new ways of “allowing” their inner selves to actualize.

The somatics movement emerged less as a coherent social program than as a network of individual practitioners and idiosyncratic methods with a shared commitment to recovering the inner bodily knowledge contemporary society had laid aside; similarly, the musical culture of self-actualization had nearly as many techniques as it did technicians, its branches sprouting new and unusual blossoms

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<sup>50</sup> Skinner, *Science and Human Behavior*, 46.

<sup>51</sup> David Osmond-Smith, “The Tenth Oscillator: The Work of Cathy Berberian,” *Tempo* 58, no. 227 (2004): 4.

<sup>52</sup> William Vennard, *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic* (New York: Carl Fischer, 1967), 209.

<sup>53</sup> Hanna, *Bodies in Revolt*, 44; Stevens and Stevens, introduction to *Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain: The Essence of T'ai Chi*, 5.

<sup>54</sup> “How have I programmed my bio-computer?” Pauline Oliveros, thoroughly versed in somatic techniques, would ask herself in the early 1970s. Oliveros, “Divisions Underground,” 102. In a 1976 essay Oliveros described sonic meditation technique as a kind of “software for people.” Oliveros, “Software for People,” 180. Timothy Gallwey, the Esalen tennis instructor, explained to his readers in 1973, “If you faithfully do not *try* to hit the can, and do not attempt to correct for your misses, but put full confidence in your body and its computer, you will soon see that the serve is correcting itself.” W. Timothy Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Tennis* (New York: Random House, 1974), 59. On the relationship between “self-realization” practices and technology, see Erik Davis, *TechGnosis: Myth, Magic, and Mysticism in the Age of Information* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2015).

of musical-cultural renewal at every turn.<sup>55</sup> Sometime around 1970, Elaine Summers began working with soprano Jan DeGaetani, an influential singer and teacher at the Eastman School of Music and the Aspen Music Festival and School regarded as “one of our busiest recording stars” at the time.<sup>56</sup> Based on her work with Summers, DeGaetani developed a new pedagogy that rang with reverence for the “liberated” soma. “My job is to help my students find a way around their tensions,” so that they “can release their sensibilities to the audience,” the soprano told an interviewer in 1973.<sup>57</sup>

This somatic pedagogy of inner “release” was brought to a new level of prestige and popularity beginning in the mid-1980s by then Cincinnati Symphony principal bassist and Cincinnati College Conservatory teacher Barry Green. Green’s 1986 *The Inner Game of Music*, a spin-off of Esalen tennis guru Timothy Gallwey’s “Inner Game of Tennis” workshops, suggested that the true goal of musical performance was less the realization of a musical work for an audience’s enjoyment than the actualization of “the spontaneous musical you.”<sup>58</sup> Realizing this uninhibited inner self in performance, Green argued, was what master musicians had always done. “The part of us that hums, whistles, improvises, and composes music is natural and unselfconscious, and it is the same natural and intuitive sense that the great performers tap into when they are playing music.”<sup>59</sup> For Green, such great performers shifted the foci of music-making from the work to the musician’s soma. Reflecting on the performances of violin virtuoso Isaac Stern, Green argued, “It is as if he has gone beyond playing the violin, and taken us into his own deep experience of the music. We too are caught up in the same shift of consciousness as we give ourselves to the images and moods evoked by his playing.”<sup>60</sup> As we shall see, this was exactly what Oliveros’s new experimental works of the 1970s had aimed to achieve, transferred to the hallowed halls of mainstream concert culture. For Green, “music” in the traditional sense, as Oliveros wrote, had become a “welcome byproduct” of a deeper inner transformation. “You are expressing,” as Green put it in one of his visualization exercises, the verb here requiring no object, only a somatic subject.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> As Don Hanlon Johnson, a key player in the development of somatics at Esalen has noted, there was little agreement among the leaders of this physical-spiritual revival. Their idiosyncratic techniques and disparate intellectual heritages resulted in as much fractious debate as it did collaboration. Don Hanlon Johnson, “From Sarx to Soma: Esalen’s Role in Recovering the Body for Spiritual Development,” in *On the Edge of the Future: Esalen and the Evolution of American Culture*, ed. Jeffrey J. Kripal and Shuck Glenn W. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 256.

<sup>56</sup> Jan DeGaetani, interview by Robert S. Clark, “Jan DeGaetani: Disciplined Freedom Gives One of Our Busiest Recording Stars the Time to Be Wife, Mother.” *Stereo Review*, September 31, 1973.

<sup>57</sup> DeGaetani, interview by Clark, “Jan DeGaetani: Disciplined Freedom Gives One of Our Busiest Recording Stars the Time to Be Wife, Mother,” 78.

<sup>58</sup> Barry Green and W. Timothy Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Music* (New York: Doubleday, 1986), 17.

<sup>59</sup> Green and Gallwey, *Inner Game of Music*, 212.

<sup>60</sup> Green and Gallwey, *Inner Game of Music*, 24.

<sup>61</sup> Green and Gallwey, *Inner Game of Music*, 218.

If Green focused on individual self-expression, other somatic musicians placed a greater emphasis on broader social transformation. In the national workshops she called “The Performer Within,” and especially through her 1982 book *A Soprano on Her Head: Right-Side-Up Reflections on Life and Other Performances*, pianist and pedagogue Eloise Ristad taught students to find various ways to “let go” of their “logical,” “thinking” selves and discover a level of “release” and “freedom” not only in their playing but in their personal lives.<sup>62</sup> Part and parcel of the burgeoning print media market for instruction in the “loosened” life, Ristad’s book framed her “entirely new, holistic, and nurturing” musical practice as a panacea for “the neuroses and creative blocks of the past generation.”<sup>63</sup> Drawing on the popular image of the right-brained dancer, Ristad distinguished between the self-actualization of the performer and the sonic results of the performance. Both were salutary, but the latter was ultimately secondary. “There is a dancer within each of us . . . longing to respond to life and music with joyous intensity and unselfconscious spontaneity,” Ristad explained. “We may need encouragement to find that dancer, but once discovered, our minds and bodies feel recharged, ready to meet challenges in our lives with fresh insight. If we are performers, the bonus is double, for our performing can take on surprising new life and energy.” Ristad transformed music-making into a life practice, a medium and model of self-actualization useful to people of all walks of life. As the book’s subtitle suggested, Ristad “wrote the book feeling like I was writing a book for musicians, and as I got into the writing of it [it] was quite apparent it was a book for everyone.”<sup>64</sup>

As much as this new humanist ethics required musicians to turn “inward,” this very orientation, according to its practitioners, also implied a new other-directedness. In her widely read exposition of a “centered” approach to skiing, the multitalented journalist and Esalen devotee Denise McCluggage wrote, “Poor skiers fight the mountain, attacking it with their tiny poles . . . and slashing at it with their edges. The good skiers join the mountain, commune with it, go with it. . . . The difference is that the poor skiers have an I-It relationship with the mountain, to use Martin Buber’s term. The mountain is a thing apart from them, an object to be manipulated and subdued. The good skiers have an I-Thou relationship with the mountain; there is union.”<sup>65</sup> Musicians who took their cues from thinkers like McCluggage learned to “commune” with their musical others, substituting musical works and other musicians for the skier’s mountain. When I asked the prominent baritone and voice teacher Sanford Sylvan about the effect years of Alexander Technique and Zen meditation, which he began in the early 1970s, had had on his

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<sup>62</sup> Ristad, *The Performer Within*. The book was published by Esalen’s Viking imprint and came with advance praise from several Esalen figures, including Virginia Veach, Barry Stevens, Al Huang, and Timothy Gallwey.

<sup>63</sup> Lorin Hollander, preface to *A Soprano on Her Head: Right-Side-Up Reflections on Life and Other Performances*, by Eloise Ristad (Moab, UT: Real People Press, 1982), n.p. On “loosening” and the print media, see Binkley, *Getting Loose*.

<sup>64</sup> Ristad, *The Performer Within*.

<sup>65</sup> Denise McCluggage, *The Centered Skier* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1983), 10.

performance practice, he replied, “We’re at our best when the music moves through us without our own small opinions mucking it up.”<sup>66</sup> Sylvan’s “centered” approach entailed adopting an “I-Thou” relationship not only to his fellow musicians but to the music he was singing. Achieving transcendent union with the music meant allowing the energy of the music to flow through him as much as the energy of the voice. “Very few people in our society get that there’s something bigger than themselves,” he explained. According to Sylvan, living out this realization musically meant placing a special emphasis on “listening to others” in the course of rehearsals and performances, a task he believed Alexander work specifically helped him to achieve. This particular ethical attitude also seems to have affected how Sylvan related to the musical works he performed: rather than seeing his task as a performer as one of realizing or crafting a musical object, Sylvan wanted to connect with musical works as if they were an integral part of his environment.

### *Me and My Music*

“The beat . . . goes ... Me ... Me ... Me ... Me ...”—thus it was with a disconcerting musical metaphor that the outspoken conservative critic Tom Wolfe concluded his now canonical essay on the 1970s, memorably labeling the era “The Me Decade.”<sup>67</sup> For Wolfe, the search for “loosened” bodily experience all pointed to one thing: the dawn of a new narcissism.<sup>68</sup> In one of the essay’s cutting caricatures, Wolfe portrayed an Esalen-style group therapy session quickly morphing into a quasi-mystical frenzy of “release and liberation,” complete with a chorus of titillating moans and groans.<sup>69</sup> But at the core of the ritual, Wolfe divulged, was no deep personal insight but nothing less vulgar or banal than one participant’s particularly pathetic personal preoccupation: “me,” Wolfe revealed, “and my hemorrhoids.”<sup>70</sup> For Wolfe, even the most secular of what he called the “Me Movements” proffered a dubious mysticism, holding out the belief that one’s true self could only be accessed via “ecstatic,” “non-rational, and even anti-rational practices” like speaking in tongues, group therapy, or group sex.<sup>71</sup>

Wolfe declined to predict when the “Me Movements” would crest, but heard in their “holy rolling” attempts at “realizing [one’s] potential as a human being”—

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<sup>66</sup> This and the following quotations are from Sanford Sylvan, personal interview with the author, 2014.

<sup>67</sup> Wolfe, “Me Decade,” 167. Ellipses without spaces (...) original.

<sup>68</sup> Wolfe was hardly the only one to come to such a conclusion. See, for example, Edwin M. Schur, *The Awareness Trap: Self-Absorption Instead of Social Change* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977); Peter Marin, “The New Narcissism,” *Harper’s Magazine*, October, 1975.

<http://harpers.org/archive/1975/10/the-new-narcissism/>. For a discussion of the trope of “self-absorption” in 1970s US cultural criticism, see Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968–1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 183–222.

<sup>69</sup> Wolfe, “Me Decade,” 132.

<sup>70</sup> Wolfe, “Me Decade,” 126, 132.

<sup>71</sup> Wolfe, “Me Decade,” 148, 134, 152.

words Wolfe might well have lifted from Maslow himself—a force that threatened the very fabric of US society.<sup>72</sup> Historians would describe the “Me Decade” as “the greatest age of individualism in American history,” Wolfe prophesied, a time when people obsessed with loosening up no longer looked out for their offspring, their community, or their nation but channeled all their energies into their own somatic, spiritual, sexual selves. For Maslow and the musicians he helped to inspire, the “peaker”—the “fully human,” fully “actualized” person—was no Narcissus. Rather, self-actualizers, with their “loosened” bodies, could see beyond themselves in a way that was crucial not only to their own self-understanding but also to solving the world’s social problems. “I would call peakers transcendents. . . . They are transcendent in the sense of transcending the ego, the selfish, or the skin-enclosed person,” Maslow had said.<sup>73</sup> According to him, a world full of “peakers” would be more—not less—socially engaged.

The rhetorical battle between the prophets of self-actualization and those, like Wolfe, who considered the techniques Maslow helped to inspire so many hedonistic dalliances with man’s nonrational side would wear on across the so-called “Me Decade” and beyond. But by the late 1970s, Wolfe and others’ critiques notwithstanding, experiences of bodily loosening were no longer reserved for the most committed of sixties cultural rebels.<sup>74</sup> In sport, spirituality, music, and dance, the culture of self-actualization had gone mainstream.

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<sup>72</sup> This and the next quotation are from Wolfe, “Me Decade,” 167.

<sup>73</sup> Bertha G. Maslow, *Abraham Maslow: A Memorial Volume* (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1972), 51. Quoted in Wood, *A More Perfect Union*, 159.

<sup>74</sup> Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 17.

## Chapter 2

### Pauline Oliveros, Somatics, and the Resurrection of the Musical Body

November 2013. The panelists played their game of musical chairs. The clutter cleared and, live over webcam—blame skittish air traffic controllers—Pauline Oliveros asked her audience to take a few moments to follow their breath. It worked: inhaling down into my gut, I was no longer a musicological sardine packed into a downtown Pittsburgh hotel room—I was the warmth of my torso, the plasticity of my jaw, the ebb of air and abdomen. So began what was, for me, a rather extraordinary session of the Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society (fig. 2.1). Oliveros guided our movements. In this iteration of her “sonic meditation” technique, a seminal musical method the experimental composer first developed in the early 1970s, I and the other attendees of the panel entitled “The Gendered Soundscape” were enjoined to imagine a sound evocative of our childhood. Then, on cue, we let it flow. We trilled our lips like horses at a trough, improvised half-daydreamed vocalizes, splashed away in imagined pools. Oliveros smiled, raised her hand in appreciation, and our performance ceded to warm laughter and applause.<sup>1</sup> I felt renewed, even changed, and it seemed I was hardly alone. What was more, the panel had presented Oliveros not merely as a composer but as a “theorist” of gender and sound.<sup>2</sup> “Sonic meditation,” Oliveros’s transformative psychosomatic practice, had become a musicological exercise.



FIGURE 2.1. Oliveros at the November 2013 American Musicological Society meeting in Pittsburgh (photo by Ted Gordon)

<sup>1</sup> A brief video of the end of the performance was posted to Instagram by Ted Gordon and can be found at <https://www.instagram.com/p/ggHOFrpb7c/>. My thanks to Gordon for allowing me to use a still from his video as figure 2.1 above.

<sup>2</sup> “The Gendered Soundscape,” in *Program of Abstracts and Papers Read*, ed. Dana Gooley (American Musicological Society, 2013), 144.



In this chapter, I want to explore the cultural history of Oliveros's meditational musical practice. In particular, I want to ask after the relationship between Oliveros's method and scholarly understandings of experimental and feminist politics, music, and the performing body. The official history of that relationship is beguilingly easy to trace. Until the explosion of feminist music studies in the early 1990s, Oliveros was an unheralded figure from the vantage point of the ivory tower. By then she had long abandoned the institutions that would have granted her some measure of official musicological recognition—centers of prestige like the San Francisco Tape Music Center she helped to found in the 1960s or the department of music at the University of California, San Diego, where she taught in the 1970s. But while Oliveros featured in just one monograph before 1990, at least eight academic articles and interviews appeared between 1990 and 1995 featuring Oliveros and her work.<sup>3</sup> In 1995 she was invited to present a sonic meditation (likely of the sort witnessed in Pittsburgh) at the third Feminist Theory and Music conference.<sup>4</sup>

For musicologists of the mid-1990s, Oliveros had come to symbolize the feminist musical maverick bent on disrupting the gender politics of American music-making as usual through works that enacted alternatives to patriarchal culture.<sup>5</sup> Scholars showed how Oliveros's "meditational" music upended composer-audience and mind-body binaries in ways that, as Fred Everett Maus put it in 1994, could be understood as "analogous to feminist social change."<sup>6</sup> This was the

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<sup>3</sup> Oliveros's former student Heidi Von Gunden had published a book on Oliveros's work in 1983. See Heidi Von Gunden, *The Music of Pauline Oliveros* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1983). Among articles that discuss Oliveros published between 1990 and 1995, see Ellen Band, "Working for Change: A Discussion of the Motivation of Creative Activity and an Interview with Pauline Oliveros," *Musicworks*, no. 45 (1990); Suzanne G. Cusick, "Gender and the Cultural Work of a Classical Music Performance," *Repercussions* 3, no. 1 (1994); Suzanne G. Cusick, "Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem," *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 1 (1994); Daniel Adams, "Women Composers and the Noble Snare," *ILWC journal* (October 1992); Timothy Taylor, "The Gendered Construction of the Musical Self: The Music of Pauline Oliveros," *The Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 3 (1993); Heidi Von Gunden, "The Music of Pauline Oliveros: A Model for Feminist Criticism," *ILWC journal* (June 1992); Jann Pasler, "Postmodernism, Narrativity, and the Art of Memory," *Contemporary Music Review* 7, no. 2 (1993); Jann Pasler, "An Interview with Pauline Oliveros," *American Women Composers News/Forum* 9 (1991); Jennifer Rycenga, "The Uncovering of Ontology in Music: Speculative and Conceptual Feminist Music," *Repercussions* 3, no. 1 (1994); Pauline Oliveros and Fred Everett Maus, "A Conversation about Feminism and Music," *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 2 (1994); Elisabeth Le Guin, "Uneasy Listening," *Repercussions* 3, no. 1 (1994).

<sup>4</sup> For a brief account of Oliveros's performance at the 1995 Feminist Theory and Music conference, see Lars Rains, "Letters from Summer 'Camp,'" *GLSG Newsletter* 5, no. 2 (1995): 6.

<sup>5</sup> In 1994, Suzanne Cusick wrote, "To arrive even at the adumbration of a resisting performance, one would first have to reconstruct the ritual of classical performance itself, so as to challenge, mock, or reconfigure in unpredictable ways the likely performances of audiences. In their ways, John Cage and Pauline Oliveros, sexual as well as aesthetic renegades, have suggested ways to do just that." Cusick, "Classical Music Performance," 98.

<sup>6</sup> Oliveros and Maus, "Feminism and Music," 193n11. In the same year, the historian of religion Jennifer Rycenga made a similar argument for how Oliveros critiqued "traditional," masculinist aesthetic paradigms. Martha Mockus reaffirmed Rycenga's arguments in her recent biography of

reputation Oliveros enjoyed until her death in November 2016. The 2013 AMS panel, too, interpreted Oliveros's work as a goad to feminist political critique. Its stated intention was to explore how musical "discourses embody or reproduce social difference and inequality," and how Oliveros's music in particular "expands our disciplinary ears" and attunes us to "issues of gender and embodiment."<sup>7</sup> Experiencing our bodies in new ways, the published description of the panel suggested, we would sharpen our critical acumen and better prepare ourselves to enact change in academic culture and in society at large.

Despite their attraction, I am not convinced that such explanations, oriented toward political critique in the public sphere, sufficiently explain the effects or allure Oliveros's work has had for musicians since the 1970s. As anyone who has laughed at Jerry Stiller yelling "serenity now!"—to the opposite effect—on the old *Seinfeld* episode from the late 1990s might suspect, "meditational" practices tend to have an inward focus that practitioners (or analysts) must take into account or risk missing something fundamental.<sup>8</sup> To date, though, it would seem that the lens of political critique has provided analytical cover for the more subtle bodily experience Oliveros's "meditational" music brought to both feminist and musicological practice. The cultural history of Oliveros's unusual mode of musical embodiment, I want to suggest, not only challenges some received methods of analyzing experimental music and feminist activism around 1970, but challenges us to rethink how the forms of embodiment Oliveros championed inform what we do as "embodied" scholars today.

### *MUSIC OF THE SIXTIES: EARLY DEATH*

Our image of Oliveros as maverick reflects longstanding assumptions about both feminist practice and experimental composition around 1970. Today scholars often understand experimental musicians' attempts to "liberate" themselves from aesthetic constraints as a form of political struggle in tune with the radical ethos of the day.<sup>9</sup> In such analyses, musicologists typically analogize musicians' works or performances to political acts in the public sphere—the social world of rational debate and direct action.<sup>10</sup> Of course, there is good historical justification for such

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Oliveros. Rycenga, "Uncovering of Ontology," 44–45; Martha Mockus, *Sounding Out: Pauline Oliveros and Lesbian Musicality* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 48.

<sup>7</sup> "The Gendered Soundscape," in *Program of Abstracts and Papers Read*, ed. Dana Gooley (American Musicological Society, 2013), 144.

<sup>8</sup> Steve Koren and Andy Ackerman, "The Serenity Now," *Seinfeld*, 1997, originally aired October 9, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> See Robert Adlington, ed. *Sound Commitments: Avant-Garde Music and the Sixties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); David W. Bernstein, ed. *The San Francisco Tape Music Center: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Taruskin, *Late Twentieth Century*.

<sup>10</sup> To take just one recent example, Sumanth Gopinath has analyzed Steve Reich's 1966 tape piece *Come Out* as "a site of interpretive struggle, one that mimics the political contest itself." Sumanth

an analytical emphasis. As Danielle Fosler-Lussier has shown, even the US State Department valued experimental music for its capacity to spark debate and thus, it hoped, instill a culture of participatory democracy.<sup>11</sup>

The historiography of second-wave feminism is likewise dominated by stories of women operating in the political public, particularly through the practice known as “consciousness-raising,” the small-group practice in which women met to discuss their personal experiences of oppression as a prelude to direct political action.<sup>12</sup> Here, too, this historiographical focus makes sense. Many leading feminist activists saw consciousness-raising as the heart of women’s liberation, and such meetings inspired some of the movement’s signal political events, including the 1968 New York Miss America protest that brought radical feminism national and international attention.<sup>13</sup>

Feminist consciousness-raising, as many advocates imagined it around 1970, was perhaps the political practice of the public sphere par excellence. Feminist icon Pamela Allen, in her classic guide to consciousness-raising, encouraged women to seek yet higher levels of “synthesis” in their critical discussions of women’s oppression in order that women might understand “the totality of the nature of our condition.”<sup>14</sup> “Elaborating . . . and repeating the analysis,” as the feminist writer and activist Vivian Gornick put it years later, feminist activists discovered what Gornick called the “joy of revolutionary politics.”<sup>15</sup> Like scholars of experimental music, historians of feminism have quite justifiably focused on the ways their subjects aimed to “raise” what might be called “political consciousness”—awareness of oppressive social norms and how change might be effected through debate and critique.

As a feminist experimental musician, Oliveros has perhaps been doubly prone to scholarly emphasis on political consciousness-raising. Indeed, in the most recent and thorough examination of Oliveros’s career to date, Martha Mockus

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Gopinath, “The Problem of the Political in Steve Reich’s *Come Out*,” in *Sound Commitments: Avant-Garde Music and the Sixties*, ed. Robert Adlington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 123.

<sup>11</sup> Danielle Fosler-Lussier, “American Cultural Diplomacy and the Mediation of Avant-Garde Music,” in *Sound Commitments: Avant-Garde Music and the Sixties*, ed. Robert Adlington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 240.

<sup>12</sup> See Victoria Hesford, *Feeling Women’s Liberation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Karla Jay, *Tales of the Lavender Menace: A Memoir of Liberation* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Delta, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Debra Michals, “From ‘Consciousness Expansion’ to ‘Consciousness Raising’: Feminism and the Countercultural Politics of the Self,” in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and ’70s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 41.

<sup>14</sup> Pamela Allen, *Free Space: A Perspective on the Small Group in Women’s Liberation* (New York: Times Change Press, 1970), 29.

<sup>15</sup> Vivian Gornick, “Who Says We Haven’t Made a Revolution?: A Feminist Takes Stock,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 15, 1990. <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/15/magazine/who-says-we-haven-t-made-a-revolution-a-feminist-takes-stock.html?pagewanted=all>.

described Oliveros's *Sonic Meditations* as a "sonic" version of feminist political consciousness-raising. According to Mockus, Oliveros's "meditation" technique taught women to question the political status quo in a way analogous to conversations taking place in conventional consciousness-raising groups, "offering participants provocative opportunities to question dominant notions of music, talent, sound, ability, and musical authority."<sup>16</sup> It was this same political consciousness that the 2013 AMS panel, with its emphasis on "social difference and inequality" and "issues of gender and embodiment," seems to have expected Oliveros to "raise" among musicologists.

This emphasis, too, is not without historical justification. As many contemporary observers implied, Oliveros's work was very much an art of the experimental public sphere, self-consciously questioning aesthetic boundaries and encouraging the kind of rational analysis and debate typical of experimental music-making and feminist consciousness-raising alike. Born in Houston and trained as a composer in San Francisco in the mid-1950s, Oliveros soon joined Morton Subotnick and Ramon Sender to found the San Francisco Tape Music Center, eventually declaring herself one of the "leading young experimental composers in the Bay Area."<sup>17</sup> In a 1963 review that foreshadowed the analytical language of "synthesis" and "totality" Allen would use to describe consciousness-raising, Oliveros's colleague Subotnick wrote that her music "demands intensive concentration on the part of listeners and performers, and offers in return an imaginative relation of gestures resulting in a complex, multiply significant, totality" (Subotnick would go on to dissect that totality in his own textual contribution to the experimental public sphere).<sup>18</sup>

The analytical exercise, even if ultimately a fool's errand, was integral to Oliveros's experimental ethos. Like Subotnick's review, Oliveros's own evocative description of one of her theater pieces from the late sixties emphasized complexity, multiplicity of meaning, and a fugitive sense of totality, which listeners were presumably expected to synthesize for themselves.<sup>19</sup> "WHY?" one San Francisco

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<sup>16</sup> Mockus, *Sounding Out*, 50–51. More recently, Stephanie Jensen-Moulton has described Oliveros's "Deep Listening" practice, an outgrowth of her sonic meditation work, in terms of feminist consciousness-raising; art historian Whitney Chadwick likewise suggests Oliveros founded a consciousness-raising group in the 1970s, presumably referring to the ♀ Ensemble. Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, "Sounds of the Sweatshop: Pauline Oliveros and the Maquilapolis," in *Tomorrow Is the Question: New Directions in Experimental Music Studies*, ed. Benjamin Piekut (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 212; Whitney Chadwick, "Reflecting on History as Histories," in *Art/Women/California 1950–2000: Parallels and Intersections*, ed. Diana Burgess Fuller and Daniela Salvioni (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 25.

<sup>17</sup> "Biographical Data re: Pauline Oliveros," MSS 102, Box 29, Folder 6, Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, San Diego.

<sup>18</sup> Morton Subotnick, "Pauline Oliveros: Trio," *Perspectives of New Music* 2, no. 1 (1963): 81–82.

<sup>19</sup> The piece, *Valentine* (which featured, among other things, the amplified heartbeats of performers playing a game of hearts), was inspired by a childhood memory of her family playing the same game to the sounds of the radio. "Sometimes the heat of the parlor game was more interesting than the radio program, sometimes vice versa or sometimes a synthesis of the whole situation could be felt.

critic asked in 1965 in view of one of Oliveros's more outlandish theatrical works.<sup>20</sup> Finding answers—explaining the relationships between sonic events, accounting for every last bit of potentially meaningful material—would take all the analytical acumen one could muster.

Yet by the time Oliveros composed the *Sonic Meditations*, “analysis”—and verbal analysis in particular—was the last thing Oliveros hoped to prompt. Her writings of the time warned emphatically against it. “Analysis: . . . am I always criticizing, taking apart sounds to see how they work, examining relationships as they happen, trying to understand and compare with past experiences?” she chastised herself in a 1973 essay.<sup>21</sup> In yet another sign of her turn from the means and methods of the public sphere, now “nonverbal” activities would be de rigueur. “The ♀ Ensemble,” Oliveros wrote in a 1971 manuscript of the *Sonic Meditations*, “has found that non-verbal meetings intensify the results of these meditations and help provide an atmosphere which is conducive to such activity.”<sup>22</sup> Oliveros's records document six weeks of specifically “nonverbal” meetings, and when she organized a multiweek “Meditation Project” at UCSD, “silence” during the sessions and agreement not to talk about the project was one of four requirements she imposed on participants alongside regular attendance, keeping a diary, and not smoking.<sup>23</sup> Elsewhere, Oliveros peppered her essays and instructions for the ♀ Ensemble with references to the deleterious effects of talk. “A day spent not speaking,” she wrote in 1972.<sup>24</sup> “This helps me to reach a more creative level: past the verbal barrage, the verbal castle, the verbal fence.” “The nervous or neurotic individual intellectualizes and verbalizes constantly,” she again reminded herself in 1973, quoting the humanistic psychologist Olive L. Brown.<sup>25</sup> Oliveros had jettisoned analysis, “trying to understand and compare with past experiences,” the lifeblood of experimental aesthetics—and radical feminist politics.

Oliveros soon recognized the will to analysis as a mere symptom of a broader crisis of the performing body. As Oliveros wrote in 1973, the experimental music scene of her early career now “seemed to be a nervous, frantic music world, full of hasty rehearsals and constantly noodling performers with up-tight vibrations.”<sup>26</sup>

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Always there was a shifting, transforming complex of mood or atmosphere and relationships to and through the events, people and environment.” Pauline Oliveros, “Valentine,” undated notes for essay published in *Observations by Composers* (1973), MSS 102, Box 7, Folder 20, Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, San Diego.

<sup>20</sup> “The New Audio-Visual Music: A Mixture of Madness, Men, and Machines,” *San Francisco Sunday Chronicle Bonanza*, June 6, 1965. Oliveros replied, “It’s a study of theatrical elements treated like music. . . . So that gestures and objects have the same importance as sound.” The pleasure in such “studies,” it seems, lay in calibrating one’s analytical faculties to the array of sights and sounds.

<sup>21</sup> Oliveros, “Divisions Underground,” 101.

<sup>22</sup> Pauline Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations* (Urbana, IL: Smith Publications, 1974).

<sup>23</sup> Pauline Oliveros, “Meditation Project for Winter Quarter,” MSS 102, Box 11, Folder 5, Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, San Diego.

<sup>24</sup> This and the next quotation are from Oliveros, “Five Scenes,” 75.

<sup>25</sup> Oliveros, “Divisions Underground,” 102.

<sup>26</sup> Oliveros, “On Sonic Meditation,” 148.

Also in 1973, Oliveros reviewed a concert dedicated to the “music of the sixties,” noting the “fiendish” technical demands of composer Iannis Xenakis (pianist “with taped fingers to support his Olympian playing”), the “busy,” “tensely engaged” performance of “complex spectra” in a string quartet by Michael von Biel, and the “judgmental activity” of colleagues that disrupted the performance of Alvin Lucier’s *Music for Solo Performer*.<sup>27</sup> “MUSIC OF THE SIXTIES” she insisted at the essay’s close: “EARLY DEATH.”<sup>28</sup> Composing and listening for complex, multiply significant totalities, it now seemed to her, was downright dangerous.

In 1970 Oliveros founded a group she called the ♀ Ensemble at the University of California, San Diego. Under her direction, the group of women student musicians met regularly “to explore the potentials of concentrated female creative activity, something which has never been fully explored or realized,” as an early brochure for the Ensemble put it.<sup>29</sup> It was for this group’s regular meetings that Oliveros developed the pieces she would publish in the early 1970s as the *Sonic Meditations*—music whose techniques would form the basis of much of her subsequent work, including the kinds of performances she would bring to musicological events beginning in the 1990s.

The goals of Oliveros’s “nonverbal” *Sonic Meditations*, among her earliest self-consciously postsixties works, read like an elixir for a decaying musical culture. Their life-bringing task was to achieve “heightened states of awareness or expanded consciousness, changes in physiology and psychology from known and unknown tensions to relaxations which gradually become permanent.”<sup>30</sup> Though these contemplative practices involved on-the-spot musical creativity with little precompositional planning in the traditional sense, this was not “improvisation,” according to Oliveros—at least not of the anxious “noodling” sort she had been accustomed to. “There came a time when I was no longer improvising,” she explained in the mid-1970s, “but I was attending to a task, and I called it meditation,” the antidote to the hazardous world of West Coast experimental music-making she had helped to forge.<sup>31</sup> In this emphatically “nonverbal” women’s small-group practice, there would be no complex “synthesis,” no “repeating the analysis” as feminists like Allen and Gornick or her avant-garde colleagues would have recommended. As we shall soon see, the ♀ Ensemble was taking experimental music-making and women’s liberation in a new direction, away from the public sphere and into what contemporaries would call the “new consciousness” of the “soma”—the antirational, intuitive body-in-performance.

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<sup>27</sup> Oliveros, “Many Strands,” 93–95.

<sup>28</sup> Oliveros, “Many Strands,” 96. All-caps formatting original.

<sup>29</sup> Pauline Oliveros, brochure for the ♀ Ensemble, MSS 102, Box 12, Folder 1, Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, San Diego. For a description of the group’s membership, see Mockus, *Sounding Out*, 40.

<sup>30</sup> Pauline Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations*, manuscript, MSS 102, Box 12, Folder 1, Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, San Diego.

<sup>31</sup> Pauline Oliveros, interview by Robert Ashley, *Music with Roots in the Aether: Opera for Television* (Lovely Music, (New York: 1976).

However accurately narratives of public, political feminism and experimentalism around 1970 portray the values of many contemporary women and musicians, the era also saw the rise of new understandings of consciousness and political action within the burgeoning self-actualization culture—understandings that would, in Oliveros’s hands, reshape both feminist and experimental musical practice. As Binkley suggests, new notions of self-“loosening,” for many contemporaries, also entailed a new understanding of how broader social change would proceed.<sup>32</sup> In his best-selling 1970 manifesto *The Greening of America*, for instance, the critic Charles Reich argued that what he called a revolutionary “new consciousness,” characterized by “self-realization,” the desire to reach one’s “true potential as a human being,” and the “liberation” of “instinct, feeling, and spontaneity,” would reject traditional political means for spreading its gospel.<sup>33</sup> Rather than “direct political action,” Reich maintained, the “new consciousness” would go about “changing culture and the quality of individual lives, which in turn [would] change politics and, ultimately, structure.”<sup>34</sup> According to Reich’s new credo, it was not political consciousness that needed to be “raised,” but the “new consciousness” itself.

One reason Reich predicted this shift away from the political public sphere may well have been his attitude towards one of its primary media: analysis and debate. Like other voices of the self-actualization culture we surveyed in chapter 1, Reich distrusted the “rational” consciousness of his day, an attitude that went hand in hand with his views on political change. As he wrote, the new “consciousness . . . is deeply suspicious of logic, rationality, analysis . . . ‘Reason’ tends to leave out too many factors and values—especially those which cannot readily be put into words and categories.”<sup>35</sup> Echoing thinkers like Ornstein and Maslow, Reich went on to claim that the “new consciousness” “believes that thought can be ‘non-linear,’ spontaneous, disconnected.” But perhaps most significantly for the future of political activity under the “new consciousness,” he went on, “it thinks rational conversation has been overdone as a means of communication between people.” Earlier social movements had promised self-realization but came up short, Reich implied, and now it was time for new strategies. By the early 1970s, Pauline Oliveros was fed up with public, analytical experimentalism as she knew it, and ready to join Reich’s consciousness revolution.

### *The Music of the Soma*

What prompted such an about-face? The answer, in short, was somatics. As we saw in chapter 1, this new discourse and practice of the “nonverbal” taught aspirants to cultivate their “soma”—the body-in-motion unencumbered by what Oliveros called

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<sup>32</sup> See Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 134–35; see also Zaretsky, *No Direction Home*, 122–23.

<sup>33</sup> Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1970), 242, 9.

<sup>34</sup> Reich, *Greening of America*, 19.

<sup>35</sup> This and the following quotations are from Reich, *Greening of America*, 257.

the “verbal fence,” the “analytical” mind. Oliveros’s musical adaptation of somatic principles would posit the transformation of the individual body as the key to the reformation of a misogynist body politic.

Oliveros took her decisive somatic turn around 1968 or 1969, when one of her choreographer colleagues arranged a one-hour kinetic awareness lesson for Oliveros with Summers in New York City.<sup>36</sup> Though the exact date of the session is unclear, by the late 1960s new notions of “awareness” were beginning to reshape her musical perspective (later, the ♀ Ensemble would advertise “Kinetic Awareness” as part of their repertoire and often begin their meetings with the practice).<sup>37</sup> By late 1968, personal notes show Oliveros toying with the idea of “sonic awareness,” an apparent precursor to “sonic meditation.” Oliveros seems to have first considered the concept in drafts for an essay to be titled “The Poetics of Environmental Sound.”<sup>38</sup> Oliveros imagined a scheme according to which musicians could develop their “sensory awareness” by concentrating on the sonic environment—a musicianly analogy, it would seem, to the kind of sensitivity Summers taught students to develop to their bodies. “We are a bunch of sensory shut-outs,” Oliveros wrote to herself. “Today we are in dire need of sensory awareness” and what she called “musicians’ awareness.” Oliveros’s experimental body was beginning to revolt.

In her later years, Oliveros would seem to downplay Huang’s impact on the ♀ Ensemble and her “meditational” aesthetic.<sup>39</sup> But evidence suggests it was a collaboration with Huang in the summer of 1970—apparently instigated by Oliveros’s kinetic awareness session with Summers—that launched the ♀ Ensemble, the *Sonic Meditations*, and Oliveros’s somatic approach to music-making.<sup>40</sup> Members of what would become the ♀ Ensemble had collaborated with Oliveros before (on her contribution to the 1970 Osaka World Expo, *Pep-psi*).<sup>41</sup> But

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<sup>36</sup> Testimonies conflict regarding the exact date of Oliveros and Summers’s first meeting, but it seems to have taken place at some point in the late 1960s. Wooster gives 1969; a 2010 interview with Summers suggests 1968, while another interview suggests 1966. See Wooster, “Elaine Summers,” 69; Elaine Summers and Pauline Oliveros, interview by Juliette Mapp, “Danspace Project at New Museum Presents a Conversation with Elaine Summers.”

[http://archive.newmuseum.org/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object\\_id/7649](http://archive.newmuseum.org/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/7649); Elaine Summers, interview by Joan Arnold, “Interview with Elaine Summers,” 2010, interview recorded on June 7, 9, 21, and 23 at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts in New York City as part of the Oral History Project, now located at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

<sup>37</sup> See Mockus, *Sounding Out*, 40–41, 53.

<sup>38</sup> The remaining quotations in this paragraph are from Pauline Oliveros, “Poetics of Environmental Sound,” notes, MSS 102, Box 9, Folder 7, Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, San Diego.

<sup>39</sup> Oliveros discusses her work with Huang in an interview in Mockus, *Sounding Out*, 40, 157.

<sup>40</sup> Summers suggested in an interview years later that Oliveros left her New York studio determined to seek out similar work in California. Summers and Oliveros, “Danspace Project at New Museum Presents a Conversation with Elaine Summers.”

<sup>41</sup> A recording of Oliveros’s contribution to the Expo, along with a description published by E.A.T., the experimental arts group that sponsored the performance, suggests that Oliveros and her colleagues (soon to be members of her ensemble) recorded vocal and instrumental long tones, later manipulated electronically by Oliveros at the event. An early brochure for the ♀ Ensemble suggests



it seems that the very first sonic meditation was performed under the title *Music for T'ai Chi*, when Huang invited Oliveros and her musicians to accompany one of his dance workshops at the Kairos Institute in Rancho Santa Fe, California, an alternative cultural center similar to Esalen.<sup>42</sup> A 1971 draft description of the *Sonic Meditations* made the connection plain, stating that “the sound material of *Sonic Meditations* has been influenced by the philosophy and practice of t'ai chi chuan in collaboration with the members of the ♀ Ensemble and dancer-tai chi master Al Huang.”<sup>43</sup> Similarly, an early 1970s brochure for the ♀ Ensemble shows that the group’s “meditative” approach emerged directly from its collaboration with Huang, “flowing according to [the] T'ai Chi principles . . . Al was teaching.”<sup>44</sup>

What Al was teaching was not his grandfather’s tai chi—at least, not completely. Huang’s work and career were perhaps even more deeply embedded within the somatics movement than Summers’s. After his work with Shawn, Huang won a Ford Foundation grant in 1966 to study Chinese dance in China and Taiwan and returned with an entirely new approach to movement. Thanks in part to a serendipitous meeting with the scholar and Daoism expert Alan Watts, Huang soon found himself teaching tai chi at Esalen, where Summers’s one-time teacher Selver and Hanna gave workshops.<sup>45</sup> Like so many others foot soldiers of the somatic

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that “Teach Yourself to Fly,” the first of the *Sonic Meditations* Oliveros put down on paper, grew out of the earlier piece *Pep-psi*. *Pep-psi*, according to a description of Oliveros’s contribution to the Expo, “was a recording of mantras by two Chinese girls singing and playing a cello and accordion.” The two women in question were very likely Betty and Shirley Wong, founding members of the Ensemble. Selected audio and video recordings from Experiments in Art and Technology records, [1966–1993], Oral histories collection, Experiments in Art and Technology records, 1966–1997 (bulk 1966–1973), Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, CA; Oliveros, brochure for the ♀ Ensemble, MSS 102, Box 12, Folder 1, Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, San Diego; Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.), *Pavilion* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1972).

<sup>42</sup> Kairos was well-known enough in the early 1970s to be mentioned alongside Esalen in a 1970 *Time* magazine article on the rise of the human potential movement. “Human Potential: The Revolution in Feeling,” *Time*, November 9, 1970. Documentation regarding Oliveros’s activities at Kairos is scant, but according to a 1971 Kairos program, Huang taught a six-weekend “Invitation to the Dance” workshop in 1970, and it is likely that Oliveros and the ♀ Ensemble first collaborated with him for that event. A circa 1972 “Career narrative” in the Oliveros archives describes the following: “*Music for Tai Chi*—Improvisation instructions for accordion, strings, winds, percussion and voices. Requested by Al Chung Liang Huang for the Kairos Festival of Arts. First Performance Rancho Santa Fe, Calif., Aug. 22, 1970.” Huang’s own account of his work with Oliveros seems to corroborate this. Program for the Kairos Institute, HPA SC 74, Box 5, Folder 24, Small Collections, Kairos Institute, Humanistic Psychology Archives, University of California, Santa Barbara; Huang, *Essence of T'ai Chi*, 111–12.

<sup>43</sup> Pauline Oliveros, “Partial Performance Log and Activities,” MSS 102, Box 29, Folder 6, Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, San Diego.

<sup>44</sup> Oliveros, brochure for the ♀ Ensemble, MSS 102, Box 12, Folder 1, Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, San Diego.

<sup>45</sup> Huang is credited as a collaborator on Watts’s final publication, his 1975 *Tao: The Watercourse Way*. In the afterword to the book, Huang credited Watts with helping him understand his own identity in terms of a synthesis of Eastern and Western cultures. According to Huang, he met Watts by chance in Santa Barbara shortly after his return to California from Taiwan in 1967. It seems

revolution, Huang diagnosed a crippling malaise at the heart of “Western culture,” one that promulgated a paralyzing overreliance on what Ornstein would have called the left brain, Reich’s old consciousness. “In our Western society so much is in the head, so much is in talking and thinking about things, that we can analyze everything to pieces and it’s still distant from us, still not really understood,” he wrote in a 1973 tai chi primer based largely on transcripts of his Esalen workshops.<sup>46</sup> Like Summers, Huang taught students to “regain balance” by finding a mode of bodily motion uninhibited by the “talking,” “thinking” self.<sup>47</sup> In a 1980 interview, Huang contrasted his own practice with those of the manuals popularized by the social dance instructor Arthur Murray in the 1950s—pedagogical schemes that led dancers to “think,” and thus attempt to control their bodies, in a way that only led to feelings of anxiety and conflict. “This thinking,” he wrote, “always interferes with the flow of the movement.”<sup>48</sup> Archival video of a tai chi workshop filmed in 1976 at Esalen shows Huang demonstrating movement as a continuous process of “becoming” without preordained goals for the direction the movement will take. Taking a student by both hands, he coaxes her into allowing his own motions to control hers, explaining, “We just do the movements for a long, long, time, and suddenly the energy takes over . . . You don’t have to think what comes next.”<sup>49</sup> To be free of the “self-conscious,” “thinking” self, the analytical left brain: this was the “liberation” of the somatics movement, the “resurrection” of the contemporary body.

In the *Sonic Meditations*, Oliveros borrowed a favorite experimental form, the “event”-based work, while rewriting its rules according to somatic principles. A telling example is the first of the set, which Oliveros eventually titled “Teach Yourself to Fly” (but as previously mentioned, seems to have been originally titled *Music for T’ai Chi*) (ex. 2.1). Composed entirely of textual instructions for specific actions, this and the other *Sonic Meditations* clearly drew on similarly structured pieces popularized by members of Fluxus and their many imitators. But though solidly within this experimental lineage, Oliveros transferred the focus of attention from the observation of the experimental “event,” and with that, from the public raising of political consciousness, to the experience of participating in the event itself, what Hanna would call the somatic “here and now of our immediate organic being.”<sup>50</sup>

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likely that Watts was responsible for Huang’s being invited to teach at Esalen. Al Chung-liang Huang, “Once Again: A New Beginning,” afterword to *Tao: The Watercourse Way*, by Alan Watts and Al Chung-liang Huang (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), 126.

<sup>46</sup> Huang, *Essence of T’ai Chi*, 13.

<sup>47</sup> Huang, *Essence of T’ai Chi*, 13.

<sup>48</sup> Huang, *Essence of T’ai Chi*, 34.

<sup>49</sup> Al Chung-liang Huang, “Tai Chi,” archival film of workshop dated January 1, 1975, Esalen Institute Archives, Big Sur, CA.

<sup>50</sup> Hanna, *Bodies in Revolt*, 37.

EXAMPLE 2.1. Oliveros, “Teach Yourself to Fly” from *Sonic Meditations*, 1974

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

Seminal “instruction” pieces like La Monte Young’s opus *Composition 1960* directed performers to “draw a straight line and follow it,” “build a fire,” and “release butterflies,” while spectators looked on. The instructions in “Teach Yourself to Fly” were more akin to those one might have heard in one of Huang’s tai chi workshops (Huang’s classes typically began with participants “[sitting] in a circle in silence”).<sup>51</sup> They were designed not to put an aesthetic frame around an ordinary activity, nor to spark verbal analysis nor raise political consciousness, but to train participants in a new skill, a kind of somatic self-programming. (In the late 1970s Oliveros referred to her current work, an extension of her “meditational” practice, as “software for people.”)<sup>52</sup> “Teach Yourself to Fly” should be understood less as a technique of political critique and more like what philosopher Michel Foucault might have called a somatic “technology of the self.”<sup>53</sup> Earlier experimental “events,” of course, had demanded fastidious attention to both the actions of the performers and oneself—especially when the material of the performance involved threats to one’s personal safety (like when La Monte Young set his violin on fire).<sup>54</sup> Oliveros’s “meditation” instructed participants in a different level of observation and awareness. The “material” of the performance was inseparable from the actions of the participants, and those actions were predicated on minute attention to one’s own sensations and what one perceived others to be doing and feeling.

As a musical correlate to both Summers’s kinetic awareness and Huang’s tai chi, which required students to “reach a level of speed that is like slow motion, in which everything is just happening,” Oliveros instructed her performers to alter

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<sup>51</sup> Huang’s 1973 *Essence of Tai Chi* begins, “It happens: We sit here in a circle in silence. Most of the time we find it very difficult to sit and not break the silence . . . and just allow something to happen.” Like Oliveros, Huang would also have his students pay particular attention to their breathing. “Sometimes we say ‘observing the breathing,’” he explained. “This does not mean that you are outside of it; it means that you just follow it, and go with it.” Huang, *Essence of Tai Chi*, 11, 22.

<sup>52</sup> Oliveros, “Software for People.”

<sup>53</sup> See Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton, eds., *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

<sup>54</sup> See Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 86.

their musical production only “very slowly.”<sup>55</sup> Oliveros liked to describe this deliberate process as “tuning”—a term that fused the technological and the musical aspects of the work.<sup>56</sup> Participants “tuned” themselves like so many individual radios—by the early 1970s long employed as musical instruments by Cage and others—slowly searching for one another’s frequency across bands of physical tension and psychological hang-ups.<sup>57</sup> The investment of energy and concentration on the somatic “here and now” this exercise required, for Oliveros, guaranteed a truer music than the forms of performance conventionally regarded as “musical.” As Oliveros wrote in 1970, describing another piece, “there is a dedication and a sense of personal involvement in this moment of the evening that is often lacking during the actual performance, and although one may grow tired of hearing the same symphonic repertoire, no one can deny the true excitement that is engendered by tuning, as it grows from the central point of A to the beautifully chaotic sound of the full orchestra.”<sup>58</sup> The sounds that an exercise like “Teach Yourself to Fly” produced were bound to be equally untidy (as anyone at the 2013 “Gendered Soundscape” panel will attest), but just as in Huang and Summers’s dance practices, the meaning of the performance was in the doing. “You transcend the form and any concern you might have to achieve some particular motif,” Huang told his students.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, Oliveros would write that in “sonic meditation,” “music is a welcome byproduct of this activity.”<sup>60</sup>

The point of sonic meditation was not to produce something “spectacular,” as Summers might have said, but to cultivate one’s soma—the bodily self unrestricted by the “thinking” mind that Huang had shown her and the other members of the ♀ Ensemble how to actualize. When composer Robert Ashley asked Oliveros why she had designed “Teach Yourself to Fly” as a vocal rather than an instrumental exercise, she responded, “This is a way that I can manifest what is occurring within myself . . . find what is in myself, and what would come forth.”<sup>61</sup> “Let your self be

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<sup>55</sup> Huang, *Essence of T'ai Chi*, 19; Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations*, manuscript, MSS 102, Box 12, Folder 1, Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, San Diego.

<sup>56</sup> In 1971 Oliveros reflected in a personal journal, “Teach Yourself to Fly had marvelous sonorities tonight. I had many sensations of other persons vibrating my vocal cords. I think the group is truly tuning.” Quoted in Mockus, *Sounding Out*, 42.

<sup>57</sup> To cite just one of many examples, Cage had written *Imaginary Landscape no. 4* for twelve radios in 1951.

<sup>58</sup> Pauline Oliveros, program note for *AOK*, included in the New Music Ensemble concert program, Howard Hersch, director, March 20, 1970, Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, San Diego.

<sup>59</sup> Huang, *Essence of T'ai Chi*, 19.

<sup>60</sup> Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations*, manuscript, MSS 102, Box 12, Folder 1, Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, San Diego.

<sup>61</sup> Oliveros, *Music with Roots in the Aether: Opera for Television*. This insistence on the voice was a shift from earlier practice. As she explained in 1976, “When I articulated *Teach Yourself to Fly* for the ♀ Ensemble some of us were playing instruments. As understanding increased of what we were doing, it was accompanied by frustration with the filter systems imposed by the instruments. Gradually we abandoned instruments in favor of the development of our voices and awareness of the

self,” Huang would tell his students.<sup>62</sup> “Not in an egoistic sense but just allowing that manifestation to happen, so that each one of us moves and dances out of our own accord.”<sup>63</sup> Again echoing Huang, Oliveros framed “Teach Yourself to Fly” as a process of allowing: “allow your breathing to become audible,” she wrote. “Allow your vocal cords to vibrate . . . Allow the intensity to increase very slowly.” Like the self-actualizing pedagogies discussed in chapter 1, Oliveros’s sonic meditation sought to “allow” the musical “self” to “be self.”

Oliveros had finally found her panacea for a postsixties musical aesthetic—a right-brained improvisation, a music of the soma. It may be tempting to read all of Oliveros’s talk of “allowing” as yet another iteration of the Cagean imperative to escape “intention” and produce an “action the outcome of which is not foreseen.”<sup>64</sup> But paradoxically, I would suggest, the solution Oliveros had found to the biggest challenge of “experimental” action had led her back to the individual, creative body—and with that, back to the old Romantic paradigm of self-expression, but with a somatic twist. If Cage wanted to “let sounds be themselves,” Oliveros wanted to let musicians “be themselves.”

### *Somatic Musicality, Somatic Feminism*

While many of Oliveros’s feminist contemporaries were advocating analysis-based consciousness-raising sessions, Oliveros’s proudly feminist Ensemble was cultivating a very different form of feminist “consciousness”—and with it, a very different form of gender politics.<sup>65</sup> We might call Oliveros’s *Sonic Meditations* a feminist, musical somatics—or, to borrow a contemporary phrase, a form of musical “body work for women.”<sup>66</sup> The process of sonic meditation helped Oliveros imagine a new somatic understanding of women’s liberation. As she put it in a 1973 letter to Kate Millett, whose writings helped set the course for second-wave feminism,

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physical changes in tension towards relaxation brought about by the meditations.” Oliveros, “On Sonic Meditation,” 155.

<sup>62</sup> This and the next quotation are from Huang, *Essence of T'ai Chi*, 118.

<sup>63</sup> As Huang’s students Barry and John Stevens warned in their 1973 introduction to Huang’s primer, “Unlearning what has been going on for centuries is not easy, and ego/intellect/I rebels at giving up control and taking second place,” but, they counceled, “Tai ji is a subtle and powerful awareness discipline, a tool to become more in touch with yourself. It is a way of allowing yourself to function naturally and smoothly, uncluttered with expectations, shoulds, hopes, fears and other fantasies.” Stevens and Stevens, introduction to *Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain: The Essence of T'ai Chi*, 9, 7.

<sup>64</sup> John Cage, “Composition as Process,” in *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1961), 39.

<sup>65</sup> To take just one example of its more politically charged activities, the Ensemble performed at a Women’s Liberation Poetry Reading at the UCSD Art Gallery in March 1971. Oliveros, *Partial Performance Log and Activities*, MSS 102, Box 29, Folder 6, Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, San Diego. For more on the connections between the Ensemble and feminist activism, see Mockus, *Sounding Out*.

<sup>66</sup> I take this phrase from Anne Kent Rush’s 1973 *Getting Clear: Body Work for Women*, discussed below. I adopt the now normative spelling “bodywork” except when quoting sources.

“Women’s music is inside women. The time has come to draw it out and see what it is. It might not take the forms that are all neatly trimmed up and available, guaranteed to trigger specific emotions. So—I have been involved in what I call SONIC MEDITATION.”<sup>67</sup> She founded the ♀ Ensemble, as we have seen, “to explore the potentials of concentrated female creative activity, something which has never been fully explored or realized.” But more than simply providing a creative outlet, sonic meditation granted women access to a previously inaccessible level of creative potential—their somatic selves.

Oliveros was hardly the only feminist to take such a somatic turn. As Binkley notes, across the 1970s women looked to their bodies as a source of personal power.<sup>68</sup> Books like *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, quoted in chapter 1, helped set the tone, but a host of lesser-known texts—including, I would suggest, Oliveros’s *Sonic Meditations*—offered women more specifically somatic techniques for self-empowerment. In her 1973 *Getting Clear: Body Work for Women*, for instance, the Bay Area author and social reformer Anne Kent Rush suggested women meet in groups to practice not only discussion-based consciousness-raising but also “body work”—massage, sensitivity, movement, breathing—to bring about true and lasting social change.<sup>69</sup> Much like Oliveros, Rush saw such practices as the key to “releasing deep muscular tension,” developing “body awareness” and learning to let go of the “thinking” self.<sup>70</sup> Oliveros’s contemporaneous work made “body work for women” a specifically musical exercise, but her social project was gaining increasingly broad appeal.

As much as figures like Rush and Oliveros supported the broader women’s movement, their choice to pursue somatic means to feminist ends would have put them under fire from many contemporary feminist activists. To some observers, women’s groups were beginning to realize all too well the turn from the public sphere Reich had predicted would mark the seventies consciousness revolution.

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<sup>67</sup> Oliveros to Kate Millett, 1973, quoted in Mockus, *Sounding Out*, 47.

<sup>68</sup> Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 212–14.

<sup>69</sup> Anne Kent Rush, *Getting Clear: Body Work for Women* (New York: Random House, 1973), 124. Clearly influenced by the contemporary “return” to the body, Rush described the somatic body as the true seat of the self. “The body is mother nature,” Rush explained, “and when you are in the body and you can feel yourself in your body, you can experience yourself as a woman. You experience your body as it is. The body is our utmost reality.” Like Oliveros, Rush came to her somatic point of view via a teacher from Esalen, who taught her the Institute’s famous massage technique and inspired her to pursue other forms of bodywork, including Polarity Therapy and the breathing techniques of Wilhelm Reich, and to see her previous experience with yoga as part of the same circle of practices. “Why did I write this book? I wanted to explore Feminism more deeply; the Bay Area, as the center of the phenomenon, the Human Potential Movement, has collected many fine female therapists and psychological innovators . . . I thought I could contribute.” For Rush, “recognizing and accepting myself, my body, as unique and valuable” amounted to “one of the great human contributions of the women’s movement.” Rush, *Getting Clear*, 28, 6, 118, 286.

<sup>70</sup> Rush, *Getting Clear*, 6, 17. Echoing Huang, Rush encouraged her readers to “think of the breathing of animals . . . They don’t think to tell themselves when to breathe next. . . . Try to find a place where you are neither forcing . . . nor making yourself breathe.” Rush, *Getting Clear*, 30.

“Rather than aiding the political development of women and building a revolutionary women’s movement,” Kathy McAfee and Myrna Wood wrote of consciousness-raising groups in 1972, “they often encourage escape from political struggle.”<sup>71</sup> From McAfee and Wood to Betty Friedan and Joan Didion, many leading feminist advocates feared the rise of women’s groups more concerned with relieving individual women’s pent-up anxieties than changing the patriarchal status quo.<sup>72</sup> Such a focus on the individual within women’s groups, somatic or otherwise, opened the women’s movement to criticism from the conservative right as well. Wolfe’s 1976 critique of the “Me Decade” diagnosed the women’s liberation movement, too, as a symptom the era’s unprecedented narcissism. Only one out of ten feminists really wanted to achieve gender equality, Wolfe alleged—the others just wanted to “talk about me.”<sup>73</sup>

Somatic feminists had an answer to such criticisms, however, one that spoke directly to the alternative model of political “liberation” Reich had proclaimed. In *Getting Clear*, Rush argued that “one of the most liberating realizations for me has been that if I change, I can change what happens to me. . . . Power is not just whether I have a certain job or legal right. That does not necessarily give me power over the things that affect me deeply. . . . What affects me most and what I see affecting others most are inner feelings and resources.”<sup>74</sup> Oliveros seems to have agreed. Oliveros dedicated her work with the ♀ Ensemble to drawing out the music “inside women,” their creative inner resources. Doing so, for her, was synonymous with emancipation. As Oliveros argued in a 1973 essay, citing Ornstein, “the recognition and reevaluation of the intuitive mode as being equal to and as essential as the analytical mode” constituted “the primary meaning of the liberation movement in the world today.”<sup>75</sup> Or, as she wrote elsewhere around the same time, “when the two hemispheres are perfectly synchronized and one can focus either mode at will, duality vanishes and—*voilà!*—liberation!”<sup>76</sup> This was somatic feminism in a musical key: to make one’s “intuitive” side coterminous with one’s identity was to be liberated from the false patriarchy of “analytical” musicality. If

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<sup>71</sup> McAfee and Wood’s 1972 essay “Bread & Roses” quoted in Michals, “Countercultural Politics,” 59–61.

<sup>72</sup> Though Betty Friedan saw the contemporary vogue for “self-realization” as a potential boon for the cause of women’s equality, she feared that even consciousness-raising groups could easily devolve into “so much ‘navel gazing,’” or as Joan Didion would put it, a “litany of trivia.” As historian and journalist Debra Michals points out, the issue was only exacerbated when an article on “How to Start Your Own Consciousness Raising Group” appeared in an August 1970 issue of *Ladies Home Journal*, precipitating a rash of guides to consciousness-raising focused not on political change but on raising participants’ “personal functioning and potential.” Friedan and Didion quoted in Michals, “Countercultural Politics,” 51; Michals discusses the popularization of consciousness-raising groups in Michals, “Countercultural Politics,” 51–52.

<sup>73</sup> Wolfe, “Me Decade,” 153.

<sup>74</sup> Rush, *Getting Clear*, 13.

<sup>75</sup> Oliveros, “Contribution of Women,” 135.

<sup>76</sup> Oliveros, “Divisions Underground,” 107.

“left/right brain” science was the theory, to paraphrase a radical feminist catchphrase, musical bodywork for women was the practice.<sup>77</sup>

*Toward a Somatic Musicology*

Am I talking to myself?

Do I think music? have an idea of it, rather than experience music? . . . Where is my body? . . . (What are we doing in our universities?)

—Pauline Oliveros, “Divisions Underground” (1972)<sup>78</sup>

The same year that Oliveros and her ♀ Ensemble were “flowing according to T’ai Chi principles” for the first time, Thomas Hanna published a bold prediction. “The brave new world to be discovered is no longer ‘out there,’” he foresaw, “but is the here and now of our immediate organic being. The brave new world to be explored by the twenty-first century is the immense labyrinth of the soma, of the living, bodily experience of human individuals. And we of the latter third of the twentieth century have been appointed discoverers and early cartographers of this somatic continent.”<sup>79</sup>

Hanna’s words have proven true, in light of the early twenty-first century popularity of so-called “nonverbal” disciplines, from yoga and tai chi to “sonic meditation.” That perhaps is one reason why Oliveros’s work has been so easily integrated into the musicological mainstream, even if her somatic model of the body has not been an explicit part of the scholarly conversation around her work. Somatic disciplines are no longer the alternative practices they once were—in an era when Alexander Technique and “Meditation for Peak Performance” courses are the regular fare of conservatory students and yoga is widely available, the somatic model of the body is now a given—including in music studies.

Since the early 1990s, somatic thinking has been part of what it means to practice musicology, both specifically feminist and otherwise. “As a performer, I act on and with what we ordinarily call music with my body,” Suzanne Cusick wrote in her influential 1994 article “Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem.”<sup>80</sup> Cusick saw her performing self as essentially bodily, while university life excluded the body and required her to “think music” instead, as Oliveros might have put it. “As a musicologist I have been formed to act on (and with?) what we

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<sup>77</sup> “Feminism is the theory; lesbianism is the practice.” Anne Koedt credited Ti-Grace Atkinson with this popular phrase in 1973. See Anne Koedt, “Lesbianism and Feminism,” in *Radical Feminism*, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone (New York: New York Times Book Co., 1973), 246. For more on the origins of this phrase, see Catharine A. MacKinnon, “Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory,” in *Feminism and Sexuality: A Reader*, ed. Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 188n16.

<sup>78</sup> Oliveros, “Divisions Underground,” 102.

<sup>79</sup> Hanna, *Bodies in Revolt*, 37.

<sup>80</sup> Cusick, “Feminist Theory, Music Theory,” 9.



ordinarily call music with my mind, and only with my mind.”<sup>81</sup> Cusick may not have gone so far as to label her musicological self a “phony,” as Hanna might have, but she did describe her musicological side as “profoundly unmusical,” defined by a thoroughly left-brained “preoccupation with the text-like nature of music, that is, with the grammar and syntax of pitches and durations.”<sup>82</sup> The future field of “embodied” or “feminist music theory,” Cusick hoped, would legitimize the somatic body as a source of musical—and musicological—knowledge.<sup>83</sup> Elisabeth Le Guin’s *Boccherini’s Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* went even further than Cusick in its insistence on the legitimacy of “embodied” musical knowledge—Le Guin even claimed the ability to inhabit the composer Boccherini’s body in the act of performance, thus gaining access to a kind of somatic archive of musical knowledge.<sup>84</sup>

Other scholars have taken the legitimacy and value of a recognizably somatic musical experience for granted. Even in an essay whose primary focus lay elsewhere, Carolyn Abbate likewise juxtaposed what she called the “gnostic” verbal analyses customary in academic music departments with the “drastic” knowledge unique to the act of performance.<sup>85</sup> “Drastic connotes physicality,” Abbate explained, “involving a category of knowledge that flows from drastic experiences and not from verbally mediated reasoning.”<sup>86</sup> The question Abbate posed in her title, “Music: Drastic or Gnostic?” turned out to not really be a question at all. For her, the “drastic”—or, I would suggest, somatic—nature of live performance (what Abbate calls “real music”) is a given, one that she uses to ground a critique of current methods in musical hermeneutics. Cusick, Abbate, and Le Guin, it seems, sought to hop what Oliveros might have called musicology’s “verbal fence,” and on the other side arrived at the soma—the “doing” body liberated from analytical encumbrances.

Few scholars who invoke somatic ideas have cited “left right brain” research or bodywork manuals. But I would speculate that the rise of what might be called “somatic musicology” owed at least as much to figures like Huang, Summers, and

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<sup>81</sup> Cusick, “Feminist Theory, Music Theory,” 9.

<sup>82</sup> Cusick, “Feminist Theory, Music Theory,” 9, 13.

<sup>83</sup> Cusick, “Feminist Theory, Music Theory,” 21.

<sup>84</sup> “As a living performer of Boccherini’s sonata, a work which he wrote for himself to play, I am aware of acting the connection between parts of someone who cannot be here in the flesh. I have become not just his hands, but his binding agent, the continuity, the consciousness.” Elisabeth Le Guin, *Boccherini’s Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 24.

<sup>85</sup> Abbate acknowledged the similarity of these ideas to Cusick’s, but chastised her for not taking them far enough. Carolyn Abbate, “Music: Drastic or Gnostic?” *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (2004): 506.

<sup>86</sup> Abbate, “Music: Drastic or Gnostic?” 510. Abbate describes the gnostic as specifically nonverbal several times in the essay. “Dissecting the work’s technical features or saying what it represents reflects the wish *not* to be transported by the state that the performance”—and here, Abbate means “the experience of playing or listening”—“has engendered in us.” Or again, she writes that doing drastic musicology “might even mean falling silent, and this is difficult to accept because silence is not our business, and loquacity is our professional deformation.” Abbate, “Music: Drastic or Gnostic?” 505–6, 510.

Oliveros as it did to Butler, Jankélévitch, or Foucault. For it was Oliveros's generation of somatic performing artists who brought the soma to the university and the conservatory, helping to normalize the notion of the performing body's "intuitive" knowledge and the antithetical relationship of such knowledge to "gnostic" verbal analyses. (Le Guin, in fact, was among the first conservatory students to have a workshop in the bodywork practice called Aston Patterning at the San Francisco Conservatory in the mid-1970s.)<sup>87</sup> In this sense, the musicological "bodily turn" may represent a belated "return to the body" and the "nonverbal" that journalists widely remarked upon in the 1970s. Foucault had as little to say about musical performance as any gender theorist from Butler to Kristeva. When it came to applying their ideas to music, scholars like Cusick, Le Guin, and Abbate had no other choice than to fall back on their own personal experience as performers—experience, their writing suggests, they understood in somatic terms. Hanna's predicted revolt, it seems, at long last infiltrated the ivory tower, as the generation of musicologists who came of age during the somatic revolution began to set the course for the future of music studies.

Figures like Oliveros helped musicologists put the body front and center, where it belongs—no one is proposing a return to the bad old days when analysis was the rule and carnality was a dirty word. Still, if we find somatic music-making and its promise of personal transformation politically as well as personally liberating, it's worth asking why this is. Are we ready to pledge allegiance to Reich's "new consciousness"? If somatic truths are our truths, how do we justify them? Ornstein's claims to scientific validity will probably not suffice: indeed, for some in the scientific community, the political and moral value of the "intuitive" and "analytical" ways of knowing are now reversed: "intuition," argues psychologist Daniel Kahneman in a recent popular book, is the "fast" mode of consciousness that leads to stereotyping and discrimination, the mode that must be checked by the "slow," "rational" mind, not the other way round.<sup>88</sup> The point, of course, is not to wed ourselves to the newest truths of the human organism but to remain cognizant of those truths' historical contingency. For the yoga practitioner, perhaps the truth of the "soma" is also a spiritual, ethical truth. In musicology, the debate between somatic and more academically recognized political methods of social change has not been resolved so much as deferred, as somatic practices like Oliveros's, born of the spirit of the "new consciousness" have been analyzed according to the principles of the public sphere they sought to leave behind. It is time to reevaluate our somatic commitments, not so much in the spirit of critique, but of diagnosis—in order to understand, as Nancy Fraser has written, "which modes of feminist"—and I would

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<sup>87</sup> Le Guin appears as a student participant in an archival film "Aston Patterning at the San Francisco Conservatory," dated January 1, 1977, held at the Esalen Institute archive, Big Sur, California.

<sup>88</sup> Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux: New York, 2011).

add, musicological—“theorizing should be incorporated into the new political imaginaries now being invented.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (London: Verso Books, 2013), 2.

## Chapter 3

### George Rochberg, Intuitive Romanticism, and the Discourse of the Postmodern

In April 1973 *Time* magazine ran a story on new attitudes towards rationality and human knowledge that were rapidly reshaping US culture. Abraham Maslow, who had died the previous year, once again spoke for the movement. “We have learned to think of knowledge as verbal, explicit, articulated, rational, logical. Aristotelian, realistic, sensible,” the article quoted Maslow as writing.<sup>1</sup> “Equally important,” he countered in the now familiar language of self-actualization, “are mystery, ambiguity, illogical contradiction and transcendent experience.”

The article caught the eye of George Rochberg, then a respected composer and teacher at the University of Pennsylvania already in his early fifties.<sup>2</sup> Some fifteen years Pauline Oliveros’s senior, Rochberg would likely have seemed to her a member of the musical establishment inimical to her experimental ethos. Rochberg, for his part, expressed nothing but contempt for the post-Cage aleatoric music scene.<sup>3</sup> Still, by the early 1970s the two musicians had more in common than either of them might have realized.

Maslow’s suggestion that “illogical contradictions and transcendent experience” might serve as an antidote to contemporary “rational” culture must have resonated especially deeply with Rochberg. Since the mid-1960s he had been developing a new aesthetic he called “ars combinatoria,” premised on the juxtaposition of seemingly opposite musical styles drawn from a range of historical periods. Across the sixties Rochberg had frequently argued that such a combinatorial music could act as a springboard to the nonlogical experiential realm, what Rochberg considered a hallowed capacity of Western art music lost to his own day. When he read the *Time* article, Rochberg had just completed his most enduring “combinatorial” work, his Third String Quartet, where he infamously juxtaposed the idioms of Schoenberg, Bartók, Mahler, and Beethoven. That same year, Rochberg described composing the piece, very much in the image of Maslow, as a process of “self-discovery and self-realization.”<sup>4</sup> By the early 1970s, Rochberg was imbuing Maslow’s ideas with new musical resonances.

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<sup>1</sup> This and the following quotation are from “Reaching Beyond the Rational,” *Time*, April 23, 1973.

<sup>2</sup> Rochberg kept a copy of the article quoting Maslow’s words with his notes as he prepared for a 1973 talk, eventually published as “The Fantastic and the Logical,” that would echo many of the *Time* article’s themes. See the notes he kept with “The Fantastic and the Logical,” draft typescript, 1973, Textmanuskripte, Eigene Texte, Sammlung George Rochberg, Paul Sacher Stiftung.

<sup>3</sup> Rochberg once described Cage’s *Fontana Mix* as an “offensive,” “unrelieved piece of dadaistic horseplay” that only expressed the composer’s “self-indulgence.” George Rochberg, “Current Chronicle: Canada,” *The Musical Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1961): 104.

<sup>4</sup> George Rochberg, undated draft of “String Quartet no. 3” (1973), Sammlung George Rochberg, Paul Sacher Stiftung.

This chapter explores the intersection of the culture of self-actualization and Rochberg's polystylistic musical language of the sixties and early seventies. Today scholars often describe Rochberg's combinatorial aesthetic, exemplified by works like the Third Quartet, as a "new romanticism"—an aesthetic and political project to "recapture a lost expressive range" in the age of abstract modernism.<sup>5</sup> Rochberg's own words would seem to confirm this view—he once characterized the affect of serial music as inherently "overintense"—leading scholars to think of Rochberg's "new romanticism" as a "rehabilitation of sweetness."<sup>6</sup> Some have interpreted this apparent expressive revival as a critique of the dogmatic Cold War aesthetic values serial and aleatoric musical styles seemed to represent.<sup>7</sup> Others, meanwhile, have analyzed Rochberg's polystylistic music for evidence of a "postmodern" attitude towards history.<sup>8</sup> But as my first two chapters have suggested (and as we shall see again in the next), musicians who sought to make music a mode of self-actualization tended to be concerned at least as much with personal transformation as they were aesthetic or political representation. As we shall see, Rochberg's "new romanticism," and indeed, his "postmodernism," were inseparable from the self-actualization culture's reevaluation of music's nonrational powers.

### *Troubled Modernist*

Today Rochberg is widely considered a representative "postmodern" composer, not least because of the way he emphatically traded the rigors of serialism, on which he had built his reputation, for the musical language of the late Romantics in the years around 1970. As if to heighten the drama of Rochberg's apparent postmodern turn, scholars like Taruskin have suggested that Rochberg the serialist led the life of "an untroubled academic modernist" prior to his romantic conversion.<sup>9</sup> That story, however, bears some further scrutiny. Readers used to thinking of mid-century serialism as a scientific, cerebral medium may be surprised to read Rochberg's

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<sup>5</sup> Taruskin, *Late Twentieth Century*, 434. David Metzger likewise argues that Rochberg sought "to revitalize new music by synthesizing the rich harmonies and melodies of earlier periods with modern styles." David Metzger, *Quotation and Cultural Meaning in Twentieth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 112.

<sup>6</sup> George Rochberg, *String Quartet no. 3*, performed by the Concord String Quartet, Nonesuch 71283, 1973, liner notes; Danielle Fosler-Lussier, *Music Divided: Bartók's Legacy in Cold War Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 161.

<sup>7</sup> As Fosler-Lussier argues, "Rochberg maintained that his primary interest was reviving a language for genuine expression of a kind that existed in earlier traditions." Fosler-Lussier interprets Rochberg's "rehabilitation of sweetness" as a political statement in the context of cold war antipathies towards the imitation of other artists and, more broadly, music that borrowed old modes of expression. She reads Rochberg's work of the early 1970s as "a comprehensive negation of the distinctions engendered by cold war politics in the hopes of bringing about a more humane world" (163–64).

<sup>8</sup> See Taruskin, *Late Twentieth Century*, 414; Robert Fink, "Going Flat: Post-Hierarchical Music Theory and the Musical Surface," in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Taruskin, *Late Twentieth Century*, 414.

accusations against his contemporaries of their overly “rational” musical output. For Rochberg—even the uncompromising serialist Rochberg of the 1950s—“intuition” was the musician’s sine qua non. That an alarming number of his colleagues seemed to ignore this fact made Rochberg a deeply troubled modernist.

Upon his return from service in the Second World War, Rochberg completed his training in composition under Gian Carlo Menotti and others at the Curtis Institute. After a fateful summer of study with Luigi Dallapiccola in Rome in 1951, Rochberg adopted a serial idiom, and by the early sixties had become one of the United States’ foremost serialist theorists.<sup>10</sup> Even as he established his reputation as a serial composer in the 1950s, though, Rochberg’s music criticism began to anticipate the antirationalist discourse that would mark the self-actualization culture. In a 1957 review of Pierre Boulez’s *Structures*, for instance, Rochberg lamented that Boulez’s “too self-conscious” “rigid canonic constructions” subjected the listener to “a kind of remarkable cerebration.”<sup>11</sup> The problem was not so much the rational structure of the music but what that “rationalism” seemed to exclude: what Rochberg variously described as an essentially “nonrational,” “poetic,” “imaginative,” or “intuitive” musical sense. “Boulez is of that contemporary school (not confined to music),” Rochberg argued, “which distrusts the non-rational that resides in the depths of the human spirit, demanding of itself absolute rational control of all means even at the expense of eschewing inner forces which invest man.”<sup>12</sup> It was a theme Rochberg would often sound in his writings of the period. In another 1958 article, Rochberg wrote tongue-in-cheek that he was grateful to be reviewing an atonal rather than a twelve-tone work, since it freed him as a reviewer to “dust off” his “intuitive antennae” and seek out the music’s “truth.”<sup>13</sup>

What exactly constituted “intuitive” music, for Rochberg? This was a question he would revisit across the course of his career, and one of the most important issues he would face as he sought new stylistic paths to overcoming the “rationalism” of his time. In the early 1970s, as we shall see, he would find an answer in studies of the “intuitive” ways of “archaic” peoples and the contemporary science of the nonrational that seemed to validate their “primitive” ways of being. In the early 1960s, though, Rochberg argued that people “intuitively” understood music, and themselves, in terms of the linear passage of time. It was by processing the relationship between chronologically connected events, Rochberg claimed, that individuals formed their sense of identity, and by the same process, were able to understand music as a series of rhythmic and melodic gestures. The problem with

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<sup>10</sup> Rochberg seems to have written only one nonserial work during this period, his 1957 *Bartókiana*. Rochberg cemented his reputation as one of US serialism’s leading lights with the publication of *The Hexachord and Its Relation to the Twelve-Tone Row* in 1955. Fosler-Lussier, *Music Divided*, 158; Taruskin, *Late Twentieth Century*, 414.

<sup>11</sup> George Rochberg, “Review: Structures for 2 Pianos or 4 Hands by Pierre Boulez,” *Notes* 14, no. 2 (1957): 197.

<sup>12</sup> Rochberg, “Review: Structures,” 197.

<sup>13</sup> George Rochberg, “Review: Sechs Stücke. Six Pieces, Op. 6 by Anton Webern,” *Notes* 15, no. 4 (1958): 653, 654.

much contemporary music, Rochberg maintained, was that listeners could no longer hope to interpret it “intuitively” as a sequence of discrete musical events—a fault Rochberg laid at the feet of contemporary composers’ will to cerebration.<sup>14</sup>

Rochberg’s reflections on the contemporary dissolution of the “intuitive” in music led him to a grand historical diagnosis of his age—one we would now recognize as “postmodern.” When it comes to early essays on the “postmodern” in music, we tend to think not of Rochberg but of his contemporary Leonard Meyer, who famously argued in 1963 that the aleatoric music of his day had abandoned teleological organization and, therefore, represented the “end of the renaissance.”<sup>15</sup> Rochberg and Meyer, though, were very much on the same page. Meyer’s essay actually contained a footnote acknowledging the similarities between his observations and those Rochberg had expressed in a 1959 essay entitled “Indeterminacy in the New Music.”<sup>16</sup> In that essay, Rochberg leaned once more on his notions of rationality and intuition to claim that composers of serial music, in their zeal to organize their music purely according to rational principles, had ended up making music that utterly failed to correspond to man’s “intuitive” feel for the flow of musical events. Rochberg developed and clarified these ideas a few years later—just as Meyer was writing his own more famous essay. There, Rochberg went beyond Meyer to argue that both serialists and aleatorists alike wrote music that was effectively “indeterminate”—nonlinear—and thus failed to address man’s “intuitive” musical understanding. Rochberg described the new music as “spatial” (as opposed to temporal), and argued in 1963 that “it is the tendency toward the spatialization of music that the larger purpose of the chief developments of this century reveals itself.”<sup>17</sup>

While Meyer saw the “end of the renaissance” affecting “only a small segment of the world of contemporary art,” Rochberg’s diagnosis was much more sweeping.<sup>18</sup> According to him, both the overrationalized serialism of Boulez and the anarchic antirationality of Cage’s chance works spoke to a broader cultural truth: modern man had become, as Rochberg put it, quoting William Blake, “weary of time.”<sup>19</sup> To explain what he called the new time-weary “consciousness,” he turned to the recent

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<sup>14</sup> “The suprarationalism of total serial music . . . does not engage the listener in his most profound intuitive relation to life and experience, through his grasp of duration by means of which he creates and recreates the order of his personal identity and therein finds his being.” Rochberg, “Duration in Music (1960),” 67.

<sup>15</sup> Leonard B. Meyer, “The End of the Renaissance?” in *Music, the Arts, and Ideas: Patterns and Predictions in Twentieth-Century Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). Originally published in *The Hudson Review* 16, no. 2 (1963): 169–86.

<sup>16</sup> Rochberg, “Indeterminacy in the New Music (1959).” For Meyer’s citation, see Meyer, “End of the Renaissance,” 71.

<sup>17</sup> Rochberg, “New Image of Music (1963),” 24. “In the new music, time as duration becomes a dimension of musical space. The new spatial image of music seeks to project the permanence of the world as cosmos, the cosmos as the eternal present. It is an image of music which aspires to Being, not Becoming.” Rochberg, “New Image of Music (1963),” 24.

<sup>18</sup> Meyer, “End of the Renaissance,” 83.

<sup>19</sup> Rochberg, “New Image of Music (1963),” 23.

writings of historian of religion and countercultural guru Mircea Eliade, who had predicted in the late 1950s that the popularity of “historicist” philosophies, which presumed a constant linear chronological flow of time, might soon come to an end.<sup>20</sup> “According to Mircea Eliade,” Rochberg explained, “contemporary man is in ‘terror of history’ and its increasingly relentless pressure. He would appear to be rejecting three centuries of a doctrine he can no longer live with because it does not provide him with the means by which he can successfully cope with the reality of his present existence.”<sup>21</sup> The renaissance was over for everyone, including Rochberg.

But the “terror of history” did not excuse composers from writing music that spoke to man’s “intuitive” musical understanding. The “end of the renaissance” was real, but the solutions composers had recently found for addressing it were entirely unsatisfactory. “Clearly some means must be discovered to effect adequate control of [the] tendencies toward chaos if composers wish to create works whose structural characteristics achieve perceptible clarity of function and design.”<sup>22</sup> This was the problem, in Rochberg’s grand historical vision, towards which twentieth-century music had progressed: how to write “intuitive” music in an age when the “terror of history” had become too much to bear.

Ironically—for the narrative of Rochberg the “apostate” postmodernist, at any rate—Rochberg’s first attempts at a solution were serial.<sup>23</sup> His 1962 serial work *Time-Span II* (and its predecessor *Time-Span*, later retracted) represented Rochberg’s first attempts to compose self-consciously “spatialized” music, what he called “space form.”<sup>24</sup> In the mid-1960s Rochberg described “spatial” works like *Time-Span II* as a “music of presence” geared toward the expression of his contemporary posthistorical, “spatialized” consciousness. In it, Rochberg seems to have attempted to solve the problem of writing “intuitive” posthistorical music by building a piece out of a series of long, sparsely textured arching motives that dovetail to produce a sense of continuity within each phrase but deny any sense of overarching teleological design. According to Rochberg, the work’s organizing principle was not time but space. Echoing the contemporaneous efforts of early

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<sup>20</sup> Rochberg, “New Image of Music (1963),” 24.

<sup>21</sup> Rochberg, “New Image of Music (1963),” 23.

<sup>22</sup> Rochberg, “New Image of Music (1963),” 20.

<sup>23</sup> Today we tend to think of Rochberg’s music of the mid-1960s as tied up with his rejection of serial technique, an interpretation Rochberg later encouraged in his writings. In the late 1960s Rochberg wrote in a program note for his piece *Contra mortem et tempus*, “After the death of my son Paul in 1964 it became crystal clear to me that I could not continue writing so-called ‘serial’ music . . . it was finished . . . hollow . . . meaningless.” Still, the significance of Rochberg’s “break” with his own compositional past has probably been overstated. Rochberg dedicated two serial works to his son’s memory: *Time-Span II*, completed in 1962 and published in 1965, and *Zodiac*, an orchestral transcription of his first-ever serial work first penned in the mid-1950s. See the program note reproduced in Joan DeVee Dixon, *George Rochberg: A Bio-Bibliographic Guide to His Life and Works* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1992), 74.

<sup>24</sup> According to Alexander Ringer, Rochberg described his piece *Time-Span* as his “first major excursion into space form” in a 1960 letter. Alexander L. Ringer, “The Music of George Rochberg,” *Musical Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (1966): 417.



minimalists like La Monte Young, Rochberg suggested that this spatial music “defines, as only music can, a state of being. There is no climax in the usual sense. The generating chain of melodic phrases leads inevitably to a sense of expanding duration, larger than clock time, which lifts the music out of the realm of physical rhythm and meter.”<sup>25</sup> In this “spatial,” posthistorical music, we might say, Rochberg developed a minimalist aesthetic contemporaneous with those taking shape in San Francisco around the same time. Like La Monte Young’s serial works of the early 1960s, Rochberg had used serial technique to create “changing mechanisms that would produce static musical surfaces.”<sup>26</sup> But though Rochberg’s belief that he was living in a posthistorical world led him to share early minimalist composers’ interest in nonteleological form, he remained far more committed to music as a form of deeply personal, “intuitive” expression—commitments that would ultimately lead him not only beyond serialism but to new notions of musical “intuition” that would resonate with the antirationalistic discourse of self-actualization. This troubled serialist, as we shall now see, was about to discover the musicality of his intuitive, carnal body.

### *A Romantic at Reason’s Court*

The mid-1960s only saw Rochberg sharpen his critique of his contemporary musical culture’s disrespect for musical intuition. In 1963 Rochberg had described both serial and aleatoric music as “both supremely human forms of musical expression.”<sup>27</sup> But two years later, the “rationalism” Rochberg had diagnosed in new music now seemed a threat to humanity itself. “The triumph of abstractionism has led us to the cliff edge of dehumanization and depersonalization, nihilism and negativism,” he wrote in 1965.<sup>28</sup> Anticipating somatic thinkers like Elaine Summers, Rochberg identified the rational with the demonic. “What William Blake called the Spectre, man’s reason, produces that frame of mind which tends to frustrate and paralyze the creative impulse. It kills or casts a pall on the artist’s energy which is passion and his imagination which is intuition.” As somatic performers like Oliveros were beginning to exorcise the “spectre” of rationalism in the immediacy of bodily exercise, Rochberg would take steps towards a Maslowian musicality of his own, modeling “intuitive” experience through new compositional styles. In the mid-1960s, such a proposition might have taken Maslow aback. In his 1968 Tanglewood talk (quoted in chapter 1), Maslow doubted whether composers of his time were tuned in to the value of peak experiences.<sup>29</sup> Had he met Rochberg,

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<sup>25</sup> George Rochberg, *Time-Span II* (New York: Leeds Music, 1965).

<sup>26</sup> Jeremy Grimshaw, *Draw a Straight Line and Follow It: The Music and Mysticism of La Monte Young* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10.

<sup>27</sup> Rochberg, “New Image of Music (1963),” 24.

<sup>28</sup> This and the following quotations are from Rochberg, “Aural Fact or Fiction,” 187.

<sup>29</sup> “So far, I have found that . . . peak experiences are reported from what we might call ‘classical music.’ I have not found a peak experience from John Cage or from an Andy Warhol movie, from abstract expressionistic kind of painting, or the like. I just haven’t. The peak experience that has

though, Maslow might have begun to think otherwise. By the late 1960s, Rochberg had become a musician after Maslow's own heart.

Rochberg's road forward would take many turns, but he had a name for it as early as 1963. As he wrote to his colleague and confidant Alexander Ringer that year, "it has taken me all these years to recognize and embrace the fact that at root I am a complete romantic and especially now that the question arises from all sides: after abstractionism, what next? The answer rings out clearly: the 'new romanticism.'"<sup>30</sup> That term, of course, would come to stand for a whole musical movement, especially after the 1983 concert composer Jacob Druckman organized with the New York Philharmonic under its banner.<sup>31</sup> Scholars have since come to think of that concert, which included works by Rochberg, as the launch of a "tonal reformation."<sup>32</sup> But Rochberg's "romanticism" entailed much more than musical sound or style alone.

It is a truism of postwar American studies that a countercultural suspicion towards traditional sources of authority, particularly science, drove the seventies turn "inward."<sup>33</sup> But as historians of science have recently begun to explore, the era also saw the rise of a new "groovy" science that both critiqued the "rationalism" of traditional scientific inquiry and sought to legitimize "nonrational" forms of knowledge.<sup>34</sup> The 1973 *Time* article quoted earlier, a special report on "a new view among some scientists that there should be room in their discipline for the nonobjective, mystical and even irrational," documented the trend.<sup>35</sup> The article dubbed one of these scientists' most prominent advocates, the critic Theodore Roszak, a "romantic at reason's court." This new "romanticism" sought not a return to nineteenth-century scientific methods but rather to the broader appreciation Romantics were understood to have for "nonrational" modes of experience.

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reported the great joy, the ecstasy, the visions of another world, or another level of living, has come from classical music—the great classics." Maslow, "Music Education," 168.

<sup>30</sup> Ringer, "Music of George Rochberg," 414.

<sup>31</sup> The concert has come to be viewed as a watershed moment in US concert culture. See Kenneth Gloag, *Postmodernism in Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 61; Taruskin, *Late Twentieth Century*, 435–36; Jonathan Bernard, "Tonal Traditions in Art Music Since 1960," in *The Cambridge History of American Music*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 559.

<sup>32</sup> Bernard, "Art Music Since 1960," 559.

<sup>33</sup> Historian Philip Jenkins, for instance, argues that "the mid-1970s marked the height of activity . . . dedicated to exploring inner consciousness. This change reflected the collapse of faith in science, alongside other mainstream institutions." Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*. As David Kaiser and W. Patrick McCray point out, an apparent antiscience bias has been part of the mythology of the counterculture from its christening by Roszak. David Kaiser and W. Patrick McCray, introduction to *Groovy Science: Knowledge, Innovation, and American Counterculture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 1–2. See Roszak, *Making of a Counterculture*.

<sup>34</sup> Kaiser and McCray, introduction to *Groovy Science: Knowledge, Innovation, and American Counterculture*. See also David Kaiser, *How the Hippies Saved Physics: Science, Counterculture, and the Quantum Revival* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> "Reaching Beyond the Rational."

As much as Rochberg would emulate nineteenth-century models, evidence suggests he, too, was a groovy romantic at heart.<sup>36</sup> That much was obvious by the early 1970s: Rochberg could have been quoting Ornstein when he wrote in 1973 that “consciousness is not definable by the rational capacity alone.”<sup>37</sup> To support this point, he turned to recent studies in ESP and electromagnetic waves that documented man’s “intuition . . . the dream life” at work.<sup>38</sup> In 1969 Rochberg had a chance to engage with the groovy scientific romanticism at the source when he was invited to deliver a talk at an international conference on parapsychology, or “psi,” a new groovy scientific field dedicated to investigating the paranormal, a major preoccupation of the new romanticism. It was an increasingly popular and perhaps surprisingly legitimate field—contemporary surveys suggested some seventy percent of British scientists affirmed the existence of some form of ESP.<sup>39</sup> For Rochberg, the conference gave him the opportunity to explore the “paranormal” aspects of his own self-consciously romantic compositional experiences of the past several years—investigations that demonstrate how thoroughly “intuitive” Rochberg’s posthistorical aesthetic had become.

“Every work of art is a raid on the infinite,” Rochberg began his talk at the psi conference, quickly turning to an apocryphal Beethoven anecdote to support his claim.<sup>40</sup> “Music is the incorporeal entrance into the higher world of knowledge which comprehends mankind but which mankind cannot comprehend,” Rochberg quoted Beethoven to the crowd.<sup>41</sup> “Translating these remarks” for his own time, Rochberg explained, “takes us into the realm of the paranormal experience of heightened states of consciousness.”<sup>42</sup> Next, it was Rochberg’s turn to demonstrate his own paranormal romanticism.

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<sup>36</sup> Though he discussed what he called the “new physics” (citing, for instance, new age scientists like Fritjof Capra, author of the bestselling book *The Tao of Physics*) most extensively in his writings of the 1980s, his earlier essays and talks suggest he understood the applicability of the new science to his musical aesthetic for much longer. See, for example, Rochberg’s references to Capra and other “new physicists” in his 1982 essay “The Marvelous in Art” and to recent findings in quantum mechanics in “Fiddlers and Fribbles” from 1986.

<sup>37</sup> Rochberg, “Fantastic and the Logical,” 212.

<sup>38</sup> “It is now a paradigm of physics that the cosmos is held together by electromagnetic forces of which gravitation is one manifestation. Recently it has been discovered that each human being carries with him his own electromagnetic field. Research into areas of ESP and psychokinesis has led to photographing the electromagnetic aura which human beings give off.” Later, Rochberg noted that ESP was one and the same with man’s “intuitive” faculty. Rochberg, “Humanism versus Science (1970),” 211–12.

<sup>39</sup> “Reaching Beyond the Rational.”

<sup>40</sup> George Rochberg, “A Raid on the Infinite,” in *Psi Factors in Creativity: Proceedings of an International Conference Held at Le Piol, St. Paul de Vence, France, June 16–18, 1969*, ed. Allan Angoff and Betty Shapin (New York: Parapsychology Foundation, 1970), 64.

<sup>41</sup> Rochberg, “Raid on the Infinite,” 64. The quote was from a secondhand reportage of a conversation with Beethoven from 1810, which Rochberg explained might be of dubious provenance but nonetheless accurately reflected Beethoven’s perspective on life and art. Rochberg, “Raid on the Infinite,” 65.

<sup>42</sup> This and the quotations in the following paragraph are from Rochberg, “Raid on the Infinite,” 65.

“*Strange and remarkable things happen when you are composing,*” Rochberg began, going on to relate his own recent “heightened”—or what Maslow would have called “peak”—experience composing two 1965 postserial, “spatial” works, *Contra mortem et tempus* and *Music for the Magic Theater*. Rochberg’s description bears quoting at some length:

I thought I was hallucinating . . . I seemed to be totally suspended internally. Time did not exist; or it had lost itself utterly in the hidden spaces of my psyche. There was no effort attached to composing. Just the physical effort of putting signs and symbols down on paper. Otherwise, I felt only a profound calm, a quiet joy in the presence of what was emerging. In both instances the state of consciousness I am trying to describe continued on after the works themselves were done, and then slowly faded away.

Rochberg had discovered a realm of paranormal creative experience with all the features of a Maslowian peak experience—“loss of placement in time and space,” “feelings of limitless horizons opening up to the vision,” and perhaps most importantly, “the conviction that something extremely important and valuable had happened.”<sup>43</sup> This was also the kind of experience psychologists and athletes were beginning to call “flow,” after a landmark 1975 study by the Hungarian-American psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, itself inspired by the work of Maslow, Ornstein, and others.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, Rochberg’s description sounds remarkably like an anonymous composer Csikszentmihalyi interviewed for his study, who suggested that in such a state, “my hand seems devoid of myself, and I have nothing to do with what is happening. I just sit there watching it in a state of awe and wonderment. And it just flows out by itself.”<sup>45</sup>

For Rochberg, the act of composition had begun to approach the “heightened” experience of paranormal achievement that somatically oriented athletes at Esalen and beyond were beginning to recognize—and seek—around the same time. After Esalen founder Michael Murphy published a novel, *Golf in the Kingdom*, exploring the mystical side of the sport, Murphy quickly filled another book with unprompted responses from seasoned professionals as well as amateurs describing their own experiences with paranormal consciousness in the midst of gameplay.<sup>46</sup> In a 1977 article summarizing his findings, Murphy noted that quarterback John Brodie had described how “at times, and with increasing frequency now, I [Brodie] experienced

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<sup>43</sup> Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1987 [1954]), 137.

<sup>44</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1975).

<sup>45</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*, 44.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Murphy and Rhea A. White, *The Psychic Side of Sports* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978). The book was only one among several similar books to appear in the 1970s exploring “yogic” experience in sport. See Gallwey, *Inner Game of Tennis*; George Leonard, *The Ultimate Athlete* (New York: Viking, 1975); McCluggage, *Centered Skier*.

a kind of clarity I've never seen adequately described in a football story. Sometimes, for example, time seems to slow way down in an uncanny way. It's almost as if everyone is in slow motion."<sup>47</sup> The famous English golfer Tony Jacklin, he added, had reached similar states; football player David Meggysey, meanwhile, had reported seeing opposing players enrobed in auras, and as Murphy described it, "could anticipate the moves his opponents were about to make in a kind of precognitive trance" (a description echoed elsewhere by football stars O.J. Simpson and Jim Brown).<sup>48</sup> "Reflect on the state of mind of a player who is said to be 'hot,'" Timothy Gallwey, the tennis guru who inspired Barry Green's *The Inner Game of Music*, urged in his 1974 book *The Inner Game of Tennis*.<sup>49</sup> "He's out of his mind," athletes said of such players, "He's playing over his head." In the image of his sporting contemporaries, Rochberg, long in search of a means of escaping the rational culture of his day, had learned to compose "over his head."

Over his head and into the carnal body. Rochberg frequently referred to the interconnectedness of sexual and artistic creative energy in his personal writings, but his paranormal compositional peak experiences seem to have crystalized the connection.<sup>50</sup> Around 1966 composer Stephen Albert drew attention to the current of sexual energy running through Rochberg's recent compositional flows in a letter to the composer, apparently responding directly to Rochberg's own hot-blooded account of his "hallucinatory" experience writing *Music for the Magic Theater* and *Contra mortem et tempus*. "You sound fecund compositionally and I'm anxious to hear the fruits of your delirium (Berlioz in many moments strikes me as a 'hallucinatory' composer—[for his time, that is], and certainly, in another sense that is the same type of impulse that gave birth to 'Tristan'). But you seem to imply a totally intuitive creative approach or are you still the 'controller'? It all sounds terrifically Dionysian from your description."<sup>51</sup> Tristan's impulse had given way to a Dionysian, intuitive—and, we might add, "romantic"—creativity, Maslow's imagined carnal music of self-actualization.

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<sup>47</sup> This and the following quotations are from Murphy, "Sport as Yoga," 23.

<sup>48</sup> Skip Bayless, "'Evolutionary Underground': Sports Center Probes Athletes' Twilight Zone," *Los Angeles Times*, March 31, 1977.

<sup>49</sup> This quotation and the next are from Gallwey, *Inner Game of Tennis*, 20.

<sup>50</sup> As he was completing the *Music for the Magic Theater*, Rochberg reflected to himself, "[There are] only two experiences in life which can be completed—making love and making art. And both belong to the body and total nature of a man." In 1966, Rochberg again equated sexual and creative energy and wrote of his need for "release." As Rochberg described the musical experience to Alexander Ringer in 1969, "I want to feel . . . that the blood still sings, the heart still pounds away and exults and dips—you know what I mean—no need to elaborate." George Rochberg, December 8, 1965 journal entry, Tagebuch [7] (3 Aug 1965–30 Mar 1966), Sammlung George Rochberg, Paul Sacher Stiftung; George Rochberg to Alexander Ringer, 1969. Korrespondenz, Sammlung George Rochberg, Paul Sacher Stiftung; George Rochberg, October 27, 1966 journal entry, Tagebuch [8] (21 Apr 1966–1 Feb 1968), Sammlung George Rochberg, Paul Sacher Stiftung.

<sup>51</sup> Stephen Albert to George Rochberg, 1966? Korrespondenz, Sammlung George Rochberg, Paul Sacher Stiftung. Brackets and underlining original.

Rochberg's breakout "Dionysiac" works were the first in a new style he would call "ars combinatoria," a style that weaved together quotations (and eventually, pastiches) of music from a range of historical eras and styles. To date scholars have made Rochberg's early combinatorial works a locus of debate over his attitude toward history and its implications for our understanding of "postmodernism." Robert Fink has compared *Music for the Magic Theater* to Luciano Berio's better-known 1969 collage work *Sinfonia*, arguing that both are characteristically "postmodern" in that their many historical references constitute "multiple surfaces" that cannot be comprehended on a single analytical plain.<sup>52</sup> Drawing on Frederic Jameson, Fink argues that for the "postmodern" Rochberg, "there is no believable hierarchy of musical styles left."<sup>53</sup> According to Taruskin, meanwhile, Rochberg's quotation-based aesthetic only betrayed his continued status as an "untroubled academic modernist."<sup>54</sup> "In keeping with so much modernist music," Taruskin argues of Rochberg's hallucinatory works, "the collage was a 'secret structure.'"<sup>55</sup> Where Fink hears a simultaneity of disjunct surfaces, for Taruskin "there is always a strict demarcation in *Music for the Magic Theater* between 'then' and 'now,'" a sign that "ultimately . . . *Music for the Magic Theater* does not (yet) imply rejection of modernism."<sup>56</sup>

As we have seen, Rochberg was indeed driven to new compositional techniques by his belief that he was living in a posthistorical era, one whose time-weariness he felt he had a duty to document musically. But in light of Rochberg's Maslowian romanticism, we might hear in his seminal posthistorical works not so much Rochberg's commentary on the nature of time but evidence of the "intuitive" mode of experience that produced these works, and which Rochberg imagined them to evoke. These works were in many ways the continuation of Rochberg's *Time-Span* pieces, now composed of a "generating chain" of musical gestures drawn from the past (largely recent twelve-tone works in *Contra mortem et tempus* and a yet wider range in *Music for the Magic Theater*).<sup>57</sup> As we have seen, Rochberg's "peak"

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<sup>52</sup> "There are multiple musical levels, but each level is itself the surface of another piece." Fink describes *Music for the Magic Theater* as "a document as foundational for musical postmodernism as its more famous younger cousin, *Sinfonia*. Rochberg's gesture, less flamboyant, less overtly virtuosic than Berio's, was perhaps even more radical, because it was so stark and uncompromising." Fink, "Going Flat," 129–30.

<sup>53</sup> Fink, "Going Flat," 129.

<sup>54</sup> Taruskin, *Late Twentieth Century*, 414.

<sup>55</sup> Taruskin, *Late Twentieth Century*, 415.

<sup>56</sup> Taruskin, *Late Twentieth Century*, 417. "As an expressive resource collage remained well within the accepted boundaries of modernist practice, in no way contradicting or threatening its premises." This task, Taruskin argues, would only be accomplished in the Third String Quartet. Taruskin, *Late Twentieth Century*, 422.

<sup>57</sup> As late as 1966 Rochberg was still describing his post-serial music as "spatial," suggesting that we should hear both *Music for the Magic Theater* and *Contra mortem et tempus* as extensions of the posthistorical, internally coherent idiom he strove to devise in works like *Time-Span II*. In a 1966 article Alexander Ringer reported that "Rochberg likes to speak of his recent music as 'spatial.'" Ringer, "Music of George Rochberg," 422.

compositional experience had been, for him, one of temporal suspension—a mode of being Rochberg’s “spatial” idiom was already well equipped to capture. In *Contra mortem et tempus*, Rochberg maintained the same sparse texture as *Time-Span II*, and as in that earlier “space” work, Rochberg achieved continuity by presenting a series of overlapping musical phrases that unobtrusively hand off from one to the other rather than drive inexorably from one to the next. In some ways, though, Rochberg’s later “hallucinatory” works were even more effective in capturing the “spatial,” atemporal experience. While *Time-Span II* had been metered throughout, *Contra mortem et tempus* dispensed with meter altogether, and *Music for the Magic Theater* combined metered and unmetered sections—both forms equally effective in disrupting the listener’s sense of clock time. The quotations functioned as “sounding forms,” as he had put it in 1963, but forms no longer “dominated and organized by a flow of measured beats.”<sup>58</sup> In this “spatial” music, “temporality is overcome by treating the sound material as ‘sonorous bodies,’” just as Babbitt and Cage had done before him.<sup>59</sup>

But unlike the “rationalists” Babbitt and Cage, Rochberg’s romantic spatial works were designed to cultivate intuitive consciousness. As he argued in his 1965 essay “Aural Fact or Fiction”—the same essay in which he first raised the “spectre” of rationality as a threat to music-making—for him the juxtaposition of disparate elements was essentially an art of the imagination. “The use of juxtaposition and discontinuity, to which I referred earlier, is an expansion of the possibilities of continuity and growth,” he explained.<sup>60</sup> These “possibilities,” Rochberg went on, opened up beyond the rational to “the fantasy world of the human mind . . . the dream life where juxtaposition and discontinuity are the rule.” In light of these comments, it is little wonder that the 1973 *Time* article quoted earlier would have resonated with him: as we have already seen, there Maslow named “illogical contradiction” specifically as a mode of “knowledge” that needed to be validated in order to fight the contemporary overreliance on “rational” logic.<sup>61</sup> It was this task that he imagined works like *Music for the Magic Theater* to accomplish. As he wrote of the piece in a 1965 essay, comparing the work to contemporary films like Alan Resnais’s *Last Year at Marienbad*, “Neither my work nor the films I have in mind . . . relate to the old logic of cause and effect or of linear movement. On the contrary they deal in contradictions and paradoxes.”<sup>62</sup> Thus it was not only a specifically posthistorical worldview that Rochberg aimed to invoke in these combinatorial works, but a postlogical one as well. “Fictions” like *Marienbad* pointed the way for musicians “to make up aural fiction raised to the levels where the making of the artwork (itself a kind of dreamwork) becomes simultaneously the making of

<sup>58</sup> This and the following quotation are from Rochberg, “New Image of Music (1963),” 23.

<sup>59</sup> Rochberg, “New Image of Music (1963),” 24, 22.

<sup>60</sup> This and the next quotation are from Rochberg, “Aural Fact or Fiction,” 197.

<sup>61</sup> “Reaching Beyond the Rational,” *Time*, April 23, 1973. Text kept with Rochberg, “The Fantastic and the Logical,” drafts and notes, Textmanuskripte, Eigene Texte, Sammlung George Rochberg, Paul Sacher Stiftung.

<sup>62</sup> George Rochberg, *Music for the Magic Theater* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Theodore Presser, 1972), 5.

magic.”<sup>63</sup> Rochberg had, or so he hoped, created a music that successfully countered rational aural “facts” with intuitive, dreamlike aural “fictions,” arriving at a music that was “human” once more.

The same Dionysian impulse that made the experience of composing *Contra mortem et tempus* and *Music for the Magic Theater* so significant also found expression in those works’ musical language. With their flow of quotations, both *Contra mortem et tempus* and *Music for the Magic Theater* seem to capture the apparently spontaneous connections Rochberg’s “irrational” right brain drew between the many bits of music floating in the composer’s subconscious. They are, in effect, sounding documents of Rochberg’s intuitive consciousness at work. Like Oliveros’s meditational music of a few years later, they are easily read as artistic interventions in the aesthetic public sphere, intellectual commentaries on the posthistorical predicament. But they also open our ears to the mode of consciousness self-actualizing musicians understood their posthistorical condition to require.

Albert’s remarks suggest as much, but Rochberg made the connection yet clearer in a performance note written around 1970 that linked the style of *Music for the Magic Theater* to one of the most Dionysian of contemporary philosophers, Norman O. Brown, “probably the clearest and most widely read author of [the] Freudian Left.”<sup>64</sup> There, Rochberg instructed performers not to shy away from the work’s stark juxtaposition of contrasting styles with reference to a line from Brown’s 1966 erotic manifesto, *Love’s Body*. “Exaggeration or extravagance; not to count the cost,” Rochberg explained to his performers, quoting Brown. “Go for broke. . . . play with madness.”<sup>65</sup> Had Rochberg continued the quotation from *Love’s Body*, players would have found the explanation, “Aphorism, the form of the mad truth, the Dionysian form.”<sup>66</sup> According to Brown, realizing such Dionysian mad truths meant, for one thing, embracing a new, drastic relationship to the body and the self in everyday life, to act in a way that seemed “mad” to this world, to “go for broke.” Rochberg, for his part, seems to have hoped the brash, seemingly mad juxtaposition of contrasting styles would induce performers to embrace a nonrational, even erotic approach to performance that channeled the paranormal, Tristanesque hallucinations that had fueled the work’s creation.

Brown’s ideas must have spoken powerfully to Rochberg, who had long envisioned composition as a form of magic. In a 1973 diary entry, Rochberg would even compare his own creative urges to those of the “shaman, yogi, [or] medicine man.”<sup>67</sup> In 1972 Rochberg equated Schoenberg to just such a “primitive” figure, writing of the composer with reference to John G. Neihardt’s *Black Elk Speaks* (a

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<sup>63</sup> Rochberg, “Aural Fact or Fiction,” 198.

<sup>64</sup> Kripal, *Esalen*, 143.

<sup>65</sup> Rochberg’s program note was written sometime after the premier in 1967 but before the piece was published in 1972.

<sup>66</sup> Norman O. Brown, *Love’s Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 187.

<sup>67</sup> George Rochberg, February 9, 1973 journal entry, Tagebuch [20] (27 Dez 1972–21 Jun 1973), Sammlung George Rochberg, Paul Sacher Stiftung.



text Oliveros also recommended in order to understand her sonic meditation technique). “This is the image that haunts me . . . the look of a man . . . like an ancient of prehistory or an old Plains Indian who has seen great visions and lives them as the medicine man Black Elk did.”<sup>68</sup> Like Rochberg’s notions of “intuition” and his self-identification as a “romantic,” the image of the composer as magician or shaman—the very antithesis of the composer-as-scientist image musicians like Babbitt had taken for themselves—could be traced back to Rochberg’s serialist years. As he put it to his friend and fellow composer Istvan Anhalt in a 1961 letter,

Music today is more than sounds and sound manipulations, at least for me. It is a way of reaching the ineffable or exorcising the Devil. . . . Neither Babbitt, Carter, nor Kirchner is capable of this. . . . Schoenberg has . . . real value . . . because he speaks with the intensity and rasping tone of the prophet crying out in the wilderness. . . . Well, never mind my raving and ranting. I simply can’t take my music calmly—objectively.<sup>69</sup>

In the juxtaposition of contrasting styles, the musical embodiment of Maslow’s call to cultivate “illogical contradiction” in the face of “Aristotelian” “logic,” Rochberg had finally found a means of combatting the cool Apollonian rationality of his day.

To compose in the Dionysian, new romantic mode was not necessarily to mimic the more extravagant gestures, orgiastic climaxes, or teleological structures of earlier musical eras. For Rochberg, composing “romantic” music meant “allowing” one’s creative energies to release in an outpouring of musical intuition—here, an outpouring of the bits of musical material swimming in what Brown would have called Rochberg’s “unconscious,” the “Dionysian ‘cauldron of seething excitement,’ a sea of energy.”<sup>70</sup> If we are to believe Rochberg’s account of his paranormal compositional experience, even the extended quotation from Mozart’s *Divertimento* K. 287 that occupies most of the second movement of *Music for the Magic Theater* might be heard as a particularly powerful sign of Rochberg’s willingness to go with the creative “flow.” An entire movement, it seems, had bubbled up from the depths of Rochberg’s sea of musical unconsciousness, and Rochberg, not about to suppress his right brain, recomposed Mozart’s movement for the instrumental forces he had at hand. With the help of the new, groovy science, Rochberg had joined Roszak and Maslow to become a romantic at reason’s court.

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<sup>68</sup> Rochberg, “Reflections on Schoenberg (1972),” 56. Oliveros listed Neihardt’s book in a 1973 bibliography for a multiweek “Meditation Project” at UCSD. Oliveros, *Meditation Project for Winter Quarter*, MSS 102, Box 11, Folder 5, Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, San Diego.

<sup>69</sup> George Rochberg to Istvan Anhalt, September 9, 1961, in *Eagle Minds: Selected Correspondence of Istvan Anhalt and George Rochberg (1961–2005)*, ed. Alan M. Gillmor (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009), 6.

<sup>70</sup> Brown, *Love’s Body*, 88.

### *Intuiting Postmodernism*

The same year Rochberg offered his paranormal Dionysian compositional experiences to the Psi conference, Rochberg penned an essay, “The Avant-Garde and the Aesthetics of Survival.” That essay eventually appeared in a special issue of the academic journal *New Literary History* on “Modernism and Postmodernism: Inquiries, Reflections, and Speculations.”<sup>71</sup> Though Rochberg’s music has been subjected to countless “postmodern” readings, few have attempted to understand Rochberg’s “postmodern” music in the terms he himself proposed. I want to look briefly now at Rochberg’s essay, not to indulge in sterile attempts to recover the composer’s “intentions,” but to investigate the ties between the “new,” antirational “romanticism” and understandings of what it meant to live in a world after the apparent end of the “modern.”

The issues “The Avant-Garde and the Aesthetics of Survival” raised were more than aesthetic—rather, as Rochberg’s title suggested, the stakes were as serious, and stark, as life and death. Like the other critics of contemporary “rational” culture we met in chapter 1, Rochberg accused the West of falling victim to what he called a “rational madness,” an insatiable desire for left-brained knowledge that, in the hands of the global military-industrial complex, threatened humanity’s continued existence (themes Rochberg would discuss at length in subsequent essays like “Humanism vs. Science” [1972] and “The Fantastic and the Logical” [1973]).<sup>72</sup> And like his right-brained contemporaries, Rochberg argued that man would only survive if he found new ways to cultivate his nonrational side.<sup>73</sup>

To achieve this, Rochberg proposed a solution in line with Brown: to reconnect with human cultures of the distant past. “It would be well to remember,” Rochberg warned, “that for countless millennia before the dawn of the age of science man survived without science as we know it. Instead of science we had a profound relation to the cosmos, however fantastic or superstitious that relation may appear from our vantage point.”<sup>74</sup> As Oliveros’s experience with somatic music-making would soon make clear to her, it was not analytical “consciousness” that was now needed but a fundamental shift in human consciousness, a “conversion” to the right-brained worldview. “All . . . forms of rational knowledge which deviate from or deny the transcendent nature of private vision, which anesthetize fantasy and art, myth and symbol . . . need to be readjusted to the nature and requirements of human existence,” Rochberg proclaimed.<sup>75</sup> Anticipating Charles Reich’s calls for a “new consciousness” rather than a new political revolution, Rochberg concluded, “It is not the world which needs remaking but ourselves.”<sup>76</sup> This was the heart of Rochberg’s

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<sup>71</sup> Rochberg, “Avant-Garde.”

<sup>72</sup> Rochberg, “Avant-Garde,” 271.

<sup>73</sup> “He survived . . . . And we? What are our chances? Can we survive our rational madness, our science and technology, our obsession for progress and change, our avant-garde . . . ?” Rochberg, “Avant-Garde,” 271.

<sup>74</sup> Rochberg, “Avant-Garde,” 241.

<sup>75</sup> Rochberg, “Avant-Garde,” 240.

<sup>76</sup> Rochberg, “Avant-Garde,” 240–41.

prescriptions in what became, in the context of the *New Literary History* special issue, his clearest statement on the “postmodern” condition. Matching contemporary calls from the seemingly distant musical scenes of classical bassists and experimental feminists, Rochberg looked forward to a return not to any particular sound world but to an “ancient” appreciation for the right brain, man’s last best hope for a future.

The end of “The Avant-Garde and the Aesthetics of Survival” had serious implications for the compositional strategies Rochberg would soon embrace—and has equally serious implications for our understandings both of Rochberg’s most “postmodern” work, the pastiche-based Third String Quartet, and the cultural history of US postmodernism more broadly. “If the theory of curved space is correct,” Rochberg observed, leaning on some groovy science, “the irreversible arrow of time, like Halley’s comet, must at some point in its trajectory retrace positions in space it has already passed through many times before. . . . The idea of cosmic return, eternal recurrence, so deeply embedded in Oriental thought, may, in the end, find a form of potential proof in this most recent hypothesis of Western astrophysics.”<sup>77</sup> Just as Ornstein had looked to modern neurobiology to support notions of consciousness deeply embedded in human cultures, now Rochberg looked to physics to prove a truth of “Oriental thought”: that repetition was an organizing principle of the cosmos.

Rochberg did not elaborate on the “Oriental thought” he had in mind in the essay, but other references to the notion of cosmic “return” in his contemporary writings suggest that this dive into the groovy science pointed him to a new interpretation of the work of Eliade, the historian of religion whose notions of the “terror of history” had helped to convince Rochberg that his was a posthistorical era in the first place. In his 1973 essay “The Fantastic and the Logical,” Rochberg argued that “ancient man,” as evidenced by Eliade’s studies of the Near East, understood how to live according to his “nonrational” nature in ways now lost to contemporary culture. Citing Eliade’s research on the “mythologies of the ancient Near East,” Rochberg argued that “there is sufficient anthropological and archaeological evidence to indicate that ancient man . . . viewed the world in ways which must strike a modern as nonrational and fantastic.”<sup>78</sup> It was just such a “fantastic,” “primitive” mentality to which human society now needed to return.

Musicologists often interpret Rochberg’s Third Quartet in terms of Umberto Eco’s notion of postmodern irony. In this view, Rochberg turned to historical pastiche out of a despondent sense that there could be nothing new under the sun—modernism had eclipsed all originality, leaving artists to speak, with bitter self-consciousness, only in the voices of others.<sup>79</sup> But read through the lens of Rochberg’s

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<sup>77</sup> Rochberg, “Avant-Garde,” 225.

<sup>78</sup> Rochberg, “Fantastic and the Logical,” 209.

<sup>79</sup> Umberto Eco, *Postscript to the Name of the Rose* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984). According to Taruskin, “Rochberg expresses his own heartfelt emotion ‘as Beethoven (Mahler, Schoenberg) would put it,’ for according to Eco, there is no other way of doing so at the fallen end of

readings in the “fantastic,” “intuitive” worldview of “ancient” peoples—views he now believed confirmed by the latest scientific inquiry—Rochberg’s “postmodern” juxtaposition of past musical styles looks quite different. As we have seen, Rochberg first applied Eliade’s thought to music in the early 1960s, arguing that contemporary culture could no longer cope with the “terror of history” and was thus turning to a new, “spatialized” consciousness. There was more to Eliade’s diagnosis, though, than Rochberg considered then. Eliade had written that “modern man” “consciously and voluntarily creates history,” finding individual meaning and value in every new chronological event. On the other hand, what he called “primitive” or “archaic” man—the other half of his grand binary—was emphatically “antihistorical”: rather than understanding individual events as meaningful for their chronological uniqueness, “premodern” peoples defined the meaning of events solely in relation to the “primordial acts” described in their culture’s myths and origin stories. Archaic man had girded himself against the “terrors of history”—plague, war, and the like—by connecting his own actions to those of the deep past, a past that he regularly reenacted through what Eliade called ritual “returns,” life structured as “ceaseless repetition of gestures initiated by others.”<sup>80</sup> As nuclear annihilation loomed, Eliade concluded, the historicism that had anchored the worldview of “modern man” seemed obsolete. With no better solution, Eliade prophesied a return to archaic ways in modern times.

Rochberg’s postmodern “return” to the music of Beethoven, Mahler, Bartók and Schoenberg in the Third Quartet seems to have been less a dystopian parroting of the past in a perilous present than an attempt to fulfill the new paradigm of the “fantastic”—to engage in the act of composition as a form of esoteric ritual on a par with those he read about in Eliade’s books.<sup>81</sup> Let us now take a closer look at Eliade’s language for purposes of comparison to what Rochberg would say of his own efforts to renew music and human culture in the Third String Quartet. As we saw earlier, Eliade foresaw a coming era when modern society would revert to archaic ways of “archetypal repetition.” “It is not inadmissible to think of an epoch, and an epoch not too far distant, when humanity, to ensure its survival, will find itself reduced to desisting from any further ‘making’ of history in the sense in which

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the twentieth century. Using an innocent language innocently—using tonality ‘in one’s own way’—is no longer even an option. The choice is bleak: either renounce expression altogether or borrow a voice.” Or as Keith Gloag puts it, “We can hear Rochberg’s Third String Quartet as one way of responding to Eco’s proposal of postmodernism as the challenge of the past, of the already said.” A number of other scholars read Rochberg’s quartet as equally dystopian. Taruskin, *Late Twentieth Century*, 434–37; Gloag, *Postmodernism in Music*, 98; see also Fink, “Going Flat”; Joakim Tillman, “Postmodernism and Art Music in the German Debate,” in *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*, ed. Judith Lochhead and Joseph Auner (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>80</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 5.

<sup>81</sup> Rochberg’s personal notes further suggest that his daughter, who was to become a noted Assyriologist, encouraged him to read recent studies of the ancient Near East. “The Fantastic and the Logical,” draft typescript, 1973, Textmanuskripte, Eigene Texte, Sammlung George Rochberg, Paul Sacher Stiftung.

it began to make it from the creation of the first empires, will confine itself to repeating prescribed archetypal gestures, and will strive to forget, as meaningless and dangerous, any spontaneous gesture which might entail ‘historical’ consequences.”<sup>82</sup> Compare this to how Rochberg described the genesis of his Third String Quartet in 1973:

In my ‘time of turning,’ I have had to abandon the notion of ‘originality,’ in which the personal style of the artist and his ego are the supreme values; the pursuit of the one-idea, uni-dimensional work and gesture which seems to have dominated the aesthetics of the twentieth century; and the received idea that it is necessary to divorce oneself from the past, to eschew the taint of association with those great masters who not only preceded us but (let it not be forgotten) created the art of music itself. In these ways I am turning away from what I consider the cultural pathology of my own time toward what can only be called a *possibility*: that music can be renewed by regaining contact with the tradition and means of the past, to re-emerge as a spiritual force with reactivated powers of melodic thought, rhythmic pulse, and large-scale structure.<sup>83</sup>

For Eliade, “making history” meant living according to the “historicist” paradigm in which man measured his existence according to unique acts along a linear timeline. Now, Rochberg suggested, “original” acts of musical creation, and particularly the modernist ethos in which every work was a singular gesture unto itself, was over. Over, too, was the pathological rejection of the past, for the romantic, groovy science had proven the ancients right: all things must “return.” A new path to “intuitive” musicality was opening to Rochberg’s vision.

As Rochberg’s other writings suggest, he understood his artistic efforts as consequential not just for musical culture but for human culture broadly. Though Rochberg shied away from apocalyptic language in his notes for the Third Quartet, as we have already seen, elsewhere he made clear that he considered the rational, scientific ethos of endless “advance”—which he diagnosed as an outgrowth of the same “rational madness” afflicting contemporary composers—to be as much a threat to humanity’s “survival” as Eliade had predicted. What was more, artists, he maintained, were capable of connecting with cosmic truths—and cosmic powers—with real consequences for human beings. “The energy which produces life,” Rochberg had argued in 1972, “is always outside of cultural forms . . . and if the artwork manages somehow to partake of it during its making, it is only because there are those rare occasions when a Beethoven . . . or Mahler . . . or Schoenberg is able to break through and tap it at the source (at grave personal risk) and give us works which . . . remove themselves from History and enter Cosmos.”<sup>84</sup> This was a shamanic power contemporary composers had recently renounced: “rationalists”

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<sup>82</sup> Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 153–54.

<sup>83</sup> Rochberg, *String Quartet no. 3*, liner notes. Emphasis original.

<sup>84</sup> Rochberg, “Reflections on Schoenberg (1972),” 57.

mired in “the making of history” had walled themselves off from the cosmic realm and from cosmic powers. It was this lost ability to “enter Cosmos,” the atemporal existence Eliade had argued characterized certain “Oriental” cultures, that Rochberg now sought—the recovery of an archaic, “intuitive” mentality that had been native to the Romantics and which Rochberg now hoped to revive.

Since its premiere the Third Quartet has become Rochberg’s best-known work of “ars combinatoria,” the “romantic” genre he had inaugurated some seven years prior with his first works based on radical juxtaposition of contrasting styles. Rochberg built the quartet of five movements, each drawing on the stylistic idioms of Rochberg’s musical heroes: notably Bartók, Mahler, Schoenberg, and Beethoven. The quartet represented a creative shift of gears from his combinatorial works of the mid-1960s, adopting pastiche rather than quotation as its main structural principle. Still, we should probably interpret the change in strategy as a continuation, even the fulfillment, of the exercises in Dionysian transcription Rochberg had begun in his first hallucinatory, combinatorial works. The quartet is, in effect, collage on a grand scale, composed of reenactments of the styles of the composers Rochberg most admired and whose shamanic power Rochberg most wanted to cultivate himself. Just as the Mozart transcription in *Music for the Magic Theater* had apparently flowed effortlessly through Rochberg’s liberated right brain, in the quartet’s individual movements Rochberg seems to have lifted the floodgates of his Dionysian impulses, giving himself permission not merely to quote or transcribe but to reenact and recompose, from the Bartókian opening and march movements to the famous Beethovenesque slow movement at the quartet’s center.

Because the Third Quartet’s movements juxtapose discrete musical styles and affects, scholars often view the piece as the crown jewel of Rochberg’s efforts to broaden contemporary music’s capacities for the representation of emotions.<sup>85</sup> Each movement suggests different emotional as well as historical and stylistic worlds, and to be sure, the quartet’s continual “[shifts] from harshness to sweetness seems calculated to deliver emotional release,” as Fosler-Lussier has observed.<sup>86</sup> Still, there was more to Rochberg’s “new romanticism” than “rehabilitating older tools for the purpose of heightening musical expression.” Like the “primitives” of old, the past surged within Rochberg’s musical consciousness, and now it would have its “release.” In the quartet’s juxtaposition of contrasting styles, Rochberg had once more “gone for broke,” to invoke the terms Rochberg had quoted from Brown to describe the affect of *Music for the Magic Theater*.

Rather than a public statement on the expressive value of older styles, the quartet invites us to raise our “romantic,” “primitive” consciousness, to realize in the experience of listening Rochberg’s hoped-for “*possibility*: that music can . . . re-emerge as a spiritual force with reactivated powers.”<sup>87</sup> To participate in the Third Quartet in this “postmodern” spirit, the spirit of self-actualization, would be to

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<sup>85</sup> It is to the Third Quartet that scholars interested in Rochberg’s return to “sweetness,” discussed above, inevitably refer.

<sup>86</sup> This and the following quotation are from Fosler-Lussier, *Music Divided*, 160.

<sup>87</sup> Rochberg, *String Quartet no. 3*, liner notes.

recognize ourselves as musical seekers, devotees of the cult of Western art music, and to accept Rochberg as shaman, the musician with the intuitive power to reenact our collective musical past in order to cleanse us from our “rational madness.” Rochberg, for one, would henceforth foreswear, as Eliade foresaw, “any further ‘making’ of history”—composing in original musical styles. Instead, Rochberg would reenact what Eliade might have called music’s “primordial acts,” the gestures of those musicians who, as Rochberg put it in his 1973 program note for the Third Quartet, “created the art of music itself.”<sup>88</sup> This esoteric project was what it meant to Rochberg to make music “after” the collapse of historicism—not simply to restore lost expressive idioms for communicative ends but to avert the “terror of history” and its threats to human existence, as Eliade’s ancients had done, by making his composerly “life . . . the ceaseless repetition of gestures initiated by others.”<sup>89</sup> True to the “postmodern” theory he had put forward, Rochberg had learned to compose music of romantic return calculated to recover the fantastic intuition of the right brain.

With the completion of the Third Quartet, Rochberg had “peaked,” and he knew it. Invoking once more the language of drastic psychosomatic creativity he had used to explain the strange state in which he composed *Contra mortem et tempus* and *Music for the Magic Theater*, Rochberg styled the process of composing the quartet in terms of what his contemporaries were learning to call “flow.” He had been driven, he explained, to “that level of reality where only the doing and striving counts and the only reward is self-discovery and self-realization.”<sup>90</sup> The high stayed with Rochberg, and like any true peak experience, taught him to see both his recent past and the future with renewed vision. “Since 1963 when my efforts to extricate myself began, the stream of a new life-energy started and suddenly, now in 1973 the awareness of a new possibility has become conscious to all through my IIIrd Quartet.”<sup>91</sup> From this cosmic peak, Rochberg could see that a “new age” was dawning—one that would find new meaning in the past. “We are living out an incredible movement in the spiritual history of man and acting out our roles. . . . I said to my [wife] Gene at lunch today: we will see the beginnings of the new age—but we will be very old. Gene said: I don’t want to live to see a time that has no place for Shakespeare and Beethoven. I said the new age would not be so unwise as to give them up. Yet . . . it is possible.”<sup>92</sup> Rochberg, for one, would see that they weren’t.

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<sup>88</sup> Rochberg, *String Quartet no. 3*, liner notes.

<sup>89</sup> Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 15.

<sup>90</sup> Rochberg, undated draft of “String Quartet no. 3” (1973), Sammlung George Rochberg, Paul Sacher Stiftung.

<sup>91</sup> George Rochberg, December 19, 1973 journal entry, Tagebuch [21] (3 Aug 1973–22 Dez 1977), Sammlung George Rochberg, Paul Sacher Stiftung.

<sup>92</sup> Rochberg, December 19, 1973 journal entry, Tagebuch [21] (3 Aug 1973–22 Dez 1977), Sammlung George Rochberg, Paul Sacher Stiftung.

### *What Was Postmodernism?*

So pervasive, and so eclectic, were theoretical explorations of the “postmodern” in the late seventies and eighties that today scholars have learned to preface any discussion of the term with the acknowledgment that “defining it is a notorious fool’s errand.”<sup>93</sup> Still, that has not stopped historians from chasing the “essential postmodernist project.”<sup>94</sup> But such a scholarly goal inevitably obscures the fact that the “postmodern” era critics began to recognize around 1970 was marked less by surefooted definitions than by struggle and debate. Ihab Hassan captured that sense of crisis in an essay published in the same 1971 special issue on the postmodern in *New Literary History* to which Rochberg contributed. “We are, I believe, inhabitants of another Time and another Space, and we no longer know what response is adequate to our reality.”<sup>95</sup> If there was an “essential postmodern project,” it was to solve this debacle, to adequately “mark . . . our change” from the modern, as the historian Hal Foster put it in an important collection of essays on postmodern art and culture in the early 1980s. Unsurprisingly, few could agree on where, or how, to draw the line.

The effort resulted not in consensus but in debate—over the nature of time and history, pastiche and originality, as familiar academic discussions of the “postmodern” remind us, but also over the legitimacy of the new vogue for self-actualization. Rochberg “marked his change” from the modern as a move from the rational and scientific to an intuitive, new romanticism. Meanwhile, in a volume edited by Foster on postmodernity, Jürgen Habermas wrote that what he called the contemporary interest in “self-realization” constituted a “problem” that a postmodern culture must fend off, not embrace.<sup>96</sup> Foster, whose ideas would later be used to label Rochberg a “reactionary” postmodern musician, was equally damning.<sup>97</sup> While he did not comment on trends in contemporary music, in a 1984

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<sup>93</sup> Taruskin, *Late Twentieth Century*, 412. Gloag makes a similar proviso, as do many writing on the subject outside musicology. See Gloag, *Postmodernism in Music*, 2.

<sup>94</sup> Taruskin, for instance, writes, “in a ‘transhistorical’ view there is no such thing as a transitional style. To achieve that perspective is the essential postmodern project.” Taruskin, *Late Twentieth Century*, 437. Joseph Auner, by contrast, has suggested we think of “postmodernist thought” and “postmodernist theories” rather than attempt to define the postmodern ethos or project writ large. Joseph Auner, *Music in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013), 267.

<sup>95</sup> Ihab Hassan, “POSTmodernISM,” *New Literary History* 3, no. 1 (1971): 23.

<sup>96</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity: An Incomplete Project,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 6, 7.

<sup>97</sup> For one such application of Foster’s ideas to Rochberg’s music, see Jann Pasler, “Postmodernism,” *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40721>. A number of scholars have critiqued this perspective as overly simplistic. See Mark Berry, “Music, Postmodernism, and George Rochberg’s Third String Quartet,” in *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*, ed. Judith Lochhead and Joseph Auner (New York: Routledge, 2002); James Wierzbicki, “Reflections on Rochberg and ‘Postmodernism,’” *Perspectives of New Music* 45, no. 2 (2007); Judy Lochhead, “Refiguring the Modernist Program for Hearing: Steve Reich and George Rochberg,” in *The Pleasure of Modernist*



essay he diagnosed the penchant for pastiche in both art and architecture as a “postmodern . . . new humanism,” a “program of reference to quasi-cultic traditions.”<sup>98</sup> Other commentators on the “postmodern” were equally quick to dismiss anything that smacked of religious revival. Andreas Huyssen, in a 1984 essay entitled “Mapping the Postmodern,” censured certain artists for reviving what he considered dangerous devotions—“the museum as temple, the artist as prophet, the work as relic and cult object, the halo restored”—and lashed out at these artists’ disturbing lack of “irony, reflexiveness . . . self-doubt . . . [or] critical consciousness.”<sup>99</sup> Foster, too, considered contemporary culture too far gone for such “humanist pieties,” and saw in the works of artist Julian Schnabel and architect Philip Johnson—just as critics would hear in Rochberg’s music of the 1970s and beyond—an attempt to “beautify reactionary politics” and enrich themselves in the process.<sup>100</sup>

Rochberg’s understanding of what a “postmodern” future might look like was quite different—indeed, in some ways the very opposite of what some of his best-known academic contemporaries came to regard as the essential postmodernist project. Rochberg anticipated many of Foster and Huyssen’s criticisms, arguing in the late 1960s and early 1970s that he was not simply looking “to sell more tickets or more records,” that he, too, would have feared any artistic movement based on “retrenchment,” and even declaring that his Third String Quartet could be heard as “ironic.”<sup>101</sup> To judge from the reputation of the “Me Decade” in American studies today, though, it is clear who “won” the political debate between self-declared “humanists” like Rochberg, so-called “neoconservative” critics like Daniel Bell, and the defenders of “resistant” cultural politics like Foster. That is perhaps one reason why the history of the musical culture of self-actualization has been neglected by scholars—academic theories of the postmodern have by and large denigrated the very notion of self-actualization as a cultural aberration.

What the historiography of “postmodernity” needs, and what I have tried to offer in this chapter, is the same jolt recently administered to the category of “experimentalism” by musicologist Benjamin Piekut in his book *Experimentalism*

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*Music: Listening, Meaning, Intention, Ideology*, ed. Arved Ashby (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004).

<sup>98</sup> Hal Foster, “(Post) Modern Polemics,” *Perspecta* 21 (1984): 146, 147.

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Brian McHale, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 96.

<sup>100</sup> Foster, “(Post) Modern Polemics,” 146, 147. “Indeed, to a great degree [the postmodernism of Schnabel and other artists] seems a front for a rapprochement with the market and the public—a rapprochement that, far from populist (as it is commonly claimed) is alternately elitist in its allusions and manipulative in its clichés.” Foster, “(Post) Modern Polemics,” 146.

<sup>101</sup> Rochberg, “No Center (1969),” 131. “A reconciliation with the past requires a reappraisal of the present. It would be foolish to dub such a reconciliation nostalgia and certainly a misnomer to term it retrenchment. Whatever emerges from such a reconciliation cannot be named yet.” George Rochberg, “The Composer’s Relation to the Past,” typescript, 1975, Sammlung George Rochberg, Paul Sacher Stiftung. A program note Rochberg wrote in the early 1970s describing the quartet as “ironic” is reprinted in Dixon, *Bio-Bibliographic Guide*, 143.

*Otherwise*.<sup>102</sup> Rather than define experimentalism in advance, Piekut sets out to “uncover the ways that historical formations take shape” in order to discover instances of what he calls “actually existing experimentalism”—fleeting, hyperlocal glimpses of what it meant to make music “experimental” for a particular musician or musical community in a particular time and place.<sup>103</sup> Applied to the category of the postmodern, such an approach is not far off from something one of postmodernism’s highest theorists, Frederic Jameson, proposed years ago. In the same 1984 collection in which Habermas’s essay appeared, Jameson noted, “there will be as many different forms of postmodernism as there were high modernisms in place, since the former are at least initially specific and local reactions *against* these models.”<sup>104</sup> Rochberg’s romantic works of self-actualization might well represent heretofore marginalized instances of “actually existing postmodernism”: necessarily singular contributions to the kaleidoscopic debate over what life after the “modern” should be, what mode of “consciousness” it should privilege; not what postmodernism “is” in the abstract, not “the essential postmodernist project”—there never was, nor could be, any such thing—but one small slice of what postmodernism “was.”

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<sup>102</sup> Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 1.

<sup>103</sup> Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 8.

<sup>104</sup> Frederic Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 112. Emphasis original.

## Chapter 4

### The Self-Actualization of John Adams

“Pardon my California years,” composer John Adams entreated journalist David Sterritt on the eve of the 1987 premiere of Adams’s blockbuster opera *Nixon in China*, “but I really do think of musical drama as a matter of balancing energy levels.”<sup>1</sup> Ordinarily, the concept of “balancing energy levels” would hardly seem to require an apology from a composer—but these were no ordinary energies. As Sterritt slyly related, Adams had described opera composition as “a matter of ‘modulating the energy’ . . . smiling at the trendy overtones of his words.”<sup>2</sup>

Trendy indeed. The phrase “modulating the energy” might have reminded Sterritt of any number of then-fashionable “alternative” approaches to self-exploration and wellbeing spawned by the culture of self-actualization. In the practice known as Therapeutic Touch, for instance, devotees learned “to help or to heal” through a meditative technique of “directing and modulating the transfer of human energy,” as a 1979 handbook put it.<sup>3</sup> By 1987, to be sure, practices like Therapeutic Touch were as prevalent in New York City or suburban Illinois as they were in the San Francisco Bay Area. Still, Adams was probably right to suspect that Sterritt would consider his “trendy” perspective on composition to be stereotypically “Californian.”<sup>4</sup> This was 1987, though, and so it was not the strangeness of Adams’s countercultural attitudes towards musical energy, but their very popularity, that required apology. The “Me” generation had grown up, and its denizens risen to power in the performing arts. In Adams’s hands, even opera, that stodgiest of performance genres, was about to begin a “new age.”

That Adams would have adopted such a West Coast perspective and applied it to his work as a composer is hardly surprising. Like so many baby boomers, the born-and-bred New Englander relocated to San Francisco in the early 1970s, passing the first decade of his “California years” experimenting with meditation, “holing up and reading Zen stories” (as he wrote years later), imbibing Norman O.

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<sup>1</sup> David Sterritt, “John Adams and His ‘Nixon in China’: Could This Be Another ‘Porgy and Bess?’” *Christian Science Monitor*, October 9, 1987.

<sup>2</sup> Sterritt, “John Adams.”

<sup>3</sup> Dolores Krieger, *Therapeutic Touch: How to Use Your Hands to Help or to Heal* (New York: Fireside Books, 1979), 58. Krieger’s practice was based on the idea that “a human being is a highly complex field, or continuum of various life energies,” as another spokesperson for Therapeutic Touch, Janet Macrae, put it. See Janet Macrae, “Therapeutic Touch in Practice,” *The American Journal of Nursing* 79, no. 4 (1979); see also Catherine L. Albanese, “The Aura of Wellness: Subtle-Energy Healing and New Age Religion,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 10, no. 1 (2000).

<sup>4</sup> The prominence of Californian alternative living centers like the Esalen Institute, figures with well-known “new age” leanings like Jerry Brown, and fictionalized representations of Bay Area “seekers” in films, novels, and the news media endowed the “new age” with a thoroughly West Coast vibe. On Jerry Brown see Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*, 35; Tom Wolfe poked fun at Brown’s “mystical” approach to politics in Wolfe, “Me Decade,” 135–36.

Brown's erotic countercultural philosophy, and solving a creative block through Jungian therapy.<sup>5</sup>

And yet, Adams's 1970s "Californian" milieu, and particularly, the role of new practices of self-actualization that blossomed within it, rarely figure in scholarly discussion of Adams's work. To date, such studies have largely centered on the composer's infamous stylistic "impurity."<sup>6</sup> Though revealing, this emphasis on Adams's eclecticism has given rise to an overly simplistic scholarly narrative of Adams's output and import, one that explains Adams's music and career as a bid to forge a musical idiom out of the pulse and process music of his day that was at once personally expressive and concert-hall friendly. Robert Fink, for example, has playfully labeled Adams's "powerful fusion of postminimalist process, the post-Romantic symphony, and . . . postmodern operatic pastiche" a "reactionary" music that managed to wed elements of minimalist style with "traditional notions of craft and compositional voice," not to mention box-office success.<sup>7</sup> But there was more to Adams's musical development than a push for popularity or penchant for the postmodern. When Adams "broke the bonds" of minimalist orthodoxy in the late 1970s, he joined the ranks of US musicians who were busy remaking concert music in the image of Abraham Maslow.<sup>8</sup>

Building on Fink's recent work to develop a cultural history of minimalism sensitive to the many modes of experience repetitive music-making might afford, in this chapter I will seek to situate Adams and his postminimalist musical output within the culture of musical self-actualization.<sup>9</sup> As I will show, evidence suggests Adams saw in the rhythmic drive and gestural intensity of 1970s minimalism the seeds of a musical practice perfectly geared towards the representation, and even the cultivation, of occult energies and Maslowian peak experience. It was this insight, I want to suggest, that spurred the development of Adams's idiosyncratic postminimalist aesthetic in the late 1970s and beyond. As I will discuss, Adams

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<sup>5</sup> Adams describes his meditation practice in John Adams, interview by Vincent Plush, "Major Figures in American Music," May 23, 1983, transcript available from the Yale University Oral History of American Music. The composer quoted excerpts from Brown's 1966 *Love's Body* from memory in a 1980 interview. See John Adams, interview by Jonathan Cott, "An Interview with John Adams by Jonathan Cott, June 1985," John Adams, *Harmonielehre*, with the San Francisco Symphony conducted by Edo de Waart, liner notes, Nonesuch 7559-79115-2, 1985. Adams's Jungian therapy is discussed in Richard Stayton, "The Trickster of Modern Music: Composer John Adams Keeps Reinventing Himself, to Wilder and Wilder Applause," *Los Angeles Times*, June 6, 1991, [http://articles.latimes.com/1991-06-16/magazine/tm-1335\\_1\\_composer-john-adams/6](http://articles.latimes.com/1991-06-16/magazine/tm-1335_1_composer-john-adams/6).

<sup>6</sup> See K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists* (London: Phaidon, 1996), 171, 177, 178.

<sup>7</sup> Fink, "(Post-)minimalisms," 544, 551, 542.

<sup>8</sup> Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 177.

<sup>9</sup> Reacting against an overwhelming tendency among critics and scholars to interpret minimalist music as essentially "self-annihilating," Fink argues, "Rather than assume that one innate subjective drive to repeat always, everywhere, and in the same way weaves culture, why not explore the many different ways that our repetitive subjectivity is constituted, over and over, within the multiple, complex webs of material culture we weave?" I adopt this goal as my own here. Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 6.

would first realize this vision in his ecstatic 1978 string septet *Shaker Loops*, a piece that self-consciously transformed the instrumentalists, with their incessant “shaking” musical figures, into a band of “peakers” on the model of the nineteenth-century Shaker sect. But the same ideal of physically induced peak experience also seems to have fueled Adams’s subsequent creative output, from his music’s characteristic unfettered flow of pulses and ecstatic climaxes to the narratives of sexual, mystical, and creative transcendence his “peaking” musical language would describe. Not only this, but eventually Adams would define his own creative process with reference to much the same post-Freudian concepts his musical works so often implied. If Adams’s music and the stories he told about and through it are any indication, we might say, a particularly Maslowian interpretation of minimalism was Adams’s pathway to his self-actualization as a composer.

But Adams also seems to have shared something of Maslow’s zeal for cultural reform. In the late 1980s Adams christened his own corporeal approach to composition a “new humanism.”<sup>10</sup> The term may have been a nod to the “human”-centered discourses of Maslow and others involved in the broader human potential movement he helped to inspire. But Adams’s phrase also made clear that, for him anyway, there was something less than human about the old “modernism” he saw himself displacing (a category, as we shall see, that also included the old minimalism). As we shall see, Adams’s claims to represent a more fully “human” music would not go unnoticed—nor unchallenged—by his critics.

### *Shake!*

When word of Esalen’s sports revolution hit headlines in 1973, Adams was a recently arrived teacher and ensemble leader at the San Francisco Conservatory. Still in his mid-twenties and yet to develop the pulsing compositional voice we know today, his early works ran the gamut of contemporary avant-garde styles and techniques popular within the Bay Area experimental scene, from tape music to outdoor sonic environments and works for his personally designed synthesizer.<sup>11</sup> It was only in the spring of 1977, after an intensive introduction to pulse-based minimalism, that Adams began to “find himself” musically, so to speak. Hands-on encounters with minimalist performance seem to have taught him to imagine the style’s repetitive, pulsing gestures as icons of ecstatic bodily energies and the performance of minimalist music as a technique of peak experience. For now, though, I want to jump ahead to 1978 to examine the “loosened” musical dramaturgy of one of Adams’s earliest minimalist works, the ecstatic string septet *Shaker Loops*.

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<sup>10</sup> Berrow and Gavin, *John Adams: Minimalism and Beyond*.

<sup>11</sup> For a rare, contemporary glimpse into Adams’s early works and aesthetic, see John Adams, interview by Charles Amirkhanian, “Ode to Gravity: Interview with John Adams, 1973,” originally broadcast on April 18, 1973, KPFA Radio, Berkeley, CA. <http://radiom.org/detail.php?omid=OTG.1973.04.18.A>.

Few pieces of music could have fulfilled Maslow's Tanglewood proposals (or haunted a critic like Wolfe's nightmares) more than *Shaker Loops*. As Adams indicated in a note supplied for the work's premiere with the San Francisco Conservatory's New Music Ensemble (which Adams was leading at the time), the title paid homage to the Shakers, who "employed rhythmic shaking to induce visionary mental states" or "Ecstatic Fits."<sup>12</sup> That original program note also made clear that the third movement, later published simply as "Loops and Verses," was first entitled "Loops and Verses Before the Lord." Adams's "shakers," in other words, would "shake" themselves into union with the divine.

More than a spiritual exercise, the Shakers' ecstatic dance was also an overtly carnal rite. "You know the Shakers were celibate," Adams told a group of students at the University of Southern California in 1985.<sup>13</sup>

And each Saturday night, or I don't know how many times a week . . . they would do this divine dance that would bring them to a frenzy. And I'm sure . . . the effect of this had to be as much of an erotic experience as it was a religious one. And I tried to imagine while writing this piece, the piece was very much inspired by the idea of these people and this dance in which [Adams performs an emphatic up and down hand gesture] they got into a, they got locked into a kind of loop, which went faster and faster until they reached a visionary state. So there is kind of a religious, but clearly erotic overtone of this piece.<sup>14</sup>

Ostensibly a representation of a nineteenth-century religious sect, the piece also staged the seventies spiritual-sexual zeitgeist. Wolfe could have been describing *Shaker Loops* when he wrote just two years earlier that "sex had now become a religion . . . in which the orgasm had become a form of spiritual ecstasy."<sup>15</sup>

The ecstatic, erotic imagery of Adams's punning title would no doubt have resonated with his first listeners. For one thing, the work seems to have built on a growing critical discourse that framed minimalism as a kind of erotic dance music akin to its often more expressly carnal cousin, disco.<sup>16</sup> As Fink points out, by the

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<sup>12</sup> Program note (unsigned) for *Shaker Loops*, included in the New Music Ensemble concert program, John Adams, director, December 15, 1978, San Francisco Conservatory of Music Archives.

<sup>13</sup> John Adams, Presentation at the USC Thornton School of Music, November 1, 1985, California Audiovisual Preservation Project, [https://archive.org/details/calasus\\_000045](https://archive.org/details/calasus_000045).

<sup>14</sup> Adams, Presentation at the USC Thornton School of Music, November 1, 1985. Comments like these seem to have been a staple of Adams's talks in the early 1980s. In 1983, for instance, Adams said of the Shakers, "I knew . . . they had this strange ritual, where these otherwise celibate people would meet once a week and do this dance, which probably was invested with all their pent-up, sublimated sexual and emotional energies. And so that awareness and that supposition was in the back of my mind in doing this piece." Adams, interview by Plush, "Major Figures in American Music."

<sup>15</sup> Wolfe, "Me Decade," 160.

<sup>16</sup> See Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 28–31.

early 1980s one critic could call minimalism the “higher disco.”<sup>17</sup> From Adams’s somewhat odd speculation that the Shakers would gather “each Saturday night” (and his even more curious correction, as if catching himself, “or I don’t know how many times a week”), it is hard not to think that images of the 1977 film *Saturday Night Fever* (which appeared just a year before *Shaker Loops* was composed), or perhaps the 1976 essay on which it was based, “Tribal Rites of the New Saturday Night,” may have been part of the work’s dramatic conception. As we shall see, Adams’s musical “erotics” would ultimately work rather differently from that of Steve Reich, Philip Glass, or Donna Summers.<sup>18</sup> But Adams may well have understood the connection between the two genres as thoroughly as any of his contemporaries.

What is more, several contemporary observers recognized the Shakers and their rites as notable antecedents to the “ecstatic” tenor of the times. In his influential 1964 text on shamanism, for instance, Eliade cited Shaker ritual as one of many “archaic techniques of ecstasy” found in world religions.<sup>19</sup> Wolfe, for his part, argued that the Shakers presaged the “Me” generation’s mystical bacchanalia.<sup>20</sup> Many others, including Wolfe, compared the Shakers to the Whirling Dervishes of Turkey’s Mevlevi Sufi order, whose touring performances in the United States across the 1970s helped to popularize the notion of dance as a means to achieving spiritual transcendence.<sup>21</sup> By the late 1970s, one could even attend a workshop in Dervish dance held, appropriately enough, on the grounds of a former Shaker colony in New Lebanon, New York.<sup>22</sup> As Adams noted in the early 1980s, the

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Sennett, “Twilight of the Tenured Composer,” *Harper’s*, December 1984, 67, quoted in Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 27.

<sup>18</sup> On the “erotics” of repetitive music,” see Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 34–38.

<sup>19</sup> Eliade wrote of the Shakers, “The principal ritual of this sect consisted in prolonged contemplation of the sky and a continuous shaking of the arms, elementary techniques that are also found, in even more aberrant guises, in the ancient and modern Near East, always in connection with ‘shamanizing’ groups.” Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972 [1964]), 321.

<sup>20</sup> “The Bacchic orders, the Sufi, Voodooists, Shakers, and many others used feasts (the bacchanals), ecstatic dancing (‘the whirling dervishes’), and other forms of frenzy to achieve the *Kairos* ... the *moment* ... here and now! ... the *feeling!*” Wolfe, “Me Decade,” 161–62. Ellipses original.

<sup>21</sup> In a 1971 account of a square dance at an Oregon commune, the one-time “upwardly mobile city editor” turned countercultural spokesman Robert Houriet told of how his partner’s “turning like a whirling dervish” reminded him of “how the Shakers, another communal sect, had gotten their name from the dances that sent them into ecstasies.” Robert Houriet, *Getting Back Together* (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1971), 81. Dancer Ellen Estrin drew a similar comparison in a 1979 article on ritual dance published in *Yoga Journal*. After describing the dervishes’ dizzying dance, Estrin observed that “in America in the nineteenth century, the Shakers practiced religious dance rituals that inspired an altered state of consciousness. They sang, and danced repetitious movements which often led to ecstatic states.” Ellen Estrin, “Recreating Ritual Dance,” *Yoga Journal*, no. 27 (1979): 18. Also see the Wolfe quote in note 20, above, and Edward B. Fiske, “Whirling Dervishes Show Ancient Ritual in Brooklyn,” *New York Times*, November 16, 1972, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/119526321?accountid=14496>.

<sup>22</sup> See Doris Kuller, “Ten Journeys for the Spirit,” *New York*, March 28, 1977.

piece was in part a musical homage to his own New England heritage: he had in fact spent his childhood a short distance from an abandoned Shaker community in New Hampshire.<sup>23</sup> But the piece seems to have been just as much a tribute to the self-actualizing culture then beginning to “loosen up” in the city by the Bay.<sup>24</sup>

For *Shaker Loops* went beyond merely depicting recognized forerunners of the “Me” generation. Rather, in it Adams seems to have heeded Maslow’s call to make musical activity a medium of peak experience. As Adams frequently explained in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the work’s title referred not only to the like-named historical religious group but to the work’s performers. The original program note for the piece (presumably written by Adams himself) stated that “Shaker” had been chosen for the work’s title, in part, “because the primary means of playing here is by shaking the bow across the strings.”<sup>25</sup> Thus the players themselves became one and the same with their ecstatic, shaking forebears. As Adams remembered years later, “the idea of reaching a similar state of ecstatic revelation through music was certainly in my mind as I composed *Shaker Loops*.”<sup>26</sup>

By aligning a particularly vigorous vision of string performance with the Shakers and their mystical, sexual dance, Adams fused instrumental virtuosity and technical knowledge with the decade of “Me.” The piece calls for the musicians to perform a series of short motifs, often composed of dynamic sixteenth-note bursts (ex. 4.1). In the first and last movements, the loops are especially demanding; at one climactic moment (module 20, m. 9), Adams adds the instruction “shake!” to a set of running sixteenth-note loops already marked triple *forte* (ex. 4.2). In addition to the near-ubiquitous tremolando motif that first appears in the work’s opening measures, the piece also calls for the musicians to perform an impressive catalogue of string techniques—sul tasto, flautando, spiccato, pizzicato, at the point, tremolo and quasi-tremolo, “brush stroke,” “off the string,” the placing and replacing of mutes—as well as less specialized but no less characteristic gestures like trills and glissandi. In *Shaker Loops*, an erotic fusion of “music, dancing, rhythm, athletics”—to recall Maslow’s list of “good paths to peak experiences”—had found its way to the concert stage.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Adams, interview by Plush, “Major Figures in American Music.”

<sup>24</sup> Wolfe, “Me Decade,” 162.

<sup>25</sup> Program note (unsigned) for *Shaker Loops*, included in the New Music Ensemble concert program, John Adams, director, December 15, 1978, San Francisco Conservatory of Music Archives. In 1983 Adams explained, “The ‘Shaker’ . . . has to do with the fact that much of the fast music in the piece is brought about by the shaking of the bows across the string, i.e. tremolos.” Adams, interview by Plush, “Major Figures in American Music.”

<sup>26</sup> John Adams, *Hallelujah Junction: Composing an American Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 92.

<sup>27</sup> Maslow, “Music Education,” 168.



EXAMPLE 4.1. Adams, *Shaker Loops*, “shaking” figure, module 1, m. 1

1  $\text{♩} = 144$   
sul tasto

Violin I *p*

Violin II *p* sul tasto

Violin III

Viola

Cello I

Cello II

Double Bass

EXAMPLE 4.2. Adams, *Shaker Loops*, module 20, mm. 7–10

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Vn. 3 *sfz* *sfz* *sfz* shake !

Va. *sfz* *sfz* *sfz* shake !

Vc. 1 *sfz* *sfz* *sfz* shake !

Vc. 2 *sfz* *sfz* *sfz* shake !

Db. *sfz* *sfz* *sfz* shake !

*Altered States of Minimalism*

A few years after the premiere of *Shaker Loops*, Adams made the (subsequently much-quoted) quip that his self-consciously “dramatic” style emerged from the fact that earlier minimalist works had made him feel “bored.”<sup>28</sup> But as I have suggested, there was more to *Shaker Loops* than musical drama for its own sake. Before taking a closer look at the musical language Adams developed to accompany—or was it to induce?—his “shakers” ecstasies, I want to delve more deeply into the work’s prehistory. As I will now discuss, it may be that Adams interpreted the music of minimalists like Steve Reich in the culturally “loosened” image of *Shaker Loops* even before he ever composed in the style himself. And as we shall see in the next section, a now largely forgotten 1977 collaboration with the composer Charlemagne Palestine (born Chaim Moshe Tzadik Palestine, also known as Charles Martin Palestine) would give Adams the framework for developing his own erotic minimalist dramaturgy. *Shaker Loops*, I want to suggest, might ultimately be best understood as Adams’s composing-out of a distinctively “loosened” Bay Area conception of repetitive music’s inherent possibilities—a conception that would only be further clarified as Adams expanded his network of minimalist contacts and range of self-actualizing musical experiences in the years 1977 and 1978.

As is well known, many listeners in the 1970s associated minimalist music with states of “hypnosis” or “trance”—a far cry, it would seem, from the kind of vigorous physical exercise that Adams would later compose into *Shaker Loops* (or that figures like Maslow thought conducive to “peak” musical experiences).<sup>29</sup> “‘Hypnotic’ is probably the best word for this music,” critic Tom Johnson wrote of then-recent works of La Monte Young, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and Philip Glass in 1972, “because it comes closest to describing the effect that it has on the listener. The music . . . simply lulls, hypnotizes, and draws him into its world. Of course, it won’t put him into a true trance, medically speaking, but the effect is something like that.”<sup>30</sup> Not all agreed with this analysis, to be sure—Steve Reich countered in interviews that when it came to his music’s psychosomatic effects, most critics got it wrong. According to him, terms like “trance” and “hypnotic” suggested the worst: that his works put listeners to sleep. “I always thought, ‘No, no, no, no, I want you to be wide awake and hear details you’ve never heard before!’” Reich told an

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<sup>28</sup> According to Michael Steinberg, Adams claimed to be “a minimalist bored with minimalism” in a 1980 conversation. Michael Steinberg, “*Harmonium* for Large Orchestra and Chorus (1980–1),” in *The John Adams Reader: Essential Writings on an American Composer*, ed. Thomas May (Pompton Plains, NJ: Amadeus Press, 2006), 82.

<sup>29</sup> On the trope of “trance” in the reception of minimalism, see Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*.

<sup>30</sup> Tom Johnson, “September 7, 1972. La Monte Young, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, Philip Glass,” in *The Voice of New Music* (Paris: Editions 75, 1989).

interviewer in the early 1980s.<sup>31</sup> For Reich, “hypnotic” listeners were poor listeners who preferred being “just spaced out” to the appreciation of true musical intricacy.<sup>32</sup>

By 1977, evidence suggests, Adams and his students in the San Francisco Conservatory New Music Ensemble had begun to experience minimalism differently. That year, Adams led a performance of Reich’s pulsing, modular 1973 work *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ* with the Ensemble. Anticipating the Maslowian dramaturgy of *Shaker Loops*, a program note for the performance suggested that the very act of performing Reich’s music was the true source of its extraordinary “ecstatic” impact. Reich’s music, the note explained, “employs simple, direct, and eminently performable processes to create energy states more akin to primitive music than to [the] Western art tradition.”<sup>33</sup> While acknowledging that Reich’s works “are, in one sense, delicately tuned and balanced machines that describe continuously evolving processes”—a view Reich surely would have approved of—the note countered that “Reich’s ‘machines,’ running as they do on human rather than mechanical or electrical energy, are capable of doing what mere hardware cannot: they can take the listener out of his normal state; they can (and sometimes do) produce in the listener a feeling of ecstasy.”<sup>34</sup> The note’s interpretation of minimalist aesthetics rested neither on notions of hypnotic trance nor aural attention, but on the very “human energies” required to perform the piece (much in the same way that the title of *Shaker Loops* would later put the players of the New Music Ensemble front and center). The note figured Reich’s work as a “primitive” rite—and an “eminently performable” one at that—whose celebration produced an extraordinary “energy state” in performers and listeners alike, one that was liable to lead to “ecstatic” experiences.

Even if it is difficult to connect the note’s atypical minimalist hermeneutic to a particular school of “loosened” thought, the note’s unusual vocabulary seems to have drawn on the growing discourse of physically induced “ecstatic” experience. We find an apparently similar esoteric worldview, for instance, in the writings of Swami Rama, among the most influential popularizers of kundalini yoga of the day. Rama wrote in 1976 of the need to regulate one’s “total energy state,” teaching that it was a “balanced state in the energy sphere that provides conditions optimal for meditation and personal growth.”<sup>35</sup> Through practice, yogis could hope to attain a “state of ‘ecstasy,’” an “intermingling of energies” on a “primitive” level of

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<sup>31</sup> Steve Reich, “The Desert Music—Steve Reich in Conversation with Jonathan Cott (1984),” in *Writings on Music, 1965–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 129.

<sup>32</sup> Reich, “Desert Music,” 129.

<sup>33</sup> Program note (unsigned) for Steve Reich, *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ* (1973), included in the New Music Ensemble concert program, John Adams, director, April 15, 1977, San Francisco Conservatory of Music Archives.

<sup>34</sup> Program note (unsigned) for Steve Reich, *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ* (1973), included in the New Music Ensemble concert program, John Adams, director, April 15, 1977, San Francisco Conservatory of Music Archives.

<sup>35</sup> Swami Rama, Rudolph Ballentine, and Swami Ajaya, *Yoga and Psychotherapy: The Evolution of Consciousness* (Glenview, IL: Himalayan Institute, 1976), 102, 44.

consciousness in which such paranormal experiences as telepathy became possible.<sup>36</sup> Of course, Reich himself had compared the performance of his works to yoga, but his own yogic perspective seems to have been rather different from Rama's. For Reich, both yoga and minimalist music-making were practices of self-discipline, the mastery of "individual thoughts and feelings," as Reich put it in the mid-1970s.<sup>37</sup> Kundalini practitioners like Rama, meanwhile, placed a much higher premium on explosive energetic experience and were thus much closer in spirit to seekers of the "loose life," whose principle tropes were "eruption, epiphany, and release" rather than self-control.<sup>38</sup> As Theodore Roszak reported in 1975, authorities held "that kundalini is a psychophysiological energy which has carried forward the entire course of evolution," an energy that could surge through the body with uncontrollable force.<sup>39</sup> The New Music Ensemble's "primitive" minimalist ritual, it seems, would channel something of these flowing psychosomatic energies.

Other contemporary "loosened" thinkers drew on a similar vocabulary, particularly those who, like Maslow, leaned to the "left" of Freud. For an example, and one last useful point of comparison, we can turn once again to the esoteric writings of Norman O. Brown. Though we can only speculate on this point, Adams may well have identified with his perspective—Adams knew and seems to have connected with Brown's work well enough by the early 1980s to cite it off-the-cuff in interviews.<sup>40</sup> For Brown, the physical body was an "energy system" whose true purpose was to channel and experience the "sea of energy" which was the unconscious, the seat of sexual desire.<sup>41</sup> In this knowledge, Brown argued, one could discover "a new consciousness, an erotic sense of reality," as he put it in *Love's Body*.<sup>42</sup> Whereas moderns went around "hypnotized" by "the abstraction of the visual, obtained by putting to sleep the rest of the body," Brown imagined that members of more "primitive" cultures still knew how to participate at a deeper, more inherently bodily level in the arts and in life more broadly, a way of being Brown called a "primitive mentality."<sup>43</sup> "Primitive mentality," Brown maintained, "involves participation; an extrasensory link between the percipient and the perceived; a telepathy which we have disowned."<sup>44</sup> Something of that "primitive

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<sup>36</sup> Rama, Ballentine, and Ajaya, *Yoga and Psychotherapy*, 102.

<sup>37</sup> Steve Reich, "Music and Performance (1969–74; 1993)," in *Writings on Music, 1965–2000*, ed. Paul Hillier (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 81.

<sup>38</sup> Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Theodore Roszak, *Unfinished Animal: The Aquarian Frontier and the Evolution of Consciousness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 73.

<sup>40</sup> "I've never received any powerful creative energy from the idea of turning my back on the past," Adams told an interviewer in 1985. "Many artists have to do that—it's like the primal scene with the father that Norman O. Brown talks about in *Love's Body*, where the act of patricide is one of self-survival. But I've never found that a necessity." Adams, interview by Cott, "An Interview with John Adams by Jonathan Cott, June 1985."

<sup>41</sup> Brown, *Love's Body*, 155.

<sup>42</sup> Brown, *Love's Body*, 81.

<sup>43</sup> Brown, *Love's Body*, 121.

<sup>44</sup> Brown, *Love's Body*, 121.

mentality,” that telepathy of circulating energies, seems to have undergirded the New Music Ensemble minimalist hermeneutic. Participants would not be put to sleep, would not be “hypnotized”—under the “primitive” spell of the New Music Ensemble’s performance, the body and its hidden, transpersonal energies would be fully awakened, even to the point of “ecstasy.”

Adams would frequently cite his performance of *Music for Mallet Instruments* with the New Music Ensemble as a turning point in his career, for though Adams would continue to dabble in other genres, pulsing, repetitive music would dominate his output from that point forward.<sup>45</sup> After the Reich performance in the spring of 1977, Adams produced his first pulse and process-based works, *Phrygian Gates* and its companion piece *China Gates*, over the summer and winter of that year. As Schwarz has pointed out, these works could rightly be described as “process” music akin to the works of Reich and Glass of the mid-1970s.<sup>46</sup> Still, we might speculate that something of the New Music Ensemble’s energies coursed through these works. For even as Adams remained true to the “carefully tuned” musical structure of *Music for Mallet Instruments*, energy flow was at the conceptual core of *Phrygian* and *China Gates*. Indeed, the very concept of a musical “module”—the individual blocks of repeating motifs upon which the piece was built—was already directly concerned with the concept of energy: in the parlance of contemporary electronic music composition (with which Adams was well acquainted from his own work in the field), a “module” was a piece of hardware that controlled the transduction of physical energy into sound. As Adams himself suggested in the mid-1980s, a “gate” was one such device, “a module that passes a certain amount of current on a given command.”<sup>47</sup> Following suggestions Adams has made elsewhere, scholars typically think of Adams’s “gates” as changes in harmony, but this does not necessarily preclude conceptualizing of them as changes in energy as well.<sup>48</sup> In *China Gates*, the current increased and dissipated in a carefully planned arch form, as an illustration of the “gating” process Adams included in the 1977 score of *China Gates* suggests.

In these early works we can hear the first fruits of Adams’s “California years,” as his works took performer and listener on a journey of musical energy modulation. At the very least, the discourse surrounding Adams’s early encounters with minimalism suggests that he may have felt these energies—and perceived their relevance for minimalist musical drama—from a very early stage. The musical dramaturgy of Adams’s “gate” works, like the New Music Ensemble program note for the 1977 Reich performance, stopped short of connecting minimalism’s “energy states” to what Brown might have called a mystical, “erotic sense of reality.” That

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<sup>45</sup> Ingram Marshall speculates that the New Music Ensemble performance may have been the first not led by Reich himself. See Schwarz, “Process vs. Intuition,” 256; Adams, *Hallelujah Junction*, 89; Ingram Marshall and Thomas May, “Ingram Marshall on the Early Years in San Francisco,” in *The John Adams Reader: Essential Writings on an American Composer*, ed. Thomas May (Pompton Plains, NJ: Amadeus Press, 2006), 69.

<sup>46</sup> Schwarz, “Process vs. Intuition,” 256–58.

<sup>47</sup> Adams, interview by Cott, “An Interview with John Adams by Jonathan Cott, June 1985.”

<sup>48</sup> Fink, “(Post-)minimalisms,” 544.

would have to wait another year, for *Shaker Loops*. But Adams would not make this connection on his own.

*“A Little Bit Like a Bordello”*

It would take another critical encounter with repetitive music, a late 1977 collaboration with the composer Charlemagne Palestine, to inspire Adams to try his own hand at composing a fully “loosened” form of minimalism. The influence of Palestine on Adams’s development is all but forgotten today (Adams himself seems to have largely disavowed it).<sup>49</sup> But in the early 1980s, Adams would openly acknowledge that he emulated Palestine’s particularly visceral brand of repetitive performance in *Shaker Loops*.<sup>50</sup> The fact that Adams composed *Shaker Loops* as a nod to Palestine underscores that Adams was hardly the first minimalist to envision music-making as a pathway to peak experience. But Adams seems to have understood better than most how to channel a “loosened,” Maslowian aesthetic into the musical mainstream.

If ever there was a composer of the so-called “Me Decade,” Palestine was it. In both concept and practice, his composition classes at the California Institute for the Arts (where he taught in the late sixties and early seventies) mirrored faddish inward-facing group therapies like that Wolfe mercilessly mocked in his 1976 essay. Palestine would have students gather in a dark room, instructing them “to search out with your body and your voice any way you want to try to articulate deep inside what seems most at the root of your sentiments and externalize them.”<sup>51</sup> Palestine sat in a corner doing the same, “making this kind of a ‘AHHHG,’ sort of searching inside for my demons in a way,” as he told an interviewer in the mid-1970s (compare this to how Wolfe described the woman obsessed with “me and my hemorrhoids”: “To let the feeling gush forth . . . she starts moaning . . . AiaiaiaiaaaaAAAAAAAAARRRRGGGGHHH!”)<sup>52</sup> Outside the classroom, Palestine imagined his performances, too, as a quasi-mystical process of self-exploration. “But I know that what I’m gonna try to bring to music now is a looking inside. . . . So every concert I do is always more than just a piece. It means that everybody who’s in it is going through some kind of reevaluation in some sense. Do you know what I mean?”<sup>53</sup>

Like Maslow, Palestine well understood the implicit connections between musical self-discovery and the carnality of the body. For him, the process of

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<sup>49</sup> Adams’s recent autobiography mentions Palestine mostly to chide him for his *épater la bourgeoisie* attitude and says nothing about Palestine in connection with *Shaker Loops*. See Adams, *Hallelujah Junction*, 97–98.

<sup>50</sup> Adams, interview by Plush, “Major Figures in American Music.”

<sup>51</sup> Charlemagne Palestine, interview by Walter Zimmerman in *Desert Plants: Conversations with 23 American Musicians* (Vancouver: A.R.C. Publications, 1976).

<sup>52</sup> Palestine, interview by Zimmerman, 263; Wolfe, “Me Decade,” 132. I have edited the length of the woman’s ecstatic groan to fit on a single line of text.

<sup>53</sup> Palestine, interview by Zimmerman, 268.

“searching inside” was also deeply erotic. Palestine said nothing to the students—“it was a little bit like a bordello,” he explained in 1976.<sup>54</sup> And the sexual undertones of his music-making ran deeper still—in the same interview, he claimed that his self-exploratory performance practice had emerged spontaneously from euphoric improvisations at the piano in a dark room after sex.<sup>55</sup>

Also true to Maslow’s vision, Palestine’s self-actualizing performances were intensely physical affairs. In the 1970s he was renowned for improvising “minimal” pieces on a Bösendorfer piano—often pounding out only a handful of chords over and over in the course of an evening—and for his marathon solo vocal rituals. Reviewing a 1974 performance of the latter at the experimental composer Phill Niblock’s New York loft, Tom Johnson related how “Palestine knelt quietly on the floor for a while, just rocking and breathing, and then gradually picking up steam both physically and vocally. When the performance climaxed, about twenty minutes later, he was reiterating loud tones and throwing himself vigorously onto his hands.”<sup>56</sup> Palestine’s orgasmic performances engrossed both musically and visually, and their dramatic potential was intriguing to Johnson. “I suspect they could lead to some extraordinary form of full-blown music theater,” he wrote, “especially if Palestine ever figures out how to present such things with a group of people instead of as solos.” Soon, at the invitation of John Adams, Palestine would do just that.

Adams commissioned Palestine to compose and lead a new work with the New Music Ensemble for a December 1977 concert.<sup>57</sup> Palestine answered with a piece for twelve strings he called *Birth of a Sonority*. There was no score (what we know of the piece comes from Palestine’s and Adams’s subsequent recollections). Each member of the ensemble was assigned a “sonority” to play in rehearsal; then, in performance, Palestine proceeded to vigorously coax those sonorities from the players with apparently wild gesticulations. “It sets up a physical rapport with the players,” Palestine said of the piece in a 1980 interview, “so that at any moment, a conductor can get a sense of intensity or sense of motion on the pitches from the player without any middle notation in a way—it’s a totally physical kind of interaction.”<sup>58</sup> By Adams’s account, Palestine subjected the New Music Ensemble to the kind of red-blooded musical treatment Palestine was used to perpetrating on his Bösendorfer—an experience that would have a profound impact on Adams’s personal stylistic development. As Adams remembered some five years later,

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<sup>54</sup> Palestine, interview by Zimmerman, 262.

<sup>55</sup> Palestine, interview by Zimmerman, 267.

<sup>56</sup> This and the following quotation are from Johnson, “January 31, 1974.”

<sup>57</sup> The performance also featured new and recent works by Ingram Marshall and Joan La Barbara, respectively. See the New Music Ensemble concert program, John Adams, director, December 3, 1977, San Francisco Conservatory of Music Archives.

<sup>58</sup> Charlemagne Palestine, interview by Charles Amirkhanian, “Morning Concert: An Interview with Charlemagne Palestine,” originally broadcast on November 20, 1980, KPFA Radio, Berkeley, CA. <http://radiom.org/detail.php?omid=MC.1980.11.20>.

He did a fifteen- or twenty-minute piece based essentially on the format of his piano pieces . . . . He stood in front of this group . . . who had no notation or anything. He'd just done this in rehearsal, sort of oral tradition. And they knew what intervals to play, a very simple minimal type of piece, and he conducted them and got very passionately involved physically. . . . I realized in watching him that he was attempting to do something that I very much wanted to do, only I took a much different tack and it resulted in *Shaker Loops*, which is a very physical and very muscular piece. I always have to acknowledge that debt to Charlemagne, that he sort of liberated a certain physical relationship to my own music that may have taken me longer to do had I not experienced that with him.<sup>59</sup>

In the early 1980s, Palestine all but abandoned the musical scene for the visual and plastic arts. But Adams would carry Palestine's carnal, self-exploratory minimalist aesthetic from the oral to notated tradition—and eventually, from the experimental loft to some of the world's most prominent concert halls and opera houses.

### *Getting “Loose” with Minimalism*

The “liberated” physicality and erotic, mystical imagery of Palestine's work clearly influenced the eventual narrative content of *Shaker Loops*, premiered several months after the *Birth of a Sonority* performance. But the New Music Ensemble collaboration with Palestine seems to have had just as important an impact on Adams's musical language. Critics have frequently noted how Adams's music of the late 1970s began to eschew the strict repetitive processes of early minimalism—in a fortuitous congruence of vocabulary, in 1990 one critic suggested that Adams's works exhibited a “loosening of musical processes.”<sup>60</sup> But what scholars have largely described purely in stylistic terms, I want to argue, can also be understood as one musician's initiation into the burgeoning culture of self-actualization. The piece's idiosyncratic style, I want to suggest, might be described as a “loosened” form of notated minimalism, apparently designed to mirror the “loosened” musical body Adams had recently discovered in Palestine and sought to emulate.

From a structural point of view, *Shaker Loops* bore much in common with the works of Steve Reich and Philip Glass of the early to mid-1970s, particularly Reich's *Music for Mallet Instruments* (a piece Adams knew well, as we have seen). Comparison shows how closely Adams followed Reich's modular structure (figs. 4.1a–4.1b). As in *Music for Mallet Instruments*, Adams constructed *Shaker Loops* from a series of musical modules and submodules consisting of short musical fragments set to be repeated indefinitely until the ensemble leader signaled the group to move on.

<sup>59</sup> Adams, interview by Plush, “Major Figures in American Music.” For a similar account, see Adams, Presentation at the USC Thornton School of Music, November 1, 1985.

<sup>60</sup> Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 177; Schwarz, “Process vs. Intuition,” 258.



Handwritten manuscript score for Reich's *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ*, modules 1-2. The score is written on multiple staves. The top staff is for Women's Voices, with lyrics "ee" and "ee". Below it are staves for Accordion, Glockenspiel, and Marimbas. The Marimbas section is divided into four parts labeled 1A, 1B, 1C, 1D, and 1E. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf*, *ff*, and *ff*. There are also circled numbers 1 and 2, and circled letters A, B, C, D, and E.

FIGURE 4.1A. Reich, *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ*, modules 1-2, composer's manuscript score

Published score for Adams' *Shaker Loops* (1978), modules 1-2. The score is written on multiple staves for Violin 1, Violin 2, Violin 3, Viola, Cello 1, Cello 2, and Bass. The tempo is marked  $\text{♩} = 144$ . The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *pp*, and *pp*. There are also circled numbers 1, 2, and 3, and circled letters A, B, C, D, and E.

FIGURE 4.1B. Adams, *Shaker Loops* (1978), modules 1-2, published score

But as if in imitation of the “passionately involved” physicality of “Birth of a Sonority,” Adams built his modules not of texturally uniform, interlocking units but of highly varied blocks of conspicuously gestural figures—a difference in character that is largely responsible for the drastically different sonic effects of the two works. In *Music for Mallet Instruments*, marimbas 1, 2, and 3 maintain an easily parsed triple-meter motif for the work’s first five modules. The strict metrical organization of the prevailing patterns makes the transition from one module to another feel pronounced, even jarring. In figure 4.1a, for instance, a sudden elongation of the chords performed by the women’s voices and organ creates an audible hiccup against the triple-meter pattern in the marimbas below. The effect is the same, if less attention-grabbing, in each of the submodules, where Reich makes smaller-scale tweaks to a single voice.

Of course, this overt patterning was very much by design—and key, as Fink has argued, to this music’s erotic charge. Reich famously labeled such effects “perceptible processes,” and the regular meter and obvious shifts from one module to the next were essential to those processes’ perceptibility. Such advertised organization was a feature common to much pulse-based music of the time—the shifts between modules in Glass’s 1976 opera *Einstein on the Beach*, another piece Adams knew at the time he composed *Shaker Loops*, were also easy to hear.<sup>61</sup> In fact, Glass often seems to have gone out of his way to aid listeners in analyzing his irregularly metered modules by having the chorus “count-sing” their looping beat patterns aloud (ex. 4.3). According to Fink, repetitive music of this kind derived its ecstatic capacities from its “recombinant teleology.”<sup>62</sup> Rather than building towards a single, grand climax, this music was built of several, small-scale cycles of tension and release.<sup>63</sup> At its most basic, this music “was about orgasms,” Fink playfully argues. “*Multiple* orgasms.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> According to Adams’s autobiography, he heard *Einstein* performed by the composer and his ensemble in San Francisco in the 1970s. Adams, *Hallelujah Junction*, 89.

<sup>62</sup> Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 42.

<sup>63</sup> Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 43.

<sup>64</sup> Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 42.

EXAMPLE 4.3. Advertised modular shifts in Glass, *Einstein on the Beach*, “Knee 1,” opening

The image displays a musical score for the opening of "Knee 1" from Glass's *Einstein on the Beach*. It consists of two systems of music. The first system is labeled "1" and features a Chorus part and an Organ part. The Chorus part is written in a single staff with a treble clef and contains three measures of music, each with a sequence of notes and fingerings (1-4, 1-6, 1-8) written below. The Organ part is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and contains three measures of music, each with a sequence of notes and fingerings (1-4, 1-6, 1-8) written below. The second system is labeled "2" and features a Chorus part and an Organ part. The Chorus part is written in a single staff with a treble clef and contains three measures of music, each with a sequence of notes and fingerings (1-4, 1-6, 2-8) written below. The Organ part is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and contains three measures of music, each with a sequence of notes and fingerings (1-4, 1-6, 2-8) written below. The score uses a variety of note values and rests to create a complex, modular structure.

*Shaker Loops* was just as carnal as any piece of 1970s repetitive music, but its particular libidinal dramaturgy set it apart. By contrast with those in *Music for Mallet Instruments* and *Einstein*, Adams's loops work to suppress, rather than reinforce, the sense of a prevailing meter, producing an affect of "passionate" involvement in the task of "shaking" that seems to override any preconceived or otherwise predictable plan. Here, the body and its "loosened" energies seem to be calling the shots. The first two modules of *Shaker Loops* illustrate Adams's metrical strategies. Unlike Reich's modules, the constituent loops in Adams's score are of inconsistent length. What is more, the prevailing loop in these modules—the "shaking" sixteenth-note figure in the first and second violins—feeds into itself without break; it is simply a string of continuous, undifferentiated pulses. Meanwhile, more soloistic loops rise out of the texture with seeming spontaneity (the third violin in figure 4.1b, module 1, for instance)—we can almost see Palestine wildly gesturing a player to "birth" her sonority. The piece would certainly be a devilish dictation exercise: deprived of metrical signposts, listeners may sense that the ensuing patterns in the various submodules are repeating loops, but the overall organization of the loops is impossible to grasp. Later, in the slower-moving movements "Hymning Slews" and "Loops and Verses Before the Lord," Adams

resorts to a different strategy for subverting measure lines: rather than tightly compacted loops of continuous pulses, Adams slows the pulse to create modules of overlapping long-held tones. In “Loops and Verses Before the Lord”—the work’s dramatic “peak”—longer, lyrical loops are set against both long-tone loops and the meterless “shaking” motif from the opening movement (ex. 4.4). The result of all this is a modularly organized work whose constituent “loops” hardly seem like “loops” at all, but instead sound like impromptu physical actions, repeated and varied at the whim of the “shaker,” and surging toward climax—the deific vision, the peak experience.

EXAMPLE 4.4. Divinely inspired lyrical “verses” and shaking “loops” in Adams, *Shaker Loops*, Part 3, “Loops and Verses [in the Presence of the Lord],” mm. 2–11 (some parts omitted)

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Example 4.4. The first system consists of two staves: the upper staff is for Violin I (Vc. I Solo) and the lower staff is for Violin II (Vc. II). The tempo is marked as ♩ = 63. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The Violin I part features long, sustained notes with some melodic movement, while the Violin II part plays a more rhythmic, repetitive pattern. The second system consists of four staves: Violin I (Vn. I), Violin II (Vn. II), Violin I (Vc. I), and Violin II (Vc. II). The Violin I and II parts are marked with a tremolo (indicated by a series of dots) and *sim.* (sforzando). The Violin I part has a tremolo starting in the second measure, while the Violin II part has a tremolo starting in the fourth measure. The Violin I and II parts in this system play long, sustained notes, similar to the first system.

And “peak” Adams’s music did. Indeed, Adams’s brand of minimalism is perhaps most famous for the way it reincorporated grand musical climaxes into what had been (for some, at least) a genre defined by its apparent lack of goal-orientation.<sup>65</sup> According to Fink, the “recombinant teleology” of mid-seventies

<sup>65</sup> Some have suspected that Adams indulged in the musical “climax carrot,” as Tom Johnson once dismissively put it, merely to win over traditionally minded concert goers. See Fink, “(Post-)minimalisms,” 544.

repetitive composers like Reich and Glass could be heard “as both the sonic analogue and, at times, a sonorous constituent of a characteristic repetitive experience of self in mass-media consumer society.”<sup>66</sup> Adams, though, seems to have taken the genre in a different direction. Rather than the modern consumer self, Adams seems to have set about representing the physically “liberated,” “loosened” self—a self that had shaken off the strictly repetitive, overtly calculated discipline of Reich’s “machines” to discover a yet deeper level of spiritual insight.

This “loosened” self, furthermore, practiced its rites of bodily liberation not to acknowledge, critique, or indulge in the modern repetitive experience Fink has called the “mercantile sublime,” nor to escape forever into ecstasy, as some critics of minimalism contended. Rather, the goal seems to have been something resembling self-actualization. As Adams recognized, the ecstasies of the Shakers had a distinct social purpose. As the program note for the premiere of *Shaker Loops* suggested, quoting a 1647 English source, the Shakers would “swell, shiver, and shake, and when they come to themselves . . . they begin to preache what hath been delivered to them by the spirit.”<sup>67</sup> Figures like Maslow, as we have seen, understood such peak experiences as no less practical. It was well and good—indeed, necessary—to repeat oneself into a “peak” of orgasmic bliss. But one had to come down from the mountain if the revelation was to have any real value. Thus whereas *Music for Mallet Instruments* ends in medias res, as if its ecstasies could go on forever (as Fink points out), Adams’s “shakers,” after a quaking “peak,” slowly fade to a standstill—a final, non-repeating submodule consisting of a single *pianissimo* long-held tone. They have “peaked”—with its memory fresh in their minds, it seems, now the real work of self- and community-betterment could begin.

Wolfe, we might assume, would have heard in *Shaker Loops* nothing but “Me . . . Me . . . Me . . . Me . . .”<sup>68</sup> But Wolfe was hardly the only one to fear the repetitive orgies of the “Me Decade.” In his 1985 study *American Minimal Music*, the composer and critic Wim Mertens argued that “the so-called *religious* experience of repetitive music is in fact a camouflaged erotic experience.”<sup>69</sup> Adams no doubt would have agreed with Mertens up to this point, but would likely not have countenanced the rest of Mertens’s orthodox Freudian party line. “Repetitive music can lead to psychological regression. . . . The libido, freed from the external world, turns towards the ego to obtain imaginary satisfaction. Freud defined this as a regression and a ‘return to the infantile experience of hallucinatory satisfaction.’” Here, I would suggest, Adams stood squarely on the Freudian Left. Looking now at the musical dramaturgy of Adams’s subsequent works, I want to argue that for him, the mystical, erotic, repetitive physical experience seems to have contained, as it did for Maslow, “the roots of creativeness, of joy, of happiness, of goodness.” If *Shaker*

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<sup>66</sup> Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 2–3.

<sup>67</sup> Program note (unsigned) for *Shaker Loops*, included in the New Music Ensemble concert program, John Adams, director.

<sup>68</sup> Wolfe, “Me Decade,” 167.

<sup>69</sup> This and the next quotation are from Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music* (London: Kahn and Averill, 1985), 124. Emphasis original.

*Loops* merely represented “peak” states without necessarily endorsing them, Adams’s subsequent works would make it plain that he commended the “liberated” physicality he wrote into *Shaker Loops* as a personal and social good—even as the artistic experience par excellence.

*“Liberating” America: From Harmonium to Nixon in China*

The peak experience and the “loosened” minimalist musical language Adams invented to describe it in *Shaker Loops* would drive the musical dramaturgy of Adams’s works across the 1980s. From his 1981 *Harmonium*, the piece that put Adams on the international map, to his blockbuster 1987 opera *Nixon in China*, which solidified his reputation as one of his generation’s preeminent composers, Adams’s characteristic “shaking” idiom would take pride of place in a compositional vocabulary that increasingly drew on a wide array of distinct musical styles. Adams’s preoccupation with depicting “peak”-like states, and his penchant for reserving the characteristic musical language of *Shaker Loops* to depict them, suggests just how intertwined the histories of self-actualization and musical minimalism had become.

From a dramatic and musical perspective, *Harmonium* for chorus and orchestra (premiered by the San Francisco Symphony in a sold-out series of concerts in 1981) picked up where *Shaker Loops* had left off, drawing heavily on Adams’s idiosyncratic “liberated” musical style to depict deeply carnal, visionary states. For the text, Adams arranged the mystical poetry of John Donne and Emily Dickinson to forge a narrative of love, death, and erotic consciousness that could have been lifted from Brown’s aforementioned post-Freudian classic *Love’s Body*. The first movement, “Negative Love,” explores the notion that love itself cannot be described in words, an idea remarkably similar to one developed by Brown in which “silence” is the essential carnal state.<sup>70</sup> The piece begins with long tones, some sung, some in the upper winds, reminiscent of the opening of “Loops and Verses Before the Lord,” as the other voices of the chorus enter performing a kind of vocal version of violin “shakes,” an unmetred quarter-note “loop” on the syllable “no”—a play, perhaps, on Donne’s line, “To all, which all love, I say no” (ex. 4.5). The “loop,” a visionary vocal warmup of sorts, eventually transforms into the first syllable of the first word of text, “never,” but not before the entire orchestra is “shaking” along with the chorus. After reaching a height of vocal and orchestral “shaking,” the chorus erupts into Donne’s visionary verses on the nature of love to a looping melody.

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<sup>70</sup> “To recover the world of silence . . . is to recover the human body,” Brown had written in a chapter from *Love’s Body* entitled “Nothing.” “Love that never told can be. It is the fool King Lear who asks his daughters to tell how much they love him. And it is the one who loves him who is silent.” Brown, *Love’s Body*, 265.

EXAMPLE 4.5. Vocal “shakes” in Adams, *Harmonium*, “I. Negative Love,” mm. 1–4

(gradually and constantly accelerating)  $\text{♩} = 126$

Flutes

Alto 2

No

Alto 3

No No No No No No No No No No No No No No No No

The work’s conclusion is no less Brownian in its spiritual-sexual imagery. According to Brown, the erotic body was one “awakened” or “resurrected,” and the third movement of *Harmonium*, likewise, seems to realize that resurrection. The second movement, a setting of Dickinson’s “Because I Could Not Stop for Death,” suggests the death of the subject. But after an orchestral “shaking” to match the climax of *Shaker Loops*, the chorus explodes into a seething setting of Dickinson’s erotic fantasia “Wild Nights,” a poem suffused with images of the ocean—recalling Brown’s Freudian concepts of the id as the “sea of energy”—and “rowing in Eden”—Dickinson’s poetical evocation of the physicality of erotic paradise. Adams set the explicitly gestural text “rowing in Eden” as a “shaking” loop that, after a series of repetitions, seems to induce the sopranos to pronounce a visionary “verse” on the sea as a metaphor for sexual union and mystical wholeness (ex. 4.6).

EXAMPLE 4.6. Carnal “rowing” induces a visionary verse on the sea. Adams, *Harmonium*, “III. Wild Nights,” mm. 289–93 (some parts omitted)

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system is in 4/4 time and features four staves: Sopranos, Alto 2, Alto 4, and Low Strings. The vocal parts sing the lyrics "ing, and row - ing, and row - ing, and row - ing, and row - ing, and". The Soprano part includes the word "Ah,". The Low Strings provide a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The second system is in 3/8 time and features the same four staves. The vocal parts sing the lyrics "the sea! and row - ing, and row - ing, and row - ing, and row - ing, and". The Low Strings continue with a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes.

The same “shaking” idiom reappears in Adams’s 1982 *Grand Pianola Music*, a piece that returned more specifically to the theme of performance as a pathway to ecstasy. Though not billed as such, the piece can be considered a concerto for orchestra and two pianos. The players begin playing independent, simple “shakes”—continuous two-note alternations of a whole step (ex. 4.7a). The pianists’ pulse patterns become more and more energetic as the piece progresses—first quarter notes, then quarter-note triplets, then running eighths, crashing *fortissimo* chords, and other virtuoso figurations. In a note published with the score, Adams claims to have been inspired by a dream of two enormous grand pianos cruising like giant limousines towards what he called their “ecstasy”—a cacophonous vision that reminded Adams of hearing countless pianists practicing simultaneously in the San Francisco Conservatory practice rooms.<sup>71</sup> In the finale increasingly dazzling “shaking” figures flow from the pianists’ hands, figures that are also increasingly

<sup>71</sup> John Adams, *Grand Pianola Music*, (New York: Associated Music Publishers, 1982).



familiar—bits and pieces of great works from the Western canon, including a triumphal Beethovenian theme. Here, the flow of musical energies seems to lead to a specifically pianistic peak experience (ex. 4.7b).

EXAMPLE 4.7A. Piano “shakes” in Adams, *Grand Pianola Music*, “Part I,” opening

$\text{♩} = 96$

Fl. 1  
*p*

Fl. 2  
*p*

Cl. 1  
*p*

Cl. 2  
*p*

Pf. 1  
*p*  
*Ped. sempre*

Pf. 2  
*p*  
*Ped. sempre*

EXAMPLE 4.7B. Pianistic “ecstasy” in Adams, *Grand Pianola Music*, “Part II: On the Dominant Divide,” conclusion (some parts omitted)

The musical score consists of the following parts:

- Picc. 1: Piccolo 1, playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.
- Picc. 2: Piccolo 2, playing a similar rhythmic pattern.
- Ob.: Oboe, playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.
- Bs. Cl., Hn.: Bass Clarinet and Horn, playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.
- Perc.: Percussion, playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.
- Pf. 1: Piano 1, playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.
- Pf. 2: Piano 2, playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

In his next major work, the 1985 orchestral piece *Harmonielehre*, the association between “shaking” and musical creativity would only become more pronounced. Here, Adams largely withheld his signature idiom until the concluding movement—a seeming depiction of Adams’s own struggles with, and eventual recovery of, his own compositional voice. Adams composed *Harmonielehre* after a two-year creative block, a struggle reflected directly in the work’s musical narrative. After an initial “shaking” at the opening, *Harmonielehre* takes a dark turn, particularly in the second movement, “The Amfortas Wound,” which Adams described in 1985 as a depiction of his “creativity wound.”<sup>72</sup> When “shaking” figures

<sup>72</sup> This and next quotation are from Adams, interview by Cott, “An Interview with John Adams by Jonathan Cott, June 1985.”

do at long last return in the third movement, which Adams described as an evocation of “spiritual and psychological harmony,” it is as if to celebrate the return of a prodigal creative self (ex. 4.8).

EXAMPLE 4.8. “Shaking” figures depict “spiritual and psychological harmony” in Adams, *Harmonielehre*, “Part III. Meister Eckhardt and Quackie,” opening (some parts omitted)

Slowly rocking (♩ = 48)

Picc., cel. *mp*

Picc., cel.

Pf., hp. *mp*

Strings *pp* *pp*

When it came to Adams’s highest profile work yet, the 1987 opera *Nixon in China*, Adams would again reserve a special hermeneutic significance for his meterless “shaking” idiom. Once more, this particular musical language accompanies the depiction of a heightened, visionary state—this time experienced by none other than Richard Nixon. In Nixon’s famous “News” aria, *Shaker Loops*’ free-flowing sixteenth-note pulse becomes a two-note loop of metrically unrestricted quarter notes (exs. 4.9 and 4.10). In the 1990s, Adams compared the orchestral accompaniment of the “News” aria to the strumming of a “giant ukulele,” and indeed, the two-part figure suggests an unremitting stream of chords produced by an up-down stroke in which the player plucks the same treble notes while alternating the bass.<sup>73</sup> This “shaking” musical figure, passed between various instruments, courses on uninterrupted—and unmetered—throughout most of the aria.

<sup>73</sup> John Adams, “John Adams on the Violin Concerto,” accessed December 6, 2013, <http://www.earbox.com/orchestra/violin-concerto>.

EXAMPLE 4.9. The “News” aria, opening. Adams, *Nixon in China*, act 1, mm. 364–82, vocal score, with added “module” numbers to match example 4.11 (below)

1

NIXON: ①

Orch. News News, News,

2

News, News, News, News, News, News, News, News,

3

News, News Has a, has a, has a, has a kind of

1

3

mys - te - y:—

## EXAMPLE 4.10. Principal loop in the “News” aria



In composing Nixon’s vocal line, Adams seems to have simply adapted the modular melodic structure of *Shaker Loops*. Example 4.11 shows Nixon’s first phrase rewritten in the “modular” form of *Shaker Loops* (refer to example 4.9 above for the published score of the aria with module and submodule numbers added for reference). Following the conventions of Adams’s earlier, explicitly modular work, I have used large numbers enclosed in squares to stand for “modules,” and smaller numbers enclosed in circles to indicate “submodules.” Each of Nixon’s repeated vocal phrases constitutes a brief submodule comparable to those Adams wrote for the third violin, viola, and cello in the opening of *Shaker Loops*. In that piece, the lower strings are assigned modules composed of variations on the same motive; the most significant variation between the loops is in the number of beats each contains. Nixon’s submodules are similarly constructed, each featuring a brief motive and a shifting number of beats per submodule. The difference, of course, is that in the “News” aria, the “shakes” that were once assigned to a group of string players are all performed by Nixon himself.

EXAMPLE 4.11. Hypothetical “modular” score for the “News” aria, Adams, *Nixon in China*, act 1, mm. 364–82

1 Orch.  
NIXON:  
News, News, News,  
has a kind of mys - ter - ry. \_\_\_\_  
2  
3

As we might expect from Adams’s previous uses of this idiom, the “News” aria depicts Nixon performing a vigorous repeated action, shaking hands—a gesture that, in Adams’s musical setting, seems to become the presidential equivalent of the violinists’ “shaking” bows or the Shakers’ ecstatic dance. And like Adams’s many previous “shakers,” Nixon’s handshakes seem to launch him into a visionary state. “News has a kind of mystery,” he proclaims, and as his Chinese counterpart Chou En-lai sings half-heard introductions to the dignitaries Nixon is meeting, Nixon launches into a series of visionary verses on his and his country’s place in the contemporary world (he sees, among other visions, the moon landing and, through a kind of clairvoyance, families back home watching him on TV). Nixon seems to be experiencing a kind of presidential peak experience, his own self-actualization as a world leader, in and through the act of shaking hands. Librettist Alice Goodman foregrounded the gesture and its transformative effects in the aria’s text (“When I shook hands with Chou En-lai . . . The eyes and ears of history / Caught every gesture . . . transforming us as we, transfixed . . . / Made history”), and her synopsis of the opera likewise framed the act of handshaking as the catalyst for Nixon’s solo.<sup>74</sup> This particular aspect of the aria may have been significant for the rest of the production team as well. When the opera was workshopped at New York’s

<sup>74</sup> Goodman’s synopsis, which appears in the published score, reads “Premier Chou En-lai . . . strolls onto the runway just as ‘The Spirit of ’76’ taxis into view. President Nixon disembarks. They shake hands and the president sings of his excitement and his fears.” John Adams, *Nixon in China*, vocal score (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1999).

Guggenheim Museum in 1986, nearly a full year before the premiere, what we know today as the “News” aria seems to have been referred to specifically as the “handshake aria,” and this even though it was performed without staging.<sup>75</sup> And when it did come time to stage the aria, director Peter Sellars had Nixon shake hands no fewer than seventeen times over the course of the aria.<sup>76</sup> From this perspective, we might read the “handshake aria” as yet another musical object lesson, alongside *Shaker Loops* and Adams’s other works of the 1980s, in how engrossing physical gestures could induce a transformative “visionary state,” one of deep personal—and even geopolitical—consequence.<sup>77</sup>

Of course, the production team’s apparent staging of a “peaking” Richard Nixon was not without its own irony: as the composer was fond of reminding interviewers, Nixon tried to send Adams to Vietnam (perhaps not incidentally, Nixon also seems to have tried to close the Esalen Institute, that harbinger of self-actualization, through covert media sabotage).<sup>78</sup> But in true Maslowian form, Adams claimed that the depiction of Nixon in the opera was less a parody than an acknowledgment of the disgraced president’s “humanity.” “We’re not having fun at Nixon’s expense,” Adams insisted in the run-up to the premiere. “It’s wonderful and amusing and wry,” he said, speaking specifically of the “News” aria, “and at the same time very human.”<sup>79</sup> Even Richard Nixon could “peak”—he was, after all, human. Nixon’s problem, the suggestion seems to have been, was that he couldn’t maintain that “peak” state nor learn from the vision it momentarily afforded him. “I feel that Nixon is ultimately a rather poignant character,” Adams explained around the time of the premiere.<sup>80</sup> “A lot of Americans would like to think of him as a ridiculous character, or a venal person, our only president who fell from grace, so on and so forth, but I find him, as I say, a visionary and a poignant character, perhaps a man whose vanity and paranoia became his Achilles’ heel.”

In the “News” aria, it does not take long for Nixon’s vulnerability to show. Over the course of the scene, Nixon rides a wave of ecstatic musical “shakes”—those looping figures repeated incessantly in the orchestra as well as his own vocal gestures. But when his thoughts turn from the transformative act of shaking hands towards the uncertainty of the future and the acute possibility of failure in his diplomatic mission, things go south—more specifically, they go “minimalist.” Soon Nixon is consumed by fear and anxiety, and the meterless flow of Nixon’s “shaking”

<sup>75</sup> John Adams, Alice Goodman, and Peter Sellars, “Nixon in China: Works & Process at the Guggenheim,” recorded as part of the Works & Process performance series at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, on November 2 and 3, 1986. Works and Process at the Guggenheim Collection, New York Public Library.

<sup>76</sup> John Adams, Alice Goodman, and Peter Sellars, *Nixon in China*, DVD, House of Opera: Duluth, GA, 2000, Houston Grand Opera, conducted by John DeMain, broadcast of the PBS program “Great Performances” originally aired on April 15, 1988.

<sup>77</sup> Adams, Presentation at the USC Thornton School of Music, November 1, 1985.

<sup>78</sup> Adams, *Hallelujah Junction*, 135. Adams also mentioned Nixon and the threat of being drafted in the interview for the PBS “Great Performances” broadcast of *Nixon in China* in 1987 cited above. On Nixon and Esalen, see Kripal, *Esalen*, 132.

<sup>79</sup> Nancy Malitz, “John Adams’s Revolutionary New Opera,” *Opera News*, October 1987, 18.

<sup>80</sup> This and the following quotation are from Adams, Goodman, and Sellars. *Nixon in China*, DVD.

accompaniment suddenly transforms into a strictly metered five-four pattern that could have been borrowed from a module of Steve Reich's *Music for Mallet Instruments* (ex. 4.12). With this juxtaposition of Reich's early idiom and Adams's "liberated," "shaking" style, the aria seems to have betrayed Adams's self-conscious postminimalist mentality—a mindset Adams had begun to express explicitly in interviews, as I will discuss below. But the stylistic juxtaposition also seems to have divulged a notably negative take on the quality of experience that strictly metered repetitive music like *Music for Mallet Instruments* could afford. Reich's style had become not the language of ecstatic, flowing human energies (as it had been for the New Music Ensemble some ten years earlier), but the opposite—utter debilitation, paranoia, collapse. In the late 1980s, evidently, Adams's "liberated" postminimalism had superseded its model.



EXAMPLE 4.12. Nixon descends into paranoia as the accompaniment shifts into a regular five-beat pattern (bracketed). Adams, *Nixon in China*, act 1, mm. 654–59

NIXON:

Orch

The

657

rats be - gin to chew the sheets. The rats,

657

### “I Am Not a Modernist”

More than superseded: by the late 1980s Adams was claiming that earlier minimalists, with their audible processes and intensive precompositional planning, had come to stand for everything he opposed. “What sets me apart from Reich and Glass is that I am not a modernist,” Adams told an interviewer in 1986.<sup>81</sup> Rather, as he explained in another interview that year, Adams saw himself as a representative of what he called a “new humanism” in US music, the next evolutionary step after the “death of modernism”—an event he welcomed with some glee (“I couldn’t be happier,” he said).<sup>82</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, the key principle behind what Adams referred to as the “new humanism” was something akin to physical “liberation,” the same concept that had come to define his core musical style. By the time of the *Nixon* premiere, I want to suggest, the notion of musical self-actualization had not

<sup>81</sup> Schwarz, “Process vs. Intuition,” 247.

<sup>82</sup> This quotation and those in the remainder of this paragraph and the next are from Berrow and Gavin, *John Adams: Minimalism and Beyond*.

only engendered Adams's idiosyncratic minimalist aesthetic but come to characterize his own self-conception as a composer.

In the late 1980s Adams began to endorse a greater role for "intuition" in the creative process, a mode of composing and performing he thought was best engaged through physical activity. Referring to a line of text from *Harmonium*, Adams told an interviewer in 1986, "Then there's this wonderful image of throwing away the compass, 'Done with the compass,' and that has great meaning to me because the plotting of one's chart has this kind of rationalistic image to it. And in a sense, my odyssey as a composer has had to do with throwing away the compass, throwing away the chart, and saying I believe that my intuitive sense is far more powerful than any rational, intellectual processes." (Not surprisingly, Adams set this text to a loosely looping melody accompanied by rapidly shifting "shaking" figures in the orchestra.) Charts and compasses were the tools of the "rationalistic" composer—masters of precompositional planning like Milton Babbitt or Reich. The imperative, for Adams, was to "throw away" these instruments in order to "intuitively" access an authentic compositional and creative voice. This antirationalistic creative sense, Adams suggested, was one he cultivated primarily through the bodily act of music-making. He explained, "I'm not the kind of composer that takes a sheet of manuscript paper and a pencil and goes off into another room with no other apparatus and creates music. I'm of a breed of composer for whom the physical touch of the sound is paramount to the creative act." "For me," he elaborated, "creativity is very much like being an athlete. You have to be in shape. It's a very physical activity for me." Throwing away the chart and its rational processes—just as Palestine had declined to notate *Birth of a Sonority*, preferring a "totally physical" musicality—meant embracing the "intuition" of the performing body, the mysterious flow of the "physical touch of the sound." To compose, to discover what his creative self was like (to paraphrase Maslow), Adams had to become a kind of musical athlete. In other words, he had to "get loose."

According to Adams, it was through this very process of physically "loosening" out of early minimalism's rationalistic strictures that he was able to compose *Shaker Loops*. The piece had begun, apparently rather unsuccessfully, as a string quartet called *Wavemaker*, an elaborate working-out of Adams's fascination with the mathematics of waveform curves. "And by an enormous effort and real self-discipline and doggedness," he told an interviewer in 1983, "I took that piece and I rewrote it. . . . I completely freed myself from all this ideology and these numbers, and these wave-forms that I had drawn on graph paper and hence used to make my compositional decisions with. And the piece became what it is now, a modular piece, very much free of any kind of methodology or ideology, and I think by far one of my best pieces."<sup>83</sup> As Adams made clear, "loosening" oneself took work, but bore fruits that were, for him anyway, well worth the labor.

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<sup>83</sup> Adams, interview by Plush, "Major Figures in American Music."

“I think we’re witnessing the death of modernism, and I couldn’t be happier,” Adams declared in the same 1986 interview quoted above.<sup>84</sup> “There is a departure from the rigorous, purist attitude towards creativity that really typifies the great masterpieces of modernism, and also I think the fascination with procedure and technique and with materials. All of this, I think, has given way to more of a concern with communication and with investing a kind of new humanism into the creative act.” That “new humanism,” it seems, encompassed all that Adams had learned from the culture of self-actualization: that the very act of music-making could be a pathway to ecstatic, musically creative peak experiences, and that the “intuitive” flow of bodily energy that act entailed, and not the “rational” mind with its charts and strictly organized musical material, was the path to true personal and artistic vision. In the long 1970s, according to Binkley, “to be loose was to be modern, and to be modern was to tell oneself a story of self-loosening, of a mediated and supervised relaxation of self-control and an acquired talent for the immersion of oneself in bodily sensations, impulses, and the inevitable flows of daily events.”<sup>85</sup> As we saw in the case of George Rochberg, musically speaking, to be loose was to be “postmodern.”

By the time he declared his “new humanism,” Adams had come to think of his own music, compared to that of his minimalist predecessors, as having a “more physiological, physical, visceral thrust,” as he told a group of students in 1985.<sup>86</sup> But those words—and here “thrust” was particularly a propos—could have described not only Adams’s musical language and dramaturgy but his entire creative outlook. In the image of self-actualizers from Maslow to Palestine, Adams sought to harness the carnal physicality of the minimalist musical experience—its deep physiological rootedness in the body, and its flowing, (pro)creative energies.

It did not take long for listeners to notice. “Minimal music can sometimes take the part of that irresistible external flow that unleashes the ego-destroying flow within,” wrote one critic in 1984 of *Harmonium*.<sup>87</sup> “The pulse, that’s the main thing. It hums, it thrums, surging, tidal, as blind, libidinous, and basic as a heartbeat.”<sup>88</sup> Indulging the music’s carnal thrust, the critic continued, “the music is gut, vast, viscous; you can float on it or smother, depending on your mood. A single chord becomes an ocean here. . . . And always there is that pulse, galvanic, relentless, almost shockingly intimate, like something turned inside out: this is music of the blood.”<sup>89</sup> Float or smother: the stakes could not have been more clearly stated for those who recognized the “galvanic” significance of Adams’s creative drive.

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<sup>84</sup> This and the following quotation are from Berrow and Gavin, *John Adams: Minimalism and Beyond*.

<sup>85</sup> Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 10.

<sup>86</sup> Adams, Presentation at the USC Thornton School of Music, November 1, 1985.

<sup>87</sup> Laurence Shames, “Listen to John Adams,” *Esquire*, December 1984, 160.

<sup>88</sup> Shames, “Listen to John Adams.” Conductor Simon Rattle offered a similarly erotic commentary on the piece in the late 1980s. See Berrow and Gavin, *John Adams: Minimalism and Beyond*.

<sup>89</sup> Shames, “Listen to John Adams.”

And in fact, the critic who most clearly recognized the antirational impulse of Adams's minimalism and its bid for a "new humanism" became one of the composer's loudest detractors. In a 1989 talk, Richard Taruskin picked up on Adams's attempts at "rehumanizing" contemporary musical culture, as Taruskin put it. But Taruskin heard Adams's musical evocation of peak states as an indulgent and politically irresponsible appeal to the "autonomic nervous system," the system of unconscious functions of the body from sexual arousal to fight or flight responses—not the creative carnality Adams prized.<sup>90</sup> "Do we have no other choice than a choice of dehumanization?" Taruskin worried. "On the one hand there is music, increasingly under attack, that makes its appeal exclusively to the cerebral cortex. On the other hand there is a music, increasingly successful, that speaks, if I may put it so, directly to the medulla and the ganglia. Is there any music being written today that addresses an integrated personality, a whole human being? . . . I cannot see how such pastiche-cum-revival can possibly offer an avenue to the future or a means of reintegrating or rehumanizing our music." Adams's high-amplitude pulsations came across to Taruskin as a sign of outright musical "dehumanization," an attempt to overwhelm listeners' "cerebral cortex," and its capacity for rational critique, in a manner all too reminiscent of fascist political campaigns. Echoing concerns over the connections between the counterculture's deification of impulse and intuition and the techniques of Nazi propagandists reported by Theodore Roszak in the late 1960s, Taruskin wrote, "It's basic behavior-modification therapy, and so far from spontaneous or liberating, it is calculated and authoritarian manipulation."<sup>91</sup> Adams's flowing, oceanic music, for Taruskin, smothered the ego rather than buoyed it up—and there was nothing "fully human" about that.

In hindsight (and as the critiques of observers like Taruskin make clear), the culture of self-actualization called not so much for a "liberation" of the self or the body but for a new model of the human body and human subjectivity—even human nature. Just what did it mean to be "fully human," and who would decide? For thinkers like Maslow and Brown, and it seems for Adams as well, there was more self, more "humanity," hidden within the unconscious, or as Taruskin might have put it, the "ganglia," than the classical Freudian model allowed. In the musical culture of self-actualization, the very biology of music-making was in question, as suggested by the title of a 1984 Denver conference featuring hardened modernist Milton Babbitt alongside the thoroughly "loosened" pedagogue Eloise Ristad.<sup>92</sup> But the stakes were as much ethical and political as they were physiological.<sup>93</sup>

Contrary to what Wolfe might have predicted, the so-called "Me Movements" had not become so self-interested as to have disowned their political voice—that

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<sup>90</sup> This and the following quotations are from Richard Taruskin, "Et In Arcadio Ego; or, I Didn't Know I Was Such a Pessimist until I Wrote This Thing (a Talk)," in *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 14–15.

<sup>91</sup> Roszak, *Making of a Counterculture*, 73n18.

<sup>92</sup> See Franz L. Roehmann and Frank R. Wilson, eds., *The Biology of Music Making: Proceedings of the 1984 Denver Conference* (St. Louis, MO: MMB Music, 1988).

<sup>93</sup> For a study of the intersection of music, physiology, and politics in the nineteenth century, see Davies, *Romantic Anatomies of Performance*.

much was plain to see in a work like *Nixon in China*. Like Oliveros and Rochberg before him, Adams seems to have embraced a model of consciousness and social change characteristic of the 1970s. As the critic Charles Reich argued in *The Greening of America*, rather than through direct political action, the transformation of society would come about organically, one person at a time, as more and more Americans embraced the new, liberated “consciousness.” As his fame increased, we might say, Adams used his composerly pulpit to spread the gospel of peak experience and self-actualization. This redemptive message, as we have seen, went as far as to ascribe self-actualizing capacities even to countercultural bogeymen like Richard Nixon. In years to come, Adams would only up the political ante, musically attributing similar states to violent terrorists in his 1991 opera *The Death of Klinghoffer*. That we still struggle with the ethics of these works, and indeed, the music of Oliveros and Rochberg as well, suggests that even in our so-called “posthuman” condition, we have yet to fully process, much less supplant, the “new humanism” of the long 1970s.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> For some recent discussions of the concept of “posthumanism,” see N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Lawrence Kramer, “Classical Music for the Posthuman Condition,” in *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics*, ed. John Richardson, Claudia Gorbman, and Carol Vernallis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

## Coda

“Experimentalism is neoromanticism is minimalism is double bass . . .” The circle of seventies self-actualizing music and musicians, which I have only been able to sketch here, encompasses much more: other rungs might have included composer George Crumb’s commitment to balancing “rationality” with “intuition” in his own works, the “meditation for peak performance” technique soprano Irene Gubrud developed in the 1970s and continues to offer at the Aspen Music Festival and School and elsewhere today, composer William Bolcolm’s attempts to adopt the interactive theater games of Esalen teacher Viola Spolin to musical practice, or the singer, dancer, composer, and choreographer Meredith Monk’s practice of the human voice “as a tool for discovering . . . pre-logical consciousness” and a deeper sense of self.<sup>1</sup> Underlying them all was a belief in the musically induced peak experience and its promise of transformation for both self and society—for both “Me” and “Us.”

The musical culture of self-actualization was among the most decentralized of the contemporary “Me” movements, which may well help explain why it has largely evaded scholarly commentary. Some may consider the fact that the movement never congealed into something more unified a sign of failure. But idiosyncrasy was built-in to an ideology premised on individual discovery and creativity. Musicians felt called to actualize their inner selves by whatever psychosomatic means necessary, and that necessarily meant following one’s own path. As Al Huang put it in 1973, “There’s no use to follow the whole sequence of t’ai chi ch’uan and imitate all the motions. If I saw everybody go out on the deck and do it in unison, I wouldn’t say, ‘Bravo!’ I would say, ‘How sad.’”<sup>2</sup> For self-actualizers, uniformity would have signaled failure.

Such diversity was yet another reflection of the musical self-actualization movement’s spiritual archetype, the Esalen Institute, whose founders envisioned a future “religion of no religion” in which “no one captures the flag.”<sup>3</sup> In effect,

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<sup>1</sup> In 1980, Crumb wrote that “In general, I feel that the more rationalistic approaches to pitch-organization, including specifically serial technique, have given way, largely, to a more intuitive approach.” In a 1977 interview, he drew on the same now familiar binary, explaining, “In composition, there is a kind of dichotomy of thought and intuition. . . . I believe that there is a tendency to adopt a one-sided esthetic. . . . [a danger that is] very real in today’s music. In fact, there are not very many composers who are willing to work in the middle ground.” George Crumb, “Music: Does It Have a Future?” *The Kenyon Review* 2, no. 3 (1980): 120; Crumb quoted in Robert V. Shuffett, “The Music, 1971–1975, of George Crumb: A Style Analysis” (PhD diss., Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University, 1979), 419; for more on Gubrud’s technique, see “Irene Gubrud: Voice Teacher and Soprano,” [https://www.classicalsinger.com/sites/index.php?user\\_id=85382](https://www.classicalsinger.com/sites/index.php?user_id=85382); on Bolcolm’s interest in Spolin, see William Bolcolm to George Rochberg, 1971. Korrespondenz, Sammlung George Rochberg, Paul Sacher Stiftung; Meredith Monk, “Notes on the Voice,” in *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance*, ed. Sally Banes, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> Huang, *Essence of T’ai Chi*, 33.

<sup>3</sup> See Kripal, *Esalen*, 8–9.

composers and performers of the self-actualization culture realized the Esalen vision musically. With each psychosomatic cog, their circle of self-actualizing practices brought a new musical religion of no religion into being, an inherently idiosyncratic and contentious sacralized musical practice that made music-making the medium of peak experience par excellence.

Is this syncretic musical religion ours? John Adams's California years made him feel sheepish some thirty years ago, but today it is Adams who listens to stories of altered states of creative "flow" from musically inclined academics: in a 2014 conversation between Adams and the social psychologist and president of Yale University Peter Salovey, the amateur bluegrass musician told Adams that when playing the double bass, "in the moment I find flow, if I think about anything else, I screw up the rest of the band. I need all my capacity to play."<sup>4</sup> Adams responded, rehearsing an analogy he had used since the 1980s and which harked back to the aesthetic of *Shaker Loops*, "If I'm in shape—very much like an athlete—things come more regularly." I, for one, recognize such experiences of "flow," and even the occasional "peak," from my own musical life, and I suspect readers of these pages might as well. Today, the historian's greatest challenge when dealing with the self-actualization culture is to make these now commonplace conceptions of musical creativity seem strange once more. For musicologists, I believe, this task will require a new level of openness, and even a hint of seventies syncretism, as we face up to our own "peak" musical experiences. Scholarly discussion of the musically transcendent has typically been limited to the study of ethnomusicological "others," but the familiarity of the discourse of musical self-actualizing suggests it may be time to focus the analytical tools of comparative religion closer to home. Only then will we be able to see not if, but where we fall, as individuals and as scholars, on the circle of musical self-actualization.

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<sup>4</sup> This and the following quotation are from Susan Gonzalez, "A Composer, a President, and a Dean Share in Conversation about Creativity and Expression," *YaleNews*, October 16, 2014, <https://news.yale.edu/2014/10/16/composer-president-and-dean-share-conversation-about-creativity-and-expression>.

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