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Publication Date

2015

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Sonic Affects:

Experimental Electronic Music

in Sound Art, Cinema,

and Performance

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Theater and Performance Studies

by

William Moran Hutson

2015

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Sonic Affects:
Experimental Electronic Music
in Sound Art, Cinema,
and Performance

by

William Moran Hutson

Doctor of Philosophy in Theater and Performance Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Sue-Ellen Case, Co-Chair

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The last decade has witnessed an increase in scholarly attention paid to experimental electronic music, especially the subgenres of sound art and noise music. Numerous books, articles, and conferences have taken up these topics as objects of study. However, only a small amount of that work has focused on the music's relationship to affect, identification, and cultural history. There remains in some disciplines an assumption that examples of experimental electronic music are either dryly formal demonstrations of art-for-art's-sake, or essentially resistant to legibility and meaning. The more "abstract" and "difficult" a piece appears on first

glance, the more likely it will be seen to retreat from social and political concerns. This dissertation considers specific works of experimental electronic music through the lenses of affect theory, performance studies, sound studies, cultural studies, and other related approaches to argue for a perspective that more thoroughly accounts for the human in the electronic.

The dissertation's case studies are selected from a variety of different media. Chapter 1 addresses four historically significant works of sound art that each take a technological or physical property of sound as a guiding compositional principle. The chapter considers the ways these pieces can be heard to signify beyond their "modernist" strategies with attention both to the affective experiences of hearing the works, and the sociopolitical contexts of their creation. Chapter 2 outlines a selective history of noise music through the vacillation between opposing poles of "noise" and "music." The chapter contains a sustained analysis of Macronympha's *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* (1995) that investigates the titular city's deindustrialization and the affects of anger and disappointment that animate the album's representations of "white trash" masculinity. Chapter 3 examines diegetic appearances of experimental electronic music in two films—*Lipstick* (1976), and *Bewildered Youth* (1957)—in which the music is made to signify sexual perversion and criminality. Using Susan McClary's notion of gendered structures in western tonal music, I argue that, in these cases, music that rejects tonality becomes characterized by a failure to adequately perform "normal" gender. Finally, Chapter 4 engages examples of extreme performance art with a particular focus on the significance of recorded audio in the documentation of John Duncan's *Blind Date* (1980). All four chapters prioritize close readings of audio compositions to interrogate the dense bundles of affect and meaning they generate.

The dissertation of William Moran Hutson is approved.

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Introduction: Sonic Affects

For twenty-eight days in 2012, performance artists Bryan Lewis Saunders plugged his ears, held a funnel in his mouth, and attempted to hear the world exclusively through the vibrations in his skull and body. Titled *The Third Ear Experiment*, Saunders's performance enacted the following instructional score:

1. Insert wax earplugs into both ears.
2. Smear petroleum jelly around the inside of the ear.
3. Gently press a cotton ball into the ear.
4. Wrap ears with tape, sealing the contents within.
5. Put sound isolation headphones on.
6. Attach a copper funnel to your mouth.

As you deny the ability to hear with your external ears, sound is redirected and heard through the inside of your mouth. Immediately, the noises of your own body moving around in the world grow overwhelmingly loud. Shortly thereafter, you begin to hear with your third ear (2012)¹

Saunders documented this performance with written descriptions of the sounds he felt, as well as through drawings and paintings of himself that visualize the sonic experiences he was enduring. For Saunders, the piece is as much an example of sound art as it is performance art, even though he was the only person in a position to *hear* the piece.

The Third Ear Experiment foregrounds hearing as a physical experience and proposes an understanding of sound as an ever-present vibratory field, insisting that the sonic consists of a constant flux of resonances and oscillations that are felt in the body as well as heard by the ear.

¹ Saunders's documentation of this piece can be accessed at <http://bryanlewissaunders.org/weblog/2012/sep/19/third-ear-experiment/>.

When the artist sealed off his ears—the organs most often associated with audition—he was drawing attention to the physical nature of sound, reminding his audience and himself that “sound” is a word that describes a range of vibrations in matter that are transferred from one material to another through physical proximity. With words and images, Saunders chronicled what he perceived during *The Third Ear Experiment*, focusing his documentation on materiality—he felt sounds through the resonance in his jaw, his mouth, his throat, his nasal cavity, his ribcage. Saunders noted and notated both the sounds that originated outside of his body as well as those he perceived to be produced by his body: the inescapable thudding of his heartbeat, the ringing of his tinnitus, the creaking of his bones, and the stretching of tense muscles.

While Saunders’s documentation was not meant to be distinguished from the performance itself, his words resemble the language of affect theory—a body of ideas that I will argue, offers a productive way to understand sound propagation and sonic movement within bodies, from source to listener and within material spaces and contexts. Affect theory arose in the 1990s in response to what some critics thought to be an over-long preoccupation with semiotics-dominated poststructuralism. Calling for a turn toward phenomenological perspectives, affect theorists attempted to account for the experience and meaning of embodiment (human and non-human) and focus scholarly attention onto the emotions as well as onto as physical encounters that link affection, cognition and action. I begin this introduction with *The Third Ear Experiment* because it illustrates how the sonic can be understood as a dimension of affect. Relying on the work of Brian Massumi, Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, among others, I take affect to mean something that exists in-between bodies, and in the transitions between states of the body. Affect describes the relationships between adjacent materials that cause changes in those

materials. Sound is one such relationship—a bell is struck; the brass vibrates with a collection of frequencies that are transferred into the air surrounding that bell; those atmospheric vibrations are transferred to the bones in a person’s ear and communicated as signals to their brain.

However, this simplified description of a signal path reduces how complicated situations of acoustic communication can be. The sonic is a messy circuit of overlapping, convolving vibrations that influence and transform each other as they pass between materials. To hear something is to experience that thing’s vibrations, and to vibrate along with it. During *The Third Ear Experiment*, Saunders’s body became attuned to this constant sonic flux of combined oscillations as they were reproduced in his own body.

In this dissertation, I will analyze works of experimental electronic music and sound art through the lens of affect theory, sound studies, and other related approaches. In particular, I want to show that these forms of sonic performance are not dryly formal demonstrations, or specimens of *art-for-art’s-sake*, but emotional, political pieces of art that signify multiple social meanings. It is common for critics to assume that works culled from the avant-garde exist outside of the specificities of human culture and experience. The more “abstract” and “difficult” a piece appears on its surface, the more likely it will be seen as “sterile” or “pure.” Affect theory provides a language that initiates an intervention into the conversation surrounding sound art and experimental electronic music to suggest that even the most inhuman sounding works can be heard to produce meaning, tell stories, incite action, and elicit emotions.

Sonic Metaphor in Affect Theory

Prior to the publication of a small handful of books and articles that explicitly address the two fields, the confluence of affect theory and sound studies had been hiding in plain sight for many years—or I could say, perhaps, hiding within earshot. Evidence of this can be seen in the scholarship in both fields. First, the technical language of sound and its propagation appear again and again as metaphor in affect theory writings. The term “resonance,” which describes audible sympathetic vibrations in adjacent materials, can be found in Teresa Brennan’s *The Transmission of Affect* where the author describes the emotional entrainment of groups of people (2004, 70-71). Similarly, resonance becomes useful for Sianne Ngai throughout a chapter titled “Tone” (another term that evokes the sonic) in *Ugly Feelings* (2005, 74-75). In *Choreographing Empathy* Susan Leigh Foster deploys resonance as a metaphor for a kind of precritical intersubjective empathy through the operation of mirror neurons experienced when observing the body of another person as it performs a dance (2011, 165). These are three diverse but influential texts concerning affect that do not focus specifically on sound but use terms borrowed from (or otherwise suggesting a relationship to) sound—resonance, sympathetic vibration, feedback. Even without addressing the sonic directly, affect theory inspires the use of sonic metaphors to describe the ways bodies and objects affect one another.

It is often the case that music, which occupies one small dimension of sonic activity, receives brief mention in works of affect theorists. Seigworth writes, “Perhaps the most everyday understanding that many people have of affect comes both from music and from children (especially infants). In an encounter with either, there are moments of unspeakable, unlocatable

sensation that regularly occur: something outside of (beyond, alongside, before, between, etc.) words” (2003, 85). One of the major functions presumably attached to music in the western tradition is the encouragement of specific recognizable emotional states within listeners. In its most reduced form, this tactic is best exemplified by the attachment of “happiness” and “sadness” to the sounding of major and minor keys, respectively. Lauren Berlant writes, “In melodrama, the soundtrack is the supreme genre of ineloquence, or eloquence beyond words: it’s what tells you that you are really most at home in yourself when you are bathed by emotions you can always recognize...” (2011, 34). In analyzing melodrama’s emotional potential, Berlant argues it is music that bears the responsibility for the genre’s affect, especially when it precedes the critical naming of an affect as a known emotion. Even when not specifically addressing music or sound at any length, theorists of affect often utilize examples that take for granted music’s connection to affect and emotions.

When the disciplinary allegiances are switched, one finds that an entire body of scholarship exists within the field of musicology that deals with affect, even when that word is not often the musicologist’s preferred term. In *The Handbook of Music and Emotions: Theory, Research, Applications* Patrick N. Juslin and John Sloboda write, “several studies have suggested that the most common motive for listening to music is to influence emotions—listeners use music to change emotions, to release emotions, to match their current emotion, to enjoy or to comfort themselves, or to relieve stress” (2010, 3). Sound in the context of theater studies likewise draws connections between sound and affect within theater practice. Sound designer Steve Brown writes, “As I began to think about this more, I realized that both of these extremes in my mood had been created, in no small way, purely by the sound in the world that surrounded

me ... I now understand how much our feelings are influenced by the sonic landscape that surrounds us” (2010, 174). By citing these examples, I wish to gesture toward both a long-held (but under-theorized) assumption that sound and music are deeply involved in the circulation of affect, and that the field of affect itself is often discussed and metaphorized as sonic vibration.

In some telling cases, however, theorists’ deafness to the sonic dimension of their studies are revealing. In “An Inventory of Shimmers” Gregg and Seigworth identify the 1995 publication of two articles—“Shame in The Cybernetic Fold” by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, and “The Autonomy of Affect” by Massumi—as “the watershed moment for the most recent resurgence of interest and intrigue regarding affect and theories of affect” (2010, 5). Massumi’s article begins with a long discussion of a neurological study conducted and described by Hertha Sturm and Marianne Grewe-Partsch. This experiment has earned its stature as a founding example of affect’s reinvigoration in the 1990s as a result of of then recent scientific discoveries. The experiment deals with a short television clip aired in between full length programs on German television—what is called a “bumper” in the broadcast industry. Massumi describes the bumper in the epigraph to the article: “A man builds a snowman on his roof garden. It starts to melt in the afternoon sun. He watches. After a time, he takes the snowman to the cool of the mountains, where it stops melting. He bids it good-bye, and leaves” (1995, 217). He goes on: “Just images, no words, very simple” (1995, 217) Apparently, after this short film aired, parents complained to the station that their children had been frightened by it. Sturm and Grewe-Partsch set up an experiment in which children viewed three different versions of the film:

The original wordless version and two versions with voice-overs added. The first voice over was dubbed “factual.” It added a simple step-by-step account of the

action as it happened. A second version was called “emotional.” It was largely the same as the “factual” version, but included at crucial turning points words expressing the emotional tenor of the scene under way (Massumi 1995, 217).

The children’s written assessments of these three versions did not correlate in the expected way to their measured autonomic responses (heart rate, breathing, skin galvanization, etc.). Examples of this included the relationship between autonomic arousal and the fact that the children rated the “saddest” version as simultaneously the most “pleasant.” Referring to the experimenters’ original report, Massumi writes that “Their only positive conclusion was the *primacy of the affective* in image reception” (1995, 218; emphasis Massumi’s).

While I remain compelled by the content of his argument, I wish address an element of the experiment that he, and the scientists he quotes, failed to consider: sound. Both Sturm and Grewe-Partsche—in their original article, *Television—The Emotional Medium: Results from Three Studies*—and Massumi form conclusions regarding the reception of televisual images, but what actually changed from version to version of the film was its soundtrack. Sturm and Grewe-Partsche make it very clear in their article that the images were exactly the same in all three versions of the film, but that the film’s audio varied in their three edits. And while the *content* of the voice-over was described—what types of words the voice-over performer said, and what they were supposed to mean, in a literal sense—Sturm and Grewe-Partsche neglect to give any explanation of this voice-over recording’s *quality*. How was it performed? Was the same actor employed to record both versions? Was the actor female or male? What of the accent? Did he or she have a deep voice, a high voice, a soft voice? Did the voice perform representations of the emotions it described—which is to say, did it sound sad when it described sad emotions? The fact of the matter is that there is no “blank” voice—no voice that when heard carries no

emotional or affective information as it vocalizes the content of a piece of text. All voices signify beyond the linguistic content of their utterances—a property Barthes might call the voice’s “grain” (1977, 179) and Mladen Dolar refers to as the “object voice” (2006, 11), which is the irreducible remainder of spoken linguistic signifiers. Could the categories of “sadness” and “pleasantness” and their disjunction from autonomic responses signal also a disconnect between the content of the text and the performance of its speaking?

In addition to the mystery of the voice-over artist’s performance, no mention is made of music or sound effects. Interestingly, Sturm and Grewe-Partscht begin their article with a section titled “The 1971 Study: Media Specific Emotional Effects,” which examines the difference between emotional responses to televisual and radiophonic programs. In that study, Sturm and Grewe-Partscht make a number of conclusions regarding the affect-related differences between listening and viewing. The authors write that “the emotional impressions that are associated with the overall program ... are media-dependent. Viewers and listeners have quite different emotional responses” (1987, 27). However, in the study about the snowman video that Masumi quotes, they exhibit no sensitivity to their prior conclusions regarding sound. They describe the original version of the bumper as “wordless” but gives us no indication as to what the soundtrack music sounded like. Is it possible that there was no soundtrack music at all? I admit I find it difficult to believe that a bumper on broadcast television would have been completely silent. It seems much more likely that Sturm and Grewe-Partscht simply didn’t mention the music. If the film had in fact been silent, it would have been unusual indeed. One can imagine that a completely silent film, running on television—a medium that is generally characterized by wall-to-wall sound—would be so unexpected as to be unsettling, even frightening to small children.

Even a small amount attention paid to the sound in the video could have had an impact on the outcome of the study. In spite of this, sound is not addressed in either Sturm and Grewe-Partsche's original article, or in Massumi's retelling of it. These omissions are symptomatic of a larger deafness to the sonic that inspired scholars to attend to sound with increasing rigor during the 2000s and after. At the same time, though, these omissions gesture toward how sound and sonic metaphor have hidden around the edges of affect discourse throughout affect's rise in relevance within scholarship.

Sound as Affect

I have already suggested the idea that sound might be theorized as a dimension of affect. A few more words on that topic are necessary to clarify how this theorization will operate throughout the following chapters. The contested nature of the word "affect" might give the casual reader the impression that it—like so many faddish terms have swept the academy—can mean any and everything an author wants it to mean. However, I don't think theorists have yet dulled the term beyond its usefulness. Gregg and Seigworth identify two competing "schools" of affect theory: those scholars who subscribe to the aforementioned model of affect as "prepersonal intensities" (associated with Deleuze, Guattari, and Massumi) and those who address the term as more specifically related to the internal experience of human emotional states (associated with Charles Darwin, Tomkins, and later, Sedgwick). I believe that the incommensurability of these different applications to affect has been overstated. The debates between competing notions of affect have not hindered such studies' usefulness to readers when

they have been placed side by side in any number of essay collections—including Gregg and Seigworth’s *Affect Theory Reader*. An amalgamated theory of affect that attempts to assimilate the two schools is as messy and unwieldy as the feelings it would purport to describe, but this is part of its value. The Deleuzian model is certainly capable of accounting for emotional states—although Tomkins’s writing might provide readers with sharper tools for working with psychic interiority—and both schools view the turn toward affect as an intervention into semiotics’ dominance over theory during the 1980s and ‘90s. I do not feel that a side must necessarily be chosen, especially if one intends to use affect theory to write about cultural objects rather than take affect theory itself as one’s topic. Different case studies might call for slightly different approaches.

So what is affect? I will attempt here to outline various approaches to affect that are useful to my project. Massumi, citing Spinoza, writes that affect “is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another...” (1987, xvi). Gregg and Seigworth elaborate on this and describe affect as “an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation *as well as* the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities” (2010, 1; emphasis Gregg and Seigworth’s). In these two quotations, affect is both an ever-present field of intensities, as well as the capacity for a body (human or otherwise) to experience those intensities and, in turn, produce, effect and redirect intensities within that field.

In a lecture given in 1978, Deleuze provides an example of an affective relationship that, presumably, illustrates his reading of Spinoza’s theory. He describes the feeling of the sun on one’s body:

What is an affection of your body? Not the sun, but the action of the sun or the effect of the sun on you. In other words an effect, or the action that one body produces on another ... action always implies a contact, and is even a mixture of bodies. Affectio is a mixture of two bodies, one body which is said to act on another, and the other receives the trace of the first. Every mixture of bodies will be termed an affection (1978, 4).

He goes on to describe the sun's affective relationship to wax and to clay where the former melts and the latter hardens. Rather than a simple feeling of warmth on the skin, the sun, in these cases, enacts a physical transformation in the body it affects. In this sense, affect is a force in between bodies, or one body's encounter with another, that produces an effect, however minor, on one or both bodies. It is this "mixture" of bodies that can be identified as an affective relationship. This may seem far afield from more humanist understandings of affect, but Deleuze's use of affect also encompasses what could be termed "feelings" or "moods" or "emotions." The mixture of sun and body that produces a feeling or an effect on the body is deemed philosophically similar to an encounter with a disagreeable person—the mixture of two bodies cause one or both to feel unpleasant (1978, 5). In this sense, the wax's melting is similar to the bad mood produced in one's body based on a unpleasant encounter. This model of affect depicts the world we experience as an infinitely complex web of relations between adjacent objects, transforming one another through vibrational, chemical, physical, emotional encounters.

Let us pay particular attention to those affects that are vibrational in nature. Vibrations in matter that fall within a certain frequency range are called "sound." Recall my earlier example of the bell: a bell is struck and vibrations propagate outward through the air. Sympathetic vibrations—which is to say, vibrations set into motion by the transfer of vibrations in an adjacent material—occur in that air and move through the rest of the air in the room at about a thousand feet per

second. Any material touching that air is affected by those vibrations to some degree or another, by absorbing and reproducing some amount of those vibrations in themselves. My ears, for example, respond to the air's vibrations by reproducing those vibrational frequencies within itself—resonating the eardrum, hammer, anvil, stirrup, and cochlea, which then converts that vibration into an electrical signal that is sent to the brain. Already, a highly complex system of vibrational relationships has been articulated by one simple gesture. This vibrational field is one of affect—a pressurized force in between bodies, where compressions and rarefactions transfer intensities from one body to another, and so on.

“The sonic” is a term I have been using to stand in for the entire realm of *sounding*—the constant, ever-presence of resonance and sympathetic vibrational relationships in all matter. I offer it as only one dimension within the field of affect. If affect can be understood as a network of connectivity and influence among objects, then sound—resonance—must be included as an affective property. Resonance and affect come together in the following observation by Elizabeth Grosz:

What is transmitted and transmuted... is nothing but vibration, vibrations in their specificity, vibrations as they set objects moving in their wake, as they produce harmonic and dissonant vibratory responses. Vibration is the common thread or rhythm running through the universe from its chaotic organic interminability to its most intimate forces of inscription on living bodies of all kinds and back again (2008, 54).

This sense of physical embeddedness and vibrational interrelation is vital to both sound studies and affect theory. Neither framework allows for a subject position from which perception is a matter of distanced objective observation. Rather, the only way of knowing or experiencing any phenomenon is to be moved by it, to be caught up in its vibration, to be affected by it. A

listener cannot hear a sound without her body resonating along with that sound. She must put herself into a physical, sympathetic relationship with other objects and is therefore denied any separate critical position. Within sound studies, this phenomenon of embeddedness is thoroughly examined in Viet Erlmann's *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality*, which tracks the relationship between its two titular concepts—reason and resonance—through a history of philosophical thought and biological understandings of the working of the human ear. Similar to my use of the term, Erlmann's theory of resonance refers to sympathetic vibrations in matter. Erlmann illustrates resonance through Diderot's metaphor of the string:

But vibrating strings have yet another property—to make other strings quiver. And thus the first idea recalls a second, and these two a third, then all three a fourth, and so it goes, without our being able to set a limit to the ideas that are aroused and linked in a philosopher who meditates or listens to himself in silence and darkness (Diderot quoted in Erlmann 2010, 9).

In the realm of affect theory, this notion of resonance can be seen to describe fluctuations between affective states, and the sense of embeddedness that a body experiences in relationship to other objects. Terasa Brennan writes, “All this means, indeed the transmission of affect means, that we are not self-contained in terms of our energies. There is no secure distinction between the ‘individual’ and the ‘environment’” (2004, 6).

Gregg and Seigworth point out, “there is no pure or somehow originary state for affect” (2010, 1). As with affect, there is no originary state of the sonic. There is no absolute background stillness over which vibrations occur. The sonic must be said to be composed of the sounds that inhabit it—the ever-present vibrations, as they resonate through, among and between materials. Sound is always already *in motion* and can only be perceived as motion. Unlike an

image, a sound cannot be stilled, as in a photograph. There is no frozen, single unit of sound. There is only vibration, change, fluctuation, movement. Even when sound is depicted as a visual image—as a diagram of a waveform—the horizontal axis represents time because sound is only imaginable as occurring over time. Therefore, the sonic is not an *a priori* empty container for sounds, as there is no such thing as silence. As composer and theorist John Cage argued after his famous visit to the Harvard anechoic chamber, no listener can ever experience silence.

An anechoic chamber is a room designed specifically to be completely non-reverberant—as close to silent as a space can be while still containing an atmosphere and not existing in a vacuum. In his account of his visit, Cage writes, “I heard two sounds, one high and one low. When I described them to the engineer in charge, he informed me that the high one was my nervous system in operation, the low one my blood and circulation. Until I die there will be sounds” (1961, 8). The impossibility of ever hearing silence leads Cage to posit a condition of “always sound.” This means that sound is ever-present. No hearing individual can ever experience silence, because their own body constantly produces audible vibrations. As with Viet Erlmann’s metaphor of the resonating string, Cage could not extricate his consciousness from its embeddedness in the world. He could not “step back” to reflect at a distance. In his story of the anechoic chamber, Cage’s attempt to shut-out the sounds of the world but instead perceives his own body as an object of sound. The split between object and subject becomes blurred.

Even without the sounds of the body present in the anechoic chamber, though, total sonic stillness cannot be achieved. Imagine a hypothetical ear—a floating, singular point of audition with no physical body attached. The hypothetical disembodied ear might continue to resonate with the vibration of chemical bonds and the quivering of atoms. On the molecular level,

microscopic vibrations would continue to permeate matter, although perhaps far too quietly for human audition.

Very low frequencies help to illustrate an analysis of resonance as affect. Sounds that have frequency components below 30 Hz are perceived more in the body's skeleton and organs than in the ear. The ear's resonant parts are too small to adequately vibrate with very slow oscillations. But if low notes are *felt* as they are *heard*, must we define listening solely as the purview of the ear? Could hearing encompass both the perception of vibrations by the ear and also the perception of those same vibrations by other organs? Unlike the eye, which is unique in that it is the only human organ that perceives light, the ear is supplemented by the rest of the body, which can be made to resonate by the same material vibrations that are heard as sounds. Low notes support more obviously affective relationships between a body and the world through their experience as a kind of touch—as a physical pressure that draws attention to a body's connectedness to the material world around it. I began this introduction with a description of a performance piece—Saunders's *The Third Ear Experiment*—that I think illustrates this physical relationship to sound. Despite blocking his ears—similar, perhaps, to Cage's attempt to eliminate all outside sounds by entering the anechoic chamber—Saunders perceives the world outside of himself as a collection of vibrations, and perceives his own body as an unceasing source of sound. This demonstration of sonic interaction between bodies and objects could easily stand in for Deleuze's example of affect wherein the sun's heat and light harden clay. Both imagine affect as the interaction between two objects in physical proximity to each other where movement—the excitation of matter (heat in one example, sound in the other)—is transferred between the objects, causing some sort of change.

Affect as it is specifically applied to human emotions also has compelling connections to the idea of resonance. I particularly appreciate that resonance engenders a convenient double-meaning: “sympathy,” which could be used in the physical sense—the transmission of vibrations among matter—can be understood also in the sense that the word is related to “empathy” and the emotions. The word “sympathy” outside of the discourse of physics, refers to the capacity to share, or enter into, the feelings of another. Consider an example: the distressed cry of a human voice. The vibrations that make up that cry have their origin in the vocal chords of another. Those vibrations are transferred through resonant compressions and rarefactions in the air in between the speaker and the listener. Finally, those vibrations are transferred into the opening of the listener’s ear, which reproduces those frequencies through its own bones, sinew, and membranes before becoming an impulse that reaches the brain along the auditory nerve. The brain’s job is to then interpret that cry, but it could be argued that what it “hears” is a cry only as its own body has reproduced it. In *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy*, Jacques Derrida quotes Maine de Biran: “The ear is as if instantaneously struck both by the direct external sound and the internal sound reproduced. These two imprints are added together in the cerebral organ, which is doubly stimulated [*sélectrise doublement*] both by the action which it communicates and by the action which it receives. Such is the cause of *têtes sonores* [literally, sonorous or resonant heads]” (2005, 148). Viet Erlmann summarizes Derrida’s point, writing that “[to] hear another is therefore to always hear oneself” (2010, 47).

Affect and Experimental Electronic Music

So what, though? What does this model of sonic affect actually achieve? What kind of new information or interpretation does it reveal about the cultural objects I intend to analyze? Briefly, I think affect theory illuminates specific aspects of sonic experience not because its use is an exercise in applying a faddish theoretical language for the sake of novelty. Rather than taking us into esoteric abstraction, I will argue that affect theory can help us understand cultural performances by deepening and expanding our ability to close read such objects. In this way, I am particularly compelled by Eugenie Brinkema's recent writings on affect that argue for the need for close readings of cultural texts. Although I do not necessarily share her disdain when she accuses the "affective turn" of providing an opportunity for scholars to avoid reading anything carefully, I am convinced by her argument that affect must address specifics and not generalities—that affect can be analyzed as belonging to the formal structure of a text, built into that text's address to its audience. In *The Forms of the Affects*, she writes,

The one way out for affect is via a way into its specificities. That approach will be called—unsurprisingly, for historically it was always the way to unlock potentialities—close reading. There is a perversity to this: if affect theory is what is utterly fashionable, it is answered here with the corrective of the utterly unfashionable, with what is, let us say, an *unzeitgemässe* call for the sustained interpretation of texts (2014, xv).

Brinkema argues that affect's resistance to the linguistic turn of the late twentieth century was something of an overcompensation. She compares affect theory to the constant sharpening of knives without the intention of cutting anything—a metaphor borrowed from Hermann Lotze

(2014, xiii). Affect's purported resistance to signification and attendance to that which is "prelinguistic" and "precritical" denies affect's usefulness to the sustained interpretation of texts. The model of sonic affect I described in the previous pages owes some of its style and structure to the very theorists Brinkema's polemic attacks, but my methodology throughout the dissertation relies more heavily on close reading than it does the sweeping pronouncements of affect's immediacy and unreadability. Following Brinkema, I interrogate affect as an aspect of a musical composition or performance's form, as something specific in its address that can be read *for*.

My examples will be culled from various genres of experimental electronic music. Throughout the dissertation I aim to demonstrate the ways in which experimental electronic music can be read through the lens of affect theory in a way that belies the music's presumed unemotional, inhuman character. While criticism and scholarship continues to appear on both sides of the issue, it remains the case that experimental electronic music is popularly considered to be art-for-art's-sake—largely self-contained and self-referential. While this designation might seem to be a pejorative to some, plenty of studies in this field appreciate the music's formal characteristics, examining the music with regard to its techniques and relationship to music history and theory, rather than as a cultural and social product of the time and place that produced it. It is my goal to supplement the available scholarship on experimental electronic music with discussions of individual recordings and performances that seek to uncover how the sounds contained within those examples produce affects and resonate with social and political meaning. In this way, I interrogate affect as it is produced by the formal structures of the music,

and not assume that the music's experimental nature allows it to escape the cultural forces that shape and contextualize any work of art.

To continue, I must briefly define the generic term “experimental electronic music.” In 1974, when musicologist and composer Michael Nyman published his history, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, the word “experimental” came into wide use to describe certain areas of European and North American musical practice. Nyman used the term to differentiate the work of composers like John Cage, Cornelius Cardew and Christian Wolfe from that of those he termed “avant-garde” composers (Pierre Boulez, Luciano Berio, Karlheinz Stockhausen, et al.) who were, for the most part, of an older generation and whose work he saw to be more tied to the traditions of western classical music (1999, 1-30). For Nyman, indeterminacy was the formative and defining aspect of experimental music. The word “experimental” can be understood to refer to a scientific context and Nyman argued that an experiment was something whose outcome was not prescribed. Cage especially intentionally left much of his compositional authority to chance, providing musicians with incomplete instructions for the performing of a piece, or determining the nature and ordering of musical events through randomization processes such as dice-rolling. Since its publication, however, Nyman's term has drifted from this initially strict definition. Experimental music encompasses a wider range of musical practices, most of which can be understood as locating a portion of their inspiration in the lineage of characterized by Cage, his followers and associates. While indeterminacy remains a factor in much of what is today termed experimental music, musicologist Joanna Demers defines experimental music as “any music that rejects tradition and takes risks through running counter to musical conventions” (2010, 7). She goes on to suggest that “experimentalism is not a metaphysical essence but a series of unusual practices whose strangeness stands out in relation to whatever the mainstream happens to

be” (2010, 7). Where Nyman fixes experimentalism to a specific historical period, and a specific community of European and North American composers, Demers argues that experimentalism can be understood as processual, defined by a temporally-situated relationship between an individual piece of music, and the accepted musical conventions within the mainstream of that piece’s time and place. Demers concludes, “I therefore define *experimental* as anything that has departed significantly from the norms of the time, but with the understanding that something experimental in 1985 could have inspired what was conventional by 1990” (2010, 7).

In the period that Nyman addresses, electronic music was a separate compositional strategy from experimentalism, although he acknowledges that the two often overlapped. He gives the use of electronics a brief chapter—“Chapter Five: Electronic Systems”—referring mostly to applications of indeterminacy and randomness in computer, tape, and synthesizer systems. Today however, it would seem that electronics are present in nearly every genre of music, experimental or otherwise. Electronic amplification and recording, as well as electronic instruments like the keyboard synthesizer are ubiquitous in most commercial music, as well as in a lot of so-called “serious” concert music. “Electronic music” as a category seems incredibly broad as a result. The term “experimental electronic music” is the genre name that I use, and its grammatical make-up would suggest that “experimental” is modifies “electronic music.” This might imply that the music under discussion falls under the larger genre term “electronic music” but could be considered experimental with regard to the established conventions of that genre. While that could be the case in some instances, I believe that “electronic music,” in general usage, too often refers specifically to electronic *dance* music—the popular music, produced using electronic instruments, designed for playback in dance clubs. As a result, it would seem more clear if the term I continue to use is understood as having the two adjectives reversed:

“electronic experimental music.” This reversed term suggests that experimental music is the object of study, and that the field is narrowed slightly to focus on the subgenre of experimental music which is wholly or mostly produced through the use of electronics. The only reason I use the term “experimental electronic music,” as opposed to “electronic experimental music” is out of habit and convention. The former is the term most commonly used by the scholars whose work I will reference throughout the following chapters.

Recently, a small but significant amount of critical attention has turned toward various experimental electronic musics. Several recent collections on music and sound have included articles on noise music, a subgenre within experimental electronic music that is the topic of the second chapter of this dissertation. Alongside those, a full length ethnographic history of Japanese noise music—David Novak’s *Japanoise: Music at the Edge of Circulation* (2013)—has greatly expanded the scholarship on experimental electronic music, as well as elevated the music as increasingly worthy of rigorous study. Within the realm of philosophy, experimental electronic music has garnered mention in the work several writers who are considered to be at the cutting edge of their field. A list of those philosophers includes Ray Brassier, who wrote an article about noise music titled “Genre is Obsolete” (2007)—which I will discuss further in a later chapter—and has collaborated with the noise artist Mattin, Robin Mackay—editor of the ultra-hip philosophy journal *Collapse*—who has written extensively on the noise artist Florian Hecker (see Mackay 2011), and Quentin Meillassoux—reluctant hero of the philosophical movement, Speculative Realism—whose work has been cited by many experimental electronic music artists and who contributed an essay to a CD release by Florian Hecker (2011). While I find each of these works exciting and productive, the chapters that follow this introduction mount an intervention to counter some of the assumptions regarding experimental electronic music on

which these philosophical works appear to rely. I don't want to push this point too hard because I do not believe these works require correcting as much as they could simply benefit from a supplement to their arguments—one that addresses the music as art that is made by people for people, and that contains all the emotional, social, and political potential any art does. The necessity for this supplement will become clear in later chapters.

Eugene Thacker has become the major theorist of “cosmic pessimism”—a philosophical perspective driven by the overwhelming insignificance of biological life in the face of the vastness of the universe. Thacker calls it “the pessimism of the world-without-us” (2015, 12)—a term he uses to indicate a concept of the world that is outside of human conception, and utterly unconcerned with the anthropocentric. He writes that cosmic pessimism is “the difficult thought of the world as absolutely unhuman, and indifferent to the hopes, desires and struggles of human individuals and groups. Its limit-thought is the idea of absolute nothingness ...” (2011, 17). In the book *In the Dust of This Planet*, he aligns this concept with certain examples of black metal, an underground heavy metal music genre that often relies on themes of nihilism, extinction, and anti-anthropocentrism. However, he concludes his discussion of black metal with the assertion that “the most striking example of Cosmic Pessimism comes from outside the metal genre” (2011, 21). He goes on to describe a recording by the Japanese noise music artist Keiji Haino—who incidentally appears in the cover photo of Novak's *Japanoise*.

Clocking in at just under 70 minutes, *So, Black is Myself* uses only a tone generator and a voice. Its sole lyric is the title of the piece itself: “Wisdom that will bless I, who live in the spiral joy born at the utter end of a black prayer.” The piece is brooding, rumbling, deeply sonorous, and meditative. Sometimes the tone generator and Haino's voice merge into one, while at other times they diverge and become dissonant. Haino's voice itself spans the tonal spectrum, from nearly

subharmonic chant to an uncanny falsetto perhaps produced only by starving banshees. Haino's performance is an example of the radically unhuman aspect of Cosmic Pessimism, the impersonal affect of dread ... (2011, 21)

Thacker's description of this particular example of experimental electronic music could stand to be supplemented by a contrasting interpretation of the piece. Thacker's analysis is depended on the recording sounding radically unfamiliar to the listener in order to evoke such a feeling of alien otherness. It is unclear to me how the sound of a man's voice—even when accompanied by electronic oscillators—can be perceived as “unhuman” or “impersonal.” What sound is more human than a human voice? It is, perhaps, the single most essential sound present in the day to day experience of most humans. It is the conveyor of speech, laughter, screams. All these sounds are deeply, essentially human. To evoke another metaphor concerning the “world-without-us,” the human voice is likely the only sound that can never stand in for the proverbial tree falling in a forest, because for a voice to exist, there must necessarily be a body present to produce—and therefore hear—it. Moreover, the voice is inseparable from its potential to express or produce emotions. As I argued with regard to the voice-over in the German television program about the snowman, no voice can be “blank”—the voice always communicates in excess of its literal meaning. Thacker himself describes Haino's pained wail but rather than hearing it as the distress call of a member of his own species—and therefore inspiring of some sense of empathy, perhaps—he imagines it emanating from the throat of a mythical monster. The “unhumanness” Thacker identifies fails to account for the formal affective strategy of Haino's recording.

When heard in the context of Haino's oeuvre—a career spanning nearly forty years and over three hundred recordings—*So, Black is Myself* (1997) is fairly typical of one stylistic area of Haino's music. Thacker's description is somewhat accurate. The spine of the piece is provided by several oscillators (not just a single oscillator) that drone continuously throughout the track's

entire duration. He tunes them separately during the piece arriving at different pitch intervals, some of which are very close together and produce what are called “beat patterns” with each other, and some of which are more traditionally harmonic. Occasionally, Haino can be heard playing a frame drum that, along with his chanted vocals, gives the piece the atmosphere of an religious—or occult—ritual. Between minute twenty and minute forty, Haino strums a stringed instrument that sounds like a dobro, or resonator guitar. The instrument is closely associated with American country music and blues—an association that is inescapable in Haino’s music as a great many of his other recordings interpolate these traditional American genres, and some even feature somewhat faithful covers of classic blues songs. Considered alongside his other work, the function of the oscillators in *So, Black is Myself* relate to Haino’s psychedelic and hard rock music, which often contains continuous amplified drones. In this case, though, they are allowed to stand on their own for longer than usual. Haino began his career in theater, inspired initially by the avant-garde theater practitioner and filmmaker Shūji Terayama, and the frame drum can be heard as being related to his brief involvement in Noh theater, as well as more experimental forms of performance. Within the artists catalogue of recordings, *So, Black is Myself* doesn’t even stand out as the most extreme, or most minimal. Other recordings might fit Thacker’s description even better than the one he chose.

What can one say about the affect of *So, Black is Myself*? Thacker’s description suggests that he believes the piece contains a “Dark metaphysics of negation, nothingness, and the non-human” (2011, 20). But what can one say about the affective strategies within the music that inspire this interpretation? Oscillators, which are the simplest building-blocks of electronic synthesizers, have been associated culturally with the non-human, with the cold, unfeeling precision of machines. Additionally, the beat-patterns produced by close tunings are a physical

property of sound. These elements could be interpreted as somehow independent of humanity, both as a electronic machine and as a demonstration of a mathematical principle, imagined as an unchangeable property of the universe. When two waves that are very close in frequency are combined, they produce audible fluctuations in loudness as their peaks and valleys cancel each other out. Experientially, this sounds like the rhythmic modulation of amplitude of a single tone. As they are tuned further apart in frequency, the beating ceases and the tones become discernible as two distinct pitches. Throughout *So, Black is Myself*, Haino continuously tunes the oscillators to produce these effects. Intellectually, this interplay of beat-patterns provides a demonstration of an interesting acoustic effect, but affectively, the experience of hearing them is dizzying. As the tones are modulated against one another, the effect on the ears throws a person off-balance, makes them woozy. Beating produces a sonic illusion that the tones are swirling around the listener's head, and each subtle change in frequency can be experienced as psychoacoustically intense, even nauseating. The process results in a physical affect that is overwhelming. Thacker's understanding of the oscillator drones as "cosmic" might be related both their intellectual sterility—their presentation of a "scientific fact" regarding the physical properties of sound—while at the same time producing an uncomfortable sensation in human listeners. This combination of affects is conceptually linked to the scenario of beholding the universe in all its vast indifference—it a system wholly untouched by human influence, one that is so *outside* of us, so completely uncaring, that it damages our bodies to witness it. Whether or not one believes that mathematics and physics are man-made constructs or essential qualities of the universe that preexist humanity's discovery/invention of them, the *fantasy* of unconditional scientific fact remains powerful. The beating oscillators are so outside of humanity, so stubborn in their droning, that they don't care or notice when they make the listener feel queasy or unwell.

Of course this analysis erases Haino's involvement in the tuning of the oscillators. It is his hand on the knob that creates these sonic effects. What is more, he adds his voice as an additional tone generator by singing pitches against the oscillators creating beat-patterns with his voice. The indifference of the oscillators is contradicted by Haino's continuous knob-turning and singing. When he does this, his voice sounds as if it is breaking-up, or stuttering with quick rhythmic glottal stops. His voice becomes convolved with the tones, taking on the same psychoacoustic effects of dizzying spatial swirling. In some cases, the effect might suggest a kind of violence enacted upon the voice by the electronics—an imposition of an outside force, ripping and fragmenting it. But Haino's voice does not read as fragile to me. The voice only appears in the recording after the oscillators have been droning for the majority of the composition's length. The voice comes into the music as something that is being *done to the electronics*, not the other way around. In this way it is almost triumphant, implying not powerlessness, as Thacker's cosmic pessimism would seem to suggest, but human mastery over the electronics.

Most of the vocals, however, are limited to guttural grunts at the very lowest end of Haino's register. Thacker appropriately describes them as a "chant." These utterances, along with the track's title—"Wisdom that will bless I, who live in the spiral joy born at the utter end of a black prayer"²—imbue the music with the atmosphere of ritual. Haino's chant could be heard as the recitation of liturgy. Most interestingly, I think, the entire recording feels less like a piece of music than it does the audio documentation of a some form of ceremony. The sound was clearly recorded all in one take. We can hear Haino's activity throughout: the piece begins with him tuning the oscillators, then those are left droning on constant pitches while he lightly taps the

² If this is confusing, the album title is *So, Black is Myself* and the album contains one track, titled "Wisdom that will bless I, who live in the spiral joy born at the utter end of a black prayer".

frame drum for awhile. After he puts down the frame drum, he tunes the oscillators again before leaving those to strum the dobro. From there on out, he alternately sings and tunes the oscillators for the rest of the performance until all the sounds fade out. *So, Black is Myself* does not feel like a musical composition but rather an audio recording of a private performance of some unknown significance. It is as if the performance took place for some other purpose than the production of a CD, and that the tape recorder's presence was secondary to whatever the performance achieved in itself—Haino would have performed these activities with or without a recording device in the room. This sense of ritual produces the sense that the listener is eavesdropping. But the performance is inscrutable. One possible interpretation of the affective experience encouraged by *So, Black is Myself*—the one that Thacker himself seems most sympathetic to—combines a feeling of ritual with an eerie confusion as to the nature of that ritual. This affect might be described as an unsettling sublimity—but one that is based very much in the body of Keiji Haino. It is not his powerlessness or insignificance that we experience—for that is rarely the position of a mystic hierophant, priest, or shaman—but his interaction with a universe that appears to have afforded him some amount of agency.

It is unclear whether Thacker means to suggest that Haino's music is a *representation* of the overwhelming indifference of the cosmos? Is that sense of dread evoked in the listener because the sound expresses a sense of “unhumanness”? Or does Thacker believe that Haino is creating a performance approximating one human's reaction to, and despair over, that cosmic indifference—a vocalization of one of H. P. Lovecraft's hapless characters who is driven mad after glimpsing the “boundless and hideous unknown—the shadow haunted *Outside*” (Lovecraft 1968, 150). It is possible that Thacker hears the separate instrumental elements (particularly the two that he mentions in his description of the piece) as adding up to a complete *mise en scène* of

comic pessimism. The electronic tones that obdurately howl away might be heard to resemble a science fiction movie's sound design of outer space. This provides, perhaps, Thacker's idea of a sonification of the dark, uncaring cosmos. Laid over the top of that, a human voice gurgles and shrieks as if experiencing pain and despair in the face of such horror. Although Thacker doesn't specifically argue this, I believe he is interpreting both a representation of cosmic pessimism and a performance of the affect of horror that that world-view engenders. Thacker concludes, "*So, Black is Myself* also manages to be mystical at the same time that the individual performer is dissolved into a meshwork of tones—voice, space, and instrument variously existing in consonance and dissonance with each other. *So, Black is Myself* is a reminder of the metaphysical negation that is also at the core of black metal ..." (2011, 21).

Thacker's interpretation of *So, Black is Myself* provides one possible understanding of the piece that is, I suspect, based on an apparent unfamiliarity with Haino's oeuvre and the musical scene from which he emerged. Although I do not purport to know Thacker's musical tastes or subcultural allegiances, his reading of Haino's recording relies on a sense that *So, Black is Myself* seems almost incomprehensible as music. The confluence of sounds are alien to Thacker, and the extremity of the minimalism—what Thacker describes as a "subtractive minimalism... beyond that of SunO))) or dark ambient artists such as Lustmord" (2011, 21)—is emphasized even though, to my ears, the music is comparatively active and timbrally rich, especially when considered in relation to some of Haino's other recordings and the recordings of many of his peers in the Japanese experimental electronic music community. I think that, in the end, increased familiarity with Haino's music, or with experimental electronic music in general, might provide a framework to hear *So, Black is Myself* as less mysterious and more manageable as a cultural text.

Outline for the Following Chapters

Thacker's analysis of Keiji Haino's *So, Black is Myself* is only one example of a phenomenon I have found to be common in writing about experimental electronic music. Often, a piece is praised for its radical outsidership—or its formal purity—when the quality that is assumed to be impenetrable and alien is, perhaps, less an attribute of the music and more related to an unfamiliarity with the genre and the subculture from which it originated. Additionally, many works of experimental electronic music are described as if they are primarily experiments in form, or—as Alvin Lucier says in *I am Sitting in a Room* (1969)—“demonstrations of a physical fact.” An attention to affect supplements these analyses by accounting for the emotional, social and cultural dimensions that penetrate even the most coldly abstract works.

The first chapter of this dissertation will address several examples of experimental electronic music from a subgenre often labelled sound art. The formal aesthetics of these particular case studies might be described by what Christoph Cox has termed “neomodernism.” Max Neuhaus's *Times Square* (1977), Alvin Lucier's *Vespers* (1968) and *I am Sitting in a Room*, and Pauline Oliveros's *The Day I Disconnected the Erase Head and Forgot to Reconnect It* (1966) might appear, on their surfaces, to be dryly clinical. Each takes a technological or physical property of sound as its guiding compositional principle. Cox argues that works of this sort present “modernist strategies of abstraction, Reduction, self-referentiality, and attention to the perceptual act itself” (2003, 1). In contrast, my chapter seeks to illuminate the ways that these pieces can be heard to signify beyond their “modernist strategies” with attention to both the

affective experience of hearing the works, and the sociopolitical contexts of their creation and circulation.

The second chapter traces a particular history of the subgenre of noise music through its vacillation between the two opposing poles of its appellation—noise and music. It tells the story of the genre’s aesthetically radical origins and eventual containment with respect to noisy sounds (distortion, feedback, white noise) and their increasing availability as legitimate musical material. The chapter focuses also on the album *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* (1995) by the noise group Macronympha. The album is examined through its titular city’s history of deindustrialization, and the affects of anger and disappointment that inspire the band’s use of white supremacist themes.

The third chapter takes as its subject the diegetic use of experimental electronic music in narrative cinema. Only three films that I am aware of feature experimental electronic music as a major plot element: *(Untitled)* (2009), about an composer whose maturation requires he reject the pretentious and emotionally-distancing qualities of his conceptual music, *Lipstick* (1976) a rape-revenge film featuring a synthesizer-playing villain whose hobby provides evidence of his twisted psyche, and *Bewildered Youth* (1957), a German propaganda film where young men are seduced into homosexuality by an older man who plays for them *musique concrète*. I argue that in these cases, experimental electronic music is put in proximity with forms of sexuality and expressions of gender that are deemed deviant and criminal. Using Susan McClary’s notion of gendered structures in western tonal music, I argue that, in these films, music that rejects tonality becomes colored by a sense of gender-unreadability, and characterized by a failure to adequately perform masculinity (occasionally with violent results).

The final chapter draws its examples from the realm of performance art. While performance is usually considered an audiovisual form, audio documentation of pieces is uncommon. This chapter focuses on a particularly disturbing work of performance art, John Duncan's *Blind Date* (1980), which is documented solely through an audio recording. No audience was present at the performance, so the only access anyone has to the work is through a thirteen minute long tape that purports to document an act of necrophilia. In contrast to the other three chapters, this chapter analyzes a piece of audio that is, in itself, undecipherable. The recording does not sound like anything recognizable sexual. In fact, it closely resembles some of the more abstract piece of sound art and noise music discussed in the other chapters. However, it is in the narrative surrounding the recording, and the act it claims to provide evidence for, that gives *Blind Date* its affective power.

All four chapter are connected by an impulse to seek out the affective in the electronic. This dissertation mounts interventions into, and provides supplements to, existing scholarship on the formal structures of experimental electronic music, and that music's usefulness to contemporary philosophical ideas about the non-human, by questioning the emotional experiences these works describe and inspire, and by attending to the social, cultural, and political contexts that created them. I want to note that I do not offer these arguments as correctives, but rather suggestions toward divergent lines of inquiry. How does a particular piece of sound art communicate feeling? How does the form of an piece of noise music address its subculture of listeners? What does experimental electronic music's narrativization in cinema reveal about the perception of it, and how can that be put to use to tell a story? The term affect may come and go throughout this dissertation, occasionally disappearing for a great many pages, but throughout each interpretation of an individual text, questions of sensation and emotion guide

my arguments. A model of sound that regards the sonic as a dimension of affect remains a foundational perspective driving my analysis throughout the dissertation.

1. Affect and Space in Sound Art

Between 45th and 46th streets in New York City's Times Square there is a trapezoidal metal grate centered on a pedestrian island. During the day, an average of one thousand people per hour walk across it.³ Very few linger on the island longer than it takes for the traffic light to change. Most of those who do are tourists, pausing to check maps on their iPhones. Fewer still seek the island out and approach it as a destination. The Google Street View image of the island (accessed October 2013) shows a collection of blurry-faced passers-by, all but two of whom appear to be momentarily stopped at the traffic light, waiting to cross 7th Avenue heading east. Of the two who seem to be lingering, one is facing south and taking a photograph on her cell phone—she stands with her arm angled upward suggesting she's trying to frame a wide shot of the area—and the other is a tour bus ticket salesman in a red vest. Not a single person shown in the image captured by the Google team that day appears interested in—or even aware of—the metal grate set into the cement beneath their feet.

Below them, hidden inside that metal grate which vents air from the subway tunnel, sits the apparatus of Max Neuhaus's permanent sound art installation, *Times Square* (1977). The piece consists of a bank of electronically controlled oscillators, precisely tuned, which produce a constant, harmonically complex hum. Hidden from view from the street, the mechanism itself is a large metal box, about waist-high, which contains both the sound-generating electronics as well as the loudspeakers which project the sound into the resonant, underground space below the

³ This statistic is cited in most articles about Max Neuhaus's *Times Square* (see Cooke, Kelley, Schröder: 2009) but no official data seems to precisely account for it. It is safe to say, however, that a very large number of pedestrians cross this island on any given day.

grate. In interviews, Neuhaus has described the character of the sound as resembling the ringing-out of a large bell. Unlike a bell, however, Neuhaus's sound never dissipates. It continues indefinitely, unchanging, peeling softly from the gridded grate.

Unless one is specifically seeking out the work and actively listening for it, it is likely that a person would mishear the sound as emitted by some kind of air-handling device, or as part of the rumble of a passing subway train. Both are common sounds in Midtown Manhattan and both are often heard to be coming from grates in the sidewalk. No plaque labels *Times Square*. In fact, there's no indicator at all that the site is an artwork; it is entirely unmarked. On the several occasions I have visited the work, I have been alone on my pilgrimage, or accompanied only by friends whom I had brought with me to the site. Never have I met another person intentionally visiting Neuhaus's installation, nor have I ever witnessed a passerby take any notice of the sound, even after standing on the traffic island for over an hour. This is, according to Neuhaus, an important part of the work's character. It isn't that the piece is hidden, or exclusive. Neuhaus did not intend for it to serve as a shibboleth amongst those educated and erudite enough to know of its existence, while weeding out passers-by who possess insufficient cultural knowledge to recognize it as art. In fact, Neuhaus's intention—if it can be deemed effective—was quite the opposite. As Gascia Ouzounian writes: "Neuhaus thus reimagines the listening public as 'anyone who happens to listen' rather than those who seek out (and gain access to) specialised listening experiences" (2013, 83). It is his art's nearly-seamless integration into the audible environment of the space—its quality of barely-there-ness—that animates the work. *Times Square* articulates the difference between *hearing* (passively) and *listening* (actively), and remains effective—or successful as a piece, according to its author—regardless of the attention of its audience.

But is Neuhaus's work a high-art reimagining of the proverbial tree falling in a forest? If most of the people who hear it do not realize that it is an intentional sound, created as a piece of art, what is the piece *doing*? Rather than putting its *sounding* into question (as one would do with the example of the tree) we might ask, is it affective? If most people don't hear it, are they affected by its presence at all? And even to those who do notice it, or who seek the piece out, what affects does it produce in those listeners?

One might question the effectiveness of affect theory to examine a work that is so gentle as to be, for many, imperceptible, but in this chapter, I intend to analyze *Times Square* as a test of some of affect theory's basic assumptions. Although it is often emphasized that affects can be strong or weak, of varying intensities, and are constantly in motion, relatively few scholars of affect actually address instances of weak affects. More often, affects are described in their extreme incarnations—sadness, anger, joy, etc. But if affect is theorized as “autonomous”—as Massumi argues—affects are ever-present even when they bypass consciousness. For example, a person might not be intellectually aware of the mood they are in by consciously reflecting upon it, but they are experiencing a mood nonetheless. Even encounters between bodies and objects that go unnoticed by the conscious mind are said to be affective. This aspect, however, is undertheorized. It is perhaps *especially* these encounters with which the theory concerns itself, only to abandon them when case studies are required to prove examples. In their article “An Inventory of Shimmers” (which serves as the introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*), Seigworth and Gregg begin by stating that “there is no pure or somehow originary state for affect” (2010, 1). A body can never experience pure stasis with regard to affect. Rather, a body is always being affected, and affecting the objects and bodies with which it comes into contact.

Nothing is ever *affectless*, only experiencing and generating varying degrees—or levels of intensity—of affect. Seigworth and Gregg continue: “Affect, at its most anthropomorphic,”—their use of that word suggesting that affects also necessarily occur between non-human objects —“is the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations...” (2010, 1). What these authors emphasize is that affects may be strong or weak. They might inspire a body to action, or they might barely register within an individual consciousness. In fact, what seems to be most important here is that affects do not require any conscious attention in order to exert their force. According to this branch of affect theory, affects are ever-present (with intensities ranging from severe to gentle to almost imperceptible) as long as bodies (human, animal, living or inorganic) exist in some physical relationship to each other. Additionally, those affects exist whether or not there is a mind present that recognizes them.

This particular area of affect theory evolved out of Deleuze’s writing on Spinoza. Scholars who subscribe to this model of affect view affect as something very different than a synonym for “emotion.” Where emotions are interior modes of being, perhaps genres of a particular set of affective states, Deleuze describes affects as relationships between bodies.

All individuals are in Nature as though on a plane of consistence whose whole figure they form, a plane which is variable at each moment. They affect each other in so far as the relationship which constitutes each one forms a degree of power, a capacity to be affected. Everything is simply an encounter in the universe, a good or bad encounter. Adam eats the apple, the forbidden fruit. This

is a phenomenon of the indigestion, intoxication, poisoning type: this rotten apple decomposes Adam's relationship. Adam has a bad encounter. Whence the force of Spinoza's question: '*What can a body do?*', of what affects is it capable? Affects are becomings: sometimes they weaken us in so far as they diminish our power to act and decompose our relationships (sadness), sometimes they make us stronger in so far as they increase our power and make us enter into a more vast or superior individual (joy)" (Deleuze and Parnet 1987, 59-60).

In his example, Deleuze describes affect existing or occurring between Adam and the apple, as a chemical interaction of nutrition and poison, as well as a social interaction between Adam and other conscious minds (perhaps God, the serpent, Eve). The relationship produces a multiplicity of affects, not all of which are obvious or even essential to the story of Adam in the garden.

Elsewhere, Deleuze describes an interaction between the sun and clay—in which clay is hardened and cracks under the sun's heat and light—as an example of an affective relation (1978, 5). Obviously, the clay's cracking cannot be likened to an emotion that the clay experiences. In this way, we can see that in this brand of affect theory, affects *include* human emotions, but are not limited to them exclusively. Affects can be subtler changes in bodies that are not necessarily known, or noticed, by a human consciousness.

Times Square is a work of art that takes this branch of affect theory at its word by testing its limits. Neuhaus's piece presents a boundary case for this particular critical lens: if affects are ever-present, no matter how mundane, ordinary, or unnoticed the encounter, can we still examine the affective relationship between a listener and a sound that goes, for the most part, unheard? It is something of a cliché that proponents of affect theory avoid ever employing it in the close reading of texts, opting instead to continuously refine the theory, argue for its vitality, and call for urgent scholarly attention to be paid to it, in a manner similar to a knife sharpener who never gets

around to cutting anything.⁴ In this sense, I am compelled most strongly by Eugenie Brinkema's book *The Forms of the Affects*, which argues that the only way for affect theory to provide any productive insight is for it to reconcile its imagined incompatibility with close reading, by attempting sustained textual analyses of actual objects of study. She writes: "If affect is conceived of as synonymous with force, or as intensities, or as the capacity for stage changes or movement as such, then it opens up very few theoretical avenues—Why turn to affect at all? In the end, ethics, politics, aesthetics—indeed, lives—must be enacted in the definite particular" (2014, xv). This methodology's usefulness in this chapter will rest on my analysis of *Times Square*, a work which, at first glance, appears to have little to do with affect because it cannot be said to elicit any strong response—emotional or otherwise— by its design, and in fact, can easily go completely unnoticed.

In addition to the ease with which it can be ignored or unheard, *Times Square* doesn't communicate anything specific. It tells no story and provides no clues as to how the piece is to be felt. It is merely a hum, built out of a number of sine waves—pure tones with no harmonic content above the fundamental pitch at which they vibrate. Sine waves are often used in experimental music as elements that resist signification and escape history. Each instrument—violin, piano, synthesizer—has a history, a politics and a tremendous amount of cultural baggage. The sine wave is a mathematical theory, one which, in actuality, can never be achieved. It presents a fundamental frequency without any timbral character—something that is impossible to experience in reality because any material through which those vibrations might travel will add distortions to the wave. Nevertheless, sine waves, in experimental electronic music, are used to

⁴ This metaphor originated with Hermann Lotze, and was famously quoted by Heidigger in his *Habilitationsschrift*. I discovered it in the Preface to Brinkema's *The Forms of the Affects* (2014, xiii).

appeal to a sense of outside-of-history, outside-of-culture, anti-anthropocentric purity where *pitch* (the musical term) is transformed into *frequency* (the mathematical term for the speed of vibrations in matter). As such, sine waves are present in the musics most often cited by contemporary philosophers as being neomodernist, or anti-anthropocentric.

The sound of *Times Square* strives, on its surface, to be as meaningless as it can possibly be. Its hum is not made up of recordings of physical instruments whose histories would color the experience of hearing them, nor does the piece contain playback of any pre-recorded audio, which would also bring with it a significant amount of baggage, and therefore cultural/historic/social connotations. How can one talk about a work's affective dimensions if, in its address, it prescribes no easily identifiable emotion or narrative? In most scholarship where affect theory is put to use in the analysis of a cultural product, that product can be said to communicate some obviously affective content. One useful example of this might be the sentimental German television bumper that Massumi writes about, discussed in the introduction to this dissertation. *Times Square* does not do this, at least not by design. At the same time, the piece undoubtedly transforms the space where it is installed. It produces affects through its relationship to the pedestrians who encounter it. It makes that traffic island into something different than it was.

Georgina Born, in her introduction to *Music, Sound and Space: Transformations of Public and Private Experience* quotes Steven Connor's assertion that "perhaps the most important distinguishing feature of auditory experience ... [is] its capacity to ... reconfigure space" (Connor quoted in Born 2013, 3; ellipses Born's). It is this suggestion which most clearly illuminates *Times Square*: the reconfiguration of space. Moreover, it is a listener's physical presence—an interaction of bodies audibly vibrating and resonating in that space—that allows

for that reconfiguration to be felt. In one of the most photographed spaces in an iconic city, Neuhaus's piece cannot be represented visually, cannot be captured in an image. It is therefore an unexpected feature for visitors who may have seen countless images of the glittery Broadway theaters, or the Coca-Cola and Calvin Klein advertisements. As a stubbornly obtuse artifact of so-called "high art," the work stands in uneasy contrast to the space's almost uninterrupted landscape of commercial logos and advertising images. All of these sights, sounds and experiences are overlaid on the space of the traffic island. Standing over the grate, hearing Neuhaus's oscillators mingle with the innumerable city sounds present in Times Square can be emotionally powerful, but the emotion experienced is not necessarily nameable, not immediately recognizable as fitting into any genre of affective state (happy, sad, frightened, etc.). It is this category of encounter between sound, space, and affect that I seek to address in this chapter.

This chapter seeks to outline a particular interpretive model for the analysis of select works of sound art by three different composer/artists: Max Neuhaus, Alvin Lucier and Pauline Oliveros. I have attempted to develop this model as a way of bringing the two fields of affect theory and sound studies together in order to access a discussion of experimental electronic sonic works that specifically engage space and place. Additionally, these works are imagined to evade elements that are common to more "traditional," pre-twentieth century arts: those of sensation, and feeling, either collective or individual. I intend to deploy a theory of affect for a number of practical reasons. The first is that it works to accentuate, in some sense, the inscription of the human in the electronic, allowing us to hear the ways in which artworks that do not prescribe their emotional content nonetheless operate as sites of the transmission of sensation. Where representational paintings, or compositions of western tonal music might be said to be, say,

happy or sad—Heidegger’s description of Van Gogh’s shoes comes to mind, as it is full of emotionally resonant language about loneliness, desolation, exhaustion, anxiety—Neuhaus’s, Lucier’s, and Oliveros’s works do not seem to “express” any emotion one could name. While some might find value in the reinterpretation of Van Gogh’s shoes through the lens of affect theory, for my purposes, affect theory provides an excellent opportunity to think through how an artwork might feel, even if those feelings cannot be named as specific genres of emotion.

Another productive application of affect, for the purposes of this chapter, is its complicated relationship to space and to place. *Times Square* is both an articulation of a space—the resonances of an underground hollow in a parking island— but also an engagement with a specific site: Times Square. The model of sonic affect proposed in my introduction, arguing that affect is often already metaphorized as a vibratory —therefore, sonic—field, provides a productive approach to an analysis of Neuhaus’s site-specific work, and its interactions with listeners and the environment.

Here, I am primarily interested in versions of affect theory which imagine affect as a distributed field of intensities, a model wherein a source of affect is difficult to pin down. Where are affects? Where do they come from? Are they only inside of bodies, or are they outside of the bodies they operate on? If a song makes you cry, did you produce that affect or did the song? Was it produced in the digital data encoded on the CD, embedded in the singer’s throat somehow, or circulating in the air which mediates the space between your loudspeakers and your eardrums? My analysis of *Times Square* will involve the application of a particular version of affect theory—I have already referred to it as Deleuzian—where affect is understood to be a constant force of

interactions and relationships between objects which produce some effect on both (or all) of the objects involved.

For the other works of sound art which will be addressed later in the chapter, my notion of affect will more closely resemble a discussion of the emotions and their circulation within a particular political context. I want to emphasize, though, that I do not believe these two modes of affect theory to necessarily be in opposition⁵. Even in Deleuze's configuration, human emotions can be accounted for as affects. It is simply the case that emotions are only one dimension of a much larger field of forces that affect describes. Throughout the second half of this chapter, more recognizable human emotions will appear at the center of my argument concerning Lucier's and Oliveros's works.

In some sense, this chapter can be understood to have a fairly simple purpose. Despite its theoretical aspirations, its goal is to consider several works of sound art that superficially appear to address only the stubborn materiality of their media—cold, formalist experiments with sound and space—as participating in a circuit of affective relations, using electronic sound not as a frank demonstration of a technological or conceptual phenomenon but as an engagement with the human lives, sensations, and emotions. Affect, with its emphasis on relationships between bodies, and its concern with emotional states, provides access to understanding these pieces as something more than dry demonstrations of acoustic phenomena, purely formal experiments, or art-for-art's-sake. Affect theory can relocate these sound works, placing them into what Barry Truax describes as circuits of “acoustic communication” (see Truax 2001).

⁵ Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth suggest that the Deleuze/Massumi faction is regularly pitted against Tomkins/Sedgwick faction (2010, 6-9).

This chapter deals with artworks by three different individuals whose works are alternately defined as experimental music, and as sound art. While the distinction is not particularly strict or consistent, it is helpful in explaining my selections for this chapter. Although Max Neuhaus was famously skeptical of the term “sound art,” arguing that the term was either too inclusive to be useful, or simply a new word people were using to describe experimental music compositions, it was his work that initially provided the impetus for the term’s invention; Lynn Cooke writes that he “more or less singlehandedly became the founding father of what is now known as sound art” (2009, 23). In his own writing, Neuhaus perpetuated the common attempt at ontological distinction that asserts “sound art is mainly about space, while music is about time” (Rudi 2009, 1). Neuhaus articulated the shift in his career from composing works to be performed by musical ensembles, in concert halls to installing non-performance-based works out doors and in public spaces as a shift in interest from time to space. In a program note from 1974, Neuhaus wrote: “Traditionally composers have located the elements of a composition in time. One idea which I am interested in is locating them, instead, in space, and letting the listener place them in his own time”(quoted in Cox 2009, 113). While I don’t subscribe wholeheartedly to this definition, I have used it, in a rather broad application, to guide the selection of case studies in this chapter. Each analysis of a specific work will argue that sound is used to describe the material conditions of a space (*Vespers, I am Sitting in a Room*) represent a space by narrativizing its context (*The Day I Disconnected the Erase Head and Forgot to Reconnect It*) or produce a space, transforming it in a way that is different from how it is experienced prior to that sound (*Times Square*).

Times Square and the Production of Space

Alex Potts, in his article “Moment and Place: Art in the Arena of the Everyday,” contextualizes the intervention that Neuhaus’s sonic installations made into art of the 1960s and ‘70s. Potts identifies that period as “a time when the idea of breaking down boundaries between art forms was being widely promoted” (2009, 45). He suggests that Neuhaus was participating equally in two interrelated artistic trajectories. The first consists of Minimalist sculpture and Land Art, which Potts describes as “work conceived as an intervention in space rather than as a sculpted, modeled, or found object” (2009, 45). The second is, what Potts labels, “the more politically charged side to his work, rooted in the libertarian avant-garde of the earlier 1960s, the moment of Fluxus and Happenings and of free interchange between visual art and performance” (2009, 45-46). I would suggest that Neuhaus, who began his career as a composer and percussionist, draws equally from the tradition of experimental music as he does from these artistic contexts.

Neuhaus’s earliest site-specific works began to draw the division between sound art and other types of experimental music of the period. The *Listen* series consisted of guided walks through urban areas where participants stopped at preselected locations in order to listen to particular sounds. Neuhaus would wordlessly stamp “Listen” onto the backs of participants’ hands as they showed up to participate in the walks. He would then set off on a predetermined path, stopping in a series of spaces chosen for their particularly unique aural environments. Although very little documentation of these early pieces survives, I’d like to suggest that an account of one of Neuhaus’s other pieces from this period could describe much of the artist’s

entire output. Artist Al Brunelle wrote of Neuhaus's *Water Whistle* (1974), a series which bridges the *Listen* walks and the public installations such as *Times Square*, both aesthetically and temporally, "[The] music didn't have much to do any more with ears or skin and seemed to be dreamy, dark shifting vapors of mood" (quoted in Cooke 2009, 34). This description—"dark shifting vapors of mood"—captures an aspect of Neuhaus's work that is often elided in scholarship in favor of its structural, formal qualities: its affective potential. It also articulates the difficulty associated with any attempt to name those "moods" as any recognizable genre of emotional state. This non-prescriptive evocation of intense affect is a characteristic of many of Neuhaus's installations, including *Times Square*.

According to Nigel Thrift, "Cities can be seen as roiling maelstroms of affect. Particular affects like anger, fear, happiness and joy are continually on the boil, rising here, subsiding there, and these affects continually manifest themselves in events which can take place either at a grand scale or simply as a part of continuing everyday life" (2007, 171). Thrift goes on to identify the proliferation of screens in the urban landscape as key sources for the transmission of mediated affect, I would point instead to the abundance of loudspeakers in urban spaces and the increasing volume of the city's soundscape. Consider how frequently one hears commercial music on the street, pumped from inside stores and restaurants, emanating from passing car stereos, or even through the increasingly common individuated experience of wearing earbud headphones in public. These speakers only contribute to the already rich soundscape of the urban environment: crowds, cars, busses, all kinds of industry and activity. Chapter 2 of this dissertation will engage the issue of urban noise and the relationship between loudness and urbanization and industrialization in more detail.

Max Neuhaus's *Listen* series can be viewed as the precursors to the artist's installation work. But first, we require a quick definition of the term "soundscape" and how that notion will be applied in this analysis. R. Murray Schafer's 1977 book *The Soundscape: The Tuning of The World* introduced the term in the context of sound studies scholarship. While Schafer's interest lay largely in a kind of sonic environmentalism, lamenting the human-made noise pollution that was drowning out the "natural" soundscape of the world, the term has found purchase in a number of contexts that don't necessarily dismiss urban and industrial sound as 'pollution'. Emily Thompson defines the soundscape in the following way:

Like a landscape, a soundscape is simultaneously a physical environment and a way of perceiving that environment; it is both a world and a culture constructed to make sense of that world. The physical aspects of a soundscape consist not only of the sounds themselves, the waves of acoustical energy permeating the atmosphere in which people live, but also the material objects that create, and sometimes destroy, those sounds. A soundscape's cultural aspects incorporate scientific and aesthetic ways of listening, a listener's relationship to their environment, and the social circumstances that dictate who gets to hear what. A soundscape, like a landscape, ultimately has more to do with civilization than with nature, and as such, it is constantly under construction and always undergoing change (2012, 117).

Schafer might have found Neuhaus's tours distasteful in that they framed certain urban sounds—construction sites, power plants, factories—as valuable sites for artistic engagement, and pleasurable "musical" listening. This connection was both reinforced, and also simultaneously augmented by what was always Neuhaus's last stop on his *Listen* walks: his own studio. A holdover from Neuhaus's days as a more traditional composer, he would end each tour with performances of several percussion pieces, composed by himself, alongside pieces

composed by other prominent experimental composers of the time including John Cage, Earle Brown, and Morton Feldman. The inclusion of more traditionally musical performances both contextualized what might be called the “found sounds” of the preceding walk as objects colonized as art by the framing practice of the guided tour, ascribing them equal value and significance with respect to established works of experimental composition. At the same time, however, by taking the participants out of the public spaces and into the studio for a more traditionally structured performance context, Neuhaus kept separate these two portions of the *Listen* series, not fully integrating these two areas of interest in the way he later would with his installation works.

Returning to the case study that opened this chapter, I wish to describe *Times Square* in contrast, perhaps, to some of the ways it has been considered in past scholarship. Christoph Cox whose recent notion of “sonic materialism” has become a particularly productive framework in the study of sound art, has been, for a decade, pushing for an understanding of the sonic as a “nonsymbolic, nondiscursive category.” He writes that sound art should be considered as “an exploration of the virtual sonic flux that precedes and exceeds human contribution” (2007, 3). He argues that sound art, following Max Neuhaus’s inspiration should be described as “neo-modernist” (2003, 1) in that it eschews referentiality (in opposition to so-called “postmodern” art which finds for its content a collage-like pastiche of high and popular forms) as well as any obvious engagement with the social. He writes, “[The] revival of modernist strategies of abstraction, Reduction, self-referentiality, and attention to the perceptual act itself—what could be called without irony, “neo-modernism”—is nowhere more evident than in sound art” (2003, 1). He goes on “Where postmodernism is about mixture and overload, neo-modernism is about

purity and reduction. Where postmodernism is about content and the concrete (the vertiginous string of recognizable samples), neomodernism is about form and abstraction” (2003, 1). But claims of neomodernist purity run a risk of eliding the human authorship and audience of works of sound art. These pieces are, of course, made by humans and designed to be experienced by humans. I wonder how a work ever truly can, as Cox argues, “precede and exceed human contribution” if it is produced entirely by human labor, and for human consumption?

I believe that much of the already-existing scholarship on this topic leaves a space open for interventions that address the works with contrasting scholarly approaches. It is my contention that *Times Square*, disguised as it may be as a sterile, formal exercise in the sonic, can alternately be heard as referring to and engaging with aspects of the social—in all of the specificity with which human lives are lived. It is through the model of sonic affect—outlined in the introduction to this dissertation—and its relationship to space that I intend to analyze Neuhaus’s piece.

My analysis must continue here with some discussion of the terms upon which my argument will rest. What do I mean, exactly, by *space*, and how does sound fit into a theorization of it? Out of the famous correspondence between Leibniz and Samuel Clarke—Clarke arguing on behalf of Isaac Newton—arose a philosophical question central to any thought regarding space: is space absolute or relational? Is space an *a priori* independent container of objects and energies, or do those objects and energies themselves produce space through their relationships with one another? In other words, does the domain of space precede the things that inhabit it? (Harman 2009, 143). Two hundred and fifty years later, Henri Lefebvre takes Leibniz’s side in his book *The Production of Space*, and moves the argument away from the cold mathematical

nature of the universe and toward how humans experience and conceive of space, regardless of any actual cosmic laws.

Lefebvre's theorization of space has a strong political thrust. His concern is not with space, in the abstract, but as a product of sociality, and as a product of power relations—and also as a force that produces those dynamics. For Lefebvre, if space is not absolute, and, in fact, produced by bodies and matter, then it continues to be reproduced, again and again with every new configuration of those bodies, materials and expenditures of energy. In this sense, the insistence that space is produced allows for the possibility of activism, allows for the possibility that space can be reproduced into something other than that which is configured by the powers of capital.

This activity that Lefebvre believes produces space also necessarily produces sound. Sound is movement; it is vibration in matter—the cyclical change in position of physical materials over time. Vibrations are ever-present, in all matter—or, at the very least, all terrestrial matter. Vibrations travel sympathetically across boundaries, through solids, gasses, liquids, from one adjacent material to another, inextricably bound up into any possible conception of space. If space is produced by relationships between objects, then sound—the vibrations which constantly move through (produced) space, which permeate and set into motion all assembled objects—link objects to one another through shared sympathetic motion. A sound produced in one object necessarily moves all other objects around it, affecting them, producing systems of acoustic sympathy which measure, delineate, partition, contour, join together and create space.

Following Lefebvre's model, the realm of the sonic is produced by means similar to the production of space. The sonic, as I earlier metaphorized it as a field of intensities and pressures related to affect, can also be metaphorized as a realm of spatiality. To refer back to Cage's

famous visit to the anechoic chamber, and his assertion that there is no such thing as silence, the sonic cannot be imagined an empty container, a bed of silence over which sounds emerge. Sounds—the ever-presence of vibrations—do not inhabit the sonic, they produce it. In this sense, the sonic is a constant flux of vibrations, making individual sounds not separate objects in themselves, but specific fluctuations that can never be removed from the vibratory field they inhabit to be heard as separate. Deleuze writes: “One can ... conceive of a continuous acoustic flow ... that traverses the world and that even encompasses silence ... A musician is someone who appropriates something from this flow” (Deleuze quoted in Smith 2012, 141). This notion becomes particularly productive in any post-Cage sound art, where the artist’s contribution is to, in some way, “frame” an already-occurring acoustic event or space as a piece of art. This idea will be addressed momentarily.

It is this type of spatial production—activity in the sonic—that, I believe, can inform an analysis of *Times Square*. Neuhaus’s piece does not interfere with the activity of Times Square—in fact, it goes mostly unnoticed by passersby. For some who notice it, though, the space is transformed by the work. In a published conversation between Peter Pakesch and Ulrich Loock, Pakesch states that Neuhaus’s public sound installations “enrich, shape and mold the environment” (2009, 86). It’s not a far leap to add Lefebvre’s term “produce” to Pakesch’s verbs. Nor would it be a stretch to suggest that Neuhaus’s work was informed, perhaps, by a political position. Neuhaus’s discipline grew out of radical art movements of the 1960s and he believed his projects to have a political intent, similar to that of Fluxus, Land Art, and the happenings of Allan Kaprow in that it took art out of the galleries and out of the hands of the art market. *Times Square* cannot be bought or sold at auction. It cannot be moved to another location, either installed in a gallery or the home of a collector or art speculator. Regarding Neuhaus’s political

intentions for the work, Lynne Cooke writes: “In pursuit of an antielitist stance, no markers indicating the entity as an artwork were deemed necessary: it was up to each individual to experience it in any terms he or she chose. The radical politic informing Neuhaus’s realization of *Times Square* in 1977 was not just a product of antiestablishment era but also his recurrent concern” (2009, 35). Alex Potts argues that Neuhaus sought to find “a way to radically democratize an audience’s mode of engagement with his work, without selling out to consumerist demands for entertainment” (2009, 46).

Neuhaus’s work takes much of its inspiration from the work and the theoretical writings of John Cage. Liz Kotz writes that “the work that most resonates with Neuhaus’s project is Cage’s legendary 1952 “silent” piece, *4’33”*...” (2009, 95). Cage’s silent piece, during which the performer makes no audible sounds and the audience is left to listen only to the incidental sounds heard in the space of the performance, was discussed briefly in the introduction. It bears repeating however, that the composition’s originary story is that of Cage’s visit to an anechoic chamber. Inside, where Cage expected to experience silence, but didn’t, he posited that there is no such thing as silence. In my model of sonic affect, I have argued that Cage’s assertion implies that it is the ever-presence of audible vibration in matter that produces the realm of the sonic. Kotz goes on: “The work [*4’33”*] aims therefore to activate listening, to be sure, but also to trigger an attentiveness to space, to the site of the performance...” (2009, 95). It is this kind of “framing” of the acoustic environment that Neuhaus experiments with in *Times Square*. The drone which is emitted from the grate in the traffic island cannot be heard unaccompanied. One cannot isolate the sound of Neuhaus’s installation from the sounds of the city surrounding it. In this sense, the listener is forced to hear the city’s soundscape as part of the piece, as part of the work of art. Where Cage frames incidental sounds as occurring within his piece through blocking

out a portion of time as a performance, Neuhaus achieves similar results by placing his artwork amidst those incidental sounds.

Another way of thinking of *Times Square* is in relation to Marcel Duchamp's large glass painting *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915-23). For Cage, as well as for a number of artists working in the 1960s (the milieu that Neuhaus was working in) the rediscovery and reevaluation of Duchamp's artworks and ideas provided a way to think through a resistance to Abstract Expressionism, serialism, and other dominant avant-garde movements of the 1940s and '50s. Duchamp's "Large Glass" consists of a window plane painted with several machine-like objects. There is, however, no background, just clear glass, so that the painting cannot be viewed without also seeing whatever stands behind it in the gallery. The piece is always displayed like a freestanding sculpture, placed in the center of a room. To observe it is to also always observe the room it is placed inside, and all of the other people who occupy the space.

Times Square's drone can only ever be heard as one component of an entire soundscape, and just like Cage's *4'33"* captures the surrounding sonic environment, claiming it as the stuff of its composition, *Times Square* transforms all additional sounds heard on its traffic island into its content. In this way, Cox's assertion that "postmodernism is about mixture and overload, neo-modernism is about purity and reduction" ignores the actual experience of hearing *Times Square*. Similar to the postmodern pieces Cox decries for their inclusion of recognizable samples and referentiality, Neuhaus's installation includes as its material all of the voices and activities of Time Square's pedestrians, the passing of cars, as well as any commercial music which invades the space, either from car windows or from the shops and theaters and hotels that surround it. *Times Square*'s content is an ever-changing, densely layered soundscape, anchored by Neuhaus's oscillators, but in no way limited solely to their output. In this way, it is productive, I think, to

hear the piece not as a cold experiment with form, but as a piece deeply engaged with the social, political and historical context of the space it occupies and activates.

Times Square was installed in 1977 and ran continuously until 1992. It was reinstalled in 2002. It is fascinating to think of the installation as perhaps one of the more permanent features of Times Square over the last three decades, in a sense, witnessing the dramatic cultural shifts that have occurred in that space during that period. Neuhaus's artwork droned quietly below Mayors Koch and Dinkins's projects to clean up Times Square's pre-1980s culture of prostitution, go-go bars, sex shops and adult theaters. It accompanied Rudolph Giuliani's so-called "Disnification" of the area and the erasure of the culture of anonymous sexual encounters described in Samuel R. Delany's influential memoir *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. If, as I argued, the material of the artwork is, in part, the aural environment of the space it occupies, *Times Square*'s content has transformed significantly during its period of operation. This shift has undoubtedly had a tremendous effect on the conditions experienced by listeners on that traffic island as they hear Neuhaus's drone. The contemporary, family-friendly, space is now characterized not by the sleazy neon which advertised sex and sin, but by the squeaky-clean logos and consumer messages of international brands.

Since its reinstallation, *Times Square*'s most insidious enemy has been the so-called Naked Cowboy, a street musician who wears cowboy boots, briefs and a cowboy hat and plays guitar, often standing on the same island which houses Neuhaus's installation. According to Lynne Cooke, Neuhaus instructed the Dia Foundation, which maintains the piece, in ways it could evict the Naked Cowboy. She writes: "[The Naked Cowboy's] long-term presence on the site was anathema to Neuhaus because in giving a focus to the pedestrian island it transformed that nondescript, mundane place of transit, where passersby, if attentive to their aural

environment, could encounter an unexpectedly resonant presence” (2009, 36). Cooke calls Neuhaus’s reaction to the Naked Cowboy “uncharacteristic.” It is interesting then to point this out in relation to the piece’s otherwise unmoving indifference to the transformations made to Times Square from the 1970s to the present. It turns out, in contrast to a purely formal execution of a conceptual piece, *Times Square* actually rejects subsuming into its sonic expression certain sonic artifacts, based either on taste or politics (the Naked Cowboy once announced his candidacy for Mayor of New York City, as well as his intention to run against President Obama in 2012, representing the far-right Tea Party). In this way, the piece actively engages the sociality and culture of the space, effectively evicting a busker, literally altering the makeup of the space.

According to Neuhaus, the sound of the oscillators under the grate are tuned to sound like “the after ring of a large bell” (Kotz 2009, 93). According to a video produced by Dia Art Foundation documenting the piece’s 2000 reinstallation, Neuhaus spent days tuning each oscillator precisely to mimic the characteristic enharmonic timbre of a bell. This specificity is not arbitrary, but deeply referential. The significance of the installation of a never-ending bell peal in a space often considered the center of New York City— and occasionally figured as “the Crossroads of the World”— points back to the history of bells in the constitution of cities and villages. This effect could not have been lost on Neuhaus who, when speaking about a series of works he created titled *Time Pieces*, which were public installations that, at regular intervals played a quiet, slow crescendo and then abruptly faded out, argued that by AD 1100, “the church bell had become united with the mechanical clock. The bell no longer just announced special events but provided a communal time base for general coordination of activities” (Neuhaus quoted in Cooke 2009, 39). The position of centrality to public life that the church bell occupied is essential in Neuhaus’s work. It cannot be a coincidence that *Times Square*, as well as a series

of later public works were consciously developed to reference church bells. Alain Corbin's article "Identity, Bells and the French Village" examines the significance of church bells to the formation and delineation of societies in pre-Modern French villages. He writes: "A bell was supposed to be audible everywhere within the bounds of a specified territory. As we know, this implied adjusting the loudness of a ring of bells so that it could cover the surface area of the parish or commune and surmount any obstacles in the terrain" (2004, 186). Corbin argues that the boundaries of a village were measured by the audibility of the central church bell, that the range of its projection defined the village, separating it from its periphery.

This detail about *Times Square*'s metaphorical connection to the church bell, deconstructed and repurposed to inhabit the center of an iconic urban space, is not as far from affect theory as it may appear at first glance. Hearing the piece as a bell brings us back to Deleuze's example of the sun-baked-clay, but raises a question regarding the intensity of the affect exerted between the interrelated objects—the installation and the listener. What of *Times Square*'s audibility at a distance? How physically large a space does the work occupy? Where is the boundary at which it can no longer be said to affect—even subtly, almost-imperceptibly—a passerby? If a politically/socially-defined space is described by the acoustic reach of a bell's peal, how far does *Times Square*'s spatial reach extend? It turns out, this question is not one of simply measuring the installation's audibility from different increasing distances at different times of day. The actual experience of *Times Square* reveals a paradoxical inversion of the piece's quietness. First, finding the correct pedestrian island is not simple. It takes walking over several grates that do not house Neuhaus's piece, though nevertheless emit a gentle humming that you think, as you search, *might* be it. Once one locates the correct grate however the sound seems unmistakable. But as one leaves, a curious phenomenon occurs. The boundary of *Times*

Square's audibility is vague, difficult to locate, or perceive. Because the aural environment of New York City resembles white noise— meaning all audible frequencies at roughly equivalent amplitudes are constantly present— even far away from the piece, one can imagine that she still hears it. Liz Kotz describes the effect in the following way: “By its nature, sound produces perceptual effects in its listeners that seem to exceed physical presence: *Times Square*'s ringing reverberates long after one has left the pedestrian island and gone out of earshot of the piece” (2009, 108). Elsewhere she writes: “And strangely, as you walk off the island, you can't really tell when you've gone out of range. The low, ringing hum triggers your sensitivity to these types of sounds, and you begin to hear it everywhere: this ring, this hum, the rumbling sound of the city” (2009, 93). What Kotz is describing is the phenomenon whereby listening to Neuhaus's drone tunes one's ears to its specific cluster of frequencies. Since the din of the city necessarily includes those frequencies (alongside all others) a person listening for them can imagine that they still hear *Times Square* even if they've since left the physical site blocks and blocks behind. If one has a good enough aural memory, and can bring those frequencies to mind even days later, she could possibly imagine she hears the piece in any other city on the planet. If the aural reach of a village church bell delineates the expanse of that distinct community, or politically/socially-determined territory, then Max Neuhaus has created a church bell that rings-out indefinitely, and does so in every noisy city in the world, if the listener is attuned to hear it. In this sense, *Times Square*'s affective force can be experienced at an impossibly great distance. If the work's physical boundary is drawn along the border at which it can no longer be heard, then that boundary is uncertain, if not limitless.

Cooperation and Anxiety in Two Works by Alvin Lucier

Already in this chapter we have encountered sound's spatiotemporal element. Sound necessarily occurs in space, over time. The definition of the word vibration requires spatiality in that it is the cyclical displacement of particles in space. Matthew Nudds provides a simple, accurate description of sounds in space that I will reproduce here:

The vibrations of objects [Nudds's example from the preceding paragraph is a plucked string] are transmitted through the air. In an enclosed space, the vibrations will tend to reflect off hard surfaces and surrounding objects, and vibrations from different objects will interact with each other. These reflections and interactions will change the spectral composition of a vibration in determinate ways. At any place, the local disturbance of the air at that place will carry information about any number of events and, in virtue of having been structured by it, about the environment in which those event occur. This local disturbance of the air is what is detected by our ears (2009, 72).

Nudd points out that what one hears as a sound, is a co-production of an initial vibrating object and the materials in between that object and the listener, which are, in most cases, space. If a string is plucked in a room, those vibrations reflect off the rooms walls, and off any other solid objects in that room, all of which incite vibrations which also reach the listener's ear. A sound in a space can provide as much information about the space it resounds in as it does about the object that initially set off the vibration.

The above quote from Nudd describes the kind of phenomena that interest many practicing sound artists, but Alvin Lucier especially in his early work. *Vespers* (1968) is similar to *I am Sitting in a Room* (which will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter) in that both use sound vibrations to "describe" a space. By that I mean that both works fill rooms with sound in the hope that the sound's reflections and interactions with the materials will, in a way,

create a map of that room— almost as if the air’s vibrations were a material in which a mold of the interior space were being cast. In the liner notes to the 1971 recording of a performance of *Vespers*, Lucier wrote:

Vespers was composed in 1968 and is performed in darkness. Each performer is supplied with a Sondol (sonar-dolphin), a hand-held echolocation device which emits a fast, sharp, narrow-beamed click whose repetition rate can be varied manually, and is given the task of orienting himself in the dark by means of scanning the environment and monitoring the relationship between the outgoing and returning pulses. When the pulse repetition rate is adjusted so that the returning echo is half-way between the outgoing pulses, an object appears to emit sound, the quality of which depends upon the material of the object itself. Moving from place to place the performer discovers clear pathways, avoids obstacles and takes slow sound photographs of his surroundings (1971).

Lucier’s score to the piece specifically emphasizes the composition’s spatial element over other music concerns. One of his instructions reads:

Decisions as to speed and direction of outgoing clicks must be made only on the basis of usefulness in the process of echolocating. Any situations that arise from personal preferences based on ideas of texture, density, improvisation, or composition that do not directly serve to articulate the sound personality of the environment should be considered deviations from the task of echolocation (1980, 16-17).

The language quoted above emphasizes that aesthetic choices should be avoided in favor of the simple carrying-out of the activity. In this way, it follows Sol Lewitt’s directive outlined in his “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art” (1967). Lewitt writes: “In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means

that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art” (Lewitt 1967).

This aspect of *Vespers* is one that is common to a number of Lucier’s pieces, especially in his earliest canonical works (those whose scores are collected in *Chambers* (1980) a book of instructional compositions edited together with interviews with the composer conducted by Douglas Simon). It is for this reason that his sound art can easily be categorized under Cox’s designation of “Neomodernism.” Cox argues the central strategies of neomodernist sound art have to do with purity, abstraction, and form (2003, 1) and Lucier’s dedication to works which explore specific acoustic phenomena through simple, processual activities would clearly adhere to this schema. In much of the writing on Lucier’s work, this characteristic is used to define the composer’s particular voice, or style. In their book *Electronic Music*, Nicolas Collins, Margaret Schedel, and Scott Wilson write, “Alvin Lucier’s music has been described as having a kind of ‘distilled simplicity,’ and it is certainly true that his most significant pieces often seem to consist less of traditional musical discourse than of ... demonstrations of acoustic phenomena” (2013, 128).

While it is true that on its surface, and in the language of its instructional score, *Vespers* would seem to fit the character of a kind of dry, antiseptic formalism, in performance, this simple instruction provides wildly unpredictable results. In an interview, Lucier tells the story of its first performance, which was documented on the *Sonic Arts Union* LP. The piece was performed in a large auditorium, littered with chairs, ladders, and potted plants, with all of the lights turned off. The four performers were placed throughout the auditorium by the composer and instructed to find each other in the darkness using echo-location. The performance itself was a lot messier

than the concept predicted. The four performers could not distinguish their own clicks from those of the other three. Without speaking, they had to improvise a strategy by which they each took turns emitting clicks and navigating the space while the others stood still, and silent. Rather than a formalist exercise in mapping space with audible reflections, *Vespers* became, in practice, an exercise in social cooperation. The dry demonstration of acoustic properties transformed into a community activity of group spatial navigation. The concept failed to fully account for the particularities of the performance situation it prescribed, and as a result, human cooperation took over as a guiding artistic force.

My interest in this aspect of the work is that it is often neglected in written descriptions of the piece. Because of the work's conceptual nature, the description provided by the score which outlines the process the performers are supposed to perform is thought to be enough to understand the piece. The brief textbook-like analysis of Lucier's *modus operandi* by Collins, et al, mentioned above is only one of many descriptions of the composer's work which emphasizes purity of concept without addressing the impurity inherent in any attempt to realize that concept.

An earlier musicological study by Thomas DeLio from his book, *Circumscribing the Open Universe* describes Lucier as "one of the first American composers to eschew all gestural aspects of traditional composition and to replace them with the pure physical presence of sound" (1984, 91). The language DeLio uses in this passage suggests Lucier's work has a kind of inhumanity, a Platonic quality of "purity." The word "gestural" in the first part of the sentence implies corporeality, imperfection, sloppiness. It isn't a stretch to read into DeLio's treatment of Lucier's work that he might understand this "pure physical presence of sound" to be largely unemotional, without affect. Regarding *Vespers*, specifically, DeLio writes: "[The] method

whereby Lucier fashions his compositions is one of presentation rather than transformation. Typically, in each of his works, some acoustic phenomena is encountered, isolated and projected to the audience. All the activities of the composer are directed toward the magnification of the isolated phenomenon making it clearly perceptible to all those listening” (1984, 95).

DeLio considers Lucier’s work to be concerned with the literal, and the objective. What is missing is the actual material reality of carrying out the activity of using echolocation to locate oneself and navigate a space, and how that differs in its affective potential relative to the text of the written score itself. What becomes clear in the description of a performance of *Vespers* is that any experience of the piece is not simply reducible to its score. The messy particularities of a physical and social context inevitably complicate the work, layering on top of it a dimension of subjectivity (as opposed to the seemingly “objective” demonstration called for in the score) that runs counter to the piece’s formal characteristics.

In some of his writing on the subject, Lucier appears dissatisfied with performances of *Vespers* that complicate the piece’s formal intentions, as in his discussion of the piece in his book *Music 109: Notes on Experimental Music*, where he describes an audience in Finland to which he distributed small plastic toys called “crickets” which made sharp, loud clicks, not unlike the sounds of the Sondols. He describes their participation as “vulgar” because they did not use the crickets to activate the space, but instead to create “banal rhythms” (2012, 88). However, in a conversation with Douglas Simon, Lucier himself cannot help but address the social, human, and performative aspects of *Vespers*. He concedes “I know that if four people are playing in the same space, the echo situation is so complex that the players cannot read their own echoes; therefore they have to stop” (1980, 23). Although it is not written into the piece, this social process of

negotiation arises unintentionally from the piece. He goes on to describe the behavior of audience members who approach him after performances to play with the Sondols, to which Simon responds: “It seems a very social idea, a friendly idea, to have the audience be able to do something too ... Do you think that the time will come when you can give a concert and the audience won’t be anxious, when they can accept it that an aspect of the concert is taking advantage of the social situation of being together, and so won’t feel left out?” (1980, 25). Simon’s question gets at the apparent, though unavoidable, disconnect between the composition (in its supposed “purity” and “objectivity”) and the social, corporeal impurity of performance, of the presence and participation of human bodies in the process of *Vespers*.

The interaction between sound and bodies in space can be described in the language of Deleuzian affect theory, where the sonic resonances shared between objects produces both a three-dimensional vibrational map of the physical space, as well as an occasion for social negotiation and cooperation. Another of Lucier’s pieces from the same period, *I am Sitting in a Room* (1969), might appear to lend itself to a similar type of reading, where affect can be analyzed as the impersonal forces pushing, pulling, and binding together objects in a space via sympathetic vibrations. While this analysis is available and, I think, productive, the piece can also be heard to address a more familiar aspect of affect: emotions.

Similar to *Vespers*, Lucier’s *I am Sitting in a Room* purports to describe, or map, a physical space through the use of sound. Perhaps, the composer’s most celebrated work, *I am Sitting in a Room*, activates the acoustic environment with the complexity of a speaking human voice rather than with “neutral” sounds (i.e.: *Vespers*’s clicks) (Lucier and Simon 1980, 26).

Although the score allows “Any text of any length,” Lucier’s iconic performance of the piece is built around the following text, spoken by the composer himself:

I am Sitting in a Room different from the one you are in now. I am recording the sound of my speaking voice and I am going to play it back into the room again and again until the resonant frequencies of the room reinforce themselves so that any semblance of my speech, with perhaps the exception of rhythm, is destroyed. What you will hear, then, are the natural resonant frequencies of the room articulated by speech. I regard this activity not so much as a demonstration of a physical fact, but more as a way to smooth out any irregularities my speech might have (1980, 30).

The spoken text describes the process by which the piece is created. The score provides the following instructions:

Record your voice on tape through the microphone attached to tape recorder #1. Rewind the tape to its beginning, transfer it to tape recorder #2, play it back into the room through the loudspeaker and record a second generation of the original recorded statement through the microphone attached to tape recorder #1. Rewind the second generation to its beginning and splice it onto the end of the original recorded statement on tape recorder #2. Play the second generation only back into the room through the loudspeaker and record a third generation of the original recorded statement through the microphone attached to tape recorder #1. Continue this process through many generations. All the generations spliced together in chronological order make a tape composition the length of which is determined by the length of the original statement and the number of generations recorded (1980, 30-31).

This process of repetitive playback and rerecording of a piece of spoken text produces a piece of sound art whereby a clean, intelligible statement is successively warped by the character of the room it is being played back and rerecorded in, blurring and manipulating the sound of the voice

with the reverberations specific to that space, until the content of the speech becomes unrecognizable. Certain frequencies, present in the voice, are reinforced, becoming louder, and more persistent, while others disappear entirely. As the work progresses, the sound begins to resemble a collection of softly oscillating tones, eventually shedding all apparent relationship to the original text. Lucier describes the acoustic physics of the process in the following way:

Imagine a room so many meters long. Now imagine a sound wave that fits that room, which reflects off the wall in sync with itself. It will be louder (constructive interference). This is called a standing wave. If the wave doesn't fit it will bounce back out of sync and dissipate its energy (destructive interference). This is a simplistic model of what happens in *I am Sitting in a Room*. All the components of my speech that related to the physical dimensions of the room are reinforced; those that don't, disappear. Think of yourself singing in the shower. You instinctively find the resonant frequency(-ies) of the small space you are in. Your voice sounds rich because it reinforces itself (2012, 90).

Lucier's recording transforms his voice, reciting a dry, technical description of the process— Lucier writes “[it] was crucial to avoid poetic references— poems, prayers, anything with high aesthetic value” and that anything but the most bland, affectless speech would “get in the way” of the process (1980, 30)— into a haunting, ghost-like reverberation built from the frequencies which are reinforced by the architecture of the room.

Like *Vespers*, *I am Sitting in a Room* builds an aural image of a physical space. It is the constant, ever-present vibrational relationships, activated by a recursive, repetitive procedure that creates a map that describes the room. Lucier's voice sets into motion, and it affected by, the materiality of the space: the walls, the carpet, the objects inside the space, even his own body as he witnesses the process. What we call pitch, the relative highness or lowness of a note, is

identified by the frequency of a sound wave. Because sound waves all move at the same speed, transferring their vibrations through air, and any other medium as well, certain pitches have different wavelengths. A higher note will vacillate across its medium more times in a given amount of time/space than will a lower note. As a result of this fact, the size and shape of a room will affect the quality of the sounds produced therein. The distance between the walls will necessarily be such that sound waves at certain frequencies will bounce off them at the exact right moment of their oscillation so as to double back on themselves, becoming twice as loud. Other frequencies will bounce off the wall near their zero-crossings, becoming quieter. Every room has a distinct sonic character. The frequencies that become more prominent and those that fall away into inaudibility more quickly can be said to be essential properties of a room, alongside its dimensions, and the materials out of which it is built. Lucier's recursive process traces these sonic properties of the room where it is performed, producing an audible map of the space, feeling out its contours and surfaces, measuring the distances and height of its walls, the reflectivity of its materials. A recording of *I am Sitting in a Room* produces a kind of audible rubbing—like a rubbing of an ancient stone tablet—where the dimensions of room are represented in another medium. The blurred tones which end Lucier's recording are the properties of that room made audible.

Trevor Wishart, in his *On Sonic Art*, describes the “sonic-object” of Lucier's *I am Sitting in a Room* as shifting from Lucier's voice to a “more abstract entity whose characteristic[s] derive from the room acoustic” (1996, 158). Collins, et al, describe the piece as a “demonstration of acoustic phenomena” pointing out that “the piece is as much a set of instructions for a process as it is a composition” (2013, 128). What is elided in these analyses of Lucier's piece as

“objective” or as a “demonstration”—as if it is simply a scientific illustration of a phenomenon—is the last part of Lucier’s spoken text. Collins et al, claim that *I am Sitting in a Room* is reducible to its instructions, implying somehow that the performance itself is perfunctory, almost unnecessary. But in Lucier’s text, he states: “I regard this activity not so much as a demonstration of a physical fact, but more as a way to smooth out any irregularities my speech might have.” In this line, Lucier provides the listener with something akin to a motivation for the work. He specifically says that the piece—for him—is not about the sonic articulation of a space, or the aural mapping of a specific room, but that in so doing he is smoothing out “irregularities” in his speech. In this one sentence, itself part of the composition, though often ignored in analyses of it, Lucier undermines—or at least, complicates—the piece’s formalist surface.

These irregularities to which Lucier refers are the hitches and hiccups, the short pauses in his speech caused by a stutter he’s had since childhood. In the two recorded versions of *I am Sitting in a Room* Lucier produced—one, shorter attempt at a studio on campus at Brandeis University, and a second, forty-four minute version recorded in his apartment in Middletown, Connecticut—his speech impediment is apparent. His voice catches especially on words beginning with the letter “r,” like “resonant” and “reinforce” in the Brandeis recording, and especially “rhythm” in the Brandeis and Middletown recordings. The halting, deliberate rhythm of Lucier’s stutter creates the movement of the piece as it progresses. It is these pauses, where a syllable gets stuck, worried over, and forced out, that shape the undulating drones which the piece becomes. As much as, in later writing about the piece, Lucier emphasizes that the content of the speech needed to be mundane, ordinary, frank, and non-poetic, these irregularities are not neutral.

Between the two recordings, the later, longer version recorded in Lucier's apartment contains fewer stutters. His speech is more forceful, more rehearsed in this recording. But his voice does catch, quite potently on two occasions. In the second sentence of the text—"I am recording the sound of my speaking voice and I am going to play it back into the room again and again until the resonant frequencies of the room reinforce themselves so that any semblance of my speech, with perhaps the exception of rhythm, is destroyed"—Lucier stutters on the "r" sound that begins the word "rhythm." It is this stutter that becomes the most recognizable aspect of the rhythm of the piece as the words themselves begin to disappear into the reverberation. It is as if he's illustrating his point about what precisely remains as evidence of the fallible, human voice at the center of this experiment. The second time he has noticeable difficulty with a word occurs one sentence later, in the text's final statement: "I regard this activity not so much as a demonstration of a physical fact, but more as a way to smooth out any irregularities my speech might have." On the word "smooth," Lucier draws out the sibilant "s." Again, the bright, hissy white noise of this extended "s" lingers in the later generations of the tape, long after the intelligible meaning of the text has been lost. This specific word is smoothed out, as Lucier hopes it would be, transforming from a stutter into a soft wave of swelling white noise. These two words are telling sites of Lucier's anxiety about his speech: as he describes the process, he admits that what will remain of his vocal performance will be its rhythm, a feature of his speech that he is anxious about. When he reveals the *goal* of the project— not a demonstration of an acoustic phenomenon but an attempt to eliminate the stutter from a piece of recorded text— his voice catches on the word which describes his desire. I don't know anything about the mechanics of Lucier's stutter, or whether certain sounds are more often stuttered, but it's hard not to hear

these two moments in relationship to the content of the speech, the meaning of those words, and to the longing Lucier espouses for the smoothing-out of irregularities. The austere, conceptual, process heard by DeLio, Wishart, Collins, et al., becomes a strategy for dealing with an anxiety, a disability. In her presentation “Cage, Cunningham and the Closet,” Sue-Ellen Case argues, in part, that the formalist strategies designed to eliminate choice, self, and subjectivity in John Cage and Merce Cunningham’s collaboration *Variations V* can be understood as an attempt to address the invisibility of representations of “the closet” and gay male relationships in the 1950s. Lucier’s erasure of traditional compositional authorship in favor of a scientific process also operates to evince a personal, subjective bundle of feelings and associations.⁶

Lucier addresses this element of *I am Sitting in a Room* in passing. Regarding the choice to use speech in the piece, he tells Douglas Simon: “My first impulse was to use various musical instruments playing a wide variety of sounds, but I tossed the idea out because it felt too ‘composely.’ Instead, I decided to use speech; it’s common to just about everybody and is a marvelous sound source. It has a reasonable frequency spectrum, noise, stops and starts, different dynamic levels, complex shapes. It’s ideal for testing the resonant characteristics of a space because it puts so much in all at one time” (1980, 36). At first he downplays the piece’s final sentence, regarding smoothing out the irregularities of speech. He describes the sonic advantages of using speech, emphasizing instead the conceptual nature of the composition. He goes on: “[Speech is] also extremely personal ... I’ve started paying attention to the characteristics of my speech which are original to my personality and don’t sound like anybody else’s; you know I’m a stutterer. So instead of trying to invent interesting speech patterns, I discovered that I have

⁶ Case’s talk to which I am referring was presented at the *Cage at UCLA* event at the Hammer Museum on December 12, 2012.

interesting speech patterns anyway; I don't have to invent them ... And while not everyone stutters, everyone has a certain amount of anxiety about speech. I've met many people who think they stutter. Bob Ashley, for instance, thinks he stutters. I wouldn't say so, but if he thinks he does, perhaps a lot of people think they do, and in that case, I feel that I'm in touch with people" (1980, 36). For Lucier, the use of his own anxious speech, even though the recording was made in solitude, in the privacy of his apartment, is a way of reaching out, of connecting through sound-in-space with other bodies in an affective circuit of communication. Regardless of one's own differences in voice, or anxieties about speech, it is an emotional experience to hear Lucier voice as it is smeared and distorted by the room's acoustics, understanding that to achieve the stated goal of the piece, his words must trade off their literal meaning for the smoothness he seeks.

It is vital, however, that studies which emphasize or acknowledge Lucier's stutter do not falsely give the impression that the piece contains any narrative of tragedy or triumph. *I am Sitting in a Room* is not about an identity, or a disability. My interest in the piece is that it is at once, something of an experiment with form, but one that cannot eschew the messy unpredictability of the ways bodies and objects interact in the space of a performance. What is lost in analyses of *I am Sitting in a Room* that concern themselves exclusively with the piece's formal engagement with space are—as with individual enactments of *Vespers*—the specificity and context of performance, and the assertion that space itself, is never neutral, never without a politics, sociality.

Pauline Oliveros and the Segregated Spaces of Tape Music Studios

In the previous two sections, I have described ways in which individual works of experimental sound art can engage conceptions of space and place. Max Neuhaus's *Times Square* reproduces the space of its iconic location for those listeners who hear it. Alvin Lucier's *Vespers* and *I am Sitting in a Room*, despite the formalism of their approaches, cannot escape the social, political, and affective dimensions present in relationships between bodies in space. In these examples, the connections between affect, the sonic, and space have arisen directly from the processes by which the pieces were created. The form of Lucier's vocal work revealed a dimension of affect in its structural articulation of an emotional anxiety regarding the author's speech. I now wish to turn to another work where an emotion—specifically those of unease, embarrassment, and even righteous anger—are bundled within what, on its surface, appears to be a formal demonstration of an acoustic phenomenon. In the following case study—Pauline Oliveros's tape piece *The Day I Disconnected the Erase Head and Forgot to Reconnect It* (1966)—the audio's dry, formal experimentation with a piece of technology reveals a relationship to space that is politicized through the anecdotal narrative of its composition.

My methodology in analyzing this piece by Oliveros will differ from that used to discuss Neuhaus and Lucier. I will address the social and political context in which Oliveros was composing in a way that I did not in my analysis of the other two composers. It could be argued that this distinction is driven by the nature of the compositions I am analyzing: Oliveros's piece is itself more overtly engaged with its context than are *Times Square* and *I am Sitting in a Room* in that it narrativizes a particularly charged encounter with misogyny in an electronic music

studio. However, analyzing these three artists in this way runs the risk of taking for granted that the work of the two white, male, heterosexual composers I have previously discussed is somehow “timeless” or “universal” and not the product of its historical/political time and place. I have attempted to provide a small amount of background on Neuhaus’s work that situates it in the politically radical art movements of the 1960s and ‘70s, while Lucier’s *Vespers* can be seen to engage concerns about democratic governance and alternative political structures that were circulating on the American left during the same period. However, it remains a symptom of those composers’ privilege that their work made and listened to without specific reference to their gender, sexual, or racial identifications. As I will discuss below, while white, heterosexual men can make art that is in a sense “unmarked” by identity, the music composed and performed by Oliveros—a lesbian woman—is forced to account for the composer’s positionality within culturally-marginalized categories. *The Day I Disconnected the Erase Head and Forgot to Reconnect It* is perhaps her most overtly critical and political composition from her early electronic phase.

The composition’s title contains a full statement which, in part, describes the process by which Oliveros produced the recording. Many of Oliveros’s early electronic works were made using a tape delay system of her own invention, created by modifying tape recorders in various ways. *The Day I Disconnected the Erase Head and Forgot to Reconnect It* was created by doing exactly what its title describes, so that when a loop of tape is run, over and over again through the machine, audio material accumulates on the tape without ever erasing what was already on it. In one sense, the title explains the unique process Oliveros developed— an experiment with technology and the form of tape music— but it contains an unusual specificity, which

personalizes and transforms its clinical descriptiveness. It not only refers to a process by which the music was produced but also to the story of its production: the specific day that the piece was made, and also the aftermath of her modification to the tape machine. This narrative of Oliveros's faux-pas, her forgetting to undo her dismantling of what was, undoubtedly, an expensive piece of studio equipment, resonates with her position at the University of Toronto Electronic Music Studio, where she was working as a visiting composer at the time she made the piece in question, as a woman in an overwhelmingly male-dominated space. She did not title the piece something like: "Tape Loop Feedback with a Disconnected Erase Head," which would be an accurate description of the formal process of the composition. Rather, the title situates the piece's generation on a specific day in a kind of "Once upon a time..." style of phrasing. It tells a story, rather than demonstrates a process. In addition, the word 'forgot' in the title also pulls the statement away from the dry frankness of a conceptual instruction. The listener is asked to decide if Oliveros is sincerely contrite, or deeply sarcastic in her admission of forgetfulness.

The language of electronic music is formed by a vocabulary of technological mastery and dominance—a discourse that is traditionally gendered as masculine. Tara Rodgers address this history in the introduction to her book *Pink Noises: Women On Electronic Music and Sound*. She writes "This persistent militaristic terminology and aesthetic priorities of rationalistic precision and control epitomize notions of male technological competence and 'hard' mastery in electronic music production. These have been produced and constituted by their opposite: non-technical or 'soft' knowledges and practices that are coded as female" (2010, 7). The development of electronic music is largely concurrent with the formation of a number of electronic music studios, which resembled scientific research laboratories more than they did places where music

might be written or performed. One such studio was IRCAM (Institut de Recherche et de Coordination Acoustique/Musique) founded by Pierre Boulez. In press releases regarding IRCAM and its music, Boulez wrote: “The creator’s intuition alone is powerless to provide a comprehensive translation of musical invention. It is thus necessary for him to collaborate with the scientific research worker in order to envision the distant future, to imagine less personal, and thus broader solutions...” He goes on: “Technology and the composer: collaboration between scientists and musicians... is therefore, a necessity... Our grand design today... is to prepare the way for the integration and, through an increasingly pertinent dialogue, to reach a common language” (Boulez quoted in Born 1995, 1). Boulez’s words clearly characterize IRCAM’s research as a scientific endeavor, one of the utmost importance. Throughout the complete quotation, he refers several times to the “solutions” the studio hopes to reach. If the few words pertaining to music were removed, one could be forgiven for thinking the text a promotion for NASA, or a military research facility, rather than an arts collective.

IRCAM was one of many such studios. Sue-Ellen Case draws a parallel between the development of electronic music studios and the use of the term “experimental music”: “The term ‘experimental’ marked the laboratory/engineering aspect of this new genre. Events took place in spaces that resembled laboratories more than recital halls and the instruments were either machines, or machinic adaptations of acoustic instruments” (2007, 128). This is particularly true in Europe where many of the electronic music studios were built inside state-sponsored radio stations, like the Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (or ORTF) in France. The focus on cutting-edge technology that drove the broadcasting industry pervaded the music-making divisions of these studios as well. Not only was the scientific language describing

these types of spaces implicitly coded masculine, these laboratories themselves were occupied mainly by male artists and scientists. Photographs of composers working in studios such as the Groupe de Recherches Musicales (GRM), the Institut national de l'audiovisuel (INA), and the Groupe international de musique électroacoustique de Paris (GIMEP)—studios whose names suggest secretive government technology projects as much as they do conservatories of music—depict men, sometimes even in lab coats, posing before large, electronic devices connected by masses of criss-crossing wires. Tara Rodgers, in her interview with Pauline Oliveros, points out the fact that images of these studios invariably show male composers and very rarely female ones. She points out to Oliveros: “Recently I saw a photograph of you at the Tape Music Center in the 1960s with some of your colleagues, and you were the only woman in a group of men. I can’t help but feel that not much has changed since my graduate classes had a similar ratio” (2010: 31). Despite the presence of a small number of women composers who worked in electronic music during this early period of development in experimental music and sound art—composers such as Eliane Radigue, Annea Lockwood, Micheline Coulombe Saint-Marcoux, Mireille Chamass-Kyrou, Beatriz Ferreyra, and Christina Kubisch—some of whom were associated, off and on, with several of the studios listed above, the ratio of male to female composers was very far from even.

Georgina Born, in her ethnography of IRCAM, emphasizes the gendered stratification of work and pay in the studio. She writes: “Overall, the pay scale sanctioned the sexual division of labor by comparatively and systematically devaluing both the sphere of reproduction (administrative and clerical staff) vis-à-vis production, and all women workers. The uneven distribution of salaries and conditions, then, closely paralleled IRCAM’s status hierarchy as

shown by the stratification of and between the spheres of production and reproduction, in turn associated with the institute's sexual division of labor" (1995, 135-136). Thorough analysis of the conditions present in similar electronic music studios during the 1950s and 60s have not been published, so it would be irresponsible to assume that IRCAM's hierarchical structure with respect to gender is necessarily representative for such studios as a class.

However, one such studio is often characterized differently from the dominant presentation (both in photographic representation, and the rhetoric of the studio's research) associated with many of the European electronic music studios. The San Francisco Tape Music Center had nowhere near the amount of official government support that the European studios enjoyed. The studio was founded in the attic of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music by Ramon Sender and Oliveros. Where photographs of studios like GRM and IRCAM support associations with the antiseptic environment of science laboratories, The Tape Music Center appeared caught up in the San Francisco of the 1960s, and the youth movements soundtracked by Big Brother and the Holding Company, and the Grateful Dead. Images of the Tape Center show composers in casual dress, often smiling and posing in playful tableaux. In one group photo, reproduced in David W. Bernstein's *The San Francisco Tape Music Center: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-Garde* (2008), four composers (Tony Martin, William Maginnis, Ramon Sender and Oliveros) all clearly laughing at the moment the picture was taken are standing around a seated Morton Subotnick. Sender and Oliveros have their hands on Subotnick's head for some unknown reason. The image is goofy, depicting a group of people who are obviously having fun. It is light years off from the stiff seriousness of the images from the studio's European and Canadian counterparts. Throughout Bernstein's history of the studio, references to the

psychedelic '60s abound—composers talk about the influence of drug use on the music composed there and the many connections they were actively trying to forge between the counterculture and the avant-garde. I do not point this out simply to characterize a studio cofounded by a female composer as essentially less serious, or less humorless than those whose membership was almost exclusively male, nor do I wish to suggest that no tensions existed for Oliveros in San Francisco. Of her experience at the Tape Music Center, she writes: “My position was unique. I held my own with male musicians though sometimes I felt discomfort. Even though I was included in the groups that I worked with I felt an invisible barrier. As I had noticed early in life, males bond strongly around music and technology and leave women out of their conversations and performances” (2004, 134-135). I only wish to suggest that the atmosphere of Oliveros’s studio is often depicted as looser, less uptight in the documentation, interviews and scholarship regarding electronic music during that period. This distinction will serve to illustrate the contrast between two spaces: The San Francisco Tape Music Center and the University of Toronto Electronic Music Studio, where Oliveros worked in 1966.

During the early and middle 1960s, Oliveros developed a technique for live electronic improvisation using oscillators, multiple tape machines, and occasionally acoustic instruments. Her use of multiple tape recorders facilitated the development of her sophisticated tape delay systems that she would use extensively throughout this period of her composing. Heidi von Gunden in her book, *The Music of Pauline Oliveros* (1983) describes Oliveros’s tape delay techniques in the following way:

The basic principle is the reiteration or echo of feedback. Material being recorded on one machine is simultaneously threaded through another tape recorder that is

in the playback mode, and then the output is routed back to the first tape recorder so that the initial machine is recording its current material and also the sound of past material. The time delay between a sound and its repetition depends upon the distance between the two tape recorders (1983, 54).

As Sue-Ellen Case points out, “Oliveros stretched the tapes through actual space to alter the time of the looping” (2007, 128). In this sense, the length of the delay becomes the sonification of a configuration and placement of objects in space—the time between a sound and its repeat represents the spatial relationship between objects and Oliveros’s body in the space of the studio. The length of a loop of tape, which is determined by the size and shape of a room, as well as the layout of the furniture and equipment therein, can be said to determine an essential character of the audio it generates. Everything from rhythmic patterns, to the pitch of the oscillations, to the speed of the buildup of feedback in the piece is influenced by the physical stretching of magnetic tape within space.

Von Gunden points out another physical and spatial element of Oliveros’s delay systems: the staggered repetition of sounds synthesize an artificial room reverberation effect:

One of the results of tape delay is a reverberant sound resembling live sound heard in a favorable acoustic environment. This quality was crucial, since one of the major criticisms of early electronic music was that it sounded dead or static. The sounds were so perfect that they lacked the transient activity of acoustical sound that we know recognize as part of the listening pleasure (1983, 54).

Not only do Oliveros’s delay systems make audible an actual relationship between the devices in space in the studio, but through imperfections in the medium, degradation of the audio over successive generations of repeats, and the feedback introduced into the system, they create a virtual “space” with its own, unique reverberant characteristics and responses, as if it were a

“real” physical space. This artificial approximation of reverb simulates the sensation that the listener is inside a resonant room where the sonic vibrations of the music can reflect off of the surfaces and materials in the space.

For two months in the summer of 1966, Oliveros left San Francisco to study with Hugh le Caine—a noted synthesizer inventor and musique concrète composer whose *Dripsody* (1955) is considered formative to the genre—at the University of Toronto Electronic Music Studio. Despite only being there for a short time, Oliveros completed a number of tape pieces there, including her series *I of IV*, *II of IV*, *III of IV*, *IV of IV*, and *V of IV*, as well as *Big Mother is Watching you*. Although these pieces are all better known than *The Day I Disconnected the Erase Head and Forgot to Reconnect It*—due perhaps to the fact that this piece was not released commercially until it was included in the box set *Reverberations: Tape & Electronic Music, 1961-1970* (2012) which commemorated Oliveros’s 80th birthday—it is this piece that best illustrates the complicated place Oliveros occupies in the documented history of electronic music, and moreover, as a female composer working in the largely male, and misogynist space of electronic music studios.

For one, it suggests the uncomfortable position of Oliveros’s tokenism as the only female composer mentioned in a pantheon of men. Rodgers notes, “Pauline Oliveros is often isolated as the only woman in textbooks that otherwise cover a variety of men’s work in detail... [Her] isolation has at times positioned her work as representative of an essentialized, “feminine” aesthetic” (2010, 11). The piece’s title draws on the friction she experienced at the studio in Toronto. Von Gunden quotes Oliveros’s story about one particular run in with the studio’s director.

In one electronic studio I was accused of black art, and the director disconnected one amplifier to discourage my practices, declaring that signal generators are of no use above or below the audio range because you can't hear them. Since all processing equipment contains amplifiers, I found that I could cascade two pieces of equipment and get enough gain for my combination tones to continue my work, plus the addition of various amplifier characteristics or orchestration (Oliveros quoted in Von Gunden 1983, 58-59).

The term "black art" connotes witchcraft—an accusation I imagine would have hardly been leveled at a male composer. In addition, the studio director's distrust of Oliveros's technical expertise shows a kind of condescension that seems likewise gendered. It is amusing then to note that Oliveros's superior understanding of the technology allowed her to work around the director's attempts at limiting her access to subaudio frequency generators.⁷

Oliveros's interest in subaudio oscillators had to do with their ability to generate combination tones, through frequency modulation. Von Gunden explains: "Combination tones are sometimes heard when two or more tones are sounding simultaneously" (1983, 57). The accumulation of tones in a tape delay system, and the ability to alter their pitches in small increments by adjusting the speed of the tape machines, facilitates the production of these combination tones. In a sense, it is the addition of two frequencies that modulate one another, producing the illusion of a third frequency. These tones manifest themselves as ghostly. They are haunted, quavering buildups of feedback which sing out, above or below the fundamental pitches

⁷ Oliveros is now widely recognized as a technical pioneer in this realm. In his lectures on experimental music, published under the title *Music 109* after the class he taught at Wesleyan, Lucier specifically praises Oliveros for her inventive virtuosity with tape loops and feedback systems (2012, 106-108). No longer are these techniques mistrusted, rather they are considered foundational within electronic music.

that produce them. Perhaps the electronic studio director was not far off in accusing Oliveros of a form of witchcraft.

This technique is used to great effect in *The Day I Disconnected the Erase Head and Forgot to Reconnect It*. Combination tones are built up by layering repeats on top of one another by disconnecting the erase head on one of the tape players in the delay system. In this configuration, when a tape loop passes back over the record head, it does not have its content demagnetized beforehand. The result is an infinite accumulation of layered tones. The piece begins with a thin, buzzing drone. In the background, a rhythmic swishing noise is audible as the tape loops back on itself at a fixed tempo, measuring out the length of the delay time. The drone quickly widens out, filling the stereo spectrum as the accumulation of sounds becomes apparent. This process isn't just set into motion and allowed to continue unmolested. Oliveros really *performs* it, making adjustments to the system, her gestures translated clearly into the sonic. Combination tones emerge as Oliveros tunes her oscillators (or perhaps the amount of feedback allowed into the signal path) which become either additional frequencies that swirl around the fundamental pitches of the constant drone, or act as vibrato modulation on the entire sonic field. Throughout the composition's thirty-two minutes, Oliveros improvises on this general theme, exploring a wealth of sonic ideas and potentials in a generally limited sound palette. At times, the drone thins out to just a couple of simple pitches, then filling back out into a complex soundscape of overlapping tones, rising and falling in frequency.

According to David W. Bernstein's liner notes in the *Reverberations* box set, the title of the piece came from another encounter with the studio's director. After having accused her of practicing "black arts" and disconnecting her amplifier, this director was "displeased one day

when Oliveros forgot to reconnect the erase head on one of the tape recorders she was using (which made the continuous accumulation of sound possible).” Bernstein continues: “*The Day I Disconnected the Erase Head and Forgot to Reconnect It*, Oliveros’s masterful sythesis of noise elements, difference tones, and tape delay commemorates her breach of studio protocol” (2012).

It is no wonder that Oliveros had difficulty working in the University of Toronto Electronic Music Studio. According to her own writing, she had some difficulty working in the San Francisco Tape Music Center— a studio she had co-founded— as the only woman in a traditionally male space. In San Francisco, the studio had been built by a group of friends working closely with one another, and according to many of their personal accounts, doing so out of love and mutual respect for each other and each other’s music. At the same time, those composers saw themselves as being involved in the countercultural scene developing in San Francisco in the 1960s, and all of the practices and associations that arose from it. The University of Toronto Electronic Music Studio was likely based more closely on the work dynamics of the French studios, where many of its composers had also trained, and the atmosphere was more buttoned-down and laboratorial. Moreover, through several accounts, it was clear that Oliveros was not trusted, or respected at the Canadian studio, and her treatment was in part determined by her being a woman. The music Oliveros created during this period contrasts the majority of musique concrète produced at that studio. Most tape music relied heavily on micro-editing—the precise splicing of tiny fragments of tape into fixed, permanent assemblages—Oliveros’s live tape improvisations are flowing, gestural and ecstatic. They relate more closely to Terry Riley’s all-night tape-delayed saxophone performances—which were improvisatory, likely drug-fueled meetings of the academic avant-garde with so-called hippy culture—or even the contemporary

Noise Music that I discuss in depth in the next chapter (most of which follow Oliveros's electronic pieces by twenty years or more).

Conclusions

The four sound works that have been discussed in this chapter all take different approaches in their articulation of the interaction between sound and space. Neuhaus's *Times Square* unobtrusively frames everyday sonic phenomena as its artistic material, creating a site to interrogate sound's affective influence at the boundaries of perception, while Lucier's *Vespers* and *I am Sitting in a Room* not only describe architecture through audible vibration, but also register as performances of social interaction and opportunities to examine anxiety and emotional vulnerability. Oliveros's *The Day I Disconnected the Erase Head and Forgot to Reconnect It* parodies neomodernist descriptive functionality with its title, and infuses the work with a feminist political narrative through its story of frustration, embarrassment and social exclusion. I have engaged affect theory, combining it with a more traditional cultural studies-tinted lens, in order to intervene in the dominant narrative of sound art—to insist that sustained attention must be paid to the political and emotional dimensions of sonic works. One must account for the human within the electronic and continue to question how examples of sound art are to be *felt*—even, perhaps especially, those artworks which may, on their surface, to seem to be—as Lucier says—“demonstrations of physical fact” or formal exercises in the materiality of sound.

2. Noise and Music in an Underground Art Subculture

In the spring of 2015, I attended a conference in Los Angeles on Noise Music.⁸ As a scholar, performer and fan of this music, I was excited and also skeptical about what the atmosphere of the event would be like, and what ideas would emerge. The panels were made up of a fairly even mix of Noise Music artists and academics, two groups that have not had, in my opinion, much historical success interacting or collaborating. The perspective many scholars take—from outside of the underground community for whom the music is made—too often praises Noise as radical and emancipatory in a way which only highlights those scholars unfamiliarity with the music and the scene. On the other hand, many artists themselves have been traditionally resistant to scholarship focused on Noise—an anti-intellectualism similar to that of the more reactionary wings of the punk, industrial and extreme metal subcultures that remains dominant. I wasn't expecting much of an ideological clash, however. What I was expecting ended up happening: the Noise conference celebrated an entirely amicable consensus regarding Noise Music's affinity with all the most fashionable brands of contemporary philosophy.

The names which appeared, over and over again, from presenter to presenter, consisted of all the hippest books' and blogs' version of a "murderer's row": Ray Brassier, Robin MacKay, Quentin Meillassoux, and even some older favorites like Badiou and Deleuze. By the second day

⁸ Although I do not generally capitalized musical genre names, throughout this chapter I will capitalize the word "Noise" when I am referring to the musical genre, and I will leave it uncapitalized when I am referring to the sonic phenomenon of noise.

of the conference, it had become a running joke that each presenter began with a long litany of definitions of the concept of noise: noise is anything that is unpleasant or unwanted; noise crosses boundaries and escapes containment; noise is excess; noise is whatever resists meaning, rejects signification, and so on. Most speakers hoped to develop a working definition of noise that accommodated their particular philosophical sympathies. But regardless of the different philosophical orientations, most speakers agreed that noise was something that exceeded meaning-making and subjectivity. In this sense, these arguments appeared to align themselves with the strong anti-anthropocentric impulse which dominates much contemporary intellectual thought—noise’s opposition to communication being somehow analogous to a perspective outside of human consciousness. Noise’s similarity to the sonification of data collected from outer space—say, from the magnetic field surrounding a planet or comet—reinforces its presumed status as existing completely outside of the world as it exists for humans, uncolonized by human minds. In addition to the anti-anthropocentric agendas, many presenters offered a radical political perspective represented, suggesting that noise provided some form of resistance to capitalism, despite the fact that Noise Music circulates through all the same economic channels that any kind of music does—through buying and selling records, concert tickets, and T-shirts. Very little mention was made of any of the theoretical movements which have gripped the humanities in the last thirty years: feminism, critical race theory, queer theory, disability studies, or any other lens which could be dismissed as too concerned with identification, bodies, or subjectivity and which might seem to lack an air of cold, philosophical rigor.

Affect theory, which enjoys much of the same hipness at the moment that these philosophical movements do and even shares a fair amount of its DNA with some areas of

contemporary philosophy through the common ancestor of Deleuze, was also noticeably absent. I thought that its focus on the messiness of emotions and sensation might have provided a productive intervention into a discussion which threatened to valorize Noise Music specifically for its imagined *inhuman* qualities. One scholar and artist described the “noisiness” of his performances as the uncomfortable tension between himself and the audience, which he attempts to push to its limit. He claimed that he thinks of this tension as a sculpture, a physical presence in the room. I told him that I thought the sculpture metaphor was confusing in that it presumed that the tension was solid, immovable, and unchanging like a block of marble as opposed to a fluid, vibratory fluctuation of forces between bodies in space. I offered that Teresa Brennan’s *The Transmission of Affect* (2004) might provide better methods for thinking through the social and emotional atmosphere of a shared space, but I doubt my suggestion was seriously considered.

I want to insist that I am not wholly unconvinced by these presenters’ ideas. In fact, I can find myself strongly compelled by these liberatory models of noise. As someone who is deeply invested in this area of thought, both personally and professionally, I am attracted to arguments which insist upon noise’s uniqueness as art and its radical potential. I see a great many problems when one actually tries to apply some of these philosophical models to the genre of Noise Music without accounting for the experiences of the lives of those who participate in the subculture. The simplest way to state my issue is this: Noise Music only resembles contemporary philosophical definitions of noise because to scholars seemingly unaccustomed to listening to Noise, the music remains meaningless, excessive, random. However, to those who participate in the culture, the music is not experienced or consumed any differently from other music. Indeed, Noise Music’s potential to overwhelm and shock dissipates very quickly as one becomes familiar

with it. The fact that the genre shares its name with the general phenomenon of noise may be a red-herring. In 2015, pinning down a definition of noise which cites the philosophical history of that concept, and then using it to illuminate a contemporary work of Noise Music—or using examples of Noise Music to illustrate a point about noise—is like booking a Geology conference exclusively dedicated to Rock 'n Roll music. In my view, the musical genre's name is a metaphor, and suggesting that it is somehow essential or ontological to the music renders the actual lived experience of hearing that music and participating in that culture invisible.

This was not always the case, though. At its origins, Noise Music genuinely aspired to noise. Its practitioners sought to create a form in total opposition to music. What followed, however, was a three-decades long history in which the noisiness of Noise became codified, shed its meaninglessness, and solidified into an established, agreed-upon musical language. The reason that the scholars and artists who presented at the conference were able to make their claims about Noise Music at all has to do with the largely-unsuccessful experiments of the earliest artists who adopted the word to describe their practice, and their attempts to escape bourgeois taste and the commodification of aesthetics. By the time that scholarship on noise took notice, the music had become something other than it was, and something other than what the scholars wanted to study.

This chapter is a discussion of the musical genre Noise Music, focusing on both terminology and practice attempting to account for some of the problems that stand in the way of a clear understand of the phenomenon. Among other things, I will argue that if Noise Music was ever *noisy* in a way that afforded any critically-useful theorization of noise, then it was only ever so for a brief moment. Almost immediately following the first sonic experiments of Hijokaidan,

The New Blockaders and The Haters, Noise Music's *noisiness*, it seems, was tamed, subsumed into a predictable, codified art practice and underground music field. This shift, I will argue, can be heard not only in the music itself, but also in the politics of the various artists' stated 'meanings' communicated by their work. Extra-musical elements—including interviews, live performances, album and song titles, and the visual art which adorned the packaging of the cassettes, records and compact discs released throughout Noise Music's thirty-something year old history—will be examined alongside the sounds themselves to trace this historical movement between the two seemingly incommensurable poles of noise and music.

What is Noise Music?

Noise Music is a genre of underground experimental music that emerged in the late 1970s. It appeared on several different continents, almost simultaneously, and out of multiple distinct historical and stylistic traditions of musical performance. Describing its origins, as well as its characteristics provides a number of difficulties. The first artists to label their own music Noise were likely the Japanese band Hijokaidan, who formed in Osaka in 1979. However, the founding members of that group often cite performances by the North American band Airway, who toured Japan in 1978, as for providing the inspiration and the format upon which Hijokaidan based their own sound.⁹ Airway—whose membership was culled from a collective of artists who later dubbed themselves the Los Angeles Free Music Society—did not use the term Noise Music

⁹ The story that Hijokaidan began as a result of imitating Airway is a common one within Noise Music communities. Its validity is discussed in an interview with Airway's Joe Potts in an interview conducted for *The Wire Magazine*, available online at lafms.wordpress.com/joe-potts-interview/.

to describe their own work. The music was only retroactively labeled after the term had become popular in Asia, Europe and North America. In Japan, the name for the genre was based on the borrowed English word: *Noizu* (Novak 2013, 7).

As with any genre of music, Noise Music's history is crowded with possibly-apocryphal tales of who-did-it-first, of breakthroughs, of inventions and innovations. None of these are of any practical consequence to this chapter, but two specific concerns which cloud these histories likewise cloud any clear discussion of Noise Music. The first has to do with the word itself. Because *noise* is a common enough word in everyday (English) language, especially as a negative judgment of music an individual listener finds unpleasant or distasteful, it is too often misapplied to music outside of the Noise Music genre. Noise Music has become a catch-all term, perpetuated by careless journalists and popular critics, used to describe any music that, for whatever reason, sounds noisy to them. In his book, *Japanoise: Music at the Edge of Circulation*, David Novak writes about the the Boredoms, an experimental Rock band active from the late 1980s until the present, and their battle to shed the Noise descriptor. He writes: "Osaka's Boredoms, for example, became one of the most widely know examples of Japanese Noise in North American reception, although the group has argued vehemently against being considered a Noise band" (2013, 13). He goes on: "[Boredoms member] Eye [Yamataka] began to inform North American audiences of the differences, insisting that Boredoms was not Noise, just 'noisy.' In explaining the distinction, he occasionally mentioned groups like Merzbow and Hijokaidan, which, he explained, could accurately be described as Noise" (2013, 14). Likewise, To Live and Shave in LA, a messy, improvisational rock group from Florida who are the subject of Ray Brassier's essay "Genre Is Obsolete," explicitly deny that they are a Noise band (2007, 61)

despite the fact that they are continuously labeled as such in print (including by Brassier himself). Even bands as popular and palatable as Nirvana have been described as Noise bands. A 1993 interview with Nirvana frontman Kurt Cobain in the Dutch publication *OOR Magazine* begins: “Everyone knows the fairy tale that came true, the one of Nirvana: a rebellious little noise-band becoming superstars.”¹⁰ The abundance of these misattributions renders any careful examination of the Noise Music genre fairly difficult. If the genre thought to be such a wide umbrella as to encompass “noisy” versions of rock music—such as Sonic Youth and Royal Trux—electronic dance music—such as Kraftwerk and Skinny Puppy—free jazz—such as Borbetomagus and John Zorn—heavy metal—such as Sunn0)))—and even classical avant-garde music—such as James Tenney and Pauline Oliveros—then the term becomes all but useless.

Another stumbling block in discussing Noise Music is its apparent opposition to the second word in that term: music. To address Noise Music as music is to already deny one of the genre’s earliest tenets: that Noise is a sound-based artistic performance genre that is defined by its resistance to any traditionally musical characteristics, and that it is therefore a distinct art practice completely separate from music. As I will explain later, in the work of some of the earliest innovators of Noise Music, the audible component of their performances was beside the point, either merely a byproduct of a physical activity being carried out (albeit, often loudly) or the provocation for a confrontational social event. I will specifically address the second of those two possibilities for noisiness later on in this chapter.

Regarding the inclusiveness of the term Noise Music, I will attempt to define here the limits of my project. I will consider in this chapter a handful of artists whose Noise Music falls

¹⁰ Accessed online at msu.edu/user/obrien31/dutchbandinterview.htm.

under the more specific category of Harsh Noise, sometimes called Pure Noise. For the purposes of this study, the Noise Music I will refer to is that which cannot also be classified under any other pre-existing genre, only made louder, more distorted, or played sloppily—it is not *noisy* rock music, or *noisy* techno. Harsh Noise contains no references to traditional compositional structures or progressions and contains no significant repeating rhythms or anything one could identify as melody or harmony. Harsh Noise is, in large part, produced electronically, through the use of distortion (over-modulation) and feedback and it is almost always experienced as being very loud. Traditional musical instruments are rarely used in Noise, and if they are, they are usually broken or used in a way other than how they were designed. This is the Noise Music that Eye Yamataka (referred to above in the quote from Novak) would have clearly understood to be authentic Noise Music, rather than the mislabeling of his loud, aggressive rock band.

The artists who will appear in this chapter—The New Blockaders, The Haters,¹¹ Macronympha, Kazumoto Endo and Pedestrian Deposit—represent one lineage of this type of music from its earliest days in the beginning of the 1980s, through the first few years of the new millennium. Geographically, three are North American, one is European and one is Japanese. Although the miles that separate these artists from one another might appear to render any comparison illogical or untenable, Noise Music remains characterized by a transnational exchange. Although small local scenes existed in some of the larger cities in the US, Western Europe and Japan, the Noise Music community thrived on international communication, exchange, and collaboration. As both Novak and Thomas Bey William Bailey in his book *Unofficial Release: Self-Released and Handmade Audio in Post-Industrial Society* argue, it was

¹¹ Both of these two Noise groups insist that the word “the” in both of their names is always capitalized.

precisely the transnational circulation of sounds, words and ideas that defined the Noise Music underground.

I will divide this chapter into three large sections. The first will address the varying definitions of the word “noise” and several of its common uses. I will try to work up to a specific, and productive understanding of the term which will allow it to be clearly measured against the characteristics of Noise Music. Noise can be defined in so many different ways— it is at once both incredibly specific when viewed through the lens of a particular field of study where the term defines a very limited category of phenomena, and highly unspecific when spoken of in everyday, “common sense” language. In the latter discourse, the term’s usage is entirely subjective, it seems, where noise exists only in the “ear of the behearer,” as determined by that person’s positive or negative judgment of a given sound. I will argue that, given any possible definition of noise, Noise Music can be heard as being ultimately no more noisy than any other genre of music, and its relationship to its namesake must be no more essential than rock ‘n roll’s relationship to actual rocks, or blues music to the color. I intend to argue that Noise Music is a musical genre much like any other, which can be engaged by listeners, critics, and scholars using the same tools as one would use to experience and think about any other musical practice. The history I intend to follow will be organized by individual Noise Music artists’ inescapable, and continuing relationship with the notion of noise as a social, cultural, historical, sonic phenomenon.

The second part of this chapter will address, in some depth, several case studies, examining how one might hear signification produced in Noise Music—a form that often cites its “meaninglessness” as its defining attribute. These case studies will be loosely chronological in

arrangement, although not to be taken as a “history” per se. This account of Noise Music is just one of a great many potential ones, though mine is one I believe has yet to be told. It will necessarily ignore many significant developments in Noise, ignore artists, groups and recordings that a complete history of Noise Music could not responsibly overlook. Comprehensiveness is not my goal, and I have selected only a few artists who I feel are representative of the specific shifts I wish to address, without repeating myself for the sake of including every historically important figure. As a result, several of the artists herein discussed are those who often come up in scholarship regarding Noise Music—The Haters and Merzbow are examined in nearly every major text on the genre—while others who I believe represent specific aspects of the genre who are rarely discussed in print—but who are very highly regarded by Noise Music practitioners and non-academic fans— will be considered at length.

The first case study I will engage will be the 1995 LP, *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* by the Noise group Macronympha. The album is widely considered one of the greatest and most influential Noise records of all time within the subculture of Noise fandom, but it has yet to appear in any scholarship on the genre. The record will serve as a particularly productive example of Noise Music’s shift from noisiness toward more musically-legible mode, and also what I will characterize as the right wing radicalism that accompanied this shift. *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* provides us an example of the ways an individual Noise Music recording might proliferate significations and produce a kind of “legibility” by opening itself up to various avenues for analysis, depending on one’s interest or critical lens. My reading of the record is a kind of demonstration that is a self-contained argument, but also illustrates ways that Noise Music can be understood using the tools of a cultural studies-oriented approach. I will argue that

despite its sonic simplicity, and rather rudimentary musicality, *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* is a multilayered work that can be heard as engaging with issues of urban noise pollution, deindustrialization, nostalgia, poverty, and racism, ultimately expressing a deeply confused and reactionary perspective on white supremacy within performative codes of white trash masculinity.

The third part of this chapter will consist of three close readings of individual Noise Music compositions. My analysis of *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* does not focus on the moment-to-moment sonic unfolding of the music, instead drawing out its reading of the album through its cultural context, its production history and the liner notes and artwork for the LP. The music itself consists of forty minutes of a nearly unmoving wall of distortion, and a close reading of its sonic characteristics would likely yield little insight with respect to the argument I'm building. However, I will describe, with some detail, two brief tracks from Kazumoto Endo's 1999 CD *While You Were Out*, and one track from a 2003 split 7" record by Pedestrian Deposit. These three case studies will address ways in which Noise artists have dealt, specifically and knowingly, with the "noisiness" of their Noise. Because the genre is forever burdened with its terminological reference, many influential Noise Music works can be considered, in themselves, to be *theories of noise*. By this I mean that within an individual piece of Noise Music, I wish to demonstrate how its arrangement can suggest that certain sonic elements be heard as noise (as disruptive, unpleasant, excessive) and others as not-noise (even, perhaps, music) in ways that allow listeners to think through the notion of noisiness and its relationship to sound and music.

Noise and Noisiness

What is noise? Too often, in everyday language, a sort of “common sense” definition prevails. To rephrase Justice Potter Stewart’s comment on obscenity: we might not be able to define it, but we know noise when we hear it. From this perspective, noise is any sound that is deemed unpleasant, encroaching, invasive. Noise is necessarily unwanted, a kind of audible pollution that requires abatement. Noise is sound out of place, crossing boundaries, disturbing borders, and escaping containment. Unfortunately, this characterization of noise presents us with a moving target. Never can we say that any particular sound is, in itself, noise. This definition describes a noise that is ever-changing, and identified from without. A sound’s noisiness is not inherent, or essential to its being. Consider that if we “know noise when we hear it,” then the *we* or *I* who can hear has inserted itself into this system of acoustic communication—which is to say that noise requires ears and a mind to perceive it and to subsequently pass judgment on its quality in order for it to exist as noise. Paul Hegarty begins his book on *Noise/Music*: “Noise is not an objective fact. It occurs in relation to perception— both direct (sensory) and according to presumptions made by an individual. These are going to vary according to historical, geographical and cultural location” (2007, 3). He goes on to say: “Noise is cultural, and different groups of hearing machines will process sounds differently” (2007, 3). R. Murray Schafer provides a couple of amusing examples. For instance, he notes that “the most complained of sounds in the city of Essen (Germany) is the restaurant noise of pounding veal for schnitzels. In Hong Kong a principal source of noise complaints is the sound of ‘mah jong parties’” (1994, 198). Taken to its logical extreme, the subjective character of any definition of noise suggests the

following conclusion: if nothing is inherently noisy (i.e.: noisy in itself, preceding and exceeding human audition and evaluation) then noise is everything and nothing. It appears that we reach, as a result, a particularly unhelpful analogue of aesthetic theory, where noisiness becomes akin to “beauty” or “ugliness”—a floating descriptor of subjective experience, which necessarily cannot account for over six billion individual perceptual perspectives at a time. While this may, in fact, be the way that the term noise is most often deployed in discourse, it is too slippery a category to provide any usefulness toward the question of the noisiness of Noise Music.

If noise is subjective, individual, and at the same time, historical, geographical and cultural, perhaps we can narrow our field by following the notion of “unwantedness” in noise. Many dictionary definitions insist that a sound must be unwanted in order to be deemed noise. R. Murray Schafer suggests that the “most satisfactory definition of noise for general usage is still ‘unwanted sound’” (1994, 273). He continues: “This makes noise a subjective term. One man’s music may be another man’s noise. But it holds out the possibility that in a given society there should be more agreement than disagreement as to which sounds constitute unwanted interruptions” (1994, 183). Mike Goldsmith questions the possibility for this kind of consensus and tests the limits of this definition. He begins *Discord: The Story of Noise*: “[Is] any unwanted sound noise? The key in the lock for a burglar? The voice of an enemy? The theme tune of your least favorite soap? ‘Unwanted’ here surely refers to a sound that is unwanted in itself, rather than what it signifies” (Goldsmith 2012, 1). So then what is a sound in itself? What properties does a sound have which might constitute, or contribute to, its noisiness?

A sound has several measurable properties: most importantly pitch (or frequency), timbre and loudness (amplitude). Hegarty writes, “Biologists, sound ecologists and psychoacoustics

would have us believe that noise is sound that damages us, and that a defensive reaction is simply natural, even if, at an individual level, it might be learned” (2013, 3). There is no doubt that sound at extremely loud volumes can cause damage to an animal’s body. This would suggest that amplitude is the only property of a sound that need be examined to determine its quality as noise. Perhaps, then, any sound—no matter how desirable—that is loud enough becomes noise. However, this cannot provide a productive account of noise as it would necessarily include loud rock concerts, which are notorious for causing hearing loss in both musicians and audience members alike, but cannot be said to produce exclusively noise, if we’re to assume that those present desired to hear the music, and that music is performed intentionally.

“Loudness” itself is a culturally and historically specific attribute of sound. Schafer argues that since the Industrial Revolution, the soundscape in urban areas has been rising at a rate of half a decibel per year (1994, 186), although this might be an excessive measurement. Schafer wrote this in 1977, and since decibels are measured logarithmically, where an increase of three decibels is a doubling of a sound’s perceived loudness, this would suggest that cities are currently six times louder than they were when his book was originally written, and about forty-two times louder than they were before the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. However, there is no doubt in the minds of many writing on the topic of noise that the world has gotten louder. In 1913, the Italian Futurist artist Luigi Russolo wrote: “Ancient life was all silence. In the nineteenth century, with the invention of the machine, Noise was born ... For many centuries life went by in silence, or at most muted tones. The strongest noises which interrupted the silence were not intense or prolonged or varied” (Russolo 2012, 55). I believe it would be reasonable to suggest that over time, the changing soundscape of a region reshapes the perceived noisiness of

certain sounds. Places become louder or quieter, and some sounds disappear or are replaced, or drowned out, by others.

In these models of noise, noise is judged by reception. A sound's noisiness is determined by individual bodies (hearing machines, as Hegarty calls them in the passage quoted earlier in this chapter) who experience the sound as unwanted, too loud or invasive in some other way. Another method by which noise is judged on the receiving end of a system of communication is in the experimental sciences where definitions of noise are grounded in concrete characteristics, allowing us to point to noise as a specific, identifiable phenomenon. Several features are highlighted: randomness, unpredictability—as with noise's usefulness to the description of Brownian motion in the behavior of pollen and dust (see Cohen 2005)—and its existence with respect to “signal.” In an experimental setting, signal is the data that is desired, that is being sought out by the experimenter. In such a situation, noise is all of the meaningless data that surrounds the signal. According to Claude E. Shannon and Warren Weaver's *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, noise is described in the following way:

In the process of being transmitted, it is unfortunately characteristic that certain things are added to the signal which were not intended by the information source. The unwanted additions may be distortions of sound (in telephony, for example) or static (in radio), or distortions in shape or shading of picture (television), or errors in transmission (telegraphy or facsimile), etc. All of these changes in the transmitted signal are called noise (1949, 99).¹²

This description seems to approach a definition of noise that might provide a more solid basis on which to build an argument about Noise Music. As any audible signal passes through a

¹² I discovered this highly influential text through its mention in Greg Hainge's *Noise Matters* (2013, 3-4).

medium, it is subject to unpredictable modulations: noises. These distortions and alterations to the signal are the stuff of experimental music: the resonances and standing waves that accumulate in Alvin Lucier's *I am Sitting in a Room* for example. But one possible stumbling block appears with the necessity for a signal—a communicative intent—to be distorted through transmission, in order for noise to become understandable as such. It is a relationship between what might be termed “figure” and “ground” but what becomes of this binary when the desired data resembles too closely what would usually be deemed “ground,” and there is no “figure” otherwise? Can sound be called noise if there is not apparent “desired” signal to distort? Is the static beneath the voice of a radio commentator noise when that commentator goes off the air, leaving only static and no voice?

Shannon and Weaver's definition also suggests that noise is present in every mediatized communication. I believe that this could be expanded to say that noise may necessarily shape any vibrational exchange between materials, whether mediated by technology or not. The sound of a spoken sentence is distorted by the physical space in which it is spoken. A voice's activation of an acoustic environment and that environment's specific sympathetic resonances are set into motion by the utterance. These physical attributes of a space are exceedingly complex and unpredictable. They contour that signal, adding harmonics, shaping the frequencies and timbral character of that utterance. A person shouting in a closet sounds very different from that same person shouting in the Grand Canyon.

Meaning appears often as a property of noise's opposite. Luigi Russolo wrote “The Art of Noises” (1913), “Noise in fact can be differentiated from sound only in so far as the vibrations which produce it are confused and irregular, both in time and intensity” (2012, 61). This is

similar to a definition of noise that is based on the aperiodicity of its waveform (see Schafer, 1994, 182). Although it may be an issue with the translation from the original Italian, Russolo uses the word “sound” where he likely means “music.” After all, even in the rest of Russolo’s text it is clear that he believes noise to be a category of sound. What is of interest is his use of the word “confused.” He writes that the vibrations which produced the noise are, themselves, confused, but we can go on to infer that, in hearing them, a listener is likewise confused. Where signal might be said to be understandable, to have some content that clearly communicates something, noise breaks down communication, disturbs readability, produces—and is produced by—confusion.

What complicates any definition of noise further, is the possibility that a sound, or communicative system might be deemed noise from the perspective of its production. In this sense, noise is not a category determined by the hearer, but by the activity (movement, gesture, vibration) that produces the sound. Under this definition, noise can be understood as the byproduct of communication. Noise is present in any system of communication, but it is whatever accompanies the signal (modulating it, distorting it, transforming it) that does not contribute to its content. It is the crackle in a telephone conversation, the reverberant echo of a shouted “hello.” In these examples, whether or not the listener is disturbed by these distortions, the purpose of these utterances was other than producing those crackles, or that echo. Additionally, this can be expanded further to say that noise is the byproduct of any activity. It is necessary, though, to emphasize the term *byproduct*. Any activity that is performed produces vibrations, and as long as those specific vibrations are not the purpose of that activity, they can be said to be noise. In this understanding of it, noise is the unintended, unpredictable—

effectively random—result of any activity. Consider an example: if one were to hammer a nail into a board, that action would produce audible vibrations in the hammer, in the nail, in the board and in the air surrounding those materials. Moreover, those vibrations would be reproduced sympathetically in all of the materials near that air, like the walls, ceiling and floor, of the workshop or garage where our hypothetical hammerer is hammering. These vibrations would be considered noise as long as the hammerer was not performing this activity for the sole purpose of producing these vibrations. If she were hammering the nail into the board as part of a carpentry project, then the audible vibrations would be the unintended (though certainly expected and thoroughly unsurprising) byproduct of that activity. But if our hammerer were, instead, a foley artist, recording hammering sound effects to edit into the soundtrack of a motion picture, then those vibrations would be the intended result of that activity—the signal, we could say—and they would cease to be noise.

All sound contains noise, depending on the *intent*—or perhaps, more productively, the *address*—of a sound.¹³ Even a sine wave—the purest tone possible, expressing only a single frequency and no distortions, harmonics or overtones—if played in a room, is subject to the distortions caused by its resonance in the materials of the space surrounding it. As composer Henry Cowell observed in 1929, “there is a noise element in the very tone itself of all our musical instruments” (1996, 23) meaning that every acoustic instrument produces a-periodic sounds, and unpredictable overtones alongside its desired tones. Cowell writes: “Consider the

¹³ I am uncomfortable applying this notion of noise to any sounds produced entirely without human activity. If we are to understand noise as the byproduct of an intentional activity, we encounter the problem that intent is an entirely human concept, and is unreadable in any non-human object. While we might want to say that it is not for the purpose of producing a loud rumble that a volcano erupts, but it is also for no other “purpose” that one does so either.

sound of a violin. Part of the vibrations producing sound are periodic, as can be shown by a harmonic analyzer. But others are not— they do not constantly re-form the same pattern, and consequently must be considered noise” (1996, 23).

Moreover, if we expand the notion of resonance to affects outside of audible sympathetic vibration— accounting perhaps even for subatomic vibrations, only considered “not sound” because they are too quiet to hear, not because they are fundamentally different from sonic vibrations— we might say that noise can describe any unintended affects that radiate out from any motion. As Greg Hainge writes about noise: “Why let matter have all the fun? Do ideas and concepts not also move and vibrate, resonate with and impact upon each other, vibrate in and beyond the time they are released?” He goes on to say, “everything is in noise, and noise is in everything” (2013, 2). Although this might be dismissed as overreaching, expanding as it does the concept of noise outwards from the realm of the sonic into an entire field of affective systems, I believe this move is an exciting thought-experiment for the study of sound. As I argued in the previous chapter, sound is only a small slice of the spectrum of vibration in the universe, and the sonic might be productively understood as a field within an affective model of motion and change. I wanted to reach this expansive definition of noise before introducing Noise Music more fully, in order to lean on this wide-open theorization while we determine exactly what is noisy about Noise Music, and where that noise might be located in it.

It is this definition of noise—where noise is the unintended and unpredictable vibrations, modulations, reverberations and distortions set into motion by an activity—that I find most valuable to my argument about Noise Music. The trajectory through Noise Music I will draw is one that treats that music’s history, its accumulation and calcification of repeatable generic codes

and its speciation into sub-genres, as a process of de-noising Noise. Although it doesn't fit perfectly with Brassier's argument in his article, "Genre Is Obsolete," this model of noise does explain what Brassier sees as a regrettable stagnation in contemporary Noise Music: "Like the 'industrial' subculture of the late 1970s which spawned it, the emergence of 'noise' as a recognizable genre during the 1980s entailed a rapid accumulation of stock gestures, slackening the criteria for discriminating between innovation and cliché to the point where experiment threatened to become indistinguishable from platitude" (2007: 63). Brassier goes on to lament this downfall, and herald the work of To Live And Shave In LA for continuing what he believes to be the revolutionary originary goal of Noise Music: to continually disrupt the expectations of listeners. I on the other hand, see this 'downfall' as the inevitable result of an inherently impossible project (how can a band continue to confound once it has performed a second show, or earned a single fan?) and this 'stagnation' as the musicalization of Noise.

Noise Music Precedents

Most histories of Noise Music, or even of "noise" in music, cite a collection of early precedents that supposedly paved the way for the music genre's appearance in the late 1970s. These supposed precedents have become so ubiquitous that it isn't necessary to rehash them, so I will only do so very quickly, and then point the interested reader toward a number of other, more detailed texts on these subjects. The first canonical "founder" who preceded Noise Music, but whose work is considered influential, was Luigi Russolo, a member of the Italian Futurist movement in the early 1910s. As Paul Hegarty writes in *Noise/Music: A History*, "The first key

moment occurs with Futurism” (2007, 5). Russolo’s manifesto “The Art of Noises,” published in 1913 calls for the incorporation of machine-like sounds into music. Russolo and the other Futurists built noise instruments called *intonarumori*, which produced sound, usually by the mechanical means of turning a crank. The sounds of the *intonarumori* were the result of internal cogs and gears and other simulations of industrial machine parts, which would rub together, or blow air through a tube like a whistle to produce sounds that resembled the urban din of an increasingly industrialized environment. These instruments were used in the performance of Russolo’s compositions, which, just like all western classical music written at the time, was scored on musical staves, with traditionally notated rhythms. Although the *intonarumori* were generally un-pitched, notation could be written for them that basically resembled a score for traditional percussion instruments. In this way, although they were likely unlike anything audiences had ever heard before at the time, the Futurists’ concerts relied heavily on traditional musical systems and ideas, with the simple insertion of more a-periodic, rhythmic instrumentation. Compositions were written on staves, often with precise rhythmic, if not pitch, notation.¹⁴

The next obligatory key moment in Noise Music, according to the accepted academic canon, arrives in 1952, with John Cage’s ‘silent’ piece, *4’33”*. The infamous composition instructs the performer to make no intentional musical sounds for the length of time that gives the piece its title. The musical material of the piece, then, is any incidental sound occurring within or outside the performance space that is audible to the listener.¹⁵ Hegarty writes, “The

¹⁴ Reproductions of some of these scores can be viewed in Chessa 2012.

¹⁵ There are many sources available for analysis of Cage’s “silent” piece including Gann 2011 and Kahn 2001. Each provides a detailed analysis of the piece’s importance and influence.

world, then, is revealed as infinitely musical: musicality is about our attentiveness to the sounds of the world” (2007, 6). Some argue that Cage’s composition opens up music to include all sounds, even noise, although Hainge suggests that “Cage might ultimately be said to eradicate noise entirely through this gesture. For, by sculpting his musical text from the incidental sounds and noises of the concert venue, it was Cage’s desire, as has been stated by many, to render all sound musical, converting noise into the primary, desired content of his piece and therefore leaving noise behind in the process” (2013, 52). If, as I argued earlier, noise can only be observed in relation to a signal, then the absence of what would traditionally function as signal raises noise up to the status of signal, transforming ground into figure and eliminating noise from the system. This process, which I am describing here first with respect to *4’33”* will be repeated over and over again in my consideration of Noise Music as I argue that Noise Music, in fact eliminates noise, by rendering it the intentional content of musical expression.

The music and theories of Russolli and Cage are often cited as precedents for the Noise Music genre, although their work predates the use of the term by quite some time. Moreover, this “history” is undoubtedly a the result of contemporary scholars and artists seeking out stylist forbears to cite. There is no unbroken line of influence from Russolli and Cage to the Noise band Hijokaidan, and the contexts and goals of those earlier composers cannot be said to be reproduced in later Noise Music. According to most accepted histories of the genre—usually recorded in fan publications and underground magazines—Noise Music began in earnest in the late 1970s. Hijokaidan in Japan was the first to use the term to describe the genre of their artistic practice, although this chapter will focus on two Noise Music groups—The New Blockaders and The Haters—who appeared shortly after, in England and The United States, respectively.

Philip and Richard Rupenus, performed under the name the New Blockaders. The two men claim to be brothers, though their blood relation is likely fabricated. They are perhaps best known for the ambitiousness regarding the stated goals their art. The group released a manifesto in 1982 which stated that Noise stood in opposition to all other art that had ever existed prior to it. Their concept divided all artistic expression into two categories: art and Noise, which they equated with anti-art. Their manifesto reads: “We are The New Blockaders. Blockade is resistance. It is our duty to blockade and induce others to Blockade. Anti-books, anti-art, anti-music, anti-clubs, anti-communications. We will make anti-statements about anything and everything. We will make a point of being pointless” (1982).¹⁶ TNB—as they commonly abbreviate their band name—saw Noise as a project that stretched much further than the realm of the sonic, but was an entire movement of art practice, including literary, performance and visual art. In their earliest actions, the audio portion of their performances seems like something of an afterthought, or even perhaps the byproduct of the performative creation of a situation, or environment, which was the group’s primary intention. Notice that in the opening lines of the manifesto quoted above, they do not even mention music, even though they are remembered largely as a musical project.

I intend to argue that the early works of TNB, though they are considered the originary examples of Noise Music, should be more appropriately considered as a kind of performance art. As a result, I wish to suggest that their musical documents from this time—mostly very low fidelity cassette recordings of live performances—can be heard as noisy in that the sounds they capture were not produced as the intentional content of these performances, but were, in large

¹⁶ The New Blockaders’ manifesto was originally printed in the liner notes to their debut LP, *Changez Les Blockeurs* (1982).

part, the sonic byproduct of the activities that produced them. I believe that if one considers the address of these early TNB works, the audio component was secondary to the creation of a situation and a context in a performance space. As such, they cannot be heard as musical works in the way that most musical works are assessed, but rather as performance pieces, in which sound was produced, but only accidentally and as an element secondary to other artistically expressive concerns.

The TNB Manifesto also provides us with an understanding of noise (and Noise Music) as a rejection, or an assault on *meaning*. Like some of the scientific definitions of the word noise, which describe noise as meaningless, random data, TNB argue that their art is likewise, devoid of meaning. This is a common theme which is repeated over and over again in the discourse of Noise Music, but seems to be misleading. Even Cage, who left the actual sounds in his compositions up to chance, understood that meaning was produced in the act of framing those sounds as music, and in organizing them as a performance. In a sense, meaninglessness as an aesthetic imperative is in itself eminently meaningful.

The Haters formed as a collective around GX Jupiter-Larsen in 1979. Even more than TNB, The Haters must be considered not as a “band” or musical project, but as a performance art collective. While countless cassettes, records and CDs have been produced, each is merely a small portion of the project itself, a pale document of a full-fledged audio-visual conceptual performance event. The recordings are the equivalent of a series of blurry photographs documenting the performance of a Broadway musical—they can be engaged with as artworks in themselves, but are not the primary purpose of the activities which they capture. This understanding of The Haters is supported by Larsen’s own writings. In 2009, a book was

produced—*Drilling a Hole Through the Sky: 30 Years of The Haters*—that contains written descriptions of all documented performances by the group. The descriptions reveal that the sounds produced during the performances were barely considered, if at all. The descriptions focus almost entirely on the materials used, and what actions were performed with them. Larsen writes: “I developed many different recurring techniques using amplified gear. The only reason I started incorporating live sound in my performances was to re-emphasize the action taking place. Not for the sake of the sound itself” (2009, 10). Regarding the founding of The Haters, he writes: “Back in New York in 1979, confusion for me meant the kind of noise I was looking for wouldn’t be the audible kind. What I was looking for was a sociological transmission. A social distortion instead of sonic feedback would be my personal post-punk mandate” (2009, 10). For Larsen, noise wasn’t solely located in the sonic. Rather it permeated systems of relation as a kind of confusion of affect. When The Haters performed a piece entitled “Drunk on Decay,” where an amplified funnel dangled from a truck hoisted above the performance space, the funnel resting on a circular disc of sandpaper that spun on a record player, it wasn’t the sound of the funnel’s grinding against the sandpaper that the piece proffered as *noise* but the affective resonances of the performance itself. The sound was merely a byproduct of the performance itself. As Larsen himself argues, the sound is always secondary to the actions being performed, and only present as an accidental and unavoidable consequence of the conditions of what are, largely, conceptual works.

The examples of Noise Music offered so far have been of a certain variety. The first generation of artists producing work in the “genre,” starting in the late 1970s, did so with a strong focus on performance. The generation that followed, emerged, for the most part, in the

early 1990s. I will argue that, for the purposes of this chapter, the defining characteristic of these younger artists was that they misheard the Noise Music of TNB and The Haters. What was intended to be meaningless, or the inconsequential and unintentional byproduct of a conceptual performance, was misheard as being aesthetically pleasing. Beginning in the 1990s, a generation of artists appeared who had grown up listening to the Noise Music of the 1970s and 80s, who were not disturbed by it, were not provoked into antisocial action by it, and did not hear it as the documentation of an art happening which had little to do with the sound being produced, but instead heard it as music. 1990s Noise artists re-musicalized Noise through mishearing it, finding in it beauty, and meaning.

The next section of this chapter will deal specifically with a single album, produced in 1995, which exemplifies this mishearing. Macronympha's *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* is noise as music, a directional shift within the genre that produces consequences for the politics of noise. In this next section, I will attempt to unpack the record's various strategies at meaning-making which, as unpleasant and abrasive as they may be, are not, in the sense I've laid out, particularly noisy.

Deindustrialization and White Trash Masculinity in *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*

Macronympha's *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* (1995) is a Harsh Noise album. Sonically, it is not particularly unique—there are thousands that sound rather like it, although those which followed it might be considered imitation. It is just over forty minutes of constant, screaming feedback, and chunky, crumbling distortion. There are no regular rhythms, no melodies, no

harmony, no tuning system. Timbre remains as the album's sole musical gesture, although the timbres used are exclusively harsh. The sounds are produced by amplifying large pieces of scrap metal, that the musicians looted from abandoned factories, and running those audio signals through chains of effects pedals like those used by guitar players. The distortion that characterizes the sound is produced at every stage of the system's gain structuring—the pedals, the mixers, and even the four track cassette recorder used to capture the performance are cranked well past oversaturation.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania is often name-dropped as the “greatest Noise album of all time.” While this assessment is not at all unanimous, the claim is about as uncontroversial as saying *Citizen Kane* is the greatest film of all time—not everybody agrees, but it has become something of a cliché. While *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* is well known within the subculture of Noise fandom and is one of the few records with nearly universal fan acclaim, to date it has evaded analysis in any existing scholarship. This is perhaps understandable because *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*'s uniqueness is difficult to unpack, and its social context is complicated and disturbing. For seventeen years now, the record has been viewed uncritically within the Noise Music community, despite its blatantly racist track titles and “message.” In a community where far-right politics are becoming increasingly rare, and where new instances of such imagery are immediately condemned by many listeners, Macronympha's 1990s work goes unchallenged.

Let's begin with the title: What does *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* suggest about music that is so abstract and so seemingly non-referential? Is this Noise supposed to be, somehow, *about* the city of Pittsburgh? It is true that the sonic phenomenon of noise has long been associated with urbanity. Luigi Russolo's aforementioned manifesto “The Art of Noises” begins: “Ancient life

was all silence... with the invention of machines, Noise was born.” According to its common sense definition, noise is sonic pollution. This is the argument championed by many writers within sound studies, like R. Murray Schafer and Garret Keizer, who champion the position of “sonic environmentalism.” They contend that noise is a product of cities, produced by traffic, sawmills, trains, slaughterhouses, factories, and large groups of strangers living very close together. The rigid grid of the city fail to restrict noise’s movements. Noise transgresses boundaries, permeates apartment walls, and drifts in and out of buildings through open windows. It is unconfined by the scales that organize urban space, jumping from the public to the private, and vice versa, encroaching, invasive and unwanted. This understanding of noise is immediately invoked by *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*’s title, a reference to a notoriously noisy urban space—a city known for its manufacturing, and specifically its steel industry.

Noise Music in the ‘90s often made special reference to the sounds of city life. Masami Akita, who performs and records under the moniker Merzbow—the name being a reference to an architectural sculpture by Dadaist and sound-poet Kurt Schwitters—draws this connection quite clearly in an interview published in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* Akita states: “Sometimes, I would like to kill the much too noisy Japanese by my own Noise. The effects of Japanese culture are too much noise everywhere. I want to make silence with my Noise” (2004, 61). Akita identifies his music as being aesthetically related to city noise, construction, cars and industry—a number of his early performances were built around the use of jackhammers and industrial drills as sound sources—but he also suggests that his sound, and the purpose behind its extreme volume, is to drown out and cover up those very same sounds when they originate in the urban soundscape. In the midst of unbearable urban noise, Akita’s Noise Music attempts to

drown out the city with its own sonic approximation of the same. It is an imitative aural blindfold — a contradictory aesthetic project. The sounds of the city pounded flat by even louder sounds of the city. But what happens when Noise Music is produced in a city that is no longer noisy? In such a situation, does Noise Music take on different meanings?

The narrator of Guy Mitchell's 1952 pop hit, "Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania" is a working-class man who must pawn all of his belongings to impress the woman he is courting. He sings: There's a pawnshop on a corner in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania / And I walk up and down 'neath the clock / By the pawnshop on a corner in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania / But I ain't got a thing left to hock." The singer fears that he may lose the affections of the object of his romantic desires to a wealthier suitor. In the post war period, Pittsburgh was on a precipice between its industrial boom of the nineteenth century, and what would eventually reveal itself to be a bust. Mitchell's song, which is specifically set in the city (and named after it so as to insist that its story somehow represents the identity of the city) straddles this divide between prosperity and depression. In the Pittsburgh of 1952, an elite bourgeoisie can still be imagined, although in the song, the wealthy man is more of an ominous, unknown threat than an individual with a face. The fact is that the wealthy man is the narrator's projected financial insecurity—he may not even exist. But the hopelessness of the lyrics—the song begins only when the narrator has run out of items to pawn—foreshadows the economic decline which was to soon hit Pittsburgh's industrial areas. The capitalist plutocrat, with whom the narrator competes, has won narrator's sweetheart. Forty three years later, Macronympha's album *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* can be understood to refer back to the same themes of Mitchell's hit. However, Macronympha put a different face on the villain of their narrative. The force which rendered their city the wasteland they perceive it to be is

misidentified as the city's also struggling immigrant population. It seems that for Macronympha capitalism is too abstract an enemy.

Macronympha formed in Pittsburgh in the early 1990s. The band consisted of two permanent members, Joseph Roemer and Roger Stella, but at times also featured Liz Fox and Nicole Gracy. Although I name them here as a convention of critical writing, I intend to analyze this particular work without specific regard for the positionality or intentions of these four artists. My reading of *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* approaches the album as a complete work whose address to listeners can be read for cultural meaning and not as an avenue to access these artists' biographies. In the instances where I quote interviews that the band gave, I treat those similarly: as texts in themselves. Their albums and their interviews exist as objects to be studied regardless of what their authors *thought* they were communicating. It doesn't effect my reading of the album if Macronympha later deny or apologize for the racist track titles, or claim that they themselves are not racist.

The liner notes to *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* read: "Western Pennsylvania is a graveyard. No ideas or worthwhile activities exist in this decaying nightmare of horror and stupidity. Just hatred and broken lives. The native population is an indigenous mutation of inbred sickness and mental corruption. Someday everyone and everything here will die a miserable death. That day cannot come soon enough." The band, not only names their recording after the city they live in, but in the liner notes they insist that the music is in some way *about* that city. To title an artwork in this way is to make a fairly sweeping claim: that something fundamental about that city's identity can be captured and evoked through the music—that the piece itself can reproduce a feeling, an energy, or atmosphere thought to be somehow typical, or illustrative of that location.

Pittsburgh, the album's titular city, was a major center of industrial production in the nineteenth century. After World War II, the US lifted international tariffs and regulations, allowing American corporations to outsource production to foreign nations where labor was cheaper, and unions less strong or non-existent. During the 1980s, Pittsburgh's steel industry collapsed; most mills were closed and workers were laid off. Between 1980 and 1984, more than half of the city's 90,000 steel workers lost their jobs. The "graveyard" that Macronympha find themselves inhabiting is an environment ravaged by deindustrialization and urban decay. The Reagan and Bush presidential administrations practiced urban domestic policies characterized by "benign neglect"—the belief that ignorance of marginalized groups and a lack of investment in impoverished areas actually benefit those groups and areas. According to William Julius Wilson, the "Reagan and Bush administrations ... sharply cut direct aid to cities, including general revenue sharing, urban mass transit, public service jobs and job training, compensatory education, social service block grants, local public works, economic development assistance, and urban development action grants" (Wilson 1997, 43).

What does benign neglect sound like in a city? Steel mills are notoriously noisy. R. Murray Schafer points out in *The Soundscape* that industrial metalwork usually produces sounds that are, at their source, well over 100 decibels (1994, 77). Within a single factory, hundreds of instances of these sounds could combine and accumulate an overall volume comparable to that of a jet airplane taking off. As the Pittsburgh steel mills closed in in the 1970s and '80s, the soundscape of that city changed drastically. But Macronympha's *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* with its blown out roar of scraping metal and feedback, approximates the noise of a steel mill in the form of a ghostly echo. With the metal looted from closed mills, Macro re-sonify the materials of

industry, and symbolically reactivate the machinic soundscape of an operational factory. I wish to read Macronympha's *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*, as an expression of nostalgia and longing.

Longing is not the emotional activity that likely pops into the minds of listeners to their music.

The music is unrelentingly aggressive, its stated and achieved goals are excess, with regard to amplitude and timbral character. But rather than being a negative portrait of the urban soundscape—as was the case with Merzbow's music—Macronympha's takes a positive, though melancholic, connotation. The album is an elegy for a sound no longer heard in their depressed and desolate, impoverished neighborhoods, a remembrance for the phantom booming of now-silent factories. They've discovered that the sounds they once judged to be noise were, in fact, life-giving.

While the album doesn't sound drastically different from those by Merzbow, or a hundred other American and Japanese Noise artists from the mid-1990s, its unique context makes it stand out, makes it mean something else. Transported from Tokyo to the so-called North American Rust Belt, in an era of economic hardship, a similar screaming wall of distortion manages to accrue a particular bundle of associative intensities. Macronympha can be seen as participating in an emergent social form, assembling itself amidst a developing structure of feeling, specific to concomitant changes in class structure, a widening wealth gap, an evaporation of the middle-class, and a shift away from a manufacturing economy in the United States. I do not wish to assert, however, that Roemer or Stella felt nostalgic for Pittsburgh's economic boom—I do not presume to know their thoughts,—but despite their artistic intentions, undoubtedly there emerges a kind of wistful affect of longing, shimmering at the edges of the band's bristling static and feedback. The “extra-musical” metadata (titles artwork, etc.) evoke a backward-looking present.

It is a present that reaches toward a void, one that has been hollowed-out in the realm of the sonic—a vacancy formerly occupied in a remembered, yet mythical, past. Rather than making silence with its Noise, the record performs a frustrated, impotent, re-sounding; its Noise, despite is spectral fullness and abundance of volume, can only feebly gesture to a great, haunted silence. But where I hear longing, Macro themselves hear rage.

In a 1997 interview, Roemer was asked about the title of one of the band's cassettes: *Urban Decay*. Roemer's response provides a answer that could just as well serve as a description of *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*.

Europe is old and decrepit and now so is America. Our infrastructure is collapsing and a lot of the money paid in taxes to fix roads, bridges and rebuild the urban wasteland goes into the greedy pockets of crooked politicians and construction contractors who are mostly thieves. Especially here on the east coast of the USA and the gateway to the midwest of America, we call it "the rust belt". In Pittsburgh the steel mines are abandoned relics like dinosaur bones fossilized in slag and coal dust. Skeletal remains that show how the large corporations picked the bones and lives of their workers clean. Vultures like Andrew Carnegie, Thomas Frick, J.P Morgan, George Westinghouse and Richard Scaife who exploited the area, sucked it dry then left the ghost towns behind. Unlike the cheap wood and tumbleweed ghost towns built by the railroads and the miners out west, our ghost towns are massive monuments of twisted junk metal, scrap iron and monolithic structures which symbolize indentured servitude and the era of the company store, the company neighborhood, and the poorly built schools and libraries left behind, now crumbling to dust. You can see such sights all through New York, New Jersey, New England, Pennsylvania and Ohio. Like Indian totems and death masks they gape and glare sarcastically mocking the failure of american dream and our transition from a manufacturing/industrial empire to an economy whose

wealth is based on information technology, paper assets and commodities trading. Thirty-five percent (at least) of our commercial real estate is owned by English banks and other foreign conglomerates so since most of the lease and rental income ends up leaving the country very little of the net profits are available to fix up the dilapidated areas. Everything about the current system infuriates us, so we use it to strengthen our Anarchy and feed our disgust.¹⁷

Although the question was not directly about *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*, I believe the quote supports my analysis of that record. Roemer refers directly to the steel mills and their closing, calling the abandoned factories “fossils,” “dinosaurs,” and “skeletons.” His language clearly evokes death and decay, and he sympathizes specifically with the workers whose bones, he says, were picked dry. These sentiments support my observations about the sense of nostalgia and past-ness in *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*, and the repurposing of factory sounds as a kind of ghostly re-sounding.

The quote is also an example of a much more thoughtful and less overtly-confrontational sentiment from Joe Roemer. In the interviews where other members of the band are also present, Roemer, Stella and any others usually present a more cartoonish, vulgar model of masculinity, cursing profusely and dismissing anything they consider “intellectual” as “pretense” and “bullshit” (see *Bananafish* #10). Roemer’s historical critique in the above quote stands as the one unique counter-example to what I see and hear as the dominant ‘politics’ of Macronympha.

¹⁷ This interview was printed in a ‘zine in 1996 or ’97. It has since been archived on the internet at the following URL: www.oocities.org/sunsetstrip/palladium/5854/nympha.html (accessed January 2013). No credits are given as to who conducted the interview or in what ‘zine it originally appeared. I discovered this interview over a year after first presenting a paper on Macronympha’s *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* at the EMP Pop Music Conference.

“White Noise”

So far I have provided a particular analysis of *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* in which the record’s audio content is presumed to have “meaning” related to the silenced noise of deindustrialization. While the sound associated with the performances of The New Blockaders and The Haters is noisy in its meaninglessness and its accidental quality, the work of Macronympha is more traditionally musical. The music’s address to its listeners, its framing, places it firmly within the medium of music, no matter how much the sounds challenge any traditional notions of musical narrative, tonality and harmonic structure. What can be seen a radical in the works of the first generation of Noise artists has been (re)musicalized, and in this way, tamed by the second. Is it possible that one of the consequences of this aesthetic conservatism is an accompanying impulse toward a more reactionary conservative politics? While early Noise Music often deployed irresponsible references to radical right-wing historical movements—occasionally using Nazi imagery in artwork—it was often collaged in such a way as to seem absurd, out of context. It was paired with cartoon drawings and nonsensical text. These images were usually viewed as examples of immature attempts to throw together a shocking juxtapositions of unrelated, although intense and evocative, elements. The politics of the movements depicted seemed to find no actual purchase in the Noise itself, and no attempt was made to contextualize one as essentially related to another. However, Macronympha, rather than confuse, make all too much sense. Their right-wing imagery and titling actually seem to add up to a coherent whole.

Side B of *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* is titled “Rusted Steel and Rotting Flesh.” This title evokes some of the same feeling that I have previously identified in the music: the steel is rusted because it is left over after the closing of the factories, the flesh is rotting as Pittsburgh’s inhabitants are wasting away from poverty. The A side of the album, however, is titled “Critical Determination of Genetic Malfunction in three Racial Groups.” The side is divided into three individual tracks, subtitled: “Negro,” “Hispanic,” and “Semite (Arab and Jew).” At first glance, these titles might seem unrelated to the rest of the album’s titles and imagery. For Macronympha, though, the frustration of poverty becomes conflated with racial hatred. In this ideological move, minority groups take the place of neoliberalism as the perpetrators of whatever social and economic problems Macronympha experience. They see themselves as oppressed and, in turn, out of misdirected fear and anger, blame superficial markers of racial and cultural difference and ignore a situation of shared material conditions. It is likely that despite whatever economic struggle Macronympha believe they are engaged in, Pittsburgh’s black and Latino populations experience similar to worse material conditions, with the additional oppression of systemic racism directed at them. *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* points its anger at the city’s minorities, eschews representing the frustrations of the poor in order to speak exclusively for the city’s white poor, who view their economic situation as the result of oppression by immigrant groups, rather than at the hands of the capitalist “vultures” Roemer decries in the interview I quoted above.

The album’s victim-blaming message bears all the traces of the post-Reconstruction political project of white supremacy, which according to W.E.B. Du Bois, was a project designed to divide the working class along color lines, and to prevent the success of a unified labor movement. Du Bois argues that white supremacy oppressed blacks and whites alike, although, of

course to different degrees. It's not that working class whites were coerced into racism by an invasive ideology, but that against their long-term best interests, white workers learned to view their whiteness as valuable. He writes, "the white group of laborers, while they receive a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and titles of courtesy because they were white. They were admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools" (1962, 700). They learned to identify upwards, believing that their whiteness allowed them to feel more in common with a white factory owner, than with a black worker, doing the exact same job, just one machine over. In the case of Macronympha, that vertical identifiatory practice forces them to see those ethnic minorities who share the same horizontal class status as just another symptom of a city in a downward spiral.

The figure of the white worker has his own racist stereotype—that of white trash. Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz address the curious nature of the term "white trash"—at once a racial epithet and a classist slur. The category finds its social usefulness in its contradiction—the incommensurable pairing of the term "white" with "trash"—and in its joining together two categories of social meaning: class with race. White trash is what happens when the normative model which adheres whiteness to a middle class lifestyle comes unglued, when the class position promised by whiteness never materializes. White trash racism repackages and redirects the rage associated with a failed promise of white privilege. As a theoretical tool, white trash indexes the contradictory forces which combine in an analysis of Macronympha's *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*. It insists that meaning is somehow suspended in the dialectic of base and superstructure, material conditions and ideology, class and race. And while Macro's album can

be heard as I have described it—as a phantasmic evocation of an industrial soundscape—this model of nostalgia and longing is, in part, what constitutes the record's racism.

The actual class position of the members of Macronympha is beside the point here. I do not wish to necessarily identify them as white trash. They have been called that by others throughout the band's history. Cock ESP, a rival Noise Music act, titled a track “Inbred Hicks from Suburban Pittsburgh” (on the compilation *A Gift for the Ones You Hate*, 1997) as a thinly-veiled attack on Macronympha. The reference to incest is one commonly associated with white trash positionality, although the term “suburban” has connotations which do not fit the “hick” accusation (nor does it describe the actual area of Pittsburgh in which the members of Macronympha lived at the time). However, it seems clear that the band performs *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* from what can be called a white trash positionality—perhaps even a caricature of white trashness. White trash indexes a collection of assembled traits which composed the band's image at the time: poverty, anger, racist hatred, and exaggerated masculinity. In addition, *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* expresses a feeling of having been robbed of the promise of class ascendance and white privilege. This is the center of the album's sonified anger: if white supremacy accurately describes the world, then why aren't Macronympha witnessing the benefits of it? White trash, as Wray and Newitz point out, is an identification which all too often depends on a position of social victimization (1997, 6).

It's true that during the 1970s and 80s, long before the Macronympha's formation, the Noise Music subculture occasionally flirted with images of white supremacy. It was a time when Noise had not fully speciated from Industrial Music, a scene where Nazi fashion, and the

aestheticization of war and violence were part of the generic code.¹⁸ S. Alexander Reed's *Assimilate: A Critical History of Industrial Music* devotes a chapter to the circulation of fascist imagery in that genre which makes mention of some artists whom Noise and Industrial Musics share as forebears: Throbbing Gistle, Boyd Rice and Death in June. After the 1990s, Noise split again, with the right wing of the community coalescing around a sonically related though socially separated genre called Power Electronics. *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* teeters on the border. It's as if white supremacy's hold on Noise Music finds its last solid purchase in Macronympha's so-called masterpiece. Its right wing politics are the genre's vestigial tail, inherited originally from Luigi Russolo and the Futurists, through the Broken Flag record label and artists like Maurizio Bianchi who package their releases in overtly fascist images. In 1995, white supremacy was a residual form, not yet fossilized into an archaic leftover, not yet entirely in opposition to the dominant Noise Music discourse. Thus it found itself put to work to address Noise Music's intersection with its own history, shifts in neoliberal capitalism, and shared feelings of imagined betrayal, longing and loss.

As Noise Music became less noisy, Macronympha reconfigure its radical potential into an expression of confused, misdirected reactionary racism. However, this is not the only "meaning" which arises when Noise becomes meaningful. In fact, to remain with the example of

¹⁸ The aestheticization of war is another element Noise Music inherited from Russollo and the Futurists. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin quotes one of the Futurists' manifestos: "For twenty-seven years we Futurists have rebelled against the branding of war as anti-aesthetic ... Accordingly we state: ... War is beautiful because it establishes man's dominion over the subjugated machinery by means of gas masks, terrifying megaphones, flame throwers, and small tanks. War is beautiful because it initiates the dreamt-of metalization of the human body. War is beautiful because it enriches a flowering meadow with the fiery orchids of machine guns. War is beautiful because it combines the gunfire, the cannonades, the cease-fire, the scents, and the stench of putrefaction into a symphony. War is beautiful because it creates new architecture, like that of the big tanks, the geometrical formation flights, the smoke spirals from burning villages, and many others ... Poets and artists of Futurism! ... remember these principles of an aesthetics of war so that your struggle for a new literature and a new graphic art ... may be illumined by them!" (quoted in Benjamin 1968, 241-242).

Macronympha, a number of seeming contradictions arise with the political position argued by *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*. In 1995, the same year the album was released, Macronympha gave one of the most famous and notorious interviews in the American musical underground. A seventeen-page transcription of a phone interview with Roemer and Stella appeared in the tenth issue of *Bananafish Magazine*. It was a sprawling, bizarre document that did far more to establish Macronympha's reputation than their music or live shows ever could. When asked about the source material for some of their sounds, Roger Stella states that he has been capturing recordings of cars with loud stereo systems as they pass by on the street. "I've been recording big heavy jack beats coming out of jeeps. Ice Cube and stuff. Mixing it, and manipulating it, making it all bass-heavy" (Glass 2005, pages unnumbered). These recordings would then, presumably, end up buried under even more effects and distortion at a Macronympha live show, or on one of the band's recordings. Stella claims to feel an affinity with rap music, hears a connection between the rattle of a car's trunk and the deep throb of Noise electronics. The noise produced by the extreme volumes achieved by car stereo systems designed to play back rap music resembles the sounds produced by Macronympha on their own records—deep bass frequencies which break apart the audio in the higher frequencies. When played very loudly, a drum machine's kick drum sound distort in the same way that Macronympha's amplified scrap metal will, generating additional noise by shaking the speaker cabinets and, in the case of rap music, the body of the car. Does Stella hear a similar affinity in the two musics' politics? The social conditions out of which hip-hop was born, almost twenty years earlier in the Bronx, were in some ways similar to those which Macronympha and others faced in Pittsburgh. Hip Hop culture—the music, the break dancing, the graffiti art—remains the major art form produced out of the depressed

conditions of deindustrialized American inner cities. Like Macronympha's repurposing of discarded scrap metal, rappers, DJs, and painters used what was discarded as trash for their art. They cobbled together a form of expression out of the ruins of urban spaces. Roger Stella's interest in recording and repurposing rap music is telling. Does he hear it as another element of refuse in a decaying landscape, or as a like-minded soundtrack to the same situation?

Macronympha's art constantly put them in contact with people in other countries on different continents. Rami Nashashibi, in his article "Ghetto Cosmopolitanism: Making Theory at the Margins," argues that Islam grants a transnational perspective to black Muslims in American inner cities, allowing ghettoized African-Americans to jump scales from the local to the transnational. African-American Muslims make pilgrimage to Mecca, follow world affairs, are open to contact with people from outside their community and often host traveling Muslims from around the world in their homes (2008, 246). Without suggesting that religious affiliation and artistic collaboration are at all similar, I think that Nashashibi's term—"ghetto cosmopolitanism"—can be adapted from its religious context to describe Macronympha's transnational circulation. I use Nashashibi's term not as it was intended, but stripped of its nuance to suggest that Noise Music allowed Macronympha to engage in a much larger and more far-flung community than is usually available to people living in impoverished neighborhoods. How many of their working-class or unemployed white neighbors were in constant contact with people from more than fifteen countries? Macronympha regularly collaborated with a number of Japanese artists—probably twenty or more—during their career. The band toured with Japanese artists, and hosted them at their home when they visited Pennsylvania. They worked often with Richard Ramirez, a gay man of Mexican decent from Houston, and also with David Brownstead

whose albums featured militant pro-Israel sloganeering. One wonders how these artists reacted to the track titles on *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* which specifically antagonize Jews and Latinos.

The compilation cassette was a particularly popular form of distribution for Noise Music artists in the 1990s. According to the band's discography, Macronympha appeared on sixty-one compilations during their career. These compilations created a kind of virtual transnational space. Much more often than not, the artists whose works were collected onto the tapes were from different countries, their tracks added by shipping tapes of Noise Music through the mail. The community formed by trading cassettes back and forth across continents for collaboration predated those formed on internet message boards, and provided Noise Music performers and fans entry into a transnational circuit of artistic exchange. For example, *Noise War*, a double cassette compiled by Roemer and Stella is equally divided between Asians, Americans, and Europeans and features many contributions from women and homosexual Noise performers.

In this light, Macronympha's overtly white supremacist theming is a disturbing fact to address. *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* invites multiple readings, both of its sound and its packaging. The few scholars who address Noise Music in their work rarely, if ever, take on the genre's politics, and when they do, it is to analyze those artists like Merzbow who in the early 2000s—after decades of packaging his records in violent, pornographic collages—refocused his artistic work into an activist project that campaigns for animal rights. Macronympha's association with fringe right-wing ideologies both supports and contradicts *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*'s anti-capitalist position, framing it as a white trash lament over the economic victimization of the poor, while falling into the same trap of sideways victim-blaming that white supremacy set in the nineteenth century.

Kazumoto Endo's Musical Noise

My analysis of *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* provided an example of how meaning can be discovered in a purportedly “meaningless” art practice, demonstrating that an example of Noise Music can be subjected to the theoretical lenses through which other, more widely studied forms of music and sound art are viewed. Noise Music may have a unique relationship to the sonic phenomenon we call noise, but the music’s supposed resistance to signification is overstated. The sonic character of Noise Music may be inscrutable and overwhelming upon first listen—especially to listeners not already acclimatized to experimental electronic music—but the same could be said for any fringe art genre. In the period following the release of *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*, certain stylist adaptations occurred within the genre which continue this chapter’s historical through-line. If a wall of white noise and feedback can be heard as communicative sonic material, rather than as “the unintended byproduct of any expressive act” (Hainge 2013, 140), it follows that it can be put to further use as the stuff of music-making. Throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, artists like Kazumoto Endo expanded the expressive palette of noise by putting it in relation to other traditionally non-noise sounds.

The proliferation of CDs made an impact on the Noise Music underground by providing an upper limit to *loudness*. On a vinyl record, the maximum volume of the sound is proportional to the durational length of the material that is cut into the record. But in the digital realm, zero decibels is an absolute limit. Additionally, in digital recordings, the noise floor—the unwanted sound that is inherent to any physical medium, such as hiss on magnetic tape and crackle on vinyl—is greatly reduced, allowing quieter sounds to become audible. As CDs became more

common, some Noise Music performers began to utilize greater dynamic range in their recordings, finding that including softer passages made loud sections feel even louder through contrast. Stephen DiBenedetto, in his chapter on sound in theater, points out that human brains have novelty-detector neurons (2010, 54) which fire when changes in a sound environment are perceived. In opposition to constant sound which can eventually be ignored, or “tuned out” by many people, even if it is quite loud, sounds that turn on and off at unpredictable intervals, dropping away to quieter sounds, or even silence, snap the listener to attention. It’s possible that even played back at modest volumes, Noise Music that utilizes this type of dynamic will be perceived as being louder than that which has consistent amplitude and density.

Kazumoto Endo, who began playing Noise Music in the early 1990s under the name Killer Bug, was an early adopter of this technique. His barrage of distortion would often cut out and drop to silence for a moment, only to switch back on shortly after. Throughout his early cassette releases, these drop outs occurred with increasing regularity, happening faster and more often. Eventually, around the time Endo shed the Killer Bug moniker, his music had become largely characterized by short, loud blasts of static distortion decaying with long reverberant tails into silences of nearly equal length. Hegarty points to this phenomenon noting: “Silence as pause to heighten effect is of course a resource for many of the more overtly harsh noise musics—Masonna [Japanese Noise Artist Yamazaki Maso] often features gaps, but the example I want to give here is a single by Kazumoto Endo, which not only uses silence as a kind of punctuation, but as material” (2007, 149). Hegarty is referring to the silences which are generally treated as in-between pieces of music, or pauses between movements, versus silences appearing as musical material within a composition. Endo’s irregular explosions of sound, separated by periods of

quietude exist within the composition, as musical features. They are not to be understood as *breaks* in between performances, rather they are there to be listened to. Tension is not let out during these silences as it would be between tracks, or between movements in a composition. Archival video of Endo shows him remaining physically taught during the gaps in sound, often not moving, not looking up from the table in front of him, his hands hovering above his electronic instruments, waiting to launch back in. His playing can be heard as an experiment performed for the novelty-detector neurons that DiBenedetto mentions. His “cut up” style—a term often used to describe Endo’s music—mimics the use of smash cuts in film, and more specifically, what are colloquially called “jump scares” in horror film. The loud sounds are startling because they are surrounded by quiet. Where Macronympha never let up, Endo’s noise becomes experientially *louder*—even if it may not actually be louder as measured by a sound pressure level meter—through its contrast with silence.

If noise, as a category of sound, only exists in opposition, made audible by contrast with *desired* sound, then Endo’s silences articulate a theoretical position within the music itself by alternating between harsh audio and quietude. The care with which Endo develops his performances with respect to achieving this particular goal is very different from the casual, uncaring regard for the audio components in the earlier, more performance art styled Noise Music, like The New Blockaders and The Haters. There’s something deliberate in Endo’s music one could almost fall back on traditional clichés about the authority of virtuosity. Endo gives the impression that no sound he makes is accidental and that everything is intended. A model of noise which defines it as the byproduct of an expressive act fails to describe what occurs in Endo’s music. His work pushes Noise Music even closer toward traditional music by his display

of craftsmanship and attention to detail. Endo's pieces never sound accidental—they sound meticulously composed and edited.

On the album *While You Were Out* (1999) Endo further developed his cut-up technique, but rather than cutting from blasts of distorted microphone feedback to silence, he would often cut to prerecorded samples. The album is best known for its use of popular Japanese pop songs intercut with the noise. “Shinjuku Kahki Pants” begins with three of Endo's signature short blasts of distortion that quickly die away into silence. After a moment, a fragment of a synthesizer-based pop song appears in the space left by the fading blast of static. The pop sample begins stuttering, as if a CD is skipping, and then becomes obscured by another longer blast of feedback. A minute passes with the microphone feedback changing rapidly, often dropping out to brief silences. Another dropout occurs with the noise giving way to a delicate harpsichord passage. The playing resembles Baroque music until a jazzy bass line joins the harpsichord. This is then followed by a recording of a young woman laughing. Immediately, the distortion reappears, completely obliterating the sample and moving into a longer passage of noise punctuated by laser-like synthesizers sounds. Finally, the track the distortion again abates and another fragment of a pop song appears, this time resembling aerobics workout music.

In much of Endo's music, the harsh material drops out to silence to emphasize its loudness and density by contrast. However, by replacing many of those silences on “Shinjuku Kahki Pants” with pop and classical music the contrast becomes more complicated. Although silence carries plenty of cultural baggage, recordings of more traditionally *musical* musics are considerably less featureless. The contrast functions as itself a theory of noise as it operates in Noise Music. Endo disturbs the boundary between noise and music and questions whether the

distinction is even tenable. In an oft-quoted interview, Masami Akita refers to the relationship between Noise Music and pop music. “There is no difference between noise and music in my work. I have no idea what you term ‘music’ and ‘noise.’ It’s different depending on each person. If noise means uncomfortable sound, then pop music is noise to me” (quoted in Cox and Warner 2004, 4). Akita clearly sees a difference between the terms but states that pop music is noise to him. Endo’s “Shinjuku Kahki Pants” illustrates this opposition. The two types of sound are never allowed to overlap in the sonic space. They are separated by sharp, jarring cuts, the nature of which force an understanding of Noise Music and pop as essentially different, emphasizing Noise Music’s properties through alterity. The track argues for a binary; by using both classically inspired samples as well as contemporary popular music for the same effect—they are essentially interchangeable—Endo suggests that the major division is between Noise Music and all other music in human history. So while Endo’s compositional virtuosity—his care, attention to detail and deliberateness of editing and performance—appears to argue that noise is not the same as Noise Music, his use of pop samples goes on to insist that despite Noise Music’s “musicality” it remains somehow separate from musics characterized by melody, regular rhythms and harmony.

“Itabashi Girl” is perhaps Endo’s best known work, and it also appears on *While You Were Out*. On this track, Endo seems to adapt the formula that “Shinjuku Kahki Pants” set up. Where the previous example was built upon the presumed incommensurability of Noise Music and pop, “Itabashi Girl” makes an argument for their compatibility. The track begins with a short disco sample. The sample is cut at an awkward place in the measure, just before the bar naturally should end, and is then looped so that each repeat feels off-kilter and asymmetrical, itself confounding expectation with each iteration. The original material is clearly designed to function

as dance music, but Endo's editing renders it apparently undanceable, pushing it closer toward a kind of compatibility with the noise. The blasts of distortion, similar to those in "Shinjuku Kahki Pants" appear, but they do not replace the disco loop. Where in the earlier songs, the pop and Noise Music elements were never allowed to occupy the same sonic space, in "Itabashi Girl" they are layered atop one another. As the loop continues, swells of harsh static accumulate over the top until the loop's pop origins become somewhat abstracted and unrecognizable. Endo's rhythmically awkward cutting and relentless repetition denature the song, allowing it to almost resemble the noise that accompanies it. The loop and the distorted feedback overlap until a smash cut interrupts both pieces of audio and cuts to two different, less dense distortion sounds that are panned all the way to the right and left in the stereo field. These two distinct but not dissimilar sounds play against each other for the majority of the middle of the track until, in an abrupt cut, the disco loop reappears. In that moment, all of what was eliminated through abstraction and repetition in the earlier section comes rushing back. The loop's second emergence hits like the punchline to a joke. The sample's incongruous cultural baggage carries a kind of pop-art absurdity which recalls Jameson's definition of postmodernism in art, where the interplay between commercial art and the avant-garde produces a seemingly ironic juxtaposition. More swells of feedback accompany the loop, growing in density and volume until everything cuts out at once leaving a sample of a woman's voice yelling "Move your body!"

Endo's samples precede their inclusion in *While You Were Out*. In this sense, they are collected by Endo and repurposed as a sculptor might find and use discarded trash. By contrast, the blasts of microphone feedback and electronic sounds are Endo's original contributions and they are very precisely edited. The care with which he composes those sections is quite apparent.

Endo commits a full reversal of the earlier ideas of Noise Music presented by The New Blockaders and The Haters by making the blasts seem carefully composed and intentional, while the pop songs—serving as found-objects—sound accidental. In other words, the blasts might be Endo’s “music” while the samples become encroaching, unpleasant disruptions, the thrown-away sonic detritus of an urban environment that is oversaturated with the “noise” of incidental commercial audio.

Kazumoto Endo offers us a theory of noise’s place in Noise Music by presenting it in opposition to, and alongside, recordings of more traditionally structured music. His method almost parodies the distinction between them. Masami Akita’s insistence that pop and noise are separate categories is at once demonstrated and rebutted. In “Shinjuku Kahki Pants,” Endo replaces his customary silences with pop and classical recordings wherein they serve both to maximize the feedback blasts’ perceptual loudness through contrast with quieter sound, but also render those blasts as noise in opposition to music. This binary is problematized by “Itabashi Girl” which allows a disco loop and microphone feedback to run in parallel. Although the two types of audio remain distinct despite their simultaneity, their blending leaves open the possibility for reconciliation between them. These two compositions from *While You Were Out* articulate one particular story of Noise Music’s relationship to noise and its presumed opposite, blurring the boundaries that the genre of Noise Music once sought to erect.

Pedestrian Deposit's Noisy Music

Throughout this chapter, I have tried to trace a historical trajectory through Noise music that follows the genre's diminishing noisiness and its increasing musicality with regard to those aspects that define traditional popular and classical musics. Kazumoto Endo performs an unsettling mix of disparate sonic elements, but their relationships within the compositions seem to vacillate between arguments for noise's inclusion as conventionally musical material, and insisting that an essential property of one or the other makes noise incompatible with music. Even when they are layered on top of each other, as they are in "Itabashi Girl," the blasts of feedback and the song loops do not fully cohere. The track's logic rests on the absurdity of the juxtaposition between the two elements. In the last step in the sequence this chapter follows, Pedestrian Deposit musicalizes noise even further, in part by misunderstanding earlier Noise Music recordings.

Since 2008, Pedestrian Deposit has been the duo of Jonathan Borges and Shannon Kennedy but the project began with Borges alone. The specific recording I will examine dates from before Kennedy joined the project. In fact, the project has been active since Borges's first live performance in 1999 when he was fourteen years old. He had begun recording Noise Music at the age of ten and at twelve had founded his own record label to release his own recordings and recordings by other artists. The only reason Borges's age is important to this argument is that he possesses a unique personal history where he began listening to Noise Music cassettes at a very young age, entirely cut off from any other Noise Music artists or listeners.

Even though the actual audio was beside the point, The Haters and The New Blockaders recorded their performances on cassettes and shared them throughout the world. The trading of these recordings fostered an international community so spread out that there was rarely any possibility of traveling to attend performances. The cassettes were documents, objects that could be shared, that would circulate intercontinentally when it was impractical or financially impossible for bodies themselves to do so. In an interview with Thomas Bey William Bailey, GX Jupiter-Larsen (of The Haters) explained that, although he was more focussed on the live performances, the recorded documents of those performances allowed for communication between artists. He says: “Anyhow, it was because of my correspondence with MB [Italian artist Maurizio Bianchi] and Merzbow that I finally got plugged into a scene that was slowly becoming what we now know as Cassette Culture” (2012, 238). In those earliest days, Noise Music was largely a performance-based practice and audio recordings were documents of live events, rather than artworks in themselves. However, artists did produce recordings as a way to communicate across borders, and share ideas about the genre. Because of this, the cassettes made available to listeners who sought them out, whether they understood what it was that they were hearing. Borges, who dedicated himself to Noise Music at a very early age, heard these Noise Music tapes, and where the artists had uncaringly generated audio, with no concern for aesthetics—what The New Blockaders called “anti-aesthetics”—Borges heard beauty. In response to some questions I sent him, Borges wrote: “I guess I misunderstood what they were going for because I thought it *sounded* good.”¹⁹

¹⁹ This quote comes from an email conversation from 2013. The emphasis is mine.

According to The New Blockaders, taste in art was anathema to their mission of disruption and confrontation. Noise Music couldn't be judged by the same terms that other art was: it was neither good nor bad—it either was noisy (which is to say, successful) or it wasn't. However, Borges discovered Noise Music through the recordings—the objects themselves (cassettes, LPs, CDs) are materially identical to the objects that carry traditional music—and responded to the audio first as music, only learning later that it was associated with performance art, or designed as social provocation. As a result, this new generation of Noise Music artists which Borges represents consciously made “noise” as music. How were they to know that they were being (unsuccessfully) compelled by The New Blockaders and The Haters to listen somehow differently when, by all outside appearances, the tapes and records listeners heard seemed to contain music?

The piece “Girl on Bicycle” appeared on a split 7” record in 2003. Although it may not have been the first of its type in Borges’s catalogue of releases, it is an early example of what became Pedestrian Deposit’s signature style. The track borrows Kazumoto’s Endo’s cut-up tactics, jarringly editing between quiet sections and loud ones. However, where in Endo’s tracks, a binary is established where “noise”—i.e. the harsh, overdriven feedback—and “music”—i.e. the sampled, pre-existing bubblegum pop songs—are proven incompatible, Borges repurposes the formula toward a different end. “Girl on Bicycle” opens with the sound of a piano. It sounds as if the recording has been reversed, with the decay of a struck note swelling up in volume, but the sample is stuck, as if it was a scratched CD that was skipping. The sound loops that way, each iteration being less than one second long, for the first seven seconds of the track. Then some buzzing feedback appears, but it also sounds as if its being played off a skipping CD, stuttering

but advancing forward, rather than being stuck in a loop. At twelve seconds, the feedback changes, the piano drops out, and a really wide stereo recording of harsh static takes over. Throughout this section, there are sharp cuts in the sound, but the volume and density are somewhat consistent, shifting between equally over-modulated feedback sources, occasionally looping a small section of audio for a moment. At thirty eight seconds, the feedback drops out and the piano returns. This time, single notes are struck and they decay with a quick delay pattern following them into silence. This happens several times until the piano notes begin trading off with blasts of feedback panned left and right, which have long reverberant tails that decay for a moment after the feedback has cut off. At 1:11, a loop that sounds like somebody fumbling with a microphone in their hands replaces the piano and the feedback blasts. It is similar to the louder distorted sounds that appeared earlier, but of a generally lower frequency. This loop then cuts to a barrage of quickly-edited harsh microphone feedback sounds which occupy up the bulk of the track's middle section. The feedback cuts between a handful of different timbral colors, as if several distinct recordings were being carefully spliced together. Single sonic gestures occasionally loop a few times before moving on, as if the track were getting stuck on itself, catching on a simulated error. At three minutes, a particularly bright, high-frequency feedback sound drops out to silence, with a long, reverberant decay. This sound is repeated four times until a buzzing, stuttering sound like amplified ground hum accompanies it. This passage reveals itself to be only a brief interlude in the cut-up feedback, as the fuller distortion reappears again for another several seconds before dying out. The last thirty seconds of "Girl on Bicycle" is dominated by piano, sometimes reversed, cut into awkward, asymmetrical loops. Blasts of

feedback emerge, but they are quieter and cannot entirely obscure the piano with their volume. The track fades out on a similar loop to the one that began it.

Rather than using silence or sampled pop songs like Endo, Borges cuts from his own softer ambient sounds to emphasize the density and volume of his feedback. The two types of sound are still set up in contrast to one another within the track—one articulates its difference from the other through the use of the smash-cut—but for the first time, they are made to cohere. For Endo, the sections which oppose the feedback are not his own, they are stolen, recorded off of the radio, or pulled from pre-existing pop records. Their difference from the feedback is amplified by the obvious difference in their origin. Although Endo cuts the samples in particular ways for the purpose of his own Noise Music compositions, part of their function within the music is to be the parts that Endo didn't make himself—the “authored” portions are the feedback sounds. Borges's piano passages fulfill a similar structural function: they are the quiet sounds over which the feedback can be perceived as “loud,” but they are also played by Borges himself, and are subject to all of the same editing techniques and signal processing that Borges applies to the harsher parts. In this way, a kind of consistency is achieved across the whole composition. The piece itself only distinguishes between the piano and the feedback in terms of timbral quality—neither is given more importance or authority. They are not presented as coming from two incommensurate worlds of sound. The ambient passages are composed with as much care and detail as the harsh distorted passages are, and the combination of the two creates the complete composition.

The piano itself carries more cultural baggage in western music than perhaps any other instrument. If one material object were to imbue ‘musicality’ simply by the authority of its

presence, it is the piano. The tonal system on which western music is built was developed alongside the piano (see Isacoff 2001). In his article “Pianos, Ivory and Empire,” Sean Murray connects the instrument’s history and its materiality to the history of western colonialism (Murray 2009). The piano is laden with a bundle of cultural associations, and “Girl on Bicycle” doesn’t deny them. Where other experimental electronic music might seek to denature the sounds of an instrument whose referentiality carries so much weight—consider Cage’s preparations, or Annea Lockwood’s *Piano Transplants* (1967-1971) and *Piano Burning* (1968)—Borges allows the piano its identity and welcomes the imposition of historical and cultural associations that attach themselves to it. In this sense, “Girl on Bicycle” brandishes its position *as music*, and seeks to eliminate any essential distinction between its loud and its quiet sections.

A History of Noise in Noise Music

The three stages of this history which I have outlined represent a shift in the trajectory of Noise Music from its start as a performance-based genre, where provocation was its primary stated goal, to a codified practice of music-making, where the noisiness of the sound bears no relation to the noise of philosophy, nor the noise of everyday language, because the audio is heard as an aesthetic object. In the middle of this sequence, I included an analysis of Macronympha’s *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* to intervene into any field of scholarship on Noise Music which insists on the music’s resistance to signification by demonstrating ways that it can be subjected to the same methods of close reading that any cultural object can. It appears midway through the history, in 1995, not necessarily because it is the turning point in my story,

or the earliest time that Noise Music can be said to communicate so clearly, but to show that this development away from Noise's noisiness was contentious and full of messy contradictions. When a generation of listeners grew up ordering Noise tapes through mail order catalogues, the sound became open to interpretation. Noise's early nihilism sprouted many branches, some whose ideological positions can be seen as right wing, others on the left. What is crucial, though, is that Noise Music was made to signify something. Having political content which was directly related to the sonic character of the music proves that the Noise Music communicated meaning through its address to its listeners. No longer could it be said that the audio was either the byproduct of a performative activity, or an excessive provocation where loudness was meaning in itself. Noise Music became something which was to be *listened to*—by the design of the artists producing it and by the formal address of the works themselves.

3. Sexuality, Fear, and Diegetic Music in Film

The question that drives this chapter is the following: why is it that in the very few films of which I am aware that feature characters who create or listen to experimental electronic music, that music is made to signify sexual perversion? I did not think up this question and then go searching for evidence; rather the evidence appeared before me, after happening upon two of the films I will discuss at length—*Lipstick* (1976) and *Bewildered Youth* (1957)—within a matter of weeks. Experimental electronic music is often assumed to be sterile, difficult, and meaningless—a position argued by the film *(Untitled)* (2009), which I will also discuss. Why, then, does it represent such a specifically sexual threat in these earlier films? Indeed, three examples is a very small sample group—especially considering that the films originate from different nations, historical eras, and genres—but I believe there is something significant to be gleaned from the one connection they do share. Experimental music is characterized by its rejection of established musical structures, including the structures that support classical tonality. Susan McClary argues that tonality has, since its invention, trafficked not in pure abstraction as is often imagined, but in representations of gender and sexuality. This chapter will investigate the premise that in *Lipstick* and *Bewildered Youth*, experimental electronic music becomes associated with failures to perform “normal” masculinity because it evades containment by gendered codes of tonal music.

Experimental Music in Cinema

Music's presumed usefulness to cinema lies in its ability to communicate how an audience is supposed to *feel* at a given time. When deployed by filmmakers, music presumes to tell viewers whether a scene is designed to be scary, romantic, exciting or funny. The language of film music is inextricably bound to a discourse of the emotions, emotions that are assumed to be "natural" and translatable across different individuals and groups of people. Kathryn Kalinak writes that film music "is characterized by its power to define meaning and express emotion: film music guides our response to the images and connects us to them" (1992, xiii). A melody written in a minor key, played slowly and quietly generally might mean that the viewer is supposed to feel sad, while a major chord progression with a strong resolution, leaping melodic intervals, and played loudly on brass instruments, usually underscores the triumph of a character with whom the audience is expected to identify. Far from natural, these systems of emotional expression in music are historically and socially constructed, as well as being geographically and culturally specific. Western music's constituent parts all had to be invented—tonality, harmony, equal temperament, individual musical instruments—and cobbled together over hundreds of years into a perceived "standard" of musical practice by the eighteenth century.

For this language to achieve even the slightest hope of "universal" communicability with regard to the dictation of emotional states, it must rely heavily on the sturdiest established signifiers within tonality. The subject of this dissertation, however—experimental electronic music—by the definition I've established in the introduction and elsewhere, generally avoids the overly-familiar musical tropes with which traditional mainstream film music creates meaning. In

this chapter, I will argue that because of experimental electronic music's frequent incompatibility with the rules of western tonal music, it has been deployed in a small number of films for very specific narrative purposes. Rather than being "unemotional," experimental electronic music is used to disrupt the standard language of meaning-making in film music, becomes associated with the negative emotions of confusion, unease, and even fear. Moreover, this chapter will argue that in the case of several representative filmic texts, experimental electronic music becomes adhered to specific manifestations of these emotions, having to do with representations of supposedly "deviant" expressions of gender and sexuality.

Experimental music has famously appeared in many mainstream films, from Bernard Herrmann's use of "extended" violin techniques borrowed from the avant-garde in *Psycho* (USA, 1960), to the placement of Laurie Spiegel's experimental synthesizer composition *Sediment* (1972) in a key scene in *The Hunger Games* (2012). Experimental music features, perhaps, most prominently in the films of director Stanley Kubrick. Especially in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *The Shining* (1980) and *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), Kubrick utilized pre-existing experimental music in scenes of creeping unease, or outright terror. It is notable, for the purposes of this chapter, that in no instance in Kubrick's films is experimental music used to score a moment of happiness, pleasure, calm or triumph. For those kind of emotional cues, pieces of music appear which more closely follow the traditionally established forms of western tonality and harmony. David Huckvale's *Hammer Film Scores and the Musical Avant-Garde* argues that so-called "lowbrow" horror cinema was an early adopter of experimental music as score. The Hammer studio's main composers (James Bernard, Elisabeth Lutyens, Tristram Cary, and others) borrowed techniques from the era's experimental composers,

but they did so in order to accompany the appearance of monsters and villains. Hammer composer Benjamin Frankel wrote the first complete film score to use Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique for *The Curse of the Werewolf* (1961) (Huckvale 2008, 4). The Hammer composers adapted experimental music, recontextualizing the avant-garde language developed in concert halls and universities in order to inspire unease and fear in the minds of moviegoers.

I bring this up to set the scene for this chapter's main argument. While a survey of experimental music, its uses in cinema, and its relationship to horror and monstrosity is too large a project for any single study, the distinction between score and source music can narrow the field. Score is the music that the film viewing audience can hear, but that the characters within the film cannot. It is a standard joke that if the characters in a horror movie could hear the score as the audience can, they would never go investigate dark basements or mysterious, rundown mansions. Source music is what people working in the film industry call diegetic music. Diegetic music is music whose source is present within the film's narrative world—the diegesis—such that the characters themselves can hear it (see Cooke 2008, 9-15). Examples of this appear when a character turns on a radio in a scene, or puts on a record, or picks up an instrument and begins to play it. As score, experimental music is often used to evoke fear. It is that same music's use as source within a film—however rare such instances turn out to be—that best illustrates why this might be the case.

In this chapter, I will analyze three films in some depth. As in nearly any case of scholarship that argues for the inclusion of certain case studies, to the exclusion of others that do not fit the author's stated goals, these three films, on their surface, might seem unrelated. Their release dates span more than fifty years, three distinct genres, and two nations. *Bewildered Youth*

is a German propaganda film, directed by a former Nazi propagandist; *Lipstick* is an American mainstream rape-revenge film and courtroom drama; and *(Untitled)* is an American independent comedy. What they do have in common, though, and the reason for my grouping them together, is that they all feature experimental music—I have temporarily dropped the term “electronic” from my description, the reason for which will become clearer below—as a diegetic element, and in each, that music is a prominent aspect of the plot. In fact, these three films are the only three narrative films I have found in my research wherein experimental music appears and is foregrounded in the plot. Both *Lipstick* and *(Untitled)* feature main characters who are experimental composers, while *Bewildered Youth*’s story involves a character who is a connoisseur of experimental music and the records he plays for the other characters become a major element of the film’s narrative. The different ways experimental music appears in these three films will illustrate the narrow range of emotion in which it is allowed to function in these examples. An analysis of the newest of the three will establish some of the issues in question in the chapter, as well as serve as a lens through which elements of the earlier two films will be viewed. *(Untitled)* differs significantly from *Lipstick* and *Bewildered Youth* in several ways that are vital to my argument and its uniqueness will be used to highlight the similarities—specifically those which align experimental electronic music with deviant, criminal expressions of sexuality and sexual practice—present in the latter two. The chapter will conclude with an application of Susan McClary’s theories, famously articulated in her book *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (1991), as an attempt to understand the relationship between the music in these films, and the meaning it is employed to communicate. In this chapter, I will argue

that sonic transgressions of tonality in these cinematic examples are understood as being transgressions of established codes of gender and sexuality.

“Unemotional” Experimental Music in *(Untitled)*

Adrian Jacobs—the brooding, prickly composer of experimental music in Jonathan Parker’s *(Untitled)*—is accused throughout the film of writing music that is sterile, unfeeling. After a performance of one of his pieces, his brother, a successful abstract painter whose work hangs in the lobbies of a chain of hotels, asks Adrian: “Why don’t you try composing something with more emotion?” Adrian’s friend—curiously named “The Clarinet” in the film, despite appearing in half of the film’s scenes and functioning as a major character with respect to the development of its plot—tentatively agrees with his brother. She tells Adrian: “Sometimes you hide behind intellectual mannerisms.” At this point in the film, it is unclear whether or not Adrian agrees with this assessment of his work, whether he believes his music is concerned with emotions. Later, he explains. While splitting a drink with Madeline—an ambitious gallery owner who represents his brother’s work—he describes his evolution as an artist: “Fortunately, my later works no longer relied on childish emotion as a source of inspiration, and I began to write music that isn’t connected with life in any way.” Madeleine asks, “What is it connected to?” Adrian pauses, searching for an answer, but is distracted by the sound of a plastic bag, which is stuck in the branches of a tree just outside his apartment window, whipping about in the wind.

In this scene, and presumably throughout the film, the audience is supposed to believe what it is often told about experimental music: that it is a purely formal exercise, with no

relationship to the emotions, and more concerned with the physical materiality of the world than it is with the history, society, politics or sensations of the world's human inhabitants. In Adrian's silence, the bag in the tree answers Madeline's question. It is the random interaction of materials, the constant flow of vibrational forces that precedes and exceeds human audition. The film suggests that Adrian's music is connected not to emotions but to the snapping and crumpling of the plastic, the clattering and creaking of the branches, the whistling of the wind. Sounds that have no "meaning" per se, but are imagined to occur whether or not a person is there to hear it. Not only are these sounds thought to exist in a sonic realm distinct from music, but it is assumed that they are not communicative in the way music or other human-made sounds are. These sounds can be imagined to exist outside human consciousness and the system of meaning-making which traps speech, music and any other intentional sound produced by humans, for the benefit of other human hearers. In the Introduction I provided several references to proponents of this position, notably from Christoph Cox, who champions a "neomodernist" view of sound art and experimental music over one which might foreground feelings, or human sensation. This understanding of experimental music also resonates with those philosophers connected by to the various movements collected under the terms Speculative Realism, New Materialism, and Object-Oriented Ontology whose proponents have argued for readings of specific experimental compositions to be representative of a rejection of anthropocentric model of the universe (See references to Thacker 2011, and Brassier 2007 in the introduction and earlier chapters).

Near the end of the film—after Adrian's relationship with Madeleine has collapsed and he has blown the commission she'd secured for him from a nouveau riche art collector who is the butt of the film's meanest jokes—the audience is shown a montage of Adrian composing

something overtly emotional. At the premier of his commissioned piece, at the last moment, he substitutes the real scores on each of his musicians's music stands with a "silent" piece, a piece that just indicates rests and no notes. The gathered crowd is incensed and Adrian's patron refuses to pay him the commission. One of his musicians, however, insultingly jokes it's the best thing he's ever written. Several scenes later, he attends a concert which the film communicates contains "good" experimental music, distinguished by the obvious virtuosity of the players (a quartet, So Percussion, tapping out very fast, intricate patterns on household objects, in near unison) with respect to Adrian's unskilled performances. The next time we are shown Adrian, he is composing for solo piano, playing plaintive, melancholy chords, adhering to the structures of traditional western tonality (with brief touches of dissonance) which he had earlier dismissed as a "Capitalist ploy to sell pianos." The scene begins at the nadir of his emotional journey through the film and the audience is led to believe that this change in direction has the potential to pull him out of his situation. This montage is presented as a kind of triumph wherein he gives up his alienating pretensions and begins composing, relatable, conventional music. The film conflates Adrian's new music with a kind of truth, or emotional honesty. It is through putting his feelings into his music that he is able to move on and, as we see him in the film's final scene, become somewhat content.

As much as (*Untitled*) wants to tell the audience that Adrian's music is unconnected to emotions (barring the final piece we see him composing) the actual scenes of his performances contradict this position. They are played for laughs, an ungenerous parody of experimental music. The second scene of the film shows Adrian, The Clarinet and Seth (who has only a couple lines in the film but is granted a name) performing a piece for piano, clarinet, assorted

percussion, a bucket hanging from a wire—which becomes a running gag throughout the film—and duck calls. Adrian counts them off to begin. His gestures establish a tempo and time signature, but the joke lands when neither element of music is discernible in their playing. However, rather than being unemotional, their playing seems impassioned. The players' emotional commitment generates the humor and ridiculousness in the scene. The Clarinet begins the piece by shrieking “Hi-yaa!” her face contorted as she bears her teeth in a battle-cry. Moments later, she is pretending to weep, her shoulders heaving with simulated sobs. Although the film makes clear that her tears are false, the performance is certainly not sterile. In fact, the music that Adrian argues is unconnected from the world in every way is, in fact, constructed from references to, and representations of, emotion. What makes them ridiculous in the context of Adrian's music in film is how obviously fabricated they are, not that they are absent. They are comic because they are akin to bad acting in a movie, a phenomenon which hardly inspires criticism that movies are therefore unconnected to any emotions.

Moreover, Adrian and Madeleine's romance begins when she describes to him the emotional impact his performance had on her. “I'm still shaking from the bucket kicks,” she begins. “They cut straight through me. Is it a death knell? A call to manual labor? Add the clarinet overtones and it's a striking effect. The chain drop: human passion unchained. The kind that takes us right to the edge.” (*Untitled*) never decides if Madeleine is sincere or if her entire relationship to the avant-garde art she supports is a complicated scam. However, it remains that no matter how often the film's characters tell its audience that Adrian's music has no relationship to the emotions, the film's narrative actually operates on the assumption that it really does. Adrian's music generates most of the film's most memorable jokes—it is advertised as a comedy,

so this is particularly relevant. In addition, it is through Madeleine's language—her descriptions of art (both Adrian's music and the visual art she represents at her gallery) which always draw connections outside of the works themselves, with references to cultural, social, historical, and emotional relationships—that allows for all of the events of the plot to occur. The movie's narrative progression actually counts on Adrian's music inspiring emotional responses from other characters and the audience through its structural relationship to emotions and representations of emotions.

Adrian's music stands in for his whole character, it is all we really know about him. He has no conversations with other characters about anything other than his music. The music itself, and his dedication to it, becomes the only aspect of his personality the audience has access to. This is a result of placing experimental music in a narrative: its supposed status as art-for-art's-sake is sacrificed for its deployment in a narrative. What is, within the diegesis, presented as meaningless and without the intention of affective responses, takes on those aspects (meaning and affect) for the purposes of the storytelling. Experimental music cannot be extricated from the conditions and context of its creation—as well as the system of relations that entrap it in its material, social, political reality—is revealed. The film betrays the fantasy that experimental music can escape the realm of affect by highlighting this contradiction in the narrative.

(Untitled) functions differently from the other two films in this chapter, partly in that it is a comedy. As I described above, the performances of Adrian's music are clearly played for laughs. In fact, much of the humor extends from the disconnect between Adrian's deadly-serious intentions, and their ridiculous realizations. To use Sianne Ngai's terminology from *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (2012), Adrian believes his music to be

“interesting”—cool, rational, conceptual, system-based, boring—when in practice, it appears “zany”—troubling the distinction between work and play (2012, 1-9). One major reason for this has to do with another major difference between *(Untitled)* and the other two films in this chapter. Adrian’s music is experimental, but it is not exclusively electronic. Some of his sounds are electronically reproduced, but even then, they have acoustic origins, which are sampled (recorded) and then later played back by electronic means. What this means for Adrian—in opposition to *Lipstick*’s composer character, Gordon Stuart, who broods ominously over banks of knobs like a mad scientist in a Universal Studios monster movie, or *Bewildered Youth*’s sinister Dr. Winkler, who merely drops the needle on his record player—is that the production of his music is physically active, and in that way, subject to ridicule. Unlike electronic music, Adrian’s acoustic music is produced by human activity, the interaction between bodies and objects. Ngai locates zaniness in the performative: “Zaniness is the only aesthetic category in our contemporary repertoire explicitly about this politically ambiguous intersection between cultural and occupational performance, acting and service, playing and laboring” (2012, 182). The activities which Adrian and his ensemble of performers engage to produce sound are, laughably, unproductive—an excess of energy expended for very little result. Moreover, the sounds produced are—according to my understanding of the film’s own position—unspectacular, not worth the effort. Comedy is derived from Adrian’s failure to achieve the cool, unemotional formalism to which he aspires. This failure is embodied in the performance of sound-production, the wackiness of bodies actually performing the acoustic activities called for in Adrian’s compositions.

Electronics, however, afford the production of experimental music a less ridiculous comportment. A knob turn is physically more economical, with respect to the sound produced, than is a bucket-kick. A great deal of sound can emerge from only the slightest expenditure of bodily movement. A distinction must be made between the zaniness of Adrian's acoustic sound-production, with the coolness of Stuart's electronic (knob-turning) sound-production in *Lipstick*. The latter affords Stuart a demeanor of threat. Electronic music also operates under a veil of mystery; the activity required to produce sound in Adrian's compositions is visible, and thus ridiculous. The physicality functions similarly to that of Ngai's arch example for zaniness (though considerably less brilliant): Lucille Ball. One can almost picture an episode of *I Love Lucy* where the protagonist tries her hand at experimental composition. In the case of electronic music, however, the interaction of electrons in a synthesizer, as well as the arrangement of magnetic particles on a piece of tape, is invisible. The activity that produces the sound is hidden, microscopic. The machines themselves resemble inscrutable infernal devices, like those that inhabit Frankenstein's mountaintop laboratory, or the crash-landed spaceship in *Alien* (USA, 1979). Their operators take on an air of authority, of technical mastery. They do not appear ridiculous at all; rather they are alchemists, or scientists. They are in control, and therefore can be characterized as threatening, powerful. In the case of the next two films I will address, this threat is also linked to criminality, homosexuality and rape. As I shall argue, *Lipstick* and *Bewildered Youth* align experimental electronic music with deviant sexuality and non-normative gender representation. In this way, the perspective of these films are significantly different from that of (*Untitled*), although I believe those distinctions can be attributed to genre (comedy versus thriller, and propaganda drama), historical context (the beginning of the twenty-first century

versus the 1950s and the 1970s), and the difference between acoustic and electronic experimental music.

In *(Untitled)*, Adrian's masculinity is, in fact, never called into question. Although he is no macho action hero, the film doesn't seem to concern itself with whether or not the character is perceived as masculine. His coupling with Madeleine is unburdened by any such questions, in fact it is implied that he is a perfectly competent, and "normal," heterosexual partner for her. He is, however, set up in opposition to the character of Monroe, an artist Madeleine shows at her gallery. Monroe is a meek, effete hermit who makes inscrutable conceptual pieces such as a single white pushpin stuck into an otherwise bare white wall. Adrian's unwillingness to be associated with Monroe is what ends his relationship with Madeleine although Monroe's art is not depicted in the film as being any more ridiculous than Adrian's. What is clear is that Adrian finds Monroe's demeanor, his comportment, his presentation of self, to be unacceptable. It is not their art which distinguishes Adrian from Monroe but their expressions of masculinity. The last time we see Monroe is at his gallery opening where, as he mumbles incomprehensible nonsense about his work, he looks up surprised and then thrilled to realize that several beautiful women are hanging on his every word. *(Untitled)* provides Monroe as a counterpart to Adrian, as a way to reinforce the stability of Adrian's masculinity and sexuality. I began this chapter with *(Untitled)* because it is the exception. However, *(Untitled)* expertly articulates, and yet also refutes, the common position that this entire dissertation seeks to debunk: that experimental music is purely formal, disengaged from the realm of the social, unfeeling. My interest in the next two films takes that project of debunking a step further: if experimental electronic music does, in fact, create meaning as any cultural artifact would, what is that meaning? How is it

deployed for the purposes of storytelling? What I will argue is that not only does the music in question exceed its presumed cool dissociation with the social, but that it *means* something very specific regarding sex and sexuality, at least in the few examples available in narrative cinema.

Violent Experimental Music in *Lipstick*

Experimental music in mainstream narrative film appears as score much more often than it does as source. In fact, It would be more accurate to say that film music that repurposes certain sonic traits usually associated with experimental music often appears in film as score. When those traits are used in a score to communicate a specific emotional state, it is debatable whether they remain truly experimental. What remains of those musics are certain characteristics: dissonance, atonality, unconventional “extended” instrumental techniques, electronic instrumentation. Waterphones and other bowed percussion instruments accompany the appearance of monsters in *Poltergeist* (1982), *Aliens* (1986) and *Let The Right One In* (2008), and Bernard Herrmann’s use of sharp string scrapes in *Psycho* has become an iconic sonic representation of cinematic violence. Beside these borrowings from the avant-garde, actual experimental music is also often used in film scoring, decontextualized from its concert hall origins and made to serve as an indicator that the world the audience is looking at is not quite right. In *The Shining*, Stanley Kubrick placed Krzysztof Penderecki’s *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* (1960) in scenes where creeping tension builds, as well as in moments of outright, abject horror. More recently, Martin Scorsese’s horror/suspense film *Shutter Island* (2010) was scored entirely with pre-existing experimental music. The soundtrack consists of works by a

collection of composers who represent a broad range of styles within experimental music and come from many different musical and national backgrounds—Penderecki, John Cage, Morton Feldman, John Adams, Nam June Paik, Ingram Marshall, Alfred Schnittke, et al. Presumably none of the music Scorsese used was explicitly designed to evoke terror, but Scorsese deployed it to do just that. Why is it that when experimental music is placed in a narrative film, it is so often made to accompany moments of fright? In order to approach a response to this question, horror's connection to gender and sexuality must be established. Where *(Untitled)* differs most significantly from *Bewildered Youth* and *Lipstick* is in the latter films's depiction of horror and monsters. In both of those films, experimental music is implicitly bound to characters of whom the audience is supposed to be afraid. Moreover, the source of the horror with which these characters are constructed is linked to their sexualities in particularly telling ways.

Many academic studies of the horror genre focus explicitly on issues of gender and sexuality. Adapting Freud's brief notes on the *Unheimliche*, or "uncanny," to horror in cinema, Robin Wood's discussion (2003)²⁰ was an early attempt to analyze horror film from a psychoanalytic perspective. Using concepts borrowed from Freud, significantly adapted by Marcuse, Wood argues that the monstrous is always figured as a failure to repress a "surplus repression," specific to a particular society and historical period. He writes:

Basic repression is universal, necessary, and inescapable. It is what makes possible our development from an uncoordinated animal capable of little beyond screaming and convulsions into a human being; it is bound up with the ability to accept the postponement of gratification, with the development of thought and

²⁰ Wood's article was originally published in 1978 under the title "The Return of the Repressed."

memory processes, our capacity for self-control, and our recognition of and consideration for other people (2003, 63).

He goes on: "Surplus repression, on the other hand, is specific to a particular culture and is the process whereby people are conditioned from earliest infancy to take on predetermined roles with that culture" (2003, 64). Surplus repressions differ from basic repressions in that basic repressions are, in Wood's words, "universal"—such as the repression of urges toward extreme violence—and surplus repressions are controlled by ideology. Surplus repressions are not necessary for civilizations to exist, rather they are the social codes that groups develop through culture. Wood writes: "[B]asic repression makes us distinctively human, capable of directing our own lives and co-existing with others; surplus repression makes us into monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalists" (2003, 64). Wood particularly identifies those surplus repressions that are specific to the western world in the twentieth century as pertaining to so-called "deviant" sexualities. He lists bisexuality, homosexuality, the sexuality of women and the sexuality of children (2003, 65). In this way, Wood argues that movie monsters can often be read as figures who fail to repress some form of non-normative sexual desire/energy.

Wood lists a number of common examples from horror cinema that illustrate his point: the prevalence of female monsters whose sexual desire marks them as monstrous, as well as the prevalence of monstrous children. What particularly concerns this chapter is the frequency with which monsters figured as male are shown in film to exhibit non-normative sexual desires, or be, in their gender expression, insufficiently masculine. Consider the implied bisexuality of Dracula (or any vampire outside of the *Twilight* films) or the childish, though still erotic, desire the Frankenstein monster has for a mate. The dialogue in James Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein*

(USA, 1935) explicitly argues that it is Henry Frankenstein's attempt to "play God" that generates the films' source of horror, but it is implied throughout that it is Henry's attempt to produce a child by means other than heterosexual intercourse—an act which he conspicuously avoids during the film—that is monstrous. In fact, although the film opens on his wedding night, Frankenstein chooses to get out of bed with his new wife in order to make a child with Dr. Pretorius (described by one character as "a very queer fellow") instead.

Contemporary horror cinema has not abandoned sexual transgression as its major marker of monstrosity. In the *Halloween* series of films, the killer Michael Myers is depicted as perpetually a child (mentally and emotionally) with an incestuous desire for his older sister. Ditto Jason Voorhees in the *Friday the Thirteenth* films, only substitute mother for sister. It is implied that Freddy Kruger is a pedophile in *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) and later stated more explicitly in the 2010 reboot. The prevalence of these tropes crosses the polarities of high and lowbrow horror cinema. Consider the similar ways in which transvestism and transexuality are made monstrous in both "serious," "high brow" films like *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), and *Dressed to Kill* (1980) and in cheap, drive-in fare such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), and *Sleepaway Camp* (1983). In all four films, a kind of non-normative gender expression (coded to elicit confusion with regard to the gender of the characters on the part of the audience) works to mark the killers as monsters. Norman Bates in Hitchcock's *Psycho* could be held up as, perhaps, the model example: a cross-dressing mama's-boy whose response to sexual arousal is murder. Like many film monsters that follow him—including Leatherface, especially in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre Part 2* (1986) — Bates kills because he cannot achieve a "normal" successful sexual encounter with a woman he desires. His violent reaction is a way of

remastering the scenario of his masculine failure. (Bates, I will argue, serves as a kind of model for *Lipstick*'s serial rapist, Gordon Stuart, who rapes as a way to avenge his damaged masculinity against women who refuse to afford him the type of recognition he desires from them, and with whom he cannot seduce into willingly sleeping with him). It is, in fact, rare for a movie monster to exhibit traditionally masculine characteristics and heteronormative drives except in horror films which appear to consciously reverse this trope as an expression of the film's politics. *The Stepfather* (USA, 1987) and *American Psycho* (USA, 2000) are two notable examples where heteronormativity is rendered monstrous.

Lamont Johnson's *Lipstick* shares a certain amount of its DNA with the above monster and slasher films. Firstly, it belongs to the rape-revenge genre, a film cycle which grew from the same 1970s market of drive-in distribution as the slasher, and could be argued that it even shares some of its common ancestors, like Wes Craven's *Last House On The Left* (1972). The rape-revenge film's association with the horror genre is a contentious topic amongst scholars. It is discussed in Carol J. Clover's *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992) as one of the sub-genres of horror and is, therefore, addressed using only a slight variation on Clover's argument regarding the cross-gender identification of audiences of the slasher sub-genre. For Clover, whose analysis focuses largely on lowbrow exploitation films such as *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978), the rape-revenge film functions similarly to slashers in the fluidity of the audience's point-of-identification. Clover, however, has been criticized by film scholars who point of the prevalence of rape-revenge narratives in cinema with nearly no generic relationship to horror film. Jacinda Read argues in *The New Avengers: Feminism, Femininity and the Rape-Revenge Cycle* (2000) that rape-revenge is "a historically specific but generically diverse cycle

of films” (2000, 241). Read accuses Clover of handpicking rape-revenge films that fit her theory to the exclusion of non-horror films, which Read herself goes on to analyze at length. For the purposes of this chapter, though, I am not concerned with representing the rape-revenge genre on the whole, but rather one specific example of it. I will rely on Clover’s theoretical perspective over Read’s because it better describes *Lipstick*, which—although it represents an attempt to bring the rape-revenge film out of the drive-ins and into the mainstream movie theaters (Clover 1992, 115)—constructs its villain in a manner which strongly follows the monster movie formula.

Lipstick is the story of a professional fashion model, Chris McCormick (Margaux Hemingway) who is assaulted and raped by her thirteen-year-old sister’s music teacher, an electronic composer named Gordon Stuart (Chris Sarandon). Gordon is portrayed as a Norman Bates type—intellectual, socially awkward, slightly effeminate, and well-dressed to the point of fussiness. In an early scene, the first where the audience hears his music, Gordon is seen recording the coos of the pigeons on his windowsill, then mixing those sounds with the electronically-generated sound of his synthesizer. As Gordon puts one hand on the joystick controller of his EMS Synthi and the other on a fader on his mixing console, the camera zooms in to Chris’s face on the cover of a *Cosmopolitan* magazine, which is propped up in Gordon’s studio. This is the first indication the audience is shown that Gordon is inappropriately obsessed with Chris. This obsession is obliquely coded as being insufficiently masculine. Not only does Gordon read *Cosmopolitan*, a women’s fashion magazine, but he participates in a particularly extreme form of fandom—often gendered feminine—by displaying the image of a famous

person he admires, or desires, in his home. This fandom is also coded as immature—it is teenagers who tack posters of celebrities on their bedroom walls, not adults.

In *Rape-Revenge Films: A Critical Study* (2011), Alexandra Heller-Nicholas describes Gordon Stuart in contrast to the often repulsive male rapists in films like *The Virgin Spring* (1960) and *The Accused* (1988). About actor Chris Sarandon, she writes:

As Gordon, he is presented before the rape as being utterly likable: charming, funny and not difficult to look at. Great effort has been made to avoid Othering him as the villain before the assault; hugging his tape-recorder when he first meets his pupil's famous and beautiful sister, if anything, Gordon is valued no differently from anyone else in the film before the rape. To emphasize the fact that rapists can be people who seem otherwise ordinary—a notable distinction from the majority of rape-revenge films where the rapist is presented as an often cartoonish villain—director Lamont Johnson makes the point of dividing the film's time relatively democratically between showing the intimate details of the lives of both rapist and his victim before the assault (2011, 27).

I believe Heller-Nicholas goes too far in her attempt to debunk Clover's categorization of rape-revenge as related to horror film in her assessment of Gordon's character. This description neglects many details which subtly suggest Gordon's monstrosity before the rape occurs. It is true that Sarandon is presented as more traditionally good-looking than are the poor rural rapists in, say, *I Spit on Your Grave*, but his demeanor is, from the beginning, made to seem off-putting to Margaux Hemmingway's character Chris. Seen through the lens of the horror genre, as Heller-Nicholas and Read refuse to do, Gordon is introduced as a monster in the vein of *Psycho*'s Norman Bates—gentle, perfectly friendly, not unattractive—but undoubtedly creepy. Although the audience might not have recognized the full threat of Gordon's character in the film's first

twenty minutes, they have been presented clues (as with the *Cosmopolitan* cover mentioned above) that something might be *wrong* with him. He only appears in two brief scenes before he shows up at Chris's apartment.

In the scene which leads up to the rape Gordon visits Chris in order to play her a tape of his music. In it, Gordon cannot be said to be "utterly likable." Chris assumes Gordon is there to talk with her about her sister, who is one of Gordon's students. From the moment of his arrival, Chris is made visibly uncomfortable by Gordon's presence. His personality is off-putting, and he doesn't seem to understand basic social cues; he is arrogant and slightly rude. He leeringly watches Chris change her clothes through a mirror while pretending to wait for her in the living room. As he walks about inspecting the photographs in her apartment, he comes upon a photograph of an experimental composer whom he admires. This composer is named Sean Gage, presumably a thinly disguised analogue to the real experimental composer, John Cage.²¹ As he looks at the picture, Gordon asks Chris how she knows Gage. "We met at some party," she says. Gordon then begins to tell her that he once sent Gage a tape of his music and never heard back, but cuts it off and tells her that he chose teaching over professional success. His pride is clearly damaged by the discovery of this photograph. As he struggles to appear interesting, he sees that Chris is bored by him. Her eyes wander as he tries to tell her about the equipment he uses for his music. Moments after he pushes play on his tape, Chris gets a phone call and leaves the room. Gordon is left alone, with his own tape still playing on his tape player, for nobody.

Gordon's music is a surprisingly believable approximation of experimental electronic music. It would seem that composer Michel Polnareff (a well-known French pop songwriter) did

some research to make Gordon's compositions appropriate to the genre. They are very much in the style of French *musique concrète* composers, like François Bayle and Bernard Parmegiani, mixing synthesized sound with manipulated recordings of natural sound, but with patterns which resemble techniques of '70s popular synth musicians like Tangerine Dream. The tape Gordon plays begins with piercing sounds which hover and fall like whale song. Thin, single tones, which seem to have no traditional harmonic relationship to each other sit atop a rhythmically-jerky sequence of short synthetic beeps.

When Chris leaves the room to talk on the telephone, Gordon's music becomes louder. When it began, the music was treated as source music, as if it were actually coming from on screen, but as Gordon becomes angry, it takes over as the score to the film. The sound grows so that it no longer sounds as if its coming from Gordon's tape player—the aural perspective does not change as he picks it up, walks around the room with its speakers pressed to his chest. No attempt is made here to make the music seem practical, as if it's actually coming from a speaker in the room onscreen. It's as if it grows in Gordon's head. The music begins to follow the action of the scene as score would, dipping under a few lines of dialogue as Chris asks Gordon to hang up the phone in the living room for her. Musical stingers—loud, percussive events—accompany cuts as Gordon looks around Chris's apartment. There are closeups on pictures of Chris with celebrities: Paul Newman, Cary Grant. Low, sustained tones, commonly used to signify dread, build as Gordon stands outside of Chris's bedroom watching her talk on the phone. Propulsive, off-kilter sequences emerge and drive the music forward, while Gordon's expression sours. At no point is there anything that could be called a melody, in a traditional sense. The audience is

supposed to hear the music as increasingly more sinister as it becomes louder, and Gordon becomes angrier. It is no longer a tape, but the inner soundtrack to his psyche.

Insulted by her dismissal, Gordon enters Chris's bedroom and assaults her. He tears off her clothes, forces her to put on the lipstick for which she is the spokesmodel, and ties her to the bed. What follows is a rape scene which Clover describes as "brief, brutal, and unerotic" (1992, 139). The scene, I believe, can only be described as "brief" because the majority of Clover's chapter is dedicated to a film as unpleasant as *I Spit on Your Grave*, whose rape is over a half an hour long. During *Lipstick's* (first) rape, Gordon's tape plays throughout the scene. The music becomes the motif to the assault, attaching itself to the crime as one more aspect of the violence Gordon commits on Chris. It is clear that for Gordon, the music enhances his feeling of control over her—he places the portable tape player beside Chris's head on a pillow while he rapes her, stopping the tape only when he is finished. Her refusal to listen to his music was akin to sexual rejection and therefore her rape is figured as twofold—both her romantic and artistic rejections of Gordon are punished—she is penetrated both vaginally and aurally. Throughout the rest of the movie, Gordon's music is a trigger for Chris to recall her attack and Gordon uses it to further victimize her. Whenever it plays, the camera shows her face presumably because hearing it forces her to relive the experience of her victimization.

In her description of the film, Clover writes that *Lipstick*

rings the old theme of rape as an act of male revenge, but for purposes of exposing it as such, not drawing us into it. The rapist, a music teacher and would-be composer is given reason enough to resent Chris: she is beautiful but rejecting (the cocktease motif), she is visibly bored with his music tape, she is rich and famous, she has pictures of well-known people all over her house, and so on.

There is only one way he has left to prove his maleness, and he uses it (1992, 139).

In other words, Gordon rapes Chris because he is, in every other way, emasculated by her. Clover goes on: “The immediate reason for the rape is male backlash: men rape when rape is the only way they have left of asserting their dominance over women” (1992, 145). The scene leading up to the rape resembles Marion Crane’s uncomfortable conversation with Norman Bates, just before he murders her in *Psycho*. Chris, like Marion, politely engages an awkward man, one whom she presumably wouldn’t interact with in normal circumstances, regarding his weird hobby (in Norman’s case, it is taxidermy). The actor, Sarandon, even seems to be channeling Perkins’s portrayal of Norman, with his quiet stutter and uncomfortable mannerisms. However, it is not only Chris who emasculates Gordon—much of that work has already been done by the filmmaker, before Gordon ever appears at Chris’s door. The composer’s inadequacy is broadcast with his every gesture: his inscrutable music, his immature, “girlish” fandom of, or obsession with, Chris, his un-masculine reading habits. Before the rape, Gordon is insecure, effeminate, immature. He carries his portable tape player clutched to his chest, like a teddy bear. But the rape remasculinizes him. Once he has finished and Chris’s little sister, Kathy comes home, he stands arrogantly in Chris’s bedroom doorway, suggesting they invite Kathy in for some “fun.” Where earlier, Gordon held his arms awkwardly to his sides, never taking up too much room, he now swaggers, leaning comfortably against the wall.

The remaining two thirds of *Lipstick* are occupied by a trial. In this manner, the film diverges from its horror film siblings until the final moments where Chris eventually takes her revenge on Gordon. The courtroom drama portion of the film is characterized by a growing sense

of injustice at a defective and misogynist system which allows the rape to go unpunished. This injustice is blamed in the courtroom on Chris's modeling career. As Heller-Nicholas points out: "*Lipstick* balances two opposing explanations for Gordon's vicious attack. Firstly, it deliberately places it in the context of Chris' profession: the fashion shoot opening of the film alone establishes a link between using her to sell products and the implication of sexual availability" (2000, 28). When Gordon is acquitted, we are lead to believe that it is because the jury becomes convinced that Chris' career as a model—as an objectified, sexualized commodity—means that she's "asking for it." The sense of injustice arises from the defense's argument that a woman who is a professional model *cannot* technically be raped because any male who sexually assaults her is taking from her a right that she has already willingly given up.

The other possible explanation Heller-Nicholas recognizes matches my own reading of the film, to a degree. She writes: "Gordon's music is intrinsic to his motivation ... Carla [the prosecuting attorney] identifies the importance of Gordon's music, and in her prosecution strategy she applies a moral value to it" (2000, 29). During the trial, Carla plays Gordon's cassette tape in court. She insists on playing it very loudly and Gordon informs the court that it was designed to be played back even louder still. The film cuts around to reaction shots of people in the courtroom as they're disturbed by the sound. The prosecutor offers the music as evidence of Gordon's instability, violent behavior, insanity. Heller-Nicholas writes that "playing his music in the courtroom, [the prosecution] alludes that the experimental, 'deviant' nature of the music itself can only reflect upon the ethical consistency of the man who composed it" (2000, 29).

However, Heller-Nicholas goes on to assert that "Carla's strategy fails for the same reason that arguments about Chris's modeling career also cannot provide an adequate motive.

Neither Gordon's music nor Chris's photographs are the issue: the responsibility for Gordon's violent attack lies not in art, but in him and him alone" (2000, 29). She fails to acknowledge the difference between one argument presented diegetically within the film (one that the audience is shown is false) with the position of the film itself, the argument is addressed directly to its viewers. What Heller-Nicholas does not recognize in her assessment is that Gordon's music is the only detail the film provides about his life and personality. A sense of "him and him alone" is not provided outside of his position as a composer of what the film argues is immoral, deviant music. Gordon's music and Chris's modeling are not given equal weight by the film itself—although the jury is convinced that Chris's photographs invalidate her claims that the rape was non-consensual, it is the film's position that the outcome of the trial was an egregious miscarriage of justice. The supposed danger of Chris's sexually provocative photographs only appears during the trial and only out of the mouth of the defense attorney. Nowhere before the trial begins does the film suggest that by modeling Chris invited the attack. However, Carla's argument that Gordon's music is proof of his deranged psyche doesn't fly during the trial—doesn't convince the characters within the diegesis—but it is, the motive the film itself offers the audience. The perspective of the film is that of Carla's legal argument against Gordon's tape. Contrary to Heller-Nicholas's assessment, this is the source of the sense of injustice that the film creates—a false, misogynist lie triumphs over the truth story of Gordon's wickedness.

Outside of the courtroom scenes, the film continues to reinforce the link between Gordon's music and his deviant, violent sexual drive. Later in the film, a remarkable scene occurs that cements the relationship between Gordon's music and his violence. After his rape trial begins, Gordon calls Chris's phone in the middle of the night. Standing naked in his studio,

he holds the receiver up to his synthesizer as it plays automatically. He is lit only by the light from his window to the outside, silhouetting him as a dark, threatening figure. The abstract sounds at first confuse Chris until she figures out what they are, that they are Gordon's music. She screams and hangs up. The image of Gordon, his nakedness as he holds the telephone up to his mad-scientist-like wall of knobs and sliders is genuinely menacing. It is telling that he doesn't speak to Chris to torment her. He allows his music to speak for him. The film tells us that the music is what is inside of him, it is who he really is. In this moment, we are shown that Gordon's courtroom testimony is a lie, that he knows he raped Chris, that his defense that they engaged in "rough" sex is untrue and he knows it. Until this moment, it is still possible, perhaps that Gordon really believes that his encounter with Chris was consensual—that the film might be illustrating conflicting backstories about rape as in the film *Rashômon* (1950), or a series of innocent misunderstandings as in the fiercely antifeminist *Oleanna* (1994).

The film's final sequence, after Gordon has been found not guilty and the sisters Chris and Kathy have decided to leave Los Angeles and begin new lives "in the mountains," drops the courtroom drama genre and reestablished *Lipstick* as related to monster and horror film. A tense stalk and chase sequence precedes the film's second rape and finally, Gordon's murder by Chris's hand—the "revenge" part of the rape-revenge formula. While Chris is working on her final photoshoot as a professional model before leaving the industry, Kathy wanders away from her sisters and the photographers. Wandering through the complex, she discovers a group of girls from her old school rehearsing a dance piece with Gordon in a large hall. She watches from a walkway above them as he accompanies the girls' movements with synthesizers and lasers. After the rehearsal ends and only Gordon is left packing up his gear, he looks up and notices Kathy

watching him. She seems hesitant to engage him, but she doesn't run away. He disarms her with some jokes. Although Kathy testified at the trial, and claims to believe her sister's account of the rape, the film implies that Gordon's acquittal has made her unsure about the veracity of Chris's story. She walks down the stairs but keeps her distance. Gordon shows Kathy that his synthesizer is being controlled by contact microphones worn on the dancers' bodies which amplify their heartbeats and breathing. He beckons her to him, goading her into trying out the microphone. "I'll tape you breathing," he says. "Oh, Kath. Come on." As she slips under his keyboard stands to stand with him among his electronics, Gordon is shot from an imposing upward angle. His demeanor immediately becomes sinister. "What a wonderful coincidence having you here," he says. He offers her a special microphone he claims was designed especially for her. It is similar to a stethoscope and Gordon licks it to stick it to Kathy's chest. The lights go out. The two are now lit only by jittering colored laser beams. Gordon's face is in shadow except for a thin band of light across his eyes. Heavily amplified heartbeats and breathing fill the room as Kathy stands nervously. We hear her heartbeat accelerate as the synthesizer's droning oscillators begin to swell in volume. Gordon takes the microphone off Kathy and licks it again, slowly and lasciviously before re-adhering it even lower on her chest, slipping it under her shirt. "It's the sound of ... the sound of our bodies mixed together," he whispers. "I mean, really mixing together." The predatory connotation of his dialogue is not lost on her. Kathy breaks away and runs from him, leading to the film's final sequence where Gordon stalks her through dark, abandoned underground hallways. After a prolonged chase, he catches her in a service tunnel. We see him tackle her and rip her clothes before the film cuts away from their struggle. This time, the rape is not accompanied by Gordon's music but by Kathy's screams, which, through a clever sonic

elision, transform into the click and whine of camera shutters and flashes as the film cuts to Chris's photoshoot.

Although his music is not heard again, it is important that it was Gordon's music, and his seduction of Kathy with synthesizers and microphones, that lead to this violent encounter. Rather than being a red herring, or failed, and erroneous, psychological testimony in a trial, Gordon's music is presented by the film as the beginning and end of his character development. Knowing that he makes experimental electronic music is enough to establish for the audience his deviant nature. In each sequence of *Lipstick* during which Gordon's experimental music is heard, it is deployed to a slightly different, but related, effect. When the film begins, his music establishes his character as effete and fussy—insufficiently masculine. Later it becomes the sonic representation of his violence. During his rape of Chris, it becomes the soundtrack of his deranged psyche, and an aural metaphor for the rape itself. After that, it becomes Gordon's weapon, evidence of his deviant, criminal sexuality. In the end, the music facilitates the "mixing" of his body with that of the non-consenting Kathy, a redundant prefiguration of his literal rape of the young girl. One film critic very clearly understood the connection the film draws between Gordon's criminal sexuality and his music. In the *New York Times* review of the film, Vincent Canby observed that the "message of *Lipstick*, if I read it right, is less about the physical and legal vulnerability of women than about the sexual hang-ups of eccentric young men who compose music with synthesizers and laser beams. The movie's subliminal message: Bring back the clavichord" (1976).

Propagandistic Experimental Music in *Bewildered Youth*

I do not wish to defend experimental electronic music against the accusations *Lipstick* makes about its nature and the psyche of its practitioners. Rather, I wish to suggest that the association the film makes between experimental electronic music and non-normative sexuality, and non-normative gender expression requires study. *Lipstick* places experimental music in proximity to depictions of misogynist and pedophilic sexual violence. It also aligns the “weirdness” of that music with the masculine sexual failure of its composer/performer. That the music is *unusual*—for one thing, it is produced electronically, which, for 1976 was not particularly common, and second, it eschews the strictures of western tonality and harmony that the film posits as “normal” in music—is enough for the film to explain its fictional creator’s antisocial, monstrous behavior. What is it about this music, though, that makes these associations convincing, or compelling to audiences? How is it that, despite all of the critical evaluations of *Lipstick* that exist in the field of rape-revenge film criticism, nobody has written that they feel any cognitive dissonance with the experimental composer/rapist equation. Each appraisal of the film seems to take for granted that Gordon’s music is a practice similar to Norman Bates’s taxidermy hobby, or the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* family’s expertise in butchery and barbecue cooking—not a mere quirk, but an indication that they are capable of monstrous deeds. I will examine one last case study in this chapter before turning to Susan McClary’s theoretical precedent, which I intend to apply to the music in these films in order to address the questions above.

Bewildered Youth makes similar claims to those of *Lipstick*, although the story differs significantly in its details. I will get to that film shortly, but to establish its historical position, I will begin with an account of its director's early career. Veit Harlan is best known for directing the film *Jud Süß* (1940) a notoriously antisemitic film produced in Germany during the Second World War under direct supervision from the Nazi party. According to several scholars, *Jud Süß* is among the most technically accomplished and most cinematically valuable examples of Nazi propaganda film. It is, as a result, "Nazi cinema's most controversial and contested film, just as its director ... the Third Reich's most controversial and contested filmmaker" (Rentschler 1996, 149). After the war, Harlan was the only filmmaker indicted for "crimes against humanity" (once in 1948, and again in 1950) for the content of his films. The plot of *Jud Süß* follows Süß-Oppenheimer, a devious, conniving Jew who ingratiates himself to the Duke of a small Duchy in 1733. He exerts his power over the weak-willed Duke, gaining power and political position, eventually declaring the duchy a new "Promised Land" for the Jewish people, many of whom then emigrate to the town. Süß abducts a beautiful Aryan woman, Dorothea, and rapes her while his men torture her fiancé in a dungeon. Eventually, Süß is brought to trial for his crimes and is executed. The Jews are then run out of the duchy. In *Propaganda and the German Cinema 1933-1945* (2001) David Welch writes, "By concentrating on the criminal elements believed to be part of Jewish characteristics, their amorality, the lack of conscience and scruples, [*Jud Süß*] provided the historical example for the Nazi's answer to the Jewish menace. Thus the last scene where Süß-Oppenheimer is hanged provides the justification for the evacuation of the Jews from Germany in 1940" (2001, 243). The influence of Harlan's film was vast. Erwin Leiser writes that *Jud Süß* "was shown to the non-Jewish population when the Jews were about to be deported.

Concentration camp guards saw it. And at the Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt former SS Rottenführer Stefan Baretzki admitted that the effect of showing the film was to instigate maltreatment of prisoners” (2001, 84-85).

I bring up *Jud Süß*, even though it is not the subject of my study, in part to emphasize the great powers of persuasion afforded Harlan’s talent as a propagandist. Most critical surveys of Nazi cinema address the director’s films with a sense of awe and respect for his craft, despite the poisonousness of his political agenda. Harlan himself denies having any antisemitic beliefs; in 1945, he wrote a document, “Where I Stood On National Socialism” which was printed in a small edition and posted to foreign critics at the end of the war. In it, as well as in his two trial testimonies and his own autobiography—which is appropriately titled *In The Shadow Of My Films*—Harlan claims to have been an apolitical artist, working under explicit threats from Joseph Goebbels to produce films that furthered the Nazi cause. He wrote: “[In] my position one could sometimes contradict Goebbels or Hitler on unimportant matters, on important issues however, as to whether we Germans wanted anti-Semitism or not, a contradiction would have been synonymous with transportation to a concentration camp” (2006, 3). He continues: “Is it the duty of an apolitical artist to sacrifice his luck and the life of his family in a practical but useless attack on National Socialism?” (2006, 4). He even claims that he volunteers for active military service to avoid making the film (2006, 14).

In light of the critical consensus regarding Harlan’s technical mastery and skill with regard to cinematic storytelling, many scholars have written sympathetically of his disavowal of Nazi ideology. However, doing so requires dismissing the vicious homophobia of his 1957 film, *Bewildered Youth*—after all, even if Harlan argued that he was never antisemitic, he never

specifically repudiated the persecution of accused homosexuals in Nazi Germany. Itself a version of a propaganda film, *Bewildered Youth* turns Harlan's persuasive camera toward the presumed evils of homosexuality in post war German culture. Despite his claims that he was apolitical, and that he sought only to create beauty, *Bewildered Youth* takes a strong position, not only against the influence of homosexuals, but also against anti-prostitution laws. Watching the film, it is difficult to agree with the director that after the war he had given up trying to influence social, political, and legal change with his films, as *Bewildered Youth* appears to have exactly those aims.

The film was released in the US in several different versions, alternately titled, *Bewildered Youth*, *Different from You and Me* and *The Third Sex*. It was heavily censored both in Germany and America, so it is possible that each title was used for a slightly altered cut of the film. (It is for consistency and clarity, I will continue to refer to it as *Bewildered Youth* and not because I will be analyzing this specific edit of the film to the exclusion of others.) Like *Lipstick*, *Bewildered Youth* is, in part, a courtroom drama. The film opens on a trial, with a woman, Christa Teichmann accused of procurement. The courtroom provides the film's framing narrative; the majority of its action takes place within a flashback, inside Christa's testimony. The judge asks Christa to tell her story of the crime, beginning when her son Klaus met Dr. Boris Winkler. She speaks nervously, her voice wavering, from the witness stand, as the scene fades into the flashback.²² A middle-aged man is shown waiting outside of a high school. He looks

²² I have not seen any account of the film's plot that calls into question the veracity of Mrs. Teichmann's testimony. The courtroom set-up allows for the possibility that the entire remaining film is distorted by the character's lies. Before the flashback begins, Mrs. Teichmann says that she cannot remember the exact date of her son's first encounter with Dr. Winkler, but the first lines of dialogue spoken in her telling of it reveal that it took place on her birthday.

shifty about while students pour from the school's doors as classes are let out. Immediately, Dr. Winkler is presented as a predatory figure. He picks Klaus Teichmann out of the crowd of boys and approaches him, and invites him to come visit him at his house. Klaus declines, saying that he needs to get home early because it is his mother's birthday. Instead of going home to dinner, though, Klaus visits his friend, Manfred—a friend of Dr. Winkler's—who is home sick from school.

The film presents Manfred as a suspicious character—he is effeminate, particularly interested in experimental art and poetry, and the son of a poor, single mother. He is introduced reading aloud a poem he's written, which has been published in the newspaper. Klaus sits very close to him on his bed, holding his hand. Immediately, Manfred's influence over Klaus and the link between homosexual desire and avant-garde arts are established. Klaus fancies himself an abstract painter, one of his works hangs above Manfred's bed. As Manfred praises Dr. Winkler's taste and influence in the art world, the scene is intercut with Klaus's parents and uncle discussing his paintings, dismissing them as “modern rubbish.” When the scene cuts back to Manfred's bedroom, Manfred is holding a record player in his lap, on which a piece of electronic music is playing. The two boys are enraptured. Klaus says, “It sounds like my pictures.”

The music consists of a multi-layered, organ-like synthesizer tone. A simple, meandering sequence plays in the foreground, while bubbling oscillations dip in and out in volume. Manfred hushes Klaus, telling him “This is the best part” when a mid-range drone emerges over a quick, rhythmic beeping pattern. Klaus's response: “Unheimlich!” which is translated in the subtitles as “Tremendous.” I don't want to hang too much meaning on the appearance of this word, as its connotations in the German language are various, but the fact that the characters use it to

describe the experimental electronic music featured in *Bewildered Youth* connects this analysis to my earlier discussion of *Lipstick*, which I introduced through Freud, Marcuse and Wood's theories of repression and the uncanny. In this one mise-en-scène—the two boys sitting together, one tucked into his bed with a turntable on his lap, the other sitting above the covers, his hands on his friend's thigh, while experimental electronic music enchants them—contains the entire argument of this chapter. That Klaus calls the music, and perhaps the whole situation he has found himself in, “uncanny”—but with the positive connotation of “tremendous”—packages the relationship between experimental electronic music, supposed sexual “deviancy,” and horror/monstrosity that I am identifying in this chapter into a single image.

Two opposing scenes illustrate the film's position with regard to music and sexuality. The first occurs at a dance which Klaus attends with a young woman, Renate (who happens to be Klaus's cousin). We view their date from the perspective of Manfred, who follows them, watching from shadows and from behind fences. Klaus and Renate flirt with each other, she sitting in a tree with her leg draped over his shoulder. She teases him: “Everyone says you don't like girls.” As if to prove the opposite, Klaus pulls her onto the dance floor when a fast, jazzy, big band number begins to play. The two do a complicated swing dance to the tune—although the dialogue inaccurately identifies it as a “rock and roll” song—which Manfred eventually interrupts. The jazz number is presented as functional. It is not art-for-art's-sake, rather it exists to facilitate dancing, and, therefore, to inspire heteronormative coupling. Klaus's father's preoccupation with rationality (money, career, family) is sonified in the rhythmic, ordered patterns of the dance music, and its practical utility within the society. The film's experimental electronic music is presented as the opposite. In contrast to the dance scene, Manfred later takes

Klaus to Dr. Winkler's house for a social gathering during which young men discuss and engage in all manner of avant-garde cultural practices.

Dr. Winkler is presented as effete but also predatory; he observes the young men with a lascivious expression, as if they were delicious items of food. Winkler is primarily shot using stark, contrasting light, similar to that seen in German expressionist films, as well as in classic monster movies. He is lit from below, creating heavy, sinister shadows across his face, accentuating his brow. His appearance is what children mimic when they hold a flashlight underneath their chin to tell ghost stories. In the scene which depicts one of the doctor's evening gatherings, the first shot is of a man playing an electronic, keyboard-based instrument. As Winkler shows Klaus around they have the following conversation:

KLAUS. I've never seen an instrument like that before.

WINKLER. You'll get to see even more surprising things here.

KLAUS. Is it electronic music?

WINKLER. Yes. Concrete music. This is Klaus. Klaus is a very talented painter.

We'll see some of his work this evening.

KLAUS. Concrete music? I don't understand that.

WINKLER. The French coined the term *musique concrète* to say that what we call music on the basis of harmonic theory has been converted into tones of the present, everyday life. Did you understand that?

KLAUS. Well, yes, but...

As with *Lipstick's* mention of "Sean Gage," *Bewildered Youth* situates the music we hear in an existing historical context, that of French *musique concrète*. Although Winkler's definition of concrete music does not exactly match the agreed-upon definition of the term, nor does the music we're hearing perfectly fit that definition, the dialogue identifies the music in relation to

an actual artistic movement occurring at that time in the real world.²³ In fact, *Bewildered Youth*'s soundtrack has significance in the history of experimental electronic music. The instrument that the young man plays at Winkler's is, as best I can tell, a Mixtur-Trautonium. According to Thom Holmes in *Electronic and Experimental Music: Technology, Music and Culture* (2012), "The Trautonium of Dr. Friedrich Trautwein (1888-1956) was developed in Germany between 1928 and 1930. The early evolution of this instrument was the result of a collaboration between Trautwein and composer Paul Hindemith (1895-1963)" (2012, 32). Trautwein's assistant, Oskar Sala, made many improvements on the instrument and became its chief virtuoso. Sala also provided the Trautonium music heard in *Bewildered Youth*, and several reviews have suggested that he might have appeared in the film as well, as the young man playing the instrument, but I have not been able to confirm this. It is unclear, also, whether Sala's composition predates the film, or if it was composed specifically for it. None of his pieces were recorded or released commercially until the early 1960s. It is interesting to consider Sala's participation in the making of this film, in which his instrument and his music are so clearly associated with the decline of society, a growing foreign influence, and with homosexuality, which was, at the time, punishable by law. Unlike Michel Polnareff, the pop singer who constructed a believable substitution for experimental electronic music in *Lipstick*, Sala was an experimental electronic composer by profession. Beginning in 1952, Sala was also manufacturing and selling the Mixtur-Trautonium,

²³ There should be distinction made between *musique concrète* and synthesizer electronic music because a debate was in progress at the time of this film's production. German composers, mostly centered in Cologne, developed *elektronische musik* out of a dissatisfaction with the Parisian *musique concrète*, believing that there was more creativity and originality to generating new electronic sounds than in recording the world around them with microphones, and then editing the tapes into compositions. The Trautonium—the instrument that Winkler claims is producing concrete music, is, by most midcentury German composers' own terms, producing *elektronische musik*. That instrument's history is implicated in the Paris/Cologne rivalry and something of a trophy of the *elektronische* composers. This debate is examined in Manning 2004 and Taylor 2001.

although its position as product placement in *Bewildered Youth* seems like bad advertising. Sala's only other notable film credit was creating the electronic flapping and chirping sounds which accompany the murderous flocks in Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963).

As Klaus is showing his paintings around Dr. Winkler's gathering, he and Winkler discuss his inspirations (Picasso, Kandinsky). Klaus's eyes grow wider as Winkler compliments him. The music swells and the film cuts between long shots of the two, not speaking, just staring at each other. Klaus appears entranced, hypnotized by Winkler. The scene is interrupted by Klaus's father and uncle as they knock on doors, trying to find Winkler's address to stop the party and extricate Klaus. When the scene returns to Winkler's parlor, Winkler is introducing his guests to the wrestling portion of the evening. The music resumes and the camera tilts into a canted—also known as a Dutch—angle. The boys clear the furniture from the center of the room and two of them strip to their underwear and face off in traditional wrestling positions. As they grapple with one another, Dr. Winkler hovers lecherously behind the transfixed Klaus, talking closely into his ear. With his hands draped over Klaus's shoulders, Winkler praises Klaus's physique and offers to provide him with boxing lessons in his home.

The performances in *Bewildered Youth*—Klaus's zombie-like, sleepwalking possession as well as Winkler's Mabuse-esque evil-eyes—present homosexuality as a kind of telepathic hypnosis. Klaus is not gay; rather he is weak-willed, and easily manipulated. Sala's Trautonium, then, becomes the equivalent of a pendulating pocket watch. The film argues that the music is an incantation which, when heard, produces homosexual desire in the listener. It seems to suggest that experimental electronic music might actually, through some mystical means, turn young men gay. In an early scene, Christa (Klaus's mother) looks up "homosexuality" in a medial guide; the

text highlighted states that homosexuals are not born, but rather homosexuality is the result of a psychological “reversal of the sex drive,” occurring around puberty. It is because of her belief that homosexuality is triggered by an outside force at a particularly delicate moment in a boy’s life that Christa decides to arrange a sexual encounter between her son and her housemaid, Gerta. Gerta is paid to seduce Klaus and *turn him* heterosexual again. The ploy works, and he is “cured” of his “deviant” desires, but in an act of revenge, Winkler has Christa arrested and tried for procurement. Harlan’s twofold propagandistic goal was to highlight the dangers of contemporary arts and their influence on the sexuality of Germany’s youth, but also to protest what he believed to be Germany’s unfair prostitution laws.

Both *Bewildered Youth* and *Lipstick* conflate experimental electronic music with deviant, criminal sexuality. In the former, hearing the music is a threat to normative sexuality in that it contains the potential to influence a person toward homosexuality. In the latter, the music is the product of the mind of a deranged, misogynist, pedophilic rapist. While one may want to recuperate the first association as a positive endorsement, on its face—homophobic as it is—its claim is effectively identical to the one made by *Lipstick*: that music which gleefully falls outside the established rules of classical western tonality has something to do with a subversion of accepted codes of gender performance, and sexual orientation. These films believe that experimental music facilitates— in Robin Wood’s terms— the “return” of “repressed” sexual energy that does not fit the ideologically enforced model of monogamy and heteronormativity.

Gendered Aspects of Musical Form

The only two mainstream narrative films to diegetically feature experimental electronic music (I do not include *(Untitled)* because the music is largely acoustic) argue that the music's rejection of established rules of tonality and harmony is equivalent to individual characters' rejections of lawful, "normal" expressions of gender and sexuality. Although we have only a very small data sample, the pervasiveness across both films cannot wholly be coincidence. Nor can it be as simple as the breaking of one set of rules getting mapped onto the breaking of others. Why does the transgressive behavior of these characters take on such a specifically sexual dimension?

Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* argues that western classical music has always been structured by notions of gender and sexuality, despite the fact that for centuries, any discourse which read social meaning into music was strongly opposed in the academy. Although her work fights a far more important, and ultimately more radical battle than the one this dissertation is engaged in, I am particularly sympathetic to McClary's injection of affect and political meaning into a realm of scholarship concerned primarily with form and structure, and presented as existing outside of the messiness of human lives and feelings. McClary writes that "instrumental music has been defined for nearly two hundred years as self-contained, available only to the concerns of formal analysis. By maintaining this stance (which may seem quite neutral at first glance), the discipline has prohibited not only questions about sexuality, but *all* studies that would treat music as an active component of culture" (2006, 211). She goes on to describe her methodology: "Rather than protecting the music as a sublimely meaningless activity that has managed to escape social signification, I insist on treating it as a

medium that participates in social formation by influencing the ways we perceive our feelings, our bodies, our desires, our very subjectivities—even if it does so surreptitiously, without most of us knowing how” (2006, 211).

McClary traces the language of musicological criticism all the way back to the first reactions of critics and other writers at the premiers of works by composers such as Beethoven and Schubert, drawing out the ways in which certain formal structures were coded as masculine or feminine. The title of the book refers to the gendering of musical cadences and whether or not a phrase resolves on the strong down beat, or is postponed to resolve on a weak beat. The latter structure is deemed a “feminine ending” where femininity in music is linked to weakness and passivity (1991, 9-10). Gender functions in macro musical structures as well, where the formal development of an entire composition is narrativized as a heroic tale in which the masculine theme conquers the feminine. Melodies written in the tonic key were considered strong, and masculine, and, in the narrative of the traditional sonata form, went out into unsupported tonal territory to heroically conquer those secondary themes, deemed weak, or feminine (1991, 12-18). For almost its entire history, western tonal music has been analyzed as if it were a universal, natural expression of mathematics, unsullied by history, sociality, or ideology, yet at the same time, musicologists uncritically assigned gendered descriptors to aspects of musical form, and judged pieces of music based on those assignments. Femininity became uncritically fixed to notions of tenderness, passivity, romanticism, while masculinity was normalized as strong, and objective. Music is simply another area of study where assumptions about universality reveal more about the dominant culture making those assumptions, than they do about anything so intellectually untenable as a “universal” human experience.

The strength of McClary's argument is revealed in the incredible detail of her research. For the purposes of this chapter, however, this level of detail is unnecessary. What is important is the sense of inescapability in McClary's analysis. The gendered system of meaning-production cannot be avoided from within tonality—or, as Adrian describes it in (*Untitled*), the “Capitalist ploy to sell pianos.” McClary does not specifically examine compositions that eschew tonality, so her argument never addresses alternatives to the system she describes, but even the pieces of music which she identifies as most resistant cannot fully excuse themselves of the questions of gendered key signatures, narrative developments and cadences. The book's final chapter contains an analysis of the Madonna song “Live To Tell” (1986) which, in McClary's description of it, feels almost triumphant in its relation to traditional musical form. However, the song's triumph is not in tearing down the distinctions between, as McClary describes them, “the unyielding fifths” in D minor (masculine) and the “lyrical, energetic refrain” in F major (feminine) (1991, 160), nor is it in sidestepping their meaning entirely. She writes, “A traditional reading would understand D (with its pedal and fifths) as fundamental (as that which defines identity) and F major as the “feminine” region, which—even if it offers the illusion of hope, escape, and freedom—must be contained and finally purged for the sake of satisfactory closure” (1991, 158-159). But regarding this “satisfactory closure” Madonna manages to subvert the formal expectation by avoid conclusion.

When the opening dilemma returns, she prevents the recontainment gesture of the fifths by anticipating their rhythmic moment of reentry and jumping in to interpose the F-major refrain instead. So long as she manages thus to switch back and forth, she can determine the musical discourse. To settle for an option—either option—is to accept a lie, for it is flexibility in identity rather than unitary

definition that permits her to ‘live to tell.’ The piece ends not with definitive closure but with a fade. As long as we can hear her, she continues to fluctuate (1991, 160).

In another essay, published in the collection *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, McClary more specifically addresses sexuality. “Constructions of Subjectivity in Schubert’s Music” argues that Schubert’s inventive deployment of tonality—which was often described as “sentimental,” “feminine,” or “weak” by critics in the composer’s lifetime—attempts to make room for the possibility of a non-normative queer subject position within musical narrative. The article was written in light of historical research that revealed Schubert’s secret homosexuality, although McClary insists that her goal is not to argue that a composer’s sexuality can be gleaned from his or her music, but that specifically in Schubert’s music, the composer’s construction of subjectivity can be heard as queer.

She writes: “Schubert tends to disdain goal-oriented desire per se for the sake of a sustained image of pleasure and an open, flexible sense of self—both of which are quite alien to the constructions of masculinity then being adopted as natural, and also to the premises of musical form as they were commonly constructed at the time” (2006, 223). She goes on: “In this, Schubert’s movement resembles uncannily some of the narrative structures that gay writers and critics are exploring today” (2006, 223). In opposition to the formal narrative structure modeled on the male sexual experience of building tension to a climactic apex, followed by a falling resolution, Schubert’s representation of pleasure drifts freely, wave-like, exhibiting no forward thrust towards climax and resolution. In so doing, the composer “pushes the formal conventions of tonality to the limits of comprehensibility” (2006, 223). These conventions of which McClary writes, however, are approached but importantly, not transgressed. Within tonality, Schubert can

only hint at the construction of a queer subjectivity, just as Madonna cannot escape the masculine resolution of the tonic, only postpone it.

I quote these sections at length to illustrate that McClary's final, most positive, example for a site of feminist and queer resistance within traditional music theory is still only a measured victory. The song's fade out prolongs Madonna's inevitable acquiescence to an oppressive system of meaning, perhaps indefinitely—but only in *not deciding*, not because she found a way out. Schubert's development of non-normative subjectivity in the “Unfinished” symphony, as McClary points out, “had to be constructed painstakingly from the stuff of standard tonality” (2006, 222). If we are to accept that, within tonality, the established codes and structures therein are marked by gendered and sexualized characteristics, then we must also accept the inescapability of those codes. Which is to say, that in western music, a chord progression either resolves or it doesn't—a melody is either played in the tonic or it isn't. There's no way out of the established system of representation. Music that is written in a key is always already trapped within, and forced to reiterate, those gendered codes. It's a binary: either masculine, or feminine, nothing in between. What McClary describes as potentially radical are those pieces of music that, in their structure, perform the codes in unexpected ways. Although they cannot eschew the codes completely, by virtue of the fact they they still conform to western definitions of musical structure and intelligibility, composers can rearrange the codes in ways that suggest alternative models of gendered subjectivity.

McClary's argument is indispensable to my analysis of experimental electronic music in cinema in examples where that music is defined by its rejection of tonality. As Andy Birtwistle writes, electronic sound in cinema signifies “a disruption to the normal, a challenge to existing

models of social organisation, a breakdown of the accepted norms of behaviour, a monstrous threat to paradigms of the natural” (2010, 127). These categories of the natural and the normal are, in cases of diegetic experimental electronic music, primarily figured in terms of gender and sexuality. In this sense, tonality can be seen as operating within traditionally constructed gender binaries, while the threat posed by experimental electronic music has to do with violently, monstrously, disturbing those binaries. The music in question is always put in proximity to, and even made responsible for, transgressions of those categories.

The confusion experimental electronic music generates in these cinematic contexts—for the characters in the films, and, presumably for audiences watching the films who are unfamiliar with the music—reads on multiple levels: as both a musical confusion, and an unsettling unfamiliarity with regard to “normal” sex. Experimental electronic music rejects the established codes of western tonal music and while this is not a particularly radical act in itself—it has been happening in western music for more than a century—it remains the case that, to a mainstream audience, the music’s refusal to adhere to the structures of traditional music makes it inscrutable. Its insistence on utilizing the frequencies in between the notes of the equal tempered keyboard, its refusal to lock into a perceptible rhythmic grid or follow a traditional narrative arc, marks it as non-normative. McClary’s study is therefore useful in showing that music is always already gendered, and when music steps outside of those codes wherein gender is readable, the music becomes both structurally, and socially, unreadable. To return to Robin Wood’s analysis of repression’s relation to the uncanny, it follows that experimental electronic music can be read as an encounter with an in-betweenness, an unassimilable expression of gender and sexuality, that can therefore be deployed for the purposes of horror. In *Lipstick*, Gordon’s masculine failure is

forewarned by his music's failure to reiterate the codes of masculine tonal expectation. In, *Bewildered Youth*, Dr. Winkler's music doesn't *turn* young men homosexual, but it does reveal to them the possibility of a world outside of traditional western music's heteronormative imperative.

The goals of this chapter might appear, at first glance, to be misguided. In arguing against the allegations of the characters in (*Untitled*) as well as those made by the philosophers addressed in the introduction that insist that experimental electronic rejects signification and communicative meaning-making, it may appear that I have hastily, and irresponsibly, aligned the music's character with queerness. While I have argued that this connection is borne out through the very few examples of experimental electronic music's depiction in narrative cinema, I want to make two interrelated clarifications. First, outside of the medium of film, experimental electronic music has certainly provided opportunities for queer composers. However, this is not the place to forward any pronouncement of the music's *essential* queerness. I am in no position to make such an argument, and moreover, I do not think the history of experimental electronic music could verify that assertion. While it could be said that experimental electronic music has had a slightly higher than average proportion of women, gays and lesbians, and transgender people represented throughout its history compared to most genres of music, the statistics still favor straight cisgendered males by a wide margin.

Secondly, the case studies I have used throughout this chapter, must be understood as examples of severe misogyny, homophobia, and—in the case of many of the horror films I referred to only briefly—transphobia. I am compelled to emphasize that the deviant sexualities depicted in *Lipstick* and *Bewildered Youth* are not examples of gender-nonconformity or

queerness that scholars should try to recuperate into positive representations. Their depictions rest on the assumption that a particularly violent, punishing form of patriarchy—perhaps the only form of patriarchy there is—is taken for granted as natural. Gordon Stuart is a heterosexual rapist who is coded as fussy, effete, and insufficiently masculine—as so many movie monsters are—and although Dr. Winkler might resemble a character like Dr. Pretorius from James Whale’s camp classic *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) he is rendered by Harlan with such venom that I doubt he’ll ever be viewed as a queer icon. It is not my intention to align either character or their actions with any liberating model of queerness or non-conformity. On the other hand, it is my inclination to view experimental electronic music’s alignment with queerness as having potentially positive implications—if, in fact, any queer composers and performers do feel this to be the case—despite the toxic representations provided by the two films I have analyzed here.

The term queer occasionally comes under fire for its overuse in certain areas of scholarship. For some, the word has become a catch-all to describe any phenomenon or perspective that can be seen to subvert or reject categories that the dominant culture deems “normal,” and some theorists fear that the overextension of the term dilutes its radical power. Theorizations which move queerness too far away from the desires and sexualities of actual human bodies threaten to make invisible the societal oppression under which lesbian, gay and transgendered people live. Throughout this chapter, I have resisted arguing that experimental electronic music presents a queer perspective by subverting the structures of tonality for fear that making such a broad claim is irresponsible. However, in this final moment I will tentatively offer that if we are to take seriously McClary’s argument that tonality—often seen as “natural” in western culture—has been gendered from the start, then it should come as little surprise that

depictions of experimental music—music that actively pushes against that system—often register as more than simply *formally* unusual. If these few cinematic examples are to be seen as representative of the dominant culture’s unease regarding music that disrupts the “natural order of things,” the fact that in some cases this disruption is perceived through dimensions of sex and gender suggests that perhaps certain rejections of tonality might provide a site for queer resistance.

4. Sound and Documentation in Extreme Performance

In my research, I have come across only one major work of performance art that is documented primarily through sound. John Duncan's 1980 performance *Blind Date* exists as one sixteen-minute long audiotape recording and one photograph, which was shot weeks after the performance had taken place. At its premiere, the piece was played back in a darkened gallery as part of a performance art festival, although the audience was hearing only the documentation of the performance several months after the actual performance had occurred. After that, the audiotape was played on KPFK, a listener-sponsored public radio station, with a spoken introduction added to the recording. For years, *Blind Date*'s documentation was available on a cassette tape, first pressed in 1985, paired with a film soundtrack, also by Duncan, released as *Pleasure Escape*. In the last decade, it has become available online. *Blind Date*'s status as a rare example of performance art documented through sound and not video, film, or photography will stimulate an examination of sound's reliability as documentary evidence. Duncan's piece will serve as an example to argue that visual documentation of performance art assumes an authority of "truth" that sound traditionally does not, and that this distinction has historical precedent in modes of theorizing human perception. Before I address those issues, though, some description and analysis of the work in question is necessary.

What follows is a transcript of the introduction, first recorded for the KPFK broadcast. The first section is read by an unnamed narrator. The second is read by Duncan.

[Narrator] On May 14, 1980, John Duncan performed *Blind Date* at DTLA in Los Angeles. Duncan's piece was part of a two-month festival of performance art called *Public Spirit*, which played at different locations throughout the city and was one of the largest and most comprehensive festivals of performance ever held in the United States. Rumor was out surrounding the extreme nature of Duncan's newest work and, in many ways, what the audience saw and heard that night in the DTLA space lived up to expectation. Immediately the performance art community was not only divided but polarized over what Duncan had dared. The magazine *High Performance*, which ran a special issue catalogue documenting the *Public Spirit Festival* refused to carry documentation of the piece. Instead, the editor printed the following: "John Duncan performed twice in this festival. His other piece is not included in this catalogue because I find it highly morally objectionable and do not wish to be responsible for publishing it." Rather than describe what occurred that May night, let us listen to John Duncan himself as he describes and performs, for radio, *Blind Date*.

[Duncan] Men Are taught to respond to their own emotional pain with rage, a rage they often aim at themselves. Teaching men to react in this way is an obscene and sanctioned perversion. If you are a parent with a male child, you are partly to blame. I was very deeply in love. When I lost that love, I saw myself as a complete emotional failure, unable to return any kind of positive affection. I wanted to punish myself as thoroughly as I could. I decided to have a vasectomy, but that wasn't enough. I wanted my last potent seed to be spent in a dead body. I made arrangements to have sex with a cadaver. I was bodily thrown out of several sex shops before meeting a man who set me up with a mortician's assistant in a Mexican border town. The man took ten dollars in exchange for a phone number. One hour with the corpse would be eighty dollars

paid to the mortician's assistant. I was ordered not to take any pictures or film. I drove to the border town, rented a room and called the phone number. About an hour later, the assistant came to my room. He drove to the mortuary at his insistence and showed me to a medium sized work room. He took the eighty dollars, shut the door and left me alone. The corpse was a woman who I guessed to be in her mid thirties with no disfigurements, all limbs and head attached, lying on a table covered with white paper. What you are about to hear is the sound of my having sex with it (1985).

What follows is thirteen-and-a-half minutes of indistinct rustling. A low rumble, which resembles the sound of a nearby freeway, runs continuously. The most prominent feature in the recording is the sound of cars passing and it occupies the majority of the sonic space. A thin hiss of white noise, which is likely the self-noise of the recording device compounded by the noise floor of the magnetic tape, is also constant. Occasionally, soft scrapes which sound like metal on metal can be heard. Very faintly, and only very occasionally, sounds appear that might be Duncan's breathing, but they are unclear. And that is it. Eventually the sound fades out although nothing in the sounds themselves indicates that an ending has been reached. Except for the few sounds I mentioned, the recording is fairly featureless. There are no grunts or moans. The metal scraping is infrequent enough that it does not suggest any repeated activity that one might associate with male sexual activity. Without the spoken introduction, I admit that I would think I was hearing a recording of a person scraping a metal utensil on a metal surface in a room near a busy road. Mercifully, the listener is spared what the performance *could* have sounded like. The cassette recording concludes with a reappearance of the radio narrator who restates the title of the piece and finishes with a station sign-off for KPFK Pacifica Radio.

Blind Date falls under the subgenre of extreme performance, which is a term that came to describe the most controversial examples of performance art. Jennifer Doyle, in her book *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art*, theorizes the term “difficult” to describe extreme performances. Certain case studies I have analyzed in earlier chapters — such as Lucier’s *I am Sitting in a Room* — have been labelled as difficult by some critics, however the difficulty of the avant-garde and the *experimental* is not the difficulty Doyle theorizes. To clarify, Doyle writes that “Art criticism has aligned one form of difficulty (in which a work’s meaning is not readily available to the viewer) with a regulation of affect (in which opacity, the difficulty of meaning, is packaged and cool, distanced, and anti-emotional)” (2013, 8). In contrast, for Doyle, a difficult work of extreme performance is “not only *about* hard feelings but *produces* them” (2013, 8; emphasis Doyle’s). These works are often shocking in their breaking of social taboos, or in the pain the artist is subjected to, while they also generate emotional discomfort in many members of the audience. Doyle writes: “This kind of work might make us angry or leave us unsure how to react, confused about our own emotions and the place of those feelings in relation to the work itself. The audience’s limits figure explicitly in such work...” (2013, 13). Doyle argues that the difficulty that animates the extreme performances she analyzes is specifically tied to “emotional and identificatory geometries” (2013, 21).

Duncan’s *Blind Date* is, in this sense, undoubtedly difficult. It is both about hard feelings, and it produces them in those who approach the work. Although the theme of necrophilia appears occasionally in art and culture throughout the history of the west — Achilles’s lust for the slain Amazonian queen Penthesilea and Salome’s erotic love for the head of John the Baptist are two classical examples — the subject is usually treated as taboo. I will discuss the piece as well as

the controversy surrounding it in order to contextualize its appearance in this chapter, but I am primarily interested in its unique sound-only documentation. The fact that this is such a rare case in the history of performance art documentation is directly related to the extreme nature of its subject matter. The difficulty of the piece is complicated by its lack of visual content. Crucial to any reading of *Blind Date* is an account of the sound's inability to provide the kind of *evidence* that visual documentation is expected to do. Without the spoken introduction to contextualize and narrativize the recording, the sound itself would resemble the art-for-art's sake abstraction of experimental electronic music of the sort I have discussed in the previous chapters, and for this reason, much of the conversation around Duncan's piece has involved speculation as to whether or not he actually did it.

Duncan's introduction for radio provides a narrative explanation for the piece's lack of visual documentation. He states that the mortician's assistant forbade him from taking photographs or shooting film. This detail implies that it was not the artist's choice to present the work as audio only. Aspects of the work and the way it was later presented may be understood to contradict this suggestion. When the piece was first presented at DTLA, the audience listened to the tape in pitch darkness. This aspect of its exhibition further suggests that themes of blindness and invisibility are intentionally built in to the performance. Moreover, the title of the piece is *Blind Date*. The term signifies primarily on the level of Duncan's relationship to the body he violated — the two were strangers set up together by a third party — but it also registers as a reference to absence of visual evidence. The blindness of the title doubles as the blindness of the documentation. The suggestion in Duncan's monologue that he was prohibited from taking any photographs seems like a very thin excuse because the address of the piece itself so specifically

plays upon the uncertainty inspired by the lack of verifying images. The blindness of the title is a better description of the audience's experience of the performance than it is a pun on the common term for a romantic encounter set up between strangers.

One way to account for the difficulty of this piece could be to fall back upon what Jonathan Sterne calls the 'audiovisual litany' and say that *Blind Date* produces even stronger negative emotions through its use of sound than it would were it visually graphic. In *The Audible Past* (2003) Sterne writes that many cultural theories of the senses pit hearing against vision in a list of opposing binaries, some of which are: "Hearing immerses its subject, vision offers a perspective ... hearing involves physical contact with the outside world, vision requires distance from it ... hearing tends toward subjectivity, vision tends toward objectivity ... hearing is about affect, vision is about intellect" and "hearing is a sense that immerses us in the world, vision is a sense that removes us from it" (2003, 15). The activity that *Blind Date* purports to document is one that is taboo, unclean, disgusting. Considering the language of the audiovisual litany, it should follow that the experience of hearing something disgusting should be stronger than seeing it since the listener is more contaminated by the proximity of the sound and not afforded the distance associated with vision. According to William Ian Miller's *The Anatomy of Disgust*, the senses are ranked with respect to the experience of disgust by the degree of contact required for each sense to perceive a object of revulsion (1997, 66). Although less contaminating than taste, touch or smell, hearing engenders closer contact with the disgusting object than seeing does. The listener is physically embedded in the field of vibrations with the object and forced to reproduce its sounds via sympathetic vibrations inside her own ears — she is immersed in the sound, enveloped by it. I could suggest that viewers would have the option to cover their eyes or turn

away from a photograph displayed on a wall, but they cannot shut their ears to the sound that resonates in the room. Or I could argue that a photograph depicts a static, past incident, while an audio recording reactivates its captured vibrations anew, occurring in time, unfrozen.

All of the binaries which make up the audiovisual litany could serve to argue that *Blind Date* is made all the more horrifying and disgusting by employing its sound-only documentation, but I do not think that this is the case. Perhaps it would be possible to offer that position if the audio content of the documentation were more explicit. As it is, though, without the spoken introduction, absolutely nothing on that tape provides clues as to what Duncan claims happened. *Blind Date* is not sonically rich, and it is visually impoverished. The sound does not sufficiently conjure images of the performance in the “theater of the mind” (to borrow a term used in radio drama). Rather the audio is utterly vacant of all the expected sounds of a necrophilic encounter. There is no slap of skin on skin, no heavy breathing, and no squeaking bedsprings. The sound does not build to a climax — it is more or less the same throughout the piece’s thirteen-and-a-half minutes. It contains only dry, indecipherable rustling. It is an austere, almost *blank*, recording. As a document, it is far less emotionally disturbing than photographic evidence of necrophilia would be. The audiovisual litany would have us believe that hearing is about feeling, while seeing is about knowing, but *Blind Date* fails to register on either level. The piece is blind, but it is also pretty hard of hearing.

Aural Representation of the Body in *Blind Date*

A significant portion of the scholarship regarding visibility and the body in cultural production positions performance vis-a-vie the function of female visibility. This line of inquiry, of course, begins with Laura Mulvey's oft-cited theorization of "the male gaze." Through the structure of the gaze, female bodies are positioned as objects of visual pleasure. Women's bodies, she writes, connote "to-be-looked-at-ness." The visual logic of photography and cinema forces female bodies into a system of representation which affords them no agency. The perspective of the camera lens is figured structurally as male, operating on a scopophilic, voyeuristic desire. For performance scholar Rebecca Schneider, the "explicit body" of the female performance artist can trouble this representational economy through the question of "who gets to make what explicit where and for whom" (1997, 20). As an example of this, Schneider's analysis of Carolee Schneemann's *Eye/Body* provides a case study for the author to argue for strategies through which female performance artists can complicate and subvert the gaze. *Eye/Body* was a loft installation that featured Schneemann's naked body covered in "paint, grease, chalk, ropes and plastic" (1997, 35) as its centerpiece. In the photograph Schneider reproduces in her book, Schneemann reclines on a rolled-out tarp, with two plastic snakes lying across her torso, and a stripe of paint dividing her face from forehead to chin. She looks directly back into the camera, not necessarily aggressively, but certainly not passively. According to Schneider, "the work ... suggested a complex theoretical terrain of perspectival vision on the flip. *Eye/Body* suggested embodied vision, a bodily eye — sighted eyes — artist's eyes — not only in the seer but in the body of the seen" (1997, 35). She goes to assert that Schneemann was "not only image but

image-maker” (1997, 35). In this sense, Schneider argues that early feminist performance artists like Schneemann didn’t reverse the objectifying gaze of the visual paradigm, but won a degree of access over that gaze, claiming it, returning it, and attempting to destabilize the male-subject/female-object logic of visual representation.

Blind Date appears to reinforce the oppressive binaries that feminist performance pushed against. It clearly indexes the male as active subject, with the female as passive object. In fact, this structural relationship is taken to an extreme: the female body is rendered as passive and as object-like as it could possibly be. In his recorded description of the piece, Duncan refers to the body as “it.” However, the lack of visual documentation complicates this criticism of the piece. Despite being a piece about sex, the expected dimensions of scopophilia and voyeuristic desire are absent. The female body is not seen. The structure of the piece does not frame the body as the source of visual erotic pleasure. Moreover, the female body is not *heard*, either. The only activity that is even audible is the metal-on-metal scraping. The origin of this scraping is left entirely obscure. It has no regular rhythm, so expectations that it is the result of Duncan’s sexual assault on the body are left unconfirmed. In this sense, the female body is unrepresented in the documentation. It is absent except in the imagination of the listener. However, we do hear Duncan’s body. Its activity is represented. It is his body that we listen to. The female body is erased from the artwork in all manners except the narrative of the event. There remains no evidence of its presence at all.

The narrative of *Blind Date* contains a representation of a severe racial imbalance which is inseparable from the piece’s misogyny. Duncan claims that he acquired the dead body by crossing the US border into Mexico. This detail reinforces a pervasive stereotype about Mexican

criminality and the availability of non-white bodies to the white male sexual tourist. Cynthia Enloe doesn't address necrophilia in *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, but her description of sexual tourism applies to Duncan's story.

Sex tourism is the process of encouraging overwhelmingly male tourists — from North America, western Europe, the Middle East, Russia, and East and Southeast Asia— to travel from one country to another to gain access to women's sexual services. Racialized, sexualized enticements are created (using the Internet to great effect), fantasies of masculinity are wielded, flights are scheduled, hotels are booked, certain women are commodified and made available, police are bribed. Profits are made (2014, 74-75).

Enloe describes an industry where bodies, the vast majority of which are female, are made available to travelers, the vast majority of whom are male, who possess the financial privilege to cross international borders for the purposes of sex. The system that allows and encourages this phenomenon is built on the participation of local governments and police. In Duncan's story, the figure of the mortician's assistant who is willing to sell dead bodies to Americans for a small amount of money fills the role of the corrupt official profiting off of sex tourism. Mexican border towns are imagined as spaces of lawlessness where white Americans have access to anything that would be illegal on the US side of the border. The trope of the Mexican brothel appears countless times throughout popular culture in films such as *Rolling Thunder* and *From Dusk til Dawn*. Enloe points out that sex tourism relies on men from affluent countries who imagine that women of color are more sexually available and submissive than women in their own societies (2014, 37). The dead body's passivity and powerlessness in Duncan's encounter amplifies this gendered and racialized assumption of availability.

In a videotaped interview conducted in 2002, Duncan claims he did not specify the age or the sex of the body he requested. He says “The woman, well — the *body*, let’s say — was about, my guess was about thirty. It was older than I was, but not that much older. Not elderly.” He goes on: “If the body had been male, I wouldn’t have cared. If the body had been old or young, it didn’t make any difference. I didn’t care about any of that.” These clarifications, which Duncan provided more than twenty years later, do not contradict my interpretation of *Blind Date* as an act of sex tourism. Regardless of his stated intention, the piece was presented as the story of a white American male who visited Mexico and paid off an official in order to have sex with a young Mexican female cadaver. The performance cannot avoid being read as an example of racialized sexual abuse in a context where expressions of white supremacy are so often accompanied by the history of rape of non-white women by white men.

Despite the artist’s own stated intentions, the performance most strongly resonates as an act of brutal sexual violence on the body of a Mexican woman. On the other hand, Steve Finbow’s *Grave Desire: A Cultural History of Necrophilia* argues that as long as the necrophilic act was not preceded by a murder that was committed to enable it, the crime itself is essentially victimless. In a conversation with artist Mike Kelley, Duncan himself echoed this sentiment.

About *Blind Date*, Kelley writes:

The work consisted of Duncan having sex with a human corpse, and was presented in the form of an audiotape as a kind of concrete music. Duncan said of the experience, “One of the things this piece showed me was that people don’t accept death. Until the body is completely dust, people can’t accept the fact that someone is dead. To me the corpse was like solid matter that had nothing to do with the person who was occupying it.” To those who hold onto an essential

notion of the human body, the corpse is inseparable from the life force that once occupied it; to those that do not, the corpse is simply another material (2002, 94). However, in the context of a work of art that provides a *representation*, no bodies are simply blank — dead body qua dead body. Instead both bodies, Duncan's and the dead woman's, are gendered and racialized within a particular sociopolitical context. *Blind Date*'s emotional difficulty is largely, although not solely, attributable to its recapitulation of patriarchal white supremacist violence.

It is certain that another aspect of the piece's difficulty is directly related to the simple deadness of the body, and the revulsion that accompanies death and decay. Duncan and Kelley's claims that lifeless flesh is just another material have a certain logic to them, especially from an atheistic or non-religious perspective. However, most audiences for the work cannot let go of the uncomfortable feelings that treat dead human flesh as a material that is *different* from all other material. Rather than demystify the dead body as just another artistic medium, *Blind Date* operates on the premise that necrophilia and dead bodies are somehow more emotionally charged than other lifeless media. In "The Uncanny" (1919), Freud attests to the uniqueness of the dead body, writing, "To many people the acme of the uncanny is represented by anything to do with death, dead bodies ..." (2003, 148). He emphasizes the particularly uncanny sensation surrounding dead human flesh when he goes on to suggest that "Severed limbs, a severed head, a hand detached from the arm ... all of these have something highly uncanny about them..." (2003, 150). For Freud, it is impossible to accept that the animating spirit has entirely vacated the body, although that fact may be intellectually understood. This disconnect between what one knows to be the case versus how one *feels* about a dead body is a manifestation of a

childhood complex — both the failure to fully accept or understand death and the childhood wish that non-living things were imbued with a human spirit. This uncanniness is built in to the address of Duncan's piece. The whole of Duncan's artistic oeuvre deals with fear and disgust. One significant performance piece that predates *Blind Date* is *Scare* (1976), in which Duncan, wearing a Halloween mask, appeared at the homes of his close friends and fired a pistol loaded with blanks at his friends' heads and ran away. This work is characteristic of Duncan's interest in taboo and fear, which is continued in *Blind Date*. The dead body's uncanny potential cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to the rational, atheistic, materialist mind as Kelley and Duncan insist. Rather, Duncan's piece must be understood as entirely predicated upon that uncanniness.

Freud also relates the dead body to the fear of castration, which is one of the repressed infantile complexes he identifies that produce feelings of uncanniness (2003, 150). Putting aside the questionable phallogentricity of the castration complex, it actually appears relevant to an analysis of Duncan's performance. Duncan's necrophilia is immediately linked to his vasectomy. Absent from many performance studies descriptions of *Blind Date* is the second half of the performance: Duncan's surgery, which occurred three weeks later and was not documented on audiotape. This association Duncan creates between the dead body and his symbolic castration — he is, in a way, *unmanned*, his semen rendered impotent — is not arbitrary. In Freud's analysis of the Oedipus myth, the threat of castration is linked to the breaking of strong sexual taboo (Ibid.: 7). For Duncan, his sexual taboo-breaking is the first step in a process of castration. His performance renders an essential component of human reproduction — semen — doubly inert. It is first made laughably useless by its misuse of dead flesh, and then eliminated entirely. Moreover, for Freud the uncanniness of lifeless bodies, severed limbs, and dead flesh explicitly

recall castration. Duncan's necrophilia and his vasectomy are, in this sense, two actions that are equated in the castration-complex.

Blind Date is not about Duncan's desire. The piece is not about a person who is sexually attracted to dead bodies. Rather, Duncan suggests the artwork is about his semen and his rejection of its potential to create life. *Blind Date* documents what the artist says is his final potent seminal emission which is rendered impotent by its expression inside of a dead body. This is why Duncan's later insistence that the sex and age of the dead body was insignificant is untrustworthy. The performance relies on the question of male potency and had the body been male, or of a person too old to bear children, the symbolic failure of his semen would be irrelevant. The body needed to be that of a young woman so that the question of fertility remained active and available in the piece. If Duncan were willing to have sex with another male in order to for his last orgasm to be reproductively useless, then the body would not need to be dead, and the act would hardly qualify as anything other than utterly commonplace. *Blind Date* brings to mind a kind of transformation of Leo Bersani's provocative query, "Is the rectum a grave?" (see Bersani 2009) — except that it perverts the sentiment for the purposes of nonconsensual heteronormative sexuality, and a much more literal relationship to the grave.

Blind Date's Photographic Documentation

One photograph is associated with *Blind Date*, but it does not depict the performance itself. As Duncan claims, he did not take any photographs of the body, possibly because he was instructed not to. This photograph was taken three weeks after Duncan's alleged encounter with

the dead body. It shows Duncan on an operating table getting a vasectomy. Dressed in a hospital gown with his eyes closed and arms folded across his chest, Duncan's posture evokes the posture of the cadaver he assaulted. But in the photograph Duncan is obviously alive. Sweat coats his forehead and he lifts his chin, stretching his neck as if to turn away from the activity of the surgeon, who is bent over him holding surgical instruments to his exposed genitals. This is the only actual image associated with *Blind Date*. It is at once both a relief not to have to endure any visual representation of the performance, but also disturbing in the way in which the two very different bodies involved in the piece become equated in their similarly recumbent, similarly passive comportments. They share sterile, clinical settings — a mortuary and a hospital. The female body that is objectified in the performance is unrepresented, except in a kind of equivalence and erasure, replaced by Duncan's body in what Tracey Warr generously describes as a "tragic portrayal of masculine impotence" (2000, 105).

This image of Duncan getting the vasectomy strongly recalls Thomas Eakins's painting *The Gross Clinic* (1875). Jennifer Doyle compares the Eakins to Ron Athey's performance, *Incorruptible Flesh: Dissociative Sparkle* by describing the two works as presenting opposite narratives (2013, 52). Interestingly, *Blind Date*'s one related image also recalls the Eakins painting, but it registers very differently from Athey's work. *Blind Date* appropriates the painting's power to frame Duncan as powerless, exposed, and victimized. Doyle describes the Eakins: "It is large, dark, and gory. The painting's dramatic effects are generalized by the horrifying juxtaposition of the patient's body — naked, vulnerable, sliced open — against the calm, reasoned, patriarchal authority displayed by Dr. Gross" (2013, 39). The painting depicts a medical theater as Gross, standing over a patient's naked, supine form, performs surgery while

lecturing to a full room of stern-faced students. Many scholars have understood the image as a depiction of clinical, institutionalized castration. Although the narrative implied in the painting's diegesis insists the cut is made both to heal and to educate, the brutality of the image itself does not reassure. Gross's authority is expressed as violence committed upon an utterly helpless figure. *Blind Date*'s sole *post factum* photograph contains only two figures, but the Eakins's power dynamic remains intact. However, in Duncan's case, the artist inhabits multiple roles: he is most obviously the patient — that is whose physical position he takes, exposed and cut open; but as the author of the artwork, he also holds that authority as well. Dr. Gross's patient is not the subject of an elective surgery, while Duncan's vasectomy is not performed for any medical purpose. Duncan's surgeon is depicted with his head down and his face therefore obscured. The roles in Eakins's painting are reversed — the vulnerable body of the patient is angled to hide his face, while Gross's face is seen full-on. But most disturbingly, Duncan's wince, his tightly shut eyes and upturned face align him with another of Eakins's figures:

The painting juxtaposes an extraordinary vulnerability with extraordinary power. As if in reaction to this, the lone woman in the surgical theater is overcome with horror. The painting's emotional drama is concentrated in her gesture: hands thrown over her eyes, body twisting away from the frightening wound at the center of everyone's attention ... The painting isn't merely difficult; it is about difficulty and about mastering one's limits as a viewer. These limits are represented as emotional and are marked as feminine in the figure of a woman so overcome with feeling that she turns away from the action" (2013, 41).

Duncan's erasure of the female body is so complete that he becomes the stand-in for Eakins's sole female figure, the only person in the painting to actually inhabit and express the horror of

what we are seeing. Duncan's wince feminizes him and frames him as a kind of martyr, with *Blind Date* as an act of masochism. What makes this aspect of the work difficult (appalling, upsetting, etc.) I think, is that Duncan's erasure of the female body works to reframe him — the subject of the work — as the victim of the situation he has engendered. It is his body that is listened-to in the audio documentation, and it is his body that is looked-at as his genitals are mutilated in the photographic documentation. His passivity in the the photograph seeks to feminize him, but that position feel deeply disingenuous, and unearned. In his radio monologue describing the piece, Duncan repeatedly insists on his own victimhood. He vacillates between activity and passivity in his description of, and justification for, the performance.

Duncan's monologue introducing the piece is not purely the cold, matter-of-fact description common to conceptual art. His reading of the text is cold and unemotional, but the text contains revealing mentions of Duncan's emotional justification for the performance. He begins: "Men are taught to respond to their own emotional pain with rage, a rage they often aim at themselves. Teaching men to react in this way is an obscene and sanctioned perversion. If you are a parent with a male child, you are partly to blame." While the phrase "obscene and sanctioned perversion" might very well describe *Blind Date* as an artwork, he deploys it as an attack on the patriarchal expectations of masculinity. Before the nature of the performance is explained, he frames it as a vague rebellion against the systems of power that control and reproduce gender in society. Moments later, though, a more desperate motivation contradicts this introduction. "I was very deeply in love. When I lost that love, I saw myself as a complete emotional failure, unable to return any kind of positive affection." These sentences seem to undo the work of the previous ones, re-presenting the work as the response to romantic/sexual

rejection by a woman. Although he goes on to claim that *Blind Date* is a way to “punish himself as thoroughly as [he] could,” it’s difficult not to hear this as an act of violence against a female body in retaliation for that rejection. Duncan’s intent in this regard cuts through any questions of the performance’s veracity. Whether the act happened or not, Duncan’s description of it betrays a messy, disturbing, hateful emotional core.

Duncan’s *Blind Date* presents itself as an examination of the failures of masculinity, and of Duncan’s own victimization at the hands of a culture that enforces gendered expectations on its population, but this argument remains entirely unconvincing. The nature of the performance contradicts Duncan’s position as victim in the encounter.

Performance Documentation

One of the more common conversation topics surrounding *Blind Date* is that of the piece’s authenticity. Online references to the work often include the words “allegedly” and “purportedly” and describe the piece as “unverifiable.”²⁴ The fact that its documentation consists of an audio recording that sounds nothing like the activity it claims to represent and a photograph that was taken weeks later calls into question the documentation’s ability to serve as evidence of the performance. *Blind Date*’s status as one of the only major works of performance art — perhaps the sole example, even — that is documented primarily through sound suggests that audio documentation is regarded as untrustworthy. Why must documentation’s account of an

²⁴ These come from the several mentions of *Blind Date* listed throughout the entries of Wikipedia, accessed August 2015.

event be trustworthy? Some words about performance documentation and its place in performance studies scholarship are necessary to frame this analysis.

Scholars of performance have long been required to analyze the objects of their study, in part, through documentation — photographs, videos, recordings, and textual descriptions that serve as evidence that the performance took place. Many historically important works occurred in front of very small audiences and, in some cases, no audience at all. In these cases, performance documents influence, possibly even *produce*, how performances are later considered.

Philip Auslander distinguishes between “theatrical” performance documentation and the “documentary” style (2012, 47). Although he eventually collapses the categories into each other, suggesting that they are not essentially different, a sensitivity to these two categories is crucial to understanding the larger issue of verifiability and evidence in documentation. Auslander writes that the latter category

represents the traditional way in which the relationship between performance art and its documentation is conceived. It is assumed that the documentation of the performance event provides both a record of it through which it can be reconstructed (though, as Kathy O’Dell points out, the reconstruction is bound to be fragmentary and incomplete) and evidence that it actually occurred. The connection between performance and document is thus thought to be ontological, with the event preceding and authorizing its documentation (2012, 47).

He goes on:

In the theatrical category, I would place a host of art works of the kind sometimes called “performed photography,” ranging from Marcel Duchamp’s photos of himself as Rrose Selavy to Cindy Sherman’s photographs of herself in various

guises ... These are cases in which performances were staged solely to be photographed or filmed and had no meaningful prior existence as autonomous events presented to audiences. The space of the document (whether visual or audiovisual) thus becomes the only space in which the performance occurs (2012, 49).

Every performance piece creates a tension between these two categories of documentation and there is no clear boundary between the two, only a matter of *degrees*. Many historically relevant performances had only a small number of first-hand witnesses present and the documentation is the only way by which the vast majority of the world can access the works.

An example of one such performance is Chris Burden's *Shoot* (1971). In the performance, Burden was shot in the arm by a friend with a rifle. The event was viewed in person by an invited audience of about ten people. Upon first glance, the documentation of this piece suggest that it is non-theatrical. One photograph most often appears associated with the work. In stark black and white, two figures occupy the frame. The camera angle views the scene from over Burden's unnamed assistant who is standing, according to Burden's own account, about fifteen feet from Burden holding a rifle. The photograph seems to have been captured at the moment the bullet hit Burden's left arm. The assistant's arms are blurred as he lowers the rifle after firing, such that the rifle itself is indiscernible. Burden is even more blurred, almost doubled — three arms and three legs, with two heads, his figure smeared by motion while the camera's shutter was open. Surrounding the artist and his assistant is the familiar, sterile, white-walled cube of an empty gallery. The environment frames the act as a piece of art. Occasionally three other photographs accompany the one I have described: one in which Burden's assistant holds the rifle upright in front of him, appearing to inspect the weapon; one in which the assistant

takes aim, with Burden himself awaiting the shot; and one taken immediately after the shot, in which Burden is clutching his side and a wound in his bicep shows two distinct punctures with a trickle of blood running down over his elbow.

As Amelia Jones points out, Burden himself selected these photographs to represent the work. She writes:

Burden carefully staged each performance and had it photographed and sometimes also filmed; he selected usually one or two photographs of each event for display in exhibitions and catalogues, where photographs are accompanied by a ‘relic’ from the event and by Burden’s laconically macho description of the performance action. In this way, Burden produced himself for posterity through meticulously orchestrated textual and visual representations (1994, 568).

Shoot was not only photographed, but also filmed, and the video confirms Burden’s concern for the documentation. Leading up to the actual act, Burden can be heard speaking to the videographer, making certain that the shot — the camera’s, not the rifle’s — is perfect. The curated visual documents of Burden’s performance are the only access any person has to the artwork, aside from the ten witnesses who were present in the original audience. Despite this, it is one of the most cited pieces of performance art.

Auslander compares performance documentation to the notion of the *performative* — a statement “whose utterance constitutes action in itself” (2012, 53). He argues:

[The] traditional view sees performance documents as constatives that describe performances and state that they occurred. I am suggesting that performance documents are not analogous to constatives [statements that *describe*, rather than *do*] but to performatives: in other words, *the act of documenting an event as a performance is what constitutes it as such*. Documentation does not simply generate image/statements that describe

an autonomous performance and state that it occurred: it produces an event as a performance...” (2012, 53; emphasis Auslander’s).

Auslander argues that the documentary process actually *produces* the performance. One way to illustrate Auslander’s theory is by the abundance of visual recording devices at performance art events. Often photographers’ viewpoints are privileged over those of the spectators. They are given the best vantage point from which to view the work, or are allowed to approach the performers and move freely throughout the space in a way that audience members cannot (walking onto stage, up and down the aisles, etc.). This is displayed throughout the documentation for Burden’s *Shoot*, but also in many other examples. Quickly reviewing the documentation of Marina Abramović’s *The Artist is Present* (2010) at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, one can see that professional photographers and their cameras are positioned in a line in front of all other spectators. The live audience for whom the piece presumably exists are not granted an unimpeded view. Even among that audience, many can be seen taking pictures and videos of their own on their cell phones.

Peggy Phelan views performance and its documentation as two very different things. In contrast to Auslander, she writes:

Performance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance’s being ... becomes itself through disappearance” (1993, 146).

She later goes on: “The document of a performance then is only a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present” (1993, 146). Phelan’s position suggests that the only access documentation provides to a performance is a diminished, distant recollection. For the audience present at a performance by Marina Abramović in the twenty-first century — the ones who watch through the lenses of cameras and the screens of iPhones — is the performance no longer a performance but something *other than*? The preponderance of these types of viewers might instead support Auslander’s theory: by documenting the event, the event is constituted as a performance. There’s a phrase often used on social media when proof of a story’s legitimacy is demanded, one that succinctly restates Auslander’s argument that documentation constitutes the performance as such: “pics or it didn’t happen.”

The question of proof is directly related to this chapter’s primary case study, *Blind Date*. The fact that the documentation’s veracity is often questioned seems especially pertinent because it is an audio recording and not a visual document of some kind. There is an assumption, perhaps, operating in the realm of documentation, that visual media provide better evidence of an event than sonic media. In “The Now and the Has Been: Paradoxes of Live Art in History” from *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, Amelia Jones asks “What is the nature of the performance event? Is it more ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ than the various kinds of documentation (textual, photographic, videographic, filmic, re-stagings) through which it is passed down through time?” (2012, 15). The forms of media in Jones’s list are all visual. Several can be audiovisual but none are necessarily defined as such — video can be silent and still be considered video, but it cannot be visually blank. This preference for visual media is so dominant as to be taken for granted.

Burden's *Shoot* can serve as a representative example of sound's treatment as secondary to the visual in documentation. Although the video of the piece contains synchronized audio, its quality and fidelity does not match the slick professional look of Burden's four curated photographs. The audio seems like an afterthought, present only because the film camera happened to have a microphone input. The sound is muffled and marred by microphone handling noise. We hear unintelligible conversation from the ten people in attendance and Burden's own instructions to the videographer. Although it is audible in the recording, the gunshot lacks the sonic impact it would have certainly had in that room. A gun being fired — even one with a rather small charge like a .22 caliber rifle, which is quieter than most guns — would be shocking to hear indoors. Undoubtedly, spectators would have jumped at the sound. Its volume would have been significantly enhanced by what looks to be a reverberant room with all hard, reflective surfaces and nothing like carpet or curtains to dampen the sound.

The audiotape Duncan presented at DTLA was done so in such a way as to assert its authenticity. At first glance, it would seem to fall into Auslander's 'documentary' category. But unlike video, or photographic documentation, audio does not carry the same weight of truth. As I have argued, *Blind Date*'s audiotape actually proves nothing. Its mystery is owed to the fact that it sounds nothing like what one would imagine it should. Despite Duncan's refusal to say otherwise — and the fact that the fall out over the piece caused him to permanently leave the United States — rumors have persisted since it was first exhibited that *Blind Date* did not *really happen*. Even among the artistic community to which Duncan belonged remains tight-lipped

about the work's authenticity.²⁵ To this day, the piece rests uneasily in the confusion between the "documentary" and the "theatrical."

Sound and Verifiability

Why is this necessarily the case? What is it about the sonic and its relationship to the visual that calls into question its verifiability? Whether or not Duncan's performance actually occurred as he says it did is, in the end, irrelevant. I am not interested in the veracity of Duncan's claim but in the nature of audio documentation and its ability to serve as evidence of truth.²⁶ The fact that uncertainty remains a major part of how the piece circulates culturally illustrates the relationship sound and vision have to notions of truth and *knowing*.

The audiovisual litany, which I referred to earlier in this chapter, posits a stubbornly pervasive model of the senses. Sterne observes that this litany idealizes hearing as immersive, subjective, and affective; in contrast, vision is described as distancing, objective, and intellectual. He points out that the litany "alternately denigrates and elevates" vision. The sense of sight is described "as a fallen sense" that "takes us out of the world, but also" as Sterne writes "bathes us in the clear light of reason" (2003, 15). Despite Sterne's opposition to the litany, its collection of assumptions appear to continue to permeate aspects of culture. Walter J. Ong's *Orality and*

²⁵ I have spoken to a number of friends and collaborators of Duncan's over the years, and nobody has ever told me, unequivocally, that he really did what he claims to have done.

²⁶ Ambiguity and non-verifiability are not uncommon themes in works of extreme performance. Jennifer Doyle's analysis of Aliza Shvarts's untitled and unfinished performance of "repeated self-induced miscarriages" existed only through the artist's written documentation of the experience. Doyle writes: "The truth of the piece resides in how one chooses to interpret Shvarts's account of what she did; this quickly becomes identical to how one feels about what she did" (2013, 30).

Literacy stands in Sterne's criticism as a particularly pernicious recitation of the audiovisual litany. Ong put hearing on a pedestal, associating it with presence, intimacy, the blurring between subject and object, and a kind of pre-critical sensitivity to the world. While Sterne accuses Ong of rehashing a Christian theological perspective on sound, others who cannot claim religiosity as a motivation can be seen to repeat Ong's conclusions. The Marxist phenomenologist Donald M. Lowe, in his *History of Bourgeois Perception* writes: "Speech is assimilated directly by the ear, without the mediation of the eye. And we are moved more by sound than by sight, since the former surrounds us, whereas the latter distances" (1982, 7). We can find even more contemporary scholars falling back on the audiovisual litany. In *Listening to Noise and Silence: Toward a Philosophy of Sound Art*, Salomé Voegelin writes:

Sound's ephemeral invisibility obstructs critical engagement, while the apparent stability of the image invites criticism. Vision, by its very nature assumes a distance from the object, which it receives in its monumentality. Seeing always happens in a meta-position, away from the seen, however close. And this distance enables a detachment and objectivity that presents itself as truth. Seeing is believing. The visual 'gap' nourishes the idea of structural certainty and the notion that we can truly understand things, give them names, and define ourselves in relation to those names as stable subjects, as identities" (2010, xi-xii).

Voegelin's account of the audiovisual litany doesn't resemble Ong theology so much as it mounts an attack on the *cogito ergo sum* logic of Enlightenment subjectivity. From Voegelin's position, it would seem that sound and hearing serve to combat objective reason and the self. While her goal is to elevate hearing, the consequence of this litany is that it grants vision the weight of objective knowledge. Will Scrimshaw points out that the list of binaries which

reinforce sound as immersive, affective, and embodied and vision as distanced and objective are, in many ways “gospel” in sound studies (2011: 1). It is not only within sound studies that these distinctions are maintained. As I have argued, this perspective is uncritically upheld in the practice of performance documentation. As a way of *knowing*, hearing is deemed insufficient. In performance art, *seeing* is believing, and sound becomes inadmissible as evidence — as if it were hearsay.

Bringing this discussion back to *Blind Date* these distinctions between sound and vision seemed to get reinforced by the continued speculation of the piece’s veracity. Despite the insistence of scholars like Auslander that the documentary and the theatrical are intertwined, and that performance is constituted by its documentation, the authority of “objective truth” is sought to prove a performance happened in the way it was supposed to have happened. Additionally, that authority still attaches itself to visual documentation in a way that it doesn’t with respect to audio recordings. And despite the insistence of scholars like Sterne that the feeling/knowing, subjective/objective divide between hearing and seeing is less essential and less ahistorical than the audiovisual litany allows, the realm of performance documentation still relies on these careless assumptions to validate an act of performance art as having undoubtedly occurred.

Conclusion

For several reasons the shape of this chapter was significantly different from the three that preceded it. The lengthy description and analysis of *Blind Date* eventually brought my argument around to a broader theory of the sonic in performance documentation. In the three

previous chapters, my arguments were, in some ways, much easier to mount. Those chapters pushed against various analyses of experimental music/sound art that neglect the art forms' capacity to signify with respect to affective, political, and social meaning. This chapter addresses case studies from the realm of performance art — rather than music or sound art — and its method differs because scholars of performance have been, for the most part, receptive to the ascendance of affect theory.²⁷ Additionally, the strains of contemporary philosophy that have used experimental music to demonstrate the materiality of sound outside of the necessity of human perception do not often engage case studies common to performance studies. Plainly said, there is no wing of performance studies scholarship that I am aware of that would benefit from the type of intervention that the previous three chapters undertook. Nobody in the field needs reassurance that in the context of performance, experimental music and sound art often register as affective, and can be heard to communicate social and political meaning.

The audio recording of *Blind Date* might be heard to resemble the experimental electronic music I discussed in previous chapters. Mike Kelley is right, I think, when in his description of the work he calls the tape a piece of “music concrete.” But what Duncan's piece offers is not a reading against the grain of formalism like Lucier's *I am Sitting in a Room* did. Duncan's overt themes of misogyny, masculine failure, necrophilia, and castration could hardly be mistaken for art-for-art's-sake. It provides a broader examination of a issue that permeates all four chapters—the significations that attach to sounds despite some sounds' perceived resistance

²⁷ Within the field of performance and theater studies, scholars have often adopted affect theory for its application to theorizations of liveness and presence, as well as its account for embodied experience. Scholars of theater have employed affect's theorizations of emotion especially in relation to acting training, and the actor's body. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work in affect and theories of performativity have proved productive for many who study performance, and the long list of performance studies scholars who have relied in some way or another on affect includes Jill Dolan, José Esteban Muñoz and Susan Leigh Foster.

to meaning. *Blind Date* encourages a lingering doubt that the activity one hears on the tape in is in fact a “true” representation of what it purports to be. The documentation of *Blind Date* and the unsurety it produces can be compared to a piece like Oliveros’s *The Day I Disconnected the Erase Head and Forget to Reconnect It*, which sounds similarly abstract, but has a narrative context that informs an understanding of what it is that an audience is hearing. Both pieces contain abstract recording of unidentifiable sounds coupled with stories that explain them. Oliveros’s piece, however, reverses Duncan’s organization by presenting the sound as the artwork and the accompanying narrative as mere additional information.

This chapter’s conclusion — that documentation is still presented, in some ways, as *evidence* and that persistent notions about the relationship between seeing and hearing determine, in part, an individual document’s ability to convince an audience of the validity of that evidence — can be understood to haunt all four chapters. Each takes a case study where the audio seems to, at first inspection, resist signification — underground humming, over-amplified clanging, random synthetic oscillations, dry rustling scrapes against metal — only to reveal that audio’s ultimate compulsion to signify across dimensions of emotion, history, culture, identity, and politics. The question of the sonic’s potential to serve as evidence is really a question of its compulsion to signify, to tell a story, to communicate meaning. In this sense, my perspective is somewhat conservative. Against arguments that experimental sonic artworks are somehow *special* — either because they are uniquely affective and immersive, or because they are uniquely resistant to readability — I hope to suggest that, to those who listen closely, they can be subjected to modes of analysis that other fields of study find productive such as affect theory, feminist theory, queer theory, and cultural studies. The resemblance the audio of *Blind Date*’s

documentation bears to the experimental electronic music discussed in chapters one through three is more than superficial — it reveals that any such collection of sounds could reveal a multilayered circuit of meanings.

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