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**LOS ANGELES NOISESCAPES:
CULTURE AND AESTHETICS
IN THE EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
EXPERIMENTAL 'NOISE' SCENES**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
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By

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ABSTRACT

LOS ANGELES NOISESCAPES:
CULTURE AND AESTHETICS IN THE EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
EXPERIMENTAL 'NOISE' SCENES

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This dissertation examines the aesthetic values of the experimental 'noise' scenes in Los Angeles from 2010 to 2014 using ethnographic methods. It centers around three main venues and the practitioners and audiences associated with them: (the) Handbag Factory, Dem Passwords, and the wulf. I interviewed twenty-three practitioners, venue owners and promoters, and non-performing audience members. I found that the aesthetic goals of the practitioners tended to center on the production, discovery, and reception of new and unique sounds (timbres) that will lead to new and unique aesthetic experiences. I asked the participants a battery of over one hundred of the same questions for comparison and analysis. The data collected informed my understanding of the sonic values of the participants in the experimental 'noise' scenes in Los Angeles. I synthesized this information to corroborate the main theses of the dissertation: that experimental 'noise' *prioritizes timbre over pitch*, and that it is characterized by its aperiodicity and ametricality in favor of what I call *entropic rhythm*. A keen interest in the characteristics of sound(s), their organization, and morphology has led me to the notion that *timbre is ontology*—not only as the being of sound(s), but as a mode of ontological agency through listening practices. I claim that these ideologies characterize experimental 'noise' as an artistic idiom in the twenty-first century.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost I would like to acknowledge my parents, Carlos and Cherri Muñoz. Their interminable support has made my work possible. Years spent with my father discussing theoretical ideologies and ways of understanding aesthetic experience has influenced my intellectual trajectory in countless ways. My mother's ceaseless support of activities that have led to my intellectual and genial edification has been equally invaluable. I dedicate this dissertation to both my mother and father.

Dard Neuman, Leta Miller, Ben Carson, Renee Coulombe, Catherine Soussloff, Pamela Madsen, and Douglas Kahn have all served as important mentors to me. In some cases I have even felt *saved* by them. Pamela Madsen in particular encouraged my critical spirit as an undergraduate, when I first began to think about music aesthetics, consonance and dissonance, and noise. She was perhaps the first professor to take my ideas seriously. Renee Coulombe helped foster that interest further with her own interests in consonance and dissonance. I first encountered Douglas Kahn's book, *Noise Water Meat* while I was research noise music with Madsen, and I would later work with Kahn at UC Davis. With Catherine Soussloff I became more deeply acquainted with issues of performance and performativity in the arts. Leta Miller's rigorous approach to writing about the American mavericks—particularly Cage and Harrison—gave helpful blueprints on how to describe a performance situation and how to write biographically. Dard Neuman has been instrumental for his anthropological and theoretical approach to issues of politics and aesthetics. I chose him to chair this dissertation for precisely those reasons. These professors have challenged and critiqued my ideas

in important ways that have only strengthened this work. I would also like to thank music Graduate Program Director Laura McShane.

My cousin Carolina Muñoz Proto began her doctoral studies in Social/Personality Psychology at the Graduate Center of CUNY. She gave me some very important advice on how to construct the ethnographic questions in the present study, imploring me to ask open-ended questions—rather than binary yes/no questions—so that I could learn from the stories of the participants.

Thanks to my close long-term friends: Ivan Quilchez, Jason Boggs, Aram Moshayedi, Christiaan Cruz, Melissa Frye, Sophia Deininger, Lauren Lavitt, and Sarah Diamond. I would also like to acknowledge my partner, Cooper T. Moll, who provided a nurturing environment that helped me finish the last year of writing this dissertation, even while attending graduate school at UCLA in Library and Information Science. Her encouragement really helped me focus in the most trying times.

Finally, thanks to the participants I interviewed: David Kendall, Henry Perez, Nial Morgan, Greh Holger, John Wiese, Elden Man, Edward Giles, Adam Cahan, Joseph Hammer, Christiaan Cruz, Weronika Zaluska, Scott Cazan, Narin Dickerson, Michael Winter, GX Jupitter-Larsen, Casey Anderson, Sebastian Demian, Damion Romero, Samur Khouja, Don Bolles, Bob Bellerue, Joe Potts, and Maria Garcia. My goal was to find practitioners in the field and learn from them: they are the experts. Their testimony helped reinforce some of my assumptions while at other times I learned through the collection of their data the aesthetic and performance practices that characterize the experimental 'noise' scenes in Los Angeles.

INTRODUCTION

I. Prelude

The subject of this dissertation is experimental 'noise' in Los Angeles. I conceived of this project in the early 2000s while attending performances of new music, avant-garde music, noise music, computer music, and free improvisation. Many of these kinds of musics were performed along side each other, and so to my mind they were related and intersected in many ways. I began this project referring to "noise music"—some practitioners rejected the term 'noise' while others rejected the term 'music.' In David Novak's book *Japanoise* he capitalized the N, thus he spoke of Noise: I have not adopted that practice. In Paul Hegarty's *Noise/Music*, he sometimes refers to "noise" and sometimes to "noise music." He believes that noise fails to be music and fails to be noise. Because of the contentious nature of the proper nomenclature of the idiom, I have decided to use the modifier *experimental* and place *noise* in single quotes—thus, *experimental 'noise'*—though sometimes I simply refer to 'noise' or 'noise music' to mean the same thing. Throughout the dissertation I will refer to the *experimental 'noise' scenes*—following the practice of Christopher Small's "musicking"[1]—as the activities of composers, performers, audiences, consumers, distributors, venue owners, critics, academics, and anyone else who is involved directly or indirectly with experimental 'noise.' I characterize experimental 'noise' as *music that prioritizes timbre over pitch*, and tends toward aperiodicity and ametricality. The purpose of the dissertation is to document the activities of the

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[1] Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan

experimental 'noise' scenes in Los Angeles roughly from 2010 to 2015, and to

test some of my aesthetic theories concerning 'noise' in Los Angeles using the

data I have collected. The dissertation is concerned with the aesthetics of the

'noise' scene through the stated aesthetic goals of the practitioners and

audiences, and through the realization of those goals through instruments,

techniques, and practices. It also explores what people in the scene listen for in

experimental 'noise' by inquiring about the listening habits of those who attend

contemporary[2] 'noise' performances in Los Angeles.

As a genre or idiom experimental 'noise' eludes definition, and yet, one

must start somewhere. So first, with its borders. Hegarty writes:

> [N]oise and noise music are not purist, and therefore cannot
> complain about being adulterated, without also losing their status
> as noise. Occupying this paradoxical space is what noise is (not)
> about.[3]

Adulteration—in this sense, the fixing and transgressing of borders that makes its

space "paradoxical"—can(not) be a concern for noise because noise *is*

adulteration (or rather, noise is (not) adulteration). This very space is what I

have referred to as "Hegartian dialectics"—a term that Paul Hegarty himself has

endorsed my coinage. Hegartian dialectics means "*it is* and *it isn't*." But we need

a starting place!

Justifying 'Noise'

'Noise' is elusive from knowledge. It can be improvised freely in its

immediacy or well-prepared with algorithms that follow strict rules given a

certain set of circumstances and parameters. I came to listen to 'noise' from

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[2] 'Contemporary' is taken to mean since the early 2000s.
[3] Paul Hegarty, *Noise/Music: A History* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 126.

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listening to bands that used noise in their music at the same time that I was discovering early twentieth century avant-garde composers like Stravinsky, Bartók, and Varèse. But the definitive moment for me was when I attended a concert in Los Angeles that featured the work of James Tenney, David Tudor, and composer–critic Kyle Gann. Tenney's *For Ann (Rising)* made a deep impression on me. I remember listening to the beginning of the ascending glissando and impatiently thinking to myself, 'This sound is going to continue for an hour.' Instead of stewing in frustration from what I was listening to, I decided to challenge myself to listen; in this fight or flight scenario, the option to flee would have been an act of resignation, so I prepared myself for the endurance test. I heard pitches entering from the lower frequencies rising in pitch toward the upper threshold of human hearing while other pitches entered canonically from the infrasonic depths. Later in the piece the rate of oncoming, upward-moving glissandi, increased. Tenney's piece taught me to listen in a new active way that I have found applicable in many contexts of music and sound.

If art and the avant-garde fetishizes the new and novel experience, experimental 'noise' might bring new sounds to interpret. One of the major tendencies in the history of Western music has been the disciplined use and 'preparation' of dissonances. David Cohen's "Metaphysics, Ideology, Discipline: Consonance, Dissonance, and the Foundations of Western Polyphony" critically traces the genealogy of consonance and dissonance beginning with quotes from Heinrich Schenker and Boethius.

> Consonance itself is sufficient evidence for itself; it rests in its euphony, signifying itself Beginning and End. Not so, however, Dissonance, for which, on the contrary, we still definitely seek a further proof of its ground of existence; for, far from resting in itself, it urgently points beyond itself. It can only be grasped in relationship to—that is, out of and through—a consonant unity, and

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it is for just this reason that only the consonant unity signifies Beginning and End for the dissonance (Heinrich Schenker).[4]

But the fifth hammer, which was dissonant to all the others, was cast away (Boethius).[5]

Cohen claims that the history of consonance and dissonance is based on a postulated hierarchy that is "by no means, self-evident, necessary, or natural, but is rather the contingent outcome of a particular history."[6] In Boethius' account, there was a fifth hammer of unspecified weight that was dissonant with all the other hammers, and was thus cast out. Cohen hypothesizes that Boethius added the fifth hammer to the story to ceremonially cast away dissonance from the 'perfection' of the harmonic series: the fifth hammer was undoubtedly the noisiest. If dissonance has been historically relegated to second-class status to consonance's first-class status, then where does that leave 'noise?'

Noise shares many things in common with dissonance and its relation to consonance: in fact, noise, in one sense, might be called dissonance *par excellence*. Noise has always been a part of music. In Western music, noise often serves to accent an important moment. The accent itself is a sort of noise (a peculiar timbre) that opens the envelope of the overall morphology of a given sound before stabilizing into a tone; in fact, synthesizing a flute sound electronically begins by using a noise generator to recreate the breathy attack of a sound played on the instrument. Cymbals and other percussive aperiodic sounds are often utilized in Western music to emphasize the accent of a loud

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[4] David E. Cohen, "Metaphysics, Ideology, Discipline: Consonance, Dissonance, and the Foundations of Western Polyphony" in *Theoria: Historical Aspects of Music Theory 7* (University of North Texas, 1993), 1.

[5] Ibid. 2, 69-70. The four hammers, according to Pythagoras, were weighed in the ratios 12, 9, 8, and 6, represented as hammers A, B, C, and D. Hammers A and D were in a ratio 2:1, the octave. The weight of hammers B and C were in the ratio 9 and 8. Their ratios with hammer A were (12:9 = 4:3 (perfect fourth) and (12:8 = 3:2 (perfect fifth)). The ratio between B and C is 9:8, the whole tone. The ratio 9:8 was considered dissonant (when sounded together), and not mentioned.

[6] Ibid., 8-9.

sustained pitch—the excessive accent of a cymbal crash often gives the

perception of a heightened musical experience. Henry Cowell was adamant about

the historical use of noise in Western music. He insists that without noise, "the

climaxes in our operas would be like jelly-fish."[7] Noise, however, is distinctive:

unlike dissonance, noise has rarely been theorized as a 'musical' element until

recently. I believe that Western developments in composition toward the greater

use of dissonance (perhaps since the classical era[8]) are related to the

developments of experimental 'noise.'

Defining Noise

Noise is defined in many ways by many disciplines.[9] Among the most

common definitions are:

1. Any sound[10]
2. Unwanted sound[11]
3. Aperiodic sound[12]
4. Loud sound[13]
5. A disturbance in a system of signals[14]
6. White noise (white sound)[15]

Definition 1—any sound—is not useful because it makes sound and noise

synonymous.

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[7] Henry Cowell, "The Joys of Noise (1929)," in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004), 23.
[8] Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1991), xviii. Goehr postulates what she calls the 'Beethoven Paradigm.' She justifies her marker historically as the beginning of the 'work-concept.'
[9] See the appended bibliography on definitions of noise.
[10] *Oxford English Dictionary*, "Noise," 1, 1a, 2b, http://www.oed.com.oca.ucsc.edu/search?searchType=dictionary&q=noise&_searchBtn=Search (accessed October 4, 2010).
[11] *Merriam-Webster Online*: "Noise," 2c. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/noise (accessed, October 4, 2010).
[12] William Burns, *Noise and Man* (Philadelphia: JB Lippincott, 1969), 32.
[13] *Oxford English Dictionary*, "Noise," —2b.
[14] *Oxford English Dictionary*, "Noise," 1, 1a, 11a.
[15] *Oxford English Dictionary*, "Noise," 11a.

Definition 2—unwanted sound—is the most common across many disciplines, and has the strongest implications for the definition of noise music. It links noise to the subjective whims of the individual, and to the ethical concerns in the social world. Noise as unwanted sound is thus a judgment of sound. Thus hermeneutics can situate unwanted sound in a context of the actors involved— one person's trash, another person's treasure.

Definition 3—aperiodic sound—refers to sound without a fixed or focused pitch. Such sounds have mostly been excluded from the realm of Western art music except as percussion.

Definition 4—loud sound—is loosely related to Definition 2, since many loud sounds are unwanted. Loud sounds can physically damage the ear and cause tinnitus (ringing of the ears). Loud sounds can also make sound tangible to the body.

Definition 5—a disturbance in a system of signals—refers to unintended or unwanted residue in a signaling chain. Examples include added changes to electronic circuits and speech circuits from sender to receiver. The medium between sender and receiver always contains noise.

Definition 6—white noise (white sound)—is "a mixture of all audible frequencies at random amplitudes… having equal energy *per unit frequency*."[16] This kind of noise is called 'white' because it is analogous to the color white in the color spectrum—all frequencies sounding together is like all colors mixed together. In fact, 'white sound' is a better descriptor than 'white noise' because 'noise' has already been defined as *unwanted sound*. White sound is used as a method for testing various kinds of scientific equipment. Through electroacoustic

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[16] Allen Strange, *Electronic Music: Systems, Techniques, and Controls* (Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown, 1983), 21.

means sine waves and white noise form some of the basic sonic materials for composing sounds and music.

Defining Experimental 'Noise'

I started with the term "noise music," but because there was such resistance to "music" and even residence to "noise," I have opted for a compromise: *experimental 'noise.'* I take John Cage's definition of experimental music through making experimental actions. "An experimental action is one the outcome of which is not forseen [sic]."[17] While no one I interviewed objected to the term "experimental" in the scene—though even "experimental" has been called into question[18]—I connect it to 'noise' in single scare quotes. However, there has been resistance to 'noise' and resistance to 'music.' The resistance and objections to the term 'noise'—the subject of chapter 4—has either been on the grounds that 'noise' is a *thing* (in this context, a codified genre) or that 'noise' means *bad* (music, sound, performance). The resistance to 'music' is more easily averted. First, by reducing the term "noise music" to 'noise,' I temper the redundancy of the term "music" and mitigate the offending term (music). Secondly, and more importantly, the resistance to the term "music" (when there is resistance) is historical and political. Music—in the Western tradition—has the baggage of history. This history can imply literacy, music lessons, and "greatness"—great composers and great masterpieces perceived as immovable pillars of music culture.

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[17] John Cage, *Silence* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University, 1961), 39.
[18] In my interview with Scott Cazan, he told me that he took a course with Professor Michael Pisaro at Cal Arts, specifically trying to define the limits of experimental music, but the results did not lead to a satisfactory definition.

I take two principal definitions of music: 1) music as the organization of sound, and 2) music as the process of composing, performing, listening, thinking about, and any activity pertaining to music: *musicking*, as Small calls it. The first definition—codified by both Varèse and Blacking—implies that the simplest level of organization is the beginning and ending of a piece (or performance). Therefore I claim that *music* and *sound art* are synonymous. Experimental 'noise' counts as music, since 'noise' performances all involve sound that is inevitably ordered in time,[19] either by the performer, or by the listener (as performer). Even if a work is intended to go on forever its process then serves as part of the second definition, music in its gerund form: 'musicking.' Now we can analyze 'noise' *as* music.

Theses

I have three claims about experimental 'noise' that I hope will elucidate the object of study. The first claim is the primary thesis; the other two claims may be thought of as ideological guidelines.

Thesis I. The primary thesis is concerned with the principal sonic parameters of experimental 'noise.' There are two criteria that are of chief concern with regard to experimental 'noise.' Since 'noise' primarily uses sonic material that has not been the focus of Western music, the first criterion is that *experimental 'noise' prioritizes timbre over pitch*. The simplest pitch, the sine wave, is defined as a sound without harmonic distortion; therefore we can call 'timbre' the harmonic distortion that encompasses, modifies, and modulates a sound. However, Henry Cowell doubts whether sine waves are even possible: "A

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[19] In my interview with GX Jupitter-Larsen, when I told him about the basic definition of music as the organization of sound, he objected vehemently against the 'organization' aspect.

truly pure tone can be made only in an acoustic laboratory, and even there it is doubtful whether, by the time the tone has reached our ear, it has not been corrupted by resonances picked up on the way."[20] Thus, all sounds have disturbances, all sounds have timbre, and all sounds have noise: timbre therefore is the negation of the purity of pitch. By extension, the only sound that does *not* have timbre is a pure sine wave, and since no human can hear a sine wave (at least given our current biological hardware, the ear), all sounds have noise (as harmonic disturbances) and all sounds have timbre. Much of Western music has obsessed over pitch, the division of the octave into scales, and harmony until a few sonic explorers looked beyond pitch as the locus of composition. Thus Luigi Russolo wrote "noise music" in 1913. Electronic sound production changed the course of music in many ways, particularly in the recording of sound and the generation of sound. The generation of sound and its synthesis was an important step in the history of music. The promise of sound generation initially meant that any sound could be reproduced, but many artists were not interested in the *reproduction* of sound at all: they were interested in sound *production*. With electronic means, new sounds were achievable. *New sounds means new timbres*. These sounds could be combined with other sounds to create traditional harmonic relationships, but in fact, new sounds are harmonies unto themselves. I refer to harmony as the simultaneity of frequency, which is an important part in the synthesis of timbre: the mixing of frequencies. Thus timbre is already harmony. Timbre is also its morphology, meaning, its envelope characteristics evolve in time. This dissertation endeavors to show how experimental 'noise' artists

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[20] Henry Cowell, "The Joys of Noise" (1929) in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 23.

prioritize timbre over pitch, evident by their unanimous search for new sounds; new timbres.

The second criterion of the primary thesis concerning experimental 'noise' is the aperiodicty and ametricality of sounds into rhythms. Many kinds of music, (like Morton Subotnick's *Silver Apples of the Moon* (1967)) realize the timbre criterion but are contained by a steady rhythm ensconced in regular meters. Predictable meters tend to fall outside the realm of 'noise' because they rely on the repetition of materials. There are some exceptions to the second criterion. Superimposed meters that are unrelated or distantly related with regard to tempo might still be considered 'noise' as long as one tempo is not dominant. Periodically repeated sounds, like Steve Reich's *Come Out* (1966), might also be considered 'noise' since repetition fluctuates and unfolds in an atypical manner. This second criterion may also be characterized by the avoidance of repetition. Frequency, pitch, rhythm, and meter all involve repetition. The fact that the learning of new knowledge is dependent on repetition means that the tendency toward aperiodity and ametricality may have important consequences for the reception of experimental 'noise.'

All other sonic parameters of experimental 'noise' tend to be free. However, in many experimental 'noise' scenes, extreme volume is an important parameter, since extreme volume moves from a sonic to a tangible phenomenon. But there are other 'noise' performers—including many involved with *As Loud As Possible*—that downplay the use of extreme volume. Concerning overall form, the characteristics of experimental 'noise' tend toward a loosely structured improvisation. Some practitioners use algorithmic methods that govern parts of a performance while others are improvised, some practitioners use a few devices to

move between sections of a performance, and some practitioners use no particular structural strategy beyond the idiosyncratic implications of the instruments they choose to work with and the histories and strategies they have developed with those instruments. In this sense, improvisation may be thought of as a third criterion.

Thesis II. The second thesis is that experimental 'noise' is *like* the North Pole: every other kind of music is south of it. There is no "pure" north, in terms of a pure experimental 'noise'—nonetheless, there are many pointers that point in a certain direction (in this metaphor, toward the North Pole—though not even the North Pole is fixed: it has a "wobble"). The most obvious direction is the phenomenon of electronically generated *white sound*, also called *white noise*. White sound, however, can never be heard in its hypothetical purity because human ears and interpretation (the "hardware" and "software," to use another metaphor) are themselves impure. In this sense, *white sound has noise*, and this noise adulterates the purity of white sound. Experimental 'noise' has several subgenres that have more specific rules and borders. I characterize "harsh noise" by its rapid changes and excessive volume. "Harsh noise wall" (or wall noise) is characterized by not changing at all. I characterize "drone noise" by its low-frequency rumble with changing agents in the middle and upper frequencies (although the low-frequency rumble itself can be caused by competing low frequencies). These three subgenres (and there are more) are all south of 'noise' from the North Pole. Also south is any other genre of music. Noise rock—characterized by bands like Sonic Youth, Matmos, and the Boredoms—is also well below the North Pole. Noisier forms of metal, like Scandinavian black metal, are also below experimental 'noise' (and perhaps at the same 'latitude' as noise

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rock). Free improvisation—coming out of free jazz and of course the history of jazz in general—comes nearer to experimental 'noise'—thus, when considering Derek Bailey's distinction between the *idiomatic* and the *non-idiomatic* improvisation, experimental 'noise' leans heavily toward the *non-idiomatic*. Experimental 'noise,' however is not an ideal as much as it is an *idea*, even though my study has shown that there are practitioners who hold the sanctity of an ideal "noise purism."

Thesis III. In my final thesis, I want to explore and apply the notion of *stochastic resonance* to experimental 'noise.' In Bart Kosko's book *Noise* he says, "*Stochastic resonance* means noise benefit. A system shows stochastic resonance or exhibits SR behavior if adding noise improves the system."[21] Through a process called "dithering" small signals can be amplified and clarified by adding noise to the system. One analogous example is lifting fingerprints using fine grain sand. By adding sand to a location with fingerprints, the fingerprints become more visible when 'lifted' with tape, thus amplifying and recording their visibility. Using distortion on a guitar can also add clarity to the sound as the sound is sustained longer, thus making its timbre clearer through its added consistency and stability. Kosko is speaking about how noise is useful in a variety of situations that benefit our lives (and he even makes the lofty hypothesis that noise might be the secret to life!). My final theoretical claim is that experimental 'noise' exhibits a form of noise benefit. Experimental 'noise' clarifies something— (a truth, perhaps)—about ourselves and our culture: at least for those who are part of the community in question: the experimental 'noise' scene.

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[21] Bart Kosko, *Noise*, (New York: Viking, 2006), 148.

II. Review of Literature

This section provides a review of some important sources that have informed my conception and ideas for the project at hand. My research shows that there are currently no major works on Los Angeles experimental 'noise' with the specificity of discussing a theoretical framework of the practices and aesthetics of the practitioners of experimental 'noise' in Los Angeles—this dissertation hopes to fill that gap. There are however, some works that discuss the performances and scenes I refer to. There are four dissertations, all written since 2005, that come close to my project: 1) "Improvising California: Community and Creative Music in Los Angeles and San Francisco," 2) "New York Noise, Music in the Post-Industrial City," 3) "Experimental Music After Los Angeles: Site, Power, Self, Sound," and 4) "Improvisation, Identity and Tradition: Experimental Music Communities in Los Angeles." The sources I found most relevant for my dissertation fall under two categories: 1) histories of music in Los Angeles concerning experimental practices, and electronic music; and 2) histories and theories at the intersection of 'noise' and music. Rather than having separate sections between works discussed in greater detail and works discussed in lesser detail, I have tried my best to string the sources in a coherent manner with a minimum of subheads. I then pivot to a methodologies section for examining and interpreting the field of study.

Dissertations Related to Los Angeles Noise Music

Of the four dissertations most related to my topic, only Caroline Polk O'
Meara's "New York Noise"[22] takes noise to be a central topic of discussion;
however, the dissertation focuses more on the *use of noise* in music and the
influence of urban soundscapes at the fringe of popular music (like noise-rock
band Sonic Youth). My study excludes music that merely incorporates noise into
its compositions or songs.

Two of the dissertations I consulted—Jason Robinson's "Improvising
California: Community and Creative Music in Los Angeles and San Francisco"[23]
and Charles Michael Sharp's "Improvisation, Identity and Tradition: Experimental
Music Communities in Los Angeles"[24]—took as their central focus improvisation
traditions in Los Angeles. These two dissertations intersect with my project in
important ways, but both also broaden beyond my narrower scope. The issue of
noise is less important to the authors than the issue of improvisation, its history,
and its progression. Sharp argues that noises are important to improvisation:
"many people not familiar with avant-garde jazz hear it as noise and as having
very little variety, while those who are familiar with it realize that noise is an
expression of an individual's style."[25]

Sharp's dissertation is impressive in its breadth, covering many different
types of music in Los Angeles over most of the twentieth century, from the
various histories of jazz, rock, punk, folk, and experimental musics. In particular
Sharp has provided some valuable information concerning the Los Angeles Free

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[22] Polk O'Meara, Caroline, "New York Noise Music in the Post-Industrial City, 1978-1985" (Diss., UCLA, 2006).
[23] Jason Robinson, "Improvising California: Community and Creative Music in Los Angeles and San Francisco" (Diss., UCSD, 2005).
[24] Charles Michael Sharp, "Improvisation, Identity and Tradition: Experimental Music Communities in Los Angeles" (Diss., UCLA, 2008).
[25] Ibid., 21.

Music Society (LAFMS) and the Independent Composers Association (ICA), two competing collectives of experimental music since the mid-1970s. Sharp explains that one of the main reasons the two groups formed was because there were no forums or venues for new music in Los Angeles outside of the Monday Evening Concerts (MEC); but the MEC was too prestigious for young composers and experimentalists (often graduates of Cal Arts) to participate without a stronger reputation. The only alternative, according to Sharp, was to leave for New York— a common trope for ambitious musicians and artists in Los Angeles.

Robinson's dissertation discusses improvisation in California, focusing on San Francisco and Los Angeles. Where his dissertation most intersects mine is in his discussion of the now-defunct venue Line-Space-Line, organized by David Rothbaum and Jeremy Drake, who were important experimental 'noise' practitioners. Robinson quotes Line-Space-Line's mission statement: "Line-Space-Line represents the diversity of non-idiomatic improvisation in Los Angeles."[26] I attended many concerts at Line-Space-Line during its brief tenure in the early twenty-first century. These concerts represented an interesting forum where the free jazz tradition and experimental 'noise' practitioners intersected. One of Rothbaum's and Drake's strategies was to announce the performers of the night and to assign duos and trios to improvise from the disparate pool of performers at the time of performance.

Finally, Barbara Moroncini's "Experimental Music After Los Angeles: Site, Power, Self, Sound"[27] discusses three composer-performers—Kraig Grady, Raven Chacon, and Bob Bellerue—and situates them within the historical and

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[26] Robinson, 215.
[27] Barbara Moroncini, "Experimental Music After Los Angeles: Site, Power, Self, Sound" (Diss., UCLA, 2008).

geographical confines of Los Angeles, particularly in relation to the urban landscape and architecture, and the alternative infrastructures that support the scene. "I maintain that composition is indebted to urban structures of power and inflected by the historical memories imbedded in architecture and urban geography, which influence the formation of subjectivities particular to place."[28] The first of three chapters is devoted to architecture and city planning. Moroncini argues that the specter of the new glitzy Walt Disney Concert Hall (by architect Frank Gehry) and the REDCAT (Roy and Edna Disney Cal Arts Theater) in Downtown Los Angeles stand as symbols mocking the experimental practices of its homegrown artists, preferring talent from Europe, or entrusting East coast artists to represent American composers. Thus the Disney Concert Hall and the REDCAT offer Los Angeles an officially sanctioned musical experience at the expense of the contemporary practices found in its backyard. The second chapter provides interviews and terse analyses of works from the three composers. The final chapter discusses alternative venues for experimental musicians. The connections Moroncini makes between architecture, city-planning, and music surely exist, but her analysis, in my view, does not adequately substantiate the claim. Nevertheless the interviews she conducted are useful.

Experimental Music Traditions in Los Angeles

There are a few books that focus specifically on the history of music culture in Los Angeles. Kenneth Marcus' *Musical Metropolis*[29] shows how diversity and the geographical decentralization of Los Angeles were (and still are)

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[28] Ibid., 2.
[29] Kenneth Marcus, *Musical Metropolis: Los Angeles and the Creation of Culture, 1880-1940* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004).

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important factors and characteristics of musical life in Los Angeles between 1880 and 1940. Catherine Parsons Smith's *Making Music in Los Angeles: Transforming the Popular*[30] discusses 'popular' music activity in Los Angeles, which she defines as 'prevalent' music, rather than simple 'pop music.' The Los Angeles Philharmonic, for example, counts as 'popular' for Smith, but there is no mention of the LAFMS representing new music culture since the 1970s. Likewise, Evenings on the Roof and Monday Evening Concerts lie mostly outside the scope of Smith's 'popular' music in Los Angeles, receiving only a few pages of consideration.

Evenings On and Off the Roof[31] tells the history of mostly Western art music in the city of Los Angeles from 1939 to 1971. The author divides the history by its two main music coordinators, Peter Yates and Lawrence Morton. Yates began the series Evenings on the Roof in 1939 and retired his involvement in 1954. He was an amateur musician who loved modern music and began the concerts in part to offer his wife, a concert pianist, a forum to perform new repertoire for audiences eager to listen. Yates contracted the famous émigré architect Rudolph Schindler to design the roof on top of their house in Silver Lake, near Downtown Los Angeles. The series, which attracted the most famous composers of the day, eventually outgrew the space and was held at various venues throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Both Schoenberg and Stravinsky sporadically attended events at Evenings on the Roof. The concerts became a music laboratory to experiment with replicas of old instruments and old techniques to achieve 'authentic' performance results. Yates was also a strong supporter of the American experimental tradition in music. When Lawrence

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[30] Catherine Parsons Smith, *Making Music in Los Angeles: Transforming the Popular* (Berkeley: University of California, 2007).
[31] Dorothy Lamb Crawford, *Evenings of and Off the Roof: Pioneering Concerts in Los Angeles, 1939-1971* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995).

Morton continued the series, the name changed to Monday Evening Concerts (1954 to 1971). Morton continued to program both early music and the latest avant-garde practices. He programmed works by the leaders of the Western avant-garde: Stockhausen, Boulez, and Nono. He was also a personal friend of Stravinsky. *Evenings On and Off the Roof* is an important book for my research purposes because it shows how individuals in a large metropolis mobilize to perform and listen to music to enrich and edify themselves regardless of economic gain. According to Crawford the concerts represented "the most challenging music of the Western heritage."

Most of the works on music in Los Angeles cite Mike Davis' *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*[32] as an important socio-historical monograph that influenced their writings.[33] He opens his dystopic history of Los Angeles with this rocket theme: "The best place to view Los Angeles of the next millennium is from the ruins of its alternative future."[34] Davis' book traces the history of Los Angeles over the last century as a polluted, dystopic wasteland, a transportation nightmare, and a city of dreams and capitalist enterprise with no center of civic activity—an anti-city. In the first chapter, "Sunshine or Noir," Davis explores the migration of intellectuals from Europe and their relation to institutions of power—universities, museums, newspapers, and the film industry—to understand the mythography of Los Angeles. He also explores the avant-garde and the "first L.A.-bred bohemia" consisting of black jazz, white hotrodders, and gay bikers.[35] Davis contends that *free jazz* was fomented, if not pioneered, in 1950s Los Angeles, with Ornette Coleman, Eric Dolphy, Don Cherry,

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[32] Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1990).
[33] Moroncini, Peterson, Sharp, Robinson, Marcus, Crawford.
[34] Davis, 3.
[35] Ibid., 24.

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Red Mitchell, Billy Higgins, and Charlie Haden. Many of these musicians then headed east to New York City to continue to cultivate their craft in a region where audiences were more receptive to their work. Free jazz continued in Los Angeles without some of its most celebrated pioneers.

Noise, Communication, Soundscape

Claude E. Shannon's and Warren Weaver's *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*[36] has been called a Copernican revolution in the history of information theory that created the field of computer science by claiming that all information is digital, based on binary digits or (its contraction) *bits*. Weaver has shown how information travels from a sender to a receiver, but is interrupted by noise, defined as "changes in the transmitted signal."[37] Therefore communication fails to communicate in a pure, unadulterated manner.

Electrical engineer Bart Kosko writes a fascinating account of noise in everyday life in his book *Noise*.[38] Kosko states that his goal is for the reader "to see more noise patterns as signals whether or not we like those signals."[39] Kosko demonstrates that noise is beneficial as 'stochastic resonance,' defined as noise added to clarify a system. Through stochastic resonance (Kosko prefers the term 'noise benefit') the paradoxical definition of noise as unwanted signal is challenged. I explore the idea of stochastic resonance (noise benefit) as an explanation for the paradoxical relationship inherent in 'noise' performance. Is anything 'clarified' in the experience of 'noise?' Does 'noise' demonstrate a form of stochastic resonance?

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[36] Claude E. Shannon and Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1949).
[37] Ibid., 8.
[38] Bart Kosko, *Noise* (New York: Viking, 2006).
[39] Ibid., xviii.

R. Murray Schafer's *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*[40] is a monumental work concerned with the changing sounds of our world. Schafer developed the concept of the soundscape by listening to environmental noise. Schafer defines 'soundscape' as any sonic environment or the study of any sonic environment, natural or artificial, including musical compositions.[41] Schafer refers to the study of soundscapes as 'acoustic ecology.'[42] He calls for 'acoustic designers' to tune the environment by 'balancing soundscapes' to eliminate or mask noise pollution caused by modernization.[43] *The Soundscape* gives an interesting history of the rise of noise in Western societies, thus altering the acoustic ecology in the modern era.

Emily Thompson's *The Soundscape of Modernity*[44] continues and greatly expands the history first set forth by Schafer. Where Schafer's book calls for a theory of acoustic ecology to study and protect the relation between humans and their environment, Thompson's book aspires toward a history of aural culture in the first half of the twentieth century in the United States. Her book endeavors to describe modern soundscapes, while Schafer's work endeavors to change them. Thompson shows how noise ordinances and abatement strategies were designed to control noise pollution. They have been used to stifle newsboys, street vendors, street musicians and other buskers, and to control vagrants. Ultimately noise abatement legislation has said more about those who have the power to make noise. In 1930 the Noise Abatement Commission in New York City found sounds in excess of 120 decibels (the threshold of pain for most humans) in

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[40] R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester: Destiny Books, 1977).
[41] Ibid., 274.
[42] Ibid., 204.
[43] Ibid., 237.
[44] Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

numerous places throughout the city—many of these places were in low-income neighborhoods near airports, subway stations, and other kinds of transportation systems.[45] Artistically, the modern soundscape spawned an interest in noise:

> Jazz musicians and avant-garde composers created new kinds of music directly related to the noises of the modern world. By doing so they tested long-standing definitions of musical sound, and they challenged listeners to reevaluate their own distinction between music and noise. Some of these listeners met the challenge and embraced the new music, while others refused to listen.[46]

The connection between modernity, urban landscapes, soundscapes, and music, inspired the Italian Futurist composers in the early twentieth century.

"Let us cross a large modern capital with our ears more sensitive than our eyes."[47] Luigi Russolo's "The Art of Noises: Futurist Manifesto" appeared on the front page of Milan's major newspaper, *Le Figaro*, on March 11, 1913. Russolo's "Art of Noises," like Schoenberg's 'emancipation of the dissonance' (1910), sought to break new ground in musical modernism while maintaining its roots in the past. The tone of his manifesto was electrifying. He proposed a new music that he claimed "has been developing toward the most complicated polyphony and toward the greatest variety of instrumental timbres and colors. It has searched out the most complex successions of dissonant chords, which have prepared in a vague way for the creation of MUSICAL NOISE."[48] The two most important conclusions in Russolo's manifesto were that Futurist composers needed to expand their sonic palates through the "infinite variety of timbres in noises" and that Futurist composers would eschew imitation through the use of a

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[45] Ibid., 162.
[46] Ibid., 119.
[47] Luigi Russolo, *The Art of Noises*(1913), trans. Barclay Brown (New York: Pendragon Press, 1986), 26.
[48] Ibid., 24.

new orchestra of noise instruments.[49] Russolo's noise music, however, failed to escape imitation. His music took its cue from (and thus imitated) the urban landscape, industry, and the sounds of modern warfare.

Like Russolo, Edgard Varèse found timbre to be indispensable to the new music: "The role of color or timbre would be completely changed from being incidental, anecdotal, sensual or picturesque; it would become an agent of delineation, like the different colors on a map separating different areas, and an integral part of form."[50] One of Varese's most important contributions to the history of Western music must be his attempt to redefine music itself.

> I decided to call my music 'organized sound' and myself, not a musician, but 'a worker in rhythms, frequencies, and intensities.' Indeed, to stubbornly conditioned ears, anything new in music has always been called noise. But after all, what is music but organized noise?[51]

For Varèse new music is often called noise, thus linking newness to noise.

In "The Joys of Noise"[52] Henry Cowell does not argue for noise music; rather he argues against the facile binary opposition between noise and music. Cowell shows how noise has been under-theorized, though it has been used incessantly in rhythm and for the punctuation of music. Without noise, Cowell tells us, "the climaxes in our operas would be like jelly-fish."[53] For Cowell, noise punctuates musical sound and heightens the senses.

John Cage's writings have been colossal in the exploration of sounds and silences for composers and listeners. In 1937 he gave a poetic lecture called "The

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[49] Ibid., 28-29.
[50] Edgard Varèse, "Liberation of Sound" (1936) in *Audio Culture*, eds. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004), 17.
[51] Ibid., 20.
[52] Henry Cowell, "The Joys of Noise" in *Audio Culture*, Eds. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004), 23.
[53] Ibid.

Future of Music: Credo" discussing the necessity of noise at the nexus of Varèse's

redefinition of (or emancipation from) music.

> I BELIEVE THAT THE USE OF NOISE
> Where we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating….
> TO MAKE MUSIC
> If this word "music" is sacred and reserved for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century instruments, we can substitute a more meaningful term: organization of sound.
> WILL CONTINUE AND INCREASE UNTIL WE REACH A MUSIC PRODUCED THROUGH THE AID OF ELECTRICAL INSTRUMENTS
> WHICH WILL MAKE AVAILABLE ANY AND ALL SOUND
> WHEREAS IN THE PAST, THE POINT OF DISAGREEMENT HAS BEEN BETWEEN DISSONANCE AND CONSONANCE, IT WILL BE, IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE, BETWEEN NOISE AND SO-CALLED MUSICAL SOUNDS[54]

Cage believed that noise was needed to make modern music and that

electronically produced sound would hold the key to infinite sonic possibilities—

any and all sounds.

Karlheinz Stockhausen also adhered to the definition of music as

organized sounds. The purpose of his lecture—"Four Criteria of Electronic

Music"[55]—was to showcase the new methods of manipulating sound in an

electroacoustic studio. The first criterion, 'the unified time structuring,'

demonstrated how short sounds can become elongated and how long sounds can

become shortened by altering the speed of a tape machine. A Beethoven

symphony could thus be shortened to one second, thus producing a sound with a

particular timbre. The second criterion, 'the splitting of the sound,' showed how

sounds could be cut, thus altering the morphology of the sound's attack and

decay characteristics. The third criterion, 'the multi-layered spatial composition,'

refers to the movement of sound in space; thus "space melodies" become

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[54] John Cage, *Silence* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University, 1961), 3.
[55] Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Stockhausen on Music* (New York: Marion Boyars, 1989).

possible by panning sound around the performance space with multiple channels. Stockhausen claims that the final criterion, 'the equality of tone and noise,' follows from the others, since non-periodic sounds can be made periodic through repetition, and periodic sounds can be made into noise. In *Towards a Cosmic Music*, Stockhausen proclaimed that "composing a single 'timbre' is indivisibly linked with the composition of an entire work."[56] Composition focused on the morphology of sound through the organization of timbres and silences, rather than tones or pitches, is key to understanding experimental 'noise.'

Composing becomes a driving force against capitalism for Jacques Attali in *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*.[57] Attali's most famous claim is that new music foreshadows the changes in society. Noise represents violence and the disruption of social codes; music is the channelization of noise through order. Noise thus becomes encoded through its organization into music. Attali goes so far as to say that music did not begin as an aesthetic phenomenon, but as a method of social control. "[Music's] primary function is not to be sought in aesthetics, which is a modern invention, but in the effectiveness of its participation in social regulation. Music—pleasure in the spectacle of murder— creates order."[58] As channel of violence, music took the role of the sacrificial scapegoat. Attali means that instead of sacrificing a human or goat to appease deities, music was played, and happy deities would give order to (and appease) society. Therefore to order sound was to create order (out of disorderly noise), and the creation of sonic order, according to Attali, would herald the future of political economy and hegemonic order. Composition, for Attali, disrupts the

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[56] Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Towards a Cosmic Music*. Trans. Tim Nevill (London: Element Books, 1989), 128.
[57] Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Trans. Brian Masumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1977).
[58] Ibid., 30.

codes through their reorganization, thus exposing the social hierarchy.[59] The last

refuge of compositional freedom for Attali is to be found in the synthesizer. But

even the synthesizer absconds freedom, since the components of the machine

are entangled in a system of rigid order. The synthesizer performer is a

"simulacrum of self-management. [S/H]e is no more than an aleatory element in

a statistical law."[60] Attali's strange utopia of the composer as hacker of musical

and societal codes through the exploitation of noise has important implications

for musicologists and other similar scholars, even if his thesis that music

foreshadows the political future and social hierarchy is farfetched.

Douglas Kahn's *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*[61] is a

monumental tome that discusses the history and theory of the use of sound in

twentieth century avant-garde art and music. Music is only one aspect of the

book; the sounds of poetry, and the implications of sound in painting and

sculpture also figure into his account. Some of the most important ideas in his

book include: the circuit of utterance and audition, the importance of the Italian

Futurists, the idea of the 'line,' and the multitude of affects inspired by the

theories and practices of John Cage. The circuit of utterance and audition

describes the corporeal production of sound and the sense of hearing as unique

among the senses. When we speak—throwing sound into the world through

voice—we hear ourselves, thus completing the circuit. Kahn concludes: "the eye

is handicapped because there is no visual equivalent to the utterance of the

voice."[62] The idea of the circuit of utterance to audition has interesting ontological

consequences, especially in terms of being in the world. At the beginning of the

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[59] Ibid., 135, 143.
[60] Ibid., 114.
[61] Douglas Kahn, *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).
[62] Ibid., 28.

twentieth century, Italian Futurism brought noise to the forefront of the avant-garde through its poetry and music. According to Kahn, the sounds of war were the impetus for an avant-garde poetry because new weaponry provided the newest noises. Futurist leader F.T. Marinetti exploited the new sounds onomatopoetically with works like ZANG-TUMB-TUUUMB. Kahn illustrates how Russolo's manifesto implies that the battlefield in WWI served as the paradigm for modern listening, since the privileging of the ear over the eye was a matter of life and death.[63] The Futurists therefore suggested a heightened sense of listening to the new technologized sounds—airplanes, bombs, machine guns. Another important contribution is Kahn's idea of the 'line.' First the line acts as a threshold that includes certain ideas and sounds on one side, and excludes ideas and noises on the other side. Secondly, the line acts as a container itself: through its thickness it acts as a reservoir of its own. "It stores noise in its intensification while suppressing noise in the purity and simplicity of the line…."[64] Kahn uses the example of the Pythagorean monochord to illustrate his point. The string of the monochord, as line, divides space into sound and non-sound, while the thickness of the string itself contains additional information itself. The line is significant in how it demarcates and discriminates between opposing sides, while noise renders lines interminably fuzzy. (The slash in the title of Hegarty's *Noise/Music* is another example of how the line separates and obfuscates, since noise exists in the "*Noise*" part of the title as well as it does in the slash ("/") of the title, since the slash attempts to contain "noise" and "music" as separate.) Kahn also uses the glissando (itself slash-like) as an example of the line. Glissandi are common in Western classical music as ornaments (mostly attacks and decays). In the

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[63] Ibid., 63.
[64] Kahn, 73.

1920s Russolo's hand-cranked noise instruments, Varèse's sirens, and Henry's

Cowell's 'string piano' made use of glissandi, while attempting to undermine their

historical role as ornaments. John Cage would later use glissandi in his *Imaginary*

Landscape no. 1 by altering the speed of test tones on two different

phonographs. Kahn emphasizes the importance of Cage throughout his book.

Nonetheless Kahn finds some of Cage's ideas problematic, especially his dictum

that we should *let sounds be themselves*. For Kahn sounds can never escape

external reference. Another problematic area for Kahn is Cage's attitude toward

loud sounds. During the 1950s and 1960s, Cage—like Stockhausen's explorations

in *Mikrophonie*—became interested in the amplification of small sounds to render

any and all sounds audible. Cage was relatively disinterested in loud sounds.

Kahn uses Cage's students, Fluxus artists Dick Higgins and Allan Kaprow, to

highlight some of their disagreement with Cage's teachings at the New School:

"To Dick Higgins, one of his students at the time, Cage was not taking his own

lesson to heart: 'Many of us wanted sounds to have a real physicality that

sometimes couldn't be perceived in the small sounds, as well as the larger

ones.'"[65] Higgins would then compose *Loud Symphony* (1958) consisting of a

microphone feeding back into a loudspeaker at high volumes, and a series of

"Danger Music"—music that was intentionally harmful to its listeners, often

through sheer volume. Furthermore, the physicality of loud sounds rendered

sounds *tangible* to the body. Another of Cage's students—painter Allan Kaprow,

(co-originator of 'happenings')—became interested in noises, which he opposed

to musical sounds. Kaprow proclaimed his desire to become a '*noisician*.'[66] The

intermedia endeavors of artists like Higgins and Kaprow have paved the way for

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[65] Ibid., 227.
[66] Ibid., 275, Kahn's italics.

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future artists using sound in the postwar era. Kahn's interesting history perhaps

waxes poetic in some ways at the expense of the clarity of linearity (which is

probably an intentional strategy). Nonetheless, the terminology he employs—the

circuit of utterance and audition and the 'line,'—provide fascinating metaphors

and alternative methods of thinking about sound in an intermedia context.

Simon Reynolds' essay "Noise"[67] furthers Attali's theme of noise as a

method of breaking cultural codes. Reynolds claims that pleasure is achieved in

noise through the obliteration of meaning. The paradoxical situation is in its

definition: to assign meanings and adjectives to noise is to control it and bring it

to culture, and therefore to remove it from its function as disruption. Unlike

Attali, who finds strategies of organizing noise though composition as a method

of subverting the social order, Reynolds takes the experience of listening to noise

personally.

> [T]he whole discourse of noise-as-threat is bankrupt, positively
> inimical to the remnants of power that still cling to noise. Forget
> subversion. The point is self-subversion, overthrowing the power
> structure in your own head. The enemy is the mind's tendency to
> systematize, sew up experience, place a distance between itself
> and immediacy….[68]

The mind's will toward reason, rationality, and organization is the opposite of

noise. Noise helps us escape the confines of rationality. "[R]esistance does not

take the form of becoming a subject, but through becoming an object. Refusing…

to deploy power over the self; to escape, for a few blissful moments, the network

of meaning and concern."[69] Such resistance through allowing oneself to become

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[67] Simon Reynolds, "Noise" (1990) in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, Eds. Christoph Cox
and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004).
[68] Ibid., 57.
[69] Ibid., 58.

object is itself subverted by the subjective choice to become object. Ultimately the strategy fails, but for Reynolds, the 'blissful moments' have aesthetic value.

In the (post-)digital age, failure becomes inspiration and rationale for a new aesthetic. In "The Aesthetics of Failure"[70] Kim Cascone glorifies glitches in digital technologies as an impetus to explore the sonic opportunities of systemic noise. One of the favored methods of exploiting glitches is through using computer programs like Max/MSP, PD, Supercollider, and AudioSculpt. Such programs make the distinctions between instrument, medium, and genre fuzzy. (When a composer makes a 'patch' in Max/MSP, is it a system, a score, an instrument, a tool, a style?) The genre of 'glitch' music encompasses a style of dance music that exploits errors and makes rhythm from the failures, errors, glitches, bugs, etc. "Because the tools used in this style of music embody advanced concepts of digital signal processing [DSP], their usage by glitch artists tends to be based on experimentation rather than empirical investigation." Cascone's reasoning is very similar to the aims of David Tudor's Composer's Inside Electronics (CIE) collective, who aspired to find out what the technology could teach them. He insists that with the new tools for exploiting errors "The medium is no longer the message: the tool has become the message."[71] But it seems to me that tool and medium have collapsed in the context of digital signal processing. Nevertheless, the implications of "The Aesthetics of Failure" (intended or not), extend toward a theory of experimental 'noise.' 'Noise' fails to be noise when it becomes music; yet music fails to be music when it becomes noise. Such

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[70] Kim Cascone, "The Aesthetics of Failure: 'Post-Digital' Tendencies in Contemporary Computer Music" (2000) in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, Eds. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004).
[71] Ibid., 395, 397.

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ideas are developed in Hegarty's book *Noise/Music* reviewed below. Now, however, I want to discuss the failure of so-called non-idiomatic improvisation.

Derek Bailey's seminal *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music*[72] is wide-ranging in its coverage and consideration of several cross-cultural genres of improvised music cultures. He introduces the terms 'idiomatic' and 'non-idiomatic' improvisation to describe two forms. Idiomatic improvisation describes a form of improvisation connected with a musical style, such as jazz, flamenco, or baroque. Non-idiomatic improvisation is, according to Bailey, not connected to an idiom.[73] The problem in the idea of non-idiomatic improvisation is not so much that it becomes an idiom as non-idiom, but that it eschews the performer's historical situation, which itself is imbedded in traditions and idioms. Therefore the problem and goals of non-idiomatic improvisation are very similar to the problems inherent in 'noise.' Both are anti-genres; both attempt to eschew history and regulation; both fail. Non-idiomatic improvisation and 'noise' are characterized by their *attempt* to be what they say they are. Non-idiomatic improvisation must always means *toward a non-idiomatic improvisation*.

In my opinion Paul Hegarty's *Noise/Music: A History*[74] is the best book on the subject of noise music written to date. *Noise/Music*, Hegarty claims, "is first of all a theory."[75] Hegarty is skeptical of linear histories; nevertheless, he tells a story of noisiness, roughly from Russolo's futuristic noise, to Cage's 'sounds in themselves,' to Ornette Coleman's free jazz and Derek Bailey's non-idiomatic improvisation (and Adorno's criticisms of jazz), to early industrial music, and finally to Japanese noise music and Merzbow. The histories necessarily intersect

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[72] Derek Bailey, *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music* (Boston: Da Capo, 1992).
[73] Ibid., xi-xii.
[74] Paul Hegarty, *Noise/Music: A History* (New York: Continuum, 2007). Emphasis mine.
[75] Ibid., x.

and overlap in interesting ways without becoming solely historically narrative—

the historical landmarks serve Hegarty's theories on noise. The title *Noise/Music*

implies a contested yet dialectical relationship between 'noise' and 'music.' One of

Hegarty's central claims is that noise fails to be music; and that when noise

becomes music, it fails to be noise. The key passage in Hegarty's book must be

the following:

> While I do not think genre, style, category can be suspended
> except very fleetingly, the attempt is still worthwhile, and if the
> attempt is all we can have, then *the attempt is the highest form of
> freedom to be aspired to*, and must be maintained as an aim.[76]

'Noise' tends toward freedom, but always fails to reach it. The *attempt* at 'noise'

is the most important drive toward the musically (or sonically) unmediated

aesthetic experience. Similarly, Derek Bailey's 'non-idiomatic' improvisation must

also be read as an *attempt* at non-idiomatic improvisation; one that constantly

fails to be non-idiomatic, while cultivating its own (non)tradition. Or as Hegarty

states:

> [N]oise and noise music are not purist, and therefore cannot
> complain about being adulterated, without also losing their status
> as noise. Occupying this paradoxical space is what noise is (not)
> about.[77]

Hegarty closes his book with a meditation on listening. He evokes Heidegger's

discussion on listening and its relation to ontological being—situating oneself in

the world involves hearing one's own utterances. "Listening" claims Hegarty

evoking Heidegger, "is an expression of concern, of care, and a society made

transparent also wants to be transphonic."[78] In other words, the being-of-

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[76] Ibid., 51.
[77] Ibid., 126.
[78] Ibid., 199.

listening is caring about and desiring to hear the world and to hear one's self in

and out of the world (perhaps the term 'transphonic' refers to a cross-cultural—

worldly—method of hearing). The nexus of 'noise' and (attempted) freedom

through listening and attempting (yet failing) to eschew history is perhaps the

most important aspect of Hegarty's book.

Joanna Demers' *Listening Through the Noise*[79] attempts an aesthetics of

experimental electronic music. Although much of the book skirts around and

avoids some of the central issues that define music aesthetics, many of her ideas

are interesting and inspired. In fact Demers never offers her own definition of

aesthetics or musical aesthetics, but instead gives the reader an idea of what

'some' feel aesthetics is or might be.

> One preliminary response to these questions is that *aesthetics are the shared values concerning what is good, entertaining, and compelling art* [my emphasis]. But if aesthetics were only this, then this book would and should be nothing more than a case study of opinions, an ethnography of the views about the field of electronic music—in short, something resembling more a work of journalism or scientific investigation rather than philosophy. I have felt it necessary to intervene, however, and to introduce observations that do not necessarily square with predominant views in electronic-music communities. In other words, I am not an invisible or transparent observer in this field but bring to this discussion my own ideologies and values.[80]

Her "preliminary response" (Demers does not say who gave it) to the issue of

aesthetics concerning the shared values of community towards art is satisfactory,

yet she errs by assuming that ethnographers are mere data collectors.

Ethnographers have not thought of themselves as "transparent observers" for

decades. In other words, she is unwilling to test her theories in the field. Another

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[79] Joanna Demers, *Listening Through the Noise: The Aesthetics of Experimental Electronic Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
[80] Ibid., 162.

issue Demers seems unsure about is the definition of music. Early in the book she provides a good discussion of *experimental music*, which she asserts is generally understood as "any music that rejects tradition and takes risks."[81] She calls *experimental electronic music* "anything that challenges the conventions of electronic music."[82] Demers is comfortable that her definition of experimental electronic music is a "moving target" since its definition will fluctuate depending on the changing traditions over time. However, what I find unsettling in Demers' ideology is her contrasting views on *electronic music* versus *music*.

> So far, I have mentioned only the most idiosyncratic examples of electronic dance music—instances when electronic music does not behave musically. Yet electronic music does often behave like music, with its preponderance of a four-on-the-floor beat. It is absolutely true that EDM is electronic dance *music*, but the musical experience of EDM affords is nonetheless quite different from that in Western art music.[83]

From the quote above, Demers treats the term *music* to mean *Western art music*. A cold and simple definition of music would help the reader to understand what she means by *music* and what she means by *Western art music*. Demers continues: "Listeners will no doubt continue to use the word *music* to refer to these frameless works, even though the experience of listening will be markedly different from what art-music listening meant a century ago." She assumes that "art-music" was the only music heard by Westerners; or that the history of Western "art-music" has assumed only one form of listening. Demers asserts two points: the first is that strategies of listening have changed over time and will continue to change; the second, however, is that experimental electronic music

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[81] Ibid., 7.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid., 151.

in particular has radically changed listening habits. The radical change has led her

to theorize what she calls "aesthetic listening."

> Experimental electronic music encourages a type of listening that
> would be highly uncharacteristic for non-electronic music in which
> discrete beginnings and endings and development are standard
> and where predictable forms, instrumental timbres, and structures
> are the norm. We can think of this new manner of listening as
> "aesthetic" rather than musical. Aesthetic listening heeds
> intermittent moments of a work without searching for a trajectory
> that unites such moments….[84]

I find her argument difficult to follow without a discussion of what she means by

'musical.' Demers believes that "aesthetic listening also acknowledges that

nonmusical sounds, the sounds of the outside world, can have aesthetic

interest."[85] By 'nonmusical sounds' Demers again conflates *music* and *Western*

art music as synonyms, while assuming that Western art music itself has

inflexible implications on listening behavior. In a discussion of 'static music,' she

approaches a definition of music: "Static music—music that is maximal in terms

of its duration and repetition—engenders a condition that is unmusical: the

absence of development, of growth, or organicisim." Music (read Western art

music) must therefore be sounds that 'develop' and 'grow' 'organically.' She

insists that *unmusical* sounds—sounds outside of Western art music—are now

available, and we can hear them through aesthetic listening practices, even

though there has already been a tradition that spans at least half a century that

has already incorporated "any and all sounds"—to borrow a phrase from Cage.

    Pink Noises[86] consists of twenty-four interviews of women composers

working with electronics in the twenty-first century, with an introduction by the

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[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., 16.
[86] Tara Rodgers, *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

interviewer, Tara Rodgers. Rodgers endeavors to provide a "postfeminist" account of the history of women in electronic music and experimental practices through her interviews. She claims that "[p]ortrayals of women in contemporary Western popular culture are postfeminist when 'feminism is "taken into account," but only to be shown to be no longer necessary' [McRobbie]."[87] In particular, Rodgers hopes that the interviews will help us challenge the assumptions she believes are inherent in the terms 'technology' and 'music.' According to Rodgers, these two terms have been masculinized, and that interest in technology by women in particular has been discouraged in our society. The disparate views of the women represented in her book bring more awareness to historians that women have always been active and relevant in electroacoustic music. Clara Rockmore's virtuosic solo technique on the Theremin helped popularize (and perhaps humanize) electronic sounds in general. Pauline Oliveros brought attention to listening as a meditative practice, much of which came from her experiences with sound synthesis. Pamela Z emphasizes voice and the use of the body to trigger different parameters of synthesis. Jessica Rylan builds her own analog synthesizers for solo improvisations. For my project, the most important issue concerns the adequate representation of women. Rodgers laments that

> [s]ome of the most important contributions to the study of
> electronic music and sound have positioned women as outside the
> scope of study…; or used observational statistics, such as that
> fewer than one in ten DJs is female, to explain women's absence
> from the text.[88]

Appeals to statistics have often stifled the representation of women in texts on electronic music.

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[87] Ibid., 16.
[88] Ibid., 11.

Adam Cornelius and Bob Bellerue— former owner of the 'noise' venue Il Corral in Los Angeles—teamed up teamed up to make a documentary on the Portland 'noise' scene—*People Who Do Noise*.[89] The video includes interviews and footage of composer-performers making 'noise' in Portland. It features many groups and performers including: Smegma, Pulse Emitter, Yellow Swans, Soup Purse, Kitty Midwife, Daniel Menche, and more. Smegma had been active members of the LAFMS in Los Angeles before the entire group relocated to Portland in the mid-1970s. Pulse Emitter works with loud pulsing sounds from a giant pulse wave generator. Midwife (one of two women artists in the documentary) is a solo performer working with contact microphones, electronics, and various toys. Daniel Menche, who works with loud ambient soundscapes, is one of the most respected practitioners of 'noise.' *People Who Do Noise* is an excellent video that well represents the 'noise' scene and its activities in Portland.

Methodologies: Superstructures and Infrastructures

As researchers and academics it is our business to rationalize and categorize information into 'bureaus'—drawers, filing cabinets, files—we are bureaucrats in that sense. Although writing a 'noise dissertation' for a 'noise' music would be tempting, it would inevitably take the form of fiction, with the hard edges of a Burroughs cut-up novel.[90] Nevertheless, even the most robust scientific analysis takes the form of fiction and autobiography. In fact, what I have learned in studying postmodernisms from Lyotard to Jameson and Eagleton

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[89] *People Who Do Noise*, DVD, directed by Adam Cornelius (Portland: Coldhandsvideo, 2008).
[90] The "cut-up" method was pioneered by dada artists in the 1920s. William Burroughs popularized the method by applying it to some of his novels: particularly *Naked Lunch*.

is the paradoxical positionality of the writer that implies, to me, the dual notions that *all writing is fiction* and that *all writing is autobiographical*. All writing is fiction because there is no truth: there are, rather, a *plurality of truths* (that a *thick description* can scratch at), and knowledge must therefore be constructed from a quantity of truths because it is dependent on repetition. There is no knowledge that is not repetition: even an individual experience must be replayed to access and make sense of it. Secondly, all writing is autobiographical because it starts with 'I'; and yet a meaningful ontology will remind us that the 'I' is itself not a singularity, but a plurality. Writing comes from the writer's point of view, or, as an amalgamation of research filtered through the writer by what the writer selects and how the writer treats the material.

This dissertation is an attempt to let the participants in the scene have a voice even though their voices are always mediated through mine. My voice is everywhere in this dissertation starting with my name that serves as author, authorial voice, and narrator. I ask the questions, and every question is framed by a set of possible answers that limit their outcome, even though the questions I ask were specifically constructed as a qualitative methodology with storytelling in mind. Ethnographers ask questions about what is inside and what is outside, and have difficulty exploring the murky areas: we tend to codify and organize them into distinct categories. This is where Douglas Kahn's notion of the *line* becomes interesting. The line serves as threshold: a border between one category and another, but the line is also a reservoir that is itself drawn by lines. In other words, lines have thickness in their liminality. My study is full of gray areas. Staying in the gray areas would make knowledge production difficult, and then fiction would be a more appropriate form than a dissertation on the subject.

Therefore the dissertation attempts to rationalize the 'noise' scene in Los

Angeles. This endeavor is both useful and blasphemous. By writing about and

rationalizing 'noise,' I will be working to undermine and *un-noise* it. I mean that

to a certain degree I will be discussing the performance practices of 'noise'

practitioners to reveal some of the techniques and clichés found in Los Angeles.

Revealing the secrets and calling certain techniques 'cliché' may anger some of

the participants—that is the blasphemous part—but my hope is that it will cause

some self-reflection to further carry out one of the common goals of 'noise'

practitioners: to explore new sounds. As Barthes concludes, "if we [mythologists

as scholars] penetrate the object, we liberate it but we destroy it; and if we

acknowledge its full weight, we respect it, but we restore it to a state which is

still mystified."[91] If my study exposes and demystifies (and *re*mystifies) some of

the common practices and common sonic results to its practitioners, then I

believe that it will help us better understand 'noise.' The diagnosis and challenge

to the culture I am studying is a result of *critical ethnography*.

> [Critical ethnographers] let the data speak to us, we do not
> prejudge or impose our own preferred meanings, and we make
> sure that we not say *is* when we mean *ought*. We are, however,
> fully free—Weber might say obligated—to select our topics and
> pursue lines of inquiry that raise "ought" questions. As scientists,
> we are simply forbidden to submit value judgments in place of
> facts or leap to "ought" conclusions without a demonstrably cogent
> theoretical and empirical linkage. In short, we can think critically
> through reflexivity and by rethinking our work and its implications
> in iterative (i.e., repeated) versions of the research process, but
> we must always analyze empirically.[92]

If my critical sensibilities are successful then this dissertation will not only serve

to document the history of experimental sound activities in Los Angeles, it will

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[91] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 159.
[92] Jim Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography* (London: Sage, 1993) 22.

also serve as an important treatise in 'noise' theory that can aid artists and give advice concerning what (not) to do.

These academic issues in the fine arts—rationalization, and the development of knowledge—have led me to conclude that ethnography is dirty business. One potent moment in the interview process came while I was interviewing Damion Romero. I asked him the question, "What is *'good'* noise music." He hesitated and responded, "That's a personal question." I froze. He was right. In fact *all* the questions I was asking were personal questions. I was asking him to give up and reveal a part of himself that he was not used to talking about; a part that exposed him and his ideologies. This is one reason I have developed the mantra: *ethnography is dirty business*. The process of conducting ethnography, however, implies a top-down approach, since the act of writing carries with it the authorial voice. Despite my conviction that the people I study are the experts, and that my job is to collect their ideas and thoughts, all of the ideas expressed by my subjects are filtered through my questions, my methodologies, my ideas, my experiences, and are therefore a part of my autobiography. Autobiography, for Stanley Fish, is at least an authentic form of writing (although I question notions of authenticity). Fish writes:

> My criticism of biography does not hold for autobiography. It makes none of the claims made for biography and is therefore not subject to any of the criticisms. You cannot fault the author of an autobiography for failing to be objective, or for substituting [their] story for the story of [their] subject.[93]

In this sense, I hope to make clear what I have already espoused: that all writing is autobiographical. And even the sincerest effort to 'get it right' with the subjects

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[93] Stanley Fish, "Just Published: Minutiae Without Meaning," (*New York Times*, September 7, 1999), http://www.nytimes.com/1999/09/07/opinion/just-published-minutiae-without-meaning.html (accessed March 3, 2014).

of this study—if sincerity were even possible—will produce effects that will indubitably seem alien to some readers.

This section will discuss the infrastructure and superstructure of 'noise' scenes in Los Angeles through the imaginations of its participants: these imaginations include my own reflections. Superstructure and infrastructure will be discussed in terms of 'noise' culture and its institutions. Culture is at the heart of superstructure. The analysis of small-scale urban cultures has been considered in different terms by various disciplines interested in the subject. Some of these terms include community, field and habitus, subculture, and scene. Benedict Anderson's notion of an *imagined community* with imaginary borders informs how I have viewed and analyzed what I called the Los Angeles 'noise' scene. I am interested in how these superstructural terms have been imagined. The infrastructure of Los Angeles as a metropolis with imaginary borders will be considered primarily in terms of venues as sites and institutions for performance and social interaction. This theoretical framework informs my analysis of experimental 'noise' venues in Los Angeles. It will elucidate who the people in the 'noise' scenes are and how they interact in a particular venue.

Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, and Roberts propose an understanding of culture that parallels in many ways Raymond Williams' modes of culture. They write: "Culture is that level at which social groups develop patterns of life and give expressive form to their social material experience."[94] They emphasize culture as an interpersonal mode of expression in relation to a material world, where 'expression' refers to behaviors in communication. Therefore, I am interested in

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[94] John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, Brian Roberts, *Resistance Through Ritual: Youth Subcultures in Postwar Britain* (London: Routledge, 1976), 10.

'noise' culture as expression (disseminating information), and impression (communication through learning information).

A. Field and Habitus

Anthropology and sociology have produced various terms and methods to describe the social spaces of interaction. In the *Rules of Art*, Pierre Bourdieu proposes a methodology for analyzing aesthetics as a sociology in relation to a *field*, its *habitus* and its systems of beliefs (doxa). Bourdieu proposes the notion of the *field* and its analysis. In *The Rules of Art* he writes:

> The field is a network of objective relations (of domination or subordination, of complimentarity or antagonism, etc.) between positions—for example, the position corresponding to a genre like the novel or to a subcategory like the society novel, or from another point of view, the position locating a review, a salon, or a circle as the gathering place of a group of producers. Each position is objectively defined by its objective relationship with other positions.[95]

The relations involved here are between categories and subcategories (or supercategories). We can imagine then, crudely, that some subcategories of 'noise' include harsh noise, wall noise, ambient noise, and glitch. The four subcategories themselves may be related complimentarily (functioning near other categories while sharing much in common) or antagonistically (in reaction to another category). We can categorize the 'noise' scene in general to the Los Angeles 'noise' scene, and then to its main venues, and then further abstract to certain cliques or circles of friends.

For Bourdieu, these positions help define various fields 'objectively.' The particularly point of view is made possible by the notion of the field. Although the

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[95] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 231.

notion of 'objectivity' makes me uneasy, Bourdieu defends it at the nexus of the

scholarly subject (as author) and its field. The field is posited by the scholarly

subject as a set of possibilities.

Bourdieu then superimposes his notion of *habitus* with his notion of the

field to analyze how the conditions of possibility can be explored.

> The *habitus* is a set of *dispositions* which incline agents to act and
> react in certain ways. The dispositions generate practices,
> perceptions, and attitudes which are "regular" without being
> consciously co-ordinated or governed by any "rule."[96]

The field as a systematic network of possible *positions* is then explored by the

habitus as a set of *dis*positions—a mode of making choices within a given field of

possibilities (or positions). Disposition thus strongly implies (what we might

colloquially call) *predisposition*, since position-taking is strongly influenced by the

field (of possibilities). The field as an objective set of possibilities (positions) is

thus interlaced with the habitus as a subjective mode of making choices

(dispositions or position-takings). Such dispositions are regulated by the field of

possibilities, but the field itself is often considered uncritically, which provides the

specter of feeling natural. The choices we make (habitus) are informed by

Bourdieu's concept of *doxa*, where doxa means belief or systems of belief.

By synthesizing the field and habitus and the study of its belief systems,

Bourdieu creates a framework for analyzing not the empirical work of art—which

he says does not exist—but rather, the *experience of the work of art* and its

subsequent meanings and values as a product of its historical situation and its

historical proximity to the *field of power*. Such an analysis of values and

meanings as forms of capital and power constitute its political economy.

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[96] Bourdieu, 352 (note 43).

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> The field of power is the space of relations of force between agents
> or between institutions having in common the possession of the
> capital necessary to occupy the dominant positions in different
> fields (notably economic or cultural). It is the site of struggles
> between holders of different powers (kinds of capital), which… have
> at stake the transformation or conservation of the relative value of
> different kinds of capital….[97]

The different kinds of power (or capital) have been summarized by Bourdieu in his essay, "The Forms of Capital."[98] He identifies three forms of capital: *economic capital*, *social capital*, and *cultural capital*. Economic capital refers to money, property, and other material items: Bourdieu believes that all capital is reducible to economic capital.[99] Social capital is a power cultivated by group, family, or class affiliation. Cultural capital is further broken down into three subgroups. The first, *embodied state*, is a power that requires personal investment and time, and cannot be immediately transferred to another person (like money or gifts), "like the acquisition of a muscular physique or suntan. The work of acquisition is work on oneself (self-improvement)."[100] The *objectified state* includes material objects that can only be rendered by embodied capital. Thus books, paintings, instruments, cameras, and other media constitute objectified capital. The simple acquisition of the product is not the objectified state: it must be rendered through the knowledge of its use. "A collection of paintings… can be transmitted… as economic capital. But what is transmissible is legal ownership and not (or not necessarily) what constitutes the precondition for specific appropriation, namely, the possession of the means of 'consuming' a painting or using a machine…."[101]

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[97] Ibid., 215.
[98] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital" (1983), in *Handbook for Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson, trans. Richard Nice (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 241-258.
[99] Ibid., 243, 252.
[100] Ibid., 245.
[101] Ibid., 246

In musical terms, to own a grand piano is an example of economic capital as object of luxury; to be able to *play* the piano exemplifies the embodied state of cultural capital.[102] The objectified state of cultural capital thus requires skill and a particular object to be wielded as a "weapon" in the field of social classes. Finally, the *institutionalized state* of cultural capital manifests itself in the form of prizes, certificates, and academic degrees. They are "legal guarantees" of competence. Certificates and degrees of similar worth can then be compared and traded (as hiring rights, for example) on the market. Importantly, social capital and cultural capital can be converted into economic capital. At the embodied state the fruits of skills acquired are displayed and converted into money. At the institutionalized state, certificates and degrees are converted into money: "academic investment has no meaning unless a minimum degree of reversibility of the conversion it implies is objectively guaranteed."[103] Their common property is time: "the best measure of cultural capital is undoubtedly the amount of time devoted to acquiring it; this is because the transformation of economic capital into cultural capital presupposes an expenditure of time that is made possible by possession of economic capital."[104] In other words, it takes time to accumulate cultural capital, and to have time available generally means possessing economic capital. Therefore the social capital of being raised in a family that possesses economic capital aids exponentially in the acquisition of cultural capital as time and resources are converted into skills that are then converted into economic capital.

The field of power then informs the political economy of the field of the artwork illuminating sites of contention and struggles for power and historical

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[102] In this context, "to be able to *play* the piano" implies playing the piano *well* and *with skill* in accordance with historical ideologies of what *skillful piano-playing* means.
[103] Ibid., 248.
[104] Ibid., 253.

legitimacy; those with power (economic and cultural capital) can transform

previous values and reassert their values as unquestioned history (doxa). And

yet, according to Bourdieu, the value of the field of cultural works lies in the

subjectivity of the viewer, but can only be understood by a viewer who is

knowledgeable in the history of the cultural work in question—i.e., has aesthetic

disposition (habitus) or the embodied state of cultural capital. Such knowledge,

as cultural capital, serves as the "entrance fee which consists essentially of the

acquisition of a specific code of conduct and expression and to discover the finite

universe of *freedom under constraints* and *objective potentialities*."[105] Avant-

gardes, as movements that push boundaries, are only possible within a field open

to their possibility. Their novelty is tempered by their historical situation: "it is

necessary for them [avant-garde works] to exist in a potential state at the heart

of the system of already realized possibles [*sic*]…. Moreover, they must have

some chance of being received, meaning accepted and recognized as

'reasonable,' at least by a small number of people."[106] Anything beyond the field

would not be detectable. The possibility of detection is therefore regulated and

informed by the field.

The field, as an objective realm, is similar to an infrastructure: it can be

drawn as a geographical boundary (California), a space or system of spaces for

social interaction (art museums), a set of macro- and micro-social groups (art

enthusiasts; sculpture enthusiasts), or a relation between art objects (twentieth

century sculpture). Habitus, as a subjective realm, is similar to superstructure

through its social complex of decision-making informed by the interaction of

people in the field. Habitus is what people *do*. Both are informed historically.

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[105] Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, 235.
[106] Ibid., 235-236.

Field, for this study, will be better served as a subjective postulating of a set of

given potentialities, and to the extent others agree or are willing to play along

with my postulates, we can align ourselves in a *group subjectivity*, or a shifting

social paradigm.

B. Community

Three terms with nuanced differences that express the social relations

between people who group themselves by a common ideology are *community,*

subculture, and *scene*. These concepts overlap in important ways. "The concept

of community" according to *A Dictionary of Sociology*, "concerns a particularly

constituted set of social relationships based on something which the participants

have in common—usually a common sense of identity."[107] Community is

considered as a pair of basic characteristics. "First, a web of affect-laden

relationships among a group of individuals, relationships that often crisscross and

reinforce one another…; and second, a measure of commitment to a set of

shared values, norms, and meanings, and a shared history and identity—in short,

a particular culture."[108] Community, then, is the interaction of people, the

meanings and values of those interactions, and the history of those peoples,

meanings and values, and interactions. Community is difficult to define because

ontologies (of any sort) are difficult to define, from the ontology of an individual

to the ontology of a race.

Communities—nations, cities, villages, and neighborhoods (to name a few

forms)—exist in various sizes and qualities. Benedict Anderson's notion of

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[107] John Scott and Gordon Marshall, eds. *A Dictionary of Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), sv "Community."
[108] Karen Christensen and David Levinson, eds., *Encyclopedia of Community: From the Village to the Virtual World* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), sv "Community."

"imaginary communities" starts with community at the level of the nation. He begins his idea with the "definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community."[109] Anderson continues: "In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."[110] Los Angeles thus counts as an imagined community. Furthermore, I include the idea that "even these (microcommunities at the face-to-face contact level)" exist as imaginary communities. Communities not only define themselves, but are also defined by the imaginations of those beyond nation, city, or community limits. While Anderson teaches that communities are imagined, Ernest Gellner teaches that nations are invented: "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist."[111] The process of inventing a nation is an official mode of drawing the field as a postulated set of boundaries. I therefore hold the following: '*Regional identity* is not the awakening of *regional people* to self-consciousness: it invents *geographical regions and regional identities* where they do not exist.' Regions, like nations, not only define themselves, but are also defined by other regions. An ontological definition not only refers to itself but must also consult the imaginations and essentialist mythologies of outside perspectives. *Therefore I broadly define the ontology of Los Angeles as the collective imaginations of its inhabitants and the imaginations of people who live outside, and are considered to live outside, the region imagined as Los Angeles*.

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[109] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: MIT Press, 2007), 6.
[110] Anderson, 6.
[111] Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1964), 168.

Imagined communities are forged by the stories, mythologies, and

ideologies the people in those communities circulate amongst themselves. These

stories are the accumulation of memories (and mis-memories) of the people in

those communities. The sum of those memories and the behaviors of the people

create a tradition. Eric Hobsbawm refers to "invented traditions" to explore the

ways that communities imagine themselves.

> 'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally
> governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or
> symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms
> of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity
> with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to
> establish continuity with a suitable historic past.[112]

Exploring values and modes of behavior of a community is how I intend to assess

the experimental 'noise' scene's aesthetics. The repetition of behaviors and the

circulation of knowledge is the key to how traditions are formed. These behaviors

establish rules that reward those who abide by them and castigate transgressors.

"Inventing traditions… is essentially a process of formalization and ritualization,

characterized by references to the past, if only by imposing repetition."[113] The

repetition of certain behaviors establishes certain forms of social behavior and

social values shared by the community. Invented traditions, as opposed to older

established traditions are characterized by their ambiguity and flexibility. In other

words, invented traditions are in flux: they are in the process of being reinvented

and reimagined, as they are relived. In the case of this dissertation I refer to the

Los Angeles experimental 'noise' scene as an imaginary community with an

invented tradition, to be read in the plural as imaginary communities and

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[112] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Traditions*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.
[113] Ibid., 4.

traditions and *scenes*. In an analysis of *community* (or *scene*) the observer need not look for hard lines of demarcation: thicknesses and greynesses are interesting places to explore.

C. Subculture

The idea of subculture stems from the 1940s and gained interest among scholars through the 1970s. Many of these studies focused on 'deviant' youth subcultures, such as American gangsters, bikers, homosexual culture, beatnik culture and deviant music cultures like mods, hippies, skinheads, teddy boys, and later the punks. An early essay on subculture, by Milton Gordon, was interested in the study of subcultures as a way to track the varied interests of people into smaller organized groups, since, he writes, "in modern society no individual participates in the total cultural complex totally but primarily in a series of population segments…."[114] Gordon uses 'population segment' as a synonym for subculture. For Gordon, subculture is a "sub-division of national culture;"[115] and concludes that subculture "is a world within a world, so to speak, but *is* a world."[116] The analysis of subculture was then a way of describing activities outside of work, like participation in a local sports team, or the culture of a local bar.

Subcultures: The Meaning of Style by Dick Hebdige examines the practices and symbolisms of 1970s subcultures in the US and UK. Though his focus is ultimately on punk, he also discusses the symbols and meanings behind skinheads, teds, and Rastafarianism. Recalling Anderson's definition of *imagined*

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[114] Milton M. Gordon, "The Concept of Sub-Culture and its Application" (1947), in *The Subcultures Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (New York: Routledge, 1997), 41.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.

communities, "Communities are to be distinguished… by the *style* in which they are imagined" (my emphasis), Hebdige's purpose is then to analyze style to understand something about community in terms of subculture. He offers many definitions and ideas about subculture throughout his study. First, subculture is "the expressive forms and rituals of those subordinate groups (—) who are alternatively dismissed, denounced, and canonized."[117] As fringe groups, they may be seen as threatening, outlandish, or benign. "Spectacular subcultures express what is by definition an imaginary set of relations."[118] For Hebdige's study objects of fashion, were repurposed to create new meaning: combat boots were worn outside of the workplace (or battlefield) to symbolize the working class; swastikas were worn to symbolize fascism now redirected from Nazi Germany toward the British government.[119]

What distinguishes community and subculture? Sarah Thornton articulates her position in the opening pages of *The Subcultures Reader*. "'Community' tends to suggest a more permanent population. By contrast, those groups identified as 'subcultures' have tended to be studied apart from their families and in states of relative transience."[120] She further explains that people often refer to 'youth subcultures' rather than 'youth communities' and posits that "[y]outh attempt to define their culture against the parental home"[121]; thus linking 'community' to the family and neighborhood. Like Thornton, Straw contends that communities tend to be permanent or historically stable within a given geography. A less scholarly approach to the notion of community reveals a deeper level of involvement from

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[117] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Routledge, 1979), 2.
[118] Ibid., 81.
[119] Ibid., 55, 116, 117.
[120] Sarah Thornton, "General Introduction" in *The Subcultures Reader* (Eds. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton) (New York: Routledge, 1997), 2.
[121] Thornton, 2.

within. In the liner notes to the compilation record *Turn It Around!* showcasing the punk scene around the 924 Gilman Street venue in San Francisco, Tim Y writes: "In a nutshell, we're reestablishing *a sense of community in the scene* [emphasis mine]."[122] In this case *community* is understood as an ethical code of conduct within the parameters of the *scene*. If Thornton's and Straw's conception of community has to do with stability, perhaps its stability stems from these deep-seated desires for relatively stable codes of conduct. Phil Cohen, writing in 1972, perhaps offers a solution to these seemingly disparate notions of *community* through the scope of subculture. "[S]ubculture is… a compromise solution to two contradictory needs: the need to create and express *autonomy and difference* from parents and, by extension, their culture[,] and the need to maintain the security of existing ego defences [*sic*] and the *parental identifications* which support them."[123] By following the dialectic, subculture, for Cohen, tears itself apart from parental culture (thesis) to find its identity through difference (antithesis), and then works to reestablish order (synthesis). What makes Thornton's and Straw's conception of community glue to Tim Y's ethical stance as a "sense of community" are the rules drawn initially by the "parental culture" as family: Tim Y's punk subcultural "sense of community" thus rearticulates the family rules in a new context.

D. Scene

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[122] Tim Y, liner notes in *Turn It Around!* (Maximumrocknroll, 1987). Thanks to David Verbuc for this insight.
[123] Phil Cohen, "Subcultural Conflict and Working Class Community" (1972), in *The Subcultures Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (New York: Routledge, 1997), 96.

Journalists in the US have used the term 'scene' since the 1940s,[124] yet it

mostly remained a journalistic colloquialism until Will Straw's article in 1991.

Straw's conception of scene ignited a new interest in the term by scholars who

began to see the notion of scene as superior to the notion of subculture. Straw

writes: "A musical scene… is that cultural space in which a range of musical

practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of

differentiation, and accordingly, to widely varying trajectories of change and

cross-fertilization."[125] To summarize, music communities are relatively historically

stable; music scenes are in flux and are characterized by (historical) disruption;

i.e., *scenes change faster than communities*. Using Straw's definition of "scene"

as a springboard to hone the twentieth century notion of subculture, Peterson

and Bennett explain:

> What we and others call "scenes" have often been called
> "subcultures." We use the term "scene" here rather than
> "subculture" because the latter term presumes that a society has
> one commonly shared culture from which the subculture is deviant.
> In addition, we avoid "subculture" because it presumes that all of a
> participant's actions are governed by subcultural standards, while
> the scene perspective does not make this presumption.
> [Furthermore] most participants regularly put on and take off the
> scene identity. Our formulation of the scene concept draws heavily
> on Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) idea of "field".[126]

The history of subculture studies has been juxtaposed with the deviant (often

called 'deviant subcultures'). Peterson and Bennett favor the term "scenes" to the

term "subculture" because "subculture" implies a lower status from the dominant

culture. Scene and subculture are distinguishable from community because the

modes of participation in a scene are relatively temporary in comparison to the

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[124] Richard A Peterson and Andy Bennett, "Introducing Scenes," in *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*, ed. Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 2.
[125] Straw, 494.
[126] Peterson and Bennett, 3.

deeper commitment to community and family. The goth or punk may only

identify as goth or punk during the times they choose to express goth or punk

style.

Peterson and Bennett use three forms of "scene" as a synthesis of field

and habitus, one favoring *field* (local scene), while the other two seem to favor

habitus (translocal scene, virtual scene). They begin with succinct definitions for

three kinds of scenes—*local*, *translocal*, *virtual*—and expand them in their essay.

> The first, local scene, corresponds most closely with the original
> notion of scene as clustered around a specific geographic focus.
> The second, translocal scene, refers to widely scattered local
> scenes drawn into regular communication around a distinctive form
> of music and lifestyle. The third, virtual scene, is a newly emergent
> formation in which people scattered across great physical spaces
> create the sense of scene via fanzines and, increasingly, the
> internet.[127]

The succinct definition of *local scene* emphasizes its geography, thus *field* is

implied as its set of possibilities. The expanded definition of scene includes its

social activity situated historically (habitus). "[W]e view a local scene to be a

focused social activity that takes place in a delimited space and over a specific

span of time in which [participants] distinguish themselves from others by using

music and cultural signs…."[128] We learn from this definition that beyond the

obvious locus of the *local scene*, a scene is a "*focused social activity*;" and that

activity is situated historically. In other words, we can say that what distinguishes

the three kinds of scene are the modes that define their fields. The succinct

definitions for *translocal scene* and *virtual scene* seem to overlap, but their

elaborations distinguish the two more clearly. Alternative rock is the example

used to activate and explicate the notion of *translocal scene*. Alternative rock

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[127] Ibid., 6-7.
[128] Ibid., 8.

exists in several urban and suburban cities in smaller local communities, but is understood as a common culture, so that when an alternative rock band plays in a neighboring town or several States away, one music culture shares many traits with another hundreds or thousands of miles away. One important irony that Peterson and Bennett point out is that *translocal scenes* sometimes inspire *local scenes* to become fiercely individualized. *Translocal scenes* gain their traction through the distribution of recordings, fanzines, and other publications, and the touring of bands. Such media distribution is related to but distinct from *virtual scenes*. Whereas *translocal scenes* have a history at least as old as mail distribution, *virtual scenes* were almost entirely impossible without internet access. According to Peterson and Bennett successful *virtual scenes* "evolve norms of communication; novices to the group[129] are informed about the norms of civility, and there is the exchange of the kind of knowledge that Thornton refers to as 'subcultural capital.'"[130] In today's world (2014) websites like Facebook act as a dominant field for not only *virtual scenes*, but also for *local* and *translocal scenes*.

With three classifications for scene—local, translocal, virtual—each conflates Bourdieu's notions of field and habitus to varying degrees. Yet there are some advantages to the approach advocated by Peterson and Bennett. Unlike Bourdieu, Peterson and Bennett allow for flexibility in their notion of scene. Bourdieu's conception of *field* as an 'objective' set of possibilities is postulated by

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[129] "[N]ovices to the group" are generally referred to as *noobs*, short for *newbees*.

[130] Ibid., 11. "Subcultural capital" is a term Sarah Thornton coined as a way to bring Bourdieu's notion of "cultural capital" to the level of the subculture. She writes: "Bourdieu explores what he calls *cultural capital* or knowledge that is accumulated through upbringing and education which confers social status. It is the linchpin of a system of distinction in which cultural hierarchies correspond to social ones and people's tastes are first and foremost a marker of class." Within her research, she argues, "I've come to conceive of 'hipness' as a form of *subcultural capital*"; and "subcultural capital is embodied in the form of being 'in the know.'" See Sarah Thornton, "The Logic of Subcultural Capital" (1995), in *The Subcultures Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (New York: Routledge, 1997), 201-203.

an authoritative academic. The softly drawn *scene*, as conceptualized by Peterson and Bennett, by contrast, allows participants breathing room: even the points of possibilities are merely possible. Though it may not be useful for the observer to draw hard lines between scenes and non-scenes, it *is* useful, if not imperative, to discover how a scene's participants draw lines to understand what Bourdieu calls the *field of power*, defined by the political relations and institutions within the scene. Although it is imperative for an ethnographer to draw some preliminary lines of the scope of research, the research itself should show how those boundaries could be expanded, and also the points of contention concerning how different participants draw those boundaries, and who has the authority to draw them.[131]

I contend that field and habitus, subcultures, communities, and scenes overlap in important ways that advance unique perspectives toward a thick description of a cultural event situated in a particular context. These terms are near synonyms with nuances that I have now called attention to. In this study I prefer the term *scene* as the conflation of its geography, its institutions, the interactivity of its people, its meanings and values, its mythologies and ideologies, and the histories of those geographies, institutions, interpersonal connections, meanings and values, and mythologies and ideologies. By conflating and softening such (seemingly) hard categories I further complicate my study of the Los Angeles 'noise' scene felicitously. The Los Angeles 'noise' scene is a *translocal scene*, in that there are other cities nearby and across oceans that also share a 'noise' scene with Los Angeles; and yet it is also a strong *local scene*. My conception of 'scene' privileges live performances and the audiences who attend.

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[131] In my questionnaire, I ask participants, "What is just inside and just outside the noise music scene?"

III. Research Strategies

The main purpose of my dissertation is to describe and characterize the aesthetic concerns of the Los Angeles experimental 'noise' scene. To fulfill this purpose, I believe that the proper method requires a combined historical and ethnographic approach that relies heavily on the testimony of the practitioners and audiences in the scenes. In her book *Listening Through the Music* Joanna Demers takes the following view of aesthetics.

> One preliminary response to these questions is that aesthetics are the shared values concerning what is good, entertaining, and compelling art. But if aesthetics were only this, then this book would and should be nothing more than a case study of opinions, an ethnography of the views about the field of electronic music—in short, something resembling more a work of journalism or scientific investigation rather than philosophy. I have felt it necessary to intervene, however, and to introduce observations that do not necessarily square with predominant views in electronic-music communities. In other words, I am not an invisible or transparent observer in this field but bring to this discussion my own ideologies and values.[132]

Demers mischaracterizes contemporary ethnographic approaches by assuming that ethnographers attempt to make themselves 'invisible' or 'transparent.' What I like about Demers' quote above is that it inadvertently describes how I feel the study of music aesthetics should operate. A successful study in music aesthetics would consult the history of the tradition studied, learn about the contemporary practices of the tradition from the practitioners, and then draw conclusions based on the information gathered. The conclusions are based on the syntheses of information and the personal proclivities (biases) of the researcher—therefore

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[132] Joanna Demers, *Listening Through the Noise: The Aesthetics of Experimental Electronic Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 162.

they are hermeneutic. If Demers is afraid that her observations may "not necessarily square with predominant views," then a strongly supported thesis ought to change some minds.

This dissertation is predominantly based on the observations I made at experimental 'noise' venues and the testimonies I collected from the participants in the scenes. Primary sources will include: live performances recorded by me, and interviews of participants (practitioners, promoters, and listeners) conducted, recorded, and transcribed by me. Secondary sources will include histories, theories, influences, and criticisms on or related to the topic.

The legacy of Cage is an important influence on many experimental 'noise' performers. However I believe the legacy of David Tudor is perhaps even more relevant, since his method of "composing inside electronics" represents an ideology similar to that of many practitioners who explore sounds and make decisions during live performance. According to Tudor, his *Rainforest IV* (1976) is "part of a series of works in which electronic components are chained together in such a way as to produce parameters unpredictable to the performer. The work is 'discovered' in live performance, through the exploration of all possible points of variation within the electronic hookup."[133] Collectives like the Los Angeles Free Music Society (LAFMS) in the 1970s provide important precursors to contemporary experimental 'noise' practices. Many of the members of the LAFMS are, or have been, active participants in the Los Angeles 'noise' scenes. The present study recognizes the LAFMS as an important precursor to the contemporary experimental 'noise' scene.

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[133] Bill Viola, "David Tudor: The Delicate Art of Falling," *Leonardo Music Journal 14* (2004): 54.

An experimental 'noise' canon in general has not yet been written: this dissertation, though not intending to, undoubtedly points toward a canon by the testimony given by the practitioners I interviewed. Hegarty writes that canons can "not be ignored, but [they] can be messed about, broken down. One of the ways we can do this is to continually remind ourselves that a precursor only becomes a precursor later on: comes to *always have been a precursor*."[134] I claim that experimental 'noise,' as much as it aspires to exist in a vacuum and eschew history, in fact has a history. Though I have attempted to construct a history toward the experimental 'noise' practices in Los Angeles as understood since the 1990s, there are other possible histories that could complement (and even contest) the histories I have constructed in this dissertation. There is certainly more work within the scope of this dissertation that could construct a thicker, more accurate story of the Los Angeles experimental 'noise' scenes: more people to interview, more questions to answer, and more perspectives to consider. These perspectives may lead toward the ossification of a particular canon, or perhaps destroy a perceived canon that might be gleaned from this study.

I endeavor to use a critical ethnographic method to explore the Los Angeles 'noise' scenes. The purpose of the method is to situate the ethnographer within the field (scene) as an active member and contributor to the tradition studied. Critical ethnography attempts to capture the historical nature of a social environment.

> Critical ethnography is a type of reflection that examines culture, knowledge and action. It expands our horizons for choice and widens our experimental capacity to see, hear, and feel. It deepens and sharpens ethical commitments by forcing us to develop and act upon value commitments in the context of political agendas. Critical ethnographers describe, analyze, and open to scrutiny

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[134] Hegarty, 11.

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otherwise hidden agendas, power centers, and assumptions that inhabit, repress, and constrain. Critical scholarship requires that commonsense assumptions be questioned.[135]

The main mode of the ethnographer is participant observation and data collection. Participant observation has gone through some of the same scrutiny as ethnography as a method of collecting 'facts.' Contemporary ethnographers deny that such facts are possible, but that does not discount the conclusions they make from the data collected. The interpretation of ethnographic data is not opposed to its collection—in fact, interpretation must be understood as the nature of understanding ethnographic data. Thus hermeneutics and the critical faculties breathe life into the data collected from participant observation. The data itself is not neutral, but is collected from a certain point of view. Meaning is then extrapolated from the data collected. Participant observation is a method for allowing the ethnographer to interface with the people they study. The point of my study is not to reach an objective truth, but to engage in dialogues with the participants to learn more about what they *think* experimental 'noise' is. In other words, the Los Angeles 'noise' scene is not one unified idea; rather, it is what its participants *think* it is—a collection of ideas, stories, experiences, sentiments, sounds, etc. Clifford Geertz famously used the expression "thick description" to allow ethnographers to approach a situation from many contextual points of view to obtain knowledge of a given social phenomenon, while avoiding the pretense of having discovered a social 'fact.'.

During the process of collecting and interpreting data, I plan to share my conclusions with the participants I interviewed using a technique Steven Feld calls "dialogic editing." After Feld finished his book *Sound and Sentiment* on Kaluli

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[135] Jim Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography: Qualitative Research Methods* (London: Sage, 1993), 2-3.

expressions in sound, he returned to Papua New Guinea to read his monograph to the subjects he wrote about. He then made corrections in a postscript written for the publication of the second edition of his book.

> Dialogic editing refers to the impact of Kaluli voices on what I tell you about them in my voice; how their take on my take on them requires a reframing and a refocusing of my account. Stated somewhat more directly, the idea here is to let some Kaluli voices get a few words in edgewise among my other readers, critics, and book reviewers. But Kaluli tellings are different from mine in arrangement, focus, intention, and style.[136]

I plan to use dialogic editing after the dissertation is complete so that I can correct any of my mistakes and misunderstandings at a later date. In other words, after I have written the dissertation, I hope that participants in my interviews will read at least the portions they were directly involved with to see if I 'got it right.' Though my interpretations and conclusions may not always agree with all the practitioners I work with, I will want to make sure the participants I interviewed feel adequately represented—disagreements are also rich sources of data.

Questionnaire

My study is based on ethnography and oral history. I interviewed twenty-three performers, listeners, and venue owners associated with the experimental 'noise' scenes in Los Angeles. I asked each of them well over one hundred questions and follow-up questions. The questions were systematic, and for the most part I asked everyone the same questions. The interviews I conducted answer these questions in great detail to provide the thickest description I could.

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[136] Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds Weeping, Poetics, and Sound in Kaluli Expression* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1982), 241-243.

The questionnaire took its final form after my third interview. For each interview, I printed a two-page questionnaire (using a small font) and made notes on it during the interview. The questionnaire is more of a list of interview questions. There are seven sections on the questionnaire: 1) Background, 2) Instruments, Techniques, and Practices, 3), Promotion and Distribution, 4) Noise Music: General Questions, 5) Noise Music Communities, 6), Noise Music Scenes in LA, 7) Aesthetic Issues in Noise Music. I documented over 1600 pages of testimony. Only a fraction of it is used in this dissertation.

There are four forms of the questionnaire: for performers, for venue owners who are performers, for venue owners who are not performers, and for listeners (non-performing audience members). The questionnaire for venue owners who are performers is the most comprehensive: it includes all of the questions for performers plus the questions for venue owners. The figure below shows the two-page document.

Figure 1: Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE: VENUE OWNERS

Background

1. Full Name
2. Do you go by other pseudonyms or band names when you perform?
3. Can you tell me about your family's relationship with music?
   a. Who in the family liked music?
4. When and where were you born?
5. How would you describe your ethnicity?
6. What do/did your parents do? Jobs, etc...
7. Did your parents turn you on to music?
8. Where did you go to school?
   a. Elementary
   b. Middle
   c. High
9. Did you go to College?
   a. Where?
   b. Did you study music?
   c. If yes/no, what (else) did you study?
10. If you are not from Los Angeles—
    a. Where are you from?
    b. When did you move to LA?
    c. What brought you to LA?
11. Do you consider yourself from LA, or from somewhere else?
12. Are you planning on staying here?
13. What kinds of music are you involved with?
14. When did you start making noise music?
15. Outside of noise music, what kind of music do you listen to?
16. Is music your primary source of income?

Instruments, Techniques, and Practices

1. How do you make noise music?
2. What instruments do you use?
   a. Synthesizers
   b. Computers
      i. Hardware
         1. Apple/PC, Digital to Analog Interfaces, MIDI, etc
      ii. Software
         1. Max/MSP, PD, Ableton, Tassman, etc
   c. Other recording media—tape, cd, etc
   d. Microphones
   e. Percussion
   f. Other electric and acoustic instruments
   g. 'Effects'
3. What are some basic noise music skills?—more advanced skills?
4. What methods and organizational principles do you use?
   a. Scores, Algorithms, Improvisation, Serial
5. What is the function of volume in your music? (How do you control volume?)
6. What is the function of timbre in your music? (How do you control timbre?)
7. What is the function of rhythm and meter in your music? (How do you control rhythm?)
8. How long do your performances normally last?
9. How does expression figure into your music?—How does expression change the sonic experience?
10. How do you use your body in performance?
11. Can you describe how you moved during a particularly potent performance for you?
12. What other elements are important to your music?
13. Do you collaborate with others? If so, who?
14. Have you been influenced by or do you participate in other art forms?

Promotion and Distribution

1. How do you promote your performances?
   a. Websites
   b. Social networking
   c. Email
   d. Flyers
2. What methods of distribution do you use to promote your music?
   a. Social networking
   b. Recordings (what kind of media)
   c. Other (describe)
3. Have you ever run a concert series or booked concerts at a venue?
   a. If yes, where and when?

Venue Owners

1. What is the name of the venue you promote?
2. How long has the venue existed?
3. How do you promote your venue?
4. How do you attract new audiences?
5. Who are the audiences at your venue?
6. How stable are the audiences? Who are the regulars?
7. How many people normally attend noise music shows?
8. How do you decide who can play at your venue?
9. Is there any performer in the scene you would not book?
10. Which performers in the noise music scene play most often?

Noise Music: General Questions

1. Do you think of your music as noise music?
    a. If not, then how would you describe your music?
        i. *For the purpose this questionnaire I will continue to use the term 'noise music' with sufficient qualifiers.*
    b. If yes, then how would you define and characterize noise music? (what is it?)
2. What are some of the general aims of practitioners of noise music?
3. Can you describe some of the basic styles of noise music?
    a. How would you describe the historical development of these styles?
4. Can you describe the relation between intermedia and noise music?
    a. How does media other than sound play into your work?
    b. How does the body relate to noise music?—gestures, dancing, etc.
5. Who is your audience?—1. Actual audience, 2. Ideal audience.
6. What are your artistic goals and aspirations as a (noise) musician?

Noise Music Communities: Practitioners, Non-Practitioners, Organizers and Venue Owners

1. How much time do you spend listening to noise music as an approximate percentage of overall music listening?
2. How much time do you spend making/practicing noise music? (hours a week)
3. How many noise music recordings have you bought?
4. How many noise music MP3s do you own (roughly)? Do you watch noise music videos online?
5. Do you listen to noise music at home, in your car, or only at concerts?
6. Do you have a favorite noise music recording? Can you describe what it sounds like? [The role of memory]
7. How would you describe the relation between noise music performers and listeners?
8. If you are primarily a listener, do you attempt to make noise music at home?

Noise Music Scene in LA

1. How would you presently describe the state of the noise music scene in LA?
2. How would you describe the changes of opinion over time?
3. Does noise music have a 'golden age' or is it yet to come?
4. What do you think is the future of noise music?
5. Would you say that is LA leading or trailing the global trends in noise music?
6. Do different performers have different scenes?
7. Do different venues have different scenes?
8. Following questions 6 and 7, how do they overlap? How do they compete?
9. Which venue(s) do you most associate yourself with?
10. Does the LA noise music scene have a 'center?'
    a. How have various centers shifted other the years?
11. Is there anything unique about the stimulus of LA to noise musicians?
12. Is there anything unique about the sound of LA noise music? Does noise in LA have a 'sound' distinct from other places?
13. What do you see as some of the trends and techniques in current noise music performers in LA?
14. Do you perform outside of LA? And if yes, where?

Aesthetic Issues in Noise Music

1. What is 'good' noise music to you? How do you know when you're hearing it? What is 'bad' noise music?
2. What is 'real' ('authentic') noise music?
    a. What lies at the edges of noise music?—just inside, just outside?—What is 'tasteful' noise music?
3. Can anyone make noise?
4. What sound or technique do you consider cliché in noise music?
5. Are there mistakes in noise music? Can you tell when someone makes a mistake? Does noise have noise?
6. What do you listen for in noise music?
7. What do you expect to hear when listening to noise music?
8. How do you feel when your expectations are not met? Do you enjoy unexpected sounds?
9. What kinds of sounds do you value?
10. Can you describe a particularly powerful noise music performance? How did it make you feel?—Can you describe those sounds?
11. Can you describe a situation in which a listener was repulsed/elated by what they were listening to?
12. What do you think your audiences listen for in noise music?
13. Do you try to please your audience? Do you do so by trying to meet their expectations?
14. Do you think your audiences perceive noise music as a unique genre?
15. Who do you think the most important noise musicians in a global sense are?
16. Who are your favorite noise musicians?
17. How do you think the most respected noise musicians in LA earned that respect? Mostly by... [Check most important]
    a. Making good noise music
    b. Making interesting sounds
    c. Interesting person (Charismatic or stern appearance, etc)
    d. Performing often
    e. Selling recordings
    f. Other (describe)
18. In terms of 'taste,' who in the LA noise music scene do you trust to find a good show or find a good record?
19. Who do you think the historical predecessors of noise music are/were?—Globally? In LA?
20. What do you think about the history of noise music?
21. Is noise music:
    a. subversive, destructive, deconstructive, generative, constructive, liberating, challenging, utopian, or is it just plain music?
22. What is the role of rules in noise music?

IV. Reader's Guide

  This dissertation has been an ambitious project in terms of the amount of testimony from the practitioners in the experimental 'noise' scenes. The breadth of the testimony is evident starting from chapter 4. One does *not* need to read every response to fully grasp what this dissertation is about. I purposefully tried not to decide which answers were valid and which were not so that I could provide the thickest description possible and avoid creating a canon of "great" 'noise' artists. In this sense, I want the reader to know that the work is here, if they wish to read it. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are thick in testimony. In these chapters a reader can abridge the dissertation greatly by reading the introductions to each section, the summaries at the end of each section, and chapter conclusions; the chapters, sections, summaries, and conclusions are all labeled in the table of contents. Then if the reader is interested in one or more particular practitioners, they can read the testimonies I included in the dissertation; they are in the same order each time.

CHAPTER 1
A SHORT HISTORY OF EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC SCENES IN LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles is a relatively young metropolis but it quickly gained a certain

prestige in the art world, even if it would also be dwarfed by New York.

Nevertheless, Los Angeles has fostered a history of sonic experimentalism from

the early twentieth century. There has been no unified history of experimental

music practices in Los Angeles. This chapter is an attempt toward a history of

experimental music practices in Los Angeles as far as it is concerned with

elucidating a particular history of twenty-first century experimental 'noise'

practices. A history of experimental music societies is the subject of this chapter.

These experimental practices in sound, as part of a regional art culture,

necessarily run parallel to the Hollywood-centered culture industry: especially the

film industry and the popular music industry. One of the common threads

throughout this dissertation is to assess the importance of the exploration of

timbre as an aesthetic priority. The purpose of this chapter is to construct a

narrative of twentieth century experimental music in Los Angeles primarily

through two main collectives. The first section of this chapter will address the

culture surrounding the Evenings On the Roof concert series that began in 1939

and continues today as the Monday Evening Concerts series at the Zipper Hall at

the Colburn School. The second section of this chapter will provide a short history

of the Los Angeles Free Music Society from 1973 to about 1983: the society

continues to have performances today. These two very different scenes—with

very different developments demonstrate the presence of a bourgeoning

experimental culture in Los Angeles—provide an important backdrop for my

greater study: experimental 'noise' in Los Angeles. These two sections themselves will be prefaced by a brief discussion of the New Music Society.

New Music Society

The first experimental music society in Los Angeles was the short-lived New Music Society established by twenty-eight-year-old Henry Cowell in 1925, the same year he wrote his most celebrated work, *The Banshee*, shortly after returning from a European concert tour. The first concert was held on October 22, 1925 at the Biltmore Hotel in Downtown Los Angeles. Cowell wanted to bring what he deemed "ultramodernist" music to Los Angeles. He undoubtedly acquired the term 'ultramodernism' from British composer William Edmondstoune Duncan who wrote a manifesto in 1915 called *Ultra-Modernism in Music*.

> Ultra-modernists in music are those daring spirits who put invention and imagination first, and precedent, convention and scholarship last. Their point of view is that of the pioneer; and only the untried absorbs them. They seem to be looking perpetually to the horizon—over the steeple and beyond the hill—away into the blue distance. And if they do look home, it is with strange glance, as if they suspected that the familiar things of life were all unreal.
>
> The ultra-modernist composer arrests attention by the very singularity of his speech. He means to be heard at any cost. In this matter he is not alone, since on every hand—dramatists, novelists, historians, poets, and painters are doing the same thing—attempting new combinations and defying the old notion of harmony colour and form.
>
> The attitude of the ultra-modernist then is this. He proffers an art that has pleased his own soul. He cares nothing whether you or I like it. He has created fresh ideas all the way, and he is proudly conscious of the fact. It was first for himself: now, it is ours. Perhaps this was always the incentive of great music.
>
> For when the creative artist breaks with tradition and custom, he either discovers new realms, or pays the penalty of his audacity.

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It sometimes seems as if we overlooked the fact that noise is with us from birth. And music is simply well-marshalled noise.[137]

Duncan's book recognized a history of experimental tendencies as far back as the twelfth century troubadours, and in fact the largest chapter of his book showcases his Francophilia. He sketches a portrait of the ultramodernist composer as one with a fierce individualism, boldly seeking new "untried" forms of expression without regard for tradition. Oddly, such passionate writing is suggestive of romanticism. Cowell, who clearly did not coin the term, appropriated it for a new American tendency in composition and listenership to promote his New Music Society of California.

It is seldom that Los Angeles has the opportunity to hear presented the works of the most discussed composers of so-called ultra-modern tendencies, such as Strawinksy, Schoenberg, Ruggles, Rudhyar, etc. The New Music Society of California, which is formed for the purpose of performing such works, announces an initial concert of new music to be held early in the fall of 1925.[138]

The city was already home to a group of experimental composers and performers that would fly under Cowell's "ultramodernist" banner, including Winifred Hooke, Wesley Kuhnle, Richard Buhlig, Adolph Tandler, and Dane Rudhyar. Rudhyar himself was a long time bicoastal resident (between Los Angeles and New York) whose works were performed at both New Music Society concerts in Los Angeles and at one of the first Evenings on the Roof concerts. His theosophical mysticism—a common trope for composers in the early twentieth century—led him to write exuberantly in 1923 about the possibilities of 'progressive music.'

[Composers like Scriabin, Stravinsky, and Schoenberg] all try to

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[137] William Edmunstoune Duncan, *Ultra-Modernism in Music: A Treatise on the Latter-Day Revolution in Musical Art* (London: Winthrop Rogers, 1917), 1-4.

[138] Henry Cowell, Announcement, New Music Society. New Music Collection. New York Public Library (in Rita H. Mead, "Henry Cowell's New Music Society," *Journal of Musicology* 1, no. 4 (October 1982): 450).

get at the tonal roots of music, by expressing the magical potentialities, the *natural life* of sounds. Some of them base their music upon the undifferentiated duodecuple system, which recognizes all sounds as equal, as anarchically living entities; others, though using outwardly the same chromatic material, are less atonal than polytonal, or let us say "syntonal" blending tonalities synthesizing tonal relations and not altogether destroying the principle of sonal relationship.

All of these tendencies can be analyzed however, as the various aspects of a unique impulse: *the desire to express the innermost and occult essence of Life through combinations of naturally evolving tones, and no longer through intellectually defined ladders of notes, viz tonalities*.

This is to me what characterizes the truly progressive music, be it harmonic or polyphonic or what not, today. And it is so because these very characteristics define the newly evolving culture of our chaotic yet powerful century, the search for the innermost, for the impersonal; for power….[139]

Rudyar's *syntonal* manifesto—as anarchic amalgamations of sonic relationships for a chaotic culture—furthered the battle cry of the ultramodernist composers.

Cowell was a persistent organizer. In a flyer for the first concert by the New Music Society, Cowell stated the society's ultramodernist goals: "To present musical works embodying the most progressive tendencies of this age, and disseminate the new musical ideas."[140] The first concert attracted over 300 people! and included works by Carl Ruggles, Edgard Varèse, Leo Ornstein, Dane Rudhyar, Arnold Schoenberg, and Darius Milhaud. Reviews were mixed, but by far Varèse's *Octandre* was considered the most controversial piece, with one critic calling the work, "just not music," and another describing the work as "the reflection of street sounds in which a fog horn and the grinding of a pushcart sounds." Another critic proclaimed that the work was "the ungodly noise of New York Harbor in a fog… and not overly refined noise at that."[141] Varèse, like many

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[139] Dane Rudhyar, "Toward a Deeper Musicality" in *Eolian Review* 2, no. 3 (June 1923): 11-15.
[140] Ibid. (Yates 1967) (Mead 1982).
[141] Isabel Morse Jones, *Los Angeles Times*, October 24, 1925.

other ultramodernists of his time, bore the brunt of the criticism for his interest in new sounds. The last two of the pejorative descriptions alluded to specifically discuss the *sound* of Varèse's work—its timbre—as analogous to a fog horn. The first and last descriptions are aesthetic judgments: the first denies its existence as music altogether; the last calls it 'unrefined.' What *refined* noise would sound like is, of course, not clear, and perhaps unimportant to the critic who levied the criticism.

Many of the ultramodernist tendencies led composers to perform their own works. Cowell wrote a series of solo piano pieces and became famous for his idiosyncratic performances that involved extended techniques, like playing the strings inside the piano, and strong tone clusters, sometimes using a block of wood to maximize the playable range of the piano. Though the composer-performer has a long history, the composer-performer as ultramodernist is connected not only to the do-it-yourself aesthetics that would pervade the second half of the twentieth century, but also to the academy of State-sanctioned avant-gardism—Cal Arts offers a specific degree for the dedicated "composer-performer." Cowell organized a second installation of the New Music Society one month later before moving the concert series permanently to San Francisco due in part to a lack of funding.[142, 143]

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[142] Rita H. Mead, "Henry Cowell's New Music Society" in *The Journal of Musicology* (University of California Press, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1982), 449-463.
[143] Catherine Parsons Smith, *Making Music in Los Angeles: Transforming the Popular* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 199.

I. Evenings on the Roof and Monday Evening Concerts

Since 2000 I had discovered and regularly attended the Monday Evening Concerts at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). Students were given free admission. During that time I heard several professional domestic and touring groups, including the Penderecki String Quartet, the Kronos String Quartet, the California EAR Unit, and the Pianospheres series. I attended Leo Stein's last performance before his death, an attempt at Boulez' *Structures*: the elderly virtuoso could not finish the performance. The music performed at these concerts was mostly from the twentieth century, but older works were performed as well. At that time I was unaware of the rich legacy of the Monday Evening Concerts and their older history rooted in the Evenings on the Roof series.

Evenings on the Roof and its successor Monday Evening Concerts[144] have provided the people of Los Angeles a rich culture of Western classical chamber music. It provided a number of composers, performers, and music enthusiasts a laboratory to experiment and listen to works in an intimate setting. These concerts provided perhaps the only opportunity to see the two pillars of Western classical music in the first half of the twentieth century—Schoenberg and Stravinsky—under the same roof. There were even rumors that the rivalry had been quashed at these concerts; certainly after Schoenberg's death Stravinsky began writing twelve-tone music, a technique pioneered by Schoenberg.

Evenings on the Roof was a concert series that began in 1939 organized by Peter Yates to provide his wife, pianist Frances Mullen, with the opportunity of performing for an audience; it also provided the opportunity for Yates himself to

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[144] Dorothy Lamb Crawford, *Evenings On and Off the Roof: Pioneering Concerts in Los Angeles, 1939-1971* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995).

listen to the freshest musical repertoire of the day. With a $2700 loan from his

great aunt, Yates rented a small home on a steep hill just south of Sunset

Boulevard in Silverlake, California in 1938. He was able to convince the famous

Viennese architect Rudolph Schindler to design a venue that would seat one

hundred people at an affordable rate. Schindler designed and built a tall second-

floor music studio on the roof of the bungalow for seventy-five dollars. High on

the hill on Micheltorena Street, Yates enthusiastically described the view:

> The back half of the south side, facing downhill, is nearly all
> windows above a four-foot rail. Three sliding windows… above, an
> enormous triangular window right up in the peak, so that from
> their seats our audiences will seem to look almost staring up at the
> stars…. The room is so high that not a roof impedes our view….[145]

Today the view at the crest of Micheltorena Street continues to provide a view of

Downtown Los Angeles in an area known for its art culture.

The first concert transpired on April 23, 1939. The nineteen attendees

were treated to an all-Bartók program. The next concert was an all-Ives program.

Many of the concerts were performed twice in one evening so that curious Los

Angeles listeners could acclimate themselves to the new "ultramodernist" music.

Yates' decision to perform the works twice mirrored the practice set by the

Viennese Vereinigung Schaffender Tonkünstler (Society for Creative Musicians)

founded by Schoenberg and Zemlinsky in 1904. Admission to the concerts was

fifty cents throughout the first five years of Evenings on the Roof.

Through his involvement as organizer of Evenings on the Roof, Yates

became a strong advocate and champion of the newest music. He made friends

with a who's who of twentieth century Western music. Bartók, Schoenberg,

Stravinsky, Krenek, Varèse, Cowell, Cage, Kodály, Hindemith, Buhlig, Harrison,

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[145] Ibid., Peter Yates, Letter to Peyton Houston, January 26, 1939: 31.

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Schnabel, Stockhausen, Boulez, Chavez: those were just a few who attended

performances of their own works at Evenings on the Roof and Monday Evenings

Concerts.

Yates also helped spawn the 'historically informed performance practice'

movement, a movement that attempted to recreate the listening environment of

older times. Period instruments, period (cat gut) strings, period methods and

techniques, and sometimes even period attire helped give contemporary

audiences insight and a perceived level of historical authenticity to their listening

experience. By 1942 Yates had moved the series out from the roof studio at his

home to a larger venue, the Assistance League Playhouse, where his music

society could seat more people. He drew up an informal policy to schedule two-

thirds of the program with music up to 1900, and one-third with music since

1900. The older music was easy to find performers for, but Yates was also

insistent about the performance of newer works and constantly encouraged

musicians to tackle the aggressively ultramodern works of the day. But what was

the incentive for the musicians? Why would they give up so much of their time to

perform the works of obscure composers of the time? Violinist Eudice Shapiro

recalls:

> We were playing for ourselves. We wanted to grow, to try out
> different things. So many composers came here to live. They were
> our friends. We played their music. We were paid nothing. We did
> it because we loved doing it. It was the most prestigious group of
> concerts in the town. Everybody was clamoring to get on that. The
> Music Guild brought in visiting artists. That was *us*. This was *home*.
> We were playing for each other…. It was quite a different life…. Los
> Angeles was really a mecca for music-making.[146]

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[146] Ibid., 282-283.

In other words, the concerts were performed for the sake of the edification of a coterie of composers and performers, to breathe culture into the city, to accumulate and build a community of listeners, and to provide prestige as a performer amongst the peer groups of musicians, both professional and amateur. Similarly, Stravinsky biographer and conductor, Robert Craft wrote:

> Why did the city's best players agree to work hard for a pittance? Because performance in the concerts carried prestige in a highly competitive scene, and because the players performed real music….[147]

The cultural capital afforded to a performer at the Roof concerts registered as recognition of their talent: the ability to affect the culture in the Los Angeles music community.

Toward the mid- to late-1940s Evenings on the Roof had gained prestige worldwide. These were, according to Yates, the "glamorous" years of the Los Angeles series. An adolescent Susan Sontag would refer to the concert series as part of a Golden Age in Los Angeles culture. In 1948 Yates held a special concert at his Silverlake home on the Roof featuring John Cage's *Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano* and the Japanese shakuhachi player Kitaro Tamada. Lou Harrison, an advocate and composer featured at the concerts, had written to Yates after moving to New York where he wrote music criticism proclaiming:

> the West is the coming cultural center for America. Music in N.Y. is a distinct disappointment & very commercial-minded & flooded with 'parisian society.' I think that largely due to your efforts L.A. is the center of art music at this point. You had ought to be very proud of yourselves & realize what an important thing it is that you are [doing].[148]

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[147] Ibid., 288.
[148] Ibid., 124, Letter to Yates.

Los Angeles would hold on to that prestige in the minds of many advocates for the Western avant-garde: at least for a little while.

Twentieth Century Music, According to Yates

Yates was an aggressive advocate for new music and tried for years to write a book on twentieth century music. He would finally complete his book— *Twentieth Century Music: From the End of the Harmonic Era into the Present Era of Sound*—years after he left the directorship of Evenings on the Roof. What Cowell had referred to as 'ultramodernism' would now be hailed by Yates as the American experimentalist tradition.

> The American experimental tradition is not… a concentrated tradition like the Germanic but a widely dispersed and weedlike growth of fresh ideas in new soil. The fundamental direction of the American experimental tradition lies in a radical departure from accepted European antecedents and radical incorporation of new means from traditions of other cultures.[149]

Like one of our definitions of noise as unwanted sound, the definition of a weed is an unwanted plant. Thus experimentalists from the United States, for Yates, embraced unwanted and cast out sonorities as new materials for consideration; they were also open to, but not bound by, the traditions of Europe and other cultures. When his book was finally published in 1967, he lamented to his friend Peyton Houston that he did not stress the importance of Cage enough.

> Nothing in the book [*Twentieth Century Music*] says that the lines of the future… will go through Cage. The entire thesis is that music will go through Ives to occupy the entire field of Sound. But Cage has done more than any other composer to open up areas of sound and modes of dealing with them not previously exploited and leading directly to the computer.[150]

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[149] Peter Yates, *Twentieth Century Music: Its Evolution from the End of the Harmonic Era into the Present Era of Sound* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), 273.
[150] Crawford, 234, Letter to Houston by Yates.

Yates, however, shed plenty of light on Cage, even if he did not hand him the keys to a musical future, as he claims to have done for Ives. Yates' argument in the book was that Ives had synthesized Schoenberg's 'emancipation of dissonance' with consonance and—intriguingly—noise.

> While Schoenberg's music remained within the field consonance-dissonance-discord, Ives had shown how much could be done with this new music, made up equally of tonality, atonality, and deliberate noise.[151]

Noise had become important in Yates' formulation, and in his chapter on "Electronic and Computer Music" (chapter 31) he was quick to quote Cage's "The Future of Music: Credo" in *Silence*: "I BELIEVE THAT THE USE OF NOISE WILL CONTINUE AND INCREASE UNTIL WE REACH A MUSIC PRODUCED THROUGH THE USE OF ELECTRICAL INSTRUMENTS WHICH WILL MAKE AVAILABLE FOR MUSICAL PURPOSES ANY AND ALL SOUNDS THAT CAN BE HEARD…."[152]

In chapter two of his book, "Silence and the Field of Sound," Yates explains that music is composed of sounds and silences. He defines silence as the absence of sound, and then charts the "field of sound" into four regions using these elements: 1) Just Intonation, 2) Continuum of Fundamental Pitches, 3) White Sound, and 4) Noise.[153]

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[151] Yates, 270.
[152] Ibid., x-xv, 323.
[153] Ibid., 10-14 (illustration on 12).
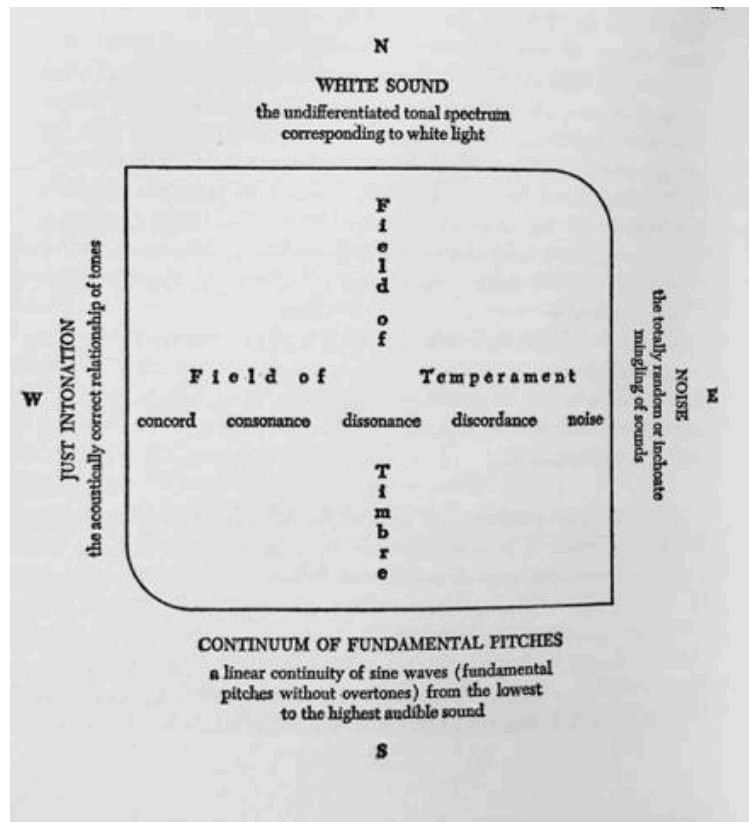
Figure 2: "The Field of Sound" (Peter Yates)

The south region represents the *continuum of fundamental pitches* described as

"a linear continuity of sine waves from the lowest to the highest audible

amplitude."[154] The north region represents *white sound* defined as "the

undifferentiated tonal spectrum, corresponding to white light." He then adds a

definition of timbre out of the north region: "The combining of fundamental

pitches with overtones." The east region is simply called *noise*, defined as "the

totally random or inchoate mingling of sounds." Finally, the west region is *just*

intonation, defined as "the acoustically correct intervallic relationship of tones."

Yates then claims that the four regions are really only two regions cleverly

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[154] Ibid., 11.

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indicated by the roundness of the corners in the upper-right and lower-left corners of his diagram. "The *continuum of fundamental pitches* [south region] and *just intonation* [west region] are contrasting expressions of the one-sound dimension: the former signifying a continuous flow of pitched sound between high and low audible dimensions; the latter signifying a series of acoustically related points derived from the overtone series…."[155] The other pair, for Yates, is related similarly: "*white sound* [north region] is the most inclusive noise, whereas *noise* [east region] is any inchoate mingling of sounds."[156] The chart and the explanation are strange, since the regions would seem to indicate that *white sound* [north region] would be the opposite of the *continuum of fundamental pitches* [south region] when in fact the two are synonymous: white sounds *means* the continuum of fundamental pitches. So north region and south region are not polar at all: perhaps a different metaphor would have been useful. West and east regions, however, come closer to representing two distinct methods of the use of the raw materials of sound represented by north and south. The east region is called *noise* and represents what Yates calls "the totally random or inchoate mingling of sounds,"[157] while the west region represents, *just intonation*, the "acoustically correct relationship of tones."[158] East and west regions are well polarized between the orderliness of the west versus the disorderly mingling of the east. Yates—clearly influenced by the American composers who were exploring tuning and temperament systems (Cowell, Partch, Harrison)—favors *just intonation* as acoustically correct. He refers to the "acoustically correct" intervals as "perfect."

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[155] Ibid., 13.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid., 12.
[158] Ibid.

What is interesting about Yates' formulation is that the north and south

regions—white sound and the continuum of fundamental pitches—are often

referred to as "*white noise*." Yates' characterization—white sound—is more

accurate, however, white sound is certainly a form of Yates' characterization of

noise as an inchoate mingling of pitches. White sound is in fact a special case of

noise: it also represents what I call sonic entropy. What is interesting about

Yates' formulation—no doubt related to the subtitle of his book, *Twentieth*

Century Music: Its Evolution from the End of the Harmonic Era into the Present

Era of Sound—is how he shows how the "harmonic era" prioritized the south to

west positions (*continuum of fundamental pitches* to *just intonation*) to what

Yates calls the "present era of sound" that prioritizes the north to east positions

(*white sound* to *noise*). He showed how Schoenberg's *emancipation of dissonance*

was a step toward the emancipation of sound in general. In Yates' chapter,

"Everything Is Admissible," he wrote:

> [T]he acoustical richness of noise provides a broad, indeterminate
> band of textual consistency which easily assimilates discord, as
> some composers have been discovering by exploration and
> experiment.
> To comprehend what is happening in music today, one must give
> equal attention to every area of the field of sound. Composers can
> no longer rely on thinking the notation or reading the score but
> must recapture the exact experience of sound across the entire
> field.[159]

Yates was a visionary in his aesthetic history of twentieth century music. Perhaps

his upbringing outside of the music academy allowed him to think so boldly, not

toward the future of music, but at its present state. From the success of his book,

Yates landed a teaching post at Rochester University the year after its

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[159] Ibid., 243. [A few paragraphs later is the famous quote that according to Yates, Schoenberg said of Cage, "He is not a composer, but an inventor—of genius."]

publication. Yates, perhaps the most important promoter of new and experimental music in twentieth century Los Angeles, helped canonize key composers in the United States in what would later be referred to as the American Mavericks.

Lawrence Morton As Director: Monday Evening Concerts

Though Yates would sometimes program future events, he officially retired his involvement as director of Evenings on the Roof in 1954 and took the name with him. The new director, Lawrence Morton, was furious with Yates for dissolving the brand. Under the leadership of Morton, the name was subsequently changed to Monday Evening Concerts (MEC) and continued to thrive. Morton and Yates were certainly not the best of friends and sometimes fought passionately over programming. Nevertheless their aims for the concert series were, for the most part, not so dissimilar. In the seventeenth season (1954) of Evenings of the Roof/Monday Evening Concerts, Morton programmed fifteen premiers, including the premier of Stravinsky's twelve-tone piece *In Memoriam Dylan Thomas* (Stravinsky had twelve premiers at Monday Evening Concerts). That season also heard old choral works by Josquin des Prez and Carlo Gesualdo. The glaring difference between the two directors was Yates' passion for American music. Yates felt that Morton's programming of more European music and less American music allowed New York to gain prestige over Los Angeles as the premier city of the American musical avant-garde. Writing implicitly to criticize Morton in the program notes for Lou Harrison's premier on January 18, 1960, Yates declared,

"There's only one thing wrong with the best American music—most of us have not taken the trouble to find out about it."[160]

Lawrence Morton's programming philosophy was that music did not have to be pretty; it only had to be interesting. He had been involved as a listener and critic of Evenings On The Roof almost from its inception. In fact, some of his criticism had to be tempered as he warmed up to Yates and company in the coming years. His passion for music and the obligations he tried to instill in listeners were loudly proclaimed in the following manifesto:

> Music has extraordinary duties to perform in these crucial times. More than ever it is needed to remind us of the magnitude and beauty of man's creative impulse. It is one of the torches of civilization that must be kept burning even if its light is temporarily dimmed by the faraway flames of homes and wheatfields ignited by incendiary bombs. It is well to consider this: that the very compositions you think are too old-fashioned for modern audiences or the pieces you think are just plain noise, with no melody, may be the very ones which have been banned from programs somewhere in war-torn Europe…. Thoughtful audiences will remember that they, as well as the performing artists, are carrying a torch for the arts. They will realize that to carry a torch for music means first of all to go to concerts, and then to work at listening, not merely to bathe in beautiful sounds. They will be grateful they still have time for listening, time for enjoying, time for studying. They will make the most of it, for they are perhaps the last free audiences to the last free artists.[161]

Morton's interest in the audience is unique in its demands because he imagines them as aesthetic *workers*. Listeners have a responsibility to listen actively (not passively by 'bathing in beautiful sounds') and their demand for an avant-garde music frees them from the allure of the bourgeoning Hollywood industry. Listening not only means contemplating the Western history of harmony through ancient music, it also means excavating meaning from the form of unmelodic

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[160] Ibid., 185, Program notes.
[161] Ibid., 248 (Morton, *Script*, October 26, 1940).

'noise'—studious and critical listening practices are the hallmarks of freedom as free listenership for Morton.

By 1965 Morton had struck a deal with the newly built Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) on Wilshire Boulevard to serve as the new venue for the Monday Evening Concerts. The new venue, which sat 600 people, not only provided Monday Evenings Concerts with a home, but it provided it the prestige of a state-of-the-art concert hall, free of charge. The concert series went from concerts at a private home to full institutionalization. LACMA would be the home for Monday Evenings Concerts for the next forty years.

In 1967 Yates was given the task of programming a few more performances for the Monday Evening Concerts series. He demonstrated his yearning for cutting edge tendencies in music and his disdain for elders who had become conservative over the years in a letter to his friend Peyton Houston:

> You may be interested to learn that, as of now, my slightly middle-aged friends who have until lately thought of themselves as the forward edge of advancing musical discovery, who marched stoutly with me in the name of Bartók, the causes of Ives and Schoenberg, the discovery of Webern, who could not entirely abandon me to Cage, are unanimously furious against me for having arranged the local appearance of my friends Mumma & Ashley from ONCE. Men and composers who believed themselves prepared to fight to the death in the cause of aesthetic freedom and modern music were stalking out in the first 15-25 minutes, enraged, outraged, glaring, uncompromising, just like the fathers, grandfathers, & g-g-fathers of musical integrity before 'em…. The sound is produced "live" on the stage, then whistled, groaned, burped, bleated, basted through circuits, filters, loops, oscillators, ring modulators, a mere toot becoming in the process an extended symphonic utterance continuing and continuing to the detriment of imagination.[162]

The all-electronic program was held on December 11, 1967 with works by two core members of the Sonic Arts Union: Robert Ashley and Gordon Mumma. The

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[162] Ibid., 231.

programming of these works demonstrated the openness and seriousness Yates had for listening not only to the newest music, but also by the newest tendencies of young composers affected by the latest technologies in sound.

From 1968 Lawrence Morton had taken a leave of absence due to poor health and by 1970 he retired as director of Monday Evening Concerts. The series continued through the 1970s and 1980s by a few different impassioned directors and had continued to be an important source of chamber music in Los Angeles. Though Monday Evening Concerts had a history of financial difficulties, by the 1980s the organization had racked up considerable debt and had to sign the name over to LACMA in 1985.

In 2005 LACMA announced that it would no longer support the Monday Evening Concerts. Justin Urcis was then given the task of directing the series. He immediately contracted the new REDCAT (Roy and Edna Disney Cal Arts Theater) and Zipper Concert Hall across the street at the Colburn School in Downtown Los Angeles. Monday Evening Concerts continues to program twentieth and twenty-first century music at the Zipper Concert Hall.[163]

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[163] "American Ensemble,"
http://www.mondayeveningconcerts.org/press/files/200708AmericanEnsemble.pdf (August 2007).

II. Los Angeles Free Music Society: Since 1973

Evenings on the Roof and Monday Evening Concerts (MEC) seemingly lies in stark contrast to the culture and activities surrounding the Los Angeles Free Music Society (LAFMS).[164] The former consisted of a collective of professional and amateur musicians playing a mix of old classical music and newer twentieth century styles, while the latter consists almost entirely of amateurs (a few members—Ace Farren Ford in Christian Death, Rick Snyder in Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band, Dennis Duck in the Dream Syndicate, Ton Recchion and Fredrik Nilsen in Bpeople, and Don Bolles in the Germs and 45 Grave—would later find varying degrees of success in different rock bands). The idea of the composer-performer dominates the LAFMS scene, and has a correlate in the developments of the American maverick tradition of composers. For a rock band or many jazz bands (though certainly not all) the composer-performer format comes more naturally than the romantic image of the solitary composer who writes large ensemble works. Evenings on the Roof and MEC had performances by Henry Cowell, John Cage, Robert Ashley, and Gordon Mumma. These four American composers also tended to perform their own works, and the latter three

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[164] Nearly all of the research for the Los Angeles Free Music Society comes from the website called *LAFMS—The Book* on a wordpress.com blog and the liner notes from *LAFMS: The Lowest Form of Music* (box set). The blog consists mostly of band biographies, short memories, a few unofficial interviews, copies of a few printed interviews for *The Wire* magazine, a few reviews of certain records, and liner notes for certain records. The most historically rich essays on the LAFMS were written by Rick Potts in a collection called "Free Ears." So far there are three "Free Ears" essays. They are well-written but not well-edited and contain many inaccurate dates. Other materials come from rare zines, like *Blorp Essette*, my official interviews with Joe Potts, Joseph Hammer, and Don Bolles, and some informal correspondence with Rick Potts, Tom Recchion, and Ace Farren Ford via Facebook. I was given digital copies of the early *Blorp Essette* zines, *LightBulb*, *Blub Krad* , and *Darker Skratcher*, for this project.
http://lafms.wordpress.com/.
David Keenan conducted several interviews with members of the LAFMS for *the Wire* that became part of the website *LAFMS—the Book.* Keenan's interviews for his article in the October 2010 issue of *The Wire* are published in full in *LAFMS—The Book*. (Keenan, Smegma 2006)
David Keenan, "The Los Angeles Free Music Society," *The Wire* 270 (October 2010): 40-46.

used electronics in their work. The composer-performer working with electronics is an important aesthetic that connects some of the avant-garde composers of the Evenings on the Roof and MEC concert series with the members of the LAFMS. Lukas Foss—who took over Schoenberg's position as professor of composition at UCLA in the 1950s, gave many performances for Evenings on the Roof and for Monday Evening Concerts—had written about the connection between electronic music and the rise of the composer-performer in an essay called "The Changing Composer-Performer Relationship." He began his essay:

> On the heels of the invaluable discovery of what is commonly referred to as electronic music there followed a diametrically opposed movement endearing to draw the performer closer in the composer's laboratory, to build performance at times "into" the composition.[165]

Foss then derided the false binary between the romanticism of the solitary composer and the obedient performer: "The methodical division of labor (I write it, you play it)."[166] According to Foss, the ascent of electronic music had two important consequences for twentieth century music: first it freed the historical limitations of pitch and rhythm, and secondly, it ushered in a new era of performance.

> Electronic music showed up the limitations of live performance, the limitation of traditional tone production, the restrictiveness of a rhythm forever bound to meter and bar line, notation tied to a system of counting. Electronic music introduced untried possibilities, and in so doing presented a challenge, [and] shocked live music out of its inertia.[167]

The new era, thought Foss, would foster more collective music making; thus he founded an Improvisation Chamber Ensemble in 1957 with himself as composer-

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[165] Lukas Foss, "The Changing Composer-Performer Relationship: A Monologue and a Dialogue," *Perspectives in New Music* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1963): 45.
[166] Ibid., 45.
[167] Ibid., 47.

performer. Collective music making while improvising with electronics was at the core of the early LAFMS.

The LAFMS has not kept consistent records or histories of their activities, and in some years the collective was all but dormant. Yet enough international buzz and influence had wafted their way so that London would host the collective in a three-day retrospective in October 2010. The passage below by Joe Potts introduces people to a collection of interviews, biographies, and memoirs of the past events of the LAFMS while encouraging participants and audiences to write their own memories as well. The blog contains some of the most important documents on the LAFMS, especially Rick Potts' "Free Ears" essays.

> This blog is an attempt to put together text for an eventual book
> about the LAFMS. True to our traditions, this project is communal.
> So as an attempt to get the ball rolling I have posted some
> interviews and articles from various sources. The idea is that you
> can paste in your thoughts, memories philosophies on anything
> that might have to do with the LAFMS as a comment. Just stick it
> in whatever category you want to.

Figure 3: Flier - LAMFS in London

London hosted and funded the travel of several of the key members of the LAFMS in a retrospective commemorating their 11-CD box set—*The Lowest Form of Music*—itself a retrospective of their work since 1975. The London retrospective was organized by scholars David Toop and Edwin Pouncey, and included the core members of the LAFMS and some of the artists from the first wave of the Japanese noise scene.

1. Genesis of the LAFMS

Le Forte Four

The origins of the Los Angeles Free Music Society can be traced back to the merging of the Potts brothers—Rick, Joe, and later Tom—and what soon became the Chapman family—Chip Chapman and Susan Farthing. In the fall of 1972[168] Rick Potts met Chapman on the first day of his freshman year in high school band class. Chapman was a senior. The teacher was asking the students what instrument they would play for the year. R. Potts was convinced to play tenor saxophone; Chapman refused to play "spit instruments."[169] When it came time for him to announce his instrument, the class erupted in laughter: "Electronic music synthesizer," said Chapman. A few months later he had managed to coerce San Gabriel High School to purchase an Arp Odyssey synthesizer, an Echoplex tape delay effect, an amplifier and to hire a new teacher to teach electronic music techniques.

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[168] Rick Potts, "Free Ears," in *LAFMS—The Book* (n.d.), https://lafms.wordpress.com/free-ears-part-1/ (accessed August 10, 2013). This citation will now be referred to as "Free Ears 1."
Rick remembers his meeting with Chip Chapman taking place in the fall of 1973. Chip says that he was recording with the Potts brothers during the summer of 1973. Chapman's facebook page says that he began classes at Cal Arts in 1973, which means he would have been a senior in high school during the Fall of 1972. I suspect Chapman is correct. LAFMS At The Block also cites LAFMS beginning in 1972.
[169] Joe Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

Figure 4: (Left) Arp Odyssey synthesizer, (Right) Echoplex tape delay.

R. Potts immediately took to Chapman and the two became friends. Between the school's new acquisition and Chapman's use of the recording equipment at Pasadena City College, he produced a work that gained him acceptance into the fledgling electronic music program at California Institute of the Art (Cal Arts) for the fall of 1973.

Morton Subotnick had helped establish the electronic music program at Cal Arts in 1969, just two years after his seminal *Silver Apples of the Moon* was released. James Tenney, a pioneer in computer music, joined the faculty in 1970 just after finishing his monumental piece *For Ann (Rising)*. Cal Arts was establishing itself as a school for experimental music with students like Chapman. By the end of the school year in 1973 Chapman was making music with Rick and

Joe Potts using synthesizers, amplified sounds, and recordings. Their first performance was a multimedia event at the end of the school year before Chapman graduated high school under the one-off band name Captain Chapman and the Fifth Battalion.[170]

"Chip always had big, fun ideas. He's smart and gets ideas and he goes ahead and does 'em. He has a way of making things happen that you didn't realize you could do."[171] In the summer of 1973 Chapman, R. Potts, and J. Potts played a YMCA concert with the Patients. R. Potts recalled, "We could barely play our instruments and I didn't really know any songs, but that didn't stop us."[172] During practice the musicians engaged in a mass argument that was recorded onto tape. J. Potts recalled the incident with a hint of embarrassment: "One time in thirty-five years I raise my voice to my brother and it ends up on a record."[173] That tape, dubbed "They Are Asleep," became source material for their first official recording, and would also become source material for several other recordings. For their first project the collective assembled two tracks on tape and sent it to an electronic music festival in Hovikkoden, Norway. The two tracks were "They Are Asleep" and "Ka-Bella-Binsky-Bungo." Chapman called the collective responsible for the tape the 'East Los Angeles Free Music Society.' The Norway tape marked the first usage of the 'society' moniker, but it was a name designed to call attention to itself. At first the tape was accepted to the festival, but it was the master tape and the collective had no copy. In 1974 Chapman wrote to Harold (Hal) Clark in Norway who was organizing the festival to have the tape returned so that the Society could use the tape recording for a new project.

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[170] Joe Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[171] Rick Potts, "Free Ears 1."
[172] Rick Potts, "Free Ears 1."
[173] Joe Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

R. Potts and J. Potts recall that at that point Clark decided to actually listen to the tape and then rejected the submission. It came with a message from Clark that would infuriate, motivate, and spurn the collective as it had been at that point, and the future 1976 collective:

> "*Free ears and minds are one thing, but what about aesthetics?*"[174]
> (Hal Clark)

By all accounts the name was a joke and was used as a marketing device (and later as a loose 'society') by the pioneering teenagers.

> I didn't know we were a group [Chapman, R. Potts, J. Potts]. I was just having fun making sounds. Sure he [Chapman] had sent that tape to that electronic tape festival in Norway as "The East Los Angeles Free Music Society" but that was a joke, right? The name was supposed to get them to take us seriously and it worked… temporarily.
> (Rick Potts)[175]

> We use 'Society' loosely. It started as a way for us (later called Le Forte Four) to sound more legit when sending in a tape to an international electronic music festival in Norway in 1974 or so. Chip Chapman figured a fancy sounding name would help sneak our submission in so he labeled the tape as being by 'the East Los Angeles Free Music Society'. It was kind of a joke because we were really just 3 or 4 teenage weirdos. This was a couple years before we used the shortened name for a larger collective. The collective was built on camaraderie and we shared gear and resources, pooled funds and ideas for projects and shared talents. The plan was to put on shows and put out records.
> (Rick Potts)[176]

> We thought of it [LAFMS] as only a ridiculous name.
> (Joe Potts)[177]

> The "Society" name was a joke that stuck.
> (Fredrik Nilsen)[178]

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[174] Hal Clark quoted from a letter to the LAFMS. I have asked Rick Potts to find the letter, since he said he had recently come across it. The letter is quoted in the booklet to *LAFMS: The Lowest Form of Music*, 7-8.
[175] Rick Potts, "Free Ears 1."
[176] Rick Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[177] Joe Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[178] Fredrik Nilsen interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

How did Chapman come up with the idea of the East Los Angeles Free Music

Society? What did Chapman intend by that lofty name? What is *free music* to

teenagers living in the early 1970s in the midst of Frank Zappa's "freak out"

music experiments and the free jazz (and free improvisation) movement? In his

interview with *The Wire* he elaborates:

> The Great Society was the political name for a bunch of legislation
> in the 60s that was, for many people, transformational. But it was
> also invisible, made of ideas more than mortar. So a Free Music
> Society, invisible but supportive seemed a good fit to my teenage
> mind. As things progressed, it sort of took on many meanings….
>
> I think I coined the term LAFMS. It evolved out of a name I was
> playing around with as part of a concept to start a recording studio,
> actually. That was a path not taken, as things turned out. Free
> music had at least a double meaning, possibly more. First, it was
> freedom to do your own thing; second, it was free from money and
> the biz. Of course, it wasn't always true to either of those lofty
> concepts, but somehow the name stuck.[179]

Free music, free ears, free minds—the collective gained momentum.

1974-1975 was very productive for the collective: "That entire school year

we recorded on most Sunday nights."[180] They spent time patching synthesizers

and recording improvisation sessions with microphones, tape, and turntables

while exploring sound in the electroacoustic world. In 1974 Chip Chapman with

Rick and Joe Potts developed a ritual. Every Friday, Chapman would return to

Pasadena from Valencia, California where Cal Arts was located, and the Potts

brothers would drive him back up to Valencia on Sunday with their equipment. In

Room B-303 they would play with the professional toys: Moog synthesizers,

Buchla synthesizers, a big mixing board with joysticks for quadraphonic spatial

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[179] Chip Chapman interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[180] Rick Potts, "Free Ears 1."

effects, giant amplifiers and speakers, and two fancy Ampex four-track tape machines.

Figure 5: Rick Potts (foreground) and Tom Potts (background) with Buchla modular synthesizers in the Electronics Studio at California Institute of the Arts.

Chapman had discovered a flexi-disc record in a copy of *FILE Magazine*, described by R. Potts as a neo-Dada magazine designed to look like *LIFE Magazine*. The flexi-disc featured tracks from *Meet the Residents* by the Residents. The Residents are an experimental band from San Francisco that were not signed to a record label: they put out the flexi-disc themselves on their own label—Ralph Records—that was released as a flexi-disc for *FILE* in February 1974. The idea of funding one's own record was unheard of at that time, and it represents an early example of DIY (do-it-yourself) culture. Chapman and the Potts brothers were immediately inspired to follow the example of the Residents. They wrote to Hal Clark for their tape submission to be returned; Clark returned the tape promptly. They also took several of the recordings made since the summer of 1973 and spliced and edited them into compositions. Funded by the

Potts brothers' parents, they then called Gold Star Studios to get the final edit

mastered by a recording engineer. The result was their first record called *Bikini*

Tennis Shoes released in 1975. For the new record Chapman decided to change

the name of their collective from the East Los Angeles Free Music Society to the

Dada-esque "Le Forte Four"—L-44 for short. R. Potts pondered the name.

> Chip tells us the new name of our group is Le Forte Four but I don't
> quite get it. Lay Fort-tay Four. Forte means loud or the thing
> someone does best, like, "his forte is piano" or "piano forte". It has
> the fancy French 'le' which is silly and also is mock pretentious. It
> also sounds like 44 (a film noir or western gun reference?). I
> decide it's a great name but I didn't know what to think. I
> wondered about what having a name meant. It seemed too
> serious. I was hoping we could still have fun 'experimenting' and it
> wouldn't turn out like the Temple Beth Torah show. It seems that I
> didn't need to worry about Le Forte Four being too serious.

Not only is 'le' a French word, 'forte' is an Italian word, and 'four' is an English

word. The interlingual name had all the markings of hip self-indulgence with an

ironic cheeky smile. R. Potts feared that Le Forte Four was too close to an actual

band name in comparison to the lofty East Los Angeles Free Music Society. But

his anxieties were quelled as the trajectory of the group veered in the same

direction: R. Potts still had plenty of fun. Chapman then salvaged the society

name by making it the name of the record label—minus "East"—so *Bikini Tennis*

Shoes was released by the Los Angeles Free Music Society some time in 1975.

The LAFMS earns its S; *Poo-Bah Records becomes headquarters*.

> *The importance of Poo-Bah Records, at least to Smegma and the LAFMS,*
> *cannot be overstated*.
> (Ju Suk Reet Meate (Smegma))[181]

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[181] Ju Suk Reet Meate interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

Tom Recchion, who was working at Poo-Bah Records, was an ally to experimental music, and unbeknownst to the newly formed Le Forte Four also organized a loose collective of friends for after-hours experimental "freak-outs" at the store. R. and J. Potts reasoned that Recchion would make a good candidate to listen to *Bikini Tennis Shoes*. "I remember Joe giving me a copy of the record when I ran into him at an art opening by his brother-in-law, artist John Schroeder. He was carrying a box of the records. I took it home and devoured it."[182] Recchion's approval was a big deal. He not only worked at an important record store that specialized in jazz, improvisation, experimental, and avant-garde music, he was a trusted music connoisseur to its customers and could sell experimental music to a desiring public. "Tom got *Bikini Tennis Shoes*. He GOT it," R. Potts recalled: "Soon, the Los Angeles Free Music Society started germinating in Tom's head. Why not create a society to go with the fictitious name?"[183] Tom Recchion remembers:

> The name came from L-44's [Le Forte Four's] first record *Bikini Tennis Shoes*. In the liner notes I noticed they'd submitted a piece of tape music to a stuffy electronic music festival in Norway and were rejected. I remember talking to them about really starting this group as an actual collective. I'd seen the Residents make their own records, L-44 did it and I was aware of lots of independent labels, so why not form our own label that served all our needs?[184]

Recchion was already the ringleader to a group of rag-tag experimentalists that included Smegma, Ace and Duce, and Recchion's own group, the Two Who Do Duets, with Harold Schroeder. Jay Green, owner of Poo-Bah, trusted the young employee and his coterie of Los Angeles mavericks.

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182 Tom Recchion interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
183 Rick Potts, "Free Ears 1."
184 Tom Recchion interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

> When the store moved to a new location on street level above the old place we were lucky to have a huge back room. It was there that we started having late night free form jam sessions. Dennis [Duck], Ace [Farren Ford], Ju Suk [Reet Meate; Rick Stewart] and the Smegmoids [other members of Smegma], Hal [Harold Schroeder], Fredrik [Nilsen] and many, many others would hang out around closing time and then retire to the 'back room'. The water bed had now moved back there. I bought an old Coca-Cola machine and an upright piano and Jay [Green: store owner] let me store them there.[185]

One informal group gave itself a lofty name and absorbed other groups with similar aesthetics: And that was how the LAFMS went from a band collective, to a record label, to a collective that could actually pass itself off as a *society*.

Smegma

Smegma began on November 19, 1973 after a potent jam session at 361 Adena Street in Pasadena. Jerry Bishop, who would later become "president of the LAFMS," suggested the name while they were listening to French prog-rock band Magma. They knew that *smegma*—a combination of oily secretions with exfoliated skin cells found usually in male genitalia (but also in female genitalia), and originating from the Greek word for '*soap*'—was a term that was not near to the public's imagination. The vulgar interpretation of the band name paralleled their crude and vulgar sounds, yet the older hygienic interpretation (soap) implied a cleansing of the aural palette. The collective up to then consisted of Rick Stewart (Ju-Suk-Reet-Meate), Cheez-It-Ritz, Brad Hostetler (Chucko Fats), Dennis Mehaffey (Dennis Duck), Amy De Wolfe (Amazon Bambi, Erph-Puss) and Cheesebro. Mike Lastra (Dr. Id) was also nearby and would play on later records.

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[185] Tom Recchion interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

Rick Stewart (Ju-Suk-Reet-Meate) had a long history with recording

technologies, and his childhood curiosities sowed the seeds for his collective.

Stewart remembers playing with a Craig 212 three-inch reel-to-reel tape machine

at age nine back in 1961.[186]

> [F]or me personally, I feel like I was part of that generation that
> got the first fun tape decks. When I was nine we got these little
> tape decks that had 3-inch reels and these little microphones. It
> was the first time children could possibly be included in recording
> techniques. So from the time I was nine years old I was making
> tapes and obsessing over them. Somehow I caught that fever.
> Some people have that fever that *you want to make a good tape*.
> It's something that fires you up: a good recording.[187]
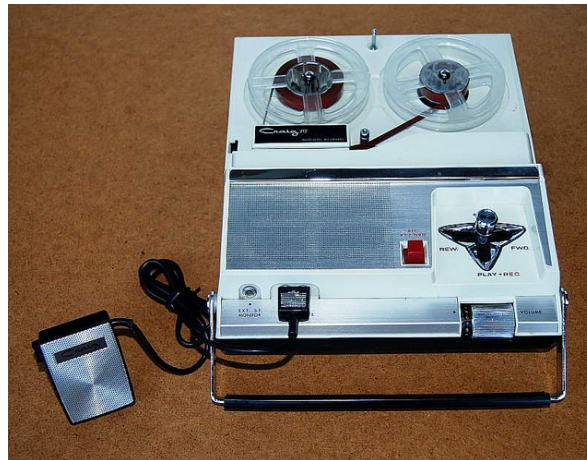
Figure 6: Craig 212 reel-to-reel tape machine

The cliché of the rising middle class in urban centers like Los Angeles is

represented in Stewart's story. In 1961—only ten years after the founding of the

Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR) studio in Cologne, Germany (functional in

1951)—small consumer-grade reel-to-reel tape machines became available in the

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[186] David Keenan, "Smegma," *The Wire*, August 2006, 34-42.
[187] David Verbuč, "Ju Suk Reet Meate (Eric Stewart) interviewed by David Verbuč (DJ Grafiti)" (radio show), transcribed by author, September 2, 2013, http://www.radiostudent.si/glasba/dj-grafiti/smegma (accessed October 21, 2013).

United States. Stewart treated the new technology as a play-toy. Ten years later his experiments would inform his stance as a(n) (non)artist-musician.

The Smegma clan was in the orbit of Poo-Bah Records and had befriended Tom Recchion, the young aficionado of experimental musics in Pasadena. "I will always remember Tom Recchion demanding that I buy these records I knew nothing about for two dollars, insisting that I would never regret it."[188] The Smegma clan had moved to Oregon in the Fall of 1975, just a few months before the 'birth' of the LAFMS. While in Oregon they heard Le Forte Four's first record, *Bikini Tennis Shoes*. "I was immediately struck with the similar non-musical-personal aspects [of the record]."[189] Smegma joined the LAFMS clan through their inclusion in Joe Potts' pet project, *I.D. Art #2* released in 1976. By then, Smegma, the fourth band of the LAFMS, resided far from Los Angeles. After 1975 Stewart sometimes returned to Los Angeles and jammed with his colleagues in Le Forte Four, Ace and Duce (Ace Farren Ford joined Smegma in 1974), the Doo-Dooettes, and the extended clan of artist and musician collaborators and friends in the porous LAFMS and Poo-Bah Records scene.

Ace and Duce

Of the four founding bands of the early LAFMS, Ace and Duce had the shortest run, the fewest records, and the least complete history of a collective that famously lacks historical documentation. Ace and Duce began in 1971 as an improvisation duo.[190] "We were street buskers and we made a lot of private recordings."[191] Many of those recordings are unreleased or lost. The full name,

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[188] Ju Suk Reet Meate interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[189] Ju Suk Reet Meate interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[190] Ace Farren Ford, personal correspondence via Facebook chat (September 2, 2013).
[191] Ace Farren Ford, Facebook chat.

seldom used, was 'The Ace of Space and the Duce of Juice.' When Steve Rietta was eleven years old a friend who played guitar started calling him 'Ace.' The name stuck, and by 1971 everyone called him 'Ace.'[192,193] Robert Pfaucht became 'Duce'[194] but also went by 'Zoot Horn Rebert the Pevert' and then later 'The Professor' or simply, 'The Pro.' Never far from the duo was Rick Snyder who struck a lasting friendship with Ace since they were about ten years old. Ace and Duce were part of the scene surrounding Poo-Bah Records since the early 1970s along with his friend Rick Snyder, Tom Recchion, and Eric Stewart of Smegma.

So what *was* Ace and Duce? It seems that Ace and Duce was a duo-type band of many possible pairings orbiting Poo-Bah Records. Ace in fact performed with many others in the Poo-Bah Records circle. For the first LAFMS show Ace and Duce performed as a quartet with Snyder and Dennis Duck on drums. Furthermore, the output of Ace and Duce was very low: only two tracks. Their first recording was a thirty-second spot on Joe Potts' first compilation record *I.D. Art #2* (1976) called "Dogs Are Barking" that was actually mislabeled, since the recording is actually a solo performance by Rick Snyder. Their other recording was almost six minutes long, grafted onto the CD version of *Blorp Esette v.2* (not found on the original double-LP from 1980; the CD was available in 1999). Ace confirms:

> We did not perform many times as a group, nor did we record as
> much as we got sidetracked by the *Blorp Esette* projects, Duce
> wasn't as crazed about music projects as I after awhile, and he was

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[192] Rick Snyder interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[193] How Ace became Ace Farren Ford. "When I was in the Child Molesters, I wanted to lose 'Ace.' I chose the alias 'Farren Forceps,' intended to be a pun-like masculine variation of 'Farrah Fawcett.' It only semi-worked because everyone called me 'Ace Farren Forceps.' When the Child Molesters broke up… I was briefly in a band called 'The Ford Edsels.' They had a peculiar gimmick that every member of the band was known as 'Edsel Ford,' so through the power of fusion and the legal system, I legally became Ace Farren Ford." (Ace Farren Ford, Facebook chat.)
[194] 'Duce' is sometimes misspelled as 'Deuce.'

more an inspiration for what I was doing than actually collaborating.[195]

The lack of output by Ace and Duce was probably the reading we should accord the statement below by Doo-Dooettes member Fredrik Nilsen:

> The LAFMS at its inception was a product of the convergence of three or four independent groups on the east side of Los Angeles, each group creating experimental sounds without really being aware of the existence of the others. Each were coming from differing backgrounds and approaches. I identify the four groups as being Le Forte Four, Ace and Duce, Smegma, and the DooDooettes. We found each other through the portal of Poobah Records in Pasadena.[196]

Nilsen spells out four bands, but mentions that there were "three or four" of them. The hesitance must come at the low output of Ace and Duce. Ace quickly absorbed himself into the Smegma clan (though he never moved to Portland) and collaborated in other projects with Tom Recchion and the Potts brothers. By 1976 he involved himself with the Los Angeles punk scene with his band the Child Molesters with Rick Snyder and Reese Hercules, and then had a long affiliation with Los Angeles death-rock pioneers Eva O and Rozz Williams of the band Christian Death.

Ace was a social person in the 1970s and made many connections, dressed well, and was considered suspiciously cool. In retrospect he thought of himself as 'obnoxious,' but Ace was still an energetic teenager during these early years. A recurring theme was that Ace was intimidating. A young Rick Potts recalls meeting Ace and Duce at the Spaghetti Works show, the first official LAFMS performance.

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[195] Ace Farren Ford, Facebook chat.
[196] Fredrik Nilsen interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

> We met Ace and also Deuce [sic]. Ace wore his light red hair long and his eyes intense. He was devilish. Big Deuce was quiet while Ace talked. He was friendly enough but he was also a bit little frightening [sic]. Deuce didn't talk. He usually went by the name 'the Professor' or more often 'the Pro'. The fact he didn't speak made me nervous. It was somehow intimidating, but back then I was pretty easily intimidated. Both wore vintage hats, looked cool and acted cooler. They were somewhat comical yet menacing in a 70's Brier Fox and Brier Bear meets Fritz the Cat sort of way.[197]

Joe Potts similarly said:

> Ace and Duce intimidated us with their musical proficiency, their fedoras and their cute young girlfriends. They were Beefheart 4.0 (a new generation.) Ace introduced us to the musette[198] at that concert.[199]

Dennis Duck, who joined Ace and Duce on drums with Rick Snyder for the Spaghetti Works show had a similar recollection:

> As for Ace and Duce, I had seen Ace and Robert (Duce) often at Poo-Bah Records. They were frequent customers and hanger-outers. They were always dressed in an outrageous manner, and I remember being a little intimidated by them but also fascinated and curious about them. I think Tom must have introduced me to Ace initially. We became friends and eventually he asked me to join the band, which then also included Rick Snyder, who would later play bass with Captain Beefheart. While we all love Beefheart, Ace was known around Poo-Bah to be the hardcore Beefheart fanatic and the music we played at that time reflected that.[200]

Despite the initial impression as an intimidating cool guy, Ace made friends easily within the Poo-Bah scene and became involved with many collaborative projects over the years.

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[197] Rick Potts, "Free Ears 2" in *LAFMS—The Book* (n.d.), https://lafms.wordpress.com/free-ears-part-2/ (accessed August 10, 2013).
[198] The "musette" was actually a Chinese *suona*, a double-reed Chinese shawm-like instrument. Ace verified that his inspiration came from free jazz saxophonist Dewey Redman and Don Vliet (Captain Beefheart) who both played the instrument. Redman would refer to the suona as the 'musette.' (Personal correspondence via Facebook).
[199] Joe Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[200] Dennis Duck interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

The Doo-Dooettes

The Doo-Dooettes (sometimes *Ettes*) were one of the (three or) four bands that represent the early pillars of the LAFMS. The origins of their name came from a duo describing themselves as *The Two Who Do Duets*. Originally these two were Tom Recchion and Harold Schroeder and they began in March 1975. Recchion and Schroeder rented an 800 square foot office space as their studio for sixty-five dollars a month in the rundown "Raymond Building" at 35 South Raymond Avenue in Old Town Pasadena. "We were practically the only people in the deserted building, so we had the run of the place."[201] Other artists followed suit, including Chip Chapman, Paul McCarthy, Phranc, and Anton Kaprow (Allan Kaprow's son). Schroeder played a Steiner-Parker Synthacon synthesizer while Recchion played drums and other percussion and a newly acquired Farfisa organ.

Figure 7: Steiner-Parker Synthacon

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[201] Recchion, "Tom on Harold N' Stuff" in booklet to *The Lowest Form of Music*, 49.

Figure 8: Farfisa Organ (not the model Recchion used)

The Two Who Do Duets actually only performed one show before their transformation to the multi-tet Doo-Dooettes. The performance took place at a church in Pasadena for the devotees of dancer and feminist Isadora Duncan. Recchion wrote:

> As we played they'd do these falling flower routines and were moving wildly all over the place. After two improvisations they came up to us and said, "We like what you're doing, but can't you do something with a beat to it?" I confessed that we really didn't work that way. They shrugged and went on dancing like weeping willows.[202]

That was their first and only show in that incarnation. They soon added Juan Gomez in the Fall of 1975 and changed the name to the 'Doo-Dooettes' to memorialize their origins in a very Dada-esque way. By January 1976 Dennis Duck was added on drums, just before the first show of the LAFMS on the Chinese New Year with Le Forte Four and Ace and Duce, also known as the

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[202] Recchion, "Tom on Harold N' Stuff," 49.

Spaghetti Works show. Though a quartet at the time, the Doo-Dooettes played

the Spaghetti Works show as a series of duets between the different members

until the final improvisation with its full membership. After the first show Fredrik

Nilsen was added to the Doo-Dooettes line-up and played the second show. After

the second show Harold Schroeder left the group and moved to Santa Monica on

the West side of Los Angeles and seemed to have disappeared.
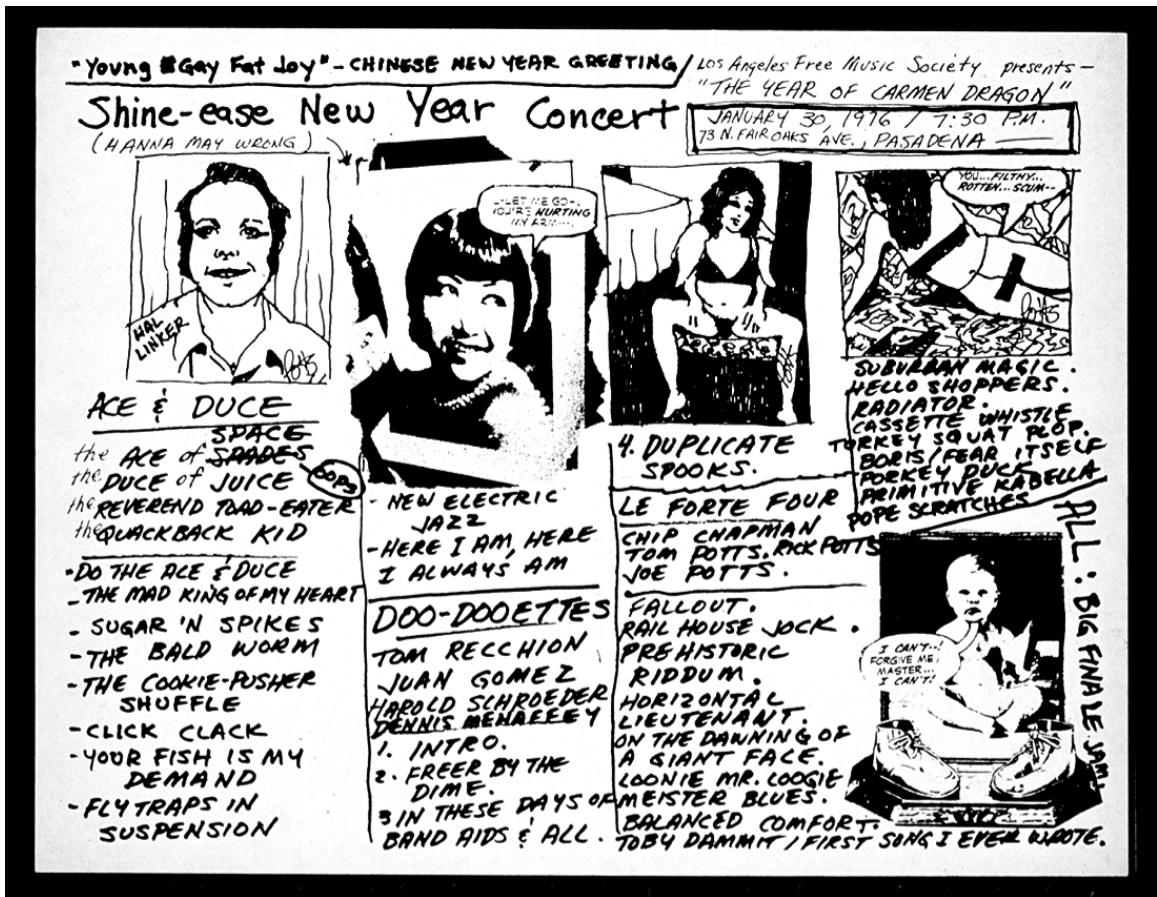
Figure 9: Spaghetti Works Concert, January 1, 1976.

Recchion was the wise sage behind the counter at Poo-Bah Records in

Pasadena. The accounts of his sales savvy are themselves the stuff of legend. He

recommended records to his local coterie of musicians and to his regular

customers as well. He was in charge of buying import records: prog rock, krautrock, experimental and free improvisation. "During the day I would talk people into buying all sorts of 'weird' music. I could sell thirty copies of the latest Derek Bailey record no problem."[203] Poo-Bah Records also sold cheap records for under one dollar that were often scoured by young collectors and the throng of experimental musicians that hung out at the record store. Recchion relished the music he played for the store on the fancy sound system provided, and enjoyed records like Terry Riley's *A Rainbow In Curved Air* as the sounds bounced from left to right speaker. He was also fascinated by the Obscure Records series put out by Brian Eno. These records showcased Hugh Davies, David Toop, John Cage, Brian Eno, and others. One of Recchion's early listening experiences with records came from an unusual source: Disney's *Chilling Thrilling Sounds of the Haunted House*. Side A featured a woman narrating scary stories accompanied by various sounds. Side B had no narrator, but had a list of short tracks with mostly descriptive titles like, "Screams and Groans," "Thunder, Lightning, and Rain," "A Collection of Creaks," "Cat Fight," "Fuses and Explosions," "A Collection of Crashes," and "Things in Space." These kinds of records prepared Recchion for avant-garde musics. "When I heard musique concrète I realized I was already geared up for the language that those composers were using. The context had just shifted."[204] He had memorized the record and could sing along with them. In other words, he had developed his ear to listen to the subtleties of timbres and could use his voice to imitate them.

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[203] Tom Recchion, "Epiphanies," *LAFMS—The Book* (n.d), https://lafms.wordpress.com/tom-recchion-epiphanies/ (accessed August 20, 2013).
[204] Recchion interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

Juan Gomez joined the Two Who Do Duets in the Fall of 1975, thus causing the group to change its name to the Doo-Dooettes. Juan would play guitar, flute, percussion, keyboard instruments, and of course, whatever was necessary. He formed The Monitors with Dennis Duck in 1976 after the two had fallen in love with the LA punk scene. He also played bass in AIRWAY and was involved in many of the Doo-Dooettes' spin-off groups.

Dennis Mehaffey, known as Dennis Duck, is a drummer who has played for many bands since the 1970s. His most successful band was the Dream Syndicate from 1981 to 1989, though there has been a recent reunion in 2012. Duck was in the Poo-Bah Records orbit, and Recchion had recruited him to join the Doo-Dooettes in January 1976. He played drums with the Doo-Dooettes *and* Ace and Duce at the Spaghetti Works show that year. He also played in Joe Potts' AIRWAY, Smegma, and some of the Doo-Dooettes' spin-off groups like El Trio Primero, Foundation Boo, the Fine Art Dumpsters, the Square Haircuts, Paul Is Dead, and the Monitors (not to be confused with Monitor, Steve Thomsen's band (Solid Eye)). He lived with Rick Stewart before Smegma's departure to Portland in Fall 1975, and almost moved with them. His interests started with experimental jazz and rock until he met Recchion.

> For me, Tom Recchion was the catalyst that inspired so many of us to be adventurous and curious and excited about new music. I remember so clearly my first meeting with Tom. I had seen a Pink Floyd special on PBS…. Tom showed me their section in the store and suggested that, if I liked Pink Floyd, I might also like "Song of the Youths" by Stockhausen and "The Delusion of the Fury" by Harry Partch. Tom and I had become instant friends. That was a turning point for me musically. I had never heard anything like those albums and from that point on I began a journey of discovery into avant garde music and, more importantly, a life-long friendship with Tom. It would be impossible to name all the wonderful music Tom introduced us to: everything from Can to Captain Beefheart, John Cage, Henry Cow, Iannis Xenakis, Roxy

Music and Brian Eno, Derek Bailey, La Monte Young, The Velvet Underground, Jimi Hendrix….[205]

Duck is a rock drummer with a strong footing in free improvisation and the experimental side of things that somehow coexisted with *and* ushered in the Los Angeles punk and new wave moments of the mid to late 1970s. In 1977 he put out a solo record titled *Dennis Duck Goes Disco* on LAFMS Records.

Fredrik Nilsen and Tom Recchion had met as adolescents at a Halloween party in 1967. Nilsen says they bonded immediately over the new Jimi Hendrix record that had just been released in the US, and both of them knew it intimately: "from that day forward we were best friends."[206] By 1971 they had discovered Jay Green's brand new store, Poo-Bah Records, and not long after that Recchion found employment there. Nilsen and Recchion scoured the store for the latest music they could find.

> [Recchion] schooled us in the wonders of Can, Syrinx, Terry Riley, Henry Cow, The Stooges, Cecil Taylor, Mauricio Kagel, Art Ensemble of Chicago, Robbie Basho, Guru-Guru, Han Bennink, Derek Bailey, etc, in an endless stream. Soon we were gathering after hours in the back room having listening parties and playing music together late into the night.[207]

Nilsen watched in awe at the first LAFMS gathering: the Spaghetti Works. He took photographs of the Doo-Dooettes—featuring Recchion, Schroeder, Gomez, and Duck—and his highly esteemed Smegma. Not long after that show Nilsen was asked to join the Doo-Dooettes on bass, reel-to-reel tape, and later on the instrument of his invention, the cross-string guitar.

> I was so in awe of what they accomplished in that concert. Tom had a studio at 35 South Raymond building in Pasadena right by

[205] Dennis Duck interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[206] Fredrik Nilsen interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[207] Nilsen interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

Schroeder's studio, Le Forte Four were in that building too. I would drop in all the time and play, and organically worked into the group and they asked me to join. In my mind it was like, WOW, I've been asked to join the greatest group in the world! I was totally stoked.[208]

With Nilsen, the Doo-Dooettes became a quintet. These five were the basic line up, though for a short time Nilsen had left the Doo-Dooettes and Lee Ray joined as a guitarist, but soon Ray left and Nilsen returned. The Doo-Dooettes' 'final show'—at least before a long hiatus—was a duet between Nilsen and Recchion in the Spring of 1984.

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[208] Nilsen interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

2. First Shows; First Collective Recordings

Joe Potts handed Tom Recchion a copy of their first record, *Bikini Tennis Shoes*
by the East Los Angeles Free Music Society at an art opening. After Recchion took
the record home and listened to it, he realized that he and his friends who were
experimenting afterhours at Poo-Bah Records were doing something similar.
Recchion read the liner notes and was inspired by the idea of the "East Los
Angeles Free Music Society." Recchion talked to J. and R. Potts and Chapman
about actually making a society out of the joke name. Thus he was instrumental
in forming the LAFMS. Rick Potts put it concisely: "The name was Chip's
[Chapman] and Tom [Recchion] applied it."[209] The East Los Angeles Free Music
Society was condensed to the even more lofty Los Angeles Free Music Society,
and the original band—Chapman and J. and R. Potts—changed their band name
to Le Forte Four. The next step was to set up a performance to showcase the
Society.

The Spaghetti Works Show

       Recchion seemed to be in charge of most of the organization of the first
event, the Spaghetti Works Show, scheduled for the Chinese New Year (January
30 1976), ushering in the year of the Dragon. Above Poo-Bah Records on the
second floor was a spaghetti restaurant and an old abandoned theater strewn
with dusty junk, mannequins, sheet metal, kegs, and other props; many items
were appropriated as instruments. Recchion put together a concert of three
bands: Ace and Duce, the Doo-Dooettes, and Le Forte Four. The members of Le

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[209] Rick Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

Forte Four had met Ace and Duce only once before at a rehearsal, and they were

still not so familiar with Tom and the 'Ettes. R. Potts remembered:

> We were pretty nerdy looking suburban geeks but the fact that we
> had an LP commanded respect back in those pre-DIY days. People
> would act differently when they found out you 'had an album out.'
> Le Forte Four was 'headlining' because of *Bikini Tennis Shoes*.
> Unfortunately we were a studio band and had almost no experience
> at free improvisation in front of a live audience.[210]

Because of the location of the Spaghetti Works Show above Poo-Bah Records, the

record store itself has been dubbed 'the birthplace of the LAFMS' by R. Potts.

Ace and Duce inaugurated the LAFMS accompanied by Dennis Duck on

drums and Rick on bass and guitar. Ace's love for Captain Beefheart was the

driving force behind Ace and Duce: they started with a cover of "Click Clack" with

Ace on eight-string bass and made their way through a succession of

improvisations with various instruments, particularly the musette (suona), also

played by Captain Beefheart. Ace and Duce also used vacuum cleaners and other

objects as instruments during their set. J. Potts expressed his admiration for

Ace's extended drum solo on a toy drum kit.

The Doo-Dooetes were the second act to perform. Recchion remembers

he had a drum kit with radios about and other objects to hit, and some reel-to-

reel machines. The performance consisted of a succession of duets between the

four members at the time—Recchion, Schroeder, Gomez, and Nilsen—culminating

in a group improvisation finale.[211]

Le Forte Four was the closing act. They hid behind a bunch of equipment

and junk that filled the room. Though they were in the habit of improvising, Le

Forte Four came to the show with little or no game plan. They thought of

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[210] Rick Potts, "Free Ears 2."
[211] Nilsen interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

themselves as a studio group who collected sounds and edited tape in an improvised fashion. And though a simple presentation of a tape was considered an acceptable performance for electronic music, they found themselves wanting to do something live. Without a plan, Joe and Rick Potts panicked about the performance. In their performance R. Potts provided a brief, vivid description of what seemed like a brief performance.

> The preshow fog suppressed some of the fear, the fear of public humiliation. Le Forte Four's crappy gear was set-up behind the weird found set pieces. We hid behind the cutout plywood tree, giant sheet metal vent pipes and kegs of TNT. We didn't really have a plan. The hiding part came instinctively. Crouched down in the shadows it felt like we were kids playing 'War', commando style. I whisper-yelled to Joe and Chip, "What do we do?" They covered me while I crawled over to my tenor sax and squealed from the floor. The audience held their fire. Before long the three of us surrendered, emerged from the debris and shrugged our shoulders.[212]

J. Potts' description corroborates the humorous ATTACK performance style with his brother.

> Le Forte Four played our tape back and hid behind the barricade, occasionally sticking out a snorting saxophone or raising a zither to hit it with a riding crop. We meant it to be silly, but I am afraid a percentage of the audience (almost all friends or friends of friends) found it seriously disturbed.[213]

The newly formed society judged that the first show was a success and began working to organize the second show for six months later.

Live at the Brand

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[212] R. Potts, "Free Ears 2."
[213] J. Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
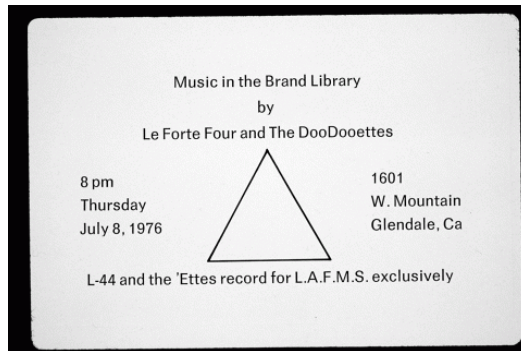
Figure 10: Live At The Brand (flyer)

July 4, 1976 the United States turned 200 years old; four days later marked the second LAFMS show; and four days after that Chip Chapman and Susan Farthing were married. On July 8 the line-up was Le Forte Four and the Doo-Dooettes at the Brand Library in Glendale. By then Le Forte Four added older brother Tom Potts (T. Potts) and the Doo-Dooettes added Fredrik Nilsen. The performances were documented and pressed to a double-LP by LAFMS Records (LAFMS#03 and LAFMS#04). The two performances were very different. The Doo-Dooettes performed live, and then after a brief intermission, the audience returned for Le Forte Four's sound installation.

The Doo-Dooettes performed four separate pieces: three were brief duets and the last piece was an extended group improvisation. "Mojave" was the first piece. It featured Harold Schroeder on Steiner-Parker synthesizer and Dennis Duck on electric organ. Tom Recchion and Juan Gomez were featured next in "Silver Hours," with Recchion playing harmonium, electric piano, and percussion, and Gomez on guitar and flute. "Twenty-four" featured Recchion on percussion and electric guitar, and new recruit Fredrik Nilsen on electric bass and tape machine. The finale featured all five members, with guest Ace Farren Ford on

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saxophone, in two group improvisations called "Children Undressing Animals,"

part one and part two. Rick Potts, who was too nervous to enjoy the first Doo-

Dooettes concert at the Spaghetti Works show commented:

> The Doodooettes played and it was the first time I realized how great
> they were. They were really focused and each improvisation had a unique
> approach from dense drones on Mojave and delicate sparse smatterings (a
> grand piano on stage) on Silver Hours to percussion freak-outs and insane
> tape loops as their set continued with Fred and Tom's duet Twenty-four
> (24).
> It was also Fredrik's twenty-fourth birthday. They sounded great and I
> was
> impressed if not a tad jealous. They played live and pulled off a great
> 'set' of noise.[214]

At the end of the set the audience cheered enthusiastically for the Doo-Dooettes.

Le Forte Four's performance was much different. They created an

interactive intermedia work that has been discussed in LA art circles now for

decades. Chip Chapman and Joe Potts combined a few conceptual ideas together

with Le Forte Four's enormous catalog of taped improvisations and mixes.

Chapman's idea was to build forty-four pyramid-shaped headphones in a

stereo[215] configuration; forty-four for L-44. The headphones were to be shared by

the audience-participants. The contents of the sound would mostly be recordings

of improvisations made by Le Forte Four and friends (other participants included

Tom Recchion, Juan Gomez, Steve Jackson, Bob Frazier). J. Potts' idea was to

include a "telethon" segment on nearly every fifth track of the twenty-six track

recording. These tracks are labeled "Telethon Returns" on the disc.

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[214] Rick Potts, "Free Ears 2."
[215] Rick Potts had said in his interview with *The Wire* magazine: "We decided to get fancy and build 44
quadraphonic headphones. Chip and Tom Potts designed and built [them]." When I sent a draft of this
dissertation to the LAFMS, Chip Chapman alerted me that they were not quadraphonic but stereo
headphones.

Figure 11: Three people wearing *pyramid headphones* with the playback equipment in the center of the room at the Brand Library concert.

The telethon idea began as a long recorded improvisation at the Raymond Building studio and was edited into smaller segments. Then, as part of J. Potts' solo graduate project at Otis Art Institute, he arranged the student lounge as a TV studio and ran the audio and video feed to a TV monitor in the school's gallery. The show ran from February 22 to 26, 1976. For about twelve hours a day for a solid week J. and R. Potts hosted the 'telethon.' They encouraged participants to join them in the mock telethon through a flyer: "Performers of various music/musical devices needed to realize new work: 'Frogs of Sleepy Hallow.'"[216] Despite their invitation the Potts brothers themselves did most of the work. Nearly all activities were improvised except for two bands, the Monitors and the Screamers. "People would come in and do things," J. Potts recalled, "but not nearly enough. Lots of the time it was just Rick and I, with the bulk of the 'entertainment' burden falling on Rick. Luckily we got a crowd of performers on

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[216] Flyer for LAFMS "Telethon Returns," in booklet to *LAFMS: The Lowest Form of Music*.

the last day because Rick and I were played out."[217] J. Potts' idea was to put on a

telethon that was about spending time, not money. "I liked the idea of a

Telethon, and I thought it would be perverse to make the telethon about time

instead of money, since basically the viewer is spending time as he sits there

watching what in most telethons amounts to one long commercial." The 'telethon

returns' tracks from *Live at the Brand* feature noisy improvisations with dialog.

Below is an excerpt from the first track of "Telethon Returns" (track 5):

—Hello?
—Yes.
—This is Telethon Returns.
—Another $500 just in from New York!
—Let's post it up on the big board. And there it goes!
—One-hundred. Two-hundred. Three-hundred! Four-hundred!! Five hundred dollars!!!

J. Potts would use the 'telethon' idea as late as 2009 during the LAFMS 24-Hour

Telethon.

J. Potts was showing his *Autopsy Art* in Tokyo while Chapman and R. and

T. Potts were assembling the first pyramid headphones. Chapman and T. Potts

designed and built the first few units, and J. Potts joined the assembly line upon

his return from Tokyo. They were made from cardboard and then spray-painted

in matte-black with a mess of wires coming from the playback equipment. The

headphones also covered the eyes so that sound was the primary stimulus for

the listener. In each of the four corners of the pyramid was a speaker. The forty-

four headphone units were reinforced by four large loudspeakers in the corners of

the room. The playback equipment was set up in the middle of the room and the

forty-four headphones with their attached cables were spread throughout the

room. During the performance the headphones began to malfunction and

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[217] Joe Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

channels dropped from them. But the idea was cool, and the four loudspeakers ensured the continuation of the concert despite the set-back.

After the show the LAFMS was already hard at work for their next projects, including the double-LP: Doo-Dooettes/Le Forte Four—*L.A. Free Music Society: Live at the Brand*.

3. LAFMS Compilation Projects and Media

I.D. Art

Joe Potts and Waynna Kato were colleagues at Otis Art Institute when they collaborated on the production of a much larger collaborative project involving many artists inside and outside of Otis. The result was a do-it-yourself social media network for artists, where they could put forth profiles of themselves in a magazine format. Rick Potts explains:

> Originally, the idea was a way for the new students to meet and get to know their fellow students and teachers. Instead of going around the room doing the "say a little something about yourselves" routine, they proposed a book of narcissistic self-portraits by fellow students as a way of everyone introducing themselves. Faculty and some friends were given flyers that invited them to participate and explained their scheme. The deal was each person had to print their own standard sized pages, fifty of them, for the edition of fifty. These pages would be collated and bound into a book. They could spiral bind them for a buck fifty each. Like *Bikini Tennis Shoes*, the covers were scavenged by Chip from his job at Cunningham Press. Off-register postcard sheets with messed up versions of stodgy portraits from the Huntington Library worked great as covers for this book of narcissistic self-portraits. The spiral bound books came out great. Everyone in the book received a copy and the extras were sold to recoup some of their costs.[218]

Designed as a social network of sorts, the result of the self-portrait calling cards was called *I.D. Art*, a directory mostly of artists centered at Otis. This model was used again for the first LAFMS compilation record: *I.D. Art #2*.

I.D. Art #2

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[218] Rick Potts, "Free Ears 3," in *LAFMS—The Book* (June 10, 2011). https://lafms.wordpress.com/2011/06/10/essay-free-ears-part-3-unfinished-id-art-rick-potts/ (accessed August 10, 2013).

I.D. Art #2 used the same do-it-yourself communal ethos as *I.D. Art* (#1)

and applied it to the circle of friends surrounding Otis Art Institute, the LAFMS,

and the greater Poo-Bah Records scene. J. Potts' idea this time was to charge

artists for time on an LP record instead of space in a print publication. The Potts

Brothers and Chapman likened this model of financial distribution to the "the

drug distribution model" or the "basic dope deal" model.[219] J. Potts described the

process:

> [B]asically we divided the maximum time on the LP by the
> projected cost of the finished edition. Then we charged the
> contributors a fee based on the length of their pieces. When the
> LPs were done the contributors received a percentage of the
> finished edition equal to the percentage of their contribution.[220]

R. Potts described the financial compensation model:

> Joe figured if eight dollars was charged for every minute of time on
> the record, a forty-minute record would take in enough money to
> fund the 200 copy pressing. Participants receive four copies of the
> record for each minute they bought.

For *eight dollars per minute*, *I.D. Art #2* attracted a lot of attention from several

musicians and artists. Flyers for the project were sent to friends and associates

and time was allotted on a first-come-first-serve basis. The deadline for

submissions was March 8, 1976, between the first and second LAFMS shows.

Forty-four artists and bands contributed to the first of several other similar

projects associated with the LAFMS.

The biggest contributor to *I.D. Art #2* was Smegma. Shortly after they

moved to Portland, Rick Stewart (Ju Suk Reet Meate) received a flyer in the mail

about *I.D. Art #2* not long after he and his cohorts in Smegma had listened to

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[219] Joe Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006; Chip Chapman interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[220] Joe Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

Bikini Tennis Shoes. After Stewart bought time for Smegma he frequently made

trips to Los Angeles and played with his friends in the Poo-Bah Records scene and

met the members of Le Forte Four.

> We had been ignorant of LAFMS while we lived in California. I was
> blown away by the shared LP concept and helped organize so much
> participation in *I.D. Art* #2 (Coulter 2010) we were collectively the
> largest contributors. And we did the same for *Blorp Esette*. and
> when we put our first LP *Glamour Girl* out, instead of Pigface
> Records I got permission to put it out on LAFMS. Just to solidify the
> connection for all time.[221]

This was how Smegma, now a Portland band, became the fourth pioneering band

of the Los Angeles Free Music Society through proxy.

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[221] Tony Coulter, "There'll Always be Smegma: An Interview with Smegma's Ju Suk Reet Meate," www.wfmu.com, January 7, 2010, http://blog.wfmu.org/freeform/2010/01/smegma.html (accessed August 10, 2013).

Figure 12: *I.D. Art #2* **flyer for participation.**

The Doo-Dooettes as a band were not involved with *I.D. Art #2*, however every one of its members contributed tracks: Harold Schroeder, Tom Recchion (on Schroeder's track), Dennis Duck, Juan Gomez, and Fredrik Nilsen. Recchion also designed the cover art and flyer. Ace and Duce, with Rick Snyder, also contributed a thirty-second track called "Dogs are Barking." Le Forte Four (L-44) played the last track, not surprisingly on track forty-four. Joe Potts, Susan Farthing, and Waynna Kato also contributed solo tracks.

After *Bikini Tennis Shoes*, *I.D. Art #2* became the second record released by the LAFMS in 1976. In a short time the DIY concept was now expanded from a small band of musicians who put out their own record—the East Los Angeles Free Music Society—to a larger group of artists who collectively paid for the production and distribution of records. Nilsen had some thoughts about what it meant to be an artist in the shadow of the Hollywood industry where politics and money made decisions.

> We were also political in that we pursued a path of self-empowerment. We were here working in the world's center of commercialization, in the heart of the beast, and we were completely disregarded by that bureaucracy. Thus, through the "I.D. Art" construct created by Joe Potts of Le Forte Four, we pursued artist financed and distributed releases using a do-it-yourself model. In this model aesthetics were irrelevant to the track selection process.

After the continued success of the LAFMS shows and the second LAFMS release, a new flyer was made for the next LAFMS compilation. Meanwhile, *I.D. Art #3* took the form of a coloring book.

Blorp Esette
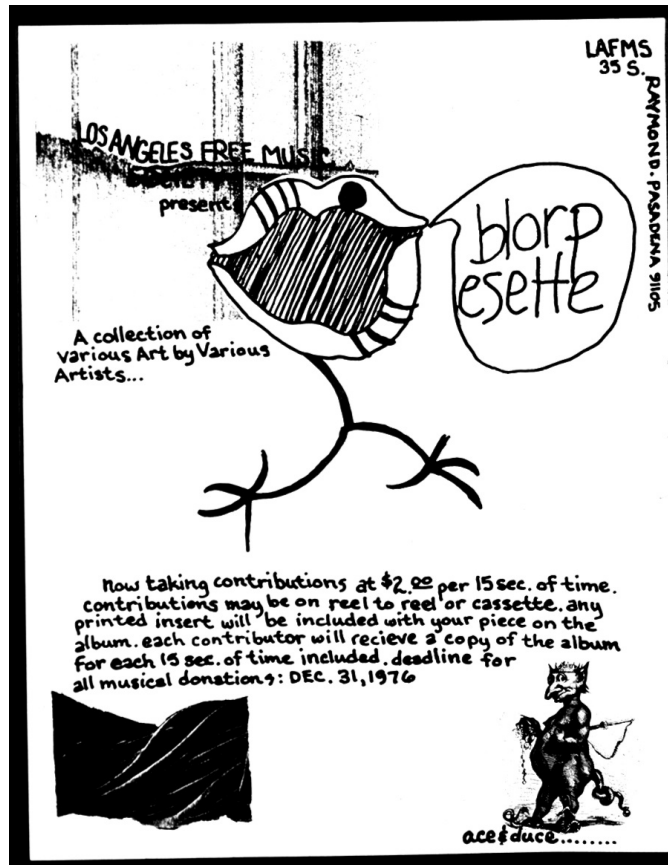
Figure 13: *Blorp Esette* [#1] flyer.

The LAFMS closed the year 1976 with the deadline of their next compilation record, *Blorp Esette*. *Blorp Esette* continued where *I.D. Art #2* left off. The same basic format was used: a flyer was sent out asking for artists to contribute tracks at a rate of two dollars for fifteen seconds (eight dollars per minute) and copies were given to the contributors. Ace Farren Ford played a vital role in the production of *Blorp Esette* as an organizer, a musician, an artist, and a recording engineer. The nineteen-year-old Beefheart enthusiast even managed to have Don Van Vliet—Captain Beefheart himself—design the cover art for the compilation. Ace had also asked Bay Area band the Residents to contribute a track to the

compilation. The Residents' first record inspired Chapman and the Potts brothers to put out their own record, *Bikini Tennis Shoes*, so it made sense to align the two DIY projects. Ace wrote, "they may well have been largely responsible for putting LAFMS 'on the map,' so to speak."[222] Most of the contributors, again, were part of the Poo-Bah Records orbit. Smegma and Le Forte Four contributed a few tracks and many of its members contributed as solo projects, like Ju Suk Reet Meate, Cheez-it Ritz, Ace Farren Ford (Ace=1), and the Professor (Duce in Ace and Duce). The Patients, from the pre-LAFMS days with Rick Potts, also had a track. The only Doo-Dooettes member on the record was Dennis Duck, who performed with Mr. Foon's Bandaloon (Mr. Foon is Tom McFarland[223]). *Blorp Esette* was released in 1977 by the Los Angeles Free Music Society Records.

Due to its success, Ford called for and organized a second volume. A double-LP was released in 1980, but in fact there was enough material for several more records. Anonymous sources told me that there had been financial problems, and that the so-called "drug-distribution model" was not working out as planned. Monies were pooled from some individuals to offset the escalating production costs. In 1999, almost twenty years later, a 4-CD box-set was released by Transparency Records as *Blorp Esette*. The box-set included the original volumes one and two (minus the track by the Residents), and then added a volume three and four. Some notable tracks from Volume Four included an extended live set by the Doo-Dooettes at Beyond Baroque, several live tracks by the Los Angeles Free Music Society Marching Band at the Doo-Dah Parade in Pasadena, an extended track by Ju Suk Reet Meate (Rick Stewart of Smegma), and a track by Ace Farren Ford as ace=1.

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[222] Ace Farren Ford, *Lowest Form of Music*.
[223] *LAFMS—The Book*.

Since 2000 Ford had been developing a new vision for *Blorp Esette* as a quarterly audio magazine that would showcase various members of the LAFMS. In the summer of 2013 Ford announced the *Blorp Esette Gazette* for preorder. The album is due to ship during September 2013, as I type these paragraphs [September 11, 2013]: I am eagerly awaiting my copy.

LightBulb Media and Other Compilations

With an eye toward promotion *LightBulb Magazine* made its debut some time in late 1977 billing itself as the "LAFMS Magazine." There were seven volumes in the *LightBulb* series: some were magazines and some were audio recordings. The *LightBulb* series used the same "drug-distribution model" as J. Potts' *I.D. Art*, but Chip Chapman seemed to have a heavier hand in *LightBulb*, even though editing must have been largely collaborative. The contents of the print editions promoted itself by calling for contributors for the magazine and compilation records. The magazine also advertised upcoming events. Poetry and drawings, many of them provocative in nature, were welcome as long as they fit the eight-and-one-half inch by eleven inch format. Most of the print editions ranged from forty to sixty pages.

The first issue had a Pee Chee folder as its cover, satirizing one of the United States primary forms of school stationery. The first pages of the issue advertised the latest releases by the LAFMS, including *Live at the Brand*, *Dennis Goes Disco*, and *Seldom Melodic Ensemble*. After these advertisements was an order form that included the entire catalog: *Bikini Tennis Shoes*, *I.D. Art 2*, *Live at the Brand*, *Blorp Esette vol. 1*, *Magic Beans*, *Seldom Melodic Ensemble*, *AIRWAY*

(Joe Potts' seven-inch single). Also included were collages, generic interviews with contributors, and a poem by Tom Recchion.

If the first issue of *LightBulb* was released in September of 1977, then the next issue seemed to establish the young publication as a monthly. Issue two featured a light bulb with crossed bones at its base and billed itself as "Special Haloween Issue" [*sic*]. Its opening pages advertised an LAFMS concert in early November that would be broadcast live on KPFK radio (where John Duncan and Paul McCarthy hosted an experimental music radio show called "Close Radio"), and a call for audio submissions for the third issue, a Christmas cassette. For fifty cents anyone could submit one minute of audio. The second issue also offered a brief summation of the history of the activities of the LAFMS up to the point. Also notable was a full-page advertisement of Ace Farren Ford's newest punk band the Child Molesters wishing the readers a happy Halloween.

Before the Christmas cassette was released, a brief third volume surfaced as *LightBulb number two-and-a-half: Turkey Edition*. The opening page illustrated a turkey being cooked by a light bulb. The brief volume consisted mainly of poetry and collages, but also included a few more interviews using the same questioning format from the first edition.

The fourth volume—*LightBulb, Issue 3*—was a two-sided cassette featuring a Santa Claus with a giant light bulb in his lap released in December 1977. It mostly featured an array of tracks on the Christmas theme, and some tracks were traditional Christmas songs. The first track, "Welcome Little Emmanuel," featured the Cal Tech Glee Club.

The next issue was another in-between issue given the name *LightBulb '78*. Unlike the *Turkey Edition*, *LightBulb '78* was a full edition with over fifty

pages. One of the opening pages was a call for submissions for the next audio

compilation LP curated by Chapman called *Blub Krad* (dark bulB backwards) due

by September 5, 1978. Notable in this issue was the full-page advertisement for

the first industrial music band, Throbbing Gristle. Next to it were two additional

pages with a questionnaire put forth by the band to catalog the demographics of

its fanbase, including an enticement to send photographs to the band with the

questionnaire. The last pages of the edition advertise live performances by

AIRWAY, Le Forte Four, and the Doo-Dooettes.

  Blub Krad was released in late 1978 and featured the usual LAFMS

members as solo artists and in various permutations with a few other

contributors. Half-Japanese, a band based in Maryland, provided the opening

track.[224] One notable track is by the Pablums—featuring "Slimy Adenoid," which

was a name Chapman gave himself to mock his former mentor Morton

Subotnick[225]—who recorded a sentimental song called "Under My Gums" to the

tune of "Under My Thumb" by the Rolling Stones. Slimy Adenoid sings and

provides a fantastic 'dental drill' solo, with the Reverend Toad Eater (Rick

Snyder) on marimba. Other notable tracks include Vetza (with J. Potts providing

electronics), Paul is Dead, the Square Cuts, the Fine Art Dumpsters, and Trio

Primero. The only tracks on the record with musicians not normally associated

with the LAFMS include Half Japanese, The Yvonnes, and Yoel (also known as

Z'EV, a famous performance artist and noisician).

  The seventh volume in the series had to wait an extra three years.

Between *Blub Krad* and the "Emergency Cassette" (*Lightbulb 4*) in the *Lightbulb*

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[224] Half-Japanese would later go on tour with 1990s band Nirvana; Kurt Cobain allegedly wore a Half-Japanese shirt when he committed suicide in 1994.
[225] In Chapman's reading of this chapter, he wrote: "'Slimy' comes a play on Mort's 'Silver Apples of the Moon' while I believe Rick coined 'Slimy Adenoids on my Spoon.' So it's a very 'inside baseball' joke." (Correspondence with Chip Chapman on May 11, 2017)

series, *Blorp Esette volume 2* was released as well as an LP called *Darker Skratcher*. The production of *Darker Skratcher* is credited to Susan Farthing. The compilation includes some of the usual LAFMS members, but most of the tracks are songs instead of all-out experimental forays, with the exceptions of the Doo-Dooettes track, "Pork Had Better Behave" that resonates with Recchion's interest in the *Chilling Thrilling Sounds* collection, and Le Forte Four's zany dance number "The Lowest Form of Music." The first track is by Boyd Rice and Daniel Miller; Rice makes another appearance on the record with his band NON after an early track by 45 Grave (with Don Bolles on drums). Monitor (with Steve Thomsen; not contemporary Los Angeles band, 'the Monitors') also made an energetic appearance with distorted guitars and accordion. The record closed with a track by Bpeople with Recchion as vocalist.

LightBulb Number Four—"The Emergency Cassette" was published by *Journal of the Los Angeles Free Music Society* and released in April 1981. The double-cassette volume featured a larger variety of performers outside the circle of the LAFMS core members. Two bands in particular would continue on to mild commercial success: the Meat Puppets and 45 Grave. This compilation had a variety of styles ranging from early punk rock to tape collage.

The various writings and compilation works urged by LAFMS members helped spawn and sustain not only their own scene, but spilled over to the various youth culture scenes particularly nestled in the Southern California area, but also throughout California, the US, Japan, and Europe. Their openness and idealistic values delivered by the "drug distribution model" won them favor among artists whose interests were in making and distributing art with the new technologies of recorded sound. None of the issues of *LightBulb* attempt a

criticism toward any specific art or artist, rather, the discussions focus on matters

nearly external to traditional aesthetic thought (on a particular object (thing), or

subject (what it's all about)). Though aesthetic values across the Society did not

always line up, disagreements never seemed as sharply articulated (or defended)

as other groups would have. In other words, there seems to have been a very

relaxed attitude toward the sound-making process,

Close Radio

    Close Radio was a weekly radio show hosted by two artists known

worldwide for their provocative imagery and performance practices: John Duncan

and Paul McCarthy. The radio show ran from 1976 to 1979 on KPFK. Both are

part of the LAFMS. Duncan has a track on *LightBulb Number Four—"The*

Emergency Cassette" and McCarthy is part of Extended Organ with Fredrik

Nilsen, J. Potts, Tom Recchion, and the late Mike Kelley. *Close Radio* featured

composers, sound artists, and other experimenters in sound. *Close Radio* was

sympathetic with, if not directly related to the LAFMS. It was an inspiration to the

Society.

4. AIRWAY[226]

Joe Potts was finishing the MFA program at Otis Art Institute when he had the

idea of making art out of the shocking imagery of autopsy photographs. First he

developed an interest in conceptual art, that led him to study and think about the

artist's relation to the audience: "I decided that artistic stimulus was not the

important part of the equation, but rather the response to it was. I began trying

to make work that elicited a strong response."[227] He chanced upon some books

on forensic pathology that contained photographs of autopsies. One day he had

the book on a table near where his brother Tom Potts was sleeping. When T.

Potts awoke, he saw the book and turned to a page with vibrant colors. He "very

nearly blacked out," J. Potts recalled: "That was my inspiration."[228] Eventually T.

Potts became accustomed to the shocking imagery, and J. Potts wanted to know

how people eventually became desensitized to disturbing imagery and events,

and so the focus of his interest was in the use of these images: he became

curious about how people process disturbing visual imagery. During his graduate

studies J. Potts had also attended a lecture by Los Angeles artist John Baldessari

where he discussed his use of subliminal messages in his paintings. Baldessari

referenced Wilson Bryan Key's book *Subliminal Seduction: Are You Being*

Sexually Aroused by This Picture? J. Potts found the book in the library and

started thinking about what kinds of information might be useful as subliminal

messages embedded in his work.

> I tried to think of what would be important information to bury. I
> decided CPR [cardiopulmonary resuscitation] would be important,

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[226] I distinguish *AIRWAY* the single by Joe Potts with AIRWAY the band; the single is italicized. Both require small caps.
[227] Joe Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[228] Joe Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

and maybe a trauma situation would trigger a recall. When I studied CPR I learned that when someone is unconscious the most important thing is to tilt their head back to establish an airway, so that they don't asphyxiate. I decided to try to imbed that information within the autopsy artworks. Then I thought it would be good to have some way to refresh the information periodically. I decided to put the same information in a record and a poster, hoping that the viewer would take the record home and play it and leave the poster up on their wall.

Thus the initial concept of AIRWAY was inspired by J. Potts' interest in CPR as a relevant form of subliminal information to accompany the shocking autopsy photographs and in the record that followed.

First, J. Potts embedded CPR messages in the autopsy photos. Next he decided that a recording and a poster should accompany the photos: both the recording and the poster would also have subliminal messages to reinforce each other. There were two aspects that were important in the AIRWAY tracks. The first was a 'wall-of-sound' that would be loud and dense enough to bury the subliminal messages. During the mastering phase of the recording, the master tape was so loud that engineer Dave Gold at Gold Star Records recommended the (seven-inch) record to be mixed monophonically, instead of a stereo spread between two speakers: and so it was. The second important aspect was a rock-style backbeat: "I thought that a rock beat would help draw in listeners."[229] For the recording, J. Potts sampled songs from proto-punk artist Patti Smith's newest release, *Radio Ethiopia* (1976). Two of the tracks on the album were released by the Patti Smith Group as a seven-inch single: "Pumping (My Heart)," and "Ask the Angels." He cut the tracks into a series of loops that included audio subliminal messages, and then had Vetza McGill scream over the results. J. Potts and McGill had previously worked together in an acoustic swing band in the early 1970s (she would later

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[229] Joe Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

become a member of Smegma). According to McGill, for the AIRWAY seven-inch

"[J. Potts] had asked me to come over and do some 'screaming into a mic.' What

girl doesn't want to do that?"[230] The use of Patti Smith's tracks was a peculiar

choice since the penultimate track on the record, "Radio Ethiopia," had received

extreme criticism for containing ten minutes of self-indulgent noise. Released in

October 1976, it was also a very contemporary piece to use. *Autopsy Art* was

presented at first as J. Potts' graduate thesis at Otis, and then he took his work

to Tokyo, Japan where it was installed at Gallery Lunami for a month in the

spring of 1976. J. Potts flew to Tokyo to attend the event. One year later (spring

1977) Gallery Lunami presented J. Potts' work again, but this time the focus was

on the sound. The AIRWAY seven-inch records and posters were given out for free

in Japan, and sold in the US for two dollars.

After his 1977 solo show in Tokyo (that he did not attend), J. Potts

envisioned a new concept for AIRWAY as a band. The crux of the idea was to

recreate the record in a live setting. He came up with a new idea to help facilitate

the wall-of-sound with subliminal messages: *electronic fascism*. The idea was to

assemble a group of musicians who would play a variety of electric guitars, tape

players, and other amplified sounds, and to have all the musicians plugged into a

mixing board that was controlled by J. Potts. In addition, J. Potts ran a variety of

effects processors through the effects loop of his mixer. These effects processors

included a chain of delay pedals, modulation pedals (chorus, flanger, phaser),

and distortion and fuzz pedals. Chip Chapman built the mixer, some tape delay

machines, and other devices to facilitate J. Potts' vision. The instructions for the

musicians were very basic: *play whatever you want, as loud as you can*.

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[230] Vetza McGill interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

Recchion, who played drums for AIRWAY, remembered: "The only instruction I was given was to play as hard and as loud as I could."[231] J. Potts would then control and mix the loudness of the various signals passed through the custom mixer, and then add effects to whoever's track he felt like: *electronic fascism*.[232] J. Potts wrote: "As Takuya Sakaguchi has described it, I treated the musicians like modules in a synthesizer."[233] In a modular synthesizer set-up, several modules performing different functions are connected together and are ultimately mixed (synthesized) to create new sounds. In addition to the plethora of sounds provided by the band, J. Potts added subliminal messages. Thus electronic fascism was achieved in two ways: 1) controlling the output levels of the various musicians he contracted to perform as AIRWAY, and 2) embedding subliminal messages within the walls of noise, enciting the audiences to certain actions and behaviors. The effects of the subliminal messages at AIRWAY's shows on the audiences became the stuff of colossal legends.

By 1978 J. Potts was vacillating between sound and image. He forged a short manifesto that surely had an effect on his work in sound; perhaps he was inspired by his work in sound. With an almost haughty sanctity, he pronounced:

TEN COMMANDMENTS OF PAINTING[234]

1. A painting is not an object.
2. A painting has no fixed location in time or space.
3. A painting is physically connected to every other painting.

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[231] Tom Recchion interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[232] J. Potts later connected the stimulus of his large-scale project to a show put on by friend and collaborator Chip Chapman. While at Cal Arts, Chapman was given the opportunity to present a work. He carefully set up his equipment and a matrix of wires and stood over it so that the results would be the desired ones. When it came time for the performance, the electronics failed, and Chapman furiously had to cancel his show, aptly titled, "The Show of Power." Before the show, J. Potts and a few others actually heard the sounds generated by "The Show of Power." "He fired that sucker up and it was freaking unbelievable. Loud as hell and sound traveling with a mind of its own." (J. Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006).
[233] Joe Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[234] Joe Potts, "Ten Commandments of Painting" (1978) in liner notes to *Airway: Beyond the Pink Live* CD-ROM, 1977.

4. A painting has no fixed image.
5. A painting has no fixed meaning. Image and meaning constantly change in relation to other parts in the universe.
6. There is no Art History. Historical progression is an illusion, because the flow of time is psychological, not physical. No physical experiment has ever detected the flow of time.
7. There is no such thing as an innovative painting, because all paintings are interrelated.
8. The painting is an unfolded manifestation of a hidden (enfolded) universe. This universe consists of all the aspects of all the paintings ever to be produced.
9. The painting has dematerialized. Its existence is only a representation of the whole of painting.
10. All paintings and all painters have a direct effect on all others. The individual artist is an illusion.

Substituting the word 'sound'—or even 'music'—in place of 'painting' surely is no stretch, as Takuya Sakaguchi would later explicate.

Some sources suggest that AIRWAY's first show took place at the LACE Gallery in Downtown Los Angeles on August 1978, but there is a flyer for the Doo-Dooettes and AIRWAY that tells of a show at the Pilot Theater on July 31, 1978—Rick Potts informed me that this concert was cancelled.[235]

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[235] Rick Potts informed me that this concert was cancelled. Facebook chat, September 3, 2013.
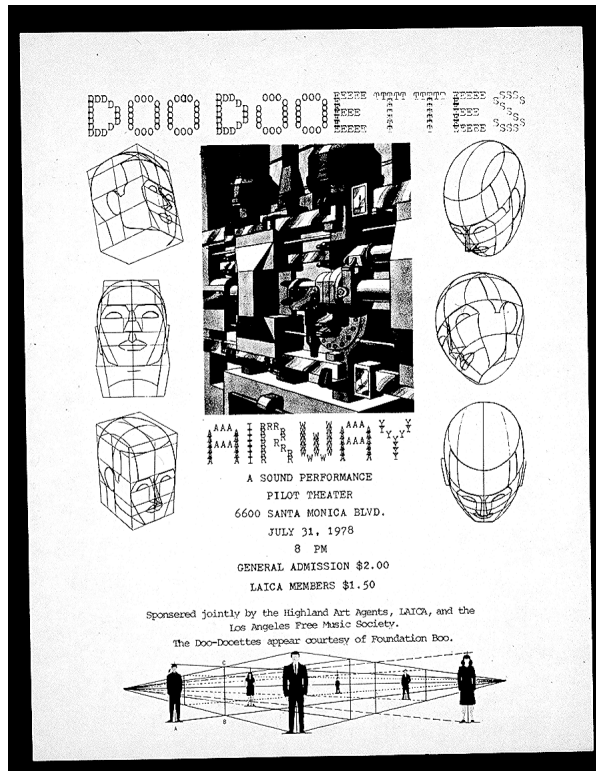
Figure 14: Flier for Doo-Dooettes and Airway at the Pilot Theater

Whatever the story is, AIRWAY must have begun as a band around the summer of 1978 (at least in late July) and then performed a number of shows through the end of the year. The famous show at the LACE Gallery in Downtown indicates that a show was recorded there in August 1978 (no day given) and released as *Live at LACE*. The performers for the first LACE show included Vetza McGill (vocals), Dennis Duck (saxophone), Rick Potts (mandolin), Juan Gomez (bass guitar), Tom Recchion (drums), Chip Chapman ("circuits"), and Joe Potts ("circuits," tape, and mixer). The line-up of musicians varied from one AIRWAY concert to another, but the idea was the same: play loud, and J. Potts would determine what sounds would be outputted to the speaker system (with the exception of the drummer).

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The legendary accounts and memories of the AIRWAY shows inspired far fewer than those who were repelled, but the results were heard overseas in Japan as much (or as little) as in Los Angeles and other California cities. There were two primary causes for significant interest in AIRWAY followed by a third. The first was that AIRWAY shows were extremely loud, and the second was that J. Potts' subliminal messages allegedly evoked strong audience responses. A third reason is that by 1978 there were two releases—AIRWAY by Joe Potts, and *Live at LACE* by AIRWAY—and in the 1970s having a record of any kind called attention to itself.

The content of the subliminal messages at AIRWAY shows varied from night to night. The most infamous story cited has been given two separate dates, but the content is more or less the same: J. Potts subliminally instructed the audience to advance forward, and *they complied*. Whether or not the instructions were the cause of the audience aggression is up for debate, but the correlation has made for an interesting story. Rick Potts claims the date was Halloween 1978 at the LACE Gallery; Joe Potts claims that it was a show on Valentines Day. Rick's account follows:

> On Halloween 1978 the Joe Potts' LAFMS noise rock supergroup AIRWAY played a party at LACE gallery in Downtown Los Angeles. AIRWAY played and it was crazy. Joe's 'come hither' subliminal messages, played behind the noise rock cacophony lured the drunken audience into rude interactions with the band. They were grabbing at instruments and at one point some guy hoisted Vetza, our petite vocalist, into the air. At the next show, Joe used 'stay back' subliminal messages. That might have been the show where the audience ended up listening from downstairs and across the street.[236]

J. Potts' recollection from my interview with him:

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[236] Rick Potts, "Meeting Monitor," in *LAFMS—The Book* (n.d.), https://lafms.wordpress.com/essay-rick-potts-meeting-monitor/ (accessed August 10, 2013).

JP: In the early days I was trying to get the audience to either move away or move closer. The most often repeated story is this thing when we played at LACE Downtown—an art space for Valentines Day. So I put a bunch of instructions and subliminals in to try and get the audience to move close to the band, and they ended up grabbing our instruments, throwing the singer in the air, and so the band told me to not use those subliminals anymore. So the next time we played there, I used subliminals to try to move the audience away. Most of the audience ended up listening from outside, but it could have been the volume too. I mean, it makes a good story.

DM: So it worked.

JP: Well, that's the story and I'm sticking to it [we laugh].[237]

J. Potts recalls the events but, like many of the other legends associated with him and the LAFMS, he has a sense of humor concerning their strength and veracity: it makes a good story indeed!

One of the regular members of AIRWAY was Kevin Laffey, who performed in other LAFMS-affiliated bands like Foundation Boo and the Monique Experience, had a similar story.

On that night, however, the crowd was a little more animated, shall we say. Guys were coming out of the audience hovering around Vetza's microphone, getting more aggressive as our performance gave way to sheer chaos. Dennis Duck, perched on a ladder, was approached by another crazed fan who finally attempted to wrestle his sax away from him, drawing blood from his lip in the process. Fredrik [Nilsen] took the law into his own hands, using the machine heads of his bass to indent the brow of one of Vetza's many suitors. The whole band turned into a hypnotic frenzy, as we did our best, until Tom [Recchion] literally fell off his drum stool and went racing offstage. We found him later in an unflattering position on the floor of the public restroom. As it turned out, there was another subliminal loop at work during that set; one that would have made even Annie Sprinkle gush with envy. We might have dubbed it "Music Minus One (for Budding Sadomasochists)," or maybe "Story of O: The Musical."[238]

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[237] Joe Potts Interview with Me.
[238] Kevin Laffey, "On Airway" (June 1995) in booklet to *The Lowest Form of Music*, 44.

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On another occasion, Laffey remembered a lighter subliminal message J. Potts

offered at an early show at Otis.

> There was the usual cacophony, but as hard as we played, the
> audience sat motionless in rapt attention. A calm hung over the
> room and stayed there until they heard the last bleat from Dennis'
> [Duck] sax, the last screech from Rick's [Potts] guitar and Tom's
> [Recchion] drum sticks were reduced to toothpicks in his hands.
> We packed up feeling that our mission had failed, until word
> circulated that Joe [Potts] had played a loop during the set that
> kept repeating, "We love you. Your neighbor loves you. Love your
> mother. Peace… Love… Aum…" or something to that effect. We felt
> a sudden sense of awe, and then a slight twinge of guilt. We
> wondered if that qualified as an abuse of power and could ever be
> found illegal.[239]

The legends buzzing around the effectiveness of J. Potts' subliminal messages at

least had the effect of inspiring vivid stories. The show that allegedly caused the

audience to approach the stage is intriguing indeed, but the shows that had

subliminal content to move away from the stage could more easily be explained

away, given the sheer volume required to make AIRWAY. Volume was perhaps the

single-most important connective fiber that linked the LAFMS to the early

Japanese experimentalists hungry for new sounds.

Japanese journalist Takaya Sakaguchi from Tokyo wrote for a magazine

called *Jam* in the late 1970s. Records by the LAFMS were often reviewed and

categorized as "psychedelic." In the summer of 1979 Sakaguchi came to Los

Angeles and learned more about the LAFMS. He was surprised that the Society

had a very loose structure. J. Potts gave him a copy of AIRWAY's *Live at LACE*.

When he returned to Japan, he wrote many articles singing the praises of the

LAFMS, and described AIRWAY as a "noise orchestra." Modeled after J. Potts' "Ten

Commandments of Painting" the following is an excerpt of the poetic form

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[239] Kevin Laffey, ibid.

Sakaguchi used to describe his experience of AIRWAY. J. Potts includes the excerpt

below in one of his social networking profiles.

> Here are COMMANDMENTS OF AIRWAY
>
> AIRWAY is a pathway.
> AIRWAY is a throat that air passes between our mouth and lung.
> Keeping AIRWAY to open is an essential way for recovering
> humans under unconscious.
> AIRWAY is a way to conscious.
> AIRWAY is a brainchild of Joe Potts.
> Here are commandments of AIRWAY
>
> AIRWAY is a hole through which our conscious passes.
> Sound of AIRWAY is not an object.
> Sound of AIRWAY has no fixed location.
> Sound of AIRWAY has no fixed location.
> Sound of AIRWAY has no fixed meaning.
> Sound of AIRWAY has no dimensions.
> Meaning and dimensions of AIRWAY sound constantly change
> in relation to the universe inside and outside listeners.
> Sound of AIRWAY has no fixed time.
> The "flow of time" in AIRWAY sound is psychological not physical.
> Sound of AIRWAY is a representation of the "whole" of sound
> existing inside and outside us.
> Because all sound of AIRWAY is interrelated,
> there is no such thing as innovative sound at AIRWAY performance.
> Sound of AIRWAY is an unfolded manifestation of hidden (enfolded)
> universe, consisting of all sound which will ever exist and has ever
> consisted inside and outside us.[240]

The zeal of the Japanese fan and reporter must have been striking toward the

end of the 1970s. J. Potts not only put on two shows in Tokyo by 1977, but now

had fans too. This encounter undoubtedly represents one of the first of many

important connections between Japanese listeners and this faction of the West

Coast experimental music scene.

In a sense AIRWAY came to symbolize and summarize the LAFMS because

it called for the participation of close friends and allies in the LAFMS, Poo-Bah

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[240] Takaya Sakaguchi, "Here are Commandments of AIRWAY" (1978) *LAFMS—The Book*, https://lafms.wordpress.com/essay-takuya-sakaguchi-airway-live-at-lace/ (accessed August 10, 2013).

Records scene, and other associates. AIRWAY continues to perform now that the LAFMS is seen more as a city treasure of experimental music with more frequent performances. J. Potts himself sits on the board of directors for SASSAS (The Society of the Activation of Social Space Through Art and Sound).

5. LAFMS Aesthetics

"Free ears and minds are one thing, but what about aesthetics?" wrote Hal Clark

in response to the first LAFMS tape. The aesthetics of the LAFMS varies from

person to person, and different actors have different ideas concerning what forms

the core aesthetic principles of the LAFMS. For the LAFMS there was a certain

skepticism if not a disdain for academic composers and their ideas on aesthetics.

But like the academic composers, the LAFMS did not always seem to have a clear

idea of what aesthetics meant. The term 'aesthetics' was therefore politicized. For

the academic composers it seemed that aesthetics meant what they were already

doing: the established academy chose them and therefore they were 'good.' The

LAFMS felt themselves to be on the fringe of music, and that is where they liked

it. Yet some members of the LAFMS were in fact part of the academy.

J. Potts finished an MFA at Otis, and though not trained so formally in

music, his thesis was intermedia in nature, including sound. On the other hand,

though he never learned to read music, Chip Chapman spent three working on

the MFA at Cal Arts, and left without the degree. So for many performers in the

LAFMS the academy represented a stuffy atmosphere steeped in tradition, and it

was a tradition that was often under attack by the young improvisers. R. Potts

found that the activities of the LAFMS did not bode well with the academy (nor

the local band scene, for that matter). Because of Chapman's association with Cal

Arts, some LAFMS performances took place at the institution. At one performance

at Cal Arts, Chapman performed his *Smix* (that featured records from Chapman's

'S' section in his record collection). Attached to the end of the piece was a loud

improvisational section by Le Forte Four. Much of the room was quiet and many

of the audience members (and faculty) had fallen asleep until they were woken

up by Le Forte Four's din. Like many other concerts by Le Forte Four, one

disgruntled student turned off the tape machine during the performance. "It

seemed to especially infuriate those people who were 'avant-garde'"[241] recalled R.

Potts.

Recchion was also connected to Otis Art Institute. His personal aesthetic

was against purity. "We never created a manifesto, though a lot of our work

might have a messy aesthetic."[242] The 'messiness' was perhaps one of the most

striking features of the early LAFMS. Against the Japanese noise that was

emergent and developing through the 1980s, the LAFMS achieved noise through

its mess. And yet Recchion revealed one of the clandestine roots for the

commonality of the LAFMS through its process: "We would build it up, create and

then destroy, only to do it all over again in another context at a different time,

under a different name or one we've used before. That was the unspoken

rule."[243] The LAFMS was about challenging aesthetics, and avoided building one.

Yet with groups of people come a community, modes of communication and

expression, and other commonalities that brought them together to make sound

useful in their lives as a collective. The 'rules' may not have been spoken, but

they could be inferred, and often were revealed in their writings.

Ace Farren Ford had a more idealistic view of what the LAFMS was. For

him the various members had a sense of independence, but came together

through their shared interests.

> LAFMS was and is still a large group of individuals who would be
> doing all these things separately if we did not have each other as a

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[241] R. Potts, "Free Ears 1."
[242] Recchion interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[243] Recchion interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

support group and fans of each other's work and a big blanket to pool together under to collectively make us a body of work beneath the same flag. We are a country unto ourselves, but then, each member of the LAFMS has a different idea of what the LAFMS is…. When I joined I was only sixteen, so I am sure my view is a little idyllic. At this point it is my family, a large family of very good friends, and it is very rewarding to work with these people and to improvise with these people, our recent shows have been like warm family reunions, the[re] is magick and great intense joy to me when we make our "music" and the recent years are just as thrilling as when we were first making this music, and finding out that there were others besides ourselves who were developing in a similar way, it is really difficult to properly verbalize what LAFMS means to me, but it is a very major part of who I am.[244]

The aesthetic of the LAFMS over time developed into a family atmosphere and provided a network of artistic support and collaboration within a group of artistic pariahs that would be one of the hallmarks of their society.

One of the often-cited aesthetic considerations in the LAFMS was the idea of *unmusicianship*. Unmusicianship meant something different for everyone involved, but much of it was an attack on the concept of virtuosity. For Dennis Duck and John Duncan it was essential to the aesthetic of the LAFMS: "That was the glue that held a very disparate group of people together."[245] Rick Stewart (Ju Suk Reete Meate) also took to the idea: "a band without musicians" was one of his early rallying cries. For Fredrik Nilsen *nonmusicianship* was a way of eschewing virtuosity, which he saw as one the main enemies to the LAFMS. "We were children undressing animals. It was part of our ethos. Even when we learned how to actually play instruments some of us would intentionally play in a way that was unfamiliar in order to enter a realm of exploration that comes from lack of mastery. Virtuosity never really mattered." Elsewhere he wrote, "If there

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[244] Facebook chat with Ace Farren Ford, September 2, 2013.
[245] Dennis Duck interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

was a common aesthetic it had to do with not really caring a damn about aesthetics. There was an irreverent attitude toward virtuosity."[246]

R. Potts saw the movement that pointed toward a "folk approach to the avant-garde" (perhaps echoing Gordon Mumma, or at least moving toward Mumma's realization of electronic music as a folk art).[247] "For the most part we reject traditional virtuosity in favor of making sounds any which way we can. The roles of composer and musician seemed limited and we wanted to work with spontaneous sound as the focus. Most were influenced by the idea of the 'non-musician' as someone who creatively works with sound as the medium."[248] One of Smegma's works gelled with the collective ideas of the LAFMS. It was called "I Am Not Artist." For R. Potts the title of the record struck a chord. "'Artist IS kind of annoying. Artist, Musician, Rock, Music all carry baggage and held a whole set of expected conditions that just get in the way. Free art. Anyone can be creative."[249] The baggage of tradition has perpetually been an inspiration for composers and artists, but the LAFMS were taking it further as a folk collective. For R. Potts *nonmusician* would be traced to Cornelius Cardew's 'Scratch Orchestra,' an orchestra of amateurs joined together to collectively make music in a non-hierarchical manner.

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[246] Nilsen interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[247] In 1976, Mumma—who was teaching UC Santa Cruz at the time—advocated for composers to use junk and junk electronics to build one's own music technology. The advantage of this approach was that composers could make new instruments that were not standard and mass-produced: thus, he called this approach a means to make experimental "folk art" or a folk mode of forging instruments leading to new kinds of sounds and performances. The implication—which perhaps did or did not come true—is that *anyone* can appropriate junk electronics to produce their own instruments and music, and *if anyone could do it*, then it would create a tradition of folk art centered around electronics.
Music With Roots in the Aether: Opera for Television. Tape 4: *Gordon Mumma*. Produced and directed by Robert Ashley, 1976. http://www.ubu.com/film/aether_mumma.html (accessed June 9, 2016).
[248] R. Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[249] R. Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

Tom Recchion's notion of the *nonmusician* was more nuanced and ironically it was even more free. As a visual artist he felt he could do whatever he wanted. He was inspired by the Portsmouth Sinfonia, which required its members to be "non-musicians," and Brian Eno's notion of the dilettante. For one of these records Recchion turned toward tonal music in a move that upset many of his previous fans who celebrated his improvisations. "After working with free improvisation I got more interested in tonal music. Not being trained in music I thought it felt a bit like Evil Knievel attempting to compose a melody."[250] This idea dovetails with Recchion's feelings against purism. "I dislike a purist aesthetic of any form."[251] Fellow Doo-Dooette Nilsen wrote similarly: "We are mostly anti-purist. Purist attitudes seem rampant. We like to mix it up. You never know what you're going to get. It's quite confusing."[252] In other words, by discarding a purist ideal, doing 'whatever you want' sometimes included having a look precisely at the tradition you were trying to avoid. From this perspective, composing a melody from the standpoint of a nonmusician was daring indeed. The anti-purist sentiment went hand-in-hand with another of Recchion's ideas: the 'undefinable.' The ability to define something is the ability to rationalize and control it, and certainly there was something front the onset of the LAFMS that was against control (or in the case of J. Potts' *AIRWAY*, the deliberate abuse of control). With the 'undefinable' even the term 'nonmusician' had to be questioned, and R. Potts hit upon an important insight:

> Later on after years of making noise I realized that our skills as sound artists/non-musicians were improving. We were becoming better non-musicians. That got to be confusing. As I got more confident I realized that sound artist, musician, non-musician or

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[250] Recchion interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[251] Recchion, April 1995, essay in booklet to *The Lowest Form of Music*.
[252] Nilsen, 1981, in booklet to *Lowest Form of Music*.

> noisemaker were all the same thing to me and I didn't care what
> you called it. I just liked the
> experience of doing it and didn't really worry much if other people
> liked what we were doing or not.[253]

The idea of musician and nonmusician, artist and nonartist, musician and noise-maker, were revealed to be unnecessary binaries. But then what were these "skills" that were developed that allowed R. Potts to come to this insight? R. Potts hinted at the answer a few sentences before the passage quoted above: "We grew big ears. Listening emerged as the most advantageous technique."[254] The skill or technique that developed most was listening. "Becoming better (non-)musicians" meant becoming better listeners.

The origins of the LAFMS through the Potts brothers and Chip Chapman started off as a do-it-yourself (DIY) aesthetic in the homes of the adolescent artists. As teenagers it manifested itself as ways to build toys and structures for play. These collaborative DIY activities developed into further artistic expression. J. Potts cites two important activities he and his brothers developed in their youth. The first he called 'drawing mustaches on Mona Lisas,' and the second he called 'tape dumb.' These two activities often were enhanced by a strong sense of collaboration. The 'drawing of mustaches on Mona Lisas' was an early form of *plunderphonics*. Plunderphonics is the appropriation of copyrighted material to make new works. It was coined by John Oswald in his 1985 essay of the same name. J. Potts gives an example of Chip Chapman's plunderphonic technique.

> If Chip wanted a hot guitar lead he didn't learn it, you just found
> someone who could play it and recorded it, or took it off of a
> record. What idiot wants to learn to play that? This seems pretty
> obvious in the sample-oriented culture we live in now, but in the

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[253] R. Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[254] R. Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

early seventies in the Southern California garage band culture it was radical.[255]

The second important idea was called '*tape dumb.*' "When you are a kid and you make your first recordings you seem to go to this stupid, silly almost trance-like place. Almost as if you are acting like a medium channeling some deranged spirit."[256] The Potts brothers made many of these recordings with the early technology they had. Rick Stewart of Smegma also saw the use of technology in his youth culture as radically different than in previous generations. As quoted earlier, Stewart says: "I feel like I was part of that generation that got the first fun tape decks. It was the first time children could possibly be included in recording techniques." The availability of tape technology and the spirit of collaboration led to creation—the collaboration drove the success of the LAFMS.

> I think a large part of the LAFMS mindset came from that early experience with do-it-yourself entertainment. We built cars, skateboards, dungeons, caves, castles, dummies. The projects were always communal. We threw our equipment, toys, costumes, ideas, and sometimes money together in a big pile and we all used it without any thoughts of whose it was originally.[257]

The innocence of childhood creativity is therefore another unspoken aesthetic value of the LAFMS. For Le Forte Four it was the communal art projects that led to "tape dumb." For Rick Stewart in Smegma, the use of toy recording equipment led to focused sound investigations. For the DooDooettes it was "children undressing animals." These DIY tendencies were later realized as sound collages and improvisations.

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[255] J. Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[256] J. Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[257] J. Potts interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

Improvisation was an essential part of the LAFMS' output. Le Forte Four, the Doo-Dooettes, and Smegma all used improvisation. For the Doo-Dooettes, sometimes structures were employed to control the sonic content; one way this was done was through the duet scheme. "At our inception the Doo-Dooettes were more interested in improvisation." "I saw experimental music and free improvisation as a way to make sound art…. Plus the very ephemeral nature of sound itself was compelling to me."[258] For Fredrik Nilsen improvisation was part of the aesthetic: "The concept [of the LAFMS] related to both improvisation and attitude."[259] Stewart had a special twist on what improvisation meant. Early on he was versed in Derek Bailey's idea of *idiomatic* and *non-idiomatic* improvisation, though he claimed neither. Instead he and Smegma crafted the idea of a "new suburban primitive music." In other words, it was a form of folk art lurking beyond the urban centers. "*New suburban primitive music…* involved a lot of reckless 'improvisation' due to incompetence." The idea of 'improvisation due to incompetence' resonated well with many of the LAFMS members and can be linked directly with Doo-Dooettes' ideologies against virtuosity. In the mid-1970s these ideas resonated, sometimes too loudly, with the burgeoning punk rock movement. "Actually we're not into music. We're into chaos" said Steve Jones of the Sex Pistols.[260]

So how does the LAFMS fit into a broader discussion of experimental 'noise?' In the case of the LAFMS, noise was always around but it was never a priority per se. The East Los Angeles Free Music Society (before they changed their name to Le Forte Four) often said to each other: "We're going to make

[258] Recchion interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[259] Nilsen interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.
[260] John Robb, *Punk Rock: An Oral History* (Oakland: PM Press, 2006), 148.

some noise," and even referred to their style as "noise music." J. Potts' AIRWAY

single, and then his group AIRWAY sent a message that hit Japanese fans hard

and had a huge impact. Japanese performer Hijokaidan was one such performer

who admired AIRWAY and cited them (along with the Nihilistic Spasm Band in

Canada) as essential to his development and the development of Japanese noise

in general. "Jojo [Hiroshige] would later say that he had been inspired to start

Hijokaidan by listening to the LAFMS super-noise orchestra AIRWAY, however, I

feel that the influence of Fushitsusha was the greater."[261] AIRWAY was loud and

chaotic, and even naughty with the mysterious subliminal messages put forth by

J. Potts. Standing waves were important to him and could only be achieved

through extreme volume (J. Potts later learned that Genesis P'Orridge of

industrial band Throbbing Gristle was using a similar technique, and claimed to

have caused women to orgasm through live sonic performances). Yet the LAFMS

never completely saw themselves in the mirror when looking at the development

of Japanese noise. Rick Stewart wrote, "The link with Japanese noise groups is

not obvious. They tend to be so singular and pure of concept, and we are messy.

But it is a spiritual bond and hard to describe." The notion that Japanese noise is

"pure" and that the LAFMS is "messy" is the main difference between early 'noise'

experimentation in 1970s Los Angeles with mid-1980s harsh noise. Recchion's

personal aesthetic was not toward loud sounds. He preferred (and prefers)

smaller more intimate sound settings. "I never thought what we were doing was

noise. I'm not particularly interested in noise for noise sake. I tend to like more

quiet music. But then again, this is not a hard and fast rule."[262] R. Potts felt he

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[261] Toshiharu Mikawa and Jojo Hiroshiga, "The Hijokaidan Story," trans. Alan
Cummings http://noise.as/index.php?topic=319.0 (accessed August 21, 2013). Mikawa wrote the
sentence cited.
[262] Recchion interviewed, *The Wire*, August 2006.

understood the link between the Japanese noise scene and the LAFMS when he himself traveled to Japan years later. He saw the nearly exclusive use of guitar pedals as a reduction of the LAFMS aesthetic to smaller, essential items for making sound. "It seems to me that maybe in Japan the gear had been reduced to the essential elements… the guitar pedals, which could be carried on a train in the suitcase." For J. Potts the influence of his music on the Japanese noise scene is perplexing. J. Potts, who headed the "super noise orchestra," gave a sober response concerning the connection between the LAFMS and the Japanese noise pioneers in my interview with him.

> I think maybe I'm regarded in harsh noise circles as being a noise guy because of AIRWAY and because of the supposed legend that AIRWAY influenced Hijokaidan and Incapacitants and some of the Japanese noise scene, which may or may not be true. They say it developed simultaneously. I don't really care because what I was trying to do with AIRWAY was completely different from what they were trying to do. If they were inspired by some of the sonic things I did and developed their own thing, that's great.[263]

For J. Potts the influence is a two-way street. He often listens to Japanese noise band Incapacitants when he paints. Others feel similarly. Smegma and Merzbow put out a record called *Smegma Plays Merzbow Plays Smegma*. The aesthetics between the LAFMS and the greater Japanese noise scene may not be the same, but certainly has enough in common for mutual respect and collaboration.

The Japanese Connection to Los Angeles

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[263] My interview with J. Potts.

The Japanese noise artists—particularly Hijokaidan, Fushitsusha, Masonna, Merzbow, CCCC (Cosmic Coincidence Control Center) and Incapacitants—became the darlings of the 'noise' scene worldwide by the late 1980s. The influence of the early LAFMS bands on the Japanese noisicians, particularly Airway and Smegma, was immense. In my interview with noisician Bob Bellerue, he recounted a conversation with Rick Stewart (Ju Suk Reet Meate) of Smegma, and mentioned the influence of Airway on Hijokaidan.:

> BB: Rick [Stewart], from Smegma, said they played a festival and Yamatsuka Eye from the Boredoms walked by and out of the blue said, "Smegma! My favorite band!" In terms of how Airway influenced Hijokaidan and all that stuff: that's huge.[264]

Yamatsuka Eye is the singer for Japanese noise rock band the Boredoms. He was also the vocalist in John Zorn's jazz-metal band Naked City. Hijokaidan is an early Japanese noise and free improvisation band headed by Jojo Hiroshige inspired by British psychedelic space rock band Hawkwind and LAFMS band Airway. Perhaps the most obvious aspects Hijokaidan adopted from Airway was the use of extreme volume, but also the chaotic electronic free improvisations, wiring various sources through a mixer. Also in the air amongst the LAFMS, the Japanese noisicians, and the British industrial music scene (particularly Throbbing Gristle) was an interest in Dada, Surrealism, the American beat poets, John Cage, the Viennese Actionists, musique concrète and elektronische Musik, Fluxus, free jazz, krautrock, and also more daring popular musics like Frank Zappa and Captain Beefheart. The strength of the influence of the LAFMS bands on the early Japanese free improvisation and noise groups may be difficult to determine. Nevertheless, there at least remains a strong connection—many Japanese

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[264] Author's interview with Bob Bellerue, August 26, 2012.

experimentalists *knew* Airway. Furthermore, the developments of the Japanese noise artists were discovered by American and European audiences and inspired a wave of experimentalism with noise throughout the 1980s and 1990s among young listeners. In the late 1970s Takuya Sakaguchi announced the LAFMS as friends to Japanese musicians.[265]

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[265] See essay by Takuya Sakagushi in the booklet to *The Lowest Form of Music*, 32.

Conclusions—History of Los Angeles Experimental Music Scenes

Los Angeles has a history of artistic performance and exploration of sound that spans at least since the 1920s. The common aesthetic between Evenings on the Roof with Monday Evening Concerts and the Los Angeles Free Music Society is the exploration of sound and the development of listening to new sounds (timbres) by composer-performers in the interest of freedom. For the concert series, active listening was the duty and responsibility of the audiences, and as aesthetic workers they carried the flame of a twentieth century musical intelligencia who had the privilege of listening intently to radical compositions and not just "bathing in beautiful sounds." They were the chosen audiences for whom director Lawrence Morton would boast: "they are perhaps the last free audiences to the last free artists." Peter Yates, founder of Evenings on the Roof, was ecstatic to have young composers like Gordon Mumma and Robert Ashley from the Sonic Arts Union working with electronic sounds because he felt himself to be their advocate, to "fight to the death in the cause of aesthetic freedom."

By contrast the Los Angeles Free Music Society soared beyond Morton's conception of 'free audiences' and 'free artists' by incorporating the brazen aesthetic postures of John Cage, Frank Zappa, Captain Beefheart, and free jazz. 'Free music' was meant as an attempt to be free to "to do your own thing" (a DIY ideal) and to be free from economic restrictions ("free from money"); the music was meant for 'free ears' and 'free minds'—that *was* the aesthetic, even if the society did not always live up to the (pure) notion of freedom. Free ears were big ears that could listen to the dynamism and subtlety of sound that would lead to fruitful experimentation for hours at a time either through improvisation, editing, or both simultaneously. For some music conservatives, the Los Angeles Free

Music Society had gone too far. One conservative, Hal Clark, who was unimpressed with the first LAFMS tape, wrote: "Free ears and minds are one thing, but what about aesthetics?" Clearly Clark had a particularly kind of aesthetic agenda in mind: one that was perhaps not as free as Yates' call for "aesthetic freedom." The LAFMS advocated for a "messy aesthetics" and held a flippant attitude toward mastery. Their interest in *unmusicianship* or *nonmusicianship* was a posture against traditional Western forms of pedagogy that fetishized music literacy: the posture was meant to inspire new sounds using instruments beyond the comfort zones of the Western canon, or using those instruments in new ways that spurned the Western tradition of music-making. As nonmusicians and nonartists, they endeavored to eschew virtuosity and achieve the childlike state of mind to create from a fresh perspective. For the Doo-Dooettes it was "children undressing animals," and attempting to play instruments they had no experience with. For Le Forte Four it was "drawing mustaches on Mona Lisas" and making myriads of "tape dumb" recordings. For Smegma, self-mockery was important: Eric Stewart's interest in a "new suburban primitive music" would provoke frenzied improvisations and reach new sounds by the force of incompetence. These tools were the means to reach the "undefinable"—perhaps not music; perhaps not art; perhaps not even 'noise': just messy sound… perhaps!

Unmusicianship was the sonically targeted form of a wider philosophical aesthetic that was against the notion of purity. Free music as anti-purity meant many things. For the Doo-Dooettes it meant that they could constantly reinvent themselves; but it also meant not limiting themselves to materials unexplored. Recchion believed he could explore tonal music with a fresh and uninformed

approach. For Joe Potts, anti-purity meant that the supergroup AIRWAY could be subversive toward the notions of freedom. Through 'electronic fascism,' J. Potts would control most (if not all) of the sonic information through his mixer while infusing the sound with subliminal messages designed to incite specific actions from the audience: a Los Angeles *Fascist* Music Society with J. Potts as the despot. If making noise was too much of a 'no' to making music, then *using music* could be a valuable source for making new forms of art/music.

These plunderphonic-type techniques were often employed to mix conventional music with other materials. The result was often confusing: the message was confusing, the meaning was confusing. Confusion about aesthetics was forged into an aesthetics of confusion. Recalling Rick Potts' realization, he wrote: "Later on after years of making noise I realized that our skills as sound artists/non-musicians were improving. We were becoming better non-musicians. That got to be confusing." "We grew big ears. Listening emerged as the most advantageous technique." The most important technique was not the external action of making music with instruments, it was the internal action of making music in the mind—listening. When R. Potts became aware that he was becoming a better listener, what did he mean by 'better'? Were his 'big ears' becoming refined? formulated? rational? virtuosic?

Perhaps the key to understanding the LAFMS is through the idea of messiness. Messiness is characterized by its disorderly disposition. It is untidy; not neat. As disorder it is difficult to define, and it has often been achieved through childlike experimentation. Compared with the Japanese noise movements, the messy LAFMS aesthetic is more open than the purity of sonic ideology from the artists across the Pacific Ocean, at least in the minds of key

members in the LAFMS. When considering the East region of Yates' chart—*Noise* as "the totally random or inchoate mingling of sounds"—the Japanese movements *tend* to represent *White Sound* as the "totally random… minglng of sounds" while the LAFMS *tends* to represent the "inchoate mingling of sounds." There lies the difference: *inchoate* means "just begun, incipient; in an initial or early stage; hence elementary, imperfect, undeveloped, immature."[266] The LAFMS use inchoation as a process to achieve their mess, even when they start with a mess.

The origins of experimental music culture in Los Angeles were born out of a need for musicians to play new (ultramodern) music and finding an audience that would listen to it. Musicians in the first half of the twentieth century were highly skilled performers or amateurs who trained for hours a day when a performance was on hand. Some performers were professional musicians in the Los Angeles Philharmonic or worked in the film music industry, while others were talented amateurs. As the concert series progressed from the 1940s to the 1950s, more works by Cage (and influenced by him) were performed and discussed, opening up audiences to listen to sounds and to invite them to listen in new ways: ways that prioritized timbre over pitch and harmony. Yates was an early advocate for new music by composers in the United States, and even followed the noisy Sonic Arts Union clan. Early works by Mumma used circuit-bending techniques and mixed acoustic instruments with electronics while Ashley explored long-form noisy works like *The Wolfman*.

By the 1970s recording technologies made music-making more accessible with the recording technology itself becoming one of the main instruments. Its

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[266] "Inchoate, adj. (and n.)". OED Online. December 2013. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/93447?rskey=cXaKoJ&result=1 (accessed March 3, 2014).

affordability gave access to a wider swath of the ever-burgeoning middle class. Its short tradition as a recording medium and as an instrument helped give the performer the freedom to experiment with the technology and make and listen to new sounds. Thus the Los Angeles Free Music Society came together as a group of inspired listeners ready to make and record music with anything that made sound. The 1970s was a decade of do-it-yourself ethos and fierce individualism. Of course the 1970s did not invent DIY: composers like Henry Cowell, John Cage, and Harry Partch had been composing, performing, building instruments, and promoting their own works decades before. The composer-performer model was often the only way an experimental composer could present their work to an audience. The LAFMS is a society of composer-performers, and they often collaborated into long-term bands, one-off bands, and sometimes gave duo and solo performances. The key difference between the early avant-garde composers and performers in Los Angeles and the LAFMS was that the former were trained in Western music literacy, its traditions and histories, and the specter of rational theories of music that were used to construct its mythology and ideology as a fine art in the Western canon of great composers and masterpieces; while the LAFMS is interested in building their own traditions to the extent possible while borrowing slices of Western music (or anything else) like a bricoleur or dilettante working with materials and methods that are not altogether clear. They attempt to start from a nascent, inchoate stance that cares little for history or tradition, and has little interest in conventional notions of skill or talent. Their chief skill is listening. From these methods they make a mess of music.

CHAPTER 2
LOS ANGELES EXPERIMENTAL 'NOISE' SCENES FROM 2011-2013

The focus of this chapter will be on three venues associated with the

experimental 'noise' scenes in Los Angeles: Dem Passwords, (the) Handbag

Factory, and the wulf. These venues constituted the main grounds of cultural

negotiation and exploration within the 'noise' scene from 2011 to 2013. Since

2013, Dem Passwords moved from its West Hollywood location to Culver City,

where its influence and importance has waned, and two newer venues—Human

Resources and Mata Noise—have come into prominence since 2013 while (the)

Handbag Factory and the wulf. continue to flourish. Other venues have held

'noise' events but perhaps without the urgency of the main three I studied. A

venue is not just a space for the performance of an activity, it is also a site for

human interaction and political negotiation. The politics of a venue tell us about

how the space is controlled and for what purpose does it serve. Whoever has the

control has at least some of the power in the greater scene—in this case, the

experimental 'noise' scene—and therefore makes decisions about how we listen

by making decisions on who we listen to. Therefore each section on the three

major venues I studied is accompanied with a discussion about how power is

wielded in its particular context.

I. (The) Handbag Factory—A History

(The) Handbag Factory was established at a former handbag factory, and has become one of the main experimental 'noise' venues in Los Angeles. It is located at 1336 South Grand Avenue in the South Park district of Downtown Los Angeles. The first show at (the) Handbag Factory transpired in January 2011 and the venue has continued to host shows. (The) Handbag Factory is a multi-level building with a basement and a roof. Most of the shows take place on the top floor, though there have also been shows on the bottom floor at the back of the building. Out the window of the top floor is a roof that boasts elevated views of Downtown Los Angeles.

(The) Handbag Factory serves three basic functions: 1) as venue for (the) Handbag Factory series and occasionally for other music promotions (indie rock, punk, metal, DJs and dance music), 2) as the site where Seahorse Sound Studios is headquartered, and 3) as a living space for its primary owner Samur Khouja and his brothers. The bottom floor is accessed through a back alley. It serves as the main studio room for Seahorse Sound Studios and sometimes acts as a performance venue. The control room for Seahorse Studios and the bedrooms for most of its occupants are on the second floor. The control room holds an impressive array of professional vintage recording equipment and digital interfaces. The top floor is where the majority of the performances at (the) Handbag Factory take place, though in fact it is the kitchen and living space, with a master's bedroom where Samur stays. The top floor and the roof are on the same level: a window at the back of the room leads to the outside roof area where people often go between performance sets to get fresh air, socialize, smoke, and take in the Downtown scenery from the roof.

(The) Handbag Factory is a brick building located on a one-way street in a relatively desolate industrial part of Downtown Los Angeles. There is plenty of street parking; in front is metered parking, but the performances always occur after six o'clock PM when the meters are no longer running. The entrance is at the front, leading to a long flight of stairs to the top floor. At the top of the stairs is an unattended table with a donation jar—five dollars is suggested for most shows but not enforced. At the top of the stairs is the living room and kitchen that serve as the main performance space for (the) Handbag Factory. The space is large for a living room, but small for a performance venue; nevertheless the space is usually sufficient for its purposes, and only on certain occasions—like when William Bennett of the famous 1970s British power electronics band Whitehouse performed—did the space seem overcrowded. The kitchen is often barricaded off to serve as a space to sell drinks and for performers to sell 'merch'[267] (recordings usually). In the corner is Samur's bedroom, which he usually keeps shut during shows. On the walls are various works of art and from the high ceilings hang vintage chandeliers. The stage area is toward the front of the building by a large window—it is not raised. There are a few couches for audiences to sit during performances and a few stools from the kitchen bar. During performances audiences typically stand or sit very close to the performer, especially if the performer is well-respected or a good friend. In some cases I have witnessed the performers and audiences interacting in a physical manner. In this way (the) Handbag Factory may be the most intimate of the scenes I have studied.

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[267] 'Merch' is a colloquially short for 'merchandise.'

Of the main venues of 'noise' in Los Angeles, (the) Handbag Factory did not boast the most impressive sound system for its loud-playing guests during my research.[268] Some performers bring their own equipment and sound reinforcement, but those performers, like Pedestrian Deposit, seem to be particular about their sound. In fact, the sound system for most performers is no shortcoming at all, and in my experience has been sufficient for most performers who require loud volume. The performers who bring their own equipment tend to favor low frequencies that require more power to amplify properly. In between sets Samur often plays vinyl records of various styles at low to medium volume. Typically there may be twenty to forty minutes in between performances. During this time performers are tearing down and setting up their equipment and socializing.

Samur makes no money from the shows he has at his home, (the) Handbag Factory. He leaves a donation jar for audience members, and most of the money goes toward the performers, but the amount collected is a pittance, especially when divvied up between the groups and performers. On occasion he has let other promoters use his venue and they have rigorously collected money as a cover charge. The ten dollars was vigorously enforced to see William Bennett's project Cut Hands headline a show at (the) Handbag Factory. (The) Handbag Factory perhaps would not survive if it were a venue only dedicated to experimental 'noise' and performance, since it does not turn any kind of a profit: Samur sustains the venue out of pocket. There are no super-donors who contribute to funding these shows.

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[268] (The) Handbag Factory currently has a large PA system with subwoofers outputting thousands of watts.

The usual 'noise' show at (the) Handbag Factory attracts about 20 to 60 people (Samur's guess is about 30 people), though I have been to shows with only a few people in attendance and shows numbering over 100. The ages of the audiences at (the) Handbag Factory tended to be between 18 and 28 years old. The gender ratio for shows at (the) Handbag Factory is consistently between 15 and 20 percent women (I always counted total occupants, and then women only). Like other similar venues, there tended to be more women in attendance if a woman was performing. Most of the people in attendance at (the) Handbag Factory tend to be enthusiasts of the 'noise' scene, or curious onlookers from other scenes. Audiences were mostly white with some Latin/Hispanic and Asians. Of the many performances I had attended, the only noticeable black person I recall seeing with frequency was Anthony Masoe of Actuary.

Regular attendees at (the) Handbag Factory tend to dress in various punk, postpunk, and early industrial styles—there is no particular 'noise' fashion (nor is there a common term to call people who do 'noise,' though once in a while the term 'noisician,' as coined by Luigi Russolo, will pop up). The attendees at (the) Handbag Factory (between 2011-2013) tended to be younger than those of other scenes, like Dem Passwords, Machine Project, or Human Resources. Before (the) Handbag Factory, Women of Crenshaw was perhaps the venue that catered to younger 'noise' audiences. This is not to say that the older guard and its audiences did not attend shows at (the) Handbag Factory. In fact, it seems that more of the older crowd began attending shows as (the) Handbag Factory became more established in 2012, and as Dem Passwords was forced to move to a smaller and more distant location in Culver City. Socioeconomically, people who attend (the) Handbag Factory seem to be low-income urban people; some have

attended or finished college—similar demographics would be found at various art gallery scenes in Los Angeles. (The) Handbag Factory often sells cheap beer for two or three dollars; often performers drink for free. Outside on the roof—usually between performances—audience members often partake in alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana. I have never seen harder drugs at (the) Handbag Factory, though I would not be surprised if hallucinogens were used occasionally. The roof of (the) Handbag Factory is where the majority of the socializing occurs. Attendees gather into their microscenes or cliques, or mingle amongst other groups, since many of the people who attend shows at (the) Handbag Factory are acquainted with each other.

During a performance at (the) Handbag Factory audiences tend to be very respectful. Most stand and contemplate the sound. Some move in a swaying motion. Very rarely do audiences engage in frenzied dancing. Though there is little movement, the energy can be quite intense. The movements are rarely flourished. Instead, the movements (or lack of movements) constitute an introverted, introspective dance, reminiscent of audiences at a classical music concert but without the confines of regulated and uncomfortable seats.

Some of the most physical performances I have witnessed in the Los Angeles 'noise' scene have transpired at (the) Handbag Factory: such occurrences are rare but potent events. One incident involving Nial Morgan's project Wrong Hole comes to mind. On June 25, 2011 Wrong Hole played at (the) Handbag Factory armed with a four-track cassette recorder, a drum machine, some effects pedals, and a contact microphone. At eighteen years old (at the time), he was amongst the youngest 'noise' performers in the scene. I counted 35 people—22 men and 13 women—in attendance inside (more people were

outside on the roof). Henry Perez of Cuddly Cactus was in attendance along with Jon Borges and Shannon Kennedy of Pedestrian Deposit, Bill Hutson of Rale, Samur Khouja of Conscious Summary and owner of (the) Handbag Factory, Cole Miller of Human Hands, and several others. The energy was electric. I had seen Henry at other 'noise' shows: I knew that his way of experiencing 'noise' performances was through elaborate dancing, head-banging, and air guitaring despite the lack of any kind of beat: though his behavior is not typical for a 'noise' show, Henry has always been tolerated. Wrong Hole's set was extremely loud and intense, ranging from knife-in-ear high frequencies to thick, undulating low tones. Nial was swaying his body as he manipulated the faders and knobs on his equipment. During this set, he interrupted the sounds with several silences. At the back of the room during a quiet section someone shouted "What the fuck!" in approval. Henry was in the very front air guitaring when Nial attacked him during his set and a short fight ensued between Henry and Nial during the performance. The crowd, led by Samur, broke up the skirmish and thrust Henry to the back of the room where he then sat drunk on the couch. Nial had not missed a beat (or a noise) and continued raising the mixer faders to a crescendo. At maximum volume Nial stepped away from his equipment and started convulsing his body, writhing on the floor. Several audience members piled on top of him in a performative dogpile. After a minute of dogpiling with Nial at the bottom, he stood up, walked over to his equipment, and turned everything off. The audience cheered with elation. The performance was over. After the performance I asked Nial about the incident. The following is an excerpt from my field notes.

> On the way down the stairs from the concert, I met the guy from
> Wrong Hole (Nial, I think his name is). He seemed to be leaving in

a hurry. I asked him what happened during his altercation with Henry. He shrugged off the question. It kind of made me feel like a reporter asking a celebrity about a sex scandal. One of the organizers overheard my question on the way down stairs and apologized to Nial; and he said that it was ok.[269]

The organizer was probably Samur Khouja, though I had not met him at that time. I remember Nial was unphased by the altercation. In my interview with Henry Perez, he said of Wrong Hole's performance:

> [H]e just got me in. He got like mind control on me man. I think most of that comes from the drunkenness too. From me being so hammered. But I didn't attack Wrong Hole. I think he kind of attacked me that night. I wasn't thinking he was going to do anything. I thought he was just going to keep screaming and spazzing off.[270]

The incident was intense but there was no bad blood. Henry was temporarily censured only in that he was banished to the couch for the duration of the performance, but he was not exiled or ostracized from (the) Handbag Factory or the broader experimental 'noise' scene. It was another night in the mosh pit for these young performers and audience members at (the) Handbag Factory, but the quality of the pit was more intimate than at a metal or punk show, even though the notion of the pit and the physical nature of the performance reception had clearly been appropriated from metal and punk culture. Other venues that specialize in experimental 'noise'—Dem Passwords and the wulf.—are not known for these levels of corporeal contact. One reason why they are found at (the) Handbag Factory is because the kind of 'noise' associated with the venue tends to be connected to early industrial music and power electronics from the late 1970s and early 1980s, which in turn was associated and in some ways

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[269] My fieldnotes, Los Angeles, June 25, 2011.
[270] Henry Perez, interviewed by me, Van Nuys, CA, August 23, 2011.

indistinguishable from punk in the late 1970s. Despite some of the more physical

displays found at (the) Handbag Factory, Samur insists that the audiences who

come to (the) Handbag Factory for 'noise' shows are amongst the sweetest

people.

Samur Khouja (b. 1985) is not only the owner of (the) Handbag Factory,

he also lives and works there; sometimes he schedules his own solo 'noise'

project, Conscious Summary, and his death metal band, Dystrophic. He is the

chief recording engineer at Seahorse Sound Studies and he works as a contractor

at other high-end studios in the Los Angeles area. He has worked with high-

profile producers and artists, such as the Strokes, Devendra Banhart, Melissa

Etheridge, Bone Thugs and Harmony, and Paris Hilton. Samur's patronage to the

experimental 'noise' scene is outstanding in that he gives the scene a venue for

performance and reception at his own home and expects almost nothing in return

beyond the fruits of the socialization and friendships afforded by the 'noise'

scene. In my interview with him, he was much more interested in talking about

his friends in the scene than he was his own work as Conscious Summary. His

account of the scene surrounding the experimental 'noise' scene at (the)

Handbag Factory is crucial. His love for 'noise' and the people in the scene was

apparent in my interview with him.

> The more noise and experimental music shows I do at (the)
> Handbag Factory are really intimate and my favorite. The noise
> shows are super abrasive and aggressive, and so harsh and hard to
> listen to, or whatever, by normal standards, and they have the
> sweetest people, and they're really helpful and kind and nice, and
> they even help clean up afterwards.[271]

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[271] Samur Khouja, interviewed by me, Los Angeles, September 12, 2012.

Samur was comparing the people in the 'noise' scene to some of the other music

scenes he has occasionally allowed to perform at (the) Handbag Factory, like the

indie rock scene or the death metal scene.

When I asked Samur specifically about what he thought about the people

who perform and attend performances at (the) Handbag Factory, he referred to

the intimacy of the space as essentially his home.

> It ranges. For the most part I prefer to do the more noise-oriented
> experimental shows—or whatever you want to call it—so a lot of
> the times it's that kind of stuff. It's usually mellow people that get
> the space. I think it takes a certain person to go to a warehouse
> and essentially see a concert in somebody's kitchen, which is kind
> of what you're doing at the Handbag Factory, is hanging out in my
> kitchen [laughs]. It's a big space and it sounds great, and I think if
> that's what matters to you then that's the kind of person that's
> going to go. Someone that doesn't really need too much, that just
> wants to be comfortable.[272]

Samur was slightly exaggerating that the audiences watch from the kitchen. The

kitchen is adjacent to the living room in the same large space, and only people

working the merch table would really experience the show from the kitchen

unless the living room was jam-packed. Nonetheless, the point is that (the)

Handbag Factory is an industrial warehouse converted into a living space on the

top and middle floors, a recording control room on the middle floor, and a large

studio space at the bottom—and a performance venue on the top and bottom

floors. Despite its large size as living quarters, it makes for an intimate space for

the performers. And the people who attend the experimental 'noise' shows tend

to be personal friends, friends of friends, and nice, respectful people despite the

intensity of the performances. One of Samur's accounts of a performance by

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[272] Ibid.

Wrong Hole showcases his attitude toward the scene and holding performances at his home.

> [T]hat was the crowd that I've been talking about with the consistent people that go and are really there to support their friends and the bands, and they just knew that Nial was fucking on that night and he was killing it. So everyone had their hands on the table with him, and it was really tribal, and everyone was egging him on, and it got intense and the energy flowed throughout. That's one of the things for me that…: I never think about my place getting destroyed when that stuff is happening. I just think, "This is so beautiful." Not to sound cliché, but it really is, and I never think about: "Oh, my living room," or "Fuck, there's 30 people here about to explode," and "Oh my god, my living room…." That never really crosses my mind. I know it's going to be ok. I think that's my background in being in a metal band and being in those situations where it's very intense, but at the same time it's very controlled and it's a giant ball of energy in this nice little orb. As soon as the music stops it's peaceful again. [W]e've had some beautiful moments where it's just controlled chaos: it's really intense and everyone's in it, and fucking destroying stuff, and nothing ever actually broke. The whole place got bent out of shape. But as soon as the energy dies down it kind of just corrects itself.[273]

For Samur, the intense experiences that come from the experimental 'noise' scene are worth the abuse and the potential for the destruction of his property. In fact, nothing is *ab*used: the space and the equipment are perhaps used to their full potential to create intense experiences at the threshold of transgressive property destruction. These intense experiences often lead to new alliances and stronger friendships: such alliances and friendships surrounding a common activity and the frequency[274] of that activity are how scenes are built and maintained.

Politics at (the) Handbag Factory

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[273] Ibid.
[274] The idea of 'frequency' implies a level of repetition and rules. The rules map onto Stanley Fish's idea that all institutions are inherently conservative.

Yet some alliances and friendships are stronger than others; at those

levels of strength comes the work of politics. Since I define politics as *the*

negotiation of power, power here is being negotiated by who is allowed to play,

who is not allowed to play, who plays the most, and who decides who is allowed

to play. For venue owners and promoters—the decision-makers that decide who

is allowed to play—I asked a few specific questions about the politics of the

'noise' scene without using the term 'politics.' These questions include: *How do*

you decide who can play? Is there anyone you wouldn't book? and *Which*

performers have performed the most? These questions, I believe, are less

threatening than more pointed political questions.

The interview process is very long, so there are other opportunities to

gather information about the politics of experimental 'noise' scenes in other parts

of the interview. This section will deal specifically with the political situation at

(the) Handbag Factory.

Samur sometimes books shows himself and at other times has others

schedule events. He first claims with a laugh that those who persistently bug him

are often the ones who get to play, but the deeper reality is that the people he

allows to play are people he recognizes and trusts in the scene. He allows those

people to book shows and trusts their judgment that they will select people

appropriate for the venue.

> A lot of time it's referrals. If a friend or a person has been coming
> there a lot, and I notice them, and they talk to me, and they say,
> "I have an idea for a show," I'll meet them that way, and that has
> happened a lot. Or there are a couple of other people, like Dustin
> Johnston from Actuary: he books a lot of shows there and he
> organizes shows there a lot, so I trust him quite a bit. He'll find
> really nice acts and put together a great bill with a good crowd,
> and I know that it's just general taste and direction and the way he
> does it is nice and suits the vibe of the venue. There are a few

other people that are similar in that regard that get shows done there.[275]

Other names that emerged for those he trusted to book a show included Jon Borges and Shannon Kennedy of Pedestrian Deposit.

Samur was shy in answering the question about performers he would not book. He was careful to say that booking a performer had little to do with whether or not he liked their performance. He also denied at times that (the) Handbag factory had a particular "*vibe*,"[276] though a few minutes prior in the interview he had said "For the most part I prefer to do the more noise-oriented experimental shows—or whatever you want to call it—so a lot of the times it's that kind of stuff." The purpose of pointing out these contradictions is not to play a game of 'gotcha' with my subjects, but rather to discover centers of power between the cracks. Samur's uneasiness with the question is undoubtedly because the question I asked—*Is there anyone you wouldn't book?*—speaks to politics and exclusionary practices. Personally speaking, I have not met anyone in the experimental 'noise' scenes in Los Angeles that would consider him exclusionary. Yet only so many performers—usually four to six per event—can perform, and events usually happen once or twice a month: sometimes more and sometimes less. In fact, there are some performers who seem to have difficulty booking shows elsewhere that have been welcomed at (the) Handbag Factory. Nonetheless, there are house rules (quite literally) that ensure the maintenance of (the) Handbag Factory, even if those rules are vague.

> I'm not going to do anything that's going to make me
> uncomfortable or eat up my day in an uncomfortable way, or make

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[275] Ibid.
[276] Ibid. "I wouldn't say there's a *vibe* to (the) Handbag Factory…."

me lose business or hurt the studio in any sense, so that's the only thing I can think of when I'm denying it [a performer or group].[277]

Though Samur is reluctant to spell out precise rules, this passage shows that even if there are not specific guidelines, those who can perform are subject to whatever makes Samur 'comfortable,' defined loosely as those who do not steal or destroy property.

Exclusionary practices, however, reveal themselves not only in who is allowed to perform and who is not, but also who performs often. (The) Handbag Factory certainly does have a "*vibe*." A "vibe" is literally a vibration, and a vibration has a frequency. The frequency refers to the identity of the scene at (the) Handbag Factory and its maintenance. The maintenance of such a scene is sustained through repetitive measures. What is being repeated is the type of event most associated with (the) Handbag Factory: "noise-oriented experimental shows" as Samur calls them (though there are other performers—Human Hands (Cole Miller), Positive Shadow (Henry Glover), Earn (Matthew Sullivan (McKinlay Fall 2010)), and others from the industrial, power electronics, and grindcore scenes—who are far from 'noise purists' who also perform at (the) Handbag Factory). In other words, the 'resonant frequency' of events at (the) Hand Factory is geared toward experimental 'noise' to the general exclusion of other types of events and genres. Samur learned from a few bad experiences that some promoters or audiences that have brought in different scenes also brought in a few bad apples that stole from the studio, and subsequently those promoters and scenes—mostly from various indie rock scenes[278]—have been excluded.

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[277] Ibid.
[278] Ibid. "I've made the mistake of renting it out to an indie rock promoter, and there's been very little people there, or just a different crowd. One crowd will help to clean up after a show and the other will just steal shit and destroy stuff."

Those experimental 'noise' events are then exemplified by the frequency of certain performers. Samur told me that the performers who have played the most were Actuary (Dustin Johnston, Anthony Masoe, J Wellman, M Milligan, E Diffner), Ezra Buchla, +Dog+ (Steve Davis, Edward Giles, others), Endometrium Cuntplow (David Lucien Matheke), Damion Romero, Bastard Noise (Eric Wood, Aimee Artz, Jessie Applehans), and Adrian Dimond (Pulsating Cyst and Exdugef). I would add to that list Wrong Hole (Nial Morgan), Pedestrian Deposit (Shannon Kennedy and Jon Borges), Rale (Bill Hutson), Sissistors (Patrick Murch), and Dustin Johnston (Droughter). Samur also performs at his place with frequency as Conscious Summary. Other notable performers at (the) Handbag Factory who have played with less frequency include Maria Garcia as both Concrete Shiva and as Unica, Henry Perez as Cuddly Cactus, Matthew Sullivan as Earn, Jeff Witscher as Rene Hell, and Alex Twomey as Mirror to Mirror and as Persimmons Pomegranate. Below is a chart I made of the most frequent performers with three performances or more at (the) Handbag Factory.

Table 1: Frequency of Performers at (The) Handbag Factory, 2011-2014.

Performers/Groups	Event Performances
Samur Khouja (Conscious Summary/Bandito Overlord)	17
Actuary (Dustin Johnston, Ed Diffner, Anthoy Masoe, Jeff Wellman)	14
+Dog+ (Steve Davis' ensemble)	12
Ezra Buchla	7
Jon Borges + Shannon Kennedy (Pedestrian Deposit/Vasculae)	6+2
David Lucien Matheke (Endometrium Cuntplow)	6
Patrick Murch (Sissisters)	6
Nial Morgan (Wrong Hole)	6
Adrian Dimond (Pulsating Cyst/Exdugef)	6
Tom Hall	5
Maria Garcia (Concrete Shiva/Unica)	4

Amps For Christ (Enid Snarb, Henry Barnes)	4
Harassor (Sandor Finta, Pete Majors, James L Brown) [thrash]	4
Damion Romero	3+1
Bacteria Cult (Kevin Bernier, Jay Howard, Chris Dodge)	3
Jay Gambit (Crowhurst)	3
Anthony King (AMK)	3
Eric Wood + Aimee Artz (Bastard Noise)	3
Scott LeFever (Goth Chix)	3
Eddie Giles (+Dog+, Modern Concert)	3
Cole Miller (Human Hands)	3
Telecaves (Juliette Amoroso, Elaine Carey)	3

Samur was careful not to mention names during the interview process. For some interviews I conducted I would sometimes ask for the names of people the interviewee was invoking if it seemed like they wanted to tell me. In some cases I was asked to turn off the recorder for a period of time to have an 'off-the-record' conversation about a sensitive subject usually regarding a particular person or group of people. Samur did not ask me to turn off the recorder and opted to keep his stories cryptic, and in this case I did not push him to give me more detailed accounts of interpersonal politics the way he saw them in experimental 'noise' scenes. I asked curt follow-up questions to get him to continue the flow of his experiences.

While Samur enjoys booking younger performers, he had experienced some resistance from some of the more established performers. The following are a few passages from my interview with Samur and his views on the politics between (some) older "jaded veterans" and younger performers.

> So a lot of people that are young and fresh, and have this innocence to them, or maybe naïve enthusiasm, get a lot of disrespect. And as a venue owner I can say you'll have a person who has been playing shows for a while that has been on tour, that

has sold hundreds of records, blah blah blah, and they won't want to play with the younger no-name noise act that maybe just goes to a lot of shows and has asked me to play a lot. I can understand someone wanting to play a show that they know is going to draw. It's not like they're getting stiffed out. There'll be four bands that have a great draw and can do fine, so it doesn't hurt to have one or two new acts on there. But then you see these guys that are working hard—these young guys that are super on it. They're working hard, they're creative, they're getting their name out, they're in-tune with these new ways to promote yourself online and whatever it is, and then they're the ones setting up the show all of a sudden, and guess who they're asking to play? It's these older guys now that are enthusiastic about what's going on. Maybe it just takes time to prove yourself to other people in the scene, and that's maybe where some of the politics lay.[279]

In this passage Samur displays his uneasiness with some established performers playing with younger performers from his vantage point as a venue owner and promoter organizing shows. As he says earlier, often times a performer will suggest a line-up for a show, and perhaps some of these line-ups have been too exclusionary for Samur's sensibilities. During his critique toward "jaded veterans," I asked him if he thought there was a conservatism amongst the older guard and about his personal run-ins with veteran performers. He shied away from both questions. "You always experience that. People don't want to give you the time of day if they don't know who you are." In this case, few people know that Samur Khouja has made a name for himself as a professional recording engineer more so than as an experimental 'noise' performer; and that is because he does not make a big deal about it. Samur runs (the) Handbag Factory so he and his friends can share sonic ideas and culture, and by extension, to meet people with those similar values. He is not specifically looking for professional connections through the experimental 'noise' scene because he already has a professional network in the commercial music industry. The experimental 'noise'

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[279] Ibid.

scene is one of Samur's ways of relaxing. Occasionally when he comes home from a hard night's work as a recording engineer contractor, he has some fun. "[A]s soon as I got home, and I do what I have to do, then I just turn my speakers up loud and fuckin' kind of let it loose."[280] Making and sharing experimental 'noise' is what Samur does for fun, and with the successes garnered from his job he is able, as a patron and enthusiast, to afford to use his home as a venue for others to partake in these sonic events.

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[280] Ibid.

II. Dem Passwords—A History

> The show was supposed to start at 9:00. It's now 9:40 and
> everyone is hanging out outside in the parking lot alley. I decided
> to step inside to write. At the moment I'm the only one inside. Phil
> Collins currently plays over the PA loudspeakers, but other kinds of
> music have been in rotation. I talked briefly in a circle with Nial,
> Maria, and Patrick; and then with a circle with Damion, John Wiese,
> and Greh. I haven't yet talked with Elden, GX, and Jessica. It's
> 9:50 and I think the first act will start around 10:00. I'm ready for
> some noise.[281]

Dem Passwords was originally a gallery that opened in a back-alley

basement unit in a wide building in expensive West Hollywood in September

2010. It was located at 7914-B Santa Monica Boulevard near Fairfax Avenue, and

later moved to a smaller location near Culver City where it enjoyed less success

as an experimental 'noise' venue. West Hollywood is between what is more

generally called the 'West side' (Santa Monica) and the 'East side' (Hollywood,

Los Feliz, Silverlake, Echo Park, Downtown) where most of the venues tend to be

located. West Hollywood is notorious for its proud gay culture. I remember in my

interview with Joseph Hammer, he made a connection between the experimental

music community and the queer community.

> Just from my experience, the bars that are run by the queer
> community, the locations where there is a queer community, are
> generally the most friendly and frequented venues and districts in
> the city and internationally—most emphatically.[282]

Joseph's experience spans back to the early 1980s with his experimental band

Dinosaurs With Horns with LAFMS compatriots Rick Potts and Tom Recchion.

Though I am unsure of the orientations of the venue owners and promoters of

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[281] My fieldnotes, Los Angeles, September 30, 2011.
[282] Joseph Hammer, interview by me, East Pasadena, January 27, 2012.

Dem Passwords (and uninterested in finding out), the West Hollywood location is

certainly in a queer part of Los Angeles.

Dem Passwords is run by Sebastian Demian and filmmaker Ethan Higbee.

They were given permission to use the basement space as a gallery. For

Sebastian and Ethan, the space was an opportunity to showcase the artwork of

Jamaican-born reggae pioneer Lee "Scratch" Perry. In my interview with

Sebastian, he said:

> I'm very passionate about *his* [Lee "Scratch" Perry] fine art and
> what he's doing, and I think it has utility, I think it's important, I
> think it has historical value. So then Ethan and I came to create
> this space, and then it was an opportunity to do a lot of other
> things. That, for me, was the main driving goal—I wanted to
> exhibit Lee Perry's artwork, and then there was a whole host of
> other ideas that I had. I had been developing a lot of ideas. It gave
> us an opportunity to do those things, and so it made sense to have
> music here, because we love music, and we're involved with
> musicians in the city, and traveling artists, and people from all over
> the world, and it made sense to have concerts here. My dream was
> to do art exhibitions and have concerts during the course of our
> exhibitions to bring the audience to see the artwork.[283]

In 2010 Sebastian and Ethan organized Lee's first solo show called "Secret

Education" featuring his paintings and video installations. Lee's works were

already displayed in the gallery before his official opening on November 13, 2010.

On September 11, 2010 Sebastian organized his first music show that included

Pink Dollaz (hip hop), Diamond Catalog (Pat Maher's 'noise' dance music),

JCiocci2000 (visual artist Jessica Ciocci), Damion Romero, and Kyle Mabson (DJ

and 'noise' artist). Sebastian loved to book bands of different stripes based on

the music he loved: rap, hip hop, reggae, thrash metal, punk, and experimental

'noise.' Sebastian's favorite shows at Dem Passwords mixed these genres in one

evening, though he admitted that after the first year the gallery came to be

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[283] Sebastian Demian, interviewed by me, West Hollywood, July 10, 2012.

known more for its experimental 'noise' shows than for its other music shows and art shows. Showcasing art with music events was one of Sebastian's goals at Dem Passwords. "My dream was to do art exhibitions and have concerts during the course of our exhibitions to bring the audience to see the art work."[284] During the two years that Dem Passwords was at its West Hollywood location sometimes art would be displayed on the walls and other times the walls would be empty. At its West Hollywood location, Dem Passwords became perhaps the most attended venue for experimental 'noise' in Los Angeles from 2010 to 2013, and the favored place to perform for some of the veterans of the Los Angeles experimental 'noise' scene. The amplification was extremely powerful in the narrow confines of the concrete space.

Although Dem Passwords had a Santa Monica Boulevard address, its entrance was in a back alley. The same block-wide building from Fairfax Avenue to North Hayworth Avenue has a coffee shop on one corner and the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute on the other corner. A 7-Eleven across from Hayworth was where audiences of Dem Passwords would often go to purchase libations to consume during performances. The building had a few basement spaces, and Dem Passwords was one of those basements. The back alley had a parking lot that seemed to accommodate some performers and audiences members; street parking was sometimes tricky, but not impossible. The red brick building, outside staircases, porches, and basement gave Dem Passwords the feeling of an underground venue. A homeless artist once told me that Dem Passwords was evil because you had to have a password to get in (though that certainly was not the case). The back alley also served as the place where

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[284] Ibid.

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audiences would congregate to smoke, socialize, and get some fresh air from the stuffy concrete-enclosed venue. Circles of friends drinking beer or perhaps sharing a pipe, joint, or spliff[285] were common sites in the back alley.

Sebastian would advertise the event on the dempasswords.com web page and on Facebook. Most people would learn about the events either through Facebook or through word-of-mouth, for those who boycotted internet-based social media. Sebastian said that he would occasionally commission flyers for the events by the artists involved.

The performance space was first and foremost intended as a gallery space. The concrete walls were painted white to accommodate paintings; the floors were composed of giant slabs of concrete; the ceiling consisted of unpainted wood beams lined with strip lighting. The space was long and relatively narrow. The performance area was toward the back of the space, where there was also an office space and a control room. Performers generally set up on the wood stage raised about eight inches from the floor.

Dem Passwords boasted an impressive audio system, with large subwoofers, a pair of speaker cabinets that held two fifteen-inch JBL speakers, and thousands of watts of clean power. The robust PA made Dem Passwords a very attractive venue for experimental 'noise' artists to take advantage of the sonic possibilities of extreme volume, and the concrete walls and floors concentrated the sound in the narrow basement hall. Notable performances by Greh Holger as Hive Mind and Damion Romero pushed the audio system to its limits; the JBL cabinets would glow from small light bulbs mounted inside the cabinets that supposedly helped dissipate the heat when the amplifiers were

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[285] A 'spliff' is a cigarette rolled with tobacco and marijuana.

driver at high power. I remember Damion had blown a fuse during a show at Dem Passwords. During a Hive Mind set, Greh's synthesizers were pulsing low frequencies at volumes so loud that each pulse came with a puff of air.

Performances rarely started on time. Posted times on Facebook would usually say that performances would begin at 9:00 PM. Often I would arrive on time or a little early and only a few people, like Sebastian, would be there preparing for the night's event. People often showed up an hour or two later, with performances beginning between 10:00 and 10:30. Performance sets usually lasted between 10 to 30 minutes. In between sets there was typically a 20 to 40 minute intermission, while the next performer set up their equipment and audiences smoked, drank, and socialized.

When performers began their sets, the audiences would file down a short staircase to the basement. At the bottom was the entrance where a table was always set up to sell 'merch' and take the five dollar donation. The donation was generally more stringently enforced than (the) Handbag Factory, though avoiding the donation was easy to do. Often I would enter early before the donation jar was set up, and I would later return to give my donation (I rarely skipped out on donations, and occasionally I would see my lone five dollar contribution in the jar for several minutes while more people filed into the venue before someone else contributed). Sometimes a person would take the donation at the table, adding a more personal enforcement.

Dem Passwords tended to have a slightly older crowd of 'noise'-enthusiasts than (the) Handbag Factory. I saw many familiar faces at Dem Passwords from the Il Corral days in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Audiences that typically attended Dem Passwords were between the ages of

twenty-five and forty-five and dressed in various styles of punk, postpunk, and early industrial, but there certainly was not a unified 'noise fashion.' If there was a 'noise fashion' at all, it was to be found in the favored instruments and equipment used by the performers. Occasionally some of the younger performers more associated with (the) Handbag Factory attended or performed at Dem Passwords, including Nial Morgan as Wrong Hole, Patrick Murch as Sissistors, and Maria Garcia as Concrete Shiva. The older ages of the audiences and performers involved with the Dem Passwords scene gave me the impression that experimental 'noise' was taken more seriously at this venue: these were the people who had stuck it out; who continued to explore and enjoy experimental sound even as they reached the ages of professional maturity. These audiences seemed to be middle-class lower income people approaching a mid-career lifestyle. Few were in long-term relationships, few were married, and none to my knowledge had children.[286]

Typical experimental 'noise' events at Dem Passwords attracted 20 to 80 people, though I had been to events with attendances under 15 people and events with well over 100 people. According to Sebastian, the average attendance for experimental 'noise' shows was 50 people. He recalled that when Andrew WK performed at Dem Passwords, 200 to 250 people had attended. The gender ratio at Dem Passwords for experimental 'noise' events was typically 15 to 20 percent women. More women were likely to show up if a woman, like Shannon Kennedy of Pedestrian Deposit, was performing. Ethically, the experimental 'noise' events were mostly composed of white people with some

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[286] Some 'noise couples' (not a real term) include GX Jupitter-Larsen and Jessica King (married), Maria Garcia and Patrick Murch, Shannon Kennedy and Jon Borges, Matt Purse and Leah Peah Purse (married).

Latin(o)/Hispanic and Asians. Blacks were rare unless the event included black

performers, which was not rare since many of the hip hop performers were black

and Sebastian liked to book performers from different backgrounds.

The audiences at experimental 'noise' events tended to be respectful and

thoughtful listeners. Below is Sebastian's account of the listeners at Dem

Passwords.

> The audiences are phenomenal. To me they all seem like amazing
> people: really creative people with style. All different types of
> people: squares, artists, very fashionable and beautiful people. I
> think all people are beautiful, but all the people that come here
> seem smart and unique, but there has been different audiences.
>
> I think the audiences are closer to a classical music audience than
> to a rock audience because noise music audiences will be polite
> and quiet and let an artist do their thing, even if the music is at a
> really low volume. Sometimes the dynamic range of an artist's
> performance will vary greatly. It could be very quiet at times and
> very loud at others. I think, especially from going to house shows—
> seeing noise music in the house show context—there's a general
> vibe. There's a respect for the performance, and people aren't
> going to make noise; they're not going to do things to disrupt. It's
> not a rock show where you're like, "Yeah! Woo!" You're not going
> to be doing that.[287]

Performance behavior for experimental 'noise' at Dem Passwords was typical in

this region: most people stood up during performances, but occasionally

audiences decided to sit on the ground, or with their backs up against the wall, or

stood at the walls. The audiences tended to listen very carefully to the

performances with little or no movement. Even when some of the more industrial

electronic performers used vintage analog drum machines, dancing, or

movement in general, was reduced to an unexaggerated sway. Audience

members who did not care for the performance might politely exit the building to

the back alley where there were always people hanging out. There was one

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[287] Ibid.

notable exception at the April 19, 2011 event at Dem Passwords. The performers, mostly from outside LA, included Crank Sturgeon (Maine), PCRV (Montana), Styrofoam Sanchez (Oakland), the Haters (LA), and Robert Piotrowicz (Poland). The lively crowd—I counted 26 in attendance (more outside)—gathered around Crank Sturgeon (Matt Anderson) who sat in a chair in the middle of the performance space shirtless with two guitar pedals—DOD Equalizers—at his feet and a strange apparatus that he blew air into that would inflate a balloon while making various noises. His multimedia performance engaged the audience thoughtfully; yet Henry Perez had a different way of engaging with the performance. Henry was rocking out with air guitar to a non-existent beat while heckling Crank Sturgeon. Crank Sturgeon responded and a short dialog ensued. Henry did the same for the previous band, experimental noise-thrash band Styrofoam Sanchez. The audience response to Henry's interruptions was very little, with only a few trying to quiet him. Eventually Henry quit his verbal interruptions on his own, but continued to watch and dance to an imaginary beat. Although some people were visibly annoyed, most paid no attention to the interruptions and concentrated on the performance. Performers also tended to be respectful. I had heard stories in the past of performers who intentionally destroy equipment, either by abusing a vocal microphone, overpowering an amplifier, or blowing out the speakers. From what I observed, the performers in LA and touring acts who came to LA were always respectful of the venue's house equipment or equipment borrowed from local friends. The equipment was often pushed to its limit, but rarely was equipment damaged.

For its duration in West Hollywood, Dem Passwords seemed to enjoy some of the most known names in the experimental 'noise' scenes in Los Angeles, and

sometimes accommodated big names nationally and internationally. There were two shows in particular that were important for many LA experimental 'noise' fans. One featured Leather Bath, Indignant Senility, Rot Tone Bone and Ilza, and Positive Shadow in September 2011. The other featured Astromero, Kitten Sparkles, and Hive Mind on April 15, 2012.

The show on September 30, 2011 featured Leather Bath (John Wiese and Greh Holger), Indignant Senility (Pat Maher), Rot Ton Bone and Ilza (Ben Osbourne and Ilza), and Positive Shadow (Henry Glover). A lot of the experimental 'noise' scene regulars were there, including Damion Romero, Shannon Kennedy, Jon Borges, GX Jupitter-Larsen, Jessica King, Elden Man, Patrick Murch, Maria Garcia, Nial Morgan, Bill Hutson, Peter Kolovos, Albert Ortega, Jeff Williams, and Ryan Williams. Over 50 people were in attendance when Henry Glover of Positive Shadow began his set. Henry G had moved to LA from Chicago. I had seen him perform at (the) Handbag Factory a few times and his sets had always been 'noise' accompanied by drum machine beats; this performance had no beats beyond the gentle undulations from difference tones at three to four cycles per second (two saw-tooth waves at 100 Hz and 97 Hz would crudely imitate the effect). His set started with a lit candle that served as the only light source in the room. Shannon, Jon B, Maria, Patrick, and Nial were up close. I could tell by the way they were standing that they revered the work of Henry G. After his set the audience filed outside. There were over 50 people at that point. Eventually the second act began, Rot Ton Bone and Ilza from out of town. They used beats in a traditional industrial style. Only 7 people were inside for their performance, and when they finished the applause was polite. Indignant Senility was next.

Pat Maher, the Portland artist behind Indignant Senility, was in the documentary *People Who Do Noise* about the Portland noise scene. He told me before his performance that he thought the documentary was terrible. His instruments included a white MacBook, an old Fostex four-track cassette recorder, three Digitech guitar pedals (I think two of them were delay pedals and the third was a distortion box), an analog delay, three Boss equalizer pedals, and a portable Walkman-type cassette recorder. Pat is a tall, stocky character with large arms and medium-long hair. He wore a braided necklace, and wore sunglasses on top of his head. There were 7 men and 4 women inside when he began, but 21 men and 6 women by the end of his set. Everyone was sitting during his set, though people were standing for the previous two sets. Pat's sounds were fast and dramatic with high-pitched filtered noise, and he made a use of intense dynamics, from loud chaotic sections to moments of complete silence, followed by blasts of sound. Pat played two sets of 'noise,' and both together were under 17 minutes. His set ended abruptly and was met with the most satisfying applause up to that point.

Leather Bath was next. They opened spectacularly with the simultaneous breaking of a large chunk of glass with the thrashing down of a broken drum set cymbal. Shards of broken glass spread through the performance area. Greh was wearing his green Ray-Ban prescription glasses with a pair of thick leather gloves and a leather vest. John was wearing jeans and a plaid button up. A Walkman-style portable cassette player was playing a 'noise' track (probably a field recording). Greh had some sort of resonant metal rod that was amplified. John was in charge of the cymbals. He placed eleven cymbals of various sizes (many were broken) on the ground facing up and had a consort of battery-operated

vibrating objects: mostly dildo vibrators, vibrating eggs or bullets, and cheap electric toothbrushes. He placed the vibrating objects on the open cymbals making them reverberate and resonate on the ground. The sound was thunderous. At around the mid-point of the performance, Greh emerged from the back of the space with large metal tape measures and began whipping them downward around the performance space, providing a new timbral layer to the sonic texture. The sound from the heavy tape measures was like a sharp, high-pitched thunder sheet. Greh would sometimes try to whip at the cymbals on the ground. The tape-whipping segment lasted about four minutes. Although the performance appeared multimedia in nature, both Greh and John rejected that notion and insisted that the various sex toys made a particular kind of vibration different from the toothbrushes, and that the tape measures were not done for any visual impact. The performance ended with applause and whistles of approval. Elden yelled for an encore.

Figure 15: Leather Bath after their performance ended at Dem Passwords.

Another event at Dem Passwords that many people attended occurred on April 15, 2012 featuring Hive Mind (Greh Holger), Kitten Sparkles (Joseph Hammer and Don Bolles), and Astromero (Hiroshi Hasegawa and Damion Romero). Hiroshi Hasegawa was on a US tour from Japan. In 1989 Hiroshi, with his ex-wife Mayuko Hino, cofounded one of Japan's most influential noise bands, CCCC (Cosmic Coincidence Control Center), and he has been playing solo as Astro since 1993. In 2005 Hiroshi released a double CD with Damion Romero in a project called Astromero. To have Astromero perform anywhere is a special treat, since the duo lives thousands of miles from each other. Another rare act was called to perform for the event: Kitten Sparkles. In a sense this show was a

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reunion show since CCCC had gone on tour with Solid Eye (Joseph Hammer, Rick

Potts, and Steve Thomsen), and Speculum Fight (Damion Romero solo) in the

spring of 1996. On April 17, 1996 CCCC played with Speculum Fight, Solid Eye,

and Kitten Sparkles at the legendary punk venue Jabberjaw in Los Angeles.

Kitten Sparkles is a project originally conceived by Don Bolles who had a

fascination with shortwave radio from his youth. The material from Kitten

Sparkles includes recordings of shortwave radio and various avant-garde

recordings on tape.

> When I was a kid [I used to play] with the shortwave radio, and
> then I brought it back with Kitten Sparkles because I was inspired
> by the Japanese noise. I would play Japanese noise on the Mars FM
> show.[288]
>
> *Don Bolles*

> Kitten Sparkles is like tape music but presented live, essentially.
> Most of the source materials and recordings come from a
> shortwave radio. Don made a bunch of tapes and I made a bunch
> of tapes, and I made tape loops from the tapes, mixed with the
> tapes. Some of the tape loops were tape loops made from records
> from Don's record collection: various avant-classical records. I kind
> of forget which records I was actually using because Don is putting
> stuff on and taking stuff off, and I was sitting there with my tape
> recorder hooked up to his stuff and he would just be throwing
> records on and off. This was in 95, so I didn't have a digital camera
> or any way to capture any of this material. I was just literally
> making tape loops from him playing records for me, essentially.
> That became a Kitten Sparkles work, which is currently under
> construction or unreleased [laughs].[289]
>
> *Joseph Hammer*

Another aspect to Kitten Sparkles is the strobe light effect. Don was influenced by

Brion Gysin and William S Burroughs' "dreamachine" that consists of constant

pulses of light at 8 to 13 pulses per second (alpha waves) to induce a hypnotic

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[288] Don Bolles, interview by me, Huntington Park, CA, August 11, 2012.
[289] Joseph Hammer, interview by me, East Pasadena, January 27, 2012.

state with the eyes closed. Don describes the effect of the recordings with the strobe light as a form of "forced mass meditation."
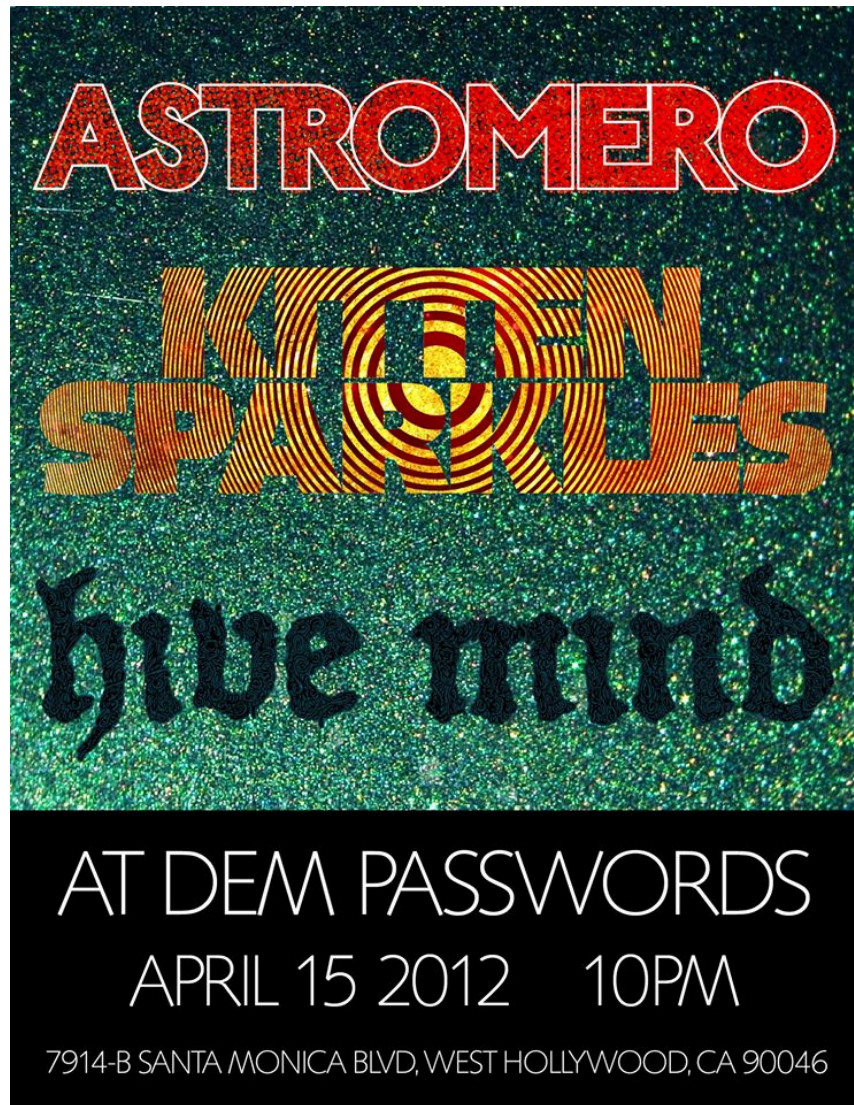
Figure 16: Flier for Astromero, Kitten Sparkles, and Hive Mind

At the April 15, 2012 show Hive Mind began with his droney low sounds and wispy high pitches at a relatively low but full volume to begin with. A sequenced part emerged with notes G-flat, A-flat, B-flat, and D-flat with high-pitched wisps

that washed over like the end of a car wash. After the sequence faded out, a

drone on B-flat faded in with F-natural pulses on top, providing a power-chord

while other noises swirled around. The drone and open fifth sound permeated the

rest of the set. The end of the set was met with applause, followed by the usual

outdoor intermission.

The intermission was almost 40 minutes, typical for experimental 'noise' venues.

I saw a lot of the regular audiences who attend 'noise' performances: Nial

Morgan, Maria Garcia, Patrick Murch, Jon Borges, Shannon Kennedy, Elden Man,

GX Jupitter-Larsen, Mark Lovasz, and Michelle Myers. Singer Nora Keys (the

Centimeters; Fancy Space People) was also in attendance, surely to support her

bandmate Don Bolles.

Kitten Sparkles was about to begin their set and the crowd funneled down

the short staircase from the back alley. Don was wearing his typical Russian fur

hat and fastened his flight goggles over his eyes, and then disappeared behind

his station. Joseph was set up with his gear—a MacBook running Ableton Live, a

mixer, a stereo phase-shifter, and an Ampex reel-to-reel recorder—ready to

engage. Although many of the performance techniques used in Kitten Sparkles

are similar to Joseph Hammer's solo work, the main difference is the material.

The materials used, as mentioned before, are samples of shortwave radio and

avant-garde recordings, including Stockhausen, Takemitsu, and Merzbow. For

this performance Joseph digitized many of the old tape loops so that he would

have easy access to them from his computer. The files he used were then fed

into his reel-to-reel recorder and manipulated in the fashion he is known for: a

sound source recording on a large tape loop several feet long, erasing sections,

adding new sections. These materials are also manipulated with a phase-shifter that adds a modulation to the sound after it has been recorded onto the loop. Halfway into the Kitten Sparkles performance Don blasted the audience with the dreamachine-inpsired strobe light. The sounds were already loud and intensely hypnotic, and now a new layer of visual stimulus was added to the intermedia counterpoint. Some people were immediately turned off by the intense light and moved outside. Some audience members complained about it to me. Others like myself endured the bright pulses through closed eyes. The last ten minutes had intensely pulsated sounds (perhaps from speeding up the phase-shifter). The performance lasted about 36 minutes and ended suddenly. The audience that remained applauded and hollered. Don plugged Kitten Sparkles again and said, "I forgot to tell you guys to close your eyes when the strobe went on, but ['I'm blind!' said an audience person] you might have figured it out." After some additional applause, the house music was turned on. The set was very intense, both sonically and visually.

The second intermission was not as long as the first; only about 15 to 20 minutes.

Astromero performed last. Few people stayed outside for the performance; some had left since it was past 1:00 AM, but there was still a sizable crowd. Their stations were set up on a long table; their controls were operated as if from the cockpit of a spaceship. As far I could tell, the two played together the whole time without interruption. Damion is known for having a particular low-frequency sound, but with Astromero the sounds spanned much of the frequency spectrum. There were moments of high-frequency noise filtered with quick turns of the knob; techniques I had heard from many noise artists in

Japan. I assumed those sounds were mostly made by Hasegawa. The volume was loud from the beginning and remained loud throughout the set, with only differences of timbre and frequency range affecting the experience of loudness. The end of the set sounded very much like the taking off of an airliner jet, with one constant sound and another sound that slid upward in pitch. After hitting a peak the pitch slid downward and so did the volume. Within a second or two the performance was faded out entirely.

The show was over. The audience applauded with a few hoots and hollers. Then everyone exited to the back alley where the people congregated into their typical social groups. I went to talk to Joseph Hammer and his friends. When I expressed to Joseph that I found the evening's program to be excellent, he responded: "That was an historic show."[290] I snickered a little inside—the delivery was honest and devoid of haughtiness—yet I felt it too.

Politics at Dem Passwords

The politics of a venue center around the people who make determinations concerning who is allowed to perform and who is not allowed to perform. The people in charge of the venue make these decisions first and foremost; they have the authority to decide who will performer and who will not perform. Sebastian Demian is the director at Dem Passwords and therefore he is the person with that power. However, he often allocates that power to people he trusts so that people beyond his knowledge base can perform and showcase their work. His role is important as a provider of the space, provider of the basic

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[290] Joseph Hammer, discussion documented from my fieldnotes, West Hollywood, April 16, 2012 (part midnight from the April 15 show).

equipment needed for such events, and as promoter and supporter of the activities of the experimental 'noise' scene.

Sebastian Demian was born in Romania and moved to the East Coast when he was one year old. He was mostly raised in Richmond, Virginia. After he graduated from Stern School of Business at New York University, he moved to Southern California in 2002. He has worked as a music and film producer and a talent manager: he currently manages Bay Area rapper Lil B. In late 2010 Sebastian and his business partner, film director Ethan Higbee, opened Dem Passwords to showcase the artwork of Lee "Scratch" Perry. Ethan had directed the documentary *The Upsetter: The Life and Music of Lee Scratch Perry* (2008) and Sebastian took a credit as co-producer. With their passion for Lee's art and art in general, they opened Dem Passwords. Sebastian is unique as a venue operator in the world of experimental 'noise' because he himself does not perform experimental 'noise.'

Although Sebastian and Ethan set up Dem Passwords to showcase the artwork of Lee "Scratch" Perry, their first music event in September 2010 already included a mix of hip hop and experimental 'noise,' including Pat Maher, Kyle Mabson, and Damion Romero. The opening mixed-genre event attempted to set the tone for future events, but many events at Dem Passwords were more or less experimental 'noise' events while others were hip hop nights, and then there were screenings and openings for the various visual artists whose works was presented there. Like other art directors and curators Sebastian relies on the judgment of other people to help him select artists and performers at Dem Passwords.

> There are programs here that I'm the curator of. A number of them come to me from the greater community, from friends-of-friends or

whatever. Or a direct friend will come to me with an idea for a show, and then sometimes I'll add an act. Sometimes it will be just the bands that they want to have on the show: their line up. People know sort of what we have here. And there are only a few people that I do that with, like Greh Holger brings me shows. Kyle Mabson. Who else has brought me some concerts? GX Jupitter-Larsen has suggested stuff. A few other people have suggested some concerts here. Damion brought a concert here. He's brought some shows. And then there will be concerts where it will be my idea. I'll program the night's event with typically four artists.

I want to do more events that are programmed internally: me setting a program, or doing something like that, or teaming up with a trusted associate who has maybe half a bill in mind, and then bringing another half of our spirit—Dem Passwords and my spirit—to make shows that are more special.[291]

Part of the "Dem Passwords" spirit then is a spirit of collaboration between Sebastian and his trusted associates to create special experiences for its audiences, and those special experiences center around what he calls "rebel art." Greh, GX, and Damion are some of the most frequent performers of experimental 'noise' in Los Angeles and are known nationally and internationally in greater experimental 'noise' circles. As "trusted associates" of Dem Passwords they have been given the power to help program events for the venue, and by extension, for the greater experimental 'noise' scene in LA. Those in charge of who is allowed to performer and who is not allowed to perform yield power and influence in the scene. Below is a list of performers who have played the most at Dem Passwords.

Table 2: Frequency of Performers at Dem Passwords, 2010-2013.

Performer/Group	Events Played
Damion Romero	11
Greh Holger (Hive Mind, Leather Bath, Anti-Civilization Mask)	8

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[291] Sebastian Demian, interview by me, West Hollywood, July 10, 2012.

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John Wiese (Leather Bath, Anti-Civilization Mask)	7
Jon Borges + Shannon Kennedy (Pedestrian Deposit)	5
Peter Kolovos	4
Joseph Hammer (Kitten Sparkles)	4
Cole Miller (Human Hands)	4
Pat Maher (Indignant Senility, Diamond Catalog)	4
The Haters (GX Jupitter-Larsen ensemble)	3
Jeff Witscher (Rene Hell)	3
Sewn Leather (Griffin Pyn)	3
Kyle Mabson	2

Sebastian cited Greh Holger, Kyle Mabson, Damion Romero, and GX Jupitter-Larsen (the Haters) among some of his most trusted associates, and the chart shows that they are also some of the most frequent performers. In fact, experimental 'noise' artists performed much more frequently than any other type of music at Dem Passwords. Two performers on the chart were not from LA: Pat Maher (Portland) and Sewn Leather (Griffin Pyn from New Orleans). Three younger experimental 'noise' artists more associated with (the) Handbag Factory—Maria Garcia (Concrete Shiva), Patrick Murch (Sissisters), and Nial Morgan (Wrong Hole)—each performed only once at Dem Passwords. Pedestrian Deposit and Human Hands (Cole Miller) were frequent performers at both venues between 2010 and 2013.

There are then three general ways events are programmed at Dem Passwords: 1) Sebastian programs the entire show, 2) a trusted friend programs the entire show, 3) Sebastian collaborates or adds performers to a show a trusted friend has programmed.

Sebastian's personal aesthetic for programming events at Dem Passwords is to bring in artists from various genres to have them and their audiences mingle in the crowds and learn about each other's work. Several times in my interview with him he referred to the notions of *narrative* and *diversity* as his chief

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aesthetic aims when programming an event. His preference for a "narrative,"

either within a particular artwork, performance, or for the programming of

events, develops an internal logic through the repetitive practices of the styles

found at Dem Passwords. The artists he respects most are those that allow him

to follow a narrative.

> To me it gets good when there's a story. That's when it gets good
> to me. Where there's a narrative; when there's something I can
> sink my teeth into. When you can look at a greater body of work.
> That's when it gets good to me.
>
> I think it's fractal in the sense that you can have a narrative during
> a performance. I can zoom out and look at it over the last… tour
> that that artist is on, and see that hopefully there's a story there. I
> can zoom out further and see the artist over the last albums
> they've done, and then look at their body of work, and see the
> other music that they've come to make.[292]

Curators and art directors, like DJs spinning records, are also artists, and

Sebastian intends to create a narrative in the programming of events at Dem

Passwords. He links such narrative-making to the creation of the history of the

gallery.

> I want it to be devastating. I want the events here to be
> transcendent, and I want the art shows here to have historical
> value; I want them to have utility for the people. The art shows
> that I try to program here are all part of a narrative. Maybe if you
> zoom out far enough there's a Dem Passwords narrative, but I'm
> thinking about each artist and their personal narratives in the
> story. I want people to come here and see artwork and then think
> about the artists and the grand narrative.[293]

By zooming in and out of a narrative arc, Sebastian asks us to look at the parts in

comparison to the whole in terms of the history of events at Dem Passwords. By

programming events that are "devastating" and "transcendent" Sebastian

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[292] Ibid.
[293] Ibid.

invokes the radically new in the arts as a multimedia montage of events, and the

timelessness inherent in reaching the transcendental. Creating a narrative helps

to build the mythology of Dem Passwords as a particular idea in the arts scene

that means something by resonating in the audiences that attend events there

and by spreading out virally to other potential audiences for these activities.

Diversity is achieved by mixing performers from different genres together

for the same event. The first show—with hip hop, punk, and experimental 'noise'

on the same bill—is an example of Sebastian's notion of diversity.

> After I did a couple of bills like that, where they were *my* ideas, I remember Kyle [Mabson] came to me and asked, "When is your next Dem Passwords show?" and I told him, and he said, "No, no. When is *your* next Dem Passwords show?" The ones that came to me—those are Dem Passwords shows. People can tell the difference if it's a show from out of town or someone came to me with an idea, and then if it's a Dem Passwords show, because usually it will have a pretty diverse bill. I try to put four different styles of music together. With the Andrew [WK] show it was Jarrett Silberman, which is noise music and harsh noise, and we had KIT— Vice Cooler's band—which is kind of punk music. We had Andrew WK at the headliner, and we had Pink Dollaz which is a rap group from Inglewood—four high school girls from Inglewood. That's what a Dem Passwords bill is to me. That diversity. You might have a rap act. We just did a show with Kyle Mabson that was very Dem Passwords style with Stunnaman from the Pack, and we had Nautical Almanac on that bill.
>
> We had the noise-experimental side with Nautical Almanac, we had the rap music with Stunnaman, and then we had—who was the fourth act on that bill?—and it was Sexting, which is like the punk, trash metal side. So we had dance music, you had thrash metal, you had the noise-experimental, and you had the rap, and that's really what Dem Passwords is all about.[294]

This form of programing is Sebastian's way of creating a particular arts culture in

Los Angeles and forging, to some degree, the identity of the Dem Passwords

scene.

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[294] Ibid.

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> I'm interested in the stories and in the narratives, and so I want the concerts that we have here to be part of that narrative: they're part of our taste. It's *our* taste here. It's *my* taste. That's what I want to display here. And my tastes are diverse—our tastes are diverse. I'm into rap music. That's what I'm listening to mostly. I love noise music. I love painting. I love rebels really. This place is about rebel music, and rebel art, and Lee Perry was the man who illuminated the path for that, because he's the ultimate rebel.[295]

In the passage above Sebastian maneuvers between his personal tastes in programming the events and creating the narrative at Dem Passwords to the scene's collective taste, and describes them as diverse. He then summarizes what he feels is the essence of the Dem Passwords scene: rebel art and rebel music. Rebel art and rebel music are found in various genres and styles, and Sebastian mixes them freely at Dem Passwords to bring them together for what he hopes will be a diverse audience. Since January 2014 Dem Passwords has moved to a smaller location near Culver City where music has played a smaller role, though the visual arts continue to flourish there.

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[295] Ibid.

III. the wulf.—A History

congratulations

you have found

the wulf.

to enter
buzz unit 203

Figure 17: Instructions for entry to the wulf. taped to the building entrance.

the wulf. is a venue in a loft apartment on the second floor of a four-floor building across the street from a strip club in an otherwise barren industrial part of Downtown Los Angeles. The address is 1026 S. Santa Fe Avenue, apartment 203. the wulf. is located at the border of the Arts District and the Central Industrial District and adjacent to the Seafood District. The main entrance is on Sacramento Street; across the street is a collection of seafood distributors; it is near the Los Angeles River and the intersection of Highway 101 and the Interstate 10 freeways.

The venue also serves as the living quarters of its original inhabitants and cofounders: Michael Winter and Eric Kenneth Malcolm Clark (Eric KM Clark). Supported by two thick columns, the large living room and kitchen with concrete floors serves as the performance area, with two smaller spaces serving as bedrooms on either side. A collection of large windows flanks the east side on the opposite end of the entrance at the southwest side. Just outside the doors of the wulf. on the right side is a narrow hall that leads to an outside balcony with emergency exit stairs on the outside of the building. The short corridor and balcony are often used by the smokers who attend the wulf. for some fresh air and a nicotine fix. Although the building has a Santa Fe Avenue address, the main entrance is on Sacramento Street. On the day of the performance a sign is taped on the door on how to get 'buzzed' in the building.[296] Once inside there is an elevator and stairs that lead to the second story apartment. Outside the apartment is a sign that reads: "past these doors something is happening (likely music). please note that sound travels easily through these doors and walls. xo, the wulf."

A donation receptacle is sometimes set up in the kitchen area near the table with alcohol and a red bucket of beer, but there is no official suggested donation for the events nor for the alcohol. On the right side are some bookshelves that house books, zines, and recordings. On the left side is a short hall that leads to the bathroom.

Advertisement and outreach for activities at the wulf. has been rather poor. Of the venues I attended for research, perhaps only BetaLevel has had worse advertisement. The primary forms of advertisement for the wulf. have

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[296] See illustration at the beginning of this section.

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been through the website, email, and word-of-mouth. In the last few years

Facebook advertisement has increased. Michael runs the website, while Eric ran

the Facebook page but since Eric's departure others have maintained the

Facebook page due to Michael's personal resistance to social media. The

relatively poor advertisement has been one piece of evidence supporting the

charge that the wulf. is in an exclusionary scene. A discussion of exclusionary

charges at the wulf. will follow later in the chapter.

The principal facilities at the wulf. include a small grand piano and a pair

of powered studio monitors. The studio monitors provide clean power, but the

volume of the studio monitors is relatively low, compared to the high output PA

systems at (the) Handbag Factory and especially Dem Passwords. Nevertheless,

the power seems to be sufficient for the performers and audiences in the wulf.

scene. In fact, many of the performers (but certainly not all) have explored low

volume as an aesthetic. The Wandelweiser Group that has played often at the

wulf. is one such group that tends to explore low volume and silences. In

addition, all the performances are recorded using a stereo microphone at the

front of the performance area and recorded on a laptop dedicated to recordings

at the wulf. Many of these recordings are made available free on the

www.thewulf.org website. Chairs and cushions are available for audiences, while

some prefer to stand.

Performances at the wulf. are often billed to start at 7:00 PM, though

sometimes they are billed to start earlier, and rarely later. The first performances

of the night rarely start on time, and may start as late as an hour later, though

15-25 minutes after the billed starting time is typical. On occasion the first

performance starts sharply at the time specified. The total length of performance

time varies from one hour to several hours. The longest performances I attended were long-scale single works. One night featured Morton Feldman's *For Philip Guston*; another night featured a paramedia duet between Mark So on piano and Rick Bahto on slide projections.[297] Both performances went well over four hours. The typical night at the wulf. features two to as many as six compositions and usually lasts about an hour and a half with intermissions. Intermissions often last 15 to 20 minutes; in some cases intermissions are much shorter if there are several performers that night, or on occasion when the inhabitants of the wulf. have late night engagements after the performances. During intermissions most of the audiences stay in the large living room and kitchen space for drinking and socializing. Smokers mostly exit the loft apartment and hang out on the side corridor where there are open windows to blow out the smoke. Some will engage in marijuana or spliffs. I never witnessed harder drugs.

When performances would begin, typically Michael, Eric, or any regular attendee would call the smokers on the side corridor in for the performance. Since I began research, I noticed that large audiences would typically sit in chairs or stand near the wall or one of the large two columns that framed the main performance area. Some would sit on the ground, or on the couch at the back of the room, or the pad at the right side near the recording equipment.

I have found that most audiences at the wulf. typically range from 10 to 20 people. Michael's estimates are similar: "I'm counting every once in a while. It varies. Probably on average about 15-30. As few as 3 or 4. As many as 70."[298] I have attended some concerts at the wulf. with only a few other people, and other

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[297] I use the term 'paramedia' in the spirit of Cage's and Cunningham's simultaneous but independent performances.
[298] Michael Winter, interview by me, Los Angeles, May 29, 2012.

concerts that had audiences nearly spilling out the back door. The gender ratio

typically ranges from 15 to 20 percent women, but sometimes would near 50

percent women. More women are involved as performers at the wulf. than at the

other venues I have studied. Most of the audiences that attend the wulf. are

current students or graduates from Cal Arts. Other audiences tend to be music

academics from other local institutions and universities. Ethnically the audiences

tended to be white with some Latin/Hispanic and Asians. The audiences tend to

dress a little more conservatively than the other venues I examined; the women

tended to dress a little more 'fashionably.' I suspect that the more conservative

fashion may be a reflection of the lifestyle commensurate with an academic

degree, but such speculation is debatable. My guess is that the age of the people

who attend the wulf. range from 25 to 40; older audiences sometimes attend

also, but rarely do younger audiences attend. Michael's estimate is similar:

> I think it's generally, reasonably well-educated 20s, 20-30 year
> olds, and we do have a fair amount of much older people. There
> are a lot of people who come who are older. But I think the core
> group of people are 20s-30s-40s, and tend to be reasonably well-
> educated. That's problematic in that that generally means rich
> white people, but I don't close the door to anybody, nor do I go…;
> again, I'm not an evangelist.[299]

These demographics, as Michael fears, might be problematic, and I will discuss

that issue more in the paragraphs to come.

Audience behavior at the wulf. tends to be derivative of the history of

Western classical music performances. The audiences are well-behaved, and they

know, for example, that in a multi-movement work to save their applause until

the work is complete. However, there are points of difference between audience

behavior at the wulf. in comparison to audiences at a Western classical music

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[299] Ibid.

concert. The first is the seating arrangements. The seats are arranged in a

relaxed ad hoc fashion. Also, seating is optional; standing or lying down on the

ground are other options. I have seen at some concerts an attempt to use

different seating arrangements nearer to the performers and even behind them,

probably in an attempted to destabilize the rigors of seating arrangements. I

have also heard from some regulars at the wulf. that concerts have become more

formalized. Composer Casey Anderson agreed with this assessment.

> the wulf. has changed a lot. It used to be super informal. They still
> try to keep it really informal, but just by the fact that the longer it's
> around the more it becomes its own thing, and that has changed
> the character of the space. I don't have a problem with it. I know
> people who have big problems with it.
> It's possible that we could only recognize it within the last year or
> two, but that it was bound to happen.[300]

I arrived on the scene at the wulf. two years before my interview with Casey, so I

would not have been able to see the changes he talks about from "super

informal" to its current state. The current state has an element of formality that

might perhaps be better characterized as a relaxed formality. What makes

formality rigid is its insistence on the conformity with the unspoken rules. At the

wulf. very few actions are considered transgressive, and since the audiences who

attend the wulf. are there to listen intently on the music, then that is what

happens. Ringing cell phones would be considered transgressive in any situation

involving the performance of music, but even in that rare situation that such an

occurrence happened, it was dealt with quickly and no disciplinary measures were

enacted or even considered. In fact, I have even seen some regular attendees

and composers texting during performances (especially lengthy performances),

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[300] Casey Anderson, interview by me, Los Angeles, July 1, 2012.

and since texting is a silent activity, no one seemed to mind and no one was reprimanded.

Performances rarely continue past 11:00 PM. Once the performances are over, one of the most important bonding rituals in the wulf. scene commences: the roof party. The bucket of beer and water and various kinds of liquors are brought to the roof above the fourth floor of the building. The roof boasts a beautiful view of the central Downtown LA area from about two miles away with views of the adjacent freeways. There is a bar area and a grill that is sometimes used to grill meats, veggie meats, and anything else. The roof party at the wulf. is a typical occurrence and is the most important way to socialize with the composers, performers, curators, and audiences in the scene. The parties typically last one or two hours, and on special occasions can continue well into the morning hours the next day. Although there are cliques at the roof parties, they are perhaps less pronounced than in some of the other scenes I have studied. In my experience, music is more discussed in the social situations at the wulf. than in other experimental music scenes. Other scenes tend to be almost secretive about their methods, while composers at the wulf. are often excited to show their scores and discuss their methods; performers at Dem Passwords and (the) Handbag Factory are usually more interested in discussing a recording (usually a tape or record) than a performance practice. I have witnessed and even participated in heated debates at roof parties, but I have never witnessed any degree of censure at these parties.

Origin Story

the wulf. is named after the late composer Harris Wulfson. He was a colleague of both Michael Winter and Erick KM Clark at Cal Arts where he studied with James Tenney, Morton Subotnick, Stephen Mosko, and Lewis Spratlan. Harris was a respected composer, software engineer, and instrument builder. On July 23, 2008—shortly after seeking psychiatric help—Harris jumped in front of a train ending his life. He was 34 years old studying for a PhD in composition at City University New York.

One week before Michael and Eric were to move into their new loft apartment, they were informed of the passing of their dear friend. They flew to the East coast to attend the funeral ceremonies and celebrate his life. When they returned to LA, they decided to honor Harris by naming their performance series after him. Michael explains the story below.

> MW: It is named after a friend of ours and composer who died shortly before we moved in. His name was Harris Wulfson, and he was a very good friend, a very good musician, a very good composer in my mind. He killed himself literally a week before we moved in. We went out to his funeral and delayed moving in about a week. A friend of ours' parents had a house somewhere in Pennsylvania, and so we went there after the funeral to celebrate his life on our own, and we figured that the one thing that we could do in his memory is to name it after him. So it's named "the wulf." with the dot, and we're kind of particular about the dot just to show that it's an abbreviation. Most people just think we're being really pretentious. We're also pretty strict about capitalization. We like it lowercase. But that's just because I'm a very case-sensitive guy.[301]

The passage not only brings insight to the affection the cofounders had for Harris but also explains the lowercase spelling of the name and the period signifying the –*son* in Wulfson. Thus, the wulf. became the name of the performance venue cofounded by Michael and Eric.

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[301] Michael Winter, interview by me, Los Angeles, May 29, 2012.

Though the wulf. is named for Harris Wulfson, one cannot help but think of "the wolf" in music, as the extra wide dissonant interval that has occurred historically due to various temperament systems. In Peter Yates' book *Twentieth Century Music*, he discussed the wolf interval as "incorrect" but with the potential to be used and exploited emotionally.

> There is also the less recognized advantage [of meantone tuning], that by a discreet introduction of dissonant (incorrect) relationships the composer can widen the emotional significance, or *affect*. The sound of such incorrect relationships was called "the Wolf," meaning a dissonance to be avoided because the discord "howled" in the harmony.[302]

The exploitation of sounds as dissonances and howls may be one subversive way to reclaim the use of dissonance and other affective sounds in experimental music at wulf. (or as "the wolf"), whether or not the founders intended so or not. There are no "incorrect" sounds at the wulf. We may assume that howls and caterwauls are welcome too, since some key members of the wulf. family—Casey Anderson, James Klopfleisch, Eric KM Clark, and Christine Tavolacci—organized a performance of Robert Ashley's noisy *The Wolfman* (1964) at REDCAT on April 1, 2015, to commemorate his works.

Unlike the other two main venues discussed, the wulf. is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Along with the advanced degrees procured by the founders, both with MFA degrees from Cal Arts, the nonprofit status gives the wulf. the specter of prestige. The 501(c) designation means that the wulf. as an organization is exempt from taxes. Fundraisers and other donations are part of what sustains the wulf.; the wulf. also sustains itself from the sheer dedication of its scene that includes composers, performers, scholars, and listeners. According

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[302] Peter Yates, *Twentieth Century Music*, 19.

to the website: "basically, we are going to keep all events free. that is the bottom line. donations will be used to offset costs of the organization." Whereas (the) Handbag Factory and Dem Passwords are also funded by donations, the donations are pushed just a little more strongly than at the wulf., where donations are never required or solicited other than on the website and for nights that are dedicated donation drives.

I interviewed Michael in May 2012. I had been attending concerts at the wulf. regularly for more than a year at that point. Eric Clark had called me the most frequent guest at the wulf. that season, which I took with a sense of pride. Michael had once said that if he had the money he would fund my research for this dissertation. The wulf. has become an important place for me. Although it has generally been frequented by Cal Arts students—sometimes called the Cal Arts Mafia or Calartians—there are other guests who are students, former students, or professors, who frequent the wulf. outside of the Cal Arts orbit. I have always felt welcome at the wulf. In a certain way, the wulf. feels like home in a way the other venues do not. I believe this is because it is a scene of music academics. We have a shared experience in the history of Western classical music and the maverick avant-garde music tradition in the US. My knowledge of the work of James Tenney—who taught composition at Cal Arts until his death—both musically and intellectually (through his writings), also brings me closer to the scene at the wulf. Not only was my attendance at a performance of Jim Tenney's *For Ann (Rising)* an important moment for me and my interest in music, but Jim became a person I was used to seeing at new music concerts in Los Angeles from 2000 until his death in 2006.

One aspect that sets the wulf. apart from the other two venues I have explored in depth is that the academics here are mostly part of a tradition of music literacy. Many of the works performed at the wulf. have a score and they require performers to realize the scores. Some of the scores use conventional notation practices while many of them use graphic notation or code. By contrast the performers in the other experimental scenes I have discussed usually function as solo improvisers or as duets. In either case they are either completely improvisational or a few guidelines are set for the performance of a given night. Some of the performers at the wulf. also function that way, but at the wulf., there is a sense of community. In many ways the wulf. is a community of composers who realize each others works, but there are also some performers—like flautist Christine Tavolocci—who are performers only.

Another aspect of music literacy is the historical academic tradition I share with many of the composers, performers, and audiences at the wulf., particularly concerning twentieth-century music and performance practices. The kind of music heard at the wulf. is highly influenced by John Cage and associates of Cage, as well as the practices found from afrocentric traditions culminating in the improvisation movement highlighted by the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM). Leo Wadada Smith was an early member of the association and has been a highly influential professor of composition at Cal Arts since 1993.

Although most of the music performed at the wulf. is new—meaning that it has been recently composed months, weeks, sometimes minutes before its performance—occasionally older pieces—particularly pieces from the 1950s New York School (Cage, Feldman, Brown, Wolff, Tudor) are performed. These

composers are often considered too old for the venue, since the mission of the wulf. is to provide a place for the newest work. In the case of Christian Wolff, since he is still alive, performances of his new works have been performed; some of the composers in the wulf. scene know Christian Wolff personally.

On May 22 2011, Mark Trayle and Casey Anderson gave performances at the wulf. First Mark performed solo, then Casey performed solo, and then they improvised together. Mark Trayle (born Mark Garrabrant) has taught composition at Cal Arts since 1996. Casey came to Los Angeles in 2009 to pursue an MFA in composition at Cal Arts, and has become an important performer in the region since completing the program. My research shows that he has performed at the wulf. more than any other performer. Mark's performance consisted of two laptops, an audio-to-digital converter, a short-scale electric guitar laid on the table and sent to a guitar amplifier. He plucked harmonics on the guitar that were then manipulated by his computer. He also used an E-Bow (electronic bow) on the guitar for some more sustained tones. His performance was relatively short. Casey's performance was much different. His instruments included a laptop, a small mixer, and an old alarm clock radio. It began with colored noises and pointillistic pops interrupted by various radio stations entering and exiting. The first song that was noticeable was a hip hop song. After a few seconds, he cut the radio and continued with noise until he decided to bring the radio sounds back. At the loudest point in the performance a drone on a sawtooth-like wave soared through the venue as subtler sounds faded in and out and filters subtly swashed the sound waves. After a few minutes the drone was suddenly cut, and what was left was Michael Jackson's "Don't Stop 'Till You Get Enough" on the radio at a low

volume. Casey, and the audience as well, snickered as he let it play for a few minutes. The low volume was maintained for the remainder of the performance. He then faded in some more high-pass-filtered noise. He changed the station again, and then played with the filter on the new song. Sometimes the filtered radio sounds would lead into filtered computer synthesis, in a strange duo. The piece ended with a quick fade out and the audience new it was over when Casey uttered, "Thanks." The audience clapped with approval. The piece was fun. The snickering during the Michael Jackson song eroded the fourth wall for a moment as the mutual snickers allowed space for a moment of comic inclusion. Casey's use of the radio was to provide audio source material from radio stations in Los Angeles—which has a history that dates back at least to John Cage's *Imaginary Landscape 4* (1951) for twenty-four performers playing twelve radios—but Casey's use of the radios was not to create a buffoonish piece; rather the buffoonish parts (if they could even be called that) were a few of a large set of possibilities for the realization of his piece, given the many radio stations in LA.

On June 19, 2011 a realization of late Fluxus artist Dick Higgins' *Clouds for Piano* was performed with new works by Scott Cazan, Gerhard Schultz, and Volker Straebel. The highest number of people I counted that evening was fifteen: ten men and five women. There were more older people that night than usual, perhaps to hear the realization of *Clouds*. The evening seemed to have a slight theme: urban field recordings interspersed with sound generators and synthesis. Dick Higgins was perhaps best known for his *Danger Music* series from the early 1960s. These works often required loud amplification. The piece that was performed on this night was a realization of his *Clouds for Piano* with a video

accompaniment. The ten-minute piece mostly consisted of wind sounds and the video showed sky divers: nothing too dangerous.

Scott Cazan's piece followed. His performances are common at the wulf. His performance that night was titled *Feedback Network*. From what I could see he was using a laptop, a mixer, and a few other devices; I am unsure what programs he was using. Scott's piece began with reverberated voices and low and high pitched hum. The low sounds rang like 60 cycle hum and droned for the length of the piece. The high-pitched hum sounded like a sine wave mixed with some sawtooth wave. The hum increases in volume as the voices decrease. The overall volume was rather low, like a *mezzo-forte*, even though there were slight changes in volume. There were many fuzzy pitches, but with no tonal intervallic relationship. A wash of gurgly noise was introduced at some point. Some of the tones melded into those bell-like dyads between tones and pitches. Scott picked up a violin bow and began bowing the violin on the table that was wired into his computer for further synthesis. The relationship between the bowing and the resultant sound was difficult to describe. Children's voices and French-sounding voices entered. The soft noise washes functioned as countermelodies to the voices. Cars and city sounds flooded the texture but faded quickly. An occasional car whizzed past. During the car sounds a group of people somewhat noisily entered the wulf. to disturb the low-volume performance, but the audience continued to pay attention relatively unperturbed. Shortly afterward the performance ended with delay trails.

Gerhard and Volker do not live in Los Angeles, but they have occasionally participated at the wulf. Gerhard Schultz' piece *Bridge (Paris 1870)* was next. He warned the audience that the performance would be loud, but it certainly was not

louder than a typical home stereo. His piece began with low pitches with a flange-like modulation undulating at a rate of about one cycle every two seconds. A men's chorus faded into the texture of the work with other spoken voices interspersed sporadically. The piece ended when a single tone faded in and out abruptly. Volker Straebel's piece followed. I saw him perform the previous year at the wulf. He is a musicologist and composer who lives and works in Berlin. Before he began, he explained that his work consisted of juxtapositions of field recordings from various parts of LA. The sounds of traffic were prominent in his piece.

On October 2, 2011 Mark So and Rick ('Dickie') Bahto performed an intermedia duo. This was the first concert at the wulf. in months, and opened up the new season. Founders Michael Winter and Eric Clark, along with Mark So welcomed me back to the space. The performance was to begin at 8:00 PM but did not actually begin until almost 8:30. The piece began without any grand gestures and there was no alert that they would begin. The small audience took their places, quieted down, and listened to and observed the simultaneous performance. I refer to this intermedia situation as "simultaneous performance" because neither Mark—who was playing piano and field recordings—nor Dickie, who was showing images on two old carousel slide projectors on opposing walls—were playing *with* the other performer. John Cage and Merce Cunningham often used simultaneous performance in their performances: they were performances that were intended to be completely independent of each other but coexist at the same time and place/space. Thus was the simultaneous performance between Mark and Dickie. Mark mostly played piano, but also had a portable Walkman-like

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cassette player for field recordings. At the piano Mark played successions of single notes, two-note intervals, and occasionally multi-note chords at a rate similar to the constant rate of the projector (but never synchronized). As Dickie advanced the slides from the two projectors, they made a constant noisy sound that provided a sort of rhythmic accompaniment to the soft piano sounds. The piano was played softly throughout, but not at the same intensity level (perhaps the piano intensity never rose beyond a mezzo-piano). Mark's field recordings varied from wall noise (unchanging soundscapes) to phone conversation and snippets of radio banter. The recordings were sonically less salient than the piano, since the piano was more or less constant, even when there were short pauses between sounds. The tape sounds were also at a low volume and never overpowered the already understated piano. Dickie's visual music had recurring motives. Potted cactus plants—sometimes one, two, or three—were first shown on one of the walls from a distance while successive slides showed them moving closer to the camera lens. Car tires were also a recurring visual theme. From the other wall was a succession of donut shops. I realized that Dickie was recycling the same fifty-or-so slides; that also gave the performance a coherence through its economy of materials. There were never more than fifteen audience members in the room during the three-and-a-half hour performance (from 8:30 to midnight). At the beginning I counted ten men and five women. One hour into the piece, many people had left and new audiences emerged. I had counted eight men and seven women then. During the second hour, I noticed five women audience members and myself as the only man (Eric and Michael had briefly exited the space, perhaps to smoke). While I had made that count during the performance, Dickie handed me a flyer that read:

October 2, 2011 (Sunday)
Mark So & Rick Bahto: Sounds and Images.
Bahto: Donuts of Los Angeles (Kodachrome Slides)
        Still Lifes (Kodachrome Slides)
So: A Book of Palms (Notebook for piano)
        Twice Around (Tape)
8 PM-Midnight at the wulf.
$0
1026 S Santa Fe #203, Los Angeles

Soon afterward, Mark rose from his station at the piano to flip the cassette tape near the mixer about fifteen steps away. There had been no field recording sounds for at least twenty minutes at that point. Since the piece was so long and quiet, I noticed cell phone texting from three people at the same time. There was also this peculiarity of the window: Mark would open the window, and then half an hour later, Dickie would close it. This happened a few noticeable times during the performance. For the closing twenty minutes or so, Dickie faced both projectors on the left wall and superimposed the images, thus allowing for a kind of visual first species counterpoint. The images were switched much more rapidly. Mark's playing also slightly gained in speed, but not urgently. The piece ended without fanfare just before midnight. After a pregnant silence, the audience applauded. It was a nice Sunday night for an endurance piece.

After the performance I asked Mark to see the score. What he showed me was written on a cheap college-rule binder. The notation consisted of a vertical series of filled in notes and open notes, spaced out kind of like on a piano, but without any indication of what the notes were, or any specific indication for the duration. The notation looked like woodwind fingerings, open and closed holes. Mark told me that he would improvise on these strange notations, most of which were dense, simultaneously placed clusters, played very slowly with silences in between; the latter half of the concert was mostly intervals. The pacing of the

show was to be at a steady tempo; but there were a few times when Dickie

would click through the images rapidly, or even as quickly as he could, and there

were a few times when Mark would play the chords at an increased tempo, but

never sounding rushed. Every time I have ever seen Mark So perform, he has

played with a disciplined patience, and that night was no different. I asked him

about what I found to be a similarity between the night's performance and the

performance of Morton Feldman's four-hour chamber piece *For Philip Guston* that

was performed at the wulf. a month before (June 25 2011). The following is a

passage from my fieldnotes.

> I told [Mark] that I thought his work was very 'patient' and he
> laughed. I also mentioned that I didn't know that I was in for an
> endurance piece like Feldman's *For Philip Guston*, which was
> performed at the wulf. a few months ago on June 26. Mark said
> that he was disappointed in that piece; that the pianist was playing
> too loudly, that the percussionist was following the pianist, and
> that the flautist was the only one who had the right idea. He said
> that the best moments in the concert was when the pianist
> switched to playing celeste, and then the parts sounded right to
> him.
> Mark said that he preferred to enjoy what he was doing, and that
> he really enjoyed the sounds he was making that night. Every time
> I've seen Mark perform—and this was the first time I had seen him
> play piano—I've noticed a tendency toward patience. What I called
> 'patience' he seem to think was just a way of absorbing himself in
> sonic experience.[303]

Mark is known for his general critical flare. His writings show an obsession with

hearing and his performances present a specter of deliberation, care, and

seriousness to a degree seemingly more than many of the other composers at

the wulf.

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[303] My Fieldnotes (Los Angeles: October 2, 2011)

On July 20, 2013, the wulf. hosted a night of Liam Mooney's compositions called "Sytrofoam and Vinyl." His piece *Styrophony* was performed by Andrew Young, Casey Anderson, David Kendall, Mark So, Michael Winter, Stephanie Smith, and Todd Lerew. I remember I attended the concert with Mark Lovasz and Michele Myers, two friends I met in the experimental music scenes during the course of my fieldwork for this project. I noticed that before the performance, Casey Anderson was putting in earplugs as he readied his Styrofoam instrument, which I found odd, since I had never used earplugs for a performance at the wulf. Liam is perhaps one of the most highly regarded composers in the wulf. scene and often attracts large audiences. His works usually include an elaborate graphic score with colors to represent extended parameters. Unlike his colleagues at the wulf. Liam rarely if ever uses amplification. When he returned from Bob Bellerue's Ende Tymes Fest—a festival for 'noise' and experimental music in New York—in summer 2011, he boasted that his performance was the only "acoustic" piece in the festival. Sometimes Liam performs solo and sometimes he cultivates ensembles for his compositions. The materials he uses are of paramount importance to his work—vacuum cleaners sucking on drum heads, dry ice vibrating pitched metal bars, oversized balloons squeaking air out their apertures until the air supply is exhausted, Styrofoam bowed until it has disintegrated: these are a few examples. Liam's performances are also beautiful as spectacles because of the materials he uses. Often the materials are used to their exhaustion, and the exhaustion of those materials often determines the form of the piece. *Styrophony* began very quietly with wooden cylinder sticks used to 'bow' the Styrofoam blocks with gentle squeaks. A *subito-fortissimo* emerged throughout the septet as they dug into their Styrofoam blocks at maximum force.

Then another quiet period. The middle section was loud and thick with bowing

techniques that caused a variety of timbres that squeaked noisily in sliding tones,

creating a polyphony amongst the Styrofoam block voices. The piece then slowly

crackled and faded until the end while the disintegrated remains of Styrofoam

littered the space. The effect was enormous. Liam had proven again, in this piece

and others, that electronics were not necessary for creating noise sounds and

textures. Mark and Michele and I were very impressed with this piece for its

timbres, materials, and orchestration.

Michael Winter is cofounder of the wulf. Although he rarely performs his

own compositions at the wulf., he often performs in the works of others. On

September 6, 2012 Michael performed at the close of a concert with Dog Star 8:

Indeterminacy (Part 17), Dante Boom, and Juan Cristobal Cerillo. He had a laptop

and an audio-to-digital converter outputted to the two studio monitors. He

dedicated this particular performance to me before he began, though he made no

formal announcement about the dedication, rather, he told me a few minutes

before he took the stage. I was still thrilled to have in some way impacted

Michael and the wulf. Before the performance Michael talked about the piece he

was about to perform. He explained that the title of the piece was also the title of

the program he wrote to perform it: *delayGraph*.

> Basically I'm connecting dots and lines and the ability to use
> graphs which basically combines two nice ideas that I think are
> nice: graphs and modular arithmetic. It's pretty unpredictable; I
> don't know exactly what will happen. Sometimes it goes very
> quickly to noise, in which case I'll just start again and do another
> one. Sometimes it will go for a while, and we'll see what happens.
> Another thing about the title: the software is tentatively titled
> *delayGraph*. If you don't know me, I work a lot with computers.
> Usually I write music for people so that I can be with people some
> more; hence this would be something a bit different. In software

> development there's a release cycle. The very first stage—in fact the prestage—is called the pre-alpha stage, which basically means that your shit doesn't really work per se, it hasn't been tested, and it's just the very beginnings of something. I kind of like the idea that maybe this software project that I'm working on now will always be that, so don't expect it to get into an alpha or a beta level.[304]

The description Michael gave demonstrates one of the definitions of 'experimental music' given by John Cage: "An experimental action is one the outcome of which is not foreseen."[305] What is also interesting is that Michael is interested in the "pre-alpha" stage of the development of his program, defined by him as a stage when "your shit doesn't really work." His aesthetic not only embraces this quality as a part of the piece, but exploits it as a material source. The rule that Michael holds onto in this piece is that if the sounds merge toward noise—a state that will be decided by him, however he wants to define it (too noisy, or white noise?)— then he will restart the program.

This performance of the piece used a combination of sine tones and fuzzy sawtooth-like pitches panned strategically between the two speakers creating an extra sense of space. The sounds were loud for the wulf. but not uncomfortably loud. Volume seemed only to be controlled by the addition and withdrawal of voices. The overtones from the sawtooth-like pitches created unusual piercing timbres and harmonics that emphasized more frequencies than there seemed to be, as two or three fundamental frequencies clashed and integrated to form more complex sounds. The fundamental pitches themselves seemed to follow in a near tonal fashion (unisons, thirds, fifths, octaves), but their combinations through formant-shaping (vowel-like) filters created dissonances. The final sound was a

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[304] My field recording. Los Angeles, September 6, 2011 (Michael Winter speaking before his performance).
[305] John Cage, *Silence*, 39.

low sustaining sound; it ended sharply, and Michael immediately thanked the audience, inducing applause.

Politics at the wulf.

What distinguishes the politics at the wulf. from the politics at the other venues I have studied—Dem Passwords and (the) Handbag Factory—is that a large percentage of participants in the wulf. scene are either students at Cal Arts, graduates of Cal Arts, or professors at Cal Arts. Disney established Cal Arts in 1961, and although I do not believe that Cal Arts or Disney donates money to the wulf., the link between Cal Arts and the wulf. is inescapable. So what does that mean? The success of a composer is usually determined by a mix of cultural capital and economic capital. A student who is lucky enough to study at Cal Arts has already gained a certain amout of cultural capital because the process of admissions is fiercely competitive, even for an undergraduate student. A graduate student pursuing an MFA in composition at Cal Arts would therefore be given even more cultural capital. Many of the professors who teach there—in this case in the music department—are world-renowned composers found in many histories of twentieth-century music, or have academic genealogies that can be traced to canonized composers. Their authority—namely, their cultural capital— has anointed generations of musicians and composers at Cal Arts. Cultural capital is also evidenced by academic degrees, which Bourdieu claims act as "legal guarantees" of competence: these degrees are awarded by professors as certificates of competence, and they are intended at some point to be converted

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from cultural capital to economic capital (money and property). As Bourdieu

reminds us:

> This product of the conversion of economic capital into cultural
> capital establishes the value, in terms of cultural capital, of the
> holder of a given qualification relative to other qualification holders
> and, by the same token, the monetary value for which it can be
> exchanged on the labor market (academic investment has no
> meaning unless a minimum degree of reversibility of the
> conversion it implies is objectively guaranteed).[306]

Thus the wulf. is teeming with participants who are in possession of a certain

amount of cultural capital through their association with Cal Arts and the degrees

given: cultural capital is potential economic capital. But unlike the Roy and Edna

Disney Cal Arts Theatre (REDCAT), the wulf. is not made of money, and they

charge nothing for admission and even the drinks are free.

Yet the association with Cal Arts as a major institution *flavors* the space in

a particular way. Why is it that most of the composers, performers, and

audiences are associated with Cal Arts? Cal Arts is thirty-five miles away from the

wulf. in Valencia, California. Why are there not more composers from other major

institutions, like USC, UCLA, or the number of smaller universities and colleges in

the vicinity? These questions are mostly rhetorical. What follows may help chip

away at an answer.

Politics exists in every facet of our lives. Such an assertion by itself

perhaps holds little meaning, but what I hope to discover are some clues about

the particular politics at the wulf. Politics, as I use the term, refers to the

negotiation of power. In the case of a venue, one of the most important places to

find how power is negotiated is by talking to the person who allows performers to

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[306] Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," 248.

play at their venue. Michael Winter is the cofounder of the wulf. and he is largely responsible for the activities that transpire under its roof.

Michael Benjamin Winter was born in Nashville, Tennessee in 1980 to an affluent family of European descendants. He took piano lessons at an early age but they ended when he bit his piano teacher. Around fifteen or sixteen he began playing electric guitar in rock and country bands around town. He attended a magnet school in high school and then bounced around at various universities throughout the US. First he studied guitar, but while at University of Oregon, Michael's interest in electronic music was piqued, so he pursued a degree in electronic music, music technology, and composition. From there he went to Cal Arts for the MFA in composition. After completing that degree he began a PhD at University of Virginia in composition, but quickly dropped out. From there he went to UC Santa Barbara to pursue a PhD in Media Arts and Technology where he finished. For the second year of his PhD program, Michael moved back to LA and began his experimental music concert series with Eric KM Clark—the wulf.—and commuted to Santa Barbara when he needed to.

The newly established venue and concert series was established in the wake of the death of friend Harris Wulfson in August 2008. The wulf. became a new laboratory for experimenting with new music ideas and sharing those ideas with others.

> the wulf. is a living room, among other things. the wulf. is not necessarily a venue. I always try to not say what it is or isn't in explicit terms. It's a place where music happens. It's a place where people live. It's a community. But it's not a group, but it has kind of a core set of musicians that often do stuff there. So it's a bit ambiguous. We often say, for ease, that the wulf. is a venue, but I think it's really much more than that; or much less.
> I find that if you create a setting to share ideas in music that's very open, that people tend to want more of that, because really our exchange of ideas and information is really restricted, and I'm not

about that. So really it's kind of a philosophy about how to make music together.[307]

Michael often refers to the regulars who attend performances at the wulf. as part of "the wulf. family" or "the wulf. community." He would sometimes introduce me to someone as "also part of the wulf. community" to signify that the person was 'one of us' and to also refer to me as one of them. Such an introduction as utterance was a seal of approval that I was *in* and the person that I was introduced to was also *in*: *in the community*, or *in the family*. Michael's introductions were often excellent conversation starters between myself and others, since being *in* often meant that we would share an academic tradition together and could talk about composers, composition, and share ideas on music aesthetics and matters beyond music.

But does the wulf. qualify as a community? In my sections on communities, subcultures, and scenes, I cited Thornton and Straw. Thornton wrote: "'Community' tends to suggest a more permanent population."[308] Straw wrote that a music community "presumes a population group whose composition is relatively stable [—] and whose involvement in music takes the form of an ongoing exploration of one or more musical idioms said to be rooted within a geographically specific historical heritage."[309] Contrasting 'community' with 'scene,' Straw writes: "A musical scene… is that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and accordingly, to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization."[310] Straw then offered the thesis that *scenes*

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[307] Michael Winter, interview by me, Los Angeles, CA, May 29, 2012.
[308] Sarah Thornton, "General Introduction," 2.
[309] Will Straw, "Communities and Scenes in Popular Music," 494.
[310] Straw, 494.

change faster than communities. In the case of the wulf., an argument could be

made that it exists as a translocal community steeped in the tradition of

experimental music in LA and in a broader Western tradition of experimental

music, sanctioned institutionally (but not directly funded) by the California

Institute of the Arts (Cal Arts). Experimental music in LA *could* be called a

community, but its community is perhaps served better financially and

institutionally by better-funded and better-attended new music series' like the

recently defunct California Ear Unit, and the Piano Sphere's series (devoted

mostly to new works for the piano). To imagine the wulf. as a scene, there must

be a variety of composers and styles. I believe that the work performed at the

wulf. contains a sufficient amount of variety to call it a scene, and its population

is not sufficiently stable, allowing a certain amount of change in styles and

directions. From my interviews I have already documented the perceived changes

at the wulf. since its inauguration in 2008. Therefore I will continue to discuss the

wulf. in terms of a scene, while imagining its 'family'-aspect as a sign of inclusion

for those who are deemed part of the family, while honoring Michael's use of the

term "the wulf. community" to describe his group of friends and the scene of

composers and performers that make up the wulf.

To find out more about the politics in the wulf. scene I asked Michael *How

do you decide who can play and can't play* [at the wulf.]*? and *Are there

performers you would not book?* I also asked him in particular about the charges

of exclusivity that have been leveled at the wulf. by some people. Michael makes

explicit that he only books performers who are part of the wulf. community or are

likely to become part of it; Michael asserts that such practices are the opposite of

exclusionary practices: "It's whether or not I can justify their membership to the

community, or a potential membership. I just mean someone who will continue

that relationship with the space, with the people, with the music."[311] Michael

continues:

> [I]t's hard to justify, especially with touring musicians, how they fit
> into the community; because often they're just touring and they're
> kind of just stopping by to play, and they're not really that
> interested in the space itself. They're interested in presenting
> themselves. And there's nothing wrong with that. I would like to go
> on tour too, but in my mind, there needs to be some kind of
> justification of how that person is part of the community. And I
> think that it's really easy. It's a matter of knowing someone who
> knows someone, or coming by if you're in town, or doing
> something that seems to align with whatever loose mission we
> have. I think a good example is John Lely. He is a composer from
> the UK who is really wonderful. I knew him before hand. He didn't
> really know anybody here. He came by and I said, "Can I do a
> concert?" There's more to it: he was already booked by Michael
> Pisaro to do something at Cal Arts, so he had, essentially an
> orchestra there of Cal Arts students. But he didn't just show up and
> play. He came, he worked with people, he hung around, and then
> he took some of the music that he learned about here, or some of
> the music of people he learned about here, back to the UK and
> played it. So while there was a connection before hand, it's not
> hard to overcome the fact that we don't know someone. *But this is
> an extension of my general philosophy of making music. I like to
> make music with my friends, and that, to me, is not exclusive*. In
> fact it's far from it. I want to say, "*Hey, come here and be our
> friend. Be someone who can engage*." Not someone who comes
> and plays, and then leaves. Something I won't tolerate is people
> who feel they have a sense of entitlement to play; people who play
> and then leave if there's someone else playing. I'm very impatient
> with that. I have no tolerance for it. So again, it's an extension of
> my everyday method of making music, whether or not it's the
> minimal curation I do for the wulf. or if it's choosing who I play
> music with or my own pieces with. I want to know that there's a
> connection, or that there's the potential for a connection that
> extends beyond that one performance or realization.
>
> So this is my *de facto* request now if it's someone in LA who I don't
> know. I say, "Come by and hang out with us. See other people
> perform." Because that's so much a part of it. It's about an
> exchange.[312]

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[311] Michael Winter, interview by me, Los Angeles, CA, May 29, 2012.
[312] Ibid.

So for Michael, those who may perform are those who are committed to a

lifestyle of sharing music ideas with the other cohorts that make up the wulf.

community or the wulf. scene. Michael used the example of Dickie Bahto to

illustrate how someone he did not know immediately became a part of the wulf.

community.

> Dickie Bahto. [H]e's one that…, I gave him a hard time. I wouldn't
> let him play for the longest time. But he really came and became
> part of the community, and became very good friends with
> everybody and now does stuff regularly and comes regularly.
> Because there was no relationship there yet. But he quickly built
> one, and not because he wanted to play, but because he really did
> share interests with those people beyond just wanting to play at
> the wulf.[313]

Dickie is not an alumnus from Cal Arts, nor is he a musician, but I often saw him

at the wulf. and I sometimes saw him perform at the wulf.

When I talked to Scott Cazan about the charges of exclusivity leveled

against the wulf., he said:

> I think that about that. That's one of the major criticisms of the
> wulf., is that there's this sort of exclusivity that when you show up,
> everyone knows each other and that they all know how to act, and
> they're listening to difficult music. For people from the outside who
> aren't used to that—people who aren't part of that community—
> they feel kind of excluded. They feel like it's like hanging out at a
> party where you don't know anybody, and everyone gets it but you
> [laughs]. I think it's a big problem with the Cal Arts thing. On the
> one hand it's very nice for Cal Arts people, because you're kind of
> born from Cal Arts into a community in LA. There's a direct path
> where you know people and you can work in that community,
> which is great. But yeah, it definitely closes itself off a bit. Certainly
> not intentionally, but there's such a large community that it's easy
> to stay with it.[314]

Scott acknowledges that those outside of the Cal Arts orbit may feel a bit distant

in comparison to those inside the orbit. He then sang the praises of BetaLevel as

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[313] Ibid.
[314] Scott Cazan, interview by me, Los Angeles, CA, May 14, 2012

an equalizing space in Chinatown where artists from the various institutions congregate to show their work at the variety of clustered galleries on Chung King Road.

I then asked Michael: *Are there performers you would not book?* He began with a horror story from a somewhat established composer in LA who Michael claimed had an entitlement complex. The conflict led to a series of unanswered emails with links to reporters and journalists that sang the praises of the entitled composer. Michael also made clear that the wulf. was less interested in established repertoire, even from the postwar avant-garde.

> [G]enerally, it's not a place for people to play music that they already have a forum for, so really it's not a place for famous music. We don't even have that much Cage played there, even though Cage is a huge influence on the community of composers. *It's mainly a place to experiment and prototype new ideas*. We had one group play, and they were really kind of professional about it, and they had their repertoire, and it was a repertoire of quasi-new music, but it wasn't an experiment. It was a professional group playing, and they had found the hip venue to play at. They asked to play again, and I just said, "We like you guys, we think you're great, you're going to have places to play, but this is just not the right forum for that."[315]

I mentioned to Michael that I had been to a few concerts at the wulf. that were packed with people I didn't recognized. These were the kinds of concerts he was referring to that he did not like to see.

> I like it when there are new faces, but it's something strange if no one from the community is there. It means that there's something wrong. So it's a general sense that it fits with our loose mission, which is to come and present freely in a free environment, and in a way that strengthens the community and leads to more creativity. This is not written anywhere. I'm kind of saying it off the top of my head.[316]

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[315] Michael Winter, interview by me, Los Angeles, CA, May 29, 2012
[316] Ibid.

The loose mission seems to be "to experiment and prototype new ideas;" therefore musics and activities that fall beyond the mission would be excusable, with Michael and company arbitrating what that entails.

Another way to find out about the political situation at the wulf. is to try to assess who the frequent performers are at the wulf. Names that immediately came to Michael included Christine Tavolacci, Liam Mooney, Mari, Casey Anderson, Lauren Hildestadt, David Kendall, Matt Barier, Julia Holter, Madison Brookshire, Scott Cazan, Michael Pisaro, James Klopfleisch, Daniel Corral, Corey Fogel, Mark So, Adam Overton, and Ezra Buchla. Michael believed in our interview that Christine Tavolacci and Mark So performed the most of all. Below is a list I compiled of performers who have performed at the wulf. Note that the list is only for those who have performed; it is not a list of composers and their dedicated works. Also note that these lists are difficult to make and may suffer from inaccuracies.

Table 3: Frequency of Performers at the wulf., 2011-2014.

Performers/Groups	Events Played
Casey Anderson	17
Scott Cazan	15
Michael Winter	13
James Klopfleisch	11
Mark So	10
Eric Clark	9
Liam Mooney	9
Michael Pisaro	9
Christine Tavolacci	8
Dicky Bahto	8
Daniel Corral	7
Corey Fogel	7
Matt Barbier	7
Tom Johnson	6

Ingrid Lee	6
Sepand Sehab	6
Andrew Young	5
Laura Steenberge	5
Adam Overton	5
Todd Lerew	5
Aidan Reynolds	4
Julia Holter	4
Archie Carey	4
Colin Wambsgans	4
Heather Lockie	4
Ezra Buchla	3
Ulrich Krieger	3
Gary Schultz	3
Orin Hildestad	3
Nomi Epstein	3
John Eagle	3
Cat Lamb	3
Odeya Nini	3
Wyatt Keusch	3
April Guthrie	3
Tashi Wada	3
Andrew McIntosh	2
Jaap Blonk	2
Andrew Choate	2
Stephanie Smith	2
William Hutson	2
Stephen Touchton	2
Lewis Keller	2
Chico Mello	2
Robert Holliday	2
Reiner Van Houdt	2
Ted Byrnes	2
James Saunders	2
Brian Walsh	2
Carolyn Chen	2
John P Hastings	2
Albert Ortega	1
C Spencer Yeh	1

Are Michael's pleas enough to skirt the charge of exclusivity? The wulf. does a poor job of promoting its activities to anyone beyond the wulf. community. Perhaps their best form of advertising is their email list. But most of the experimental sound venues exhibit a similar kind of insularity. The kind of music that is performed is for a niche audience made up mostly of performers who are also involved in that kind of music. Let me make the question more pointed: Does the wulf. have an additional 'moral' burden—a debt to society—to advertise their community/scene because of the cultural capital they have been given by virtue of their connection to Cal Arts and due to their nonprofit status? My feeling is in the negative on both counts. For one, the wulf. has teamed up with MOCA (Museum of Contemporary Art) to give some joint concerts. These reach-outs may not be much, but I suspect that the desire for contemporary music practices, especially by fresh, young composers, is not that great, and that the wulf. community by its very existence is already offering a service to them, especially since the the wulf. has thrived. Nevertheless, I would like to see composers from some of the local universities, colleges, and unaffiliated composers present their work and integrate themselves into the fabric of the wulf. scene.

IV. Other Venues

Human Resources

Human Resources is a large venue at 410 Cottage Home Street just north of the Chung King Road arts district in Chinatown. It began operation in 2010. The first performances I saw there were mostly idiomatic improvisations in a tonal world often using loop guitar pedals to give a minimalist aesthetic. I also saw various kinds of theatrical events there. I had mostly dismissed Human Resources as a suitable venue for experimental 'noise' until Grant Capes took over the booking in February 2012. Grant was already known for the shows he booked at Echo Curio in Hollywood from 2006 to 2009, and later at Homeroom101 between Koreatown and Filipinotown from 2011 to 2012. People in the 'noise' scene trusted him, and he soon began booking people to play at Human Resources from various experimental 'noise' scenes in LA. Unfortunately, by the time I was reaching the end of my research stage, Human Resources became one of the most important venues for experimental 'noise.' Its large space attracted performers from the other scenes I have previously discussed: the wulf., (the) Handbag Factory, and Dem Passwords. The rise in interest in Human Resources came a few months before the fall of Dem Passwords at its West Hollywood location. Chinatown is effectively between Echo Park and Downtown, and therefore its location was better-suited to the scene than West Hollywood, a place a little too far and with restrictive parking.

BetaLevel

BetaLevel is perhaps the strangest and most underground of the venues, first because it is literally in a basement, and second because its promotion is

scant. BetaLevel is located in the Chung King Road district of Chinatown in a back

alley smelling of Chinese food and down a staircase at 963 North Hill Street. At

the bottom is a concrete room with a low ceiling, uncomfortable theater seating,

and a small bar. Yet the place is quaint and makes for an interesting venue for

sound, though it also hosts video and other kinds of performances. Most of the

performances I attended there included Casey Anderson and Scott Cazan as a

duo and performing solo with others. Though there was a slight dominance of the

Cal Arts contingent, Casey and Scott made sure that other voices were heard,

including GX Jupitter-Larsen and John Wiese. The amplification was enormous for

the small space, and the architecture was useful as a resonator by many

performers interested in exploiting the volume capacity of the amplification

system.

Mata Noise

Toward the end of my main ethnographic research Mata Noise surfaced as

a new experimental 'noise' venue at 3709 Pico Boulevard in the Arlington Heights

district of Los Angeles. Maria Garcia and Patrick Murch moved in to the storefront

space in December 2012 and held their first event in March 2013. To the left of

the small gallery is a Spanish-speaking strip mall-style church, common in LA,

called Iglesia Peniel; to the right is a print shop called O.K. Printing. Scratched

into vertical slats above the gallery door reads "Mata" in a triangle-inspired font.

The gallery itself is perhaps the smallest space of any of the 'noise' and art

galleries in LA: maybe thirty-five feet by twenty feet. The back wall has a partial

partition with a door. Behind the partition is double the space; it serves as the

living quarters for its inhabitants—Patrick and Maria. Behind the living quarters is

the bathroom—audiences must walk through the living quarters to get to the bathroom. The ceiling is relatively high. The white walls are covered in posters, photographs, paintings, and other kinds of art by local artists. The equipment available is a small mixer, a powerful rackmount amplifier, and two large cabinets each with two fifteen-inch speakers for a total or four fifteen-inch speakers. To the left of the entrance is a small table for collecting donations; Maria usually sits there encouraging the suggested fee. The founders of Mata Noise—Maria Garcia and Patrick Murch—are one of the "noise couples" in the experimental 'noise' scene in LA. Though they were perhaps most associated with (the) Handbag Factory, they also performed at Dem Passwords and Human Resources. Because of their contacts in the various scenes, Mata Noise has made a name for itself in a short amount of time for bringing together artists from all three of the main scenes I have discussed: (the) Handbag Factory, Dem Passwords, and the wulf. Mata Noise seems to be considered a precious venue by the various scenes. Samur Khouja at (the) Handbag Factory continuously promotes activities at Mata and Grant Capes has held two fundraisers called "Mata Rising" at Human Resources to Mata Noise alive. To stay afloat, since Patrick and Maria do not produce much income, Mata Noise has a kickstarter.com page for donations. Various artists in the experimental 'noise' scenes have donated their works for sale to contribute to the Mata Noise fund.[317]

Machine Project

Located at 1200 D-North Alvarado Street in Echo Park, Machine Project has become an important gallery and workshop center for various artists and

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[317] Unfortunately Mata Noise closed in early 2016.

audiences. In its earlier days they had more experimental music and 'noise.' During my research they did not have enough events in experimental sound, and the ones they did have often promoted touring artists. Furthermore, the workshops they hold tend to be prohibitively expensive.

South of Sunset

South of Sunset is a gallery in Echo Park located at 1218 W Temple Street run by Elizabeth DiGiovanni and Megan Dudley. It began as a studio space occupied by Elizabeth and Colin Manning. After Colin's departure in late 2013, Elizabeth and new resident Megan decided to make the studio into a space to show their work and host the works of others. I suggested the name *South of Sunset* to Elizabeth. South of Sunset has hosted two experimental 'noise' series'. The first was Stephen Touchton's *ExImOt Series* (Experimental Improvisation Other), which began at HomeRoom101 and has since moved down the street to Pehrspace. The other is a series that I host called *FFFF Series*. The two series' together have bought together performers from the various scenes in Los Angeles. Liam Mooney, Joseph Hammer, Casey Anderson, Rale (William Hutson), Conscious Summary (Samur Khouja), Damion Romero, Fenian (Matt Purse), Michael Winter, and Chelsea Rector are some of the performers who have performed at South of Sunset. Experimental 'noise' at South of Sunset happens about two or three times a year when the gallery is between artist residencies.

The Smell

Founded in North Hollywood in 1997, the Smell moved to 247 S Main Street in Downtown LA in 1999. The downtown location is a large narrow hall

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space with high ceilings. It has become perhaps the most important venue for indie rock, punk, and experimental rock in all of Los Angeles. In the earlier days at both the North Hollywood location and the Downtown location, the Smell often featured experimental 'noise,' including young Cal Arts composers and enthusiasts of the burgeoning 'noise' culture. The Smell programs an experimental 'noise' performer once in a while, but rarely devotes an entire evening to the experimental 'noise' scene. More often a 'noise' performer who is playing at the Smell will perform in a band that might be described as 'less pure' than 'noise.' For example, John Wiese has performed many times at the Smell with his grindcore band Sissy Spacek, and Greh Holger has played as a guest with black metal band Harassor.

Pehrspace

Located at 325 Glendale Boulevard in Filipinotown, Pehrspace has become one of the most important venues for local indie music and youth culture in Los Angeles. Pehrspace was founded by Adam Hervey in 2006. It is similar to how the Smell was in its earlier days. For years Monday Nights at Pehrspace hosted by Sean Carnage was an important event on Monday nights in LA. The Pehrspace scene is perhaps the link between the small experimental 'noise' scenes and the punk, pop, and dance music scenes in LA.[318]

Beyond Baroque

Beyond Baroque Literary Arts Center is a west side venue located at 681 Venice Boulevard in Venice, California founded in 1968. Though it is called a

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[318] Pehrspace was shut down in 2016.

"literary arts center" it also has a substantial performance space; it has held a variety of experimental music performances mostly from academy-based composers. I spent more time at Beyond Baroque in the early 2000s, but I found that the performances I was looking for were more often found elsewhere. Many of the people I interviewed agreed with my assessment. Nevertheless Beyond Baroque is one of the longest-running venues in Los Angeles that continues to showcase experimental music.

SASSAS

The Society for the Activation of Social Space Through Art and Sound (SASSAS) was founded in 2004 by Cal Arts alumnus Cindy Bernard. Many of the activities take place at the MAK Center for Art and Architecture at the Schindler House on 833 North Kings Road in West Hollywood.[319] Although SASSAS events have included performers in Los Angeles that work in experimental 'noise,' the prices for admission are often exorbitant and stupendous: admission to one of their "listening parties" was $125 a person according to a flyer I picked up after one of their events. Furthermore, some of the performers I interviewed who have worked with SASSAS had negative experiences. SASSAS events do not adequately represent the experimental 'noise' community in Los Angeles. In fact, that SASSAS can command such fees is a total mystery to me.

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[319] The Schindler House was designed by architect Rudolph Schindler, who also designed the roof for the Evenings on the Roof series in the 1940s in Silverlake.

V. Closed Venues

Women of Crenshaw

Sometimes called Women House or simply Women, Women of Crenshaw is a house that was used as a DIY venue. The music most often heard there was punk, indie rock, experimental rock, experimental 'noise,' and anything weird. It seemed to cater to a younger crowd. Shows were mostly cancelled at Women of Crenshaw around 2012; by then (the) Handbag Factory became the venue that I would see people who previously had frequented Women of Crenshaw. Nevertheless Women of Crenshaw was a significant venue for experimental 'noise' until its demise as a venue.

Echo Curio

Founded in 2006 Echo Curio was a tiny storefront gallery in Echo Park located at 1519 Sunset Boulevard. Grant Capes hosted an experimental sound series at the venue that flourished until the Los Angeles Police Department shut them down in 2010 for holding "live music" without a permit.

HomeRoom101

HomeRoom101 was a short-lived venue in Koreatown located at 3121 Beverly Boulevard. It was host to rock bands, experimental 'noise,' poetry, stand-up comedy, and other kinds of performances. Stephen Touchton established his ExImOt (Experimental-Improvisation-Other) series there, and Grant Capes also hosted experimental 'noise' on some nights. The space was small with chairs set up for the audiences. Nevertheless both Stephen and Grant were able to attract

performers from the various scenes in Los Angeles. HomeRoom101 lasted for about one year, from September 2011 to about September 2012.

Line-Space-Line

Line-Space-Line was an experimental improvisation concert series cofounded by Chris Heenan, Jeremy Drake, and David Rothbaum. It began in May 2002 at the Salvation Theatre in Los Angeles and moved to a few different locations before the series folded in 2005. According to their website the series "represents the diversity of non-idiomatic improvisation in Los Angeles."[320] The use of the term "non-idiomatic improvisation" points to Derek Bailey's influential book *Improvisation*. Bailey was a guitarist from the jazz tradition who moved toward free jazz. Through his book he became the champion of the free improvisation movement. He famously distinguished non-idiomatic improvisation from idiomatic improvisation. Idiomatic improvisation came from a tradition, like baroque basso continuo realizations or flamenco style, while non-idiomatic improvisation attempted to make music devoid of tradition. Line-Space-Line was a place where performers from different backgrounds improvised for each other. Sometimes they even improvised together. In my recollection, performers from a free jazz background were most frequent, but there were also performers from the algorithmic music (laptop music) community that were represented, like David Kendall. Line-Space-Line and Il Corral were two venues that I frequented in the early 2000s and I have found myself blurring the aesthetics of these two venues together; and so for me, Line-Space-Line was part of the soundscape that I was beginning to conceive of as "noise music" even though Il Corral would

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[320] www.linespaceline.org .

become known for its experimental 'noise.' Furthermore, all three founders of Line-Space-Line also performed at Il Corral.

Il Corral

Il Corral was a short-lived venue that made massive waves in the experimental 'noise' scene in Los Angeles. Located at 662 North Heliotrope Drive in Hollywood near Los Angeles Community College, Il Corral was founded by Bob Bellerue and Stane Hubert in January 2005 and closed nearly two years later in December 2006. Bob graduated from Cal Arts with an MFA in composition in 2003, though he was not a formally trained musician by most standards.[321] The performers that performed at Il Corral were from a variety of backgrounds, but all were connected by their experimental practices. Il Corral hosted performers who were composition students and art students from local institutions, musicians working with electronics, veterans from the LAFMS, and touring experimentalists. Bob and Stane lived at Il Corral for most of its tenure as a venue. Sean Carnage began his Monday night series at Il Corral where he hosted indie bands, experimental music, and other kinds of odd musics; he later moved his series to Pehrspace where it remained until January 2014. One of the most important documents of the happenings at Il Corral was Sean Carnage's movie *40 Bands In 80s Minutes!* (with myself in attendance!). Il Corral was a special place for me; I conceived of this dissertation topic largely because of the performances I saw there. I spent a lot of time at Il Corral during its two year tenure before I moved to Santa Cruz to pursue a PhD. I developed a few

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[321] "I can't write music. I understand the principles of musical notation, and looking at something I can get a general gist of it, but I never really studied. I never got into that part of it." (My interview with Bob Bellerue).

friendships and acquaintances from those times, and I even performed once or twice with David Kendall's group Pity Party. Notable performances I recall include David Kendall, David Rothbaum, Jeremy Drake, Ezra Buchla, Nels Cline, Peter Kolovos, Damion Romero, Pedestrian Deposit, John Wiese, the Cherry Point (Phil Blankenship), Joseph Hammer, Albert Ortega, Adam Overton, and many others.

Conclusions—Experimental 'Noise' Scenes

From the time I began studying the three scenes in 2011—the wulf., Dem Passwords, and (the) Handbag Factory—it was apparent that Dem Passwords and (the) Handbag Factory enjoyed more crossover artists with each other than with the wulf. Since Dem Passwords moved from its West Hollywood location, it has mostly lost its hold in the 'noise' community, and recently Samur seems busy with other projects (probably his recording job) and has held 'noise' shows less frequently than in the last few years. The wulf., has continued to provide experimental composers with a venue, but not with the kind of explosive 'noise' found at other spaces. Since 2013, other venues like Human Resources and Mata Noise have begun to really fill in the need for such explosive music. They also seem to be more open to the academic kinds of musics that I believe are close relatives to the not-so-academic 'noise,' since both are interested in the exploration of new timbres.

In this chapter I have introduced the reader to the various venues and the aesthetics and politics of those venues in the context of experimental 'noise.' The continued existence of these institutions provides evidence that experimental 'noise' is a necessary activity for many artists in Los Angeles.

CHAPTER 3
'NOISE' NOMENCLATURE

One of the tasks I have concerning this project is what to call the field (or object) of my study. What is the name that captures the scene I am studying? What qualifies as within the bounds of the object of study and what moves beyond the bounds of the object, and then, what lies at the edge, on the line, and what blurs the lines of the object of study. I started with the assumption that I was studying the Los Angeles noise music scenes. "Noise music" was the category I chose to use. I took 'noise music' as my starting point, my general assumption, knowing that some people would contest it. Nevertheless I stuck to it for a long time. After years of study, I realized that I had run into one particular trap that I was deaf to; a trap that I had warned others against. The trap was one of redundancy. While I was teaching World Music at Gavilan College, I would try to impress on my students that 'gamelan' meant 'ensemble,' and that to say 'gamelan ensemble' was as redundant as to refer to 'tuna fish' when tuna suffices already as a fish. Similarly, 'noise music' is redundant in the same way; and even when my subjects of study would prefer to refer to their craft as 'noise' and not 'noise music,' it had no effect, at the time, on my nomenclature to refer to the genre as 'noise music.' I was deaf to the idea that few people refer to 'jazz music,' 'rock music,' 'rap music,' 'punk music,' etc.; rather, we speak of jazz, rock, rap, punk, and so on. Perhaps the reason I held onto the term 'noise music' for so long was ensure that I could continue to refer to 'noise' (the genre) as within the bounds of the institution of the term 'music' as I understand it: as the organization of sound, and the processes associated

with that organization (musicking). I also did not want to confuse other uses of the term 'noise' with the genre 'noise.' My conservatism is to claim 'noise' as an object of musicological study, the way the Inuit game of katajjaq is claimed as an object of ethnomusicological study by Jean-Jacques Nattiez, even though the Inuit themselves have little use for katajjaq as music the way Westerners tend to think of music in a more colloquial sense (to the Inuit, katajjaq is a game). Nevertheless, I was insistent and consistent in all of my interviews by referring to the object of study as 'noise music.' So when reading the testimonies of my respondents, keep in mind the complications between 'noise' as genre and 'noise' as phenomena through the various definitions already discussed. In a sense, my misunderstanding makes the distinction more clear because my insistence on 'noise music' separates 'noise' as genre from its other definitions. Yet there are still important elisions and intersections between 'noise' as genre and "noise" through its other definitions that complicate the issues, sometimes even for purpose and effect. Some authors (David Novak) have tried to make the distinction by capitalizing the 'N' as Noise to refer to the genre, but I have not adopted that practice. For this dissertation I refer to 'noise,' 'noise music,' 'noise art,' and experimental 'noise' to denote the field of study as the cultural practices in the scene (though I purposefully did not include single quotes around 'noise' and 'noise music' when transcribing the interviews). These terms should be understood by the reader as relatively synonymous and nearly interchangeable for the purpose of this study. I tried to use the terms that the subjects of my study were most comfortable using, though many were resistant and some rejected the term I used in the interviews—noise music—altogether.

The next sections of the dissertation will necessarily overlap and complicate each other. How does the researcher separate the aesthetic issues in experimental 'noise' from its instruments, techniques and practices? Aesthetics, as the study of what we think is beautiful through our (artistic) choices and the interpretation of (sonic) data, must then incorporate the choices of instruments, techniques and practices. In this dissertation I have tried to separate these issues for clarity. I hope to have connected the dots within and between sections thoroughly, and I hope that a sensitive reader will find more connections implicated in my study.

The purpose of this section—also concerned with aesthetics—is to understand in a broad way what 'noise' means to the subjects I interviewed. The questions addressed here fall under a broad category in my questionnaire that I call "Noise Music: General Questions." The four salient questions that I will be addressing are quoted below from my questionnaire:

1. Do you think of your music as noise music?
   a. If not, then how would you describe your music?
      i. *For the purpose of this questionnaire I will continue to use the term 'noise music' with sufficient qualifiers.*
   b. If yes, then how would you define and characterize noise music? (what is it?)
2. What are some of the general aims of the practitioners of noise music?

In these basic questions, three of them (1, 1a, 1b) are related through dichotomy: 1) *Do you think of your music as 'noise music'?* 1a) *If not, then how would you describe your music?* 1b) *If yes, then how would you define and characterize noise music?* Although in general I tried to avoid binary yes/no questions, the first question—*Do you think of your music as 'noise music'?*— serves as a thesis. In some cases my subjects made clear that they did *not* want their work to be considered as 'music,' and so I would sometimes substitute the

term 'music' for the term 'sound art' or simply 'art' or even 'work.' (i.e., *Do you consider your work noise art?*). (The practice of adjusting the questions to suit the preferred terminology of my subjects was sensitively followed throughout the interview process for every subject.) If the subject answered negatively, then I would ask them how they would describe their work. Then I would offer the following disclaimer: *For the purpose of this questionnaire I will continue to use the term 'noise music' with sufficient qualifiers*. The qualifiers I have in mind are intended to show that not everyone I consider to be within the postulated field of the 'noise music' scene feels comfortable with the generic term. I am responsible for maintaining that they are part of the scene that I claim they are a part of, and for representing their ideas to the best of my ability; if I am able to do that, then I will maintain that I have made 'sufficient qualifiers.' If my subjects answered affirmatively, that their work is in fact 'noise music,' then I would ask them: *How would you define and characterize noise music*? or more generally, *What is it?* If my subjects preferred a different term than 'noise music'—'noise,' 'experimental music,' 'industrial music,' 'sound art,' etc.—then I would ask how they would define and characterize the term they preferred. In most cases, those who denied the term 'noise music' as their chosen term conceded that the term was close enough. The final question addressed in this section—*What are some of the general aims of the practitioners of noise music?*—sometimes clarified in more colloquial terms as "What are you going for? What are you trying to do?" is designed to understand just that. So there are two basic questions addressed here: *What is it?* and *What are you trying to do?*

A note before I explore the answers of the subjects interviewed: many times, answers to the questions above were found in other sections in the

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questionnaire in response to other questions. I will often take the liberty of using

responses to any questions that answer the question I may be concerned with.

The answers will be used sometimes to clarify and other times perhaps to

obscure or contradict what the subject has said elsewhere. When contradictions

are found, they are never for the purpose of shaming or embarrassing my

subjects, but to find clarification, and describe thickly what they hope to

communicate. I am responsible for interpreting the responses of my subjects,

whether I agree or disagree with their answers. Agreeing and disagreeing is not

what my project is about, since the Los Angeles 'noise' scene is more theirs—

through the political democracy of their collective ideas—than it is mine (as a

singular member, researcher, and participant observer).

A second note: In my interviews, I abbreviated all names by their first and

last initial, except for GX Jupitter-Larsen, who I referred by the name most

people use to call him: GX. None of my participants shared initials. Naturally, I

refer to myself as DM (Daniel Muñoz). Furthermore I tend to refer to my subjects

by their first names. Last name formalities are rare, and since none of my

interviewed subjects share a first name, they are not required.

I. Is It 'Noise?'

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Table 4: 'Noise' Nomenclature (Preferred Term)

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Subject	Initials	Yes	No	Preferred Term
David Kendall	DK	*		Noise
Henry Perez	HP	*		-
Nial Morgan	NM	*		-
Greh Holger	GH	*		Noise, experimental, atmospheric
John Wiese	JW		*	Experimental music, genreless music
Elden Man	EM	*		Noise
Edward Giles	EG	*		Noise, Industrial
Adam Cahan	AC	*		Noise
Christiaan Cruz	CC	*		Noise
Joseph Hammer	JH	*		Noise, Free Music
Weronika Zaluska	WZ			* Not Questioned *
Scott Cazan	SC		*	Experimental Music
Narin Dickerson	ND			* Not Questioned *
Michael Winter	MW	*		("Frankly I could care less.")
GX Jupitter-Larsen	GX		*	Noise
Casey Anderson	CA	*		Experimental Music
Sebastian Demian	SD	*		Experimental Music
Damion Romero	DR		*	(only in a "casual way") sound art
Samur Khouja	SK	*		-
Don Bolles	DB	*		-
Bob Bellerue	BB	*		Improvised experimental music
Joe Potts	JP	*		Noise/Noise Drone
Maria Garcia	MG	*		Noise, experimental, ambient

Of the twenty-three people I interviewed, seventeen participants agreed that their work could be called 'noise music,' four participants disassociated themselves from the term 'noise music,' and two were not questioned or had no answer. Whether the participants agreed or disagreed, I documented their preferred term. Only the participants I interviewed *solely as listeners* were not asked the question of whether their work was 'noise music.' One of those

listeners, Adam Cahan, answered the question in the context of a different

question, so I included his answer.

II. Why is the Activity Not 'Noise Music'?

A closer look at the dissenters may help clarify the field of inquiry concerning whether the activity in question can be called 'noise music' (or 'noise'). The four dissenters—Scott Cazan, Damion Romero, GX Jupitter-Larsen, and John Wiese—are some of the most respected artists in the scene, so their input will be seen as particularly valuable for the cultural capital they have amassed. Other participants in my project made objections to the term 'noise music' but were less vehement in their objections, so let it be clear that the passages below are not the only objections, but only the loudest ones. When the subjects of my study rejected the term 'noise music' to describe the activities and objects of the field of study in question, I read to them what I called my 'disclaimer': "*For the purpose of this questionnaire I will continue to use the term 'noise music' with sufficient qualifiers*." Then I would ask to them to describe the activity (music, sound art, etc.) that they do. A final note: I have formatted all of the dialogic block quotations from my interviews to be indented on the left side only; I did not indent on the right side.

Scott Cazan as Dissenter

When I asked Scott Cazan (1981-) whether he thought of his work as 'noise music,' he responded with his own questions to what *I* thought it was.

> SC: I don't know, that's a hard question, because that's like so…, it depends on what you think noise music is.

> DM: What do *you* think it is?

> SC: I think it's experimental music. I think if you call it noise music it becomes a kind of trap for style, and you're starting to imply that it has a certain sound to it, and a certain style to it.

DM: Does experimental music also have a style?

SC: I don't think so. Not if you are broadly defining it. Some people define it as John Cage and that sort of sound. I think some people see it that way, but that's not everything.

Scott takes issue with the term 'noise music' because he believes that it has developed a history, and that its history has reduced it to a style. He prefers the term experimental music. When I challenged his claim, that experimental music also has a history, he rejected my claim. In other words, Scott believes the term "experimental" is a more open and inclusive term.

SC: Don't you feel like it's kind of a thing now? It has a history…

DM: But doesn't experimental music also have a history?

SC: It does have a history, but it has multiple histories. You can have a history that involves John Cage or not.

The debate seems to be that 'experimental music' refers to a process or method, while 'noise music' may have more to do with noise as entropic sonic material. One of the most accepted definitions of 'experimental music' is that its explorations lead one to unforeseeable results. The results in experimental music imply (but perhaps do not explicate) sound, so 'experimental music' implies unexpected sounds (or sound combinations, if the sounds themselves are already given).

SC: Is it a literal description of the music, meaning that it's made with what we would consider noise?—pink noise or white noise—or something that approximates that? But then you'd have to discount Damion Romero, for instance, because those are really nice tones. So I don't know. I think that's a very problematic term.

Scott's concern with the term 'noise music' is that its materiality might exclude the work of Damion Romero, who is considered by many to be one of the most

influential practitions in the 'noise music' scene in Los Angeles. What might

disqualify Damion's work as 'noise' is that the materials he uses tend to be low

frequency pitches, often beating against each other and creating difference tones

and rhythms. Scott's challenge is not unique; the challenge is not to discredit

Damion's work, but to problematize the term 'noise music.' Throughout the

interview Scott preferred the term 'experimental music' and referred to the three

other dissenters—Damion Romero, John Wiese, and GX Jupitter-Larsen—as

experimental musicians.

When I asked Scott about the general aims of the practitioners of

'experimental music' (his preferred term), he answered in the following manner:

> SC: I can tell you what specific people are trying to do. I think they're just
> trying to explore the environment. Some people are trying to explore
> perception. Some people are very practical, and they're trying to explore
> new ways of generating sound, and new aesthetic experiences. Some
> people are more scientific about it: let's discover new things about
> ourselves through this music. Those are two very different goals. I can't
> really speak for everyone, but I can say that there are a lot of
> experimental musicians who are looking for new ways of perceiving sound.
> Or new ways that sound can help us perceive the world or discover new
> things. Some people see it as a philosophical pursuit, whereas other
> people are just finding new things that they enjoy listening to
> unexpectedly. Maybe that's it: always finding the unexpected. Being
> surprised. Maybe that's a consistent aim: being surprised by what they do.
>
> DM: Is that what you're going for?
>
> SC: Yeah, totally. To try to discover things. That's the best is when you're
> surprised: "Oh, that's happening: interesting. Let's explore this. What
> happens when I start to tweak this?" That's the fun of performing,
> because that's what you're doing on stage, is discovering new things.

Not only does Scott's answer fall in line with standard definitions of experimental

music (activities that lead to unforeseeable results), he sees such exploration as

a valued aesthetic ("That's the best is when you're surprised"). Scott's main

objection to the term 'noise music' then must be because if 'noise music' is a

thing and it has an associated style, then there would be little room for discovery or surprise.

GX Jupitter-Larsen as Dissenter

When I asked GX Jupitter-Larsen (1959-) if he thought of his work as 'noise music,' he answered in the following manner:

> GX: No. I just think of it as noise. I say this because I was interested in noise as a sonic experience outside of the musical context. I do not think of my sound art as music, ever. Other people may reinterpret it that way if they care to, but for myself, musical issues never enter my mind when I'm either performing or recording. I was involved with people at a time— say, late 80s to early 90s—where a lot of participants in noise didn't want to make music [and] were not interested in musical issues. They were more interested in making sound a physical experience, and this didn't include things like composition or musical terminology. But a lot of people outside the noise scene of that time period refer to it as 'noise music' because they were not aware of the internal dialog and debate going in the scene at the time. Noise has been a very dynamic hybrid machine, constantly reinventing itself, so by the mid-90s a whole bunch of newbees get involved, and they're interested in the idea of noise as music. So to them noise music isn't an outsiders redefinition, it's their definition of what they're doing. So anyway, because noise constantly reinvents itself— because there's new people constantly coming into the scene—they're bringing in their own agenda, their own biases, their own misconceptions of what it's supposed to be. And if enough people have a misconception [laughs], the conception is no longer the misconception. So the lines between industrial music, cassette culture, noise, noise music, improv, free improv, whatever, gets blurred because you have people coming from outside from different scenes bringing in their influences and it gets the conversation very confused.

With GX, the issue is not with 'noise' but with 'music.' Just as Scott Cazan found 'noise music' to be too restricting to include what he saw as a broader soundscape that could be possible from the practices of 'experimental music,' GX found the term and the institution of 'music' to be far too conservative for his needs. He prefers the term 'sound art' or 'noise art' and rejects "musical issues" and "musical terminology" as having any relevance to the processes his works

undergo. Such a rejection was also near to the early punk attitude: "Actually we're not into music, we're into chaos," said Sex Pistols guitarist Steve Jones in *NME*. And though he concedes that his works can be heard and interpreted as music, ultimately such an endeavor is not necessary for him. Like other early practitioners of 'noise,' the physical experience of sound, often through heavy amplification and complex timbres, was a principle aim to the creation of his work. The physical experience could then synaesthetically blur the lines of the senses as sound is literally felt by the skin; thus 'musical issues,' for GX, had the possibility of being bypassed entirely. GX then claims that since noise works could be interpreted in different ways, including as musical phenomena, and was also garnering the interest of those involved with cassette culture and free improvisation, 'noise' became inclusive of other forms of expression.

GX's answer strongly implies his own conservatism and exclusionary practices concerning the issue (or perhaps the 'institute') of 'noise.' When I asked him how he would define and characterize 'noise art' (his preferred term), he answered in the following manner:

> GX: It's bringing about a non-academic, very base emotional passion to an experience. Not that there aren't a few academics involved in the noise scene, but by in larger I think most participants have almost this punk, do-it-yourself attitude to an experience that doesn't conform to the pop culture norm. Even the kids who have reduced noise down to a style, as opposed to an attitude. They still do have a lot of passion. I see kids coming and they just throw their emotion into what it is that they do, and this hasn't changed from day one. But certainly the outside influence of having so many kids that came to noise from the metal scene has definitely affected noise as a whole—the scene as a whole.

The juxtaposition of the non-academic and the extreme expression (emotional passion) would in some ways seem at odds with many academic experimental composers. John Cage—a canonic representative of the institution of Western

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experimental music—was famous for his desire to rid himself of any expressive

content. The move against the academic and toward the do-it-yourself seems to

move closer to Cornelius Cardew and the ideals of the "scratch ensemble." Noise,

for GX, is an attitude and not a style. I asked about the nature of the attitude of

noise.

> GX: I think because when I got involved in what became the noise scene, a lot of us came from the punk scene. In punk, punk was this attitude, and it was, "Let's make some noise and cause commotion." When I heard that from people, I took them very seriously—literally. I said, "Yeah, let's make noise!" But of course, that's not what people really meant when they said that. They just wanted to make noisy music that would get attention so they could sign on to a label. But that wasn't what I was interested in, and a lot of other people who got involved with cassette culture at the time, really did want to make noise. They were actually interested in distortion and feedback that they found thrilling on some level. But exactly how to make that distortion and how to make that feedback was a big question. Nevertheless there was this kind of, "Let's find your own answer." Punk went from an attitude to a style, and I think the same thing has happened to noise now. I think people are very concerned about pedals, and they're very concerned about software. Although you do have circuit benders and you do have people building their own gear, and I respect all of them very deeply for building their own equipment, but I think for the kids that just collect pedals without necessarily building or modifying those pedals, I think for them noise is just a style. It isn't necessarily an attitude.

For GX, the 'noise attitude' is connected to what he sees as the original punk

aesthetic rooted in DIY culture and fierce individualism; a style, one can glean,

that comes from the use of factory-made instruments used in ways felt, by

certain practitioners like GX, to be predictable and conventional methods of

making sound. GX views unmodified guitar pedals with suspicion because their

factory settings would give a limited palette of sounds that could be reduced to a

style. When I asked GX about the general aims of the practitioners of 'noise,' he

said the following:

GX: I think it depends on the time frame. I think there was a real, deep-seeded curiosity, a sense of play that might be mixed with anger or angst or ego, but I think there was a sense of trying something really different.

The notions of 'curiosity' and 'play' are closely related to the practitioners of experimental music who are interested in exploration and unforeseeable (sonic) consequences, while the notion of angst has often been associated with punk aesthetics, working class ethos, and the rejection of political norms to forge a unique identity. Punk can also be associated with a certain kind of working class ethos, as outlined by Dick Hebdige in his *Subcultures: The Meaning of Style* (where style tends to refer to the dress codes and behaviors of punks in the mid- to late-1970s).

To really understand GX's idea of 'noise' as a term that describes the attitude and art that interests him we must examine his notion of 'noise purism.' 'Noise purism' strongly implies a border between what is 'noise music' and what lies outside the confines of 'noise music.' It implies notions of authenticity and the exclusionary practices levied against those who do not qualify as purely noise. This question will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 6 on 'noise' aesthetics.

John Wiese as Dissenter

In my interview with John Wiese (1977-) I asked him whether or not he referred to his sound works as 'noise music.' More than any other person I interviewed he rejected the term. His immediate answer to the question was the following:

JW: I don't identify with either term: noise or music. And then together it creates this whole other thing that I just don't relate to at all.

John Wiese's rejection of the terms 'noise' and 'music' was unique amongst the people I interviewed. 'Noise' was a term he felt particularly sensitive about. In fact he seemed even to avoid the term 'art,' though he graduated from Cal Arts with a BFA in graphic art. After I gave my disclaimer—that I would continue to use the term 'noise music' for the purpose of the interview, and explained to John that my work would be clear to say that he did not use the term 'noise' or 'noise music' to describe his work—he launched into a monolog describing his feelings about the matter from an interview he did with Bruce Russell for *The Wire*.

> JW: When *The Wire* did this article, maybe five or six years ago: this guy Bruce Russell wrote it, and he asked me a similar question. And I said: "I would really appreciate it if you wrote this article about me and never used the word 'noise' at all in the article. I think it would be really great, and I think it would be very helpful for the reader, to use more useful and interesting words to describe the work and what I'm doing. I think when you use the word 'noise' it has an enormous stigma to it, and it makes people think that they know what you're talking about when maybe they have absolutely no idea what they're talking about. And not only that, but it reduces it to, not only an absolutely overly simplified term, but an overly simplified negative term. It's like saying this is "retard music," or this is "dumb music," or "bad music." It's not any of those things. And then he sent me the first draft of the article for me to check for factual clarifications, and the first sentence of the article was something like: "John doesn't want you to call his music 'noise music.'" And I wrote him back and said: "No dude, you're missing my point entirely."
>
> [M]y point is that you can write about something on a much smarter level that will inform the reader more and actually serve the work much better by just eliminating this term. Don't even make reference to it. Eliminate it.

If the inclusion of this passage reiterates John's warning—that his work is not 'noise music,' and that the term will be misleading every step of the way—then it can also be instructive concerning the nomenclature and classification of this form of sound art, and whether such a form even exists. Certainly in record stores that carry his records, John Wiese is filed under "noise;" or at Amoeba Records under "unusually experimental." John's critique though is not that his

work is not "just noise," it's that "noise," to him, implies bad music, or work that is not carefully thought out; and this runs counter to the meticulous care John puts into each of his works. Continuing the passage above, John discusses some alternatives to the term 'noise music.'

> JW: And then I made this writing piece, and I told him all these terms and phrases you could use instead. And one of them was "exhausted spectral incantation." We were talking about several specific records and specific pieces. I said: "If you want to talk about this piece, it's this full, homogenous sound that is constantly erupting." I said: "You can describe it as an exhausted spectral incantation." The worst thing in the world to call this record would be a 'harsh noise wall.' Oh my god, please. [We laugh] Why would you call it that when you could call it an exhausted spectral incantation, you know?

"Exhausted Spectral Incantation" is the name of John's one-hundredth seven-inch record. It consists of two locked groove loops on the A side only. Both sound like 'noise;' almost white noise. In the passage John also objects to the term "harsh noise wall." 'Harsh noise wall' is a subgenre of 'noise' (or 'harsh noise') generally characterized by noise that does not move, or remains static. Under such a strict definition "Exhausted Spectral Incantation" actually qualifies as a 'harsh noise wall.'[322] In place of a codified genre, John prefers poetry: an "exhausted spectral incantation"—essentially the infinite singing in time and space—describes nothing or everything. What John objects to is the classification of his work by genre. He sees classifications by genre as ghettos for artists that restrict their maneuvers and handicap their creative impulses.

> JW: To me this goes back to the least interesting aspect of experimental music, which is this sort of genre codifier that nullifies your whole scene. Experimental music. If it's noise, and it's music, then it's not that experimental anymore. I guess I would question artists that would accept a term like that, because…: does it describe them? Do they really feel comfortable using it? Do they identify with it? Do they feel like they're

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[322] I had not thought to call John's "Exhausted Spectral Incantation" a 'harsh noise wall,' but I realized after he had rejected the term, that his piece actually fits the definition of the term.

coming into a predetermined, established, codified scene or genre of music that they're just rehashing? I'm highly suspect.

Continuing his thoughts on genre, noise, and experimental music, John and I have the following exchange:

> JW: I have a very deep-rooted dislike for genre music. And I don't find it interesting when I see artists identifying these elements of music that's been made, albeit under a quote-unquote 'experimental banner' and then simple rehashing it by following these rules or following these predetermined indicators that this is experimental music. I just think it's the least interesting….

> DM: Do you prefer the term 'experimental music'?

> JW: I guess I tend to say it. I tend to say it as a very broad term.

> DM: Do you think that that constitutes a genre?

> JW: Yes, I think so. I think it's a genre that has no particular sound. 'Experimental' could mean black, white, red, yellow; it could be anywhere. 'Experimental' could be an umbrella for anything from Merzbow to Henry Chopin to… you know… to John Zorn.

John's preference is for the term 'experimental music,' but even here he hesitates and finds discomfort in the term until I ask him some questions concerning the aesthetics of this kind of work. For me the *eureka*! moment of our interview occurred after I had heard John refer several times to "genre music." So I coined and offered the term "genreless music." This was the only term that excited John, and so I used it for the remainder of the interview (A longer discussion of "genreless music" will be discussed in the section on aesthetics.) When I asked John about the general aims of the practitioners of 'noise music', he said the following:

> JW: I think I would hope to hear something that felt like an exploration or possibly even a discovery of something new and interesting. I don't know how much more I could generalize about the scene.
> Something that I've tried to do consistently is to make a work that's really inconsistent.

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In the passage above John concedes that there *is* a "scene," namely, a cultural field that he himself is a part of, regardless of the name that is assigned to it. He then generalized his preference for the types of performances he would expect to experience: an exploration or a discovery of something new. Finally, he offers up a personal aesthetic goal, namely, to attempt to create *inconsistent work*. Consistent work would bring about a body of knowledge; a body of work that could be replicated and understood. Inconsistency, on the other hand, approaches the entropic.

Damion Romero as Dissenter

Of the subjects I interviewed for this project, Damion Romero (1970-) was perhaps the most shy with his answers. The following passage is our exchange concerning whether or not he considers his work 'noise music' and how he feels about the term 'experimental music.'

DM: Do you think of your work as noise music?

DR: No. In a more casual way, sure. There are people who people call 'noise people' [laughs] and I suppose I identify with a lot of those people. I feel like my stuff is somewhat unique, but everybody's is really. There are a lot of different people doing different things, and there is sort of a community, though it's always changing. There are these different times of more or less activity happening, and some people fade in and fade out, then fade back in again. But yeah, sure—in a casual sense, yeah. But not as some sort of real definition.

DM: Do you prefer the term at Amoeba Records, "unusually experimental?"

DR: I don't know.

DM: How would you describe your music?

DR: I don't know. I remember Daniel Menche going off—that's another guy I've collaborated with a lot over the years. I remember him getting really mad about that. I don't know how he feels about it today.

DM: The 'unusually experimental' thing?

DR: Not that, but the word 'experimental' in any way, because it makes it sound like you don't know what you're doing. You're just experimenting and trying to figure something out. Which I guess is true with me. I am actually experimenting quite a bit to get to where I want to get. So in that sense my music is experimental, but that's not really the goal. It doesn't really matter. What matters is the actual music, and some people are offended by some things, or prefer some things over other things, but that's just those people's preferences.

Damion's position is that although he does not identify with the terms 'noise' or

'noise music,' the terms also do not offend him because regardless of the name

used, there *is* a community of artists that some have called "noise people"

(though I have not heard anyone other than Damion use the term "noise

people"). I then asked if he preferred the term "unusually experimental" because

Amoeba Records—the largest record store in Los Angeles with two stores in the

Bay Area—files the works of Damion Romero, John Wiese, Daniel Menche (from

Portland), and everyone else who sells 'noise music' records in the "unusually

experimental" section. This question led us to discuss the term 'experimental'

through his conversation with prominent Portland artist Daniel Menche. Daniel's

objection to the term 'experimental' music is similar to John Wiese's objection to

'noise music': while John finds the term 'noise music' tinged with negative

connotations—"It's like saying this is 'retard music,' or this is 'dumb music,' or

'bad music'"—Daniel Menche also finds the term 'experimental music' to have

negative connotations for work done by a dilettante dabbling with sound. Damion

then says that he in fact does believe that his work is experimental in nature, but

that the end goal is not the experimentation itself but the results of the

experimentation. In the passage above he concedes that his work can be called 'music,' but elsewhere he shies away from that term to describe the works he plays on his radio program, Psychotechnics, on KXLU.

> DR: So anyway, the point is that things are changing a lot, and I don't know what noise music is. There are people who are doing interesting things who…. My radio show I suppose, I don't play stuff that's so much music, it's more just sound, and I guess non-music [laughs]. I guess that's sort of how I would define noise music: non-music. But it's all up for interpretation, because some people think what they're doing is musical. It's pretty broad. Noise is really broad.

In the passage above he hesitantly defines 'noise music' as 'non-music' or 'sound,' and then continues: "noise is really broad." These characterizations, in a sense, show the elusive quality of any characterization toward the subject of what I call 'noise music' (or 'noise'). When I asked Damion about the general aims of the practitioners of 'noise' he answered thusly:

> DR: There's a lot of stuff. I don't know. There are maybe too many people doing too many different things to really…. I think it has something to do with…. Some of it is really psychedelic, I think. Some of it really jarring; shocking. Some of it is really serene. I don't know why all these things are associated with each other, but it's something about…. Maybe it's some kind of pure experience.

In this passage, the ellipses represent actual gaps in Damion's thoughts (and not quotes truncated by me to condense and consolidate the main points of the subject's thoughts). Ultimately Damion's answer to the question concerning the general aims of the practitioners of 'noise' is a hypothetical: "Maybe it's some kind of pure experience." The 'pure experience,' from a variety of perspectives and methods—whether it is psychedelic, jarring, shocking, serene, or other descriptors—is perhaps what many of the arts attempt to do, or what many people who seek out the extremes of art (what was called 'avant-garde' in the twentieth century) are hoping to find. The 'pure experience' has the scent of the

romantic sublime experience in art; but the words of Damion Romero give us a hint of what might be called the postmodern caveat to the sublime—the abyss of the great *maybe*.

III. I Do 'Noise,' *or* You Can Call It That

Though other noisicians I interviewed accepted the term 'noise music,' not all of them necessarily embraced it. The rest of this chapter will explore what the people who accepted the term thought about 'noise music,' its defining characteristics, and the general aims of the people involved in making it.

When I asked David Kendall (1978-) about whether he considered his work 'noise music,' his answer was, "not specifically." At the time of the interview he thought of his work as "computer music." I have known David for a long time and I recall moments when he considered his work 'sound art' and other times when he specifically reclaimed the term 'music' to describe his work. I also know that in the past he had collected modular analog synthesizers to work with; but the thrust of his work has mostly been with computers using different kinds of software. I had also heard him using the term 'noise' to describe his own works and the works of others. Nevertheless, because of his initial resistance, I read him my disclaimer. The passage below shows the sequence of my questions and his answers.

> DM: Ok, so here's my little side note when I say, for the purpose of this questionnaire I will continue to use the term 'noise music' for my purposes.
>
> DK: It's close enough. I don't want to worry too much about. I don't like to worry too much about labels. I try not to anyway.
>
> DM: So I'm going to use this label anyway… for now.
> So, how would you define and characterize noise music? Or, what is noise music?
>
> DK: Noise music is a genre that is descended from punk and experimental electronic music from the 60s and 70s. It's characterized by… it's usually loud, and it's really common to hear mixer feedback through a distortion pedal; so it's characterized by either really simple sounds; generally really simple harsh sounds but also sounds of destruction; or recorded sounds. The sounds of destruction are really simple and kind of harsh; in your

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face. Misuse, mistreating… using an object in a way that it was not intended to be used, as a way to create noise.

From the sequential passage above I glean that David *does* know what 'noise music' is by the way he broadly traces its history to the familiar yet disparate categories: experimental electronic music and punk, placing its origin in the 1960s and 1970s. He then characterizes 'noise' by some of its instruments and techniques: loudness, mixer feedback, distortion pedals, recordings, and the appropriation of objects and instruments to create new sounds through experimentation. Furthermore, David uses the term 'harsh' to describe the quality of the sound, often (but not always) associated with 'noise music' (where the qualifier 'harsh' can be thought of as a synonym for 'abrasive'). Below is David's answer concerning the general aims of 'noise music:'

> DK: Generally, catharsis. There's a cathartic element that runs through it. And if not fully cathartic then still really powerful…—what's the word I'm looking for?—like the sublime; like pleasure mixed with pain. This sense of overwhelmingness. That's the effect.
>
> DM: How does one achieve catharsis, or this overwhelming feeling?
>
> DK: Through volume. It's like a rocking feeling.
>
> DM: Is it always through volume?
>
> DK: No. Sometimes there can be great tension caused by pauses especially. But it's characterized by extremes of one sort or another. So it's either extreme volume or this sort of extreme tension created by a lack of volume.

Catharsis—either as purification or purgation—is the result of an intense emotional experience. For David, 'noise music' can induce catharsis through a dialectical relationship between pleasure and pain. Since David cites extreme sound—especially extreme volume (too much or barely enough)—as some of the salient parameters of 'noise music,' we can imagine that empirically loud sounds

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can be painful to hear, and that their timbral combinations mixed with our interpretations of them can induce pleasure; or empirically soft sounds—like the ones preferred by the Japanese onkyo[323] (onkyokei) style or the Wandelweiser Group—that cause listeners to physically strain to hear the sounds, can also induce pleasure: these pleasurable experiences may also lead a participant to experience the sublime. What is most important is that David believes that 'noise music' has the potential to induce powerful experiences, and that the purpose of 'noise music' is either to be effected by those experiences, to induce them (through making 'noise'), or both.

Henry Perez (1988-) tended to give concise, self-deprecating, and morbidly sexual answers to many of my questions during our interview. Our exchange below perhaps reveals more than one might expect at first glance, despite its brevity.

DM: Do you think of your music as noise music?

HP: It's pretty shitty, but yeah.

DM: How would you describe it?

HP: Shitty static.

DM: How would you define and characterize your music?

HP: Probably like Jeffrey Dahmer, but without trying to kill people. Or not trying to have sex with organs.

DM: Not trying to have sex with organs?

HP: Yeah [laughs].

DM: What would you say are some of the general aims of the practitioners of noise music? What are they going for?

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[323] "Onkyo: Literally (in Japanese) 'reverberation of sound.' The term has come to be applied to an improvisational practice prominent in Japan that explores the fine-grained textural details of acoustic and electronic sound." Eds. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner, *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 413.

HP: I don't know. Lust. Or just to annoy people.

DM: That sounds very punk rock. Is there a connection there between noise and punk rock?

HP: Probably. Some punks make music; I mean noise, don't they?

DM: Yeah.

HP: I think noise is anything people want it to be.

Counter to John Wiese's insistence that 'noise'—or non-genre music—is not a 'bad' form of expression, Henry embraces its 'badness' as "shitty." Elsewhere he referred to 'noise music' as "terrible." Henry repeatedly described 'noise music' as "static." When I asked him in particular how he defined harsh noise, he said "Staticky. Sounds like a vacuum." Perhaps Henry was referring to the sound a vacuum cleaner makes. Henry's two enigmatic characterizations seem like throwaway comments. Through relating 'noise' to Jeffrey Dahmer—the horrifying serial cannibal of the twentieth century—we can extrapolate that 'noise' is terrifying and related to the powerful emotions one may feel toward cannibalism. A comparison of Henry's comment of "not trying to have sex with organs" to Deleuze's and Guattari's notion of the body without organs is tempting but I feel it would be out of place. Of the people I interviewed, Henry was probably the only one to embrace the idea that noise was annoying. A definition of noise as unwanted sound implies that noise can be annoying, but annoyance as an aesthetic practice seems to be unique to Henry's conception of 'noise music.' The sexual nature of Henry's answer brings to light the corporeal nature that many 'noise' performances have: Henry's performances are very physical in nature, bordering on self-afflicting violence. Finally, Henry says "noise is anything people

want it to be." The comment speaks to the inclusive nature of 'noise' as a performative art form.

Nial Morgan (1992-) was the youngest person I interviewed. He was confortable with the term 'noise music' from the onset. When I asked him to define and characterize 'noise music,' he gave a succinct answer.

NM: Something that is still structured, but is atonal, dissonant….

Nial was perhaps one of the few participants to think of 'noise music' as structural. His reference to the "atonal" reminded me of Schoenberg's objection to the term "atonal" to describe his own works, since he composed with twelve tones. In my own hypothesis that 'noise music' is about the prioritization of timbre over pitch, we can imagine such a type of music as fulfilling the term "atonal" in a more meaningful way. When I asked Nial about the general aims of 'noise music,' he said:

> NM: I guess it varies, but some people try to stay as far away from rhythm as they can, and others [go for] minimalism, no change. I know Vomir has the three nos: No change, no dynamic, and something else, I forget. Also like subliminal emotions and a lot of cathartic feelings. Like describing a picture with sound.

According to a review in *the Wire* (May 2011) French artist Romain Perrot, who performs as Vomir, released a split record with Foul in 2011 called *No Dynamics, No Change, No Development, No Ideas* (four nos). The album cover had the initials HNW, which stands for 'harsh noise wall,' also known as 'wall noise.' Nial initially ascribed the strict definition of 'harsh noise wall' to 'noise' or 'noise music.' When I asked him to describe the difference between 'harsh noise' and 'harsh noise wall' he was able to parse out the differences and explain himself more thoroughly.

DM: What is the difference between harsh noise and harsh noise walls?

NM: To me harsh noise has a lot more dynamic than a noise wall. A wall of noise is like—that's it. It's just a wall of noise: no change, no dynamics. But harsh noise music to me is way more dynamic and cut up; to me it's a little more aggressive and violent, but harsh noise wall just means really bleak.

DM: Is it that there is no change in harsh noise walls or is that the changes are just slower?

NM: It can be that way, it can change that way, but, the concept of a harsh noise wall to me, is pretty much no change.

At the time of the interview I was ignorant of the strict definition of 'harsh noise wall,' and the interview led me to read more about it. Sam McKinlay, who performs as the Rita, coined the term and wrote an important manifesto and discussion called "The Politics of HNW." It begins with a definition: "Wall Noise: A massive, seemingly unchanging harsh noise 'wall' of electronic distortion, crunch, and rumble. 'Powerful minimalist deconstruction of the harsh noise object.'"[324] So the difference between 'harsh noise' and 'harsh noise wall'—as stated by Nial and supported by his research—is that a 'harsh noise wall' has no dynamic, meaning that it does not change, while 'harsh noise' in fact is full of changes, and that these changes are "cut up." The 'cut up' method was made famous by William Burroughs and used by Genesis P'Orridge in the early industrial band Throbbing Gristle. I wish I had asked Nial if he had been influenced by Burroughs (though I know through my interview that at the time he was not influenced by Throbbing Gristle, though he was familiar). Nevertheless, 'cut up' is a method that can also refer to making quick changes in a piece, either by literally cutting up tape or by turning sound sources on and off quickly. 'Harsh noise,' for Nial is often

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[324] Sam McKinlay, "The Politics of HNW" in *As Loud As Possible: The Noise Culture Magazine*" (Fall 2010), 14.

characterized by these abrupt 'cuts' and changes (though fading sounds in and out is also an important technique for him). For many people in the scene 'noise,' 'noise music,' and 'harsh noise' are used interchangeably. In the passages cited above, Nial contrasted 'harsh noise' with the 'harsh noise wall.' I glean from Nial that in a more general sense 'noise music' is an arhythmic minimalist form.

Greh Holger (1978-) was one of the more loquacious subjects I interviewed. He answered the question concerning whether he considered his work 'noise music' with a definitive "yes." The following passage is the exchange we had when I asked him how he would define and characterize 'noise music.'

> GH: Man that's a hell of a question. To me it's anything that doesn't fit into a traditional musical format or song structure, that also appreciates the approach and instrumentation that are abstract or opposite to what we think of in terms of normal music. It uses dissonance; it uses harshness and abrasiveness; it uses more atmospherics, and possibly more layers or more changing, more fast-paced or slow-paced [laughs]… elements in it than normal rock music would with things being in a 4-4 time and having guitar, bass, drums, vocals; or even classical music, though some classical music definitely favors dissonance and a slower tempo or more building a layered structure. It's the absence and abstraction of what's considered normal music. It can be emotionally related to in the same way, but it sounds, feels, and looks different. It's really hard for me to…

> DM: Is there normal noise music?

> GH: There's genre-type noise music, and rules. Whether they're written or not there are certainly accepted types of noise music that things fall into… and there are people who desire to push outside of that too. I can say harsh noise or wall noise or drone or industrial noise or cut-up noise. These are different specifics. So in terms of it being normal there is definitely accepted types or brands of noise music just like there are with rock music. You got your psych rock, your garage, your indie, your pop, punk, hardcore punk. Whatever. There's normal and accepted classifications and types and methods of approaching noise within what's an alienating and underground subgenre of music.

> DM: What are the normal characteristics of noise music?

> GH: When I think noise I think *atmosphere*. That's a word I use a lot that doesn't necessarily have a tangible thing to go along with it, but in terms of aesthetic and sound it's just something that helps to capture my

imagination and conjure a mental association with the music. Dissonance and abrasive or unusual sounds are characteristic of noise to me.

Some of the salient points that Greh makes concerning 'noise music' are its dissonance, harshness, and abrasiveness. 'Noise music' is also characterized by its lack of traditional song structure. Greh says that 'noise music' is often faster paced but can also be slower paced, and often has more layers than traditional music. He also introduces the term "*atmospherics*" to describe what he likes in 'noise music.' Elsewhere Greh talks about *atmospherics* in a similar manner that Raymond Murray Schafer would use the term 'soundscape.'

> GH: There's a drone right now: the sound of the city behind us. It has its own droning on. There's very rarely actual silence. There's the hum of the refrigerator, or the sound of the streets and people walking by: everything that falls into the daily sounds. To me that's really part of drone or atmospheric noise, is those elements, and background sound, and those things become the forefront.

In the lengthier passage above, Greh—who owns a small record label and works for Vacation Vinyl—also outlines a variety of noise subgenres: harsh noise, wall noise, drone, industrial noise, and cut-up noise. For Greh these subgenres are distinct with their own sets of rules. Even though Greh does not tell us exactly what those rules are, they seem to be distinct enough for him. I stopped him when he mentioned 'normal noise.' By 'normal noise' I had in mind to have Greh explicate the characteristics of a postulated garden variety of 'noise music.' He again invoked the terms atmospheric, dissonance, and abrasiveness—to this list he added 'unusual sounds,' unwittingly recalling Amoeba Records' section labeled "unusually experimental," where they file 'noise music' records and other sonic rarities. When I asked Greh what the general aims of 'noise music' practitioners were, he gave the following thoughtful response.

GH: I think it's about pure sound worship. I think noise listeners are people who listen to a lot of music and a lot of different sounds to a lot of different types of things and appreciate different sounds. And I think that the creation of noise and the listening of noise are both done out of appreciating sound in a way that a lot of people don't. One can be deemed ugly sound or unappealing sound in a way that people who listen to rock music don't understand or aren't wired to think, or haven't learned to appreciate. I don't know that there's a specific goal in mind—aside from the creation of sound that is, in some way fulfilling to get lost in or appreciate and to have consume you, or fulfill you in some way by hearing. I think that people listen to and create noise music for much the same reason. It can be said that a lot of people who create noise music aren't necessarily talented with any other instrument or any other type of music, and nor do they desire to or know how to create other types of music. There's certainly a degree of crossover with people who are talented musicians who play guitar very well in a rock band or a funk band or play drums or play keyboards, that also have this abstract side to make noise music, but I think that a large portion of the people who make noise music are people who…—making traditional music has never been appealing to, so they never learned to play guitar, they never learned to play keyboard properly, they never learned about scales and notes and reading music and writing music: and the immediate generation of sound—creating something; having it be ready and be a final product more immediately than working on how the parts of the song; working on figuring out the drums, working on writing lyrics—I think that has a lot of appeal for people who create noise: somewhat to its detriment, but also definitely to its benefit. Because it's something that's accessible to almost everybody. I mean, you can make noise with… [drops a piece of metal that falls strangely] that thing. But to actually get proficient at making that sound the way that you and someone else want to hear; it does take the same level of dedication, I think, that playing guitar does, but in a completely different way. And possibly using a different part of your brain than…. GX [Jupitter-Larsen] playing a stapler isn't the same, and wouldn't be thought of as the same as someone playing the guitar….

In the thoughtful and reflective passage above, let me first point out that these kinds of responses are the ones I have enjoyed the most as an interviewer because they show the careful stops and starts of every thought, even changing course in mid-thought. The first sentence is clearly, to me, the most important: 'noise music' is about "pure sound worship." Next is a lengthy discussion concerning the importance of listening to sounds. During this exposition, Greh imagines that listening to 'noise music' and listening to more traditional types is

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not, in a particular sense, that different ("I think that people listen to and create noise music for much the same reason"). Finally, he compares the skills and 'talents' of traditional musicians the practitioners of 'noise music' by comparing a traditional guitarist to GX Jupitter-Larsen playing a stapler (a staplist?). Greh's initial answer—that 'noise music' is about sound worship—is sufficient by itself; but by reading his longer response, we can read into Greh's struggle with the question, his taking the question seriously, and tacitly asking himself the question, "Does traditional music also worship pure sound?" Perhaps what is at issue then is the nature of sound's "purity," to whatever extent sound can be said to possess the characteristic of the pure.

Elden Man (1968-), like Greh Holger, works at a record store and has a vast knowledge of many genres of underground music. Although he is involved in a few different genres of music, he embraces the term 'noise music' for his thirty-year old project Allegory Chapel Ltd. But Elden's approach serves to obfuscate the boundaries between 'noise music' and other forms.

> EM: Number one, if you subscribe to the conventional concepts that noise is not music, then my music has noise and my noise has music.

Whether such concepts are 'conventional' or not is immaterial to the sentiment that Elden likes to introduce noise into his music and also to introduce traditional music ideas, such as conventional rhythms and tonal progressions, in his 'noise' works. When I asked him to define and characterize 'noise music' we had a spirited exchange, beginning with a fourfold answer that he then expanded and explained.

> EM: Dissonance, dynamics, production, and effects.

> DM: How does that differ from other kinds of musics? Don't other kinds of musics have that?

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EM: I think other kinds of music only use it as the frameworks to conventional songs. It's not on the same scope, where there's a more intense usage of all those different elements.

DM: So, it's the *intense* use of dissonance, the intense use of dynamics, the intense use of production?

EM: In other words a more expanded *overuse*.

DM: Excess?

EM: Yes. And I'm sure there are more other words. Improvisation is in there of course. Experimentation, definitely. In conventional music, you tend to have less and less experimentation; less and less improvisation. Extreme philosophy behind the messages. Extreme emotion and purgation.

Dissonance is opposed to its counterpart, consonance, as two dialectically related concepts in music; while consonance is defined by its pleasantness, dissonance is defined by its unpleasantness; furthermore, much of Western music's history has been interested in the resolution of dissonances to consonances, though what counts as consonant and dissonant has been in contention over the centuries. Nevertheless, Elden specifies unadulterated dissonance as his first term that characterizes 'noise music.' Dynamics can mean either changes in volume specifically or it can be changes of any sort in general. The speed of changes— quick changes, or rapid dynamics—has been a staple of the early Japanese 'noise' scene, a scene Elden was instrumental in promoting in the US since the late 1980s. The idea of 'effects' in the history of classical music, and music since effects pedals came to market in the early 1960s, have given composers expanded timbral palettes. An effect can be a technique, like pizzicato on a stringed instrument or glissando on a trombone, or a physical device, like a trumpet mute. The purpose of effects is to add timbral variation—*color*—to a sound. Production must be understood as a synonym for composition—the

juxtaposition and organization of sounds—either as large-scale formal structures

or as the composition and layering of a particular sound (or the combination of

those sounds in a polyphonic texture). Elden then claims that the four basic

terms that defined and characterize 'noise music'—dissonance, dynamics, effects,

and production—are then expanded through their excess (or overusage) and the

extreme nature of the compositional approach (production). "Extreme

philosophy" summarizes Elden's view. Improvisation and experimentation are

then important production techniques to achieving the sounds necessary in 'noise

music.' Purgation, as extreme emotional experience, is the result of a successful

'noise' experience, but an extreme emotional experience can also induce an artist

(or noisician) to create 'noise.' When I asked Elden about the general aims of the

practitioners of 'noise,' he responded in the following manner:

> EM: Definitely experimentation. The aim also is to be a performer and
> artist if you're not musically trained, because a lot of them aren't
> musically trained. They don't know how to read notes. They know how to
> play their instruments after studying the manual pretty well, and playing
> shows a lot.
>
> It's an expression, so they're trying to distribute their expression:
> disseminate their expression to outside of their home. Trying to promote
> and distribute all over. That's how they meet people. People they can
> trade with. The whole foundation, early on, was tape-trading. So you get
> it on cassette and you trade with other people, because you know you're
> probably not going to sell them. So you get other people's stuff, that way
> you don't have to buy it. You trade. Networking is definitely a huge part of
> it.

Elden first discusses the general aims of the practitioners of 'noise' as nearly the

antithesis of trained musicians. Instead of reading notes, noisicians read

instruction manuals for how to operate different kinds of gear—mixers, effects

units, synthesizers, etc. Noisicians can then express themselves through live

performance or through recording cassette tapes that can then be traded with other collectors associated with cassette culture.

My longest interview was with the enigmatic Edward Giles (1967-). Eddie spoke at length in our interview that lasted over thirteen hours. Though he preferred the term 'industrial music,' he sometimes thought of his work as 'noise.' To Eddie, 'industrial music' meant the early works of Throbbing Gristle and the 'power electronics' of White House, both originating from the mid- to late-1970s springboarded from the British punk scene and taking the punk aesthetic to a new extreme. Industrial music and power electronics both favored percussive instruments, synthesized sounds (often noises), and aggressive vocals. Eddie often thought of his work as outside the realm of 'noise,' and often felt that others thought his work was outside the realm of 'noise.' Though Eddie gained a certain amount of notoriety for his New York power electronics band The Final Solution in the 1990s, he mostly played with Steve Davis in +Dog+ in LA, though he also performed solo as Destroy Date.

> EG: I still like the term 'industrial,' because I feel I'm using materials and textiles [sic]. 'Noise' is really sort of descriptive, while 'industrial' sort of promotes the idea that there are elements of building or construction: industry or textiles—things outside. I always liked the term 'industrial,' which is basically one of the first generations of 'industrial music,' which was an extension, I think, somewhere between punk rock, electronic, or avant-garde music. Throbbing Gristle, to me, were the predecessors of all that, and I always go back to Throbbing Gristle. I like to really think of what I'm doing as…; it's experimental because it's working with different ideas and concepts. If I'm going to go for a straight noise thing, then it is 'noise.' If I plug in my gear and it's real limited sound, and it's noise, you can call it 'noise.' I call it 'noise' for the lack of calling it other things. There could be an argument, but I like to call it 'industrial.' I like 'industrial music.' It's a broad category, and 'noise' is actually a very narrow category. A lot of people would say that what I am doing is *not* 'noise.' A lot of people don't consider +Dog+ 'noise.' They consider that something else. They don't consider it 'noise' because it seems that there's a purist genre in 'noise'—straight noise—'harsh noise walls.' It's 'wall noise,' from beginning to end there's almost very little movement. It's just a straight, solid noise. You can say: "Sure, that's a noise project."

The Rita is another example. It's pure noise, from beginning to end, it's very little. It's just a wall of noise. I don't do that. I could—it's easy. At times I might.

DM: Is it the rhythmic aspects what makes it industrial?—since you use rhythm boxes?

EG: When I think of 'industrial music' I think of the idea of a disposable consumer society of materialistic ideas. I like the idea that I'm doing—although I consider it…: see, once again, it has to do with the value, the identity of value. The stuff that I'm doing is really disposable. It's throw-away. I'm not saying it as a sort of self-effacating [sic (self-deprecating?)], I'm not trying to lower the standards of what I'm doing, but I really feel that a lot of the stuff I'm doing is throw-away: it's toss out. I'm finding a way to recycle a lot of stuff that's put out there for mass consumption, and that's why I like the idea of 'industrial music,' because a lot of the gear I have was thrown away.

DM: So you identify with industrial.

EG: Yes. I identify with 'experimental industrial.' To the common folk out there, it's all noise. Rock n roll is still noise to some people.

Like other people I interviewed, Eddie felt uneasy about the term 'noise' and

made reference to the narrowness of its materiality.

EG: Noise is a very limiting definition and category. It's almost a descriptive, so it's not really a definition.

He also equated 'noise' with the more specific term 'harsh noise wall' or 'wall

noise' and referenced the Rita (Sam McKinlay), who wrote about the definition of

'harsh noise wall' as an uninterrupted stream of noise without change. He even

referred to "straight noise." For Eddie 'industrial music' is a broader category that

encompasses the kind of experimentation he uses in his work. He also said that

some people questioned whether +Dog+ was 'noise' or not; I have never heard

anyone refer to +Dog+ as any genre other than 'noise' or the Amoeba-branded

"unusually experimental." In fact, Henry Perez cited "Steve Dog" as among his

favorite 'noise' artists: "My favorite favorite [double emphasis intentional] is for

sure Steve," said Henry. Though I rarely discussed the preferences of other subjects I interviewed, the following is an exchange I had with Eddie about Henry's feeling about +Dog+:

> EG: I think that he was mostly influenced by the five minutes or less crowd, where it's totally out of control for a very short period, and he has real energy: high energy, very fast runoff of energy.

> DM: He actually cites +Dog+ as a huge influence on him.

> EG: Really?

> DM: Yeah. But when I hear him I think of Masonna.

> EG: I think of Jeff [Witscher] from Impregnable too. I think maybe Jeff and Jon [Borges] from Pedestrian Deposit.

> DM: Yeah.

> EG: This sort of in and out, and totally abusing the equipment, and then it just ends. I think that when I see him, that he echoes that a little bit or reflects that. I didn't know +Dog+ was a big influence on him at all. I didn't think…, well that's good. I'm glad that it helped him get to this stage. And he's doing shows all over the place now, so it's cool.
> I never walk away from a noise show feeling disappointed. I never did.

Although the influence of +Dog+ on Henry Perez does not automatically make +Dog+ a 'noise' group, I feel that most people in the LA 'noise' scene *do* think of +Dog+ as belonging to the scene. The short five-minutes-or-less sets were a staple of Japanese noisician Masonna, and was widely emulated in the US throughout the 1990s to the present, including the LA noisicians associated with Deep Jew, like Jeff Witscher's project Impregnable. Another important element for Eddie was the notion of a "disposable consumer society" that influenced his work. The appropriation of junk and junk electronics due to the obsolescence of technology is a common trope amongst artists. Eddie cited the instruments themselves—the cheap Casio keyboards, Radioshack mixers, and handheld cassette recorders—as "throw-away," but he was not specific when he called his

own work "throw-away" as an aesthetic: "I really feel that a lot of the stuff I'm

doing is throw-away: it's toss out." Did he mean that the physical recordings he

made—the cassettes, records, and CDs—were throw-away? Or did he mean the

performances themselves? Eddie has boxes all over his attic filled with his

collection of recordings: perhaps the performances themselves, their duration,

were the "throw-away" byproducts he meant. When I asked Eddie about the

general aims of 'noise' artists, he answered in the following manner:

> EG: It could be anything. It could be an artistic statement or a shock
> tactic, an ironic take on things, it could be an exploration of what music is,
> it can be an exploration of what the gear can do. There are so many
> different aspects. It's very personal why people do this and what their
> intent is. I think a lot of the first and second wave of industrial or noise
> musicians were going into uncharted territories. There wasn't really a set
> way of doing things. It's always the first and maybe second wave of things
> that were the most pure and sincere.

In the passage above Eddie referred to 'noise' as an artistic statement, implying

a sense of purpose. He also referred to shock tactics and irony. Shock tactics can

be linked to disruption, a common definition of noise in a more general sense.

Irony might be explained as reasons for listening to an artform that does not lend

itself to traditional modes of music analysis. Eddie also imagined that 'noise'

might explore the philosophical dimensions of the possibilities of music itself. He

also thought of 'noise' as an exploration of the gear used to make it, putting him

inline with David Tutor's interests in learning what a circuit could teach him

through the performative exploration of the circuit. Through a discussion of the

first and second waves of 'noise'—or at least through 'industrial music' from the

late 1970s—he imagined their explorations as "pure and sincere." In other words,

he connected a certain amount of authenticity, and even conservatism, to the

first adopters of the new genre, apart from the generations of imitators that followed.

I frequently found Adam Cahan (1983-) at experimental music events, though he himself is not a 'noise' performer. Nevertheless I found that asking the opinions of people who were mostly listeners to be an important part of my study. When I asked Adam how he defined and characterized 'noise music,' he provided me with the following response.

> AC: From what I know noise music is interested in, along with other musics, is interested in sound and the idea of sound as being the primary thing, where sound is music, so all the ideas of notes and harmonies and melodies and rhythms, and stuff like that, they don't go away, but they're not necessarily the primary organizing principles. Noise music has a lot of focus on process. It's really into technology. From what I know about noise music, you could probably do a lot of similar things with mechanical stuff or banging on stuff. There are other ways to make those sounds. From what I know of noise music, they like to use electricity, and I think that's a really big thing: using electricity and technology and manipulating it directly as their instrument: electricity as instrument. I read a Jimi Hendrix quote which is kind of cheesy but great for noise music. And obviously Jimi Hendrix was using it to describe himself, but he said: 'I don't play guitar; I play amplifier.' The thing was that he was so loud. And he's kind of a proto-noise figure in some ways too. I think he had some crazy live shows. In my opinion, putting aside electric basses and guitars, the two most successful, truly electric instruments…, I guess there are synthesizers, but synthesizers are a little trickier because you have the keyboard. If we are talking about an instrument in terms of… I think a lot in terms of interface—then the mixing board or the mixer. The mixing board is really the first thing and the turntable as electric instruments, and also as interfaces. You see the mixing board all over the place, and the same principles come up in synths too.

> DM: There are modular synthesizers that don't have keyboards.

> AC: Right. And those things really are…. I guess modular synthesizers would have to go in their category. In terms of instruments that you purchase, you purchase your mixing board, your modular synthesizer, stuff like that, and then the turntable becomes more interesting—or will become more interesting…. The stuff that turntablists do in terms of isolating sound and channels, and what happens when it's slowed down…. It is very powerful, and it will become more so as that interface is used to send data. With the mixing board, I guess the interesting thing about that, and the thing that it has in common with the turntable, is that they don't generate sound on their own, but they're all about organizing and

structuring sound, that there is some source, and then that source is manipulated and you have this very sculptural approach to sound which is very different from the more traditional ways of playing music; and very specifically with electricity. I guess noise musicians are into that: into expressing musically the scientific and mathematical principles of electronically generated noise and the aesthetic possibilities and ranges of electronically generated sound.

Adam chose to define 'noise music' by the instruments and techniques used by artists who were concerned primarily with sound. He recognized the importance of the technologies often associated with 'noise'—"electricity as instrument"—but also recognized that 'noise music' did not require those instruments, nor did it have to abandon traditional modes of music-making: harmony, melody, rhythm. He found that the mixer was one of the most important instruments in 'noise' because it was a means of manipulating sound sources but was not a sound source itself.[325] Adam also mentioned the turntable, an instrument that was used by John Cage as a sound-generating instrument in the 1940s—though today Walkman-style portable cassette recorders are much more prevalent than turntables in the making of 'noise' (perhaps he attended an AMK show; AMK is known for using turntables in his 'noise' performances). When I asked Adam what he thought the general aims of the practitioners of 'noise' were, he said the following:

> AC: I think a lot of them are looking to express emotion. I think that personal expression is a huge element of noise music. I guess I think of noise music as aggressive, generally, in terms of the loud and difficult…—I guess 'difficult' is kind of a problematic word—loud and difficult and dissonant, and with a lot of musics like that, not just noise, I do think that if someone is playing music that way then there's something that they want to get out there. Well maybe with all music. So I think that's a big thing; and expressing things more directly, because you don't need to have formal musical training to make noise music because there are no rules for the tools, yet. If you were working with tapes and sounds…;

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[325] I did not correct Adam here: no-input mixer feedback is a common way to use a mixer to generate its own sound.

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synthesizers, maybe they have more rules, but throwing a lot of stuff together…. The word noise is used in everyday language as something like inchoate and unorganized and all over the place and 'just a bunch of noise' and there's no rules or structure, and so because of that there's this opportunity to be very direct and straight to what you want, and it's new ground too. Because of the way noise music is, the aesthetics of it, all this stuff is, at least for the West, new ground, and I'm sure that's exciting for a lot of practitioners of noise music.

Adam cited the expression of emotion above all, and found 'noise music' to be an effective and "direct" form of expression. He toyed with the notion of the "difficult," since "difficult music" has been a term used at experimental music venues like Machine Project and the wulf. One reason why 'noise music' could be a more direct form of music, for Adam, is because it did not require "formal musical training," since such training would be in adherence to a codified set of rules. The lack of codified rules could then free 'noise' artists to explore new sounds in a way that could not be called the *wrong* way because the *right* way to make noise had not been established.

Though I have known Christiaan Cruz (1975-) since high school, we became closer friends in college. He introduced me to "noise shows" in the late 1990s to early 2000s. When I asked him to define and characterize 'noise music' he answered in the following manner.

CC: It's that specific genre of music that a lot of people just don't think is music. When someone says: "God, that's not music!" then that's noise— when a good amount can say that. And it's not just because they don't like the melody or they think it's dissonant. They specifically, adamantly say: "This doesn't make any sense; this is not music."

The intriguing part of Christiaan's testimony is not that some people hear 'noise music' as no kind of music at all, but that 'noise music' is perceived as not making sense: it evades rational conceptions of music-making. Under this conception, 'noise music' does not merely challenge the notion of what music is

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or can be, it offends the definition of music itself. When I asked Christiaan about

what he thought some of the general aims of the practitioners of 'noise music,'

he said:

> CC: I think most of them are just looking for specific sounds. They have
> this idea of what specific kinds of noise gets them off, and then how it
> affects the audience. They are just looking to either maintain that, and
> keep it right there in their compositions and keep that level of quality
> going, or they're just constantly searching for that better sound, that
> better noise, that extra umph, those different frequencies, that deeper
> sound, that whatever, that extra thing that will make their compositions
> better. So it's either a search or a maintaining something on some level
> that they think they've obtained.

Like some other interviewees, Christiaan sexualized 'noise' as sounds that might

'get off' the performer, the audience, or both. He discussed the qualities of 'noise'

as either something to be maintained within the parameters of 'noise'

performance—whatever those parameters may be for the performer or the

listener—or to aesthetically change the quality through the improvisational

exploration of new sounds. Those new sounds themselves could constitute the

"better," "deeper," or "extra[ordinary]" in 'noise' performance.

Part two of my interview with Joseph Hammer (1959-) took place at the

REDCAT theater in Los Angeles for a performance featuring Damion Romero solo,

and a duo featuring the late Zbigniew Karkowski with Xopher Davidson as part of

the CEAIT festival (Center for Experiments in Art, Information, and Technology)

billed as "Noise Night" and curated by Ulrich Krieger, professor of composition at

Cal Arts. My interview with Joseph that night took place in the lobby and began

with the question, "Do you think of your music and 'noise music'?" The following

was our exchange.

DM: Do you think of your music as noise music?

JH: Yeah, yeah. Well not noise music, just noise.

DM: You don't think that it's music?

JH: No. Although I'm not discounting that it's not. I just think that it's noise because music is a social term. So what I'm doing doesn't follow any tradition that is a convention. So that's why I call it noise, because it's not one of those forms.

DM: Do you think that the kind of music you do has created a tradition?

JH: No. But I can qualify that in that I think that it hasn't created a tradition, but I think that perception has expanded to encompass it. So it's not a tradition. It's not creating a linear line. It's taking place within a clock.
It's music in that it is a directed activity.

Joseph prefers the term 'noise' because it evades the historical understanding of music as a tradition and the rules, habits, and conventions implied by many Western canons of music. I gently challenged his notion of a tradition in my follow-up question. His answer had to do with how time is understood: time is dealt with and explored within a linear way in traditional music, whereas in 'noise,' time is perceived differently. Joseph's conception of time in music recalls Sebastian Demian's contrasting interest in listening for a narrative. Joseph also provided his definition of music as a "directed activity," presumably toward sound, and on the level of "directed activity" one could listen to 'noise' *as* music. When I asked Joseph how he would define and characterize 'noise music,' he answered the question differently at first. He originally answered the question to what I would call 'noise rock,' but eventually veered into the path I laid out for him, namely thinking of 'noise' or 'noise music' as the activities of the scenes that he himself participates in, and not the slightly more mainstream 'noise rock' (like Sonic Youth).

JH: I consider the definition of noise music to be something like Sonic Youth, essentially, which is music. It's music in the sense that it's using a known traditional structure, but sticking into a texture that is in contrast

to the expected sounds that are coming from that traditional production, so that you're introducing something that's not socially acceptable as part of that musical form into that musical form, to create an extra flavor. And that's what I consider noise music, at least at this stage of the game. I have an expanded definition in my own life, which is more like what we were talking about, which is noise that has been created in a directed fashion and without the intention of being music: that's noise music; that's what I consider to be noise music.

Joseph begins his understanding of 'noise music' in a similar vein that Boulez understood the music of Schoenberg's early twelve-tone works: new wine in old bottles. New sounds in old (rock) structural forms like traditional instruments, rhythms, and even tonal structures, mixed with liberal amounts of feedback noise and other pitch ambiguities are defining features of the music of Sonic Youth; that was Joseph's original conception of 'noise music.' The subject of 'noise' as genre yielded the limitations of the concept of genre and how 'noise' as a genre complicates the notion, particularly by attempting to destabilize the formation of canons.

> JH: I struggle with this idea of hierarchy where some sort of an agree[ment]… —this gets back to the issue of noise and music, because to me a genre implies a certain agreement of a definition that is socially accepted. And so genres exist as subgroups of these things. In order for these genres to be defined there needs to be an idea of authority where somebody decides, or a large group of people decides that a genres exists because a large group of people choose to work within that genre. And by doing so there starts to become a field of competition where rankings start to occur. And I think that's an overlay, but it exists. There is this idea that you stay within the genre, you limit yourself to the genre, and you understand what the genre is; and differentiation occurs by showing how you understand the parameters of that genre.

> DM: That sounds like a roundabout way of saying that you have a hard time defining the genre.

> JH: Yes. Let's just say that I'm not interested in defining the genre. And I question the structures that lead to the idea that there is genre. For what purpose is there genre? It's like a comfort zone. You can focus on it, on what you're doing inside that genre and know that you are following a particular path because you can see that there is a path. You're following

in the footsteps of others that have done something similar, and possibly have actually been inspired by people in those footsteps or trail your on.

The "something similar" through the traces of "footsteps" and blazing of "trails" are the "comfort zones" of course (as traditions) that concern the present study. Though Joseph questions how someone else might organize such a genre, I am interested in how he draws the boundaries of such "comfort zones." When I asked Joseph what the general aims of the practitioners of 'noise music' were, we spun into a discussion concerning how the creation of new technologies in sound inspired new uses of those technologies that led to the creation of sounds for some practitioners.

JH: I think that it runs the gamut. I can only speak for myself.

DM: Ok, so then what are *you* going for?

JH: I'm going for personal interest. I'm motivated to be active with certain things that intrigue me.

DM: What intrigues you?

JH: Looks and smells [laughs], and noises, and conceptual ideas. I'm intrigued by the technological advancements in electronic music made on the West coast of the United States in the twentieth century.

DM: In the context of you using vintage equipment, what do you mean by technological advances?

JH: That for some reason people were motivated to create objects that didn't exist before for the purpose of the generation of sound and creation of music, essentially. I think that it starts in noise because these devices are so new that their uses have not been defined yet, but there's a fetish of pursuing ideas and pursuing the craft of bringing these things physically into being. And I feel that through my interaction I've discovered these objects, and they're kind of rare or rarefied.

DM: Are they objects that you've documented? What do you mean by these sonic objects? Are they objects that you can recreate at will?

JH: *Create* at will [Joseph's emphasis]. And so they're like achievements, or steps along the road.

Since Joseph's primary instrument is the reel-to-reel recorder, the discussion of creation and recreation is pertinent to his particular style. What is important and relevant to the question concerning the general aims of the practitioners of 'noise music' is that the notions of "creating" a sound object "at will" and the "fetish of pursuing ideas" that have led to a discovery of "rare or rarefied" sound objects" is in line with what many other interviewees have said before: that the aims of the practitioners of 'noise music' are to discover new sounds.

Weronika Zaluska (1974-) is a visual artist that I became acquainted with from the scene at the wulf. She was one of the few people I interviewed that attended experimental 'noise' shows who was not herself a noise artist. When I asked her how she defined and characterized 'noise music,' she said:

> WZ: To me it's sound art that draws upon sound that's not necessarily pleasing to the ear, that doesn't really discriminate, and uses any kind of sound, including industrial sound.

Her answer was reminiscent of twentieth century conceptions of sound exploration, like the Italian Futurists who fetishized the sounds of the city, or John Cage's dictum that new music would explore "any and all sounds." She then discussed her preference for a "softer version" of 'noise music,' perhaps as opposed to the rapid changes of timbre experienced in "harsh noise."

> WZ: Well I do like the softer version of it, like Damion's [Romero] stuff. But he uses acoustic elements, right? It's like the vibration of mechanical things. So that I relate to that more than just pure synthesizer. But there's something about the repetitiveness of it that I find really…, I feel like I can really tune into it with my whole body, it's like a full-body experience. It's not just hearing it, it's more like overall vibration that I can really relate to. I don't really enjoy the really disturbing sounds. Not in his work but in other people's work.

Damion Romero's work, though almost always loud, tends to be more drone-like, with slower-moving timbres and changes. For Weronika, his style allows her to

feel the sounds corporeally in a manner that is not disruptive. Further in the

interview she likened Damion's work to sonic yoga.

> WZ: So what was I saying? That Damion's work is like a vibration. It's more like Chi Gong, or what is that yoga where you do the gong and it vibrates you? I have the same experience with Damion's work. I never experience the disturbing effect. It's always the opposite. And the performative aspect is very much a part of it, because he doesn't even move. He's so concentrated and focused.

When I asked Weronika what the general aims of the practitioners of 'noise

music' were, she had no answer, so I asked her if she could describe some of the

basic styles of 'noise music.' She answered in the following manner.

> WZ: I can only describe two styles that I noticed. One is more narrative, like Joseph Hammer with the use of sounds from real life and recordings, and then completely non-representational sound, which is pretty much everybody else I've seen. I think Joseph is the only one who uses those mixed in.

The two styles Weronika distinguishes, in one sense, can be expanded. On the

hand Weronika discusses Joseph Hammer's use of the reel-to-reel tape machine

as a form of field recording. But field recording itself—a technique used by many

practitioners of noise, sometimes as an object of manipulation, and sometimes as

the sound object (or piece) itself—is not the only distinction. Joseph's style

includes the constant manipulation through recording, erasing, and re-recording

of pre-recorded sound on a tape loop: those processes, for Weronika, inform a

narrative approach to listening to his work. The other style, for Weronika,

endeavors to completely preclude representational sound. Representational

sound must be understood as familiar sound, or sound that one can remember or

recall with ease, or that stands in for another object or idea.

Narin Dickerson (1981-) is another person I interviewed who is not

himself a 'noise music' artist, but he is certainly one of the most active audience

members of music, cinema, and other arts that I know of in Los Angeles. I have

heard others refer to him as the best audience member, due precisely to the fact

that he does not perform himself. In other words, he does not attend

performances to promote his own work and then listen to the works of others: he

is there only to listen. When I asked Narin how he would define and characterize

'noise music,' he provided the following answer:

> ND: I guess for me, the noise music that fascinates me is music that's
> really intrigued by the sonic characteristics of performance, and very
> much concerned with sound, and the nature of the sound itself: the way it
> sounds, the way it sounds in a space, the way sound is performed. That's
> sort of what I think of as being noise music, is music that is very, very
> concerned with that.
>
> DM: Music that's concerned with sound.
>
> ND: Concerned with the sound itself: the nature and quality of the sound
> being made. Quality, timbre, resonance: all these kinds of properties that
> we use to describe sound. Maybe I'm narrowing it too much, but a lot of
> the performers that I really enjoy I think are really attuned and when they
> feel that they've got something that they want to perform it's because
> they've listened back to the sounds that they were producing a lot, and
> they're happy with the way they sound: the quality of the sound and the
> quality with the way that those sounds interact is satisfactory. I'm
> oversimplifying it, but I think that's something that definitely relates to
> the music that I would talk about as being noise music.

Narin focuses the characteristics of 'noise music' to the concern and attention to

timbre, sometimes referred to by him as "quality," "resonance," "sonic

characteristics," and even "sound" and "sound itself." Though he warned that he

might be oversimplifying, I find that the subject of timbre is complex, and not

simple at all: thus if Narin is oversimplifying, it may have more to do with lack of

words we have to describe particular timbres. When I asked him about the

general aims of the practitioners of 'noise music,' he focused on listening

practices and alluded to the idea of "difficulty."

ND: In the broadest sense I'd say that a lot of it is going towards attentive listening to a very diverse range of sounds and frequencies and things that are physically difficult to listen to, to things that are extraordinarily quiet and difficult to hear.

DM: Is difficulty part of it?

ND: Not necessarily. It's definitely related to a fair bit of music that defines itself as noise. Some of it is quite confrontational and difficult in that way, but not all of it. I don't think it's a unifying thing that unites all music within the noise genre, especially if that genre is seen more expansively.

The notion of "difficult music" sometimes surfaces in the discussions of people involved in experimental 'noise' scenes, particularly in Los Angeles where a magazine titled *Everyone Loves Difficult Music*, associated with Machine Project in Echo Park, emerged in the mid-first decade of the twenty-first century (and I would argue that it has as much to do with the New Complexity movement spearheaded by academic composers like Brian Ferneyhough as with the explorations of sound more associated with the history of experimental music in the US and contemporary experimental noise' circles). Narin believes that 'difficulty' is one aspect of the experimental 'noise music' but is not the defining aspect.

Michael Winter (1980-) cofounded the wulf. in 2008 with Eric Clark. He graduated from Cal Arts with an MFA in composition and from UC Santa Barbara with a PhD in Media Arts and Technology. At Cal Arts he studied with James Tenney before his untimely death: Jim Tenney had a seminal impact on him. I had read Michael's dissertation, "Structural Metrics: An Epistemology," before our interview, so our exchanges were lively and informative. Unlike the other people I interviewed, Michael was quick to discuss the definition of 'noise' well before I

intended to ask the question in my questionnaire, so I reordered the sections to accommodate him.

> MW: My best answer is to spout out some of the definitions that have influenced me. There's Cage's "sounds heard." Jim Tenney, I think, adopted that to some extent, and then when he talked about what harmony was—I may be misquoting—but I remember him personally telling me that often 'harmony' is defined as sounds heard together. But he said that he would modify that to sounds *considered together*, so that there was this idea of memory.

In my own studies of Jim Tenney's *Meta+Hodos*, I came to the conclusion that his conception of harmony was nearly identical to my definition of timbre, where any timbre can be analyzed and synthesized using an infinite amount of sine waves: the simultaneity of sine waves characterizing a timbre thus constitutes harmony. Michael's recollection of Jim's dictum that sounds could also be '*considered together*' so that memory could play a role in harmony leaves open the possibility that harmony could be more than the simultaneity of sounds; it could include the successions of sounds in time—in other words, the consideration of form itself could be "harmonic." Such a peculiar feature of the definition of harmony resonates with my definition of timbre: we could imagine a particular timbre developing over a long period of time. Michael was less interested in defining music—which he defined as everything we do, putting him in line with Christopher Small's definition of "musicking"—and more interested in the idea of "noise." When I asked Michael if he considered his work 'noise music,' he gave a pithy answer that was seemingly interested and dismissive.

> MW: I wish we could talk about what noise is. If music is all of the things that I do in my everyday life, I would say that noise—that randomness—is essential to it. If you want to say that that makes it noise music, that's fine. It doesn't matter to me. So I would say that the ideas of information theory and of what noise and randomness is, and what the limits of computation are, are fundamental to my way of making it. So call it noise music if you like. Frankly I could care less.

In the passage above Michael substitutes the term 'noise' for 'randomness.' He

doubles down on this idea a few passages later when I asked him to define and

characterize 'noise music.' He again was more interested in defining noise from a

mathematical perspective.

MW: I would like to get at the question of noise, not noise music.

DM: Ok, we can start there.

MW: I take—and this is based on the influence of mathematics and
algorithmic information theory and information theory and computer
theory. Noise, I think, by definition, is randomness, in the strict
mathematical sense, in the sense that I adopt because it's well-defined.
Now, What is randomness? And there's another definition that is very
well-defined in algorithmic information theory, that something that is
random has no structure: it cannot be compressed. You can define that
very simply as in, the smallest computer program that generates the data
is equal in size to the data itself. If something has structure, you can
compress and iron those redundancies out, and the computer program to
generate that object or that data is significantly smaller in size. So the
funny thing is that when I talk about my interest in writing short computer
programs, that by definition means that it's not noisy music. But I think
there's a lot more to it at play. So really, the definition that I adopt with
noise is this idea that, given an object—be it music or you or me or an
apple or an orange—it is noise if it is uncompressible. You can measure its
compressibility by comparing the size of the smallest computer program
to generate it to the object itself. But there's an interesting caveat here
that comes from Gregory Chaitin, this guy who I have had the great
fortune of becoming good friends with, that you actually can't know for
certain, in most situations, what the smallest computer program is. I think
that's really an exciting thing. What it means is that all this stuff is up in
the air. God plays dice everywhere: that's how Greg would say it. So we
can't even know for sure to what extent something has noise in it.

DM: When I was reading about that in your dissertation, I was imagining
an atom. This is supposed to be the basic building block. But then you
have electrons and protons and neutrons, then you don't know if those
three particles are the smallest particles. No one has figured if those are
split up into other pieces.

MW: That's right. And by definition the smallest unit is noise, because it is
uncompressible, because it's the fundamental. So if such a thing exists,
then…. But that's the thing: you kind of can't get there.

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For Michael, a structured object must be compressed so that it has no structure, reduced to its smallest part, to be considered noise, or randomness. Structure has redundancies—which means iterations, or repetitions, and can even mean memory—whereas randomness is defined by its reduction to an unstructured unit. The way Michael spoke reminded me of the atomism of the Greek philosopher Democritus, and more so Pythagoras' obsession with numbers. I asked Michael if he thought of himself as a Pythagorean (though perhaps a comparison to Philolaus would have been more just). I was intrigued by Michael's interest in noise and randomness as atomic irreducible particle, and his ideas on a digital (thus binary) philosophy. Below was our exchange, an exchange I felt felicitously complicated that matter.

> DM: Would you say that you have a Pythagorean outlook?
>
> MW: Yeah.
>
> DM: The world is numbers. That's what I mean by that.
>
> MW: Yeah. I would say that, but that's what I was saying earlier: when I hear something that seems random, but then in my perceptual apparatus and my cognitive apparatus starts moving toward these other definitions of randomness: it's all one and the same. I think Pythagorean is better. I've been using the word Platonic, but Pythagorean is more correct. But I think I was using Platonic just to talk about this idea of pure mathematical ideas, but I think that fundamentally our world is not separate from that. It doesn't sit on some other plane. I think that we live in that.
>
> DM: So that goes along with your digital philosophy?
>
> MW: Yes.
>
> DM: Would you consider yourself an adherent to the digital philosophy that you talk about in your dissertation?
>
> MW: To some extent. I'm saying that it's a way of looking at things. I'm not saying that it's an answer. It's like any philosophy, it's to try to understand the world and how we function in it.
>
> DM: But that's different. The way I see it, if you think in Pythagorean terms, you actually think that everything is based on numbers, but if you

don't then you can see numbers as a way of analyzing things that may or may not be influenced by numbers. For example, the nautilus: there's a mathematical formula for how to make the perfect nautilus, but then there's no such thing as a perfect nautilus, there's always some kind of imperfection or noise—that's one way to put it—or entropy. So that's where I'm going with that: do you think the world is really all numbers, or are numbers just a convenient way to put a structure on top of nature?

MW: I think the former, but I feel like I'm contradicting myself some, because computer languages and mathematics are the way that we can express these things. Can I say a bit of both? [laughs]

DM: Yeah.

MW: I think the world is numbers, but we have access to those numbers as measurement to us, and more importantly as tools of creation and tools of sharing.

The discussion might be summarized by the following question: are objects reduced to numbers as atomic particles, or are numbers used for analysis and measurement? If numbers are used as measurement, then they are used for comparison; but to compare one thing to another requires degrees of replication and redundancy. Instead, Michael concedes that perhaps it could be both. Noise as randomness, for Michael, is simplicity, not complexity. For this reason he sees the production of 'noise' as simple, despite the complexity of its result.

MW: So I would say that most noise music—maybe barring the traditional, or the definition that is maybe more accepted or common—is not noisy at all. We just perceive it as noisy, as complex. But these people are often doing pretty simple processes. For example, feedback. Feedback loops that generate noisy textures. So we have to disambiguate 'noisy' as in perception and 'noisy' as in the Platonic definition. But really what it is is a very simple algorithm that's very chaotic; that's very sensitive to initial conditions. So by the algorithmic information theory definition, it's not noisy at all: it's very structured.

Many post-war era schools of algorithmic composition tend, in my experience, to favor the process of making music. With this in mind, we can see how Michael criticizes many "traditional" or common-practice 'noise' artists for using simple

means of generating 'noisy textures' through the use of feedback loops to the empirical complexity of the sounds heard. He attempts to draw a distinction between noise as a generative source and the notion of the 'noisy' as a descriptor of sound. In other words, the use of feedback loops is rife with structure and redundancies. Nevertheless Michael finds that noise and randomness are essential to the methods he employs to make his music, and therefore 'noise music' may be one way to describe his work. Or, as he summarizes: "it's noise music, I guess, if we're going to call it such, by virtue of its consideration of what noise is." When I asked Michael about the general aims of the practitioners of experimental 'noise music,' he gave the following answer:

> MW: The quest for new experiences; to perceive or experience something new in a new situation with sound. I think that's the fundamental goal; the ultimate goal—if there is such a thing. To learn. The main ontologies are new experiences, to learn, to share.

New experiences; new learning—these are the postulated goals that interest Michael in the production and reception of his work and other works that interest him.

Casey Anderson (1984-) has been a frequent performer at the wulf. since it began hosting performances in 2008, and he has also played regularly at BetaLevel in Chinatown. He came to California in 2007 to pursue an MFA in composition at Cal Arts after completing a bachelor degree at University of Wisconsin in music composition and philosophy. When I asked Casey how he would describe and characterize 'noise music,' he answered in the following manner:

> CA: Looking at things that are marginalized normally, or not focused upon regularly that are possible with sound. Investigating extremes, whatever those may be. I think those are simple definitions.

Characterizing experimental 'noise' as the investigation of extremes and the

focus on marginalized sounds are common tropes amongst these practitioners.

When I asked Casey about the general aims of the practitioners of 'noise music,'

he gave a broader answer about the definitions and social impacts of the term.

> CA: It's all over the place. I just think of it as being really open to possibilities. What I don't like about the noise music world is the same thing as a lot of music worlds where people get hung up on these arguments about whether it *is* or *is not* that particular genre, and I don't really care about that. It doesn't seem particularly beneficial. There's noise in everything. Maybe one could think about it that way, where it's like, that's an accurate representation of the world on so many different levels. Why not, if one is open to anything happening in one's music, one could reflect [on it] that way by taking on that genre name. But honestly, to be totally simple about it, I normally call it noise music because, as I was saying earlier, it's a simple way to convey to people who kind of know what I'm talking about, the general world I feel associated with, and that I can make discrepancies there. What I think is stupid is that, "It's all about alienation!" Or, "It's all about being aggressive!" The aggressive thing drives me fucking crazy. This macho bullshit that gets tied up in this type of music. Fortunately most of the people I meet don't approach it that way. But I have a real hard time with that kind of thing. I don't like violence and I don't like aggression. I don't think of my work as having anything to do with that, and that's fine with me. Those aren't things that I like in general. I think there's an interesting investigation into extremes, that would be a common thread across a lot of noise music, or exploring things that most people don't tend to explore. So you can set up a relationship to everything else in the music world and noise music that way. But I think of it as a real outgrowth of experimental music, and just coming out of the Cage point that everything has the potential to be heard musically. So there you go. You can think of it as all noise if you're fine with noise being music. That seems to be what he's saying.

In the passage above, Casey makes clear that the term 'noise music' is

convenient for discussing the kind of work he does to people who have not been

fully initiated to this kind of music. He neither derides the term, nor does he

particularly defend it: rather, he finds it a convenient way to open a discussion

about the kind of work he is involved with. What he does deride is the gendered

connotations some people feel toward 'noise music' and the 'noise music' scene,

linking expressions of aggression to the overt masculine posturing and the myth

of the Romantic alienated artist who uses art to vent pent up aggression, or to channel it through means sometimes associated with 'noise' artists. For this kind of artist, sounds considered unpleasant by some listeners are amplified to extremes to aggressively attack its listeners. Casey is opposed to this attitude, but not necessarily to the actual sounds that are made. Casey also alludes again to the investigation of extremes. For him, this could mean the investigation and amplification of small sounds, the focused listening on everyday sounds that are often ignored, or the algorithmic juxtaposition of sounds determined by a score. Ultimately he places the genesis of contemporary 'noise music' with John Cage (even though he later references the Italian Futurists) as an "outgrowth of experimental music," emphasizing the open listening practices closely associated with experimental music.

Sebastian Demian (1979-) is the only organizer of experimental 'noise' I interviewed who is not himself a 'noise' practitioner. He serves as director at Dem Passwords, one of the most important 'noise' venues in Los Angeles. Instead of asking Sebastian whether he considered *his* music to be 'noise music,' I asked: "Do you think of the music you promote as noise music?" Below is our exchange, dovetailing to the next question: "How would you define and characterize 'noise music?'"

> DM: Do you think of the music you promote here as noise music?
>
> SD: Yeah, some of it for sure is noise music. But noise music is kind of a crazy term.
>
> DM: How would you define and characterize noise music?
>
> SD: I really liked what GX said on his Twitter the other day where he said, "The relationship between noise and music should be thought of as in the

same way we think about the relationship between land art and landscape painting."[326] I thought that was a unique way of thinking about it.

DM: You're the second person I've talked to who has talked about that quote.

SD: Yeah, I like that quote. It's dope. Noise music is… maybe noise is a misnomer. I think it's about experimental music or people doing different things. It could be anything. I think experimental music is probably a better title for it. Some of it isn't so noisy. Noise sort of implies loud volume, I think: at least that's how I've known noise music to be. A lot of it is about volume.

Sebastian books shows that are not exclusive to the 'noise' community, and often times he likes to mix a few different music scenes together to further the dialog and cross-pollinate artistic ideas. His hesitation toward the term 'noise music' comes from his feeling that perhaps the term is too narrow to describe the activities of the scene. For Sebastian 'noise' strongly implies loudness, and certainly many of the shows at Dem Passwords have been extremely loud. He uses the term, but he prefers instead the term "experimental music." When I asked Sebastian how he would define and characterize 'noise music' he began by quoting a Tweet from GX Jupitter-Larsen. GX wrote: "The difference between noise and music is the same as that between land art and landscape painting. At least it should be." The analogy endorsed by Sebastian compares *landscape painting*—the depiction of natural scenery and landscapes—to *land art*—the sculptural use and integration of the environment to make art works.

Samur Khouja is the owner of (the) Handbag Factory. (The) Handbag Factory is not only a venue, it is also Samur's home and houses his professional recording studio. Samur often performs at (the) Handbag Factory during 'noise' events by the moniker Conscious Summary, but rarely as the headlining event of

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[326] "The difference between noise and music is the same as that between land art and landscape painting. At least, it should be." GX Jupitter-Larsen June 24, 2012 via Twitter.

the evening. When I asked Samur if he considered his work 'noise music,' he said, "I refer to it as noise music a lot of times. Sometimes I feel like I'm being lazy when I say it, but at the same time it's easier." Samur accepts the term 'noise music' but admits that it is a facile category. When I asked him how he would define and characterize 'noise music,' he said:

> SK: I guess it's very primal. It's something that feeds and grows fast without it being too conscious. That, to me, is the core of noise, or what I would think would be the nice romantic part of calling it or putting it in a genre.
> It could be anything that's atonal or arhythmic, or not musical, but then you have to define 'music,' and that might be the same question.

For Samur, 'noise music' seems to appeal to the less rational states of mind: states that are "primal" or not "too conscious." These less rational or pre-rational states are responsible for the "core" of 'noise music' for Samur. Compared to 'music,' 'noise' is atonal, arrhythmic, and amusical. He then added that one would have to define 'music' to understand 'noise music,' so I asked him how he defined music. In the following passage Samur compares 'music with 'noise music.'

> SK: The same way. I'll give the same answer I just did about noise, but then I would say that maybe music is something you try to fit more into some sort of framework, like harmonies. Music, and especially in a production sense, if you're trying to make a mood come across or an emotion come across, you would choose certain harmonies. Or if you want to go for a certain vibe. Also music is made to sound like things—other songs—a lot of times. So that could be considered more musical because you have to work toward something that has a framework, whereas, you work toward an emotion and plateaus and hills and moods and eras; also in noise music, but there's maybe less of a framework in noise. Maybe it's more open to interpretation, or there are less 'walls'—if you will—where music might have more of a language that's more common or standardized.

In the passage above Samur discusses the tradition of music (at least Western music) as a genre interested in frameworks, standards, and "walls." Such

codification is the result of a rational world with categories and frameworks. Samur shows how 'noise music' is "more open to interpretation" with "less 'walls.'" Because rigid standards have not been codified in 'noise music,' the performers are open to work with less restriction; or they may have license to constantly recode through 'noise music'-making. Listeners are also more open to listen (relatively) free from standard listening practices prescribed by standard music. Then I asked Samur what he thought the general aims of the practitioners of 'noise music' were. He said the following:

> SK: You have certain kinds of noise that wants to put you in another landscape or another world [with] really atmospheric stuff, and they use certain frequencies that shift to trance you out. Or the length of some of their stuff that would be more ambient. And then you have the stuff that's really shocking. So a lot of noise artists like to be shocking in some regard.

Samur discusses two basic kinds of noise practitioners. On the one hand there are those who make ambient or "atmospheric" 'noise.' On the other hand, there are those who use shock tactics to make their work. Those who use shock tactics tend to be those associated with "harsh noise," though ultimately these distinctions are not sharp, and he admits that many artists, including himself, use both strategies, even within the same performance.

Don Bolles (1956-) is known first and foremost as the second (and perhaps most infamous) drummer of LA's first legendary punk band, the Germs; and in the early 1980s he played in the equally seminal 45 Grave. As a youth in Scottsdale, Arizona Don became acquainted with avant-garde classical music, early electronic music, and krautrock. Inspired by Karlheinz Stockhausen, he also began experimenting with shortwave radio to create sound collages that he would record on cassette tape and reel-to-reel tape machines. During the early 1990s

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Don teamed up with Joseph Hammer to form Kitten Sparkles, a 'noise' duo that

continues to give performances on occasion. When I asked Don if he thought

Kitten Sparkles was considered 'noise,' he said:

> DB: At first I figured it was noise, sure. Then later it became codified into a seminar-like experience. We'd do live things on the radio where I was just doing turntables and other people were doing other stuff. After sampling and hip-hop, it's like, "Why can't I just play a record, or a couple of records at once, and say, 'This is my composition,'" you know? That's what everyone else does. So I started doing that, because I had all these records and nobody knew what they were because not a lot of people are really into avant-garde stuff, and I had a lot of sound effects records too: a lot of out-of-the-way sound effects records. So I just wanted to use those. Joseph would make loops out of some of them. We'd do weird things with them. And that was Kitten Sparkles too. But mainly Kitten Sparkles was the one thing with the shortwave sounds and the strobe light after a while. But at first it wasn't even the strobe light. We just had noise.

In the beginning it was noise. Don discussed at length the desire for Kitten

Sparkles performances to be like a new age est (Erhard Seminars Training)

seminar. Though initially in the early 1990s he thought of his work as 'noise'—

interested in joining the burgeoning 'noise' scene through his association with

KXLU Psychotechnics DJ Damion Romero—he later found that Kitten Sparkles had

become a "codified" project. What is interesting here is that Don subtly insinuates

that a project that is codified might not qualify as 'noise.' Therefore the

practitioners of 'noise' would strive to create work that would evade codification.

For Don, Kitten Sparkles is about exploiting the catalog of shortwave radio

sounds he has collected since the 1970s, sometimes with avant-garde records,

having those sounds manipulated through Joseph Hammer's reel-to-reel looping

techniques, and blasting the audience with a strobe light and extreme volume.

When I asked Don how he would define and characterize 'noise music,' he instead

told a story about his introduction to these kinds of activities. The following

excerpt is our exchange.

> DM: How would you define and characterize noise music?
>
> DB: Just noise. In fact, the first noise music I was aware of—besides John Cage and Gordon Mumma and all that, was—the first neo-noise thing, was Boyd Rice with his band NON. We used to have them play with 45 Grave all the time. It was just him wearing a flight suit with a cassette machine and an Ampeg SVT.[327] He would just hit play on the cassette machine and this noise would come out of the Ampeg SVT. He would just stand behind it.
>
> DM: So what does a noise have to have to make it noise music?
>
> DB: Just not music. Sounds that are very loud and abrasive and noisy. I think Merzbow really defined it. I've always said it's really hard to make a noisier noise than Merzbow. He pretty much took it as far as it's going to. You're not really going to go farther than that. Boyd Rice: rumor had it that he made some of his noise things by sticking the microphone from a tape recorder into the nozzle of a vacuum cleaner. He never denied it. It might have been what happened. Basically, noise should sound like you stuck your head in a jet engine.

Elsewhere in the interview, Don mused about the limits of music that seemed to

have important implications toward his conception of 'noise music.'

> DB: I like music that doesn't have melodies and doesn't have beats. Then a lot of people say, "Then it can't be music." No to me. That's where the music really is, to me, is in those weird parameters outside of those things.

For many people inside the field I have designated as 'noise music,' sonic works

that do not include rhythms (beats) and melodies might be described as 'noise,'

and yet Don conceded that "that's where the music really is." Though he cites

John Cage and Gordon Mumma as 'noise music,' he then discusses the 'neo-

noise' of Boyd Rice giving a high-volume performance while wearing a flight suit

and blasting the audience with noisy sounds allegedly made from a vacuum

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[327] An Ampeg SVT is a loud all-tube bass amplifier usually paired with a speaker cabinet with eight ten-inch speakers (called an 810 or 8x10).

cleaner.[328] But it was Japanese noisician Merzbow, for Don, who took 'noise' to its apex. When I asked Don about what the general aims of the practitioners of 'noise music' were, he instead gave a critique on the motives of some of the people who do it.

> DB: Now days they're just doing something that's cool without having to really do anything. I think a lot of people like to be cool without having to work at it, and that happened a lot with punk too. That's where the oom-pah beat came from, is people that wanted to be punk but not have to work it and do it all bad-ass. A lot of noise stuff is easy to do. You just do something that's noisy and then it's noise. I'm sure some great noise recordings are done by people who are dilettantes. You don't have to have any particular talent. It's not really about that.
>
> DM: Do you consider yourself a dilettante?
>
> DB: At the time. I just thought: 'I can do this.' No, I thought I was entitled to be part of it because I had been doing this shit since I was a kid and I was into that kind of a sound. Whenever there was noise in music, I liked that music a lot better. I didn't like music that was just nice little sounds that went together in a certain way. I didn't like that at all. I liked chaos and noise. That's why I liked punk.

Like some other early punks, Don feels a connection between punk and 'noise.' Concerning the connection between punk and 'noise,' I found Don's critique and defense of dilettantism to be ironic. As a slight digression, Paul Hegarty, author of *Noise/Music: A History* wrote one paragraph on the Germs in his chapter titled "Inept."

> The Germs sit high in punk mythology. At the beginning they were strikingly unable to play…. The Germs tried hard to fail…. The first single, "Forming"/"Sex Boy" highlights the band's ineptitude to the literal point of telling us about it, with "Forming" ending with these lines: "whoever would buy this shit is a fucking jerk; it's played all wrong, the drums are too slow, the bass is too fast, the chords are all wrong, it's making the ending too long." "Sex Boy" is badly ranted and played, but the real noise element here is in releasing it as a finished song…, and the song is often lost in ambient sound.[329]

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[328] Avant-garde composer Gyorgy Ligeti also used the vacuum cleaner to sonic effect.
[329] Hegarty, *Noise/Music*, 100.

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For Hegarty, notions of talent and ineptitude are binaries linked in rational thought and rational music, but 'noise' cannot aspire to purity of either kind. 'Noise' culture, for Don, does have a litmus test for entry, and that test depends on the motivations of the performer as a listener. When I asked Don if anyone could make "*good* noise," he said:

> DB: Yeah, you could. Some people can. It depends on what your agenda is. If you truly listen then you can make a really good thing that's worth listening to. But if you listen, you have to be John Cage-like to all the sounds around you, and then you can distill that into something. It's people that at least know how to listen that will make the good sounds.

The agenda and motivations for making noise are important to making any kind of 'noise music,' and whether a performance qualifies as 'noise' is also what determines whether the 'noise' is good or not.

Bob Bellerue (1968-) was the cofounder of what was perhaps the most important 'noise music' venue of the first decade of the twenty-first century in Los Angeles, Il Corral. Though he finished an MFA at Cal Arts in composition, he has little "traditional" training in Western music. He has since started a family in New York City where he continues to perform and promote 'noise music.' Bob gave thoughtful, pithy responses to the questions concerned in this chapter under my questionnaire's subheading: "Noise Music: General Questions." The following is our exchange with nearly no edits. (This passage also gives the reader a broader view of how the interviews were conducted.)

> DM: Do you think of your music as noise music?

> BB: Well, yes: yes. It's also just music. We talked about this a lot on our last tour, about how noise is really a bad term now in some way because…; I mean, it makes sense historically, but in terms of aesthetics, and technically maybe it makes sense, in terms of how you're approaching your equipment, but I start thinking more about abstract music and improvised music. So I tend to emphasize that. I tend to say: 'improvised experimental music.' But for people who know about noise I'll use the

word noise. People who don't know about it I tend to not [use the term noise] because it can bring up interesting conversations with people, which is fine, but it's just not always fitting and it's not always helpful.

DM: How would you define and characterize noise music?

BB: I would say, using non-traditional approaches and using non-traditional sources and technology, techniques. I'd say discovering, through accident or willful negligence, different ways of making sounds; as well as just listening to the unintended sounds of the world. It's both a technical thing, in terms of how you're making sound, but it's also almost a consciousness thing: like when you are out in the world, how do you listen to the world? So I think that it is a big influence on approaches to making it. Do you need to have Muzak to feel normal? or are you ok with silence and weird sounds?

DM: What are some of the general aims of the practitioners of noise music? What are they going for?

BB: It varies. I think for a lot of people it's just finding their sound. My friend Brian Eubanks had this great quote about how it's like you're creating your own form of music that no one else plays, and that could never be invented if you didn't think about it or discover it on your own. So I think a lot of it is just discovering; but it's also a way for non-composers to create great works, or to create music. People who don't play guitar, who don't write music, they can turn something on and make a sound. And they can get experienced enough and skillful enough with it that they have reliable abilities.
I think it's just like any artistic expression, except it's for people who aren't necessarily trained in music. They can certainly be musicians, but sometimes the worst noise music is made by asshole musicians who say [in a stupid voice], "I can play noise," and then they think: "I'm going to act like I'm playing the saxophone [rapid mouth sounds]: lu-lu-lu-lu-lu-lu-lu-lu: I'm so wacky and noisy and weird!" I've seen that a lot, especially at poorly curated festivals that shall remain nameless…. To me, it's just a form of sonic expression.

Unlike some practitioners (like Casey Anderson) Bob uses the term 'noise' or 'noise music' for insiders and 'improvised experimental music' for those who are unfamiliar with the term. He struggled with the justification for the term by alluding to his perception of its historical accuracy, but also found the term not very helpful in some situations. Bob characterized 'noise' as a "form of sonic expression" focused on discovering new sounds through non-traditional

techniques and practices. He also emphasized listening to the environment ("world") in a more open and acute way. When I asked Bob about what he thought were the general aims of the practitioners of 'noise music,' he gave an erudite anecdote about how the practitioners and performers of 'noise music' create their own idiosyncratic worlds that only they themselves can create and perform. He then discussed how 'noise' is a form of sonic expression for non-musicians and non-composers. Yet the explorations executed by skillful 'noise' practitioners are not the meanderings of dilettantes; rather, they are performances and recordings by sensitive artists interested in discovering new sounds and new sound worlds. Bob has witnessed musicians trained in the Western tradition haughtily surmise that anyone, even a musician, can make satisfying 'noise,' but to his mind, many (though certainly not all) of these musicians failed. 'Noise music' and "improvised experimental music" are forms of sonic expression Bob takes seriously, perhaps even defensively.

Joe Potts (1953-) is a founding member of the Los Angeles Free Music Society (LAFMS) in the early 1970s. From a young age Joe was interested in art, performance art, and experimental music: all three are mutually informative to his works. His early band AIRWAY made a noisy record that allegedly influenced some of the pioneering noise experimentalists in Japan, thus galvanizing evidence of an overseas connection in experimental 'noise music' from California to Japan since the 1970s with influences flowing in both directions. When I asked Joe if he considered his sonic work 'noise music' he provided me with the following answer.

> JP: From the beginning we called what we did 'noise' so people wouldn't think of it as music and then compare it too much. But there's a noise genre now. It's kind of a specific thing. I think AIRWAY has more to do with that, like I said, because of the interest in standing waves and sound

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harmonics in relation to the space and that kind of thing. I think a lot of the other stuff we do doesn't relate to that whole harsh noise thing.

For Joe, referring to 'noise' was a strategy to steer listeners away from listening and judging the work he and his companions were engaged in as music. When I asked him how he would define and characterize 'noise music,' he said the following.

> JP: When I was talking about my music at the beginning…. It's primarily not rhythmic, and in fact, there's a tendency that if rhythm develops to try to cancel it by either dealing with it as something sampled out of context that repeats a few times, or by having it go out of sync to crreat these chaotic patterns, and not really a strong melodic structure. I see it more as a collection of sounds and an interaction of those sounds, rather than something following any kind of structured, melodic, predetermined score. A sample of sounds that are interacting. I have a hard time with the term 'noise' because of that whole harsh noise thing, which I think is a thing unto itself. But I think with harsh noise there's a physical element too. The sound is expected to interact with the audience on a physical level.

Joe's dissatisfaction with the term 'noise' comes from his desire to separate himself from the practitioners of 'harsh noise,' a term that perhaps has a stricter definition, since it is often opposed to 'drone noise' and 'harsh noise wall.' Nevertheless he alludes to techniques and strategies he himself has engaged in to create such sound works. Two strategies include the obscuration and cancellation of rhythm, sometimes by adding sound or counter-rhythms that obscure the salience and regularity of any particular rhythm, and the depression of melodic figures. 'Noise,' for Joe, is a sonic montage: it is the collection and juxtaposition of sounds and the attempt to evade structure. Even though Joe distances himself from 'harsh noise,' he concedes that what 'harsh noise' and his early work in AIRWAY have in common is the technique of making sound physical through extreme volume. AIRWAY performances were said to be among the loudest performances some people have heard attended. The loudness in AIRWAY

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served two basic purposes: to obscure the subliminal messages Joe buried in the

mix of sounds, and to create "standing waves and sound harmonics in relation to

the space." Many practitioners of 'noise' and 'harsh noise' also allude to the idea

of making sound physical through extreme volume. I then asked Joe what about

the general aims of the practitioners of 'noise music,' specifically since the

founding of the LAFMS.

> JP: I think the LAFMS grew out of frustration with rock music coming out
> of the 60s. It seemed like things were getting more and more
> experimental and moving more and more away from pop. You had the
> Beatles: George Harrison putting out *Electronic Sounds*, and John Lennon
> working with Ornette Coleman. Things seemed to be moving away from
> pop. And then somehow you turn the corner in the 70s, and all that came
> to a crashing halt. I think a lot of people that started working in noise
> were trying to take that extra step beyond what was happening in the 60s
> in one way or another. With Le Forte Four, a lot of what we did was
> sarcastic, mocking. But then there's other Le Forte Four stuff that was
> kind of serious. We were mocking minimal music, but then we were also
> big fans too. It's like what I talked about with Hijokaidan: trying to take
> what we liked from the 60s and go one step beyond into the stratosphere
> and get away from all the structure and just use those elements that we
> liked outside of the pop genre and be able to explore the elements that we
> were relating to with pop music and jazz. We had a lot of appreciation of
> experimental jazz too, but kind of frustration too, with the structure. So
> we were trying to break outside of all that imposed structure of those
> musical forms and be able to use the elements we liked without all the
> structure.

Breaking out of traditional music structures and exploring new sounds while

making sardonic imitations of the new pop music of the early 1970s were some of

the main goals of the practices of the LAFMS. With such antipathy and

dissatisfaction of the 1970s in mind, I asked Joe a follow-up question concerning

the bourgeoning punk tendencies and the do-it-yourself movement in the 1970s.

> DM: How did punk and the do-it-yourself movement influence you in the
> 70s? You kind of predated it.

> JP: Yeah. We were pre-punk, but we were influenced by the neo-Dada
> movement. They were kind of the pre-punk movement; particularly the
> Canadian Dadaists and San Francisco Dada. That's where the Residents

came from. We used to look at the magazine called *FILE* and mail art too. In that same period there was a lot of mail art being done, and so we participated in that. It was through those connections that I made contact with Cosey from Throbbing Gristle, and we corresponded for a while and we found out about the Residents and were inspired to put out our own records.

Mail art and cassette culture (the making and distributing of cassettes through the mail) were important means of art and music dissemination in the mid-1970s and throughout the 1980s. These forms of communication united like-minded artists and aesthetes. Joe became better acquainted with artists working in similar veins to himself throughout the US and abroad. Situating the development of a Los Angeles experimental 'noise' scene, through the LAFMS and the early punk movements as movements with aims to cancel traditional and institutional structures, allows us to more fully understand what Joe Potts and other similar artists were trying to achieve in the mid-1970s: an attempt toward expressive autonomy.

Maria Garcia (1988-) is one of the younger practitioners I interviewed, and one of the few women who continually performs in the 'noise' scene. Since my interview with her, her and her partner Patrick Murch opened an experimental venue called Mata Noise that has quickly become one of the most important and welcoming venues for experimental 'noise' in Los Angeles. When I asked her if she considered her work 'noise music,' she said the following.

> MG: I constantly wonder about that. I'm on the fence about it, actually. I know there are elements of noise, but I guess it's not 'harsh noise' it's 'noise,' because it's definitely not pop songs or singer-songwriter songs. I'm not usually playing an instrument. It's usually textural songs, but not harsh noise.

Like many other people I interviewed, Maria was afraid that the term 'noise' would be conflated with the narrower term 'harsh noise.' She self-characterized

her work as "textural songs," and certainly her own voice has been an important

element in her work at key moments of her performances. When I asked her

specifically how she would define and characterize 'noise music,' she told me the

following.

> MG: [You mean] If I were telling someone who knew nothing about noise?
> I usually say "textural sound" or "ambient sounds." I feel like we looked
> up that definition one time: "unwanted sound" is what it said noise was.
> Usually when people ask, "What is that?" I say, "I play noise" or I'll say
> it's textured sound, or manipulation of feedback or static; a lot of
> distorted sounds is pretty much what I would tell people when asked what
> noise is.

Even with Maria's hesitations about the term 'noise,' she still found that the

easiest ways to discuss her art was to say, "I play noise." Perhaps no one else I

interviewed made such a statement, the way one might say, "I play jazz," or "I

play rock." She appealed to some of the materials and techniques in her

characterization of 'noise:' feedback, distorted sounds, static, and "textured

sound." When I asked Maria what she thought were some of the general aims of

the practitioners of 'noise music,' she responded thusly.

> MG: That's what's cool about noise, is that I feel like everyone is going for
> their own idea of what noise is. Everyone can have their own opinion
> about what it is. It's not necessarily this objective that everyone is going
> to be some career musician. I feel like there are genres of music that
> people play because they expect certain things out of it, but you can
> expect whatever you want out of noise.

For Maria 'noise music' is an expressive outlet for making idiosyncratic work and

providing an idiosyncratic framework for one's self. Not only is there no right and

wrong way to do it or think about it, but the very naming of the activity seems

itself to be a barrier to the activity.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout this chapter I have tried to let the subjects of my study define and contest the term 'noise music' the way they understand and define it in a broad way. Through their testimony I have outlined some tendencies. I tried to extrapolate the following broad categories to simplify the subject at hand. Such categories include: discovery, exploration, and novelty; entropy, randomness, and tendencies against structure (astructural); a taste for excess and extremeness; idiosyncrasy and personal expression; sonic material and technological equipment; quality as predicates used to describe a material or process; and techniques, processes, and experimentation. These broad categories were used explicitly to define the idea of 'noise,' though the subjects of my investigation usually addressed all of these categories during their interviews, either because I asked questions about such categories, or because the answers they gave were relevant in the context to other questions I asked.

Discovery, exploration, and novelty was a common trope amongst those I interviewed for this project. Casey Anderson said, "I think there's an interesting investigation into extremes." GX Jupitter-Larsen said, "I think there was a real, deep-seeded curiosity, a sense of play that might be mixed with anger or angst or ego, but I think there was a sense of trying something really different." Michael Winter referenced "[t]he quest for new experiences; to perceive or experience something new in a new situation with sound." Scott Cazan was alight during his explanation of the general aims of his sonic activities: the purpose was "to try to discover things. That's the best is when you're surprised: 'Oh, that's happening: interesting. Let's explore this.' That's the fun of performing, because that's what you're doing on stage, is discovering new things." For Joseph

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Hammer discovery transpires during the process of creation: "I feel that through my interaction I've discovered these objects, and they're kind of rare or rarefied." For Christiaan Cruz, discovery and maintenance of a discovered sound are key: "So it's either a search or a maintaining something on some level that think they've obtained." "Experimentation and expression" are key ingredients for noisicians, says Elden Man. For Bob Bellerue the method of making 'noise' is by "discovering through accident or willful negligence different ways of making sounds." Eddie Giles waxes philosophical in his answer: "it can be an exploration of what music is, it can be an exploration of what the gear can do," but such experiences necessarily venture into "uncharted territories." Though John Wiese was disdainful toward the term 'noise music,' his preferences tend to include him with the ideologies expressed by others when he expressed the kind of experiences he enjoys at performances: "I would hope to hear something that felt like an exploration or possibly even a discovery of something new and interesting." These quotes corroborate the thesis that discovery, exploration, and novelty are important defining elements in the idea of 'noise.'

Entropy, randomness, and the movement against structure was another common trope amongst the people I interviewed. For Greh Holger 'noise' "doesn't fit into a traditional musical format or song structure." Christiaan Cruz is certain that if enough people can say, "'This doesn't make any sense; this is not music;' then it's noise." For Michael Winter noise as empirical sound is fundamental to novelty: "Noise is randomness; something that is random has no structure: uncompressible." "Noise—randomness—is essential to it [music]." Randomness is essential; noise is essential to revolution. For Samur Khouja 'noise' perhaps has "less 'walls'" that would structure and codify it, and he muses that perhaps it is

"more open to interpretation." Bob Bellerue imagines the characteristics of 'noise'
as a discovery "through accident or willful negligence" that leads to different
ways of making sound and listening to sound. Weronika Zaluska sees the
production of "non-representational sound" as an important strategy to achieving
'noise.' For Joe Potts, he and the LAFMS "were trying to break outside of all that
imposed structure of those musical forms and be able to use the elements we
liked without all the structure." He confessed that "[m]ost of what I do,
personally, is kind of noise drone. It doesn't have a traditional musical structure.
In that way it's kind of formless and non-melodic." The attempt to move against
structure and the use of entropic materials and processes is not only an
important aspect to the way people make 'noise,' but also to the way people in
the scene listen to it.

For many of the people I interviewed 'noise' was connected to excess and
extremes. The most obvious manifestation of excess in 'noise' has to do with
volume—usually loud volume—though there are other extreme qualities in
'noise,' including extreme soft volume. For Elden Man 'noise' was connected to an
"intense" and "expanded overuse" of dissonance, dynamics, production, and
effects. He added that 'noise' practitioners have an "[e]xtreme philosophy behind
the messages." GX Jupitter-Larsen spoke of excess and extremes historically as
an aesthetic: "Since the 80s a lot of people felt that, 'It just can't get any more
harsh or extreme or minimalist than it has already,' but then it does. Somehow
the scene becomes that much more. You're dealing with aesthetics or techniques
that are just that much more minimalistic or more abstract." Casey Anderson also
references explorations at the fringe: "I think there's an interesting investigation
into extremes, that would be a common thread across a lot of noise music, or

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exploring things that most people don't tend to explore." For David Kendall 'noise' experiences are attempts at reaching catharsis, or the sublime: "There's a cathartic element that runs through it. And if not fully cathartic then still really powerful…—what's the word I'm looking for—like the sublime; like the pleasure mixed with pain. This sense of overwhelmingness. That's the effect." Excessive stimulus through inundating the audience with a plethora of sonic information is a leading concern for Joseph Hammer. "That's actually a pretty important factor in my music: is this idea that there's a lot of distraction and distracting—confusion: overwhelming stimulus—to the point where you lose a certain amount of the ability to… you're forced to go into automatic mode." When I asked Damion Romero to discuss the general aims of the practitioners of 'noise,' he found the works of the artists themselves to be excessive: "too many people doing too many different things." My interviews as a whole show the importance of an "extreme philosophy" toward sound.

Idiosyncrasy as individual expression is another element when considering the 'noise' scene in Los Angeles. The people I interviewed discussed the exploration of new sounds, and the expansive nature of the various artists involved with 'noise.' Some have even claimed that each artist is their own genre. The explorations are approached from different, idiosyncratic points of view. Maria Garcia said "Everyone is going for their own idea of what noise is." For Eddie Giles, 'noise' could aspire to be an "artistic statement." Adam Cahan described 'noise' as an important medium for "personal expression" because its lack of codified rules was freeing to artists because they could express themselves more directly. For Scott Cazan the general aims of making 'noise' are closely linked to explorations in perception and listening practices. He is hoping

to be surprised in his explorations, and to discover areas of sound that will lead to more surprises. Scott was one of the few people I interviewed who was skeptical about the idea of artistic expression. He linked artistic expression to romanticism. "I think if you express things, you run the danger of becoming a romantic. It's not so much that I would like to remove expressionism as much as I would like to remove romanticism from the music. And romanticism is boring, I think." When I asked Scott to clarify what he meant by 'romanticism,' he said "I think of it as nostalgia. It becomes something outside of the music. It becomes something that's not about the music." By connecting Romanticism to nostalgia, we can also connect it to memory, knowledge, and the iterative functions that involve both. Experimental 'noise,' for Scott would try to remove those repetitive practices that might lead to Romanticism; or rather, repetitive practices that might already be considered Romantic for Scott. Bob Bellerue echoed his friend Brian Eubanks' proposition that making 'noise' is "like you're creating your own form of music." Henry Perez imagined a most inclusive idea: "I think noise is anything people want it to be." The idiosyncratic nature of 'noise' is understood not only by the practitioners who make it, but also by the listeners who engage with it.

Other important elements that the people I interviewed used to imagine the parameters of experimental 'noise' involved the sonic material, especially with regard to timbre and volume. Adam Cahan spoke of the use of "electricity as instrument." He also appealed to the empirical nature of sound: "noise music is interested in sound and the idea of sound as being the primary thing." For Weronika Zaluska, 'noise' is inclusive of natural sounds and human-made sounds: it "uses any kind of sound, including industrial sound." Casey Anderson

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is interested in sounds that are often overlooked: "Looking at things that are marginalized normally, or not focused upon regularly that are possible with sound." Greh Holger cites the exploration of "unusual sounds" as an important goal for 'noise.' Joseph Potts imagines a "collection of sounds." For some practitioners and listeners, like Scott Cazan and Sebastian Demian, 'noise' recalls the idea of loud volume. Thus Scott said, "When I think of that term, 'noise music,' I start to think of volume a lot," and Sebastian said, "Noise sort of implies loud volume, I think: at least that's how I've known noise music to be. A lot of it is about volume." Yet for other practitioners, like GX Jupitter-Larsen, the importance of volume is overstated: "Volume is actually not as important to me as some people might think." For David Kendall it can be either or both: "It's either extreme volume or this sort of extreme tension created by a lack of volume." Narin Dickerson imagined experimental 'noise' through its difficulty, either by its extreme volume—loud or quiet—or through other kinds of extremes: "a lot of it is going towards attentive listening to a very diverse range of sounds and frequencies and things that are physically difficult to listen to, to things that are extraordinarily quiet and difficult to hear."

The descriptions of the sounds was also an important aspect of the understanding of experimental 'noise.' Many common terms include *harsh*, *abrasive*, and *noisy*. Some people who protested the use of 'noise music' protested precisely on the grounds of its empirical materiality. Thus Scott Cazan queried: "Is it a literal description of the music, meaning that it's made with what we would consider noise?—pink noise or white noise—or something that approximates that?" Many practitioners, however, appealed to the sonic qualities in 'noise' as predicates and metaphors to describe the material or processes

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involved. David Kendall said "it's characterized by either really simple sounds; generally really simple harsh sounds but also sounds of destruction." For Greh Holger, "it uses harshness and abrasiveness; it uses more atmospherics." Don Bolles said, "Sounds that are very loud and abrasive and noisy." Maria Garcia appealed to "textural sound," "ambient sound," and "distorted sound." Samur Khouja described 'noise' in terms of "primal sound." Henry Perez was more crass in his descriptions, calling his 'noise' "terrible" and "shitty." Descriptions about experimental 'noise' speak to the poetics of how this art form is imagined, produced, performed, and listened to.

To summarize: I have outlined some of the salient ideas gleaned from this chapter concerning the definition of experimental 'noise' through the testimony of the people I interviewed. The next chapters will help to further articulate an understanding of experimental 'noise ' through the instruments, techniques, and practices used by the practitioners, and through the aesthetic ideologies of the practitioners and listeners in the Los Angeles experimental 'noise' scenes.

CHAPTER 4
INSTRUMENTS, TECHNIQUES, AND PRACTICES

This chapter endeavors to learn about the experimental 'noise' scenes through some of the instruments, techniques, and practices used to make it by the practitioners in Los Angeles. Like other chapters previous to this one, and the chapter that will immediately follow this one, the subject matter will inevitably overlap with them. The definition of noise (previous chapter) is informed by its instruments, techniques, and practices (current chapter), as well as by the aesthetic ideas and decisions that lead one to make the sounds in this art form (next chapter). This chapter discusses how one goes about making experimental 'noise' in a very fundamental and rudimentary way. It is not intended to be an instructional cookbook on how to make 'noise;' rather, it details how the people I interviewed—whom I consider experts in the field regardless of their experiential longevity or peer appreciation—make 'noise' through the equipment they use and how they treat sound. The quality and level of detail of the answers varies greatly from one practitioner to another. Although I originally (perhaps exorbitantly) aspired for this chapter to read as a "noise music theory," the plurality of methods would amount to volumes of material that could never be completely exhaustive.

The chapter addresses five basic questions from my questionnaire.

1. How do *you* make experimental noise music?
2. What instruments do you use?
3. What organizational principles do you use? How long do your performances normally last?
4. What is the function of timbre, volume, rhythm, meter, and duration in your work?
5. How does expression figure into your work? Are you trying to express yourself? How do you use your body in performance?

These five basic questions, and their correlates, are used to assess in a general way the instruments, techniques, and practices of the practitioners of the experimental noise' scenes in Los Angeles. Many of these questions are open to interpretation and qualification, thus creating a problem for cataloging particular skills that require precise knowledge and expertise; and in fact, many of these questions proved difficult by the practitioners themselves because of their complexity, or their reliance on intuition, or both. Since improvisation plays an important role for many 'noise' practitioners, we can see how difficult a question would be to ask an improviser of any stripe "How do *you* improvise?" One might appeal to an idiom (idiomatic improvisation) or (in the case of most 'noise' improvisers) one might attempt to move against an idiom (so-called non-idiomatic improvisation). The complexity of the answers, in either case, is the sort of material dealt with in this chapter.

I. How Do You Make 'Noise?'

The first question in the section "Instruments, techniques, and practices" is the broadest question: "How do *you* make experimental noise music." The purpose of the question is to give the participants a chance to articulate a brief or broad idea of how they make their art. Some discussed the instruments they use, some discussed the techniques and practices imperative to their performances, and some discussed their aesthetic goals and ideologies. Some of the answers are very broad while others have more specific aims. Some use specific instruments but use broad methods, while others use specific methods without necessarily having specific instruments in mind.

David Kendall's answer was brief: "I type it into a computer." Although David sometimes uses analog synthesis, most of his recent work is done on the computer using Supercollider.

Henry Perez' answer to "How do you make noise?" also appealed mainly to the instruments he uses: "Distortion pedals; circuit-bent ones. Delay pedals and contact mic, or sometimes circuit-bent electronics." Henry does not circuit-bend in live performances, but he does use circuit-bent electronics in his performances.

For Nial Morgan, his method is to synthesize instruments and materials together: "I try to find interesting mediums to incorporate into noise music. Just like lots of EQ [equalizer] and lots of distortion and tape loops and samplers, tape collages and stuff." Nial uses a variety of sources and sound-modifiers that are integrated with a mixer. Source material from analog or digital sources (tapes and sampler) are combined with modifiers like distortion and filters (equalizers).

John Wiese was reluctant to make a broad statement about his approach: "There's no answer to that, really. I've never only done one thing."

Elden Man gave an answer discussing the importance of primary and secondary sources to be amplified.

> EM: There are different methods. Number one is electronically with whatever you can plug into an amp. I use a lot of what I call primary sources, which are electroacoustic instruments, whatever makes noise, metal, chains; secondary sources would be, if you record the primary sources, then the recording becomes the secondary source, and I utilize that in the context of musique concrète or collage: the secondary source is the recording of the primary source. Primary sources can also be spoken word; secondary sources could be recordings of spoken word and other instruments that are manipulated, like flute, melodica, feedback, cassette tapes—I've used cassettes a lot, getting back to secondary sources, as a source to make noise. Whatever is available, but I do avoid computers.

Amplification through loudspeakers is the main concern. Then Elden distinguishes between primary and secondary sources. For primary sources Elden uses the examples of noise, metal, chains, and voice. In most cases these examples are to be amplified with a microphone or transducer of some type, with the exception of 'noise,' that could be interpreted as originating from a white (or pink) noise generator. Then Elden discusses secondary sources as any source that has been recorded. These recordings can be canned performances—'noise' performances, using other various techniques, like feedback, electroacoustic manipulations (the use of effects, etc.) that have been recorded—or field recordings of sounds of interest, or recordings of voice (spoken word). Elden is open to a variety of source material but avoids using computers.

Eddie Giles mostly plays with the group +Dog+, but sometimes he plays as his solo project, Destroy Date. In the following passage he discusses broadly his approach to making 'noise.'

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EG: That's a hard question because it all depends on what the situation is. If I'm going to do something that's considered 'noise' or 'power electronics' or just something gritty sounding, I'll do something that's really sort of simple and minimal. I have an old beat up Casio [keyboard] in the corner, and I've got some pedals, and I just go directly into my state-of-the-art [sarcasm] tape recorder over there, and just record tracks of electronic, synthesized notes. And I just tweak them out a little bit, and that's it; and maybe I'll add a found sample—a voice sample—that's ironic or stupid as a sort of indicator of random stupidity. I really like culture jamming, and I can really work with a lot of the other ideas that I have in Destroy Date. When it comes to other types of stuff—other types of projects—the rule for me is that I usually dedicate instruments to that project, and I don't expand upon it. So I take a sort of Ramones-like approach to things where I'm not playing a lot of notes, and I'm playing the same thing over and over again, but I do that really well. If I need to expand the sound, obviously I will bring in more instruments or I will try something different. For a long time I would try to force one sound onto another sound. Once I find what works for me, I stick with it. It's getting easier and easier to do because what I'm doing is I'm playing keyboards. Most of my stuff is keyboard-based with some tapes in the background. When I play with +Dog+ now, or some other projects, I'll play what I like to call the preset (quote/unquote) "new-agey" sounds in the background. I don't like to play the harsh stuff too much; it all depends. I do have a little tiny synthesizer I play with +Dog+: a toy synthesizer going through some distortion pedals, and that works fine. But I actually like to add softer, more dreamy-like sounds, because while everyone is getting all gnarly and bashing away, I like to have this off-thing going on. I didn't think it was going to work, but it's actually quite memorable. Within all this different noise you have this gentle sound in the background. I don't mind that, and no one else does so far. I prefer keyboards and tapes, and I prefer rhythm boxes over drum machines, but I like drum machines.

Eddie's basic methods for making 'noise' include using old keyboards sometimes with distortion, and field recordings. Most of his performances were with +Dog+, a group founded by Steve Davis with a constantly changing line up: Eddie became one of the regulars. In +Dog+ Eddie gave himself the role of playing subtle "new-agey" sounds, using pitches, to contrast with the more aggressive sounds that often came from the other performers. He also brought with him a cheap tape player to play field recordings and various cassette tapes that he would find in thrift stores (usually from old answering machines). He also sometimes used rhythm boxes (limited drum machines) and drum machines to

provide contrast. These methods are part of Eddie's interest in "culture jamming," an idea pioneered by Don Joyce of the collective Negativland. Culture jamming, among other things, is a technique used to bring awareness to strategies corporations use to sell products using media. For Eddie, the use of lo-fi instruments and the use of discarded cassettes with old recordings of communications long lost, are among his methods for making 'noise.'

Christiaan Cruz is concerned with the continual search for new sounds: a common trope amongst people who make 'noise.' Unlike others, he brings his sound experiments with him to work: at least in his work van.

> CC: Sometimes I want to create a different sound on the computer because I always think that everyone is doing the same shit, so I'm just always trying to find that different synthetic computer program sound. Then other times I'm just clunking things together: different instruments, different pieces of wood, different rocks, just different materials until something sounds interesting: tapping them and beating them until I have a composition that I like. It just happens. Acoustically first. I know how I'm going to get things done with a microphone. I know what I have to do to my equipment to get the sound that I want; so acoustically, it's always acoustically. I used to do a lot of field recordings and because I was bored driving around I used to use my car as an instrument and just have the noise and mics running through the car, just sitting in traffic having the noise reverberate in the car and recording that. So those kind of field recordings and those kind of outside noise recordings.

Some of his favored methods for making 'noise' are with the computer, listening for new computer-generated sounds using various software; with materials that make acoustic vibration; and by making field recordings in his work van of the sounds of traffic in Southern California using microphones filtered and fed-back by the acoustical space of the van. Although elsewhere Christiaan talks about the various effects chains he uses, computer-generated sounds and field recordings (usually with some feedback) constitute his basic approach.

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Scott Cazan states that his basic approach to experimenting at home is nearly identical to his approach while experimenting in a performance.

> SC: It's the same process that I do on stage. I feel like they're almost one and the same, it's just that what happens on stage is something that I've been working on for a bit. It depends on the piece. Sometimes—it's a habit—I like to just kind of learn things. So sometimes it's just reading like crazy. That's a stupid comment: of course everyone likes to learn things. But sometimes it's just reading things, and I'm starting to think about relationships which gives me these ideas, like: 'What if I set this in relationship to this? How is that going to react? How is that going to work?' So there's always something that starts it. Or sometimes I'm building something, and I think: 'What if I insert this into it? What's going to happen?' So there's always a start like that. And then from there it's just hours and hours of practice. Practice isn't the right word. Hours and hours of exploring. So I put these things together; it's making this horrible sound: what happens if I do this? And eventually you can create these systems. Or, this is a great sound, but it's not something that I'm terribly interested in, or at the very least, the system that I have here now has a lot of potential for exploring this concept, or something like that. So I think: 'It would be better if I inserted this piece in here, or plugged this into this, or what if I take something external and put it into the system.' Then after a while you have something that's reacting to something that starts to sound like a piece. And then eventually you have a system that you can use. And then you play with the system. You kind of discover all the quirks about the system, and usually they're pretty chaotic. So if I pull this off, it generally has this sort of effect. But then if you layer all these things together, you have all of this sort of complex networking movements or effects.

Learning through experimenting with different ideas and processes is a very important aspect of Scott's approach. Such an approach is similar to David Tudor's approach to learning about the possibilities of a circuit while working with his collective Composers Inside Electronics (CIE). Eventually, Scott finds a way to focus in on a sound or a conceptual process that leads to more sonic possibilities. An important part of his process behind the scenes is reading. "[E]veryone likes to learn things," Scott quips. This statement is evidence that exploration and making connections are important aspects of his general approach to making 'noise.'

Michael Winter thinks with and in computer programs. As an algorithmic

composer, he is interested in setting up processes and relationships.

> MW: Well really, right now, the way I write music is that I write computer programs. I used to sketch a lot—write down ideas—but I've got to the point where I'm doing that much less, and I'm actually going straight to computer programming. If I have an idea and I think it might be worth pursuing, I'll start coding it immediately. Sometimes I'll audition it and sometimes I'll just have faith in the algorithm, at least until I hear it later. It often involves a lot of just sitting around and staring at a wall and thinking about things and relationships, and again, What is the underlying structure of what I could potentially explore? which is somewhat synonymous with, How do you program something? [G]enerally I'm very interested in automated processes. Things where I execute a program and it generates a piece in its entirety, and then I don't do any editing. I even write another program to transcribe it. So, I don't know what you would call that approach, but it's something based on process.

Michael often moves from an epistemological question, to creating sets of

relationships between ideas, to a method of realizing an algorithm for

performance, either by a computer, performers, or both.

> GX Jupitter-Larsen has a more specific approach to making 'noise' through

literal destruction.

> GX: Well the quick and simple answer—these days, and maybe for the last twenty years or so—it's mostly one form or another of amplified erosion. Grinding, sanding for the most part. Sometimes manually, sometimes through some motorized tool. Regardless if it's manual or motorized, amplifying the breaking down of the surfaces, either both or the grinder or the grindee, and then isolating the layers and trying to amplify the distinction between the various layers of sounds within that entropic process. It's a reflection of entropy. Before that I used to do a lot drilling or punching of holes—digging of holes—but I really like the tonal qualities of erosion. I think it's a very beautiful process, actually, and sonically I find it the most interesting.

In a sense, GX is interested in making entropy through the destruction of formed

materials: he deforms them through their obliteration, using techniques like

grinding, eroding, and incinerating. These processes are then amplified. GX also

likes to grind hot microphones, thus noising the very first stage of transduction:

the transformation of sound into electricity.

Casey Anderson prefers electronics, the amplification of various objects,

and a radio.

> CA: A lot of electronics. I like low-grade, simple DC electronic applications, and radio has become a big thing that I use a lot. So at this point I would refer to that as my other instrument. There are field recordings—just recording outside. And then I like just using objects a lot. I have this battery of objects and that ceramic pot. So ceramic pots or lids to cooking apparatuses, and brushes and drumsticks and rocks, stones, and contact mics.

The radio is an important aspect for Casey, both for its historical use in

experimental music, and for its practicality and portability as a pseudo-random

song or random station generator, and the noises that are possible in between

stations. The ceramic bowl is used as a sort of semi-global container that

provides certain acoustic effects within it, depending on what other object is in

the bowl, how it is being manipulated, and where the contact mic is in relation to

the bowl. Electronics are used either to manipulate the acoustic information from

contact mics or to interface with a computer. Field recordings provide other kinds

of input. When I interviewed Casey there was a considerable amount of bird

sounds outside that pleased him.

Damion Romero referred to electronic devices he built himself that were to

be amplified.

> DR: In a live context there are instruments that I build and there's some sort of PA system. It sounds really obvious, but that's basically it. There are instruments that I have built—mostly I build things to try to make the sounds that I want, and it requires amplification.

Damion's home-built electronic devices often capture acoustic vibrations to be

amplified.

Don Bolles answered the question by providing examples from his own history of sonic exploration beginning with his time as a radio DJ in Arizona in the 1970s.

> DB: I got into turntable stuff sort of as an outgrowth of my DJing on the radio and raves. I did a lot of mixes on the radio—live on the radio mixes—since I was in Phoenix doing the KDIL stuff. I'd be on the air all night and we'd broadcast all over town, and I'd be stoned as fuck or on acid or both—everyone would when we did shows there pretty much; it was the rule—and I would do these improv-collage things with carts, which would look like eight-track tapes that we had made of different things and reel-to-reels and live mics. We didn't do much with those because you were usually the only person there. We would talk or something. I was terrible at talking on the radio, but I was really good at putting weird stuff together and making crazy collages.
> So I would do that with two records. Sometimes I'd turn the things manually by hand, and you could not recognize those sounds if you did it that way. It was just a crazy soundscape. And then with the other one I could do backwards things, because they were radio turntables. You could do these weird things. They'd go in neutral, so you could do crazy things with them. And we had a mixer with those giant, you know, those huge knobs on really old looking gear that you see in books. Giant knobs. One knob would turn both channels, you know, the stereo channels up and down. We'd just use those things a lot and use weird records and make crazy stuff. We'd put spoken word things over things they didn't belong over. Stuff like that. And make things that sounded like real radio but then would degenerate into this total surrealistic avant weirdness. So I got pretty good at that kind of thing, like the psychedelic mind-meld mixing. I carried it out to weird…. I jammed out with Otomo Yoshihide before, and people liked that. I'd loan him my turntables when he'd come to town sometimes. He'd do really cool things, like put a paper clip, like a stretched out paper clip that was in this weird jagged shape instead of a needle in it, just jam that up in there and then throw that across the record and make these weird boingy sounds. It was some pretty crazy shit. I learned a few good techniques from that guy.
> I started playing records. I started using my Revox A77 tape reel-to-reel as an echo. So I would use that with my little Mackie mixer. I'd send the signals from out of the effects sends into two channels. Out of the effects sends, and whatever programming material I put through those and go into the Revox and come back into the mixing board into two other channels. And then I would pan those hard—one right and one left—and I would take those channels' effects sends and turn them up a little bit and send them back into the tape deck again, and then back into the thing again, creating this weird loop.

Don describes mostly the importance of the equipment available at the radio station he worked at in Phoenix that could facilitate his experimental urges. These experiments are reminiscent of the early electronic music experiments in postwar Europe, particularly in Paris and Cologne. Unlike early electroacoustic pioneers, like Pierre Schaeffer, who sought to create a comprehensive catalog of timbres in the form of a sonic dictionary, Don was more interested in the play of making and listening to sound, rather than its scientific documentation. Don also discussed his experience and acquaintance with Japanese experimental composer Otomo Yoshide, who had impressed Don by using various objects to replace a record needle to make unusual sounds. John Cage had pioneered this technique in his *Cartridge Music*. The practical techniques of operating a mixing board and reel-to-reel recorders, along with his earlier interest in shortwave radio signals, certainly informed Don's approach to experimental sound as a DJ and as an experimental 'noise' artist in Kitten Sparkles.

Bob Bellerue's answer to how he makes 'noise' encompassed instruments, techniques, and practices in a broad way.

> BB: There's the development of instruments I guess, and the development of pieces, and then there's lenient improvisation and jamming. Most of the time my stuff involves a lot of use of feedback, so I'll either be amplifying an instrument and running it through pedals and laptop, and basically riding the feedback, or there are internal loops, but I'm primarily obsessed with feedback. It's also a lot of it in terms of the compositional elements and time-based aspects: it's more of a discovery. I spend a lot of time really listening while I'm playing. I don't do as much where I think: "And now, go!" I don't play notes. I can change sounds quickly, but I like it to be this thing and have them stay. You don't really notice the touch of the performer. I think about that sometimes: there are note-based instrumental performers and I'm on this other end where I really like stuff where you can't tell that I'm doing something. Sometimes I prefer that when I listen to recordings: you can't hear me go 'click,' you can't tell when something actually got changed even though it evolves over time.

Feedback is Bob's chief interest, whether it comes from a feedback loop between a microphone and a speaker, or from internal mixer feedback from the auxiliary send to a channel. He also stressed the importance of listening while performing, either solo or with others. "Lenient improvisation and jamming" means that Bob is improvising with preselected materials: namely, the devices that have been chosen for a given performance, and perhaps certain sounds and techniques to explore. He then discusses the notion of the "touch of the performer." Here, Bob is talking about the motions and actions a performer might make that have no immediate effect on the sound. For example, a button or command might be activated that perhaps has a time-lapse or delayed effect, so that the sonic outcome would happen moments after its articulated execution, or the activation of a button or command might lead to a developing process, or perhaps a slow crescendo or the gradual increased intensity of a tremolo or distortion figure. I asked Bob this follow-up question: "So you avoid one-to-one relationships between a movement and a sound?" His response:

> BB: You can't completely, but I definitely don't feel like I need to. In terms of my style and my technical set-up, I don't have that much control over things that way. I was thinking about that the other night at that jam session[330] because in instrumental style it's all articulation, so I want to figure out ways that I can have some articulation. But at the same time I don't need it for myself. I like that smearing and ending waves and torrents and maelstroms of sound.

So one of the techniques Bob considers when making 'noise' is the general avoidance of homologous (one-to-one) relationships between the articulation of movement and its corresponding sound; but he is also interested in moments

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[330] David Kendall invited Bob Bellerue and I to his Friday night jam session in a lock-out studio in Culver City. These sessions were mostly in a rock music style. I brought an analog synthesizer, David played guitar, Mark Lyons played synthesizer and ran vocals through a series of effects, James Bene played drums, Jim Cheydleur played bass, and Bob Bellerue played computer patches and analog electronics.

when such one-to-one relationships can be advantageous, particularly when

working with others in other styles.

Maria Garcia made reference to her instruments and a general plan of

action.

> MG: For me it's just having a few pedals and some sounds that I like.
> Usually recordings that I make are of the crickets that are outside, and
> putting it through my gear and seeing what happens, having some idea of
> what might happen, but for the most part just letting it do its thing.

A few pedals, some field recordings, and a general idea of what might happen,

and the openness to find out what surprises might lead her in a new direction are

the general ways Maria makes 'noise.'

Samur Khouja is unique amongst the practitioners of experimental 'noise'

not only because he is well-versed with sound technologies (a few others are as

well), but because he works as a professional audio engineer and producer to

some big-name musicians in the pop world. For some people the pop world and

experimental 'noise' are seemingly polar opposites.

> SK: I would say that they're more compositions that I wrote, and it's just
> a matter of getting that sound, or getting that feeling, rather than a
> specific way of getting it. And those sounds can come from anywhere.
> They can be from pedals; they can be from field recordings; they can be
> anything. I pretty much use whatever I can. I'm lucky enough to be
> around a lot of audio equipment all day, and old equipment that's noisy
> in-itself. It sounds really good, and there's an interesting thing to audio
> that makes it more listenable, and then at the same time is kind of old
> and funky that you can just mangle stuff. So as much as I like making
> stuff that sounds good for other artists, a lot of times when they're gone
> I'll take stuff and just make it sound horrible or destroy it. I like to use the
> same tools that would make something sound better to make it into noise;
> to break it apart too, because I like gear that's really extreme as far as
> processing audio. Some compressors can make things sound really nice
> and tight, and then other compressors can just destroy things and make it
> unlistenable too, or just unrecognizable. I like that kind of stuff and I tend
> to gravitate towards those kinds of gear, because then you have more
> flavors to add to the palette.

As a professional sound engineer Samur Khouja's home is also his studio. Few

people anywhere possess his familiarity and expertise with analog and digital

professional audio systems. His expert knowledge in sound and audio gadgetry

has helped inform his general way of making 'noise.' Samur views his

performances as compositions; his claim implies a lesser degree of improvisation

and a higher degree of the general understanding and predictability of the

capabilities of various kinds of audio equipment. In his discussion on the use of

compressors, one can tell that he has intimate knowledge—a professional

knowledge—of their inner workings, so that the degree of surprise may be, in a

sense, minimized. Thus as an experimental 'noise' artist, Samur can do more

composing—rationalizing, designing—to achieve a particular effect, rather than

perform mostly as an improviser.

II. Instruments

This section will explicate some of the instruments used by the practitioners as they answered the questions in my interviews. It will present a brief discussion of some of the classes of instruments used by the practitioners. The discussion should inform the reader on the basic instruments used in the Los Angeles experimental 'noise' scene. The salient information in this section, therefore, will be the chart of the instruments used by each practitioner. The chart mostly tells of the instruments that the practitioners told me they used, and—in some cases—of my memory of what they used from the performances I attended. The chart should be used referentially, but is not intended to detail every instrument a practitioner uses, or particularly how they use it. The instruments and devices used by many 'noise' practitioners are typically in flux, to some degree. If a practitioner is known for using pedals, different pedals might be swapped from time to time. If someone is known for coding software, different patches or different programs might yield vastly different results. So this section is intended to give an overview of instruments and devices someone might see at an experimental 'noise' event. Before discussing instruments and devices, a comment on one of the most important devices in 'noise'—the amplifier.

One of the most important instruments used by almost everyone working in experimental 'noise' is the amplification system, or PA ("public address" system). One of the few notable exceptions to the rule that 'noise' should be amplified is the work of Liam Mooney, who consistently produces work that could be classified as 'noise' without using electric amplification. His "Styrophonic" pieces are an excellent example: they involve blocks of Styrofoam bowed with wooden rods by performers until the Styrofoam has disintegrated. The results are

very loud and screeching sounds rich with ear-piercing treble frequencies. For nearly all other practitioners, amplification is essential. For at least two practitioners—Damion Romero and Jon Borges—the amplification system with speakers is an essential element to their style. In fact, Jon typically brings his own large and heavy amplification system—with bulky subwoofers—to every show. Damion tends to bring his system when he feels the system in place is inadequate or needs reinforcement. The amplification set-up is similar: a pair of QSC K12 speakers and a pair of QSC subwoofers. Each K12 is a self-powered twelve-inch speaker with 1000 watts. Each subwoofer is a one hundred-pound eighteen-inch subwoofer powered with 1000 watts. These 4000-watt systems are very loud, and can be found in music venues throughout Los Angeles. The controls on these amplifiers are minimal, with a volume knob, and a few on-off switches to change the character of the sound. These systems are expensive and heavy. For Damion and for Jon, the amplification system is essential to their work. "The PA system is actually part of my instrument" said Damion in our interview. An amplification system that is simply loud may not provide adequate amplification. The quality of the sound, for some practitioners—especially of the subwoofer, delegated to produce accurate sounds at the brink of human hearing (around twenty Hertz)—must be clean (without internal distortion) and be able to produce the widest spectrum of frequencies possible. If white noise is defined as Allen Strange defines it—"a mixture of all audible frequencies at random amplitudes… having equal energy *per unit frequency*"—then the best amplification would be able to reproduce those frequencies within the realm of human hearing (approximately 20 to 20,000 Hertz). Most practitioners of 'noise' require an unspecified amount of loud volume. For Joseph Hammer, he requires

volume loud enough to activate the space. Others subscribe to a more brutalist aesthetic: "As loud as possible." Issues of volume will be addressed further in this chapter.

I have broken down the instruments used by the practitioners I studied into nine basic categories. The categories of instruments I chose were based on the instruments and devices normally brought by a practitioner to make their performances. These nine classes include: 1) mixing board 2) electric keyboards, synthesizers, and drum machines, 3) recording devices, 4) microphones, 5) effects, 6) computers, 7) software, 8) conventional acoustic instruments, 9) objects. These categories are not perfect, but general, and allow for some overlap. For example, software is clearly a subset of computers; computers can be used for nearly all of these functions: mixing, synthesizing sound, drum module, recording, built-in microphone, and effects (it could even be appropriated to be used an acoustic object). Allow me to describe and justify these categories.

Other than an amplification system, the mixing board—mixer—is one of the most important devices for experimental 'noise' artists. Most practitioners only require a small mixer, between two and eight channels. These mixers are relatively inexpensive to purchase and they are easy to operate with a low learning curve. Many practitioners (but not all) point to the mixer as their primary instrument. This makes sense, since to mix, to synthesize, and to compose, have similar meanings, and a mixer is a device with the primary function of collecting sounds to be mixed and balanced by the user. The practitioners of experimental 'noise' use mixers in five principal ways. The first

way is the aforementioned way of collecting sounds and sound sources into distinct channels to be mixed and balanced by the user. The second way is to control the overall volume of sounds in their balanced form. The third way to create 'mixer feedback' by using a patch cord between the auxiliary send jack directly into an open channel. The fourth way is to add filtering using the equalizer controls on the mixer (to add or subtract treble, middle, and bass frequencies). The fifth way is by adding effects in the 'effects loop' between the auxiliary send jack and the auxiliary return jack (though most practitioners prefer to use effects between a given source and an open mixer channel. A mixer is considered by most practitioners to be essential to making 'noise.' In fact, some practitioners only use one instrument, the mixer, by using the mixer feedback technique plugged directly into an amplifier. There are other uses for a mixer— like panning sounds between the left and right channels for a stereophonic effect, or for the feeling of movement from one side to the other, but these spatial techniques are used less frequently.

Electric keyboards, synthesizers, and drum machines is a broad category. By themselves, these instruments can be seen as relatively conventional. In the early 1960s, the glaring difference between the Moog and Buchla synthesizers is that the Moog was controlled by a conventional keyboard while the modular Buchla system discouraged the use of the keyboard. This category includes synthesizers with keyboards and modular synthesizers. Since keyboards are used as controllers for synthesizers, MIDI keyboard controllers are also included in this category, whether they control synthesizers, drum modules, or computer data. This category also includes inexpensive electric keyboards based on sampled presets. Many electric keyboards and synthesizers have a drum machine module

built into their designs, so drum machines—synthesizers that focus on drum and percussion sounds that are then sequenced into rhythms and meters—are also part of this category. One could make a case that effects are also built into synthesizers, and that some (or even all) effects are synthesizer modules. This study will consider effects as a separate and unique category. Many practitioners of experimental 'noise' will use some form of synthesizer. The most common use of a synthesizer comes from the electric sound generators and filters. Strangely, to synthesize means to mix, but the basic component of a synthesizer is the sound generator. The two basic kinds of generators found on a synthesizer device are sine wave generators and white (or pink) noise generators. Other common generators include square wave, triangle wave, pulse wave, and sawtooth wave generators, though these generators are, in a sense, premixed using an algorithm of sine waves. These wave forms are added together in a unique synthesis (or mix) in a process called additive synthesis. Subtractive synthesis comes from the filtering devices. A filter can be used to filter out high frequencies, low frequencies, or a selected band of frequencies. Using these basic techniques the sound possibilities are enormous. (Frequency modulation (FM) synthesis is rarely found in experimental 'noise' in Los Angeles: I have never seen a practitioner use a Yamaha DX7 FM synthesizer. Granular synthesis, in most cases, requires a computer.) Many practitioners, like Greh Holger, use analog synthesizers to make 'noise.' Greh usually tapes down one key (with masking tape), and manipulates the controls. Drum machines are not very common in experimental 'noise' scenes in Los Angeles, mostly because 'noise' tends to avoid rhythm and meter. Nevertheless some practitioners enjoy the sounds possible from drum machines. Consumer keyboards are sometimes used

as toy instruments, sometimes for their unique and goofy qualities (bark and quack effects, for example). Joe Potts is known for using the Optigan (optical disc organ): a keyboard from the 1970s, literally with a tape loop sample per key. Joe learned to make his own samples so that each key (B-flat, for example) triggers a sampled sound instead of an instrumental pitch. The case of the Optigan therefore lies between this category—electric keyboards, synthesizers, and drum machines—and the next—recording devices.

Recording devices can come in different forms, but this category focuses on recording devices used as a sound source. Therefore digital audio workstations (DAWs) belong in the software category. The most common recording device used in experimental 'noise' is the handheld cassette recorder, commonly referred to as the Walkman, after the popularity of the Sony Walkman since the late 1970s. These devices are inexpensive, portable, easy to find, and most practitioners believe they have a pleasing sound. The cassettes are also inexpensive and easy to find; and in fact, many practitioners, like Eddie Giles, seek out discarded stashes of cassettes at pawnshops and thrift stores to find strange recordings, particularly of lost conversations or old answering machine messages. Many of these portable devices also have a built-in microphone that can be used to make field recordings, or for those like Nial Morgan, it can be used as a vocal mic in performance. Other portable cassette recorders are also used, and sometimes a practitioner may use an old home audio dual cassette deck. Nial Morgan uses an old "Portastudio" four-track cassette recorder with a built-in mixer for even greater possibilities with field recording. Of course, handheld digital recorders are also now readily available, so some practitioners use those kinds of devices. Once in a while turntables are found at experimental 'noise'

events. AMK and Rock 'n' Roll Jackie (Oblivia from Smegma) are the two frequent

performers using turntables. Finally, the reel-to-reel recorder falls under this

category, though the only person who uses this device is Joseph Hammer. Joseph

uses an analog reel-to-reel recorder as an active instrument to continually

record, playback, and erase various sound sources originating from his computer.

In other words, Joseph does not use the reel-to-reel to record a piece; rather,

recording, playing, and erasing are some of the techniques he uses to make

sounds with the reel-to-reel recorder. In the hands of Joseph, the instrument is a

reel-to-reel sound generator.

Microphones were the chief component of the musique concrète practices

in postwar France. The common practices of Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry

included the composition of field recordings using microphones to capture

ambient sounds in the city and in nature. These sounds could then serve as

sound sources for further manipulation or to mix in with other sounds. These

general practices with microphones are an important aspect of experimental

'noise' artists, therefore the use of microphones is an important category of

instruments. There are three basic kinds of microphones—mics[331]—used in

experimental 'noise' scenes in Los Angeles. The first kind is the handheld

microphone. Most of the handheld microphones vary in quality. Cheap toy

microphones, that could be found at thrift stores and adapted for use with other

equipment (perhaps with a simple eighth-inch-to-quarter-inch phono plug

adapter, or by soldering on a quarter-inch phono plug or XLR plug) are common.

Lower grade professional audio microphones can also be relatively inexpensive,

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[331] The practitioners, and myself, will often refer to microphones as "mics." When I was taking a beginning course in audio engineering during my undergraduate education, my teacher, Alex Cima, was very firm about the spelling of the truncated use of microphone to "mic," and not "mike." So in this study I will often use the term "mic," "mics," the gerund form "mic'ing" (with apostrophe), and the past tense "mic'ed" (with apostrophe).

between thirty dollars and one hundred dollars. These microphones tend to be robust, even for performers who prefer a more hardcore, violent style, like Eric Wood from Bastard Noise. But not all performers who use handheld microphones use them for vocals. They can be used for amplifying anything the performer desires, and of course, they can be used for making feedback with the amplification system. The second kind of a microphone might be described as a clip-on microphone. These small microphones are usually inexpensive and poorly constructed, but they are very lightweight and portable. They can be very useful and used for a variety of contexts, from amplifying instruments and objects to amplifying voice. Scott Cazan likes to have one in his mouth. The third kind of microphone commonly found is the contact microphone. These microphones detect vibration through hard surfaces, rather than air pressure. They can be bought relatively inexpensively, and they can be made even more cheaply with parts found at convenient electronics stores like Radioshack by those who possess elementary soldering skills. Other kinds of microphones in use include microphones that are built into other devices—like those built into cheap cassette recorders, digital audio recorders, or even a computer—and condenser microphones, used mostly for capturing sound in the field (rather than performance). Microphones are transducers. They transduce audio vibrations into electrical signals that are then either amplified substantially to make the sound louder using loudspeakers (which are also transducers that transform electrical signals into audio signals), or they are amplified enough to record on an audio format: magnetic tape, phonograph, or digital media. There are other classes of transducers that would then fall under the microphone category, like electric guitar pickups. Electric guitar pickups use magnets to capture the vibrations

made from metal electric guitar strings, but they can also be used to amplify anything metal, or anything that vibrates with the metal strings. On occasion, other forms of transducers, like electric guitar pickups, are used in performances. For example, Damion Romero uses transducers he made to capture sound vibrating in a small metal enclosure, and furthermore, he uses magnets to alter the sound (perhaps by further disrupting the magnetic field capturing the internal sound from the external magnets). Though not everyone uses microphones and audio-capturing transducers, they are certainly a mainstay in the experimental 'noise' scene in Los Angeles.

Effects are a large category of electric devices that are used to modify a sound. Nearly all affects can be activated and bypassed (turned on and turned off) by a footswitch: thus they are sometimes called "stompboxes." An effects chain is a group of effects plugged in together. Therefore a sound can be modified by one effect, a few effects, all effects available, or no effects, depending on the sounds demanded by the user. Most effects are intended for electric guitar or electric bass, though many people use them with synthesizers and other electric keyboards. Recently, in the last ten or so years, there has been a rise in effects devices designed for vocalists, but many practitioners of 'noise' run microphones into effects devices intended for guitar. In the last fifteen to twenty years, a renaissance of local builders have been making and selling "boutique" effects devices to fit the timbral needs of an ever-growing population of musicians intent on recreating their favorite sounds, or intent on making the most unique sounds possible. Circuit-bending is a technique that lends itself well to effects, and allows circuit-benders to explore and customize effects already made, and in some cases, to give them ideas on how to create their own effects.

There are a number of sub-categories that can fall under the term 'effects.' The most common of these effects can be narrowed to the following categories: dirt, delay and reverb, modulation, volume and equalization, and loop samplers (loopers). Dirt pedals fall into three basic categories: overdrive, distortion, and fuzz. Overdrive gets its name from overdriving a tube amplifier, thus causing distortions in the signal, and these distortions have become an aesthetic (if not an obsession) by musicians since the advent of dirt boxes in the 1960s. Overdrive can be subtle, adding very little effect, or it can be over-the-top and raucous. Distortion picks up where overdrive left off. Distortion, in a sense, means more overdrive, but usually distortion is characterized by more sustain than overdrive (at least from the standpoint of electric guitarist) and tends to further compress the input signal. Fuzz is the most distorted of the dirt pedals. Although one might be tempted to simply state that distortion lies between overdrive and fuzz, a more complicated discussion (one that I no longer have space for) would show that overdrive, distortion, and fuzz actually have different timbres and different levels and intensities: some overdrives can move toward fuzz territory without ever sounding much like a classic distortion sound. A second class of effects devices is delay and reverb. Digital reverb is generated by a very short delay repeated multiple times (feedback); spring reverb (usually found on a guitar amplifier) is rarely used by experimental 'noise' artists. Delay effects are echo effects, and they can be analog or digital. A delay pedal is fundamentally a mechanical canon-making pedal at the unison. Delays are controlled by programming the time between the intervals of the original sound and the delayed sound, the amount of repeats the sound should have, and the volume of the repeats as they trail off. Analog delays have poor fidelity: each

sound is more deteriorated the longer it repeats. This phenomenon is often considered desirable. Furthermore, interesting pitch-shifting effects are possible when swiftly turning the delay time knob. Digital delays tend to preserve the sound intact during their repeats. Some digital delays have a "backward" setting, so that the delayed sound is heard in retrograde, like playing a tape backwards, or rotating a vinyl record backwards. Modulation is a third class of effects device. The most common modulation devices include chorusing, flanging, phasing, tremolo, and ring modulation. Chorus effects are created using a short delay and a slight shift in the pitch using a narrow low frequency oscillator (LFO). It is intended to make the sound bigger by simulating different iterations of the same sound with slightly different intonation. A flanger uses a similar principle to the chorus effect except that the delay times are much shorter and the LFO has a wider range, providing a swooshing effect designed to simulate the sound of two reel-to-reel recorders slightly out of phase with each other by manually pressing the "flange" (the edge) of one of the recorders. A phaser sounds similar to a flanger in that both provide a swooshing sound, but the phaser swoosh has a different timbre. There is no delay in a phaser. Instead, an LFO controls a filter sweep that causes the swooshing sound. Joseph Hammer uses a stereo phaser with his reel-to-reel set-up. A tremolo effect pedal is different from a tremolo effect used on a conventional instrument. As an effect, a tremolo means the automatic ramping up and down of amplitude (volume). The speed of the ramping is controlled by an LFO. A fast tremolo effect can therefore simulate, to some degree, the manual tremolo effect such as used by a violinist rapidly undulating the finger over the strings. Ring Modulation is a special effect that uses a carrier frequency to modulate an input frequency. The result is the sum

and difference of those frequencies, providing a unique, 'bell'-like quality. Many conventional musicians loathe the sound of ring modulation because the mathematically induced results rarely fall within the harmonic series, and therefore the sounds can be difficult to adapt to traditional Western harmony. Ring modulators are excellent for sound exploration because even if a particular pitch is used to affect the carrier frequency, the result will be a strange harmony, if not a noise (defined as a sound without definite pitch). Another kind of effect is equalization (abbreviated as EQ). Of course mixers generally have equalization built in, but EQ pedals allow a particular timbre to be activated, and if running through an effects chain, the placement of the EQ pedal could drastically change the overall timbre of the sound. A good EQ pedal will have about seven frequency bands with individual sliders and one overall volume slider to set the timbre required. A typical seven-band EQ will have frequency bands dedicated to 100 Hz, 200 Hz, 400 Hz, 800 Hz, 1600 Hz, 3200 Hz, and 6400 Hz. EQ is typically used to greatly increase a particular frequency range—like the extreme bass frequencies or the extreme treble frequencies—for a particular effect; or they can be used more simply to add volume suddenly or gradually. A compressor effect narrows the bandwidth of a sound usually to streamline the frequency so that a sound can be heard more separately from other sounds. It works like an automatic volume control so that sounds that are too loud are kept in check. Compression is an effect rarely used by the practitioners of experimental 'noise,' but Samur Khouja and Casey Anderson use it in different applications. Casey uses compression to control volume spikes in his sound sources. On the other hand, Samur takes advantage of the timbral effects achieved by compression. As the intensity of a sound is squashed, its timbral makeup can alter significantly,

depending on how hard the ratio of compression is and the amount of release.

Finally, some effects pedals are dedicated loop samplers. While other kinds of

samplers may play back a particular sound, loop samplers provide the user with

on-the-fly digital recording that plays back in an infinite loop. Continuously

recording over a digital loop can cause enormously intense and drowning

feedback. Some experimental 'noise' artists use an entire arsenal of effects with

an elaborate effects chain, while others use only a few; still others are adverse to

effects devices altogether. Some criticize the use of commercially available

effects devices as products of capitalist consumption, preferring practitioners who

make or alter some or all of their effects. Eric Wood (Bastard Noise), for

example, builds his own effects devices out of simple electronic components.

Some practitioners in the experimental 'noise' scene use computers. The

basic kinds of computers and their operating systems used are Apple's Mac and

personal computers usually operating on Microsoft Windows. Tablets and

smartphones are also used by some practitioners. This category, computer as

instrument, piggybacks with the next category, computer software.

Using various kinds of software, experimentalists in sound have the widest

gamut of possibilities available given the proper skills. Some practitioners use a

digital audio workstation (DAW) like Ableton Live, Cubase, ProTools, and Reaper.

These kinds of software are good for professional recording, sequencing, and

synthesis. Others prefer a visual programming language like Max/MSP, PD (Pure

Data), both written by Miller S. Puckette. Still others prefer coding from the

trenches, using software like SuperCollider. Experimentalists who primarily use

code to make and organize sound are often referred to as algorithmic composers.

Programmers working in code make sound nearly from the ground up, and

therefore they have the widest gamut of sonic possibilities. Michael Winter actually composes his own software using the language Mathematica. Some practitioners working with computers, like Michael Winter and Casey Anderson, prefer to use open source software (freeware) when possible, while others use the most advanced professional software available (ProTools, Ableton Live). Supercollider is the preferred open source software for those interested in coding, while PD is an open source visual programming language similar to Max/MSP; many of the more advanced programs are actually coded from Max/MSP patches. Reaper is a DAW that is nearly open source; one can use it for the sixty-day trial period indefinitely after bypassing the "nagware" screen (imploring the user to purchase the product). The full version of Reaper is $60. Compared to ProTools at $700, Reaper is a bargain. Garage Band for Apple is a DAW that is probably also used, since it comes free with Apple computers, but I am unaware of anyone who has used it for experimental 'noise.' Some people use smartphone application software (apps) for a variety of purposes. Two applications I have seen include using the smartphone for field recordings (using a DAW app), and using synthesizer software. Damion Romero sometimes uses his smartphone as a sine wave oscillator source, though I am unsure which app he uses.

Conventional instruments are relatively rare in experimental 'noise,' but sometimes they are found at performances; their use warrants its own category. Conventional instruments are defined as typical instruments one would find in an orchestra, a rock band, or any 'normal' instrument found in a culture that recognizes an instrument as a 'musical instrument,' excluding amplified keyboard instruments (like synthesizers). They are either used conventionally, to add contrast to a 'noise' performance, or they are used in ways that extend beyond

their conventional use (for example, one can extend the use of a synthesizer by beating it with a drum stick). Maria Garcia often opened her sets with low volume noises while playing a simple riff on the mandolin for one part of the performance before exploding with noise in the second part. Shannon Kennedy, with the duo Pedestrian Deposit, rarely performs without her cello amplified with effects, which provides a contrast with Jon Borges' violent harsh noise performances. Then there are less conventional uses of conventional instruments. Scott Cazan often uses the violin as a resonating box, capturing sound with a small microphone, or he enjoys the noises made from scratching the bow over the strings without letting the strings vibrate the pitch. Liam Mooney uses a drum set activated by vacuum cleaners attached to the skins of the drum heads to create very loud resonances (another example of a performance without electric amplification, unless the vacuum is considered a sound amplifier). Electric guitars are sometimes used in experimental 'noise.' The only performer who uses electric guitar exclusively—with a large effects chain and stereo amplification—is Peter Kolovos. Peter plays the guitar at loud volumes with feedback, using a variety of effects, many of which are controlled with rocking voltage-controlled foot pedals (essentially turning knobs with a foot controller) constantly altering the parameters of the effects, to achieve his 'noise' performances. Other performers (like Harry Cloud) occasionally use guitars as a feedback source, or sometimes will place one or more E-Bows (electronic bow) for sustained sounds to be manipulated by effects. Rick Potts, cofounder of the LAFMS, modified the neck of his guitar with a door hinge, calling the resultant instrument the "hinge-neck guitar." Rick uses the hinge-neck guitar to alter the tuning of the guitar greatly by changing the string-tension from the hinge. Rick also uses an E-bow for

sustained sounds, an arsenal of effects, and a mixer. Conventional instruments are rarely used because of their histories and associations with the conventional music world, but when they are used, they are often altered physically (like the hinge-neck guitar), or run through an assortment of effects, thereby changing the sounds usually associated with them.

'Noise' artists often appropriate various objects to exploit their potential to make new sounds. Any object can become an instrument of sound, so this final category addresses everyday objects used for exploring new timbres. Usually the sounds are amplified with a microphone or a contact mic: this technique of amplifying small sounds has a long history at least since Cage. In most cases objects go hand-in-hand with microphones, but some objects do not require amplification to achieve sufficient volume. Nial Morgan sometimes uses contact mic'ed metal rods in his performances. In the duo Leather Bath—Greh Holger and John Wiese—John spread out broken cymbals and activated them with an assortment of electric toothbrushes and vibrating dildos (thus appropriating a conventional instrument with a vibrating object). The plethora of vibrating cymbals provided more than enough volume to fill the room—Dem Passwords in West Hollywood—with great volume without amplification (though an amplified field recording was also part of the performance). GX Jupitter-Larsen uses a variety of objects for their visual impact as much as for their sonic possibilities. In the Haters, GX is perhaps best known for his amplified suitcases, but he also has an amplified shovel and an amplified pro wrestling-style championship belt (*Untitled Title Belt*). Sandpaper, electric drills, and other grinding devices are implemented to make sound. One technique in particular is the conceptual use of the microphone as instrument amplified while being ground down to a nub with a

grinding device: thus causing the acoustic and amplified sound of the microphone's destruction. Casey Anderson uses an amplified ceramic pot (and other kinds of bowls) to create a small, semi-enclosed environment to be amplified with a microphone. Often he will use other objects of various sorts in the pot (or bowl) and amplify the interaction of one object inside another. When an object is captured by a microphone, it can then be subjected to effects devices or computer algorithms to further modify the sound before its amplification to loudspeakers.

The following chart lists the instruments used by the practitioners I interviewed. 'Noise' artists generally change parts of their instruments to suit their needs, so this list in not intended to be the last word on what these experimental artists use or can use.

Table 5: Instruments Used by the Practitioners

	Mixer	Keyboards and Synthesizers	Recorder	Microphones	Effects	Computer	Software	Conventional instruments	Objects
DK	Mixer	MIDI		Mic	Tube Filter	Mac & PC	Supercollider, Ableton, Reaper		
HP			Tape recorder						
NM	Mixer	Oscillator, pulse generator	Tape player, four-track cassette	Mic from tape player	Distortion, delay, flanger, compressor				Metal rods
GH	Mixer	Analog synths, drum machine							
JW	Mixer	Drum Machine	Portable player recorder	Contact Mic		Mac	Max/MSP		
EM	Mixer	Analog synths	Tape recorder	Mic					
EG		Analog synth, keyboards, drum machine, rhythm box	Cheap tape player		Distortion				Electric toothbrush, drumstick, various.
JH	Mixer		Reel-to-reel		Phaser	Mac	Ableton Live		
CC	Mixer	Synth and MIDI	Tape recorder	Contact mic, condenser mic	Pitch modulator, distortion, octave, delay	PC	Cubase	Drums	
SC	Mixer			Mics		Mac	SuperCollider	Violin	
MW	Mixer					Mac	Custom software		

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GX	Mixer			Mics, contact mics					Sandpaper, grinding wheels, shovel, radio, various, suitcases
CA	Mixer		Handheld digital audio recorder	Contact mics	Custom electronics, compressor, distortion, radio	Mac	Supercollider	Saxophone, drumsticks and brushes	Ceramic pot, rocks, radio, various.
DR	Mixer	Sine wave generator (analog and digital)		Custom transducers	Custom electronics				
DB	Mixer		Digital sampler, reel-to-reel, tape recorder, turntable		Shortwave radio, circuit-bent toys			Toy instruments	
BB	Mixer			Contact mics	Bass overdrive, EQ, delay, reverb, ring modulation	Mac & PC	Supercollider, PD		
JP	Mixer	Optigan (optical disc organ)	Digital sampler		Delay, modulation, trackpad synth (Korg Kaossilator)				
MG	Mixer		Digital sampler (looper), digital recorder	Contact mics	Reverb, chorus.			Mandolin	
SK	Mixer	Analog synth, custom oscillators (sine/saw)	Tape recorder, digital recorder	Contact mic	Delays, reverb, distortion				

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III. Organizational Principles

If experimental 'noise' is music, it is because the basic definition of music I consider here is that music is humanly organized sound. This section is devoted to the question: "What methods and organizational principles do you use?" I sometimes augmented the question by asking, "How do you structure your performances?" or "How do you create form?" Follow-up questions include, "Do you use scores?", "Do you use algorithms?", and "Do you improvise?" or "How does improvisation figure into your performances?" The question, "How long do your performances last?" is also addressed here, though in the questionnaire it was addressed with the question of duration (the question of duration will be addressed in the next section). Over the course of the interviews, I learned to sometimes ask the question, "How do you know when it's done?" (How do you know when the performance is over?); since most of the sounds are improvised, the form itself must also be improvised in some way, and the nature of the closure that marks the end of a performance seemed like an interesting question. Almost all experimental 'noise' performances have some level of improvisation; in fact, improvisation and experimentalism are closely related, since many of the experiments are improvised in real time. Practitioners who favor algorithmic methods often spice their algorithms with external indeterminacies; often these indeterminacies are the improvisational choices they make during a performance. Since both music and sound art—though I deny there is a distinction—are both arts heavily involved with time, the use and division of the time into sharply distinct, or relatively different sections based on perceptible changes in sonic parameters—frequency band (treble, middle, bass), timbre (sounds rich in treble, middle, bass), texture (simple and complex layers of sound), and volume—

informs the conscious or unconscious mode of performing and the conscious or unconscious mode of listening. This section will focus on how practitioners describe their methods of organization.

David Kendall has been engaged in computer-generated experimental 'noise' since the Il Corral days in the early 2000s. When I asked him how he organizes his performances, he discussed his general organizational strategies and then gave an example of a piece he had been working on that algorithmically rendered the faces captured on a camera into sound. David began with two basic answers:

> DK: Algorithms. Improvisation. I'm trying to move away from improvisation and focus on algorithms. I used to do improvisation extensively, and currently I'm interested in algorithms. I'm interested in a sound that has a lot of features and… a single sound where there's a lot of detail to hear. But how it's played, what the characteristics of the sounds are going to be when it starts and stops, how loud it's going to be; that is algorithmically generated. The piece that I'm currently working on is this idea of using facial recognition for a computer camera. It's a really rough… it really just gets a rough idea of this gesture of placing your face in front of a webcam, and it really roughly translates to how the sounds will turn on and off. But it's there and you listen to it, and that's the structure. That's where you get these buildups, these kind of abrupt pauses, extended silences, extended periods where you hear sound. All of that. So the idea is that you can listen to the recording and it feels like there's a structure, but it's not specifically chosen; it's chosen through this kind of problematic interaction with the computer. So the question, 'what's my process'? My process is that I spend all too much time designing sounds that always end up being kind of mushy, and end up sounding simpler than I think about them. They have this way of just kind… all the ideas that I pack into the sound will just kind of get obscured, so it ends up being… you end up hearing something different than what I put into it. So the way I work is I work on that sound, and then I try to think of a way for a structure, ways for emergent structures to come about without it being caused specifically by me.

When David says, "I'm interested in a sound that has a lot of features and… a single sound where there's a lot of detail to hear" he seems to be saying that he is interested in sounds with a complex timbre, or sounds that can move in

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complex ways. David is also interested in using external stimuli to affect his

programmed algorithms to behave in unique ways, depending on the stimulus.

New stimuli provide material to create new sounds.

Henry Perez gave a curt answer to the question concerning organizational

principles. Below is our exchange in the interview:

HP: Sometimes I try to practice it before anything, and I'll just go off on what I remember I was trying to do. Like memory.

DM: Do you consider what you do improvisational?

HP: Yeah.

DM: How much of your work is improvisational?

HP: One-hundred percent [laughs].

DM: How long do you normally play for, when you perform?

HP: It depends. Sometimes I'll go off on, probably for five minutes or less. At Graff Lab it was probably the second time I went off for longer than five minutes, I went off for about ten minutes.

Henry performs as Cuddly Cactus with a few circuit-bent effects, toys, and a tape

machine sprawled on the floor, and improvises his explosive performances by

activating and bypassing various effects and his tape machine while manipulating

parameters by turning knobs. His performances last from about three to ten

minutes.

Nial Morgan also engages in explosive performances in his project Wrong

Hole. His answer explains a simple form that he improvises around.

NM: For the harsh stuff, it won't be improvised, but I'll have a couple of different phases: like I'll have three different phases in a set, and I'll improvise within that, and I'll know which sounds will be coming, but I'll know how to use them, so it's not necessarily completely improvised.

Nial has expertly learned to use the devices at his disposal to the effect he finds

appropriate for his performances. But his improvisations are also experimental.

Elsewhere he discusses the notion of 'hunting' for the tone: "Like that one tone

that you really want. You gotta really search for it, because there's so much

harsh noise out there already, it's been done over and over." His basic method is

to improvise within certain constraints of instrumentation and certain formal

constraints grouped into "phases." Nial's performances last, "usually five to ten

minutes."

Greh Holger mostly works improvisationally, but he described a new

recording process that would incorporate his understanding of using 'leitmotifs' to

provide unity amongst his works as Hive Mind.

> GH: It's largely improvisational. It's all by feeling. It's true of almost
> everything I have recorded, except for what's now going to be the next
> Hive Mind record, which is the first time I've written out what I want each
> piece to sound like, in the direction of instrumentation, and sort of score
> each of my pieces. I came up with this idea of a leitmotif, and recycling
> melodies, and atmospheres throughout a double album to create a feeling
> of familiarity and to give it more structure and more of a song or album
> feel than just some improvisational pieces. My normal method of working
> is improvisational. The newest thing I'm doing is attempting to give
> structure to my improvisation, and use the things I've learned to apply it
> to a more rigid or more structured or more specific way of recording or
> composing.

Greh's notion of melodies intrigued me. Clearly he did not mean a melody with

pitches, but perhaps he had some concept of antecedent and consequent, or

simple binary or ternary structures. His idea of "recycled melodies" clearly

pointed to his concept of leitmotif, so I asked him the follow-up question: "How

do you conceive of melody?

> GH: It's entirely by ear and probably doesn't fit most people's definition of
> melody. The concept of leitmotif is more important to me than necessarily
> the value of using similar identifiable structures and notes and tones and a
> sequence. So melody is an arrangement of notes and tones in a specific

organization that can then be played with and moved around, but it's still recognizable as being of the same or similar ilk, and causes the same or similar emotional response. Hive Mind stuff is usually automatic synthesizer: leaving it on and adjusting it, and now—coming to where I'm more comfortable playing—I'm doing more percussive elements with the glass and metal I was talking about, but I'm also trying to work with more structure, melody, and playing notes, and having something be in…. My concept of music and time and time signatures and structures and melody structures isn't…. I've never learned or studied any of that. And I've never had any interest in it, but it's something that I hear in everything I listen to and do, so it's sort of approaching it with caveman tools [laughs], and trying to do it and figure it out my way, and apply it in that way. Bludgeoning it with a rock, instead of saying: "Here's this melody, here's this harmony, here's this": it's more like, it sounds good when I play these notes in this structure at this interval or whatever, and I will use that and modify and build off that.

Most of Greh's work as Hive Mind involved taping down a single key on a synthesizer (usually his semi-modular Korg MS20) and manipulating the main oscillators, low frequency oscillators, filters, envelope generators, and plugging up the patch bay in various configurations to create thickly textured timbres and low frequency powerful pulses. Greh's flirtation with traditional music structures derives from his cognitive interest in structures in general. The "caveman tools" Greh has at his disposal are more advanced than he gives himself credit for. When Greh says, "The concept of leitmotif is more important to me than… the value of using similar identifiable structures and notes and tones and a sequence," I believe he slightly misspoke. I feel he meant only to claim ignorance on notes and tones, but that the structural aspects of leitmotif were paramount to his conception. Of course, Greh is working through these ideas in real time—in interview time. The point is that Greh has been thinking about structure as a method of creating a deeper impact on listeners through some kind of repetitive sonic mnemonic inspired by the classical notion of leitmotif in music. Ultimately,

his work relies heavily on improvisation. According to Greh his performances usually last between fifteen and twenty minutes.

John Wiese is known for continually altering his performances, never settling into a particular style for too long. He is known mostly for his experimental solo works, but also for his grindcore band, Sissy Spacek. He often collaborates with other experimental artists as diverse as the Haters (with GX Jupitter-Larsen) and Smegma. When I asked John about the organizational principles he uses to generate his works, he answered in the following manner.

> JW: I have tried to maintain a foot in different modes. For example: I made a Sissy Spacek album that was recorded on Dub Lab. It was an eight-piece band. We all did improvisation based on loose instructions. So there was a vague instructional score. So you could say that it was scored in a sense. But it was based on improvisation. Everybody was recorded separately, and then I took all of those recordings and made a collage of each person's performance, and then layered them. So it became a sort of musique concrète mode as well. So it was kind of scored, kind of improv, and it was kind of musique concrète. I think that's how I would approach organizational ideas: to keep things possible; to keep an air of possibility throughout as much as possible.

John's overall approach to organization is to keep things in the realm of possibility. In his recent experience recording his band Sissy Spacek, he showed a multitude of methodologies before the final product: a loose score of instructions that involved improvisation, the synthesis of sources from the various performers into a multilayered soup. I then asked a more specific question: "Can you tell me a little more about the role of improvisation in your work?"

> JW: I think it's definitely a base of what I do. But like I said, I feel like all of my work is like that. It's more or less composition that incorporates improvisation and…—what's the verb for concrète?
>
> DM: Making a collage?
>
> JW: Yes, some sort of assemblage. When I play a show, or when I record,

there is always a strong element of improvisation, where there are many elements left to chance, there are many ways that it could go; but at the same time it's using elements that have already been prepared and doing something within a mode that's predetermined. So it's everything and it's nothing. I don't know how to simplify it.

Improvisation and assemblage are the basic techniques John uses in his work. The mixer, undoubtedly, is the tool used in the assemblage and layering process during live performances. To try to steer the question back to form, I asked John a question about his interest in recording on seven-inch vinyl (a seven-inch vinyl record holds about four minutes per side at forty-five RPM). I had attended his opening to celebrate his one-hundredth seven-inch release, which included the release of a book he wrote and self-published on his Helicopter label. I asked John: "You mentioned [in your book at the gallery] that the seven-inch record was a perfect format because it forces you to listen. When you record onto seven-inch do you think of the time-frame specifically as a form? as a formal principle?" His answer:

> JW: Yes, often I do. I think a pitfall of the scene in general is that people play for these excessive, masturbatory lengths, or this stuff in general, and I've always tried to state my idea more concisely. And I think that's very informed by the seven-inch as an object. I certainly make longer pieces as well, but in general I think that in a lot of my work I know whether an idea should play out longer or shorter based on that experience or learning process.

In a sense, because of the strict time format of seven-inch records, the making of seven-inch records has instilled in John an essayist's sense of making a pithy point in a short amount of space: a sonic aphorism. There is clearly an aesthetic of the use of time, even if particular forms are not presented. I then asked John how long his live performances last. "Usually about twenty minutes: twenty [to] twenty-five minutes. I feel like that's a good attention span. Personally, when I

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see people play much longer than that, it's usually too long for me." Beyond

twenty-five minutes would be "masturbatory" for John. Finally, I asked him how

he knew when his performance was finished.

> JW: I just listen. I try to listen as attentively as I can. When I hear that it's done, it's done. I'll usually try to stop at that point; because a lot of people, I feel, decide they're going to play a certain amount of time, and they don't let the experience dictate the quantity of time.

I tried to avoid annoying reductionist tactics. I could have asked, "How do you

know when you 'hear that it's done'?" or "How does an experience 'dictate the

quantity of time' in a performance?" Although these questions are of great

interest to me—and in fact, they reflect the spirit of the questions I ask

concerning form—I decided to let the answer stand. John allows the experience of

the performance dictate the length of the performance; he believes that the

experience of performative time informs his decision to conclude the

performance.

Elden Man begins with a certain cerebral approach to the organization of

his experimental 'noise.' The following is our spirited exchange.

> EM: Number one: before I commit anything to recording or live, it's in my head. Sometimes it will be in my head for years, because I think that thought that is not articulated is perfection. Once you try to articulate it, then you lose perfection, because it could never be as perfect as what you envision in your brain. So for me the main form of organization is what I can hear in my mind, and then I'm trying to articulate it in the real world. As far as other methods, whatever way I can record: multi-track.

Some composers have also agreed that the work in their head is superior to any

performance. Here, Elden uses the idea of articulation to describe a physical

rendition of the sonic thoughts heard in the brain. I then asked Elden if he used a

score or any method of writing down his ideas.

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EM: I used to. Especially when I'm using synthesizers and rhythm machines, because, aside from hearing it in my mind, if I don't have charts or scores, I'll forget what the patches and settings are; even on effects, on what effect-settings are. But then a lot of times I leave it to chance. I like that element of randomness and chance at certain times, because that's actually the only time you can get to true improvisation; approach improvisation—when you leave the control. But then you're also relying on technology too. A lot of what I try to do is very controlled.

Scores and charts are used to aid memory when so many parameters are at stake for creating a 'noise' performance. And yet, Elden is also comfortable with leaving certain operations to chance. According Elden, chance elements and randomness lead to the path of "true improvisation," which is attainable when you give up control of the sound. But Elden also notes that when using technology, the technology itself is ordered and limited, and therefore the improvisation may be limited to the technology itself. The discussion on chance piqued my interest. I asked Elden a follow-up question: "I understand a lot of what you do is very controlled because you say a lot of it is in your head. So how does that work with improvisation? Or these elements of chance? Or does your head include chance and randomness? And how does improvisation help you try to achieve that perfection?" Elden's answer:

EM: Like I said: in my mind it's perfect. For example right now: if I'm thinking of, say, blending white noise and pink noise in my mind—I can hear it, but then when I try to articulate it on machinery, there's no telling what's going to happen. So that element of chance can't be controlled. From my experience, I know what certain frequencies can do—especially in terms of harmony—how they can affect a listener. The combination of consonance and dissonance, combinations of intervals—major, minor, whatever. I have a little bit of experience and knowledge, and I know how they're going to affect the listener. I hear that in my mind and I know what I want to do. But then when you transfer it to something real, like an acoustic instrument, or even an electronic instrument, those frequencies are not going to be perfectly the same as what I heard. So the blending of the different frequencies: that's very hard to control. Especially with the variations like, what they call the timbre of instruments. They're all different. And so when you blend the different sounds together, it's not always going to be what you thought of in your mind. And there's a lot of

beauty in that, because it's not what you expect. So I'm not saying that imperfection is something to avoid: it's also something to utilize and appreciate.

Elden's aural imagination is detailed, but the means to reproduce his imagination are limited by constraints of the technology, and perhaps what might be called, the perfect control over the technology. The limitations and imperfections themselves are then open to be heard as aberrant sounds or pleasant surprises. In any case, the organizational principles are perfect in Elden's head, but the articulation of his aural imagination alters the form. I then asked Elden to discuss more about the role of improvisation in his work.

> EM: I might have a certain framework, but beyond that linear progression, there are events that happen that you can't control. That's what makes a live performance something to be appreciated and treasured. Because those fleeting moments—unless they're recorded—they'll never happen again. Even though I have the concept that there is no true pure improvisation, there are events that will never happen again. As much as you try to recreate them in the future—like if you go to see Janet Jackson, and you hear the same set every night, but there are elements within that show that never occur and they will never occur again: they are exclusive to that period in time, when you're there. So that's something to be appreciated, and actually something to shoot for. You can't achieve perfection each time: it would be boring. So you do appreciate, and you anticipate those moments of improvisation and imperfection and fleeting, temporary events.

Elden is shooting for the unrepeatable, unique experience: and improvisation—even though he admits that improvisation can never be pure—leads to the possibility of these unique, unrepeatable, experiences. The unique experiences are momentary and ephemeral, and therefore the appreciated unique experience is coveted. I asked Elden how long his performances lasted. His answer: "I actually just try to make it at least more than fifteen minutes, but no more than thirty, because you begin to stretch people's tolerances for consuming a performance. A lot of times that's sufficient for getting across what you want to

say." Fifteen to thirty minutes is the proper length for him. Finally, I asked Elden

how he knows when a performance is finished.

> EM: That's hard to answer. The short answer is, when you feel like it. Masonna [for example]—a lot of the performances I've seen him do, the shortest was like a minute-and-a-half to two minutes, and then the longest was maybe twelve minutes, and that was fine for him. For the audience it was never enough. So again, it's a matter of personal taste for the artist.

Elden ultimately appeals to the personal tastes of the artists and audiences when

considering the length of a performance.

Eddie Giles described a few of his approaches to recording experimental

'noise': many of these approaches also inform how he performs live.

> EG: If I'm familiar with the instrument—familiar with what they can do and their limits—then I tend to start off with a level flow of sound, if I'm doing a noise piece. And then I'll incrementally start adding bits and pieces: maybe a second tone, or a third tone. A lot of it is based on: A) intuition, and B) the clock. I'll hold a certain note up until four minutes and twenty-one seconds and then at four minutes and twenty-one seconds I'll add the secondary note. So I'm basically watching the clock, and minutes tick by. And when I feel like enough minutes have ticked by I'll either stop or start bringing it back down. But the small increments build up and find a level, and then they come back down. The way I record here at the desk, the way it's set up, I don't necessarily hear what I'm doing in real time. If I take the keyboard over there and plug it into the recorder, there's no way of hearing it. I can't hear what I'm doing. I only know what it's going to sound like because I know. Because if you do this long enough you know that these two pedals—these two effects boxes—will sound this way at these settings, and that C note will sound this way. So I can repeat certain sounds, and I try to. This way I can say that what I'm doing is repeatable, and therefore I can consider it a type of music, or at least it's structured in a way that can be repeated.

Eddie records using an inexpensive portable cassette tape recorder that does not

have the functionality to listen to what he is recording while he is recording it.

This technique adds a level of indeterminacy, but Eddie's experience with the

procedure has familiarized him, leading to some predictable results. Eddie says

that since the results are "repeatable," then the result can be called "music." One

method of organization Eddie uses is to choose a particular time to engage in a new action. Many composers using algorithmic methods also favor using clock time and stop watches to organize parts of their performances. When I asked Eddie how long his performances normally last, he gave the following answer:

> EG: First of all I really can't control that factor a lot because if you're playing with a few other artists you have to be respectful of their time too. You can't go on too long. I think, honestly, I can wrap it up in about twenty-three minutes; anywhere between fifteen to twenty minutes is fine: twenty-three minutes would be perfect. For longer compositional pieces I would need maybe forty minutes

The passage above shows Eddie is a team player when he collaborates with others, like +Dog+. He cites fifteen to twenty minutes as suitable durations for his performances, with twenty-three minutes as the sweet spot. Longer works are rare for Eddie, but can last as long as forty minutes. When I asked Eddie how he knew when a performance was over, he gave the following vague answer: "I think the composer will know when it's done when the art itself appears: then they'll know it's done: it's simple."

Joseph Hammer's main instrument is the reel-to-reel tape recorder, fed by a playlist on his computer. Part of the reel-to-reel machine is a pre-selected tape loop that typically lasts about twenty seconds long; in his case, the length of the tape loop imparts a particular kind of organization, but his execution of the recording, playback, and erasing of sounds, obscures the length of the loop, and obfuscates the length—and thus the predictability—of hearing the loop. Joseph uses a playlist of audio sources to feed the tape machine; the playlist consists mostly of songs, pieces, and other sonic fragments; Joseph does not use simple sound generators like sine waves, square waves, and white (or pink) noise. Joseph's 'noise' thus consists predominantly of the inundation of juxtaposed and

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superimposed audio sources, added, subtracted, and layered. Below is our

lengthy exchange concerning Joseph's conception of form, from creating and

resolving tensions, to dividing the tape loop in several sections. I begin with the

question, "How do you move from one section to another?"

> JH: Oh yeah, that's a tough one. That's based on taste. Sometimes there is no going into another section. You're in it. It's basically vertical composition.

> DM: Are you improvising?

> JH: Yeah. I suppose in that type of situation there is some sort of structure in order to narrow the parameter of choices so that what starts and ends in between doesn't seem to go through any perceived…, like traditional types of movements. Like something that builds and releases tension.

> DM: And how do you know when something is tense? What is tension?

> JH: They are techniques. Where there are fast staccato things it's tense, and when things are low and strong and drawn out tones, then you're relaxed. So if you just do one or the other, [laughs] without or the other [awkward], then you're technically not going through any movements. But often with duration movement happens just perceptually: you put it in, because your mind does it if you're not paying attention [laughs]. It's like drone music, but I have issues with drone music because I think drone music is specifically drone music. I wish I could make some examples, but I don't have any for you. To a degree Kitten Sparkles was kind of like that, but we have movements where we're choosing sounds that have more tension in them, because they're more staccato-like and more high-pitched like, and other parts that are more sustained lower tones.

> DM: When do you decide to go on to the next section?—or let me put it this way: When do you decide to use a new audio source?

> JH: It's kind of like juggling: you kind of have to keep all things spinning at the same time, so it's just inevitable that you're going to want to move past one thing and move onto another thing. You just keep it rolling, essentially.

> DM: But you're also making choices about which audio source you're going to use next. How do you make that kind of choice?

> JH: Hopefully accidentally [we laugh].

> DM: Well the machine doesn't pick for you.

JH: No it sure doesn't. These are like scenarios where you're stuck being able to do only a few different things. Especially this business of seeing the sound file that I'm going to be taking from and being able to just move that cursor and click: that's what starts coming out.

DM: Are the sound files listed?

JH: Yeah.

DM: Do you have them in the order?

JH: Yeah.

DM: And you just go from one to the other, or do you skip some sometimes?

JH: I skip around. But they are in groups that I get to know simply because they're in a group and I've seen them before; I've dealt with them before.

DM: How do you decide….

JH: They're usually from various sessions where I gather them, so they're probably based chronologically on acquisition, so there would be other sound sources in it that probably are similar in many ways to the other sound sources. I go to some blog that has these avant-classical records, or obscure records, and I'll be just interested in singles from the UK from 1979 to '83 or something. So there will just be a bunch of these weird, obscure English bands. And if I think hard about the parts that I want to take, that's usually what doesn't work out, as far as I'm concerned. I have to get hand-to-ear feedback loop going in order to start to make a composition become interesting, as far as I'm concerned.

DM: Do you think of yourself as a DJ? Or do you just try to make random clicks and just find out.

JH: That's just it: I don't know. I think that there's a random element, but it's sort of hoping that the right part will be there at the right time, but you don't know what it is and you don't know when it is. But you know intuitively about the cycle, because the tape loop is going around at a certain speed, so that's built in.

DM: Are you changing the speed?

JH: No, but there is something that's going on because I'm holding the tape. There's some drag that occurs. And sometimes it gets stuck on something, so we may add time to the loop momentarily. So to somebody who really knows musical time, they'd have to make up for the discrepancies a little bit.

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DM: But there are always discrepancies for each loop?

JH: Oh yeah.

DM: So it's not a real constant loop in terms of time?

JH: No, it's not locked in, but it's very close. It's just a loop of tape going around and around.

DM: How long… [is the tape duration]?

JH: I seem to be into a loop that takes about twenty seconds or so to make a cycle, as opposed to shorter cycles. And I often will catch the larger…, you know, the cycles within…, like the half cycle of an entire tape loop—one revolution—: I can break it into its components: into its pie shape: into its various degrees, equal divisions of that, intuitively. And so I'm adding in things in particular places and moving things in particular places. But that's all the body working. It's all not the conscious mind: that's automatic behavior, and it's a technique and a practice that I've developed through just doing it almost every day for decades.

DM: What do you do when you choose a file that you feel was the wrong file at that moment?

JH: I try to wipe it out on the next pass [laugh].

DM: You can wipe it out that quickly?

JH: Yeah.

DM: Is there ever a time when you dwell on a file for a little while?

JH: Yeah.

DM: Is that bad when that happens?

JH: As far as I'm concerned. But it can't be helped often, because if I'm dwelling it's probably because there's something in it that I'm trying to flesh out, and it may just turn into a practice session, like an exploratory zone, as opposed to…. That's something that I'll use later because in many ways my compositions—my pieces—are improvisations based on certain sets of limitations. Namely, the sound sources that I'm using in that piece, and the length of tape: basically the meter: the cycle of time. Those are really what define my different pieces, is those things, physically. Everything else inside of that is improvisation.

DM: And you never try to speed up or slow down the loop for a different effect?

JH: All you can do are tricks at that point—tape manipulation tricks—which I can do. They definitely show up in my compositions at this point. But when I improvise with other people where I'm adding sounds to an overall mix of sounds, as opposed to being one player making one contribution, I do a lot of manipulation of the speed. But it's all physical. The tape machine doesn't have a vary speed. It actually can't because all these electronic…. There's a bias frequency [laughs]. There are all these technical reasons why it's difficult to change pitch without drastically changing the way that the fidelity is being played back. Slight variations in pitch can actually accentuate certain qualities of the recording process which are interesting and happen as part of just my standard technique, because of the tension that's happening with the tape. But I can retard the fly wheel of the capstan, thus slowing the speed of the tape physically. And if I'm playing back, the tape slows down and you hear the sound of a tape going more slowly, although kind of warbly because instead of it simply going to another speed and resuming an even speed, it's kind of going [makes a sound] *reh reh reh*, like that, but maybe not so extreme because I know how to hold pressure against that wheel that's just enough to slow it down by that amount. So it sounds pretty stable considering what's coming out of it sounds like mulch for the most part anyway, so you never really notice these irregularities.

In the exchange above, Joseph spoke to the limitations of the improvisations he makes with the equipment and materials, some of the techniques for manipulating the reel-to-reel tape machine to affect certain parameters, and perhaps most importantly, how he fleshes out a tape loop through recording, playback, and erasing. Breaking the fixed loop into pieces—by recording, playing back, and erasing—is the principal method he uses to deal with form: the organization of the sonic data magnetically inscribed in the tape loop. Joseph is keenly interested and tuned into duration in a way that other practitioners are not because cyclical repetition using a tape loop is his primary practice. The exchange below occurs in a different part of our interview concerned with the function of duration and how Joseph thinks of duration through divisions of the loop to give form to practice.

DM: The next question: How do your control…, instead of using rhythm and meter, let's just 'duration.' And I guess your entire work is controlling duration in a specific way.

JH: Yeah, it's shifting emphasis in your perception of duration, possibly.

DM: So even though you have a specific duration—a specific length of tape that you're working with—you can still alter the duration by….

JH: I do a lot of stuff where because I can keep moving that playback head on the source material, I usually find some spot, usually because I just set it and let it go, and sounds comes in and an event occurs. Rather than being the event that comes back around and you hear it again and that's the loop is that one thing happening once every cycle, I'll find that same sound but on the source material and put it in at another point in the cycle. So you got that same sound twice in a cycle and you've got a different…, and suddenly you're mind perceives a box, because you're hearing that same sound here and here. And then I'll put in other sounds that break up those particular sounds, sometimes the very same sound itself in another place to fool you into thinking that the loop isn't this long but it's actually that long. They end up in funny places to give you an irregular repetition, like a polyrhythm, kind of; except that it's not a polyrhythm. But I'll often keep putting in the same source again in another place and actually wipe the previous one in another place. So those points that you thought were there and there are now over here and here: maybe here, here, and here. What's nice is that sometimes I'm able to take something that's making you think in fours and shift it or bounce it into a three or a two [laughs].

DM: Do you normally think in terms of twos, threes, and fours?

JH: I hadn't thought of it. I can't say that I have. I think I'm more interested in…, I guess juggling. There's this automatic behavior. That's something that is really part of all kinds of things that we do where we train ourselves how to do things. And our bodies just go ahead and do it, and really so much of our culture and popular culture is these weird dances, where you're not thinking about what you're doing, you're actually taking up time in this activity where you're just doing something. You're not thinking so hard about what you're going to do next. You just take it for granted that what you're going to do next is going to be ok: maybe even enjoyable. But you don't know what it is yet; but you trust that because you have a system that you will perform, that you'll manifest.

In the passage above, Joseph illustrates his method of recording, playback, and erasing in a way that is deceptive to the listener's ability to predict the repetitious cycle of the loop. He uses—for the second time—the analogy of "juggling" to show how sources appear in a loop; some sources are juggled out while others

are juggled in. The passage below continues the idea of loop juggling and

duration deception.

> JH: I play with that loop length. If the loop length is really short, your body starts to really feel that short, repetitious pattern really quickly. You can't escape it. So I like to make tape loops that are about one and half times bigger than that. And then within that cycle of that length of tape I can split it up into pieces that are more like what you would hear on a shorter loop, but I'm fooling you because I'm actually bringing that same sound in again and again. You hear something happen four times, so you figure you just heard a cycle happen four times, but actually you just heard one cycle that had four things happen in it at a regular point that made you think it was repeating. But then I can remove and add things between the sections that you think are repetitious moments to break that cycle: to confuse you, actually, into thinking: "Am I hearing the same thing over and over again?—or am I hearing something else?" Frankly, most contemporary music is made up of cycles of repetitious patterns, so I'm playing with that confusion, because I'm using something that is entirely a repetitious pattern. But I'm not satisfied to enjoy just one repetitious pattern. I like to confuse myself, or make it so that what I'm hearing is a surprise to me.

Confusing and overwhelming the audience is one of Joseph's primary interests,

and he achieves this goal through the organization of the loop cycle by

juxtaposing and superimposing sonic material. I then asked Joseph how long his

performances normally last. "I guess anywhere from ten minutes to several

hours. But I guess usually about a half an hour to sixty minutes," he said. I then

asked how he knew when a performance was finished.

> JH: Often I'm cycling through a certain number of things and if the time limitation is a particular moment, then I just look for a time to release the audience. I have certain sound files that I can say: "I'm done now." I used to never do that. The audience never had a very good indication of when start and end were happening, and my endings were almost always where it could have just kept going, except it faded out and it's done now.

An issue I did not ask Joseph, but perhaps should have is the question: "How do

you know when you have begun?" One unique aspect of Joseph's performances is

that he provides no distinct beginning. The audience waits while he sets up—and

most of the time they are talking because he is setting up—and then he gives no indication that he has begun. He elides the setting up with his performance—or perhaps setting up is part of the performance. The audience may be socializing with oblivious hubbub for well over ten minutes before they realize that Joseph has begun his performance. Joseph begins by fading in the attention of his audience and ends by fading out the sound.

Christiaan Cruz mostly improvises now, but he described a time when he tried to use scores to structure his performances in group projects.

> CC: I tried with scores. I did it with a group and I did all these experimental scores. Nobody wanted to look at that shit. It was all these complex things drawn out and diagrams and stuff. It looked pretty. It looked great. There were a lot of squiggly lines and zig-zags, and lots of stuff. It looked cool and it was on brown paper bags and all that stuff, but nobody followed that shit. They just wound up improvising. And even when I've followed other people's scores I wind up forgetting the directions and everything else too, so you just wind up bullshitting and playing whatever the hell you want anyways.

I remember in the early 2000s David Kendall asked Christiaan and me to perform his *Difference Quartet* that used a video score. The instructions were complicated and difficult to render (reminiscent of David's interest in trying to overload a computer with excessive data). I had a hard time following the score instructions and confessed to Christiaan that I had cheated a little. He confessed that he cheated almost the whole thing. The solution (whether felicitous or infelicitous) is usually a form of improvisation. I asked Christiaan to discus the role of improvisation in his work.

> CC: I guess it's all of it. Even with initial compositions I'm not like a regular composer. I don't have a specific idea. I can't just go to a piece of paper and write out exactly what's going to happen with instructions or whatever. It's completely improvised because I have no idea what I want when I'm starting out. I have no idea what I'm going to use. I have no idea what's going to happen in the end, and I don't even know if I'm going to like it halfway through. So it's completely improvised. I think my mind

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is playing tricks on me, and I don't even believe my opinions: I think my opinions of everything as I'm doing it are improvised as well, because I really don't know what to think of most of what I'm doing until I've been removed from it, maybe a month down the line or something. After I've performed it or something, then I have a proper outlook on what the fuck I did. It's weird.

The notion of "improvised opinion" on the fly is really interesting. To improvise an opinion might mean to make an aesthetic choice in the heat of a performance when several formal and sonic directions are presented to the improviser; or maybe it is a synonym for experimenting with a choice made. In either case the opinion must be "do I like this direction or sound?" or "is this direction or sound useful?" In either case, experimentation and exploration runs through the lens of improvised decision-making that guides the form. Such a practice is probably common to all improvisers, but Christiaan's notion of "improvised opinion" articulates the process in a unique way. When I asked Christiaan how long is performances lasted, he said: "Twenty minutes or more. I think forty minutes has been the longest."

Scott Cazan's methods of organization include algorithms and improvisation, and in some cases he uses short-hand notes as reminders to take certain actions. When I asked Scott about his organization techniques he said:

SC: I use lots of algorithms. Algorithms and interface. I've been studying interface a lot lately, actually. The interface…, what is it?—the Maggie Payne article on Gordon Mumma. Gordon Mumma is fantastic. I forget whether it was her that said it or him that said it, but it's Maggie Payne writing about it. It's called "The Circuit is the Score," and I really believe that. Same with David Tudor. The organizational practice is the system itself.

Gordon Mumma is known for making sound using junk electronics as a "folk" art, since discarded electrical parts were once cheap and easily obtainable. David Tudor was a pioneer in circuit bending, interested in learning what a circuit could

teach him by exploring its potential through improvisational probing as

performance. These two similar methodologies inform Scott's approach to making

sound. Thus Scott's excitement about the circuit as score.[332] Scott continued:

> SC: I think the algorithms themselves are the ways that things are connected. If it's something that I have a very specific outcome for, it's usually just notes—like written notes—or it's a visual score. But then I have this whole other thing, which is written music for other people to play. In that case it's mostly text: text and maybe a little bit of notation. But I don't like rhythm so much. It's new notation, I guess. So it's often very basic notation.

The implication of Scott's statement—through his statement and through my

personal experiences attending Scott's performances—is that he writes scores for

other people to play, or for groups of people to play. He generally does not use

scores for solo performances or performances with one other collaborator. When

I asked Scott how long his performances last, he said:

> SC: Normally twenty minutes…, almost all the time. Unless I have longer. If it's a performance with me and three other people, which usually it is, then about twenty minutes—fifteen to twenty minutes. If it's just me it's forty minutes or so depending….

I believe when Scott referred to "a performance with me and three other people,"

I believe he meant that there were three other people performing that evening,

and not three other collaborators performing with him. My research shows that

most of Scott's performances last between fifteen and twenty minutes. When I

asked Scott when he knew the performance was over, his answer was

indeterminate: "You never know, and that's the hard part. That's a hard one. It's

like, 'When do you know when a piece is done?' And it never is."

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[332] Scott wrongfully attributed the quote "the circuit is the score" to Maggi Payne, and I wrongfully corrected him by saying that it was Gordon Mumma. It was in fact Nicholas Collins in *Leonardo Music Journal* who wrote, "The circuit… became the score."

Michael Winter is another composer heavily invested in algorithms and the use of random procedures. Michael finds organization wherever randomness in missing.

> MW: I don't think much about the technique but, for example, in computer theory you have a subroutine, and if that subroutine runs multiple times then you have structure right there. You have something that's happening again. Maybe something changes—a variable changes in a subroutine—but there's something that's compressible that comes out of it, so there's often structure there. One thing I also like to do is, I wish it was possible, but to search solution spaces and software spaces: to stumble upon something. What would be cool is if I could randomly generate computer programs and see which ones I like. But the problem with that is that the software space is so huge that usually you get a bunch of stuff that you're not interested in. Music is about honing our aesthetics, and I think it has a biological importance in that it helps us survive.

If Michael is correct, that "music is about honing our aesthetics,"—an idea appropriated from Curtis Rhoads and had been reaffirmed by his dissertation mentor, Gregory Chaitin—the honing is a continuous decision-making process to get what the composer (or listener) wants. Eliminating redundancies—repetitive measures—is itself an organizing principle in Michael's work, compressing redundancies as far as possible. This balance between highly organized computer programming and an interest in entropy is key to understanding Michael's work. But Michael also has staunch ideas on the nature of composition and music. Before our interview, I had read Michael's "Structural Metrics: An Epistemology"—a dissertation he claims is rooted in music—and I noticed that he did not use the term "improvisation" anywhere in the text. Since improvisation is important to most of the people I studied, I was eager to ask, "So how does improvisation work in your music?" after prefacing the question with Cage's dislike for improvisation in the context of the realization of his *Variations V*, that was realized by Malcolm Goldstein and James Tenney with improvisational

elements. He responded by jokingly asking me what I meant by 'improvisation.' I said: "One definition that comes to mind, since your dissertation doesn't talk about improvisation at all, you say that most music is composed, and composed means that the rules comes before the sound, and that it's *not* spontaneous—that was the word you used. Well one of the definitions of improvisation is 'spontaneous composition,' and so that could be a springboard for a definition for improvisation." Of course I had just read Michael's dissertation, and Michael himself had given himself some mental distance from the project for over a year to focus on composition. In his answer, Michael shifted the terminology from improvisation to "open" elements, a maneuver I assume bringing him closer to the indeterminate practices of John Cage.

> MW: There are a lot of things in my music that are open, but those often take a fair amount of consideration before a performance, so maybe they're not so spontaneous. But ultimately what happens from performance to performance, that's the piece. The score is not the piece; the algorithm that generated the score is not the piece: *the piece is what happens*.
>
> DM: Talk about what happens in the open sections? Or what kinds of things are possible when you are describing something as 'open.'
>
> MW: Often instrumentation is open, but that's not something you can often decide spontaneously in the process of realizing the piece. I'm not sure I leave much up for spontaneous interpretation. But ultimately what happens is never the same, so that has to do with that instance of the work, or of the realization of the work. The work *is* the realization; it's *that* realization. I don't have much music with on-the-fly—apart from where musicality decisions are made in the moment of realization.

I did not press Michael further to discuss the nature of "musicality decisions." I then asked him how long his pieces normally lasted. Since his works are algorithmic and rely heavily on relationships between one element and another, the length of his works has the potential for great variability between short

durations and long durations. His answer was "However long it takes, I guess."

To try to get a more specific answer, I asked, "What is your longest piece?"

> MW: My longest piece is forever, I guess. I have these pieces that are titular…, not jokes per se, but I have a piece called *Almost Every Piece*. All it says is: "Random at a very high sampling rate." And of course it's this play on the idea that if you let it run long enough you'll get every piece that has ever existed. But not only every piece but every performance of every piece. A lot of my pieces are not defined by strict lengths, they're defined by relativities. For example: 'This part needs to be five times longer than this part,' so you have to define a unit duration. So the idea there, again, and this is completely in keeping with this idea of a program that is fundamentally…—like Jim's piece *Having Never Written a Note for Percussion*—

Here he gives an example. "Often it's based on the process. You have to go through the process. You can't cut it off. So this chord in *Maximum Change* repeats 256 times. If I do it one every ten minutes it's going to be 2560 minutes." Michael's forms tend to use proportional relationships to determine durations.

GX Jupitter-Larsen's experimental 'noise' group, the Haters, has a different set of personnel depending on where he is playing. In Los Angeles, the Haters is generally GX, his wife Jessica King, and Elden Man. When I asked GX how he organizes his performances, he had a most concise, minimalist explanation. "I start and then I stop when I get bored; or I stop just before I get bored. That's it." For further clarification, I asked: "When you recruit a new person to be part of the Haters, what do you tell them in terms of performance instructions?" GX said,

> GX: I tell them, "Whatever you do, just do that and don't stop until I tell you to." That's it. Whatever you're going to do, do it for as long as I'm doing what I'm doing. That was the traditional pitch. Essentially it evolved to a point where one person, or a pair of people, would do something, and then if there were any other performers, then they would react or interact with whatever that function was. But however they interacted with it, they had to be consistent and constant. That's it.

I then asked about the nature of improvisation in his work. His response:

> GX: I never think about it. I never think in those terms. I have a pretty good idea of what's going to happen. I think about what it is that I'm going to do. I have a pretty good idea of what's going to happen, and then I do it to see if it comes true—and it almost always does.

This sort of experimentation is not like the sort of experimentation that people who do "experimental music" do—activity concerning sound in which the sonic outcome is not known. GX's experimentation is more like testing the repeatability of a scientific experimentation. He continues an action having a good idea of the outcome, and the experiment is to find out if his hypothesis was correct, and usually, according to GX, it is. GX does not, however, say that the veracity of the result is either good or bad, only that it met his expectations. According to GX his performances usually last between twelve and twenty minutes.

Casey Anderson has a background in jazz improvisation with the saxophone and came to coding through his studies in experimental music. As he explains below, graphic representations of possible performance activities have become convenient for him.

> CA: Especially just for thinking through things, scores are the best way to do it. I do scores, and lately I've started to do more graphic scores, so those are just structures. I think a lot about structures and relationships, and a lot of times I plot those out by hand on paper in words, or little diagrams and drawings. So I think because I perform and have performed so much, the score is a very comfortable metaphor for thinking about things. I grew up reading a lot, so writing things in words has always been really natural for me, and much more naturally than writings notes on a page. But also, if I'm dealing with indeterminacy, it makes more sense to describe those things as a trajectory within a certain range, or a across a range, in words or via some sort of graph-looking drawing. So lately that's what it has been. Otherwise it's just this moment-to-moment improv thing. But I don't feel like those things are unrelated; I feel like they overlap quite a bit.

> DM: In terms of indeterminacy?

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CA: The relationship between structure and indeterminacy, and listening. So maybe those are the real things I'm talking about, because I think that those things exist in any of the forms that I work in. So it makes sense that you can go through the history of improvised music and see a lot of these people engaged with Cage, etcetera, in some way. It's interesting that Cage supposedly hated improvising so much. It's weird, because I thought it was a very natural thing [for me] to get interested in Cage, given that I was predominately interested in improvising.

Cage's scores certainly had an influence on Casey; he was drawn to Cage specifically through the connection he perceived between improvisational actions and actions left open to the performer or through chance. Casey uses scores, algorithmic techniques, and improvisation in broad ways to structure his works. I then asked him how long his performance normally lasted.

CA: If I'm doing something by myself, lately it has been in the ten to twenty minutes range. That's something that's hard, because by myself I lose track. When it's just me, I'm doing so many things. I don't know, I haven't really figured that out yet. I, and a lot of other people, settle into a particular duration pretty easily, and if you're not conscious of that, I think it becomes like you're doing the same length piece or set over and over again. If there's not a reason that it needs to be like that, why couldn't it be even shorter or much longer? I think it's dictated by the piece. But with the computer music stuff, there are structured improv things where I could potentially go on for a long time, and just stop when I feel like I've done enough. I think lately they've been ten to fifteen minutes.

In many cases the length of a piece is indeterminate for Casey. This is especially evident because he "lose[s] track" of duration; and even a structured computer program can lead him to a lengthy performance. Nevertheless his performances remain between ten and twenty minutes. When I asked him how he knew when a performance was finished. He gave a thoughtfully revealing answer.

CA: I think it depends on what you're going for or what the idea is. For example, a sine tone for twenty minutes maybe. Ok, fine. If that's at a volume level where you have to really search for it, that's kind of a lot to do for the listeners, so that could potentially take a good amount of time. I feel like I can imagine myself doing that relatively quickly. When I think

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of that kind of a situation, let's say it takes a minute or two minutes to figure out what's going on, hear it, and then really listen to the relationship that this one sine tone may be equalized with the ambient sound of the room, to some degree. Ok, fine. But do I get a benefit out of doing that for more than, say, ten minutes? I would say 'no.' So that's one example of me trying to think through that kind of a scenario, otherwise when improvising, I think of things in terms of streams a lot. So if you have three people improvising and one of them is soloing, so to speak, or inserting new information and taking command over what's going on, then the other two people can either present contrasting information similar to the soloist, in which case you're quickly getting into your European improv territory where everybody is doing their own thing at the same time, or one or both of those other people not soloing can be in the background. When that person closes off what sounds like a thought, and stops for a second, to me that would be like saying, "I am done." It doesn't have to be rhythmic, but it's like, if you're thinking about these things, especially in the Wadada Leo Smith sense, where there is a proportional amount of sound and silence, then how long does an idea really need to be going on? Maybe it's hard to put your finger on, but I feel you kind of know when it's done. You don't just keep talking endlessly. Even me, and I have a tendency to ramble. You know—it's kind of a natural thing—you know that you've said what you need to say, and then you stop. I think that just comes through experience. That's an extremely abstract concept, and it's something I have a lot of problems with. I get into arguments at rehearsals all the time, especially in an improv context where (I think), "We collectively ran through three separate endings, and every time we kept going, it got worse." And then what does that even mean? I'm not really sure, I just know that that was what was going off in my head is, "This needs to be over now. We just closed off a thought somehow, or a statement." So I guess it comes back to thinking about it maybe verbally.

Casey applied the question concerning when a performance was over to the context of playing with other musicians, and expressed frustration at moments that he felt the performance was over. In one instance he claimed to have heard three distinct closures before the piece was finally ended: implicit in my question, How do you know when it's done? is the question: What is the nature of a closure? Casey's monolog illustrates the internal struggle concerning the nature of closure. What at one moment seems like a frustrated conservatism—Casey's actual *knowing* of when a piece is over—is tempered by a self-critique—"That's an extremely abstract concept, and it's something I have a lot of problems with."

Ultimately I find the passage above illustrative of a thesis I developed during

improvisation studies courses with both Renee Coulombe and Amy Beal: namely,

that group improvisation is political. In other words, Casey's story provides an

example of improvisers as subjects politically negotiating the end of a piece

through musical gestures of some sort.

Damion Romero's performances generally consist of low frequency sounds

at high volume that slowly shift over time. When I asked him how he organized

his performances, he said the following:

> DR: I'd say it's improvisational, but I don't use a score. Occasionally I'll
> have a general set length of time that I'll play or be asked to play, but
> even that is not always so set. I guess there's a physical system inside the
> stuff that I build, so I think a lot of the composition is in the physical
> aspect of it. I don't think about composition too much because I don't
> think in terms of a narrative in my work or anything like a…. It's not about
> time, I guess. I think it's more in search of some kind of suspension of
> time, maybe. I don't know. It's definitely not… I'm not trying to tell stories
> or anything like that. The physical stuff is designed to get the sounds I'm
> trying to get, so that's where the composition is, really.

Damion claims that his works are non-narrative, and that he aims to create the

sensation of the suspension of time. And yet Damion is engaging with his

equipment constantly during his performances, and those actions must constitute

some kind of form. But an aesthetic toward the sensation of suspended time has

a long history among composers and listeners (Olivier Messiaen's *Quarter for the*

End of Time comes to mind, or even JS Bach's *Goldberg Variations* written as a

soporific). When I asked Damion how long his performances lasted he said:

> DR: I think average about fifteen minutes. That's average. One of the
> shortest was—well I've probably played short, but that I can think of—was
> seven minutes or so, anywhere up to an hour, though that would be at the
> request of the organizer of the event. I don't generally play that long at
> all. Fifteen minutes. I have a hard time knowing how much time has gone
> by, so I need to watch that. The seven-minute show I thought was fifteen
> minutes but it had only been seven, so it's really hard for me to gage

time. But if it's really good maybe it should go on longer, but I usually stop when I feel like I've lost track with where I'm going with it.

Fifteen to twenty minutes is the typical set time for Damion's performances, but he is not counting. Damion decides that a performance is over when he loses track of the direction the work was taking him in.

Don Bolles' main experimental 'noise' project is his duo with Joseph Hammer called Kitten Sparkles. Don discussed the notion of organization through his intermedia performance antics. Kitten Sparkles performances include recordings from Don's shortwave radio collection and other recordings manipulated through Joseph's reel-to-reel machine. Toward the peak of the performance Don shines a bright strobe light at the audience between eight and thirteen pulses per second to further induce a hypnotic response. Below Don discusses the general structure of the performance.

> DB: In Kitten Sparkles, it's like what I said. It's a particular thing. So it has to have a human structure. You have to start it really slow in a dark room. It has all those parameters of the final outcome being someone in this crazy space trance for as long as the power stays on. That's the final outcome. You build it up until that, and then it just peaks, because it just can't go any higher once you have the sound going on and the strobe going on. You can't go any higher unless you just absolutely kill everyone, or something crazy like that. You really can't go much higher. You don't really want to either. You could go faster and crazier, but people couldn't perceive it. It's right at the edge to where it's a blur, to where it just seems like a bright light. It's before that, so it's still a pulse.

Don describes Kitten Sparkles performances as having a narrative structure to induce trance (elsewhere in the interview he referred to the performance procedure as "forced mass meditation"). I asked Don what the nature of improvisation was in his work.

> DB: It's like emergence theory, really. It's like emergence or information theory. It's to create universes. That's all you're doing. You're creating a new universe, or you're expounding on the one you're in in some way that

seems compatible with—like if you're doing it with others—with what they're doing. You guys get in the zone.

Don said that Kitten Sparkles performances normally last between forty-five minutes to an hour. At the performance I attended at Dem Passwords in West Hollywood, Kitten Sparkles played for about forty-five minutes.

Bob Bellerue uses an assortment of instruments, including two laptops, some effects pedals, a contact mic, and a mixer. His method of organization for 'noise' performances is to improvise around a simple structure. When I asked if he used scores or serial methods, he said:

> BB: Fuck all that shit. That's not for me. I really like improvisation with a basic structure. So with repeated gigs or especially with tours I tend to start falling into a pattern which I like where I'll start with something, and then I know that I can go toward this other thing. But in the meanwhile I can still just fool around and see what happens, and sometimes something falls over and that becomes part of it; or I push the wrong button, you know. I like it because it's exciting to be really present in the moment and listening to what's happening, not being able to hide my mistakes, having to follow through with every action, but then also knowing I have a route to go to, if suddenly I get in over my head. Then I'll think, "I should do that next." I try to be patient with myself. Sometimes I'll want to go to something and I'll have to set it up first; and sometimes I want to just go there! "No way, let's just check: are the settings right?" I try to make sure that I'm ready to go there so that when I go there I can be committed to it. But usually it's more like I'm changing things and I build stuff up and I take things out. I often don't have big dramatic changes, and I try to let myself do that sometimes, even at the expense of making a mistake and suddenly it's really quiet and it's really tense, and then I think: "Ok, that's how it's going to be."

Bob shows that with the experience of years of performances he has developed certain tendencies in his work. These tendencies form loose patterns and structures that ultimately give rise to his unique style. Through improvisatory exploration and 'mistakes,'—unintended sounds and events during a performance—he enjoys the new paths they provide for him to explore, and yet he partially grounds himself by the instruments he chooses and how he decides

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to set them up through cables and basic settings, and through a basic formal

roadmap he has in his mind. Mistakes can either be explored in real time, by

accepting them and working further with them, or the mistakes can be tempered

by changing to a new set of semi-planned possibilities that are, in a sense, easier

to control because the possibility of mistakes is abated. Listening to the

succession of sounds and being patient with their idiosyncratic possibilities,

adding and subtracting sounds and layers, and accepting and working with

unexpected results are hallmarks of Bob's improvised performances. In a

different part of his interview he discussed his trio called KILT, with himself,

Sandor Finta, and Raven Chacon. KILT can be any two members, or all three

members, since they each live in different States. Bob discussed how Raven

structured KILT performances when they went on tour.

> BB: With KILT, we did this US tour five years ago. For part of it, it was me
> and Sandor and I was solo, and for part of it, it was me and Raven. With
> Raven, going into it before the first gig he said, "What do you want to
> do?" and I said, "Why don't you come up with a score for us tonight?" So
> he came up with this simple score in terms of a slow build for so many
> minutes, and then at a certain point he would play flute, and then that
> was a sign of going into something…. So we had this really simple
> structure that worked really well, and we just stuck with it for the first
> week and a half, and then for the last few gigs we just abandoned it and
> just did whatever. And that was nice because each night he would say,
> "Let's do this build for nine minutes…, no no no: eleven minutes." And he
> always had his watch, so he would check his time, and I just let him do
> that, and then I could be drunk and stoned and just riding the waves and
> enjoying being able to follow what he was up to.

For Bob, solo performances tend to have a structure internal to him and his

knowledge of the equipment he uses, but when working with others like Raven

(who he met while attending Cal Arts), a simple score was helpful for organizing

particular parts of the performance. Raven relied on clock time to organize and

schedule certain events, while Bob relied on certain organizational cues, like the

example of the flute, to trigger a new section. When I asked Bob how long is

performances normally lasted, he said that fifteen to twenty minutes was typical

for his solo sets. I then asked when he knew a performance was finished.

> BB: It just happens. It feels like there's a resolution. I really like being
> able to end things in a way, but sometimes you have to just turn it off too
> and go, "Holy fuck." Even though these dramatic endings where you just
> unplug the mixer or whatever, can be really splashy and exciting, at the
> same time, I find I like it better for the audience to trail out something.
> That, in a way, has a final…. With the KILT thing we were at the end [for]
> a lot of the shows. We would be fading out, doing this heavy thing, and
> then we would both turn off something and it would be gnarly but it would
> get quieter and drawn out, and I would do something that would be
> whistling or something: this quiet sound would get picked up, as a way of
> letting the audience recover or something. And just for giving it shape.
> Because this block end of [mouth noise] pbpbpbpbp, could get old I
> guess. It depends on the purpose. Damion [Romero] could pull the abrupt
> ending off really well because with a lot of his sound, I always imagine I
> have curly qs coming out of my ears when I finally get done with listening
> to him.

Bob describes the two basic kinds of endings in experimental 'noise'—the abrupt

ending, and the fade-out. The fade-out can vary between a slow fade-out over

the course of a minute, and a relatively quick fade-out lasting only a few

seconds. Though Bob admires the affective results of Damion's performances,

which often end abruptly from an extreme loud intensity, Bob favors a fade-out

of some sort, to aid the audience in anticipating the ending; to give them a

gentle landing.

Joe Potts, cofounder of the LAFMS, has been performing the longest out of

the people I interviewed. When I asked him how he organized his performances,

he said:

> JP: It's improvisational, primarily. The closest to a score is more like a
> strategy in terms of what the instrumentation will be and those kinds of
> parameters—volume levels and…. Although a lot of that is improvised.
> Especially working with Joseph Hammer: we never rehearse before we
> play; we have almost never talked about what we were going to do before
> we started to play. But then we seem to pick up on these compositional

ideas, like what volume level we're going to play at. That kind of thing. So it's weird I guess. But as far as structure, it's the same principles: to try to create that arc so people feel like you've taken them on a journey, or that kind of thing.

Most importantly, structure is never discussed between him as his collaborators, but is innate to the various instruments chosen for the performances, and the possibilities of their mixture. Joe appeals to a 'strategy,' but even the strategy is largely improvised. Joe uses the metaphor of an arc to narrativize the formal structure for the audience. When I asked how long his performances usually last, Joe gave the following response.

> JP: What has become traditional for noise is twenty-minute sets. So that's what I play. Although (with) AIRWAY, the idea is to play for at least an hour, if not longer. But it almost never works out that way. For one thing, usually the drummers can't play continuously for that long, even though there are usually multiple drummers. When AIRWAY was going strong, we rarely made it over twenty minutes before we got shut down by the venues. Ideally an hour for AIRWAY.

Most fascinating in this passage is that Joe advances the notion of a "tradition for 'noise'" through its typical durations: about twenty minutes. As an older participant, he has the vantage point, and perhaps the authority, to make an assessment of traditional procedures by their historical usages with regard to experimental 'noise' scenes in Los Angeles. My research in this chapter confirms that twenty minutes is typical for an experimental 'noise' performance. Nevertheless, in his performances with his larger group AIRWAY, one hour is preferred, but the hour is rarely reached either because the band has been shutdown by the venue, a circuit has been broken due to excessive power requirements, or since drummers are required, the drummers simply run out of steam. So even though Joe prefers hour-long AIRWAY performances, they rarely reach past twenty minutes.

Maria Garcia is one of the younger people I interviewed. When I asked her

how she structured and organized her performances, she said:

> MG: I haven't always done this but I've been doing this recently, where I
> note out the steps for what I'd like to do, because I feel like a part of it
> ends up, not necessarily improv, but just figuring out what's sounding
> good at that moment. I map out, or at least write a little note to myself,
> step by step, of where I'd like for my set to go—how I'd like for my set to
> go. Like, 'Start this loop,' or 'begin scratching the board now.' I usually
> have a little sheet that I try to keep with me when I'm playing.
>
> DM: Do you improvise?
>
> MG: I think it ends up being like problem solving more than improv, just
> figuring out what's going to complement what's coming out already with
> the sources that you have already. It's a little bit more than improv'ing.

Maria uses "problem solving" techniques to adjust and complement other sounds

and processes in her work. She structures her work with notes jotted down on

paper to keep her performances on track to achieve her aesthetic goals. When I

asked her how long her sets normally last, she said: "Between five to ten

minutes. Sometimes a little longer."

Samur Khouja must be organized in his professional career as an audio

engineer and producer. As a practitioner of experimental 'noise' his creativity is

expressed differently. When I asked him how he organized his experimental

'noise' sets with Conscious Summary, he gave the following answer:

> SK: A lot of it is improvised and a lot of it is pulling the sounds out of my
> head. A lot of it is verbal, especially if I'm communicating with other
> musicians. It's like a mixture of things. I'll have something in my head—
> especially with Conscious Summary. I like to have these zones or these
> moods—I have these moods that are like building blocks. So we'll move
> from one mood to the next, and I'll explain these moods to the musicians
> or to myself, and then whatever is the best way to get from A to B, or
> from A to wherever you want to go: A to emotion, or A to love, or A to
> hate, or A to confusion, or A to something silly—to the next part. In sets
> with Conscious Summary in seven minutes it went from this minimalist,
> atonal, arrhythmic, free jazz-inspired stuff to heavy, crazy drones that
> twist your brain a little bit, into really harsh aggressive noise, and into this
> dreamy folk that sounds like you're on heroin next door to a concert hall,

and that now you're listening to the orchestra, and I'll write those parts out. But my core—when I'm playing with other people who just know how I work, and I'm fortunate that I can explain the moods and the building blocks to them—a lot of them are songs, and I end up naming these moods and they end up becoming songs essentially. So really we're just playing these songs I wrote, and they're like any other noise piece you'd hear.

Conscious Summary is often a solo project for Samur, but sometimes he performs with other musicians or incorporates a visual element, with someone doing projections on a wall. When performing with others, verbal instructions concerning the general direction by mood are typical, and sometimes written instructions are required to facilitate memory. When Conscious Summary is just Samur, he improvises his sets with a general idea of what he wants to do, and then executes his performances moving from zone to zone, mood to mood. When I asked Samur how long his sets normally last, he said, "Around ten to fifteen minutes. Lately they've been really short." Samur played for almost twenty minutes when he played at the event I hosted called FFFF Series at South of Sunset Gallery in Echo Park.

Experimental 'noise' performances often use some form of improvisation. Sometimes the nature of improvisation in a performance is relatively structured, so the performer might have an idea to improvise using a certain instrument or set of instruments for part of the performance, and another set of instruments for a different part of the performance. Some performers prefer algorithms, and the algorithms generally have some improvisational gestures associated, and given what those gestures are, a whole battery of operations may follow from the algorithm. Whether a performer uses algorithms or not, many performers use a certain amount of automated procedures, whether it is a cassette tape playing, a key taped down holding a tone or a noise generator, a delay or reverb effect set

for very long repeats (or infinite repeats), a loop sampler, or an envelope

generator (ADSR) ramping to a set amplitude, holding the amplitude, decaying

the amplitude, and releasing the sound until it fades out.

Summary—Organization Principles

This section on the organization principles used by the informants I

interviewed in the Los Angeles experimental 'noise' scenes has shown that the

overwhelming majority of performers improvise using a loose structure. Of the

people I interviewed, everyone who specified that they use algorithms in their

work attended Cal Arts for their graduate work in composition, with the exception

of John Wiese who did undergraduate work at Cal Arts in graphic design. About

half of those interviewed had either made scores, used general notes, or had

given verbal instructions to direct a collaborative performance. Many performers

use no notes and do not rehearse. A few used collage techniques: I interpreted

collage to mean either a field recording mixed into a performance situation, or a

recorded collage mixed into a performance situation, usually as a cassette tape

(though other media are possible). For the chart I made—Organizational

Principles at a Glance—I established three categories of structure: loose

structure, medium structure, and total structure. I define total structure in the

context of the total serialists, who attempted to control every parameter of sound

possible. No artist I interviewed used total structure. Loose structure is defined in

three basic ways: a few performance notes, a small score with general

instructions, or a general idea of how the performance should transpire. I define

medium structure as having more specific or elaborate notes (or scores) than

loose structure.

Joe Potts commented that "[what] has become traditional for noise is twenty-minute sets." My research has mostly corroborated Joe's assessment. The shortest experimental 'noise' set I experience was a performance by touring Japanese artist Masonna when he played a set in Pasadena on October 16, 2004: also on that bill was Damion Romero, the Cherry Point (Phil Blankenship), and Bastard Noise (Eric Wood). Masonna played for a few minutes at most. Performances under ten minutes are rare in the experimental 'noise' scenes in Los Angeles. Fifteen to twenty minutes is typical. Some artists, like Joseph Hammer, typically play longer sets.

Table 6: Organizational Principles at a Glance

	Improvisation	Algorithm	Loose Structure	Medium Structure	Total Structure	Collage / Assemblage	Score/ Notes
DK	*	*	*				*
HP	*						
NM	*		*			*	
GH	*		*				
JW	*	*	*			*	*
EM	*		*			*	*
EG	*		*				
JH	*		*	*		*	
CC	*		*				*
SC	*	*	*				*
MW		*	*	*			*
GX	*		*				*
CA	*	*	*				*
DR	*		*	*			
DB	*		*			*	
BB	*	*	*				*
JP	*						
MG	*		*				
SK	*		*				*

Table 7: Performance Durations

	Performance Durations
DK	20-25 minutes
HP	5 minutes
NM	5-10 minutes
GH	15-20 minutes
JW	20-25 minutes
EM	15-30 minutes
EG	15-25 minutes
JH	30-60 minutes
CC	20 minutes
SC	15-20 minutes
MW	Not specified
GX	12-20 minutes
CA	10-20 minutes
DR	15-20 minutes
DB	45-60 minutes
BB	15-20 minutes
JP	20 minutes
MG	5-15 minutes
SK	10-20 minutes

IV. The Function of Timbre; Volume; Rhythm, Meter, and Duration

The previous section focused on general organization procedures for performing experimental 'noise' sets. This section focuses on four basic parameters to further understand the techniques and practices of the practitioners of experimental 'noise' artists in Los Angeles. The parameters discussed are timbre, volume, meter, and duration. These parameters can be used to articulate important events in a performance, or they can be viewed as containers within themselves. For example, by analyzing timbre by its constituent harmonic content, we analyze the form of a sound. Stockhausen wrote in *Towards a Cosmic Music*, "composing a single 'timbre' is indivisibly linked with the composition of an entire work," and in "Four Criteria of Electronic Music" he wrote: "I would even go so far as to say that form and material have to be considered as one and the same. I think it is perhaps the most important fact to come out of the twentieth century."[333] The four functions questioned are inextricably linked with issues of form, technique, and aesthetics. In most cases I asked these questions in order—timbre, volume, meter and rhythm, and duration. In some cases I began with the function of volume first and then timbre. In many cases, the functions of meter, rhythm, and duration were elided.

I begin with the question: *What is the function of timbre in your work?* Timbre is generally defined as the 'quality' of sound—colloquially it is described as the 'color' of sound, so that a particular timbre is understood metaphorically as a particular hue. We can analyze timbre by the structure of its harmonic content, but we must also take into consideration the morphology of that content in time, for example, the timbre of a piano is inextricably linked with the decay of

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[333] Stockhausen, *Stockhausen on Music*, 111.

its volume, so that timbre is more than the harmonic content associated with a pitch, it is also dependent on its envelope shapes that determine part of its morphology from attack to decay.

Some of the practitioners I interviewed were not familiar with the term timbre. For those artists, I would explain the term similarly to how I defined it above: as the 'quality' of sound, or more metaphorically, as the 'color' of sound, with each particular timbre understood similarly to the term 'hue' in the visual world. I also explained that in the guitar world the term 'tone' maps onto the term 'timbre.' Finally, I would explain that using a graphic equalizer was a common way of manipulating timbre, but not the only way. The term 'sound' can be (and often is) used as a synonym for timbre. When we ask the question, "How does it sound?" we are in fact asking chiefly about its timbral components. Other factors include how high or low the sound is, and how loud or soft the sound is, but the general idea of how something sounds is expressed by its harmonic characteristics: its timbre. Elsewhere I ask the question: What sounds do you value? Although this is a question concerning timbre in disguise, another possible answer is that the valued sounds are loud sounds. On one level, such an answer might seem to pass through and beyond issues of timbre. However, volume that is increased or decreased is never neutral: in other words, significant changes in volume affect the harmonic characteristics of a sound, thus its timbre is changed. Since I want to explore the hypothesis that experimental 'noise' has at its core the priority of timbre over pitch, this question interests me greatly. Since our language for discerning timbral nuances is limited, we can expect the descriptions to be rich in metaphor. One issue I had when asking the question about the function of timbre is that many people answered the question as a theory of timbre, rather than

how they use and handle timbre. In any case I found digressions toward a theory of timbre to be a good issue to have.

The second question asked in this section is: *What is the function of volume in your work?* Volume is an obsession for many artists working in experimental 'noise.' The name of one of the most important magazines in this field is called *As Loud As Possible.* Extreme volume not only alters the timbral characteristics of sound, it can also render sound physical. Transforming a sonic experience into a physical experience is quite different from following pitches as they organize into coherent melodies and harmonies as in the Western tradition of music making. The effect of a physical experience from extreme volume can vary between piercing knife-in-ear treble frequencies to an almost gentle sonic massage using low frequencies. Some performers—like the Japanese Onkyo scene, or the Wandelweiser Group—focus on extreme low volume, forcing listeners to struggle with the physical act of hearing (in contradistinction to the interpretive act of listening). Volume can also be used as an organization principle. Amongst the Cal Arts composers I interviewed, I often liked to bring up the case of James Tenney's piece *Having Never Written a Note for Percussion* because the score is simple: it begins at piano, crescendos to maximum volume, and diminuendos to piano al niente. In other words, the piece is structured by the gradual rise and fall of volume. Such a formal technique is often found in experimental 'noise' by those who have no knowledge of Tenney's piece, but it is also a governing principle for other types of music.

The next question I asked is *What is the function of meter (or rhythm) in your work*? If music is defined simply as the organization of sound, I found that meter is defined most simply as the organization of beats or pulses into groups.

Experimental 'noise' generally avoids meter or regular rhythms, but sometimes meterless pulse is found, or sometimes two (usually low) pitches can create a third frequency (through difference tones or heterodyning) that can create an incidental rhythm. Other times rhythmic meters are used for contrast to noise, but in general experimental 'noise' excludes any kind of rhythmic regularity or meter. The difference between rhythm and meter is that meter is dependent on frequency—on a measurably frequent pulse or beat (or the perception of frequency)—while rhythm, more strictly, can be understood as any change in duration. Since most people understand rhythm as 'the beat'—where 'the beat' does *not* mean pulse, but actually means *rhythm within a meter*—I have placed issues of rhythm and meter together.

Since meter is generally not used, the question of the function of meter thus often elides immediately with the next question: *What is the function of duration in your work?* In the previous section I asked a question concerning the total length of a performance as a function of the formal principals that organize the work (if music is the organization of sound, then the most fundamental organization must be its total duration: it starts here; it ends here). The question of duration thus elides the issue of—what I call—*microform* (the organization of beats in a measured meter) and *macroform* (larger divisions of a durational whole). The question of duration concerns how long an action should last, whether the action is very short, or lasts the entire performance. In some cases, the issue of duration is gleaned from other parts of my interview with a given subject.

David Kendall's sounds come mostly from his computer. He favors "sound that has a lot of features" with "a lot of detail." When I asked him about the function of volume, he said that he uses volume to generate a cathartic experience for his audience. "Sometimes there can be great tension caused by pauses especially. But it's characterized by extremes of one sort or another. So it's either extreme volume or this sort of extreme tension created by a lack of volume," he said. Volume provides tension and relief from tension. Tension is created at either extreme: extreme loud volume, or extreme soft volume.

Henry Perez uses circuit-bent pedals and devices in his performances. When I asked him what kinds of sounds he valued, he said, "I want to hear something like really loud and just distorted and chaotic." When I asked, "What lies at the edge of noise music?" he said: "Probably when it starts having a beat." Henry likes to perform as loud as he is allowed to play, values loud, distorted, and chaotic sounds without a beat.

Nial Morgan's set up usually includes a mixer, a four-track cassette recorder with pre-recorded four-track cassette cartridges, a handheld Walkman-type recorder, and some guitar effect pedals. Equalization techniques are important to his practice. "I try to EQ it to be as dense as possible, and like it as sharp and as dense as possible, and punchy." When I asked him about the functions of high and low frequencies in his work, he described a confusing performance situation when he aimed to get high sounds but ended up with low sounds: the process was the *hunt for the tone*.

> NM: I've been getting more accustomed to the lows, especially when I play live I tend to craft it more in the style of harsh noise wall. But I've been using a lot more low feedback than highs, because every time I play live and I plan to get really high feedback, I always get low feedback. So now that I've been getting low feedback, I just kind of build on that, and try to make that sound as interesting as I can: hunt for it; *hunt for the*

tone. Like that one tone that you really want. You gotta really search for it, because there's so much harsh noise out there already, it's been done over and over, you know. You can play every frequency at once and still sound the same as The Rita or Pedestrian Deposit or Impregnable. For me I'll have to sit down and fine-tune all of my EQ and distortion to where it's just the right rumble.

Here 'tone' does not refer to pitch, but to timbre. The tone knob on a guitar works as a high frequency attenuator, and setting the equalization on a guitar amplifier is referred to as setting the tone. Though Nial does not play guitar, the reference to tone clearly means timbre here. He sets the EQ and the distortion pedal to achieve the effect he wants in combination with his other gear and the amplification system. Nial sometimes hunts for the harmony that "rumbles." Such a rumble presumably would be rich in low frequencies with a certain amount of undulation. "You gotta really search for it…" implies a certain amount of improvisatory exploration to achieve the desirable effect; such an effect is not a simple preset that can be easily recalled, but perhaps a set of conditions that would achieve an acceptable rumbling effect. When I asked Nial how volume functions in his performances, he said "for the harsh stuff, what I've been doing lately is, I'll cue a very quiet loop or melody to focus on, and then when the harsh stuff comes in it's so much louder than everything else, that it contrasts…." Volume is used to create contrast from one section to another in his work. Nial does not use rhythm, but he sometimes uses a technique to create undulating pulses between two low frequency oscillators.

> NM: I don't really use rhythm too much in Wrong Hole. But sometimes I'll trigger two bass frequencies to trigger a wave form to cancel out some of the higher frequencies I'm hearing when I'm playing live, and I'll make it kind of rhythmic like: wa-wa-wa-wa-wa-wa [makes an undulating bass sound with his mouth at about six cycles per second.] Just so that the melodies beneath rise up when it's on the crest. I try to stay as far away from rhythm when I do the harsh noise.

Nial avoids rhythm and metric regularity.

Greh Holger's sounds come mostly from old analog synthesizers that he uses mostly for the wave-shaping controls. He usually tapes a key down and manipulates the parameters of the sound by adjusting knobs and sliders. When I asked Greh about the function of timbre in his work, he answered in the following manner.

> GH: I think with electronic music, and synthesizers especially, it's easy to adjust and dial in the color and the tone and the breadth and the resonance of your sound, and those colliding sounds. I like things that sound like cicadis or cicadas [the insect]. I like things that sound like insects, or that sound like trees rustling. Slow, murky, earth-moving, grinding, grumbling. But it's not something I know by a technical term. It's something I know by sound, and by feeling. It's how I describe everything that I do musically. It's not by a sound or a feeling when it sounds right to me. It's much easier for me to sit in front of a piece of equipment and tune it to a way that I want to hear than it is to talk about it or to try to describe it to someone else. I know what sounds I like; I know what tones and timbres I like, but I don't know how to necessarily describe them in any kind of eloquent way.
> What I tell soundmen when I'm playing live is: give me heavy bass and piercing highs and don't worry about the mids in terms of EQing me for live. I like thick, throbbing, slow-churning bass sounds, and I like chirpy and deliberate and piecing highs, and I like the juxtaposition of those two in tandem. I like having a really high, almost unlistenable tone or oscillation going, and then having this slow rhythm churning, carrying that forward, propelling it.

The pulsing sounds of cicada insects are not indigenous to Los Angeles. Perhaps Greh heard them in Michigan, or on tour throughout the Midwest. Greh has an active internal aural imagination, but when trying to form these aural ideas into words, he resorts to metaphors like insects, grinding, grumbling, earth-moving. His knowledge of the synthesizer serves as the interface for him to articulate and manifest these ideas from aural imagination to empirical sound. In larger venues when someone is hired to do final sound mixing before the signals are amplified by the house PA, Greh asks for extra bass and treble frequencies for maximum

emphasis of frequencies he wishes to exploit. In another part of our interview, I

asked Greh about the general aim of experimental 'noise.'

> GH: I think it's about pure sound worship. I think noise listeners are
> people who listen to a lot of music and a lot of different sounds to a lot of
> different types of things and appreciate different sounds. And I think that
> the creation of noise and the listening to noise are both done out of
> appreciating sound in a way that a lot of people don't.

In this context, "pure sound worship" is a function of timbre. Next I asked Greh

about the function of volume in his work.

> GH: It feels like a cop-out at this point to keep saying it, but it's really an
> intuitive thing. And almost formulaic, in a way, of starting quiet and
> building louder, building layers, and having the piece develop in that way.
> Just because that's how I find that I hear things; or at least the things
> that I want to hear, like the car approaching: it's quiet, it gets louder, it
> gets quieter. And as I walk around I'm going to hear the crickets quieter
> over here and louder over here.

> DM: So do you use that [Gaussian distribution] as an organizational
> principle?

> GH: Volume is used for organization and for… I feel like a Hive Mind
> recording is meant to be loud, but I feel like I record them with quiet and
> atmosphere in mind. A background in mind more so than loud, but I find
> that I enjoy listening to them more when they're loud because it's more
> all-encompassing and more of a visceral, physical sound. Even when it's
> drones, it's more captivating at volume. For live volume—that's why I say
> I really want to push bass and highs, is because of the physical response;
> because of the level of discomfort or the level of physical motion following
> the room shaking from bass oscillations.

By asking Greh if he used volume as an organizational principle, he

acknowledged that he did, and then launched into other functional aspects of

volume, namely, the physical aspects of listening to experimental 'noise' at loud

volumes. I can attest that among the loudest experimental 'noise' events I have

attended were performances of Hive Mind blasting away at Dem Passwords, the

Smell, and the Complex. So Greh uses volume in two basic ways: as an

organizational principle, and as mode of rendering sound physical to the touch

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through extreme volume. When I asked Greh about the function of meter or

rhythm in his work, he provided the following answer:

> GH: I'm maybe too guilty of using rhythm in my music. Less so rhythm
> than oscillations, which are rhythmic by their nature—rising or falling.
> There's generally not a punctuated rhythm or something that's on time.
> It's generally a polyrhythmic experience with those tones, those
> oscillations rising and falling, and maybe lining up and maybe not, but
> creating that using those sorts of sounds, even if they're really slow or
> slow to morph, as rhythm. So there's definitely a pulse and a heartbeat
> and vibe to the stuff I do, and it's not a drummer's rhythm by any means,
> but there's a slow churn of a rhythm to a lot of the stuff I do.

Greh generates rhythm through the interaction of oscillators. Though sometimes

they incidentally organize into discernable meters: rhythmic undulations.

John Wiese typically uses a computer and a mixer as his basic

instruments. When I asked him about the function of timbre in his work, he gave

an example of a piece he made on seven-inch vinyl called *Circle Snare*.

> JW: *Circle Snare* is a good example of making juxtapositions between
> different [ideas]: pure electronic rough tape, amplified voice contact mic
> scuffle, percussion or vibration. I've spent a lot of time making
> relationships between those things, and trying to see how they can be
> exploited for effect.

For John timbre concerns the relationship between various sound sources. When

I asked him about the function of volume in his work, he said, "It's just an

element, like anything else. It's another thing to play with." I then asked if he

preferred loud or soft volume. His response: "It totally depends on the sounds,

on the environment, on the desired effect. Loud-quiet has no inherent use. It just

depends on what you're trying to achieve." After my entire interview with John,

he talked about a time he played in Europe that was extremely loud, tangible,

and started to make him nauseous; and that there were a group of people in a

circle slowly headbanging during his performance. For many people in the

experimental 'noise' scenes, loud volume is important. For John, volume is one

parameter to work with, and sometimes he chooses to exploit it for its physical

effects. I then asked John about the function of rhythm in his work.

> JW: I think that a lot of my works have a rhythm to them, but typically
> they are fairly irregular. I've never employed much sense of a typical or
> regular rhythm in my work. That has never been particularly interesting to
> me.

> DM: So when you say that you think there's a rhythm in your work, what
> do you mean by that?

> JW: It depends on what piece it is, but you can get a sense for it. I think
> that something that is interesting in a lot of my older works that are more
> full-on loud, is that there will be this sense of speed achieved by lots of
> cuts. It's not rhythm in a percussive sense, or a repetitive sense, since in
> my work there is typically no repetition at all, but there is a sense of
> rhythm in the sense that there is a sense of speed or velocity in the
> pieces.

We typically think of meter as an organization of pulses at a certain tempo. John

brings up an issue that is perhaps unique to experimental 'noise' (or the

electroacoustic avant-garde in a deeper, historical sense): namely, this art form

eschews regularity in meter by tempo in favor of changes that occur at irregular

timings, but can be generalized by their change in *speed*. Sounds are cut either

more slowly or more quickly, but unpredictably without regularity. An

accumulation of changes in a short amount of time is a *fast speed*; a low number

of changes over a period of time is a *slow speed*. John's thinking of speed or

velocity was also an obsession of the Italian Futurists who were some of the

pioneer artists working in 'noise' (Russolo and Marinetti).

Elden Man's set involves a rackmount system with delays and reverbs,

and a sampler, and then a few analog synthesizers. When I asked Elden to

discuss the function of timbre in his work, his gave an elaborate answer on the

uses (and abuses) of instruments.

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EM: Timbre makes each instrument unique: that's basically it. So each instrument that you need can serve its own purpose in the context of a composition, a live execution. It's good to be at least familiar with your instrument: what it's going to do. There have been a lot of times where I've destroyed instruments on stage, and that's another purpose that the instrument probably wasn't designed for, but it serves another purpose that is used in the context of whatever you're doing.
The approach often times is to change the sound of the instrument so that it's indistinguishable from what it originally…: I'm talking about acoustic instruments. As far as electronics, the timbre is whatever you plug into it, whatever sound design that you try to achieve.

DM: Talk about the sound design.

EM: That's basically manipulating sine waves and getting the sound that you want from filters and oscillators and whatever. Everybody does it. You just have to find a sound that you like, that you have an affinity for, that you think you can use in a certain context in a certain piece, whether you love it or hate it. And that's each individual's taste. The way Greh in Hive Mind uses his [Roland] SH-101, will be completely different from the way I use my SH-101. That goes without saying I guess. And it's the same with any acoustic instrument.

Elden seems to be using the terms timbre and instrument as synonyms: fair enough, if we understand an instrument by its harmonic content and morphology. When Elden says, "The approach often times is to change the sound of the instrument so that it's indistinguishable from what it originally…: I'm talking about acoustic instruments…," he is talking about using traditional musique concrète techniques. In this context, the "acoustic instruments" are the *acoustic sounds picked up from a microphone*, that are then manipulated "so that [the sound is] indistinguishable from its original" *source*. He goes on to say that as for "electronics, the timbre is whatever you plug into it": by electronics he means electronically produces sound generators, like oscillators and noise generators. Elden uses both purely (or internally) electronic means to make sound, and field recorded sounds that can then be manipulated by electronic

means to achieve unique timbres. I then asked Elden about the function of volume in his work.

> EM: A lot of times the volume is just a way to obliterate the extraneous sounds around, and to affect your environment. The more volume you have, it blocks out unwanted sound. Unwanted sound is actually the basic definition of noise, but then again, if you're acclimatized to dissonance, and that's what you like, then it becomes music to you; so it goes around and around and around. I understand how some artists use silence, or very low volume in their pieces, but for me, that's marred by the incidental sounds in the environment that are not part of the performance. Even though Cage made a piece out of it, where what you were listening to in the hall—people coughing, opening gum wrappers or whatever—was part of the piece. To me that's that element that's unwanted. Of course…. I guess I could plan for it in my mind: 'Ok, there's going to be a helicopter hovering overhead during the performance,' but that's unwanted sound. And volume, hopefully, will blanket that: obliterate that sound.

While many practitioners of experimental 'noise' favor loud volume particularly for its physical effects, one of Elden's uses of loud volume, ironically, is to obliterate noise: noise here is unwanted, distracting sound. I then asked Elden, "Do you prefer loud volume?"

> EM: Yes I do. I know people prefer loud volume because they want to affect people physically, like their bones. To me, you don't need volume. It's the frequencies that do that. The frequencies and the combinations of harmonics, and consonance and dissonance, intervals—that doesn't require volume. You can do it on an acoustic piano and affect someone: bring them to tears or get them pissed off by hitting certain intervals and clusters of sound. You can only get a certain volume on an acoustic piano that's not amplified. I think a lot of people have the wrong idea about amplification. In saying that, the other side is that I think a lot of people have the wrong idea about silence and space and low volume also, because sometimes, if you can't hear it, then what good is it? You can feel it, that's great. And maybe that's what the artist is going for. But for me that's not my approach.

Elden is less interested in the effects of loud volume to make sound tangible than he is in the crafty combination of frequencies and harmonics to affect audiences. In other words, such a crafty combination of frequencies and harmonics is a

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function of timbre. Then I asked Elden about the function of meter and rhythm in

his work.

> EM: I do use it sometimes, but then a lot of times I don't use it because it's too regimented, but, for example, when you use samples, or any type of loop, there is a pulse. A lot of times, even if it's not inherent in the sound that has become a secondary source, the pulse occurs when the beginning and end are up against each other: when they meet. To hear them as pulse, in terms of…—primitive drumming has been around even before melody. Melody came with speech, I think. So in terms of rhythm, sometimes you can't get away from it, even if you're doing just pure all-out white noise, there's an underlying pulse underneath because of the way electronics are created, or the way a secondary source is looped: a primary source is looped as a secondary source. I have, in the past, attempted to obliterate any type of rhythm, and the way I've been successful is by using random echo and delay. So you do have the pulse of the original sound, but that is mixed way low, and when it's coming through the effects, the effect is random, and so you don't hear a regimented pulse: you hear a chaotic pulse. I don't know if that answers your question. Sometimes it's very important, and sometimes it's not. I mean that sometimes it's important that I try to eliminate it.

In the passage above, Elden gives a thorough answer about how repetitive

structures emerge in a variety of ways. Ultimately, his answer is that sometimes

he feels the need to dismantle and obfuscate emergent iterative processes—

frequent pulses, rhythms—and other times he allows those processes to

continue.

Eddie's main instruments include junk keyboards and a cassette recorder

with field recordings. When I asked him about the function of timbre in his work,

he began with a discussion of the empirical nature of timbre verses a

hermeneutics of timbre.

> EG: There are a lot of subtleties. Timbre is a very wide playing field. It's almost a very hard definition because, although these definitions can be applied, there is a lot more to it. A lot of it really has to do with the individual and the way they listen to things and how they perceive things. There is a sort of deterministic idea that if you do this to an instrument you will produce this sort of sound. It is conclusive that if you do a certain thing to an instrument you will get a certain quality of sound or a sound color of sound. The other side of it is the way a person hears these things

and interprets them, which is another dimension of timbre. It's hard because you can make a sound and it's deterministic—in other words, it's empirical: it's happening out there—but as you perceive it, your idea of what is being done is changed, or perhaps your ears are not tuned, or you're half-deaf in one ear. So the way you hear this color in sound will be a lot different from the actual sound itself. So there is a fuzzy area I think. I could be wrong.

During the interview I decided to engage in a discussion here with this follow-up question: "I would say that the timbre is the empirical sound, and then there is the interpretation in how you hear it." What I really meant to say, trying not to steal the spotlight, is that even though there are empirical timbres, there are no sounds-in-themselves: that all sound is interpreted. In a way, I meant to say that we are all partially deaf, to use Eddie's analogy. His response:

> EG: Then it becomes physics. It becomes a physical quality and an intrinsic… essence, or element of that action—the action being done to the instrument. So if you strike an instrument, the very action of striking an instrument, and the way the instrument responds to being struck or bowed or plucked or whatever, will produce that certain timbre. But I also think that there is a second side of it, which is the argument that I have that the way it's perceived by individuals listening is another part of timbre, which can be either increased or decreased. I don't think people— or only certain people, possibly—have that quality of listening or hearing. To be a classical musician you actually have to have quite good ears. A lot of it has to do with the way it sounds. Different spaces change the way the sound is. If Anne—my mother-in-law [a classical flautist]—were to come in here and play the flute in this room, it would sound a lot different than if she played it out in the front lawn: a lot different. Yet she's doing the same thing.

Eddie's fixation with timbre as empirical and timbre as hermeneutic is fascinating. He says that empirical timbre is a question for physics, and that the manipulation of timbre leads to "deterministic" results. With the notion of hermeneutic timbre [my term for his idea], Eddie is claiming that the quality of aural perception can increase timbre ("[T]he argument I have that the way [sound] is perceived by individuals listening is another part of timbre, which can be either increased or decreased"). He is saying that acute listeners have an increased awareness of

timbre, and because they have that awareness, they are able to hear sounds in

greater detail. Timbre, for Eddie, is not simply sonic data, it is also the

interpretation of that sonic data. Although it seems that what Eddie is saying is

the same as I said in my follow-up question, the subtle difference is that I tried

to pull the act of interpretation apart from the data being interpreted, while Eddie

elided the data from the interpretive process. I finally brought Eddie back to

discussing how timbre functions in his work.

> EG: When it comes to noise, timbre does exist. It's a very overlooked
> aspect of the spectrum of sound. When it comes to doing way more
> delicate sound work, or tape work, I try to find—this is a stretch—I try to
> find a bit of timbre with working with cassettes. There's a certain sound
> quality I'm trying to find out of your basic commercial-grade cassettes.
> Whether it be low noise or high output. I'm looking for a particular range
> of fidelity in recordings. So I'm trying to use recorded music or the sound
> of something being recorded. I'm looking for the timbre after-the-fact of
> the music being done. So I can play some music, and I'm trying to enrich
> the timbre, or at least maintain the quality of the timbre, but I actually try
> to do that a lot more with tape. I'm not very good at it, to tell you the
> truth. It becomes way more involved with musical theory and real
> musicianship, which I have to say that I lack. I would really like to BS my
> way through this, but to be quite honest, I don't think I ever really
> achieved a certain timbre. There are certain tones and elements, and they
> are harmonics that happen—some of them are happy accidents—but I
> couldn't say that I…; I know that I'm achieving it in one way or another
> because I know how to approach getting that right sound, but a lot of it is
> hit or miss. And honestly some of the duds do go out the door because I
> don't try hard enough, or I don't have the equipment to do it. In a sound
> studio or in a laboratory—what I mean by 'laboratory' is using computers
> and machinery that are not necessarily good for sound, so I mean
> 'laboratory' in terms of an experiment; the idea that you are using non-
> musical approaches to create acoustic sounds.

There are a few important things we learn in the passage above. First, Eddie,

after all, does not have a perfect grasp of the meaning of timbre. When he says,

"It's a very overlooked aspect of the spectrum of sound," he misses that

empirically, timbre *is* the spectrum of sonic frequencies and their morphology (of

course the purpose of this criticism is not shame). Secondly, similar to how some

phonograph enthusiasts have a fixation with the timbral characteristics of vinyl, or even the densities of vinyl, Eddie is interested in the particular timbral characteristics of tape fidelity. Thirdly, Eddie admits that he is not very skilled at achieving the timbres he hears in his aural imagination. I still was not satisfied with how Eddie was answering the question on timbre, and since he was using the words 'sound' and 'sounds' as synonyms for timbre, I then asked him: "What kinds of sounds do you like to use?" Eddies response:

> EG: When I go for sounds, I do like the incidents of sounds that come from air vents, overheated machinery, alarm systems or signal systems you might get from AV [audio/video] equipment. So like I said, going back to the work environment, if I go to a work environment and there are these many different sounds, I will try to record these sounds, and sometimes I will try to find the tonal quality of that sound in a synthesizer, and try to merge them or mesh them a little bit. I'm not really good at it because I would need a professional mixing board to get a really great sound out of it, but I do my best. I've never invested too much in musical gear. It can become an obsession. I never had the money or the time or the patience to sit down and really absorb the technical aspects of any particular gear. I should have, but I never did. In a way I don't think that I've suffered a lot from it, I just think that I've limited myself. That's another thing too, is that I do like limitations. There's the idea of an open system and a closed system. I like the idea of entropy in the sense that if you have limited sounds and you approach them in a very minimal way, there are only so many different combinations from this limited closed space: it's finite. It's sort of like that. It's finite, so that means that you'll get to an endpoint. Open systems are like an open source, in the same sense that more things can be brought in.

Eddie's loquacious rants on timbre address many aesthetic issues, including incidental ambient sounds, the sounds of a work environment and industry, the replication of environmental sounds on a synthesizer, and the quality and fidelity of instruments and antiquated recording technologies capable of achieving certain sounds. He also tied in the idea of an "open system" and entropy as methods of exploring and exhausting a system. These ideas come together with Eddie's amateur approach because his self-proclaimed lack of knowledge, as limitation,

has allowed for the acceptance of incidental and entropic events to emerge

without the treatment that an expert might bring. I finally arrived at a point to

ask about the next functional parameter in my questionnaire: the function of

volume in Eddie's work. Below is our short exchange concerning a performance of

+Dog+ I had attended recent to the interview.

> EG: I want it to be listenable, so I don't do it too loud. If I had it my way I wouldn't want something too loud.
>
> DM: It was pretty loud at the last venue I saw you perform in.
>
> EG: Yeah, but I wasn't in total control of it. There were five other people involved. I said, "Let's do something quieter," and they all said, "Ok," and the next thing you know we're just going at it. So much for subtlety. I wanted to have a real subtle build-up. A lot of artists do that too: they build up, so you have a rising sound, and that's pretty cool.
>
> DM: That's how that performance went.
>
> EG: But the rise was quick and it stayed up there.
>
> DM: It got a lot louder at the end actually.
>
> EG: I know.

In this exchange Eddie reveals that he often uses volume as an organizational

device. Extreme loud volume is not a value for Eddie, and in a group context he

can sometimes become impatient with excessive volume for the sake of

excessive volume.

> EG: And if you're not listening to one another, and everyone is just running for the hills as loud and as fast as possible, then that's what you're going to get. And that's cool. I can't say I don't like it, but after a while, if you've got five bands trying to do that all night, one is enough. I'll just leave. If I keep seeing that over and over in the night, I'll just decide: "I've had it, man. It's all good. Do it."

In either a group context, or the context of a series of performers, volume

becomes political as individuals strive to have their sounds heard while others are

abated, muted, or silenced. Eddie has limited patience for an approach to experimental 'noise' as a pissing contest over who can perform the loudest. I then asked Eddie about the function of meter and rhythm in his work.

> EG: That's more of a musical question. When you say 'electronic music' to some people they will think nothing but dance music, and they think of rhythmatic [sic] music. But if you listen to anything—even the most diverse music, even the most scattered music or freeform music—what happens, I think, on a very natural scale is that it starts to converge and starts to come together in a sort of unity. And if you listen to it, there are habitual rhythms going on. They're almost intuitive. People—as they play music, even if it seems completely random or scattered—eventually fall into a groove, or fall into a nature of discussion. The music is discussing: it's talking back and forth to one another. Jazz people do it the very best; Indian music too. There's a communication between two different musicians. They might start off in completely different scales and different notes, but somehow they start to get into a sort of dialog. The way we have a dialog now there's a rhythm between what I say and what you're saying. The cadence in my voice, the structure, the syntax: all these things come into view. I refer back to language and how people related information to one another. There's a rhythm to the way people type, walk, [etc.], so there are many different types of rhythms going on. When it comes to music, if you're set out to do rhythm, it becomes an important part of the piece if it's rhythm driven. Most electronic dance music [EDM] or music with a solid rhythm will conform to that rhythm. Everything conforms to a certain meter.

Eddie's thesis is that "[e]verthing"—all activities, including music—"conforms to a certain meter." He calls the notions of rhythm and meter "musical questions," most likely for the issue of organization that belies meter—as an organization of beats or pulses—and the commonly accepted definition of music (as the organization of sound). Music has a groove and a discursive—if not antiphonal— mode, a frequent regularity. Eddie claimed that he could even predict the kinds of events and movements a 'noise' artist would engage in while listening because of its temporal regularity. Unfortunately, Eddie did not really answer the question of how meter functioned in his 'noise' performances, but in his other project, Destroy Date, he discussed the importance of drum machines.

EG: I wanted Destroy Date to be more dancy. I have rhythm tracks that I've done: I've done tons and tons of rhythm tracks with very beatable drum machines and rhythm machines. I really wanted it to be a break from all the different noise. I wanted to bring back the idea that you could have a sound project that had rhythms, influenced by Cabaret Voltaire, how they're exploring rhythms.

Though Eddie does affiliate himself with other experimental 'noise' artists, he feels more comfortable with the traditions of early industrial music and power electronics, like Throbbing Gristle, White House, and Cabaret Voltaire. Contemporaneous with punk, these late 1970s movements helped give rise to the 'noise' movements of the 1980s to the present. Industrial sounds—though the term comes from Throbbing Gristle's record label—often invoke images of industrial metal apparatuses repurposed as percussion instruments, clanging noisily to a crude drum machine (like a drum box). Though 'noise' in some respects, is not too far from industrial music, Eddie's affiliation is stronger toward industrial.

Joseph Hammer's main instrument is the reel-to-reel recorder with a laptop providing song samples to be manipulated in real time. When I asked him about the function of timbre in his work, he initially said, "it's emotional," and then continued:

JH: It's all timbre. It's extreme timbre. Extreme, high resolution timbre [laughs]. High resolution, wide range, wide band—timbre. And that's part of that business with why I'm obsessed with high fidelity, is because I'm too much interested in that—timbre. And if it's going to be really grungy and shit like that, I want it to be truly really grungy and shit like that. If it's lo-fi, it's got to be lo-fi in a very particular way, without insipid discoloration—or I shouldn't say 'insipid discoloration,' I should say coloration. And that's fine actually, if it's just that, like that, that's timbre, that's color. But because I've got all this other shit going on—like the A to D [audio to digital] converters and all these other things—the tiniest little problem becomes a big problem in terms of creating a barrier to the information that is coming out of my tape recorder. Everything that's going into it is god-knows-what. The more I know about what's going into it the less interesting it comes out.

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According to Joseph, his work is "all… extreme timbre." When he continues about the importance of high resolution, the idea is to provide the highest "wide band" fidelity to every frequency he wishes to produce (not *reproduce*, as he later corrected me). Even low fidelity sounds must be accurately handled to be *true* to its nature ("truly really grungy"); these sounds must have, what he initially calls, "insipid discoloration," where the term "insipid" denotes that Joseph is making judgments on sound. He later corrects himself and refers to "coloration" as opposed to "discoloration"—"discoloration" implies a disagreeable alteration of the sound source, where as "coloration" can be interpreted as a favorable alteration of the sound source. Joseph's reel-to-reel machine, even in its old age, is a high fidelity machine and uses premium quality tape, thus it would inevitably provide a timbral "coloration" to the audio signals passing through it. In a near contradistinction to Eddie's view on a hermeneutics of timbre—that the quality of aural perception, aural knowledge, can increase timbre—Joseph seems to appeal to a certain amount of mechanical ignorance to keep the sounds interesting ("Everything that's going into it is god-knows-what. The more I know about what's going into it the less interesting it comes out"). A certain degree of ignorance is, in a sense, preferable to maintaining a degree of surprise from the emergent sounds. And yet Joseph has a very refined understanding of his reel-to-reel machine for someone whom is not an electrical engineer.

> JH: The Ampex ATR-100 [reel-to-reel machine], which does not have a capstan, it has reel motors and a rubber thing that the tape goes around that is connected to a servo motor that feeds back to the reel motors. So it's really the reel motors, which are really highly developed motors, moving the tape past the tape head in an extremely precise manner with extremely precise tape tension and azimuth control uniform.

Although Joseph did not exactly answer the question how he uses timbre, in an earlier part of the interview, he told an interesting story that I find illuminating.

> JH: There's that whole rerecording process called '*sweetening*'—audio sweetening—where you take the source material and rerecord it on another machine that's a better sounding machine—the engineering of the circuits and the materials used in the components and how well the spindles move in conjunction past the tape head: it's nuts.

Audio sweetening—the rerecording of one source onto another machine that is supposed to have higher fidelity—partially, but keenly, explains Joseph's process when he uses digital sources to input into his reel-to-reel machine, which is then manipulated by hand, by recording, playing back, and erasing swatches of digital audio onto magnetic tape. I then asked Joseph about the function of volume in his work. He began with brief answers to a few different uses of volume. His initial answer concerning the function of volume was: "To adequately activate the performance space. It's a critical factor in activating the space." The idea of "activating the space" was important to Joseph, and he raised the issue on other occasions. His second answer to the question of volume was: "Low volume would be fine but it's usually not possible because the ambient sounds are usually really loud. Volume has to be added to overcome the distracting sounds. I do kind of like high volume. It has an immersive quality." This second answer is similar to Elden's answer. Both require loud volume in part to silence other sounds, so that the sonic focus is maintained and directed toward the performance. Joseph also enjoys high volume for its ability to encompass a space with sound. When I asked if and how he manipulated volume during his performances, he gave the following response:

> JH: It's very important. It's so important that I adjust volume. Volume is one of the most critical factors of the whole process. Gain—input and output stage gains, all up and down the signal chain. They all have to be

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adjusted in different ratios according to where they are in the signal chain in order to change the coloration of the sound and the way the sound actually activates the space. It's very complex. I have a volume pedal that's connected to my digital audio workstation. It's a MIDI controller that controls the volume on the software mixer. And there are gains for the volume of the sound source as well as the input gain on the tape recorder itself. And the output gain on the tape recorder itself, which is not part of the original equipment, but is an addition. The output gain of a tape recorder—specifically that tape recorder—should be preset to a standard setting. And you should just adjust the input gain to match that preset output gain. But somebody put a potentiometer that is normally on the back, but it should just be set to one thing and left alone. So I can actually balance…, it's like an overdrive knob for a guitar amp. I can adjust the output gain and basically overdrive the circuit, or underdrive the circuit. You underdrive the output, but overdrive the input gain, or do the opposite of that—underdrive the input gain and overdrive the output. That along with the other volume levels of the other sounds—like the synthesizer or the other players—and the EQ settings all factor into how the sound that's being put on that tape and that I'm manipulating and playing actual sounds in the space, and forms with the other sounds. And I can't predict what that's going to be. I just have to be ready to work with it: work with whatever I've got. And if it's not working, to try something else…, in desperation [laughs].

Joseph has a variety of volume controls at various stages of his setup. Most are used to adjust volume to create balance from one element to the next in a mostly linear fashion (since they are successive volume controls from source to source, input to output, etc). However, I thought it was really interesting that when I asked him a question about volume, he also launched into a discussion of equalization and about overdriving and underdriving sound: these methods are all ways of affecting timbre. I found interesting that Joseph used volume, in a sense, to affect timbre. This makes sense: when manipulating a frequency band on an equalizer—bass, middle, treble—one either boosts the volume of that frequency band, or one cuts the volume of that frequency band, affecting the timbre of the sound. By asking a question about volume, Joseph gave me an answer about volume and timbre, then discussed the importance of high fidelity, and the importance of using the widest possible frequency range—"it's all

timbre." When I asked Joseph to discuss the function of meter and rhythm in his work, I worded it this way: "I was going to ask you next about meter, but your loops are *literally meters*" (in the sense that they are measured lengths; though Joseph measures them in inches). Joseph agreed, and added:

> JH: I guess it's the overall structure, because I deal with a loop of tape. So that cycle, and the rhythm that is created simply because it's a loop of tape, that's pretty important. So it's not rhythm in the sense of a beat, but it's rhythm in the sense that the beat is usually in a particular type of rhythm.

In Joseph's work, he often picks and juggles a handful of samples at a time. He may have four or five different sources cycling around the twenty-second loop, and each source could be between one and ten seconds long. One source might be a country-western song, another might be a movie soundtrack, another might be a blues song, another might be a television commercial from the 1960s, and another might be an Indonesian gamelan performance; furthermore, he could be recording two or three swatches of a performance on the loop at different locations. Contained within each loop could be the rhythm inherent in the sound source: the blues rhythm, the country-western rhythm, the gamelan rhythm, etc. The sources themselves also form a rhythm as discrete articulations in the tape loop, but the rhythm does not create meter. I then asked Joseph to discuss the function of duration in his work, since duration for him begins with the length of the tape loop and the manipulation of the cycle.

> JH: It's shifting emphasis in your perception of duration, possibly. I do a lot of stuff where, because I can keep moving that playback head on the source material, I usually find some spot, usually because I just set it and let it go, and sound comes in and an event occurs. Rather than being the event that comes back around and you hear it again and that's the loop, is that one thing happening once every cycle. I'll find that same sound but on the source material and put it in at another point in the cycle. So you got that same sound twice in a cycle… and suddenly your mind perceives a box, because you're hearing that same sound here and here. And then

> I'll put in other sounds that break up those particular sounds, sometimes
> the very same sound itself in another place to fool you into thinking that
> the loop isn't this long but it's actually that long. They end up in funny
> places to give you an irregular repetition, like a polyrhythm, kind of;
> except that it's not a polyrhythm. But I'll often keep putting in the same
> source again in another place and actually wipe [erase] the previous one
> in another place. So those points that you thought were there and there,
> are now over here and here: maybe here, here, and here. What's nice is
> that sometimes I'm able to take something that's making you think in
> fours and shift or bounce it into a three or a two.

The duration of the loop is constant, and acts almost like a conveyor belt at an airport. One can imagine several colors of luggage placed on the belt and then memorizing the sequence of colored luggage; but Joseph's technique also involves putting the same color luggage at different points, altering the order of colors, and fooling you into memorizing the sequence. He is also taking colors out and adding new colors during the process. Joseph is playing with memory through repetitive measures by denying frequent events extra iterations through these deceptive measures. These deceptive measures—as some histories of Western music theory have taught—can pique interest.

Christiaan Cruz uses an assortment of microphones, effects pedals, tape recorders, and sometimes a laptop. When I asked him about the function of timbre in his work, he said the following:

> CC: It's pretty important. That's what I'm mostly listening for when I'm
> listening to recordings on my own or listening to someone else perform. A
> lot of the times it's just this neutral sound, neutral color over everything.
> Towards the end there will be a punch in the face of something else, like a
> weird frequency on top of the color that just pops out at you. If there's a
> good listener out in the audience, it will be something that will make them
> smile or make them feel interested in the performance and the piece.

For Christiaan, different timbral characteristics can cause a listener to take notice; timbre can provide contrast between "neutral" sounds" and sounds that

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pop out (even if the pop is precipitous). When I asked him about the function of

volume in his work, he responded with the following:

> CC: I think it just depends. I always wanted to do more soft stuff—more
> low volume things. I guess it depends on the room. A lot of times when
> you're performing noise, people just get really quiet and watch you. So if
> it's really quiet then I know I can do it. But if there's a bar and a lot of
> clink-clink noise from glasses and things like that, then you have to
> change stuff around, and the acoustics of the room and everything. So it
> depends on the room and the environment and what's going on: who
> came before you and who is going to come after you, so you can set the
> mood.

For Christiaan volume is a function of the social environment. When I asked him

about the function of meter and rhythm in his work, he said: "If it's noise,

probably not too much concerned with time. I guess there's just the beginning

and an end. It doesn't really play much of a role." Issues of rhythm and meter

fall under the broader category of duration, and thus of form as the organization

of time. Since form does not play a significant role in his work, the beginning and

ending suffice as formal considerations for Christiaan.

Scott Cazan mainly works with computer algorithms, contact

microphones, and plays with feedback systems. When I asked Scott about the

function of timbre in his work, he gave a profound response.

> SC: Timbre is everything. Especially in electronic music, because it's the
> only thing that can differentiate one thing from another—one process from
> another. To me, timbre is ontology essentially. It's separating out objects,
> and when those timbres sort of merge and blend, that becomes really
> interesting, where you start to perceive certain types of shapes and
> certain types of motives that come out of these systems. That's a really
> cool moment, like when that pops out and you think: "Oh man, there's
> this thing happening" [laughs]. It's not like a synthesizer where you have
> a melody—I mean a synthesizer in a disco tune or something, with a
> keyboard and you have a melody and that has one timbre, and then you
> have another melody and that's another timbre—but when you have this
> mass of timbres, and from that mass comes these sorts of timbres that
> relate to all the timbres, or to multiple timbres. They just kind of interact
> and become like an object. So that's how I view timbre a lot. Timbre is a
> kind of ontology: the discovery of motives and content.

I had my biggest "aha" moment when Scott said, "timbre is ontology." He articulated what I had been thinking about for years in a concise manner with that phrase. He related timbre to the separation of sound objects and their morphology into and out of different sound shapes and the interaction of sound shapes. For Scott, listening to the interactions of timbres is where the discovery of new sounds begins. When I asked him about the function of volume in his work, Scott said the following.

> SC: I use a lot of loud volumes—very loud volumes—because I like space and the idea of space. I like music that has a kind of spatial thing, and I feel that it's only when you get to…, well two things. When you get to these extreme volumes, you activate the space, and the space becomes really present and the room becomes full, literally full, you feel it, and you feel the way it reacts to you, so it's this kind of physical connection to sound. On top of that you get all these nice other sounds, so you kind of pad the space into your own system. The space starts to resonate and shake and rattle and all these kinds of things, which is nice because it's very immersive, which is very good for listening. I think it takes you away from this kind of virtuosity on stage, where you watch the performer. I don't think at all about what you should be doing—we're not doing anything. It's really about the space around you. But on the opposite end of the spectrum, I like to use lots of really quiet sounds as well, because I think it really invites listening and invites listening to detail. So I think both of them have to do with detail, because when you make it very loud and steady, all you have to grasp onto is these little details: these things that are changing; the way that you shift into space. Whereas when things are very quiet, you kind of have to lean in, and this whole world of… you know, a simple thing like dragging the bow across the tuning pegs on a violin in any other environment would sound like a *shhhh*. But in a quiet environment, that's the first thing you hear, and then you kind of get this zooming effect where you can hear all the details and it becomes this whole world. So I think that's very exploratory for the audience, to hear that. So I like to play with that a lot. In the middle, I generally just don't like the middle at all—of anything. We're too used to the middle. We always hear the middle. If the middle is interesting, I feel like it's interesting in a way that it interacts with what's currently there, with the environment. So if you have sine tones in the middle, it starts to blend with what's happening outside—dogs and stuff like that, or whatever. So I guess that's the way that I approach volume. Different volumes have different sorts of effects in terms of perception. So very quiet is great because you can really zoom in. They're both kind of meditative in a way.

Since volume is a continuum from barely perceptive sound to extreme immersive (even painful) sound, Scott divides the continuum into three broad level: loud, soft, and medium volume. At loud volume and at soft volume, he discusses the different qualities of timbral change. While loud volume forces listeners to listen to detail in an immersive sound environment, which includes the interaction of sound with the architectural environment, soft sound forces listeners to focus in on subtle minutiae. Middle-ranged intensities, according to Scott, tend to blend in with the ambient sounds of the performance space (or sounds outside the performance space but within aural perception). Volume is an important parameter for Scott because it can serve a variety of purposes depending on the effect he wishes to procure. When I asked Scott about the function of meter and rhythm in his work, he said:

> SC: Meter doesn't exist. I like John Cage's outlook on rhythm: rhythm is a relationship of frames: something starts and something ends at some point, and that's all I really care about in rhythm. Sometimes it's nice to hear rhythms, like more specific rhythms, sometimes I put them in there just because I'm enjoying it, but I like to think of larger rhythms, like sections. Here's a thing, now here's a thing.

"So form," I replied. "Yeah. Form, really. I think of rhythm as form," said Scott.

Michael Winter often uses a computer with self-coded software when he performs his solo works. When I asked him about the function of timbre in his work, he said, "It's not something I focus on." I challenged him using a story he told me concerning the function of volume. Pivoting from the end of our discussion on the function of volume (to which I will address in more detail) to the function of timbre, we had the following exchange.

> MW: I have a lot of pieces that are one pitch, or a very limited set of pitches, or a very limited set of elements. The idea is that you focus on the structural…, on different relationships. I think it's maybe because the most obvious ones—the ones that catch our attention the most—are pitch

and loudness. Those are the things that we're used to finding structure in. What I want people to find is a means of perceiving it on their own terms, finding various structures. Not just in pitch, not just in loudness, not just in differences of this or that, but in any of them. So when you ask a violin player to play a long tone as exact as possible, as precise in pitch, as precise in dynamic, really when you zoom, what you've done is you've zoomed into a world that is also very expansive and infinite, and you start to hear more and more.

DM: That's the perfect segue to the next question: What's the function of timbre in your music?

MW: Again, it's not something I focus on.

DM: Well that example you were giving when you were talking about a violinist playing something as static as possible, and you're zooming, the zooming in seems, to me, to be a focus on perceptive changes of timbre.

MW: Well, no. I guess what I'm trying to say just in general is that when you focus on something, you realize that to limit one's self and to focus, does not necessarily mean limiting the relationships or limiting the kind of structural potentialities or the perception of structural potentialities. In fact, maybe it encourages it. So what you hear is something as dynamic as something that's very fast moving, or that has a lot of elements, and is quickly iterating through them. There's different ways, but I can say that generally I'm trying to allow people to hear different things whenever they hear it, or hear it on their own terms. So again, to level the playing field to the extent possible such that there's not one primary element, there are a slue of elements that are of equal importance that allow the listener to engage on their own terms.

While Scott Cazan understood timbre in terms of an empirical ontology (and morphology) of sound to interpret, Michael Winter focused on human ontology as a measure to interpret the sonic world—on interpretation itself. In a sense—to use the example of zooming in on a violin sound—exploring the sonic world through the relationship of its component parts is a form of self-exploration more than it is a form or exploring sound that is *out there*, so to speak. Michael is more interested in allowing people to hear sound equally and to serve their own purposes. He is less interested in timbre and more interested in the nature of change itself, and detecting change as a mode of self-exploration—*to listen to*

ones listening, to use a phrase from Pauline Oliveros' "deep listening."[334] I

continued to push Michael into a discussion of timbre, partially because his late

mentor, Jim Tenney, wrote in detail about the subject. I asked him, "What are

the timbral constraints in your work? Do you ask for certain kinds of timbres?"

> MW: I often specify relationships. It's about the structure of things. What
> I'll often say—and this is taken straight from *Meta+Hodos*, a big influence
> from *Meta+Hodos*—is not defining things absolutely, but defining them
> relatively. So to say how things are different rather than how they are. So
> to impose a relationship, I'll often say: "Four like-sounding instruments"
> or "Four dissimilar instruments." I have this piece that we've been doing
> recently in a guitar quartet, and it specifies how they're different from
> each other, and that difference is how they sustain their tones. So
> generally what I'm doing is I'm creating a structure between the various
> timbres. Timbre itself, I think, fundamentally has structure, a harmonic
> series, and things like that. Within that I'm less concerned. Jim [Tenney]
> was very concerned with timbre. But I'm never thinking absolutely about
> how one element is, I'm thinking about how they relate to each other.

Though Michael's answers on timbre often felt like a dodge, he was very

consistent: relationships between disparate elements are more important than

the elements themselves. The ontological nature of the listener is the target, and

the stimuli are not sonic objects in their dynamism and morphology, but the

relationships between them. I then asked Michael about the function of volume in

his work.

> MW: I generally have a very static volume. In a lot of my scores there is a
> very specific instruction that says: "Clear and not loud." I think what I
> mean by that is that it's meant to be heard—I'm not one of these people
> who are always working on the threshold of audibility or the threshold of
> pain. I want it to be about the ideas, in a sense. It's all about mapping. I
> have all these mathematical processes. One thing that's interesting about
> music—and Larry [Polansky] says this a lot—is, "If it's ones and twos or
> apples and oranges or colored balls that you're picking, why not just pick
> colored balls? There's something about the way we hear and perception,
> and that's something that Jim [Tenney] was really great at in his music, is
> how he listened and how he perceived things. What was the question?
>
> DM: The function of volume.

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[334] Pauline Oliveros, *Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice*, (New York: iUniverse, 2005), xxiv.

MW: Right. So one thing, to contradict all that, is that the function of volume in my music is often a non-function. To make it something that's not a focus of attention so that the structure of the piece is important, and that's what I'm getting at. So there are different modes of perception, and I think Jim was often very concerned about harmony, and that's one type of structure. I'm generally concerned about structure on all levels. I find, often, that when you make things very static, it makes it easier to find your own understanding of the fundamental structure of the piece. With that said, dynamics can have structure too. They can relate to each other. One moment can be louder and one can be softer, and they might have a definite relation to each other. That's not to say that that's not there, but I guess it has been a common practice of mine to keep a very static thing to where people can hear the elements but are not overwhelmed or not hunting for them.

The idea of "static" is important to Michael as a starting point, but not as an absolute idea. "I think ultimately the idea of the static is not real. I've never really heard something that sounded flat to me. That's why I often say: 'No vibrato.' You don't need to make these big gestures. Things are going to be dynamic on their own," says Michael. Extreme volume—either at the loud end or the soft end—do not interest him, and when he gives the instruction, "clear and not loud," he seems to be curbing loud volume as excessive information, signifying that volume is not the focus of the piece. Beyond a set threshold on the upper limit of volume ("not loud"), Michael is interested in volume in terms of its relation from one intensity to another, and the relation between volume and other sonic elements. When I asked him about the function of meter in his work, Michael gave the following pithy response, "Sometimes I use meter; sometimes I don't. Different pieces call for different explorations." I then moved onto the question of the function of duration in his work. "Duration takes care of itself [laughs]. I think music is inherently a time-based linear thing. Our only means against that is memory: we can remember something from the past. That's the only thing that makes it alinear to some extent." I gave the following challenge:

"In a lot of your work you specify to 'play this for this amount of time and this amount of time.'" Michael's response was lengthier this time.

> MW: Or I say relationships. I say 'play this for some time.' So I have these pieces that all started with one piece called *Sound On Sound*. The idea is, it's really a simple ABA form, but the B is really small and the A is really long. I have a lot of pieces that have this structure. What I'll specify is that the A—the sound—is significantly longer, like five times longer than the B on both sides. So it's a relationship. It's a structural thing. I also do a lot of things where I use a strict unit of time. It depends what musical space I'm exploring. The general catch-all answer here is that either everything is focused and flat, such that they all emerge to their own dynamism, or there's a particular focus, in which case everything else is flat except for what's focused.

Michael's aesthetic for durational relationships between various parameters of sound, rather than a focus on the composition of sound, is reminiscent of Cage's works in a variety of ways, and removes him from many European post-war composers working with electronics (Stockhausen, Schaeffer, Boulez) who were focused on timbre. In a sense, while most other practitioners or experimental 'noise' artists are focused on *making* new sounds through various synthesis techniques (additive, subtractive, granular, collage, etc.), Michael's focus is particularly through the *listening* of new sounds as a mode of (human) ontology. His work is about setting up conditional relationships for listening to new sounds, rather than specifically creating and synthesizing new sounds. This is not to say that he does not use synthesis techniques, or that others are not interested in listening as a form of creation; rather, Michael's work focuses more on the aspects outlined than other practitioners.

GX Jupitter-Larsen's the Haters have been performing for decades. Many of their performances involve amplified suitcases. The suitcases are fitted with transducers (probably contact mics and light sensors) that interact and feedback with other materials, so that slight movements cause various fluctuations in

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sound that are difficult to control. Controlling the nature of the sounds requires

delicate movements because the amplified suitcases are delicate instruments.

When I asked GX about the function of timbre in his work, he responded in the

following manner.

> GX: I don't think I've ever really thought about it in those terms. For me
> it's more of a tactile experience. It's how it *feels* to me, the texture, the
> feeling. I want a sound that feels like sandpaper. I think, regardless of
> whether I'm hearing it in my gut or if it's just something between my
> ears, that's really the texture that I most try to find: sandpaper that's
> dissolving. Certainly that's visually what I try to go after, or have in the
> past at least, but I think sonically it's a very tactile and textual kind of
> thing.
>
> DM: So the sounds that you listen for you're trying to relate somehow to
> touch.
>
> GX: Yeah, definitely. A rough texture that is dissolving, that is in
> perpetually dissolving; that perfect moment of entropy where you just
> have this thing that looks crippled that's just about to evaporate, but
> never does. It's like this moment in time that's just frozen. That's what
> I'm after.

The physical idea of texture describes the component characteristics of a material

by touch. If timbre is often described metaphorically as color in the visual world,

it can also be described metaphorically as texture in the tactile world.[335] And yet

for GX he is often concerned with homologous actions and sounds to connote and

describe certain ideas. Destruction and erosion have imagery, sounds, and

textures associated with these ideas: GX is interested in these easily-readable

associations, and not necessarily for abstractions. In other words, he is usually

more interested in the sounds *of* destruction and erosion, rather than to have

something sound *like* destruction and erosion: that is one reason why many of

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[335] Unfortunately the history of Western music has often used the term 'texture' in a strange way to
describe the relation and combination of different voices: often times the metaphor of how fabric is
interwoven is employed to describe music texture. I would find the idea of texture in music more
helpful if it described the relations and interweaving of fabric in terms of timbre (the interweaving of
harmonics and the shape of their morphology)): colloquially, many musicians and nonmusicians use
the term 'texture' to describe timbre.

his performances literally use grinding devices, drills, electric saws, etc.; another

reason is for the visual associations those devices connote. To summarize GX's

use of timbre in his work, he often uses timbre to evoke ideas of destruction. I

then asked GX to describe the function of volume in his work.

> GX: Volume is actually not as important to me as some people might
> think. I think volume, to me, is necessary if it really helps generate
> standing waves that are going to start making things shake or move. One
> of the best performances I ever did in San Francisco was just last year. I
> was able to achieve a tone that actually shattered someone's filling in
> their tooth. They actually had to go get a root canal the following day.
> *That's audience participation*. The young lady was actually quite proud.
> She kept me updated as to how her dentist appointment went. But I don't
> think a sound necessarily has to be loud. I think what has happened in
> noise has been oversimplified. I remember a great performer, Key
> [Ransone]—who went by the name of Small Cruel Party—his
> performances weren't always that loud, but they had beautiful sounds.
> They were very great minimalist tonal frequencies that were just very
> interesting. Geoff [Brandin]—better known as Fin: a local performer—he
> did a piece using an oil drum as a speaker. He didn't put a speaker in the
> oil drum, the oil drum itself was the speaker. You could see, if you paid
> close enough attention, the oil drum would just barely move, and in the
> movement would generate this tone, and the tone was like listening to
> ghosts. I don't know any other way of explaining it. He opened up for John
> Duncan. I know John was mesmerized by the sound, and later tried to
> record Jeff's oil drum, but John said he just couldn't do it. It didn't work
> because he needed the physical experience of actually being in that room
> hearing that oil drum slightly quiver, and hear those ghostly, faint, distant
> sounds. Everybody wants to be loud now, and it's too bad, because again,
> the vocabulary has been narrowed and simplified. In the 80s you didn't
> always have to be loud. Some of us were loud because we were brutes:
> we were young, brutish men. But not all of us were. Some of us, not
> including myself, were smarter than that, and would sometimes do very
> quiet pieces if the quality of the sound demanded low volumes. You don't
> get that very much anymore; hardly at all; it has been oversimplified.
> Now everybody wants to be the loudest. It doesn't matter how loud you
> are, there's always some idiot who always screams, "louder!" at some
> point during the set. There's this heavy metal attitude, and everyone is so
> macho about their egos and their presence on stage, and everyone is
> trying to have the biggest dick by having the loudest volume, but it's not
> necessary. You can have amazing impact by doing very quiet things.

GX's experience and longevity in experimental 'noise' scenes throughout the US

has informed his ideas on volume. Loud volume can produce standing waves,

caused by loud sound waves interacting with the structure of the space and exciting the resonant frequencies of objects in the room. Here GX tells the story of the alleged destruction of a woman's tooth during one of his performances. GX also likens loud volume to masculinity and machismo, and admits that he partook in some of these activities himself as a young "brute." Through decades of experiences however, he learned to listen with subtlety, thus his story depicting Geoff Brandin's piece using an oil drum as an output transducer, and John Duncan's failed attempts to record the nuances of the sounds emitted by the device. Although most performances by the Haters are in fact relatively loud, I have attended performances at softer volume levels, particularly at BetaLevel in Chinatown. I then asked GX about the function of meter or rhythm in his work. He said: "I try to avoid it. It happens, but it's an accidental byproduct. If it's there it doesn't serve a structural purpose." On the function of duration, GX said, "The only duration I care about is to quit before I get bored." Thus, duration is connected to form for GX.

Casey Anderson typically brings a computer running Supercollider, an alarm clock radio, contact microphones, and various objects. When I asked him about the function of timbre in his work, he gave the following spirited answer.

> CA: That's one of the things I'm most interested in, different types of sounds, and really perceiving them, or trying to. So I think that's critical. You can never play the same note the same way over and over again, so even if you're just going like, "Da da da da," it's different every time, and that's a physical property of the sound and that people are doing it, but computers are like that too. It's nice being put in a container where that's the operative component of a piece. That's really important.
> I try to be really critical about what I'm using and why, and then really protecting that, or bringing that out to the fore, in terms of what it already is timbrally, and really trying to work with the actual detail of a particular sound or set of sounds and their relationships to each other. What's different? How are they different? How much or how little are they different? Things like that. I would like to think that that's effective in my music, but it's certainly on my mind a lot when I'm working on stuff. Aside

from other things, that's one of the main attractive points of using a computer: you can make any sound with a computer, to a degree. So then I interface with people with that. But just thinking that none of these things are as fixed as they seem, I've been thinking a lot about this. Somewhere in the Christian Wolff book he talks about how you have a group of people trying to attack a note at the exact same time, it's never going to be one attack, it's always like—I think the term he uses is—a kaleidoscope. But that adds up to a pretty nuanced timbral sound. So from a gestalt standpoint we hear that as one sound, but we're going to hear it as a changing sound, very slightly, and that's really very interesting. And how can you set up containers for that? With this outside machine thing, maybe the best result of that is that people, when trying to listen to those, realize how timbrally rich the environment already is. So there's kind of a functional aspect there too, about listening. But I think you can potentially have that experience in any concert, or when listening.

Timbre is an important aspect of Casey's work in experimental music. The idea that no two sounds are alike is exciting to him because as a critical listener he takes pleasure in the nuances of such different sounds. He is also concerned with shaping the details of particular sounds and their relations to other sounds. The computer, claims Casey, can aid in making almost any sound ("to a degree"), which is to say that the computer can aid in synthesizing nearly any timbre. He also claims that listeners can listen to the rich nuances of timbre at any concert, but implicit in his answer is that his work is particularly about setting timbres and relations of timbres, whereas other concerts—focused on more traditional forms of music—prioritize the sequences and relations of pitch. When I asked Casey about the function of volume in his work, he provided the following answer.

> CA: I was really interested in the absolute threshold where something is about equal with the room, but maybe just enough above to notice, or maybe it's wavering in between that. So I have a lot of pieces—especially the verbal score pieces—where people are instructed to equalize the volume of whatever they're doing with the room and-or other people. I'm still really interested in that; I feel like it's impossible, and it's super subjective, of course. But trying to do that is really interesting, and I think it generates a certain kind of a form. I have some relatively quiet pieces. My pieces have never been inaudible, I don't think. I used to be really into the really, really loud thing. This is another one of those places where I

really agree with what Cage says: there's really only one loud, but there are lots of different quiet. And so I think it's a little more interesting, but ultimately these days I'm more interested in being dynamic with volume, and really exploring a trajectory rather than being one way all the time, which I think, if you would have asked me four years ago I would have said, "Whatever volume it should be, it should be at that volume level the entire time." I was super obsessed with that, because over time it just changes for you. Like if it's super loud, after a while your ears adjust and then it's not that loud. Or if it's super quiet your ears adjust and then it becomes more normal seeming. So that's a useful device to me, is to try to think about perception and its relationship to amplitude and volume. But it depends on the situation. Like these machines I was talking about designed to be just outside. The idea is that they would try to equalize volume to the surroundings over a period of time. So that's a real trope for me. That's something that I really keep coming back to: How can you get something to be almost exactly the same as its surroundings in terms of its loudness? There's so much there.

DM: That's interesting. It seems like if you just move, you change the sound.

CA: Exactly. It's basically impossible. I did this residency under Alvin Lucier, and he had this great way of putting it. He said, "You can compose differences, or you can compose similarities." He was saying, "I compose similarities because the differences happen." So all those instrument and sine tone pieces, that's where all those come out of. It's impossible to play, for example with an oscillator. So the differences just naturally happen, and they're much more beautiful that way, rather than forcing it. So I'm interested in systems that take that as a given, and you have a much different experience trying to do that as a performer than the audience will. So I think there's a range of activities and it's going to be changing so much depending on what's going on, that it's a very rich component. And I have tons of pieces where that's all it is. There were two years when I was writing a piece a week. That was the main thing that was controlling what happened. Equalize this with the room. Equalize that. I stopped because I felt like there was one piece that was basically all the versions of that [laughs]. So I'm really interested in volume. I don't like going to performances that are just blisteringly loud all the time. My dad has basically been deaf his entire life, so I grew up being really paranoid about my hearing.
So maybe you can say that it has always been on my mind.

The passage above illustrates Casey's deep interest in the potential of exploring

volume. He gave two seemingly different scenarios for using volume in particular.

In one scenario he explored the affects of loud, constant volume, and through the

consistency of the volume, he imagined the listener to settle into the sonic

environment. In that scenario, the dynamic occurs in the acclimation process of

the listener. In a second scenario, he described the attempt to have performers

make sounds at the same volume level as other ambient sounds, but admitted

that due to the subjective nature of listening, such an attempt was in fact

impossible. In both cases, the leveling process allows for differences to happen

on their own, and those differences are to be detected, experienced, and

appreciated by a keen listener. In his anecdote on the residency he spent with

Alvin Lucier, Casey learned that Lucier composed similarities, because

differences, according to him, happen on their own. This idea also dovetails with

what Casey learned from Christian Wolff when he answered the question on

timbre: when you ask a group of people to play a sound at the *same time*,

because of the slight discrepancies in time, the attack of the sound becomes rich

with *dissimilarities*. Creating situations for similar movements, and taking

pleasure in the richness of discrepancies is an important aesthetic tool that Casey

exploits using volume and timbre. I then asked Casey about the function of

meter and rhythm in his work.

> CA: That has changed a lot. I used to be really concerned with that.
> Leaving my undergrad I was really obsessed with Steve Reich in addition
> to all the improv stuff that I was interested in, and a lot of the early
> minimalism. And also I think with Wadada Leo Smith, it's much more
> interesting rhythmically than Steve Reich or Philip Glass or any of those
> guys. So I think of that proportionally. I like this Leo Smith idea that
> every note is followed by a proportional amount of silence, and I try really
> hard to play like that.
> So, a short note, in *Ankrasmation*, is followed by the same duration of
> silence in a rhythm unit, for Leo. So he doesn't write this in. It's just how
> you would play. So if you see four short notes, that would actually look
> like, "Play a short something; rest for the same amount of time; play
> another one; rest for the same amount of time." So they're always
> proportional to each other and they're always related to each other in
> terms of this sound and silence equaling out somehow. And that's really
> important to me. I don't regularly use a strict meter at all in anything I
> do, but I like thinking of proportional rhythms and really highlighting that.

So being rhythmic is interesting to me. Just, the way I do it might be spread out over a long period of time.

Casey's interest in rhythm is really a function of duration, and the placement of sounds during that duration. He learned from Wadada Leo Smith that the proportion of sounds to silences set up interesting relationships and disparities between sounds. When I asked him about the function of duration in his work, he gave a self-described conservative answer.

> CA: That's super important to me overall. I think pieces should justify themselves in a way. That's the way I think about it. What you're doing and how it's done are intrinsically associated with each other in my mind. So going back to the big fat drone example, if it's not very informationally dense from a timbral perspective, then you're in this place where you think, "Ok, maybe it's a simple sound for a long time, and what you could potentially get out of that is, the longer the time, the more the sound will change for the listener." But there's this part of me that thinks, "How long does that actually need to happen for that effect to get across?" because after a while, if that's all that's going on, people are going to stop hearing it. It will just recede into the background. That's fine if that's the point of the piece, but if it's not, then it doesn't need to be super long. So that's super important to me. And that's the biggest thing, especially in an improv context. People always fuck up the endings. They don't actually stop when they should. Ideas will have gone on for the amount of time that they need to go on, and it should be time to move to a different thing, or to stop. You can tell in all these situations when you think, "That sounds like an ending." Maybe that's a trope that comes out of everything I listen to, and is kind of conservative, but that's fine. It drives me fucking crazy when it sounds like someone has wrapped up an idea and then starts it over again, and you get these series of what sounds to me like false endings. I fucking hate that. It's the worst thing in the world to be involved in. I try to be really critical of that when I'm doing it, because I know how much I hate it when other people ignore that.

Casey has strong feelings about the end of performances, particularly in the context of group improvisations when endings are negotiated in real time. Although false endings are not new to Western music (Haydn's String Quartet Op. 33 no. 2 "The Joke" comes to mind), improvising an ending is certainly more politically involved when working with others. (Who will play the last sound?)

Implicit in Casey's answer is an entire economy of time through the duration of

sound ("How long does that actually need to happen for that effect to get

across?"), and so time itself seems to be a value for him. Casey seems to try to

use duration to satisfy the needs of an audience that is used to searching for

changes in timbre and duration without abusing their patience.

Damion Romero's set up involves a battery of electric devices and

transducers he himself built plugged into a mixer. He has been using a cell phone

app as a sine wave generator used to excite some of the elements in his

equipment. I asked him about the function of timbre in his work.

> DR: I try to get certain sounds. I idealize sounds in my head and think
> about a sound that I would like to hear. In a sense it's some sort of noise.
> Not so much like a pure white noise, but kind of. I don't know why or what
> makes it so special, because I don't really know where the meaning is,
> and I guess I just follow my gut a little bit, and I don't really know why,
> because it could be kind of pointless. I guess there are certain sounds that
> I like or that I think of, and it would be cool if they…. Again, I'm having a
> really hard time describing it. It really depends. You can have just a
> sub,[336] really low frequency tone or tones and then in that sense the
> timbre is just muffled or something, but then you'll hear the other things
> in the room vibrating. So I don't really know when the timbre stops and
> the surrounding sounds begin sometimes. I do think about the tone of
> something. I don't want to make sounds that are unpleasant—not usually
> anyway—and I don't want to make things louder just because it hurts
> more or something. Ideally it would be really as loud as anything could
> be, but it wouldn't be causing any damage to anybody. But not all the
> time. I guess I just go after certain types of sounds I like.

Damion aurally imagines noise sounds, and since those sounds are not white

noise, they involve timbral complexities. He separates the timbres he produces

from his equipment, from the sounds he causes through loud volume that

vibrates the performance space, even though he consciously tries to activate the

space in such a way. Volume and timbre are often linked with Damion's work,

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[336] In this context, "sub" may mean subwoofer—a speaker capable of producing strong bass
frequencies—or subsonic. Subsonic would imply frequencies below the threshold of human hearing. In
this case, one would not hear pitch, but may hear pulses (or even rhythms) as frequencies below
twenty hertz.

"but not all the time," he warns. In a discussion about how the architectural

space affects the performance, he cited the amplification system as a salient

instrument.

> DR: The PA system is actually part of my instrument. It's all one sort of
> system. And the acoustic space itself is part of that too. It's hard to play
> in really dead spots. I prefer wooden spaces. It's really fun to play in a
> house because it's really easy to get things shaking. A lot of places that
> have cement floors are not as good. But there are a lot of factors. There's
> the PA system and there's the people. The people aren't really so much
> part of the instrument, but they all have an effect on the acoustics in the
> room. But that's it: it's sort of like a system. All these factors affect the
> others, so it's always a little different.

Amplification and the room itself are important instrumental factors in Damion's

performances. Spaces that are constructed of wood are preferred acoustic

environments because they vibrate in ways that are more interesting to him.

When I asked him specifically about the function of volume in his work, he

provided the following response.

> DR: I generally like to use a lot of amplification, and it's usually the more
> the better. Not so much because I have a sound and I want that sound to
> be louder and louder, but more like…; a lot more things can happen if you
> have more power in the amplification. The amplification is generally
> limited because it's not such a natural thing having an amplifier that
> makes a sound louder. Why not be able to have an amplifier that…. There
> are limits to sound systems. What am I'm trying to say? [Thinks] Different
> things happen. My live stuff is really kind of physical and you feel these
> vibrations, so I'm always struggling with having enough of a PA or not.
> I'm usually not very satisfied. Occasionally it's enough, but….

> DM: So mostly you use volume to try to get a physical presence—is that
> the gist of it?

> DR: Yeah. You just get a lot more things moving when you have more
> power behind the speakers. I'm always really interested in what happens.
> It's just a lot more tactile, rather than listening in headphones. It just
> seems a little more interesting, or more fun, or a lot more interesting
> things happen when there's more power.

Damion favors low frequencies; low frequencies require more amplification than frequencies centering around 2000 Hz because human voices tend to speak in that the range, and so biologically the human ear has evolved to favor frequencies in the range between 2000-5000 Hz. Outside of that range, either lower or higher, requires more amplification to be heard. Low frequencies also have a broader spectrum of harmonic content because they have more overtones, and so those overtones can resonate other materials that share a resonant frequency. When materials like wood or metal sympathetically resonate with a sound, the material itself vibrates, and that vibration can sometimes create rattling or even an audible pitch. The rich overtones from powerful low frequencies can vibrate multiple objects with varying resonant frequencies. More power; more vibrational movement. These movements are experienced through the shaking of objects in the room, and through the room itself shaking, and through the tactile experience of sound vibrating the body. Few practitioners can make sound tactile more effectively than Damion. When I asked Damion about the function of meter and rhythm, and of duration, he replied:

> DR: Duration is relative. As far as meter goes, I think I try to strip out anything that's arbitrary. There are beats and there can be… pulses, and all of that. But I don't so much try to create a beat in the way that you would think of music having a beat. I like things having that sort of periodic… I don't know. The whole spectrum of vibration—pitch and tone and meter—it's all kind of the same.

Deciphering Damion's answers is not always easy, since he was thinking and rethinking ideas during the course of the interview, and often had difficulty articulating these ideas. I could tell there was a sense of being "on the record" that seemed to make him hesitant. In any case, what we can glean from the interview is that Damion understands that these various parameters (other than

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intensity, perhaps) are all functions of time, or vibration as cycles per unit of

time. And yet he stopped short of an idea that might have been revealing: "I like

things having that sort of periodic… I don't know." What kind of periodicity was

Damion talking about? Periodicity means some kind of repetitive measure.

Certainly, since he actually uses low pitches, there is periodicity as low

frequency, or as pulse that happen between two frequencies (difference tones or

difference pulses). Was he on the verge of revealing a technique? or did he feel

that he was not explaining himself properly? Either way, the only duration that

Damion was relatively definitive about was the typical duration of his

performances: about fifteen minutes.

Don Bolles mostly plays experimental 'noise' with Joseph Hammer in the

duo Kitten Sparkles. The materials are compiled from Don's collection of sounds,

mostly from shortwave radio. When I asked Don about the function of timbre in

his work, he said:

> DB: That's another parameter. They're all parameters. Anything you can
> control you might as well make a part of the thing. You can modulate
> sound with light and light with sound. So there's really no distinction
> between any of those kinds of things. It's just vibrations.

When I asked him about the function of volume, he said:

> DB: Certain volumes are necessary for certain effects. So you just use it
> as another parameter. With Kitten Sparkles it needs to be pretty loud with
> no distortion. It needs to be insanely loud with no distortion and big. Not
> with subwoofers necessarily, but the functional equivalent of that: a lot of
> air has to move with the speakers.

Extreme volume is important to Don for carrying out Kitten Sparkles

performances. When I asked him about the function of meter or rhythm, he said:

> DB: I use pulses only; I use the rhythm of the whole piece in its entirety;
> and I use the human rhythms, like the pulses that the Dream Machine
> frequencies use that put you into the alpha state. So I try to keep around

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that with that part of it, and then the other stuff is more slowly moving waves that pull you along and pull you into the thing.

In this case, Don is talking chiefly about the pulses emitted form the strobe light he controls that is an essential element to Kitten Sparkles performances. The strobe light pulses at about eight pulses per second to induce the alpha state, and the state of "forced mass meditation" he requires his audiences to undergo through the performative experience.

Bob Bellerue typically has a computer or two with a contact mic running through various effects pedals to a mixer to create his experimental sounds. When I asked him how he controlled timbre in his work, he said:

> BB: It's through all the choices in terms of all the levels. Amplitude is certainly one of them. In terms of the pedals and the routing and all the various settings. Basically everything affects the timbre, I guess. But I do find that I'll try to use…. I use pedals that affect the sound, obviously, but I don't use certain kinds of pedals. I kept buying bass octave pedals and I found I didn't like the sound. It just has this [mouth sound] uhhhhh sound to it that I just didn't like; and I found that I'd just rather EQ something than try to add this little box's analysis of the center frequency, and then a recreation of lower octaves based on that. I have a delay and reverb, but then I'm also using a Rat [distortion] pedal I borrowed from a friend. So I have this [Boss] bass overdrive and Rat pedal. The bass overdrive is the only pedal I had for years. It's just a really simple drive. It has some EQ but mainly I just turn it up all the way and it's more about the mixing and the combination of internal circuits with contact mics and other kinds of feedback sources.

Bob says that everything effects timbre, and gives a variety of examples of how timbre can be effected, from changing EQ, using various pedals, and even affecting the overall amplitude of a sound. Since Bob is working with a complex set up of modular instruments (pedals)—though simple unto themselves—each component can vary the characteristics of sound from subtly to drastically. Furthermore, feedback techniques add entropic elements to further complicate

timbral qualities. When I asked Bob about the function of volume in his work, he

said.

> BB: I like to work a lot with different volume levels. I use a little amp next to me. I have the speaker drivers in the guitar amp. I'll be playing with the PA. I have a really big sound, but I like to turn all the big stuff down and just have the little stuff, and draw everyone's hearing back toward the small sound to refreshen their ears because it can be such a big, close reflective sound. I think the visceral element is important, that you really need to feel it. I like to feel it when I'm playing. I think that's important.
>
> DM: Does that require loud volume?
>
> BB: It can. I don't really like painful—I guess—music, but there are times you need to go to those places where it's really physical sound, or it's high-pitched and you have to go like [closes ears]. But I don't necessarily feel like it has to be the loudest ever. It's more about having that option to really feel the bass, because the bass gets lost. Especially when you're in that context where there are no paradigms for…. If there's a random sound engineer at a club, you're not going to say: "This pedal is like my bass drum, and this one is like the bass guitar" or whatever. It's more like, "We play noise," and they're going to say, "What?" and assume we're going to try to break the PA or that the aesthetics of it is going to destroy the equipment. So a lot of times you try to tell someone, "Can you just make it as loud as possible without breaking your equipment? And let us control the sound." Like I said: we're not just bringing traditional instruments; there's not a traditional set up for it.

Bob works with volume in a variety of ways to provide contrast between the

different sounds he works with. He is also interested in rendering sound tactile

through loud volume: "I like to feel it when I'm playing." Although loud volume is

important to him, he is not interested in causing pain through sound; nor is he

interested in destroying the house PA at a venue. Nonetheless, loud volume is an

important component to Bob's experimental performances. I then asked Bob

about the nature of meter and rhythm in his work.

> BB: I don't normally try to do something [rhythmic]. There are times I do, but a lot of times I turn a button on by mistake and it makes this hideous sound. I'll sometimes do it a couple of times to give it a little more of a musical context. But usually I'm working on an internal feedback system and there'll be that point where it's unstable, and I'll try to find that place for a rhythm to come out. In general I work more with textures I think:

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extreme visceral textures, getting a lot of stuff together, rather than it being either really static or like an individual instrument. It's more like a clusterfuck.

Mixer feedback techniques easily lend themselves to extreme high pitches, extreme low pitches, and pulsating noise rhythms. These rhythms are difficult to describe, not easily danceable, and nearly impossible to re-create (and that is the fun of using mixer feedback techniques!). When Bob speaks of working with "extreme visceral textures" he means a variety of intense timbres. The morphologies of these timbres are constantly changing in Bob's performances.

Joe Potts has become known in recent years for his use of the Optigan sampling toy organ and other gadgetry, but he also uses a variety of rackmount delays, reverbs, and modulation effects, and uses a Kaossilator track pad controller to affect various parameters of sound. His supergroup, Airway, was known for holding some of the loudest performances, running sounds from various performers into a single mixer controlled by Joe (with the exception of a rotating group of drummers). I asked Joe about the function of timbre in his work, and he gave an odd answer.

> JP: That's important in Airway, but the other groups, not so much. For experimental music it's kind of a no-no because it chops the structure up and you contextualize sounds unintentionally. So it's something to be avoided. I guess in my work I use it mainly for hypnotic effects.

Perhaps he did not hear me correctly, or perhaps he misunderstood the term 'timbre'—which is also to say that I should have explained it, since I certainly explained terms like timbre for other people who seemed confused by the question.

In any case, to say that timbre is a "no-no" seems to imply that he did not understand the term. He seemed to think it meant rhythm. The way he answered

the question on meter and rhythm seems to corroborate my claim. In another

part of the interview when I asked what kinds of sounds he valued, he said:

"Layered sounds and hypnotic sounds." I then asked Joe about the function of

volume in his work.

> JP: Especially for AIRWAY, volume is pretty crucial because the idea is that
> the music works physically on the audience. Their bodies resonate with
> the music—of the sound, anyway—and also, especially with AIRWAY, the
> idea is to try to create standing waves. You can talk to Don Bolles about
> standing waves: he's a standing waves fanatic; and Damion. But anyway,
> that's something that I just stumbled into in the 70s when we started
> doing AIRWAY and playing in these lofts with flimsy walls where the walls
> would start to vibrate. We were using reel-to-reel tape delays and other
> kinds of tape delay boxes. We started getting some standing waves. You
> end up with something greater than the sum of your parts, and it's also a
> physical phenomenon that has an effect on the audience, and that's what
> I was trying to do, is have an effect on the audience and get some kind of
> physical reaction from the audience. Later on, reading, I guess that's what
> Throbbing Gristle was doing too. At the time I kind of knew them, but I
> didn't really know that that was such a big part of what they were doing.
> To me, from their early records it's not that obvious. I guess it was more
> in their live performances. They talk about women having orgasms from
> the standing waves and stuff. I think AIRWAY is one group that I've been in
> that's the most dependent on high volume for the effect.

AIRWAY allegedly had an important impact on Japanese experimental sounds

artists as well as artists in the United States. One reason was because of the

extreme intensity of their performances (another reason was because of the

suggestive subliminal messages Joe embedded in the layers of sound, instructing

the audience to approach the stage, or back away from the stage). Loud volume

made their performances physical to the touch "resonating their bodies" with

sound. When I asked Joe how he used meter and rhythm in his work, he said:

"Just for hypnotic effect. The way you get around chopping things up is by letting

it go out of sync." Joe continuously discussed issues of rhythm in terms of

"chopping" (even his Optigan technique he refers to as the "chopped Optigan").

In my interview I suspected that Joe was influenced by William Burroughs and his

cut-up tape pieces (also used to make novels, like *Naked Lunch*), but he said he

was actually more into the Dada movement and the 1950s French musique

concrète activities.

Maria Garcia's set-up usually involves a mixer, some reverb and

modulation effects, a loop sampler, and sometimes her mandolin. I asked her to

describe the function of timbre in her work.

> MG: I'll use speed controls, and sometimes I'll take a slow organ piece
> that I've done here [at home] and slow it down even more so you get a
> drone out of it or something, as opposed to a diddy. Or speed it up,
> depending on how I'm feeling, or what kind of set I want to play.
> I really enjoy high frequencies. I like what they can do to your ear. I like
> that they're just so piercing, even though they may sound so quiet,
> they're so piercing that you can walk away from it and be completely
> frazzled. With an extremely high pitch, you almost don't even hear it. I
> like high frequencies a lot. I like crackly sounds. I like a lot of natural
> sounds. The sounds I use are a lot of natural sounds, like water, animal
> sounds, crickets chirping, [their dog barks], I've used dogs barking as part
> of pieces that I've made. A lot of natural sounds from everyday life. When
> I see a set, I really like high tones and crackly tones.

In the passage Maria described a few techniques for altering timbre through

speed controls. By recording organ sounds on tape and slowing the tape down,

the pitch of the entire recording lowers. Likewise, by speeding up the tape, the

pitch of the entire recording gets higher. Maria also says that she enjoys piercing

treble frequencies from high-pitched knife-in-ear sounds. Field recording allows

her to introduce and recontextualize environmental sounds in her work. When I

asked her about the function of volume in her work, she said the following.

> MG: I use several different volume controls throughout, because I have
> the separate four-channel bare mixer, which is essentially just a volume
> control, and also there are several volumes on all my pedals and
> everything. But just trying to make smaller sounds much bigger; trying to
> get the smallest sound to sound really large in a room.

Several of her electronic components have volume controls that change not only the intensity but also the overall timbre of the sounds. This is partially due to the fact that raising the intensity with a volume control has the effect of changing the timbral make-up of the sound: more high frequencies might be present with more overall energy pushed by altering the volume control. With a four-channel mixer, four distinct sound sources can be faded in or out, or mixed and balanced to achieve the sounds desired. Amplification of small sounds is also important to Maria, either as a small recorded signal, or by amplifying a small sound with a microphone. These sounds can then by amplified to gargantuan proportions, highlighting particular details of the sound. When I asked her about meter and rhythm in her work, she said,

> MG: I feel like I definitely have some sort of melodic sound. It's definitely not just blasting harsh noise. Not that that doesn't have some sort of rhythm, but I think I keep more on a plane, so I think the way I get rhythm is by looping a lot of things. By looping you get almost like a droney beat at the end, and usually I do a lot of building up when I play, so you get a heavier and heavier beat by the end of it.

Maria connects meter and rhythm to a sense of melody—unconventional melody, to be sure. She explains that rhythm is achieved through loop sampling. Since loops have a measurable duration, a sense of rhythm can emerge from a loop, as repetitive measures lend themselves to a certain degree of predictable results. Often drones result from loops as washes of timbres; at other times accented sounds can lend themselves to more percussive rhythms.

Samur Khouja's set-up seems cryptic, since he often provides himself with a comfortable workspace with his equipment around him. When he performs at (the) Handbag Factory, he is often more relaxed, since his bedroom is literally next to the main performance room. His set-up often entails some simple

oscillating sound generators, a cassette player, and a mixer busing sounds to various effects devices so that he can add and subtract effects at will. When I asked him about the function of timbre in his work, he immediately connected timbre with intensity.

> SK: Volume and frequency go hand-in-hand. Different playback systems won't be able to reproduce all the frequencies, or the frequency isn't the same at different playback levels. But as far as timbre goes, timbre, to me, is how the instrument sounds and kind of how it makes you feel, too, about the sound. If it has such a unique sound to where you're noticing that it has a timbre, to where timbre becomes an issue, then it must be inspiring or really uninspiring. Like if a guitar is old and has a specific sound to it, it could be perfect for a song or for a mood, so timbre is really important. How I control timbre is really how I would in the studio. I know that I can get a good recording if the source is good. Forget having a bunch of good mics. It's actually a really cliché thing in the audio world. If it generates a good sound and it's a good quality instrument and it sounds pleasant, it's going to record well, generally. If you have a shitty mic and shitty equipment to record stuff, it's not going to make the instrument sound better. The source: I don't waste a lot of time fucking with the sound if I know it's not the right source to begin with. If it's the kick drum or a snare, and I know it's not appropriate, I'm not going to try messing with it: I'd rather just gravitate toward having the proper source and then manipulating it. But then sometimes happy accidents happen. Maybe you're just stuck with something. If you're stuck with a particular timbre, trying to manipulate it can sometimes lead to new things that are great, or also just help your knowledge. "I know this timbre through whatever I did to it: it's just not going to work" or "It's going to get this sound." So having these sounds you can recall in your head, later, that are nice to have.
> In general I usually cut the top and bottom off things. I really like finding the mid-range—the middle ground. If there's excess high end and excess low end I usually shave those things off. I definitely band-pass a lot, if you want to ask that sort of specific…, you know?

For Samur, timbre is not only *how* a sound sounds, it is how a sound makes you feel. In other words, Samur connects timbre not only to the uniqueness or idiosyncratic property of the sound, but also—in some way—to emotion. He describes his experience in the studio recording various sounds with high quality microphones, and contends that high quality microphones cannot make a bad sound good. The sound source itself—and its resultant timbral makeup—must be

appropriate. Since Samur understands the tools of the recording studio

intimately, he has developed an intuitive knowledge of some timbres, particularly

how they will sound when they are recorded, or how they will sound when

amplified. His expert knowledge allows him to manipulate sounds with more

predictability. Unlike other experimental artists, Samur says that he likes "finding

the mid-range." I suspect that he does *not* mean that he does not explore very

high pitches or very low pitches, but rather, that whatever sounds he does use,

he gives them a focused timbre by passing excessive bass and treble harmonics;

thus these sounds would be easier to control from a compositional standpoint.

When I asked Samur about the function of volume in his work, he continued to

discuss the interaction of volume and frequency.

> SK: Dynamics are really important to me. I'm hypersensitive to dynamics because I mix music. It has a really big impact. As far as making sure that your sound has an impact, you want it to be loud, you don't want it to be too loud to where people aren't enjoying themselves and have to cover their ears. Or maybe they're still going to cover their ears but…. A lot of times I know I'm going to get loud and people are going to cover their ears, or it's an extreme volume difference, but it's as such that the nature of what I'm changing to is something that's not harsh, it's just louder. So you have to cover your ears, but at the same time it's not distracting. So I'll do that a lot; I'll keep that in mind, to where if you want to be seamless, you have to think about volume and frequency. You can't just think about volume because, especially with your playback systems, they're not going to be able to reproduce all frequencies at different volumes correctly or evenly distribute stuff. If you're working on a smaller system [and] you get loud [then] you're going to have to cut some of the bass, and then your volume is going to get really shrill, and then people are going to start covering their ears. If not, you can work with the systems: if you're really familiar [with the system] maybe they distort at a specific frequency or volume level, and you can use that to your advantage, and then all of a sudden the PA becomes an instrument as well. Same thing in the studio. I have to mix at a certain level because I know the bass is going to build up at a specific volume and I'm not going to be listening accurately, and my decisions at that point aren't going to translate out of the studio. So I'm very conscious of volume and dynamics.

Samur often uses volume as a mechanism to articulate formal aspects in his work. When musicians discuss "dynamics," they are typically discussing the changes in volume, and the duration of those changes. He is sensitive to how his audiences will perceive changes in volume, and tries to create an impact without unduly startling them. He explains how different amplification systems favor different frequency bands, and how alterations in equipment can excite or dull the resultant timbral make-up of the sounds depending on volume settings. When I asked Samur about the function of meter and rhythm in his work, he responded: "In my noise music specifically, not much."

Summary—The Function of Timbre

How timbre is used and discussed in experimental 'noise' performance varies from performer to performer through the choices of instruments used in the performance and the language used to discuss it. I have found that the participants I interviewed tended to discuss timbre in four ways: as metaphor, through its instrumental usage, through certain performance practice methodologies, and as an ideology.

Many participants discussed timbre in terms of metaphor. Henry Perez said he favored distorted, chaotic sounds, popping sounds, and "sounds like a vacuum." Nial Morgan was fascinated with "rumble" sounds, and often made mouth noises to replicate the kinds of sounds he likes. Greh Holger described favorable sounds as murky, grinding, grumbling, and chirpy. Joseph Hammer uses a production technique called "audio sweetening"—the 'sweetening' is the metaphor used here. Crackly sounds are favored by Maria Garcia. GX Jupitter-Larsen enjoys the sounds of destruction. He ranked his favorite timbres: 1)

breaking glass, 2) fire crackle, 3) a good car crash, tied with explosions, and 4) sandpaper tied with erosion.

A second way that the participants I interviewed discussed timbre was through the instruments they used to produce and alter sounds. These instruments are generally synthesizers, guitar pedals, equalization (EQing),[337] mixers, microphones recording technologies, and computers. Henry uses distortion, modulation, and delay pedals with a microphone. Nial uses the EQ functions on his mixer to obtain a "dense" sound. Greh Holger uses the various oscillators and filters on his synthesizers. Elden Man favors mixers, filters, oscillator sounds, and delay devices to obliterate the identity of the original sounds he uses. Joseph Hammer uses high fidelity tape for his reel-to-reel machine with an analog phaser that splits the monophonic signal into a stereo signal. Bob Bellerue uses a chain of effects pedals that include overdrive pedals, an octave pedal, reverb, and mixer EQ using mixer feedback techniques.

A third way the participants discussed timbre was through various methods of using it. John Wiese thought of timbre in terms of its relations to other sounds and parameters. Elden Man's technique is to obliterate the original source of a sound through altering its timbre: he specifically favors using a delay pedal to randomly alter the delay times to destroy a sounds identity. Casey Anderson is interested in relationships between different kinds of timbres, as a formal device marking one event from another.

Finally, a few participants expressed what I call an ideology of timbre. For Greh Holger, experimental 'noise' is about "pure sound worship"—its purity is not

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[337] Equalizers (EQs) are timbre controls that add or subtract various frequency bands in a sound signal. Equalization controls are not only found on mixing boards and amplifiers, they can take the form of a rackmount unit, a dedicated guitar pedal, a distortion pedal, or any audio device. Many audio devices use some form of EQ—sometimes a simple 'tone' control—either to compensate for lost frequencies, or to create a general frequency character that is pleasing to the listener.

in pitch, but in the quality and morphology of the sounds—timbre. Joseph

Hammer pronounced, "It's all timbre. It's extreme timbre." Christiaan Cruz said

that timbre is what he is mostly listening for when he performs. For Scott Cazan,

"timbre is everything"—"Timbre is ontology." Timbre is exciting for Casey

Anderson because he claims that no two sounds ever sound alike, so timbre is

connected to sonic identity and difference. Damion Romero "idealizes sounds" in

his head that he would like to hear: "in a sense it's some sort of noise." Bob

Bellerue says that everything affects timbre, "especially amplitude"—thus raising

and lowering the volume on bass frequencies alters the timbre. Samur Khouja

also expresses the connection between volume and frequency: for him, complex

timbre is connected to emotion.

Summary—The Function of Volume

Since most—but certainly not all—of experimental 'noise' is electronic and

uses amplification, volume is an important issue. High-powered amplification is

generally preferred to activate the performance space and balance low

frequencies and high frequencies (though some performance spaces, like the

wulf., use much smaller amplification equipment).

Through the testimony of the participants in my project, I found a variety

of uses for volume. Three of these basic uses for volume necessitate (relatively)

loud volume. The first reason for (relatively) loud volume is to silence the

ambient sounds. These sounds include sounds that are outside of the venue as

well as inside the venue. Relatively loud volume is used to focus the listener on

the sonic activity of the performance. Thus, Joseph Hammer said, "Low volume

would be fine but it's usually not possible because the ambient sounds are

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usually really loud. Volume has to be added to overcome the distracting sounds."

Secondly, relatively loud volume is important to "activate the space." GX Jupitter-

Larsen, Joseph Hammer, Damion Romero, Scott Cazan, and Samur Khouja all

agree that the volume of a performance should activate the space to give the

sonic performance an all-encompassing immersive quality. The third use of loud

volume is to render sound palpable to the skin so that the listener can *feel* the

sound. This kind of volume is extreme volume, often as loud as the PA is capable.

Extreme volume not only allows the listener to feel the sound, but it can also

move the structure of the building the performance is taking place in, and many

performers and listeners find the rattling and shaking of the performance space

to be a pleasurable experience. There are varying degrees of extreme volume

depending on the power capabilities of the amplifiers and speakers used.

On the other end of the intensity spectrum, only three performers I

interviewed experimented with extreme soft volume—Casey Anderson, Scott

Cazan, and Michael Winter—though none of them use extreme soft volume

exclusively. In this context I am considering the use of extreme soft volume in

terms of its prolonged experience, requiring strained focus to hear the contents

of the sound. Many performances by the Wandelweiser Group and the Japanese

Onkyo movement use extreme soft sounds in their performances.

A few more performers I interviewed have explored soft volume (as

opposed to extreme soft volume), either as part of a dynamic performance that

moves toward and away from soft volume, or for the exclusive exploration of soft

volume. Performances by Casey Anderson that attempt to perform sounds that

equalize with the ambient sounds of the performance space are an example.

Another example includes some of the scores by Michael Winter, who often gives

general instructions for the intensity of a performance to be "Clear and not loud." There are also explosive 'noise' performances that will delve into soft volume to produce tension in between louder parts. David Kendall and Nial Morgan both use such a technique. In those cases, soft volume is used strategically to space out, articulate, and intensify loud volume.

Medium volume is generally explored either when loud volume is impossible, or as part of a dynamic performance that explores medium volume as part of the trajectory of the performance.

About half of the performers I interviewed used different volumes throughout their performance in a dynamic way that jumped between different volume levels. The other half tended to play more or less at one (static) volume level. Playing at one volume level is an important aesthetic choice for many practitioners. Some prefer their performances to be constantly loud for the immersive affect that loud volume has. Casey Anderson holds an interesting view concerning the use of one dynamic level for auditory perception. He claims that whether using extreme low volume or extreme high volume, the ears adjust, and thus an internal dynamic is set into place. At extreme loud volumes, the ear adjusts and settles into the sound: it no longer sounds loud. At extreme soft volume, after straining to hear for a time, the ear eventually adjusts to the soft sounds. The normalization of intensities means that some salient features can stand out that may have been a struggle to hear without the prolonged experience of focused listening to soft sounds.

There are two other ways that volume is used in experimental 'noise' performance. One way is to use volume as a formal device that separates parts

of the performance. Thus, we may hear the loud section, the soft section, the build up (crescendo section), etcetera.

Another way volume is used is to affect timbre. By raising or lowering the volume of a frequency band on an equalizer, the frequency becomes more present or less present, thus the timbre is altered through the addition or subtraction of harmonic content in the sound. Volume is also important in the morphological shaping of sound through its envelope. Thus, a fast attack means the volume is ramped up quickly; or a slow attack means the volume is ramped up slowly. The sustain characteristics determine the main volume of the body of the sound. The decay is how quickly or slowly a sound ramps down in volume. The morphology of sound—its timbre—is about the intensities and simultaneities of frequencies. Finally, volume raised or lowered does not raise all frequencies equally. Thus, lower volumes will tend to excite fewer frequencies, and higher volumes will tend to excite more frequencies. Lower frequencies and higher frequencies need more energy (amplification) than sounds that can be heard in the middle of the locus of human hearing. Overall volume affects our perception of timbre.

Summary—The Function of Rhythm, Meter, and Duration

The function of time—as rhythm, meter, and duration—is fascinating in the context of experimental 'noise.' Two salient features of experimental 'noise' are 1) its resistance to traditional pitch materials into successions of tones and semitones, organized into scales and chords, and 2) its resistance to organized meter and rhythm. Rhythm and meter both have a strong tendency to invoke feelings of regularity and standardization in the experimental 'noise' scenes. For

example, in the opening questions concerning aesthetic issues in experimental

'noise,' GX Jupitter-Larsen was adamant about his dislike for music, specifically

because of its history of regimented meters and rhythms.

> GX: People fall into line. They're too easily distracted by conformity. The trouble with music is that it promotes conformity. And I don't care what kind of music you're talking about. With very few exceptions, the vast majority of music ever composed anywhere in the world promotes conformity. You march to the drummer, and you march to the drummer that you mostly identify with. The whole point of drumming is to set up social boundaries between people. This is the whole purpose of music. This is why you have the punks and the whatever, the headbangers, and whatever. Music—popular music in particular—it's all about conforming to the wishes of the status quo. And I don't care how grandiose and how overdramatic that sounds.

GX's dystopian sentiments are not unique. French economist Jacques Attali made

a similar claim: "The rhythms, of exceptional banality, are often not all that

different from military rhythms"—and—"Music thus fashions a consumer

fascinated by his identifications with others, by the image of success and

happiness."[338] Thus, the music consumer identifies with and conforms to

readymade images of success and happiness—the status quo.

The participants I interviewed discussed the functions of rhythm, meter,

and duration in four basic ways. First, most of the participants I interviewed said

that the most prominent way to handle rhythm and meter is *to avoid it entirely*.

Secondly, meterless beats, pulses, and even complex rhythms, sometimes

emerge from the mixing of frequencies. Many practitioners find pleasure in these

complex periodic sounds.

Third, three people I interviewed—Elden Man, Eddie Giles, and Michael

Winter—claimed that they *do* in fact use rhythms and meters. When I asked

Elden about the function of rhythm, he said: "I do use it sometimes, but then a

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[338] Attali, *Noise*, 109-110.

lot of times I don't use it because it's too regimented…. Sometimes it's very important, and sometimes it's not. I mean that sometimes it's important that I try to eliminate it." For Elden, "my music has noise and my noise has music." Another person who uses rhythm is Eddie Giles. He does not have an explicit stance against rhythm. In fact, he sometimes uses rhythm, but prefers rhythm boxes to drum machines. A rhythm box is simpler than a drum machine and makes very simple drumbeats. These sounds were common in the early days of industrial music and power electronics in the late 1970s and 1980s. In fact, he prefers those terms to describe his work, even though he has become associated with the experimental 'noise' band +Dog+. Finally, when I asked Michael Winter about the function of rhythm and meter in his work, he said, "Sometimes I use meter; sometimes I don't." I have not heard Michael use meter in his works; perhaps he uses meter as a way to organize time, without regard for rhythmic regularity.

Finally, since rhythm and meter both employ levels of regularity (as far as rhythm is *in* meter), changes over time are typically better understood in terms of duration in the context of form (or structure). In other words, duration is related to the organization of a performance. Many of the practitioners I interviewed used duration to structure and organize their performances; or rather, in the course of a performance a structure can be gleaned by the duration between or within salient events and the rates of change from one section or event to another.

I have found one other consideration concerning the function of rhythm and duration. I gave a paper at an experimental 'noise' themed conference in Los Angeles in 2015. One of the persons in the audience was an author I had quoted

from his book *Noise/Music: A History*. Author Paul Hegarty and I then had lunch

discussing his book. He said that one chapter he wished he had written was a

chapter on "speed." I was not sure what he meant by "speed," but I already had

my own ideas of what it could mean. In my mind, speed was an interesting way

to think about the rate of change in an experimental 'noise' performance. I

propose three basic ways to conceptualize speed: no speed, slow speed, and fast

speed. No speed—or at least the specter of no speed—would define the harsh

noise wall: a timbrally complex sound that does not change. Slow speed may, to

some degree, define the temporal dimension of drone noise: a relatively

unchanging ground with changing activity above. Finally, fast speed seems to

generally characterize the quick rates of change in "harsh noise" (harsh noise is

also generally characterized by its loud volume). Connecting my conversation

with Hegarty to my own work, I was reminded of John Wiese's answer to my

question concerning the function of rhythm in his work.

> JW: I think that something that is interesting in a lot of my older works
> that are more full-on loud, is that there will be this sense of speed
> achieved by lots of cuts. It's not rhythm in a percussive sense, or a
> repetitive sense, since in my work there is typically no repetition at all,
> but there is a sense of rhythm in the sense that there is a sense of speed
> or velocity in the pieces.

Speed—not in terms of the rate of frequent repetitions, but in terms of the

irregular rate of quick changes (each change at a different rate)—is an important

method of disrupting patterns. John says that speed is "achieved by lots of cuts."

These cuts can be tape cuts (like in the cut-up technique), but they can also be

rendered by the turning devices on and (cutting them) off quickly at a mixing

board, but at irregular temporal intervals. I will call this phenomenon "entropic

speed" or "entropic rhythm." *Entropic rhythm* refers to the rate of irregular

changes, especially in sound. If entropic rhythm has a generalized tempo, it can be estimated by its general rate of change: fast speed, slow speed, etcetera. Though John Wiese is the only person I interviewed to explicitly discuss the notion of speed in experimental 'noise' in terms of rhythm, entropic rhythm is a technique used—knowingly or unknowingly—by many performers.

V. Expression and Body in Experimental 'Noise' Performance Practice

The issue of expression in experimental 'noise' performance is particularly interesting, since some performers are explosive in gesture while others are almost completely inert; many still make only the gestures they feel necessary to make the sounds necessary for performance. This section asks the following questions: *How does expression figure into your work*? *How do you use your body in performance*? The purpose of these questions is to understand modes of expressivity through experimental 'noise' performance. John Cage famously denounced expression, and used algorithmic methods specifically to avoid expressivity and remove ego from his work. Some of the performers I interviewed were very influenced by Cage's ideas, but ultimately none of them were completely willing to do away with expressivity.

The body generally articulates expression in music and experimental 'noise' performance. Corporeal articulations and the resultant sounds often occur in a homologous one-to-one (1:1) relation. With homologous articulation, the bowing of the string—or the activation of a distortion pedal; or the twisting of a volume knob—results in an immediate change in sound (perhaps from no sound to sound, or from one pitch to another; or from one timbre to another). But heterologous articulation is also possible in experimental 'noise.' When a key is stroked that sets off a complex algorithm—or an analog delay pedal is set so that all sound will pass after a set amount of milliseconds—the sound may occur at a different time from its corporeal articulation. The body does not always synchronize to the sound. Homologous synchronicities are generally experienced by listeners as important data signifiers concerning the expressivity of a performance. In this section I learn what practitioners of experimental 'noise'

think about the issue of expression and how they use the body to articulate their performance.[339] The answers vary in length and breadth. Some chose to discuss their physical movements, while others were interested in the theory of movement in performance. Many practitioners—particularly older practitioners—found angst-driven aggressive performances overly macho and unnecessary for their listening enjoyment, while others embrace the intimacy and potency of such extravagant displays. Others prefer the intimacy of a performer making smaller, intentioned movements to enact their sounds, since extravagant motions can distract from the listening experience. My job in this section is to present the modes of expression performers use to enact their sounds beginning with the body as instrument.

David Kendall generally performs with a laptop computer and a mixer. His performances generally involve the movements necessary to make the sound he requires, but on occasion I had noticed more facial expressions approaching potent structural moments of the performance. When I asked him how he used his body in performance, David said:

> DK: I try not to think about it. I make a point of not thinking too much about it, actually, and not trying to seem like I'm trying to be too still and trying not to look like I'm trying to amuse people.

I countered with my own observations of his performances: "I noticed that some people who make noise behind a laptop are much more still than you are, and some people are much less still than you are. So when you say you try not to think about it, it sounds like you *do* think about it." He then responded:

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[339] The only performance I attended that was purely musique concrète was by Manfred Werder, who performed some field recordings of various sites in Los Angeles and Paris at the wulf. I recall having a lively conversation with him about the playback operator as performer.

DK: Yeah, I do actually. I do. And that's exactly it. I just don't feel like being a performer. I don't feel like jumping out in front of the computer. But I reserve that option for the future. At any time I might jump out in front of the computer and do something silly, but you know, in the meantime I'll just kind of relax behind it.

Clearly David thinks about how he uses his body, but his purpose is to think about how the body will *not* become a distraction from the listening experience as performance, but as he says, he reserves the right to make the performance about more than sound to suit the event.

Henry Perez is one of the more explosive performers I interviewed. His performances often involved dancing and head-banging to a beat that was not there. When I asked Henry about the role of expression in his performances, we had the following exchange.

HP: I throw myself around.

DM: Does the way you move your body have anything to do with how you make sound?

HP: Sometimes. I think the movements pick up the noise. It kind of makes some of the sounds.

DM: Why do you dance with a beat but you don't make music with a beat? What's the role of the beat when you're dancing versus the non-beat when you're making sounds or listening to sounds?

HP: I don't think there is. There's no style, so I just go off on it. I just let loose on the noise.

DM: Where does that beat come from?

HP: My head [laughs]. I probably just make a beat in my head.

Henry generally performs on the ground with gear, thrashing around with pedals. His thrashing certainly affects some changes in sound as he bangs his head to an

imaginary rhythm.[340] These movements speak to a thrash metal aesthetic. When

Henry says "There's no style" he is saying that any method can be integrated into

a 'noise' performance.

Nial Morgan's performances as Wrong Hole are also explosive and

physical. Perhaps more than any other performer in the experimental 'noise'

scenes in Los Angeles, Nial comes closest to embodying a rockstar aesthetic,

though I doubt he himself would agree with that assessment. He has described

such interactional performances involving dancing, wrestling, "dog piles," stern

eye contact, and passionately kissing audience members. When I asked Nial how

he uses his body in performance, he said, "I guess I try to force emotion and

expression onto people. Especially when I do Wrong Hole. It's kind of an angsty

thing, which I'm trying to break apart from right now." Like Don Bolles' notion of

"forced mass meditation" in Kitten Sparkles performances, Nial Morgan actively

tries to make his audiences *feel* his performances, not only through the extreme

loud sounds he uses, but also through physical interactive contact. Nial

continues: "It's just how I feel inside. The pain. All the pain and frustration I feel

inside being released. That's the whole piece. When I play, that's what I want to

do. I want to release all of that." Nial speaks of angst and a release of expressive

energy he has been harboring prior to performance. These modes of expression

are often associated with rock music and other popular forms, but certainly many

musics (if not most) have expression as an important aesthetic goal. In

particular, Nial says that he is "trying to break apart" from angst-driven modes of

expression. Many other practitioners—particularly older practitioners—find angst-

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[340] My exchange with Henry on the subject of expression may read overly critical of his approach to making sound with an imaginary beat, but I assure the reader that I am only interested in why he makes these gestures. I am not implying that the gestures are irrelevant or superfluous. My interview shows that they are necessary for Henry's performance.

driven performances unnecessary for their listening enjoyment, while others

embrace these displays for their intimacy and potency.

Greh Holger claims that he chooses instruments based on their

"expressiveness." He explained to me what he meant.

> GH: I find something like a guitar or a cymbal to be an expressive instrument in that I have a variety of ways to approach playing it, from a really small rattle on the cymbal, to a vibrator on a cymbal, to dropping pennies on it, to smashing and just wailing on it. And the same thing with the guitar. It's a very expressive instrument: the way your fingers pick, the way your hand picks, the way you bend the notes; it's very expressive. It's very much an extension of a human playing [an instrument]. And synthesizers are cold, electronic instruments that don't have that tactile, hands-on relation to what you're playing, what you're doing with your muscles, and the sound that's actually being made. But there are synthesizers that come a lot closer to that. Like the Korg MS-20 is pretty sterile: it's dirty. It has a dirty, full sound. It's known for being a noisy synth. But approaching [it]—it's a Japanese design—it's very sterile-looking, its knobs, keys, patch-banks. For the longest time I was scared to touch the keyboard. I would just tape a key down, and that was it. I didn't want that increase in note or octave to come through in my music. I wanted this tone to oscillate. And not like: "I'm going to play this sequence, or play this melody." But something like the Roland SH-101 feels more expressive. And then it came with a guitar grip, that you could put on it, and it has a guitar peg on it so you can wear a strap around it. It has a mod stick so you can bend the oscillator, you can apply the filter to it, widen or narrow down the resonance on the filter.

Greh seems to discuss the expressivity of an instrument based on the amount of

subtlety one can use to alter its sound. With synthesizers, he claims that the

Roland SH-101 has more expressive potential because it can be interfaced like a

guitar, using a guitar strap. I believe Greh is making a connection to an historical

approach to musical instrument design—with bows, strings, keys; in other words,

a one-to-one homologous approach to making music—and the clinical interface of

a modular-style synthesizer, that resembles scientific instruments, with precision

dials. Greh calls the MS20—a semi-modular synthesizer with a patch bay to route

audio and control signals in a variety of ways—"pretty sterile." Greh continued to

discuss the SH-101.

> GH: It's more of an experience in the way that you're playing it, and also
> in the sound. You can adjust how much the note on the keyboard affects
> the envelope. Or how much the modulation affects the envelope. You can
> do this with a lot of other synths. You can patch it up for specific things,
> but that one especially feels more directly… it's closer to playing a guitar
> to me than how some of my other synths feel. It's really about interface,
> and how when I'm playing it I feel like the things I'm doing are translating
> more directly to the sound. I feel like a modular is not necessarily an
> expressive instrument at all because it's cables, knobs, patches, and I'm
> deliberately configuring something to make these sounds. And with a
> guitar or with drums there's a lot more physicality with what you're doing
> to the instrument and how it sounds.

Greh is saying that a knob (or dial) can be assigned to perform any task—

volume, filter, attack, decay, sustain, release, pitch, etc.—and the uniform size of

the knob sterilizes its functionality. An instrument like the Roland SH-101 is a

keyboard synthesizer that comes with an extension on the left side that, when

used with a guitar strap, can be interfaced in a manner similar to a guitar: hence

it is sometimes referred to as a "keytar." The left-hand grip has two triggers that

are generally assigned to trigger bitch bends and modulation (to simulate string

vibrato). Many of the controls on the SH-101 use sliders instead of knobs. The

sliders give a more user-friendly bar-graph representation of the parameters; a

feature many people prefer to twisting knobs. So Greh appreciates the interface

of the SH-101 for what he feels is its more intuitive approach: the interface

facilitates expressivity. And yet he is known for using the "dirty" synth, the

MS20, with its semi-modular interface and assignable wheel (commonly assigned

to adjust pitch). Greh concedes: "Every different sound that I want to generate is

on a different interface. Even if they're similar—even if it's keyboards and

knobs—it's still a different interface. It's still a different feeling and a different

way to approach it." 'Feeling' an instrument differently means, for Greh, exploring its expressive potential. When I asked him how he used his body in performance, he gave the following answer, recalling some of his early performances in Black Sand Desert.

> GH: Early Black Sand Desert performances were very physical. It was my first attempt at harsh noise. It was very physical; scrap metal; me banging contact mics and scrap metal on my pedals and on my equipment, flailing around, using a chain or using different things. It was a lot more physical. I don't feel like I really use my body in any context now. The Hive Mind performances tend to be very stoic and emotionless. I wouldn't play without sunglasses and a hood—removing myself from the spectacle in a way.

Greh describes an evolution of his performance practices, from a greater physicality to a more "stoic and emotionless" posture. Beneath his stoicism, he still manages to manifest a corporeal expressivity.

> GH: I move with the music I'm making, certainly. And there's a way to turn a knob or there's a way to *turn a knob* [makes a more dramatic twisting-arm motion connected to his fingers to simulate the turning of a knob]. And if I'm feeling into it, and if I'm captivated by what I'm doing, and if I'm really absorbed, if it's where I want to go, then you'll see that in my actions. Even if I'm in my bedroom recording, there's a definite…, almost a swagger that comes with it, that's sort of the same thing I can identify with when I'm performing. I don't know if I would have that if I hadn't played so many live shows over the past ten years. It's definitely something that has been born of me playing a lot of shows and seeing a lot of shows

Greh illustrates a manner of turning a knob with additional body movements not necessarily required to functionally enact the intended sound that indicates that expressivity of the movement. In my experience of attending Hive Mind shows, the performances are less dramatically movement-oriented than Greh suggests; perhaps the "swagger" is in the subtlety. Ultimately the passage speaks to how expressivity connects to the body in its physicality through the seemingly clinical motion of twisting a knob to affect the sound.

John Wiese has used a variety of methods of approaching his sonic

performances, but his main instrument is a medium-small mixer. I asked him

how expression figured into his work.

> JW: I think it's [expression is] a big part of it, for the most part. I feel that what you can achieve with sound is very powerful. In my experience, in general, it's more of an internal experience. When I'm listening to sound or music the experience that I have is more or less an internal one. I personally like…. I can appreciate the far-removed-from-any-necessity-of-theatrics or video, or anything…. I think people are often making some sort of spectacle to distract from…, or some kind of spectacle that they feel is enhancing the sound, or making it somehow palatable, or experiential, when I think it's actually total nonsense. In my experience, it only distracts from it. And if there is actually any power in the sound, and it's often distracted, and typically the theatrics are used to mask the fact that there is no power in the sound.

John touches on a variety of issues in this passage. Clearly he feels that sound

can provide a powerful experience on its own. Not only can integrating other

kinds of media distract from the sonic experience, it is often a sign that the sonic

performance is not strong. In his performance at Dem Passwords with Greh

Holger as Leather Bath, John's performance involved placing vibrating

toothbrushes and a vibrating dildo on cymbals sprawled out across the concrete

floor. The vibrating dildo provided a visual spectacle to the performance. I asked

John, "Can you explain the vibrating dildo at the Leather Bath show?" He said:

> JW: That's more practical I think, than theatrical. I mean, it is something to look at, but it's not actually the goal in a sense. To me it's the same as when I use the electric toothbrushes. It's literally the same thing; because the majority of those things were toothbrushes. There were some vibrators. I had several vibrators, but I needed to fill it out, so I got all these electric toothbrushes. I don't know if that's exclusive of what I'm talking about….

I countered: "But you had to know that people would look at the vibrators and

have a laugh."

JW: Yeah, and that's fine. I've played thousands of shows, and that was one of them. What I'm talking about is a little more broad. What I'm talking about is conveying an experience through sound that is in-itself…— what I'm trying to say is that there's an experience in sound that is powerful on its own without theatrics. That's not to say that there's absolutely no emotion conveyed in someone's non-theatrics. Someone getting up to sit at a table and slowly and purposefully moving knobs: that's also theatre—it is. But there's a necessary movement to let people experience the sound and then there's also putting on a costume and shaking your body [laughs], or turning the stage into some sort of jock show. I think you've seen all these things.

John did a get a little defensive, and that was as far as I was willing to push him concerning the powerful visual impact of a sex toy in a performance. His defense was that the dildo functioned as a vibrating object, and John required vibrating objects to excite the cymbals. He wanted to separate his work from more macho forms of making experimental 'noise'—forms he referred to as a "jock show."

More importantly for John, the performance was not about the visual impact (though the entire performance with Greh and John was certainly loaded with visual stimuli), it was about the sonic impact. When I asked him how he uses his body a certain way in performance, he gave the following answer:

JW: If it does, it does. I find that I mostly try to do what comes naturally, and I don't aspire to perform any more than that. That just goes toward my personality. I don't identify myself as a performer. I don't aim to…: I think a lot of people make a shitty performance in the guise of music or sound or whatever. I feel like I'm always seeing people make a terrible performance. It's this thing that doesn't really stand as a performance, and doesn't really stand as an effective sound either. It just becomes this thing: I wish they would do one or the other. Those are my personal gripes.
I think I try to be extraordinarily honest. I'm coming up here; I'm making these sounds for our mutual experience; generally I don't add much more to that. What I'm doing is causing this, and I don't need to pretend that I'm freaking out because I decided to earlier that day when I was packing up my equipment. I feel like that's enough—that the experience that can be created through sound is plenty. And if you're actually making sound for that purpose, then it's great: just make the sound. That's good.

John is not particularly interested in the gestural aspect of making sound. The body serves the function of creating the sound through the manipulation of faders and knobs. The sound itself is the subject of interest for him. Therefore the extravagant use of the body is against his aesthetic as a performer and as an audience member. Expressivity is in the sound itself.

Elden Man brings a few synthesizers and some rackmount gear to his performances. When I asked him about the roll of expression in his work, he began his answer with a theory of expressivity.

> EM: By expression, you mean the desire to articulate what you hear in your mind so that you're sharing with people. The question—'How does expression figure?'—I think that that's a main part of performance and recording and releasing stuff. It's basically having something to say. That goes back to the argument where people say that noise isn't saying anything. Well you're wrong. It's the artist expressing themselves to the audience. Even if the audience might be passive, or the audience might not be acclimatized to what they're doing, or it's dissonant to them. Noise and music is a form of expression. And when you say 'expression' it's definitely a form of communication where there's an exchange between the artist and the audience, or whoever consumes it.

Elden feels that all performance is a mode of expression and communication, and that since experimental 'noise' performances involve an exchange between performer and audience, then lines of communication are transpiring. I then asked Elden how he uses his body in performance.

> EM: There is a measure of control in terms of playing the instruments, tweaking the knobs and dials. I actually used to intentionally lose control, but then the result is that too many instruments get destroyed: really expensive keyboards get destroyed. So there has to be a good balance, where things are under control, but then there's just the right amount of physical abandon and wild release. I used to be really physical—I mean violently physical—and aside from destroying instruments, it would take its toll on my body. I wouldn't do anything like what other artists do, where they do cuttings or whatever, but sometimes I would draw blood accidently. I never planned for that, but you're working with things made out of metal, you get cut, and physically afterwards you're exhausted. I did one performance with a band called Bust Monsters, which was an all-star band in Japan that featured Merzbow, members of Incapacitants,

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CCCC. It was a progression from another band called Flying Testicle, which was started by Masami [Akita] of Merzbow. I just did vocals for Bust Monsters, but everything was going on at the same time, along with my vocals, and there was another vocalist: it was so violent. We played for, I think, forty minutes. Afterwards I was in such pain that Mayuko Hino from CCCC had to walk on my back and massage me, because she was a masseuse, and that really helped, but I was just in pain for days afterwards. So I don't know if that answers your question.

Elden describes a few modes of expressivity he has indulged in over his expansive experience as an experimental 'noise' practitioner. In his more grueling physical performances he allowed himself to let loose, and even drew blood. In an attempt to understand further the nexus of expression with the body, I asked Elden "When you're tweaking a knob, do you do it with a certain flourish?" His answer:

EM: No, I don't think that's necessary, because number one: depending on the distance of the knob, you might have to do something else at another distance, and so abbreviated movement is probably the most…, well economically the best thing to achieve, in terms of articulation…. I guess sometimes when you're playing the piano the left hand can cross over the right. Sometimes that's required because of the way it's written. But to the audience it's just a show, a flourish. I don't think it's necessary. It's required only if that's the way it's written. But if I have to change a knob over here, and within one second I have to move over here and change another knob, I don't want to have to [makes a motion] you know, because then I'm wasting time.

I then asked "So you don't subscribe to that [form of expression that incorporates grand gestures to articulate the sound]?" Elden anticipated my question. He responded, "No, I mean, if it's a release of energy, or adrenaline, and you're anticipating the sound, hoping it's going to be what's in your mind, then yeah that's natural actually." So for Elden, body movements should be minimized to their most economic forms to enact the procedures required for the performance, however, some extrasonic movements used to articulate the sound are natural to the process.

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Eddie Giles generally performs using a synthesizer and sometimes uses

field recordings. He is certainly one of the most visually expressive performers in

the Los Angeles experimental 'noise' scenes. When I asked him about the role of

expression in his work, he gave a long-winded sinuous answer (as he often did).

> EG: Anyway, expression is very important, especially if you consider
> yourself an artist, and I don't know if I consider myself an artist or a
> writer or a musician.
> So expression: I can only measure that I am trying to express something.
> When it comes to noise it's basically what you see is what you get. Very
> basic. I like to say that I ride up on the surface of things. I like the
> surface: I don't like the depth. When you get into the depth it becomes
> very muddled and very confusing and very contrived and pretentious. I
> learned not to try to outsmart people, don't try to out-think them, but you
> can bombard them with confusion, hints, clues, and you can be elusive in
> a very subtle way by dropping hints about things, trying to piece stuff
> together like a jigsaw puzzle.

Eddie digressed into several other topics, and so I had to remind him that the

subject was expression.

> EG: I try to express myself on a surface level. At the same time, the
> contradiction is that it's not all surface. There's a lot of complexity going
> on. I like the surface, which means that when things appear, become
> apparent, even if they're not easily read, they work as a function or
> transmission of ideas. That sounds like a lot of bullshit [laughs], but it's
> true. As things rise to the top they're easier to read. I don't start from the
> bottom up. I start from the top and try to go even higher. In other words,
> the event of information going on—whether it be noise or conceptual art
> or expression—has to be on a surface level, otherwise you can't read it. I'll
> be thinking: "What is he thinking?" You don't know what I'm thinking if I
> just sat here like this, and you wouldn't know what I was thinking, and
> you would think: "Maybe this is deep; it's complex." But I'm just thinking
> about what's for dinner: I have no idea. In my own personal life I try to
> bombard people with information in Destroy Date, and at the other time I
> relieve myself from that by being in +Dog+ which is really simplistic and
> rudimentary. I don't even have to think about it. I just show up and play.
> I drift off and play, listen to what's going on, and I try to add what I can,
> but I don't really have too much concept when it comes to +Dog+ only
> because I realize it's Steve's project and he likes to keep it really simple.
> It sounds like I'm talking negative about him but I'm not: I respect him
> for what he's doing. I want a little more.
> So when it comes to expressing one's self you don't want to bombard
> people with too much complexity, too much concept, because they won't
> be interested or they won't be able to read it, or they just won't be

interested in it. So you have to keep people's interest. And that's why I try to work with: surface issues. Surface issues are important. Surface issues are what people can read first. Malcolm Gladwell and a few others said: 'If you want to get someone's attention then it has to be [claps] bang. They have to be able to read it and they have to be able to process it and they have to be able to like it.' How do you know what people are going to like? Well, you've got to test it. How do you get something memorized? There's a brand, there's a marketing way.

A lot of the noise people either play with their emotions or they exaggerate them, or they deny them. They try to make it cold and isolating. Sometimes it's just a gimmick. A lot of power electronics stuff is silly because it's over-the-top. It comes off like they are bad documentarians. Like, 'the murderer.' I don't care about the murderer. I don't care about the psycho. I don't care about the widow. I'm dealing with real situations in life. When it comes to expression I think people are limited. Some people try to take this artsy angle—"Hey, I'm an artist" or "I'm into the science look, I've got the science thing going on, this is all technical stuff and academics"—and then there's the people into the crazy stuff. A lot of it is really bad gimmicks, and I think it's really bad habits of not challenging one's creativity. Just falling into categories. So that's where branding is bad, because you call into categories. It's easier to fall into a category—and there are tons of noise categories now.

Eddie's logorrhea often led him toward a range of subjects, often involving scene politics. Through his monolog we learn that Eddie is interested in the "surface" of sound, rather than depth. There are perhaps several ways to read what he means, but I think he means that, to a certain degree, he fights the intellectualization of sound so that he can hear sounds for themselves. He also discusses the notion of "gimmicks" in 'noise' performance. Ironically, the confusion of gimmickry as surface and depth is a contradiction that excites him. Gimmickry adds complexity by adding easily readable (if not distracting) stimuli to other simple ideas. In performances with +Dog+ he claims that Steve tries to make the sounds simple, but with the glut of sounds made by the performers (usually there are three to five of them), the sounds become inevitably complex. When expression stays at the surface—when it is simple—audiences can understand and read the performance more easily. When I asked Eddie about

how he uses his body in performances, he admitted that he was somewhat of an

Elvis of the experimental 'noise' world, inspired by his favorite band, Suicide. We

were both laughing through this exchange.

> EG: The truth is *I pose a lot*. I take poses, I really do. The only thing I
> recorded was Dave from Endometrium Cuntplow who called me on it. He
> said: "Dude, you're fucking voguing! You're making these weird sexy
> poses." And I said: "You're right. He said: "Why are you doing that?" And
> I said: "I don't know man. I don't know what to do with myself." I'm
> playing this stuff at the table so I'll make this cool move. I learned all that
> from Suicide. Alan Vega from Suicide, because he had hot moves. That
> guy was great. He changed my life. He had these moves. He makes this
> crazy music and he's playing like Elvis—he does these Elvis moves—and it
> just worked so well. Sometimes I act. Sometimes I put these orgasmatic
> moves. My wife has caught me a few times. She has said: "What are you
> doing?" And I say: "I don't know." And she says: "You look like you're
> getting off or something." You have to look at something man! It's part of
> the act.
> I'm sort of acting and reacting to it. I'm playing around with it, but I try to
> vogue. I am striking certain poses. You will see me strike a stud pose, or
> I'll play and I'll do one of these poses like I'm some kind of hot guy
> playing noise. I'm making fun, and it doesn't fit in the context. No one
> else in the band sees it because everyone else is on the floor. But if you
> notice, I always stand or I sit: I will never go on the floor. I usually like to
> stand because I don't like being on the floor. And I only sit because it's
> convenient to work the gear. If I stand I will pose. I'll strike a pose. I'll
> like the sound and I'll pose like this [demonstrates]. I do it as a gag, and I
> do it because a lot of times there is nothing to look at: it's a guy at a
> table. You might as well be at a flea market. You have to give someone
> some eye candy. I have to say it like that. It's my rock fantasy. Once
> again, it's a sort of rock sensationalism. The opera or theatre—the
> theatrics of rock: Mick Jagger.

Eddie's expressive performances highlight the absurdity he feels about

experimental 'noise.' In this sense, his posing is a sort of 'drag' performance of

'noise,' in the way Judith Butler might discuss gender identity. For Butler, drag is

not the exception to gender performance, but the rule, since she insists that hard

gender distinctions are socially constructed: thus drag is the reminder than any

gender identity is possible. Likewise, Eddie's flamboyant performances can be

read as a reminder that the sonic arts are never purely sonic, and so as long as a

visual aspect remains in experimental 'noise'—literally the act of *watching* a

performance—then the multimedia aspect of bodily visual cues will affect the

reception of the performance.

Joseph Hammer's performances are visually stimulating. He is tall man

who cradles a large reel-to-reel recorder—a piece of equipment not designed to

be held in such a manner—and manipulates magnetic tape with one gloved hand.

In my conversation with him about expression and the use of his body in

performance, he gave an animated account of his struggles with the visual

presentations of his performances. Starting with expression and communication,

we had the following exchange.

DM: How does expression figure into your music?

JH: It's entirely expression. It's absolute and complete, unadulterated self-expression.

DM: What is it that you're expressing?

JH: I'm expressing my existence on earth. I'm not sure I said that right. Maybe it's communication. It's not expression. That's a tough one. I'm not sure that's a very valid answer, actually.

DM: What are you trying to communicate?

JH: Oh man, now I'm really in over my head. Maybe I'm trying to communicate a possible activity, like a viewpoint or a cosmology: a possible identity. Music and performance really is about actually watching somebody making a statement about their being. It's a reflection both for the performer and for the audience. I probably view it sort of from the audience point of view. I'm doing it for the benefit of myself—like that thing I said about Steve, and potentially it's not like I know what he's doing, but I get that feeling that he's thinking: If I was in the audience, if I felt motivated enough to get my butt up off a sofa and participate in a musical experience where I am the viewer, the receiver, then it would be something that I would find interesting and unique, and that I could have an experience in the moment. That's what I want to share. I'm not sure if it is communication or expression, frankly. I think it's maybe outside of those two things, but such a core human activity: really basic. I think self-expression is a very basic human necessity, like one of those things that human beings absolutely need to do. It's wired in.

DM: But in your case you're using the samples, and you're also using technology in a way that, as we discussed before, it's like you're in negotiation with the designers of the technology [Ampex].

JH: Yeah, I am. It is sort of this weird…. It's sort of outside any other field of endeavor in this weird way. I purvey this activity in the noise world at these clubs and I make these records and they get listened to. So I'm able to share this experience like that, for myself, and actually create or discover a community, and thereby an identity. Almost like making the world [laughs].

Joseph tries to make sense of communication and expression through shared experience, community building, and identity forging, both his own, and that of his audiences. When I asked him about the use of his body in performance, I reminded him that we had previously discussed how he would sometimes perform offstage so as to eliminate the visual aspect of the sound-making process, but that he found that the audiences were more distracted by not having any visual cue, so then he began performing onstage again. Below is our exchange on the use of the body in Joseph's performances.

DM: Let me start the question like this: When you first started performing, you didn't like to perform in front of an audience, you preferred to be backstage. So you tried to eliminate the body.

JH: Yeah.

DM: But now you perform on stage, so…

JH: I understand that because it is a performance, and I'm the one performing, that I want it to be clear to the audience that it's me there, and I'm not wearing anything to distract anyone from who I am, nor am I trying to wear a costume to create a very specific image in the audience.

DM: Well you do wear a glove, but I know that's not part of a costume, but….

JH: It's unfortunate but it's necessary. Most people don't know why I'm doing it. Tape? Nobody has the faintest clue that tape is so sensitive to those types of pressure—tape tension—and how the oils on your hand can affect the playback and cause unnecessary…, things that I haven't predicted and are distractions to the performance. So most people consider the glove to just be some sort of…

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DM: Instrument?

JH: …of a gag. Which is fine because I think gags are great. I can't help it. It's not my choice but I'm not going to belabor it. If people think it's funny and they remember me a little better for it, then that's just fine, isn't it now? Sorry, I'm being cynical.

I asked the question about the glove to Joseph but I have not actually talked about the glove with other people. The glove certainly is peculiar, but I felt that Joseph was being a bit defensive over it. I would not say that the glove is distracting, but only that it is a salient part of the imagery of him playing his instrument, and since his instrument is unusual—the tape recorder manipulated with a gloved hand—it calls attention. Of course Joseph catches himself "being cynical." Continuing the discussion on the use of the body:

DM: When you're performing does the sonic experience make your body move a certain way?—or do you move your body to enhance a certain sonic experience?

JH: I think in the past I've definitely used my body to enhance or to create a situation that I felt helped the overall shape of the performance by actually being in an uncomfortable position for a long period of time, so that I am actually in noticeable physical discomfort, but I don't do that so much any more because the consequences later on are not worth it [laughs].

DM: What are the consequences?

JH: I'll develop an injury based on prolonged misuse…, you know, like kneeling for long periods of time over and over again, will eventually cause my bones and my muscles to do certain things, and I can't do things like that. Plus it's just kind of ridiculous anyway.

In a different part of the interview he discussed in further detail the use of his body in performance at the nexus of pain.

JH: I used to play on the ground because I wanted to de-emphasize my position as the performer. I also like to play on the ground because it was difficult to do, and as the performance progressed the pain grew worse and worse. The pain, I felt, was actually a factor in the performance,

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which I enjoyed actually. And I felt that I was happier with my performances than performances where I had been more comfortable. I'm using my body, like any performer. It's true: it's hard to hear that hand-to-ear coordination as opposed [makes an action like bowing a violin]—like that. Everyone see that and it's very satisfying. And so with me it's not as satisfying. In noise music that may be one of the things that is actually an aspect. As aspect of noise music is that dichotomy between the costume performer and the performer who makes very little movements versus the performer who makes a lot of movements, and how that affects the experience.

Joseph's answer is interesting as a seasoned performer. To perform in a consciously uncomfortable manner to affect the audience a certain way was surely an important aspect to the experience of his work, designed to make the audience feel sympathetically uncomfortable. Eventually he decided that the effect was not necessary, nor was the damage to his own body. Nonetheless, his discussion of the disparity between the obvious homology of a violinist's bowing with the resultant sound, and the modes of performance found in experimental music that are often visually difficult to decode from corporeal articulation to sonic manifestation, have proven to be insightful. I then asked him more specifically if he used larger gestures to articulate sound.

JH: None. I think that shit's great. In the past I've indulged in a little of that. We even used to make a joke of it when Dinosaurs With Horns used to play. I did some work with Spencer Savage in the 80s when we did some live performances, and we did a lot of these types of gestures. We were really into corn and TV.

By "corn" Joseph is referring to making corny or campy gestures. Although Joseph admits that he himself appreciates a good gag in the experimental 'noise' performances, he himself rarely engages in such tactics anymore. Joseph uses his body only to make the movements necessary to enact his sounds.

To make experimental 'noise,' Christiaan Cruz often uses a computer, a

battery of effects pedals with a mixer, or both. When I asked him about the role

of expression in his work, he gave the following response:

> CC: I'm not really that expressive I don't think. It's just making sounds. I can't really think of anything that I'm trying to express or that I'm trying to prove or otherwise.

For Christiaan, expression—or perhaps a theory of expressivity—is not an issue. I

then asked him about how he uses his body in performance: how he moves.

> CC: Not very much either. Usually I'm sitting down or standing. If I'm just in front of the laptop I'm barely moving at all. Most of the time people don't see my fingers or anything else. I guess that's where the drum works out, because I did a piece where I was trying to do feedback on a podium with my laptop, and the podium was plexiglass and it really wasn't vibrating or doing much, and there was a drum set near me, so I moved the contact mics over to the drum set. I guess that was a lot more movement because, I didn't mean to, but I was dancing around the drums a little more because I was placing the contact mics and improvising the placement, so I was moving around the set more than I would in a normal performance. Movement is just trying to place things and do things to make the sound better.

Movement is thus a practical concern for Christiaan. I then asked about specific

gestures, like turning a knob.

> CC: Probably with my hands, but I think that's just how I naturally move my hands anyway. I think I have a teacup pinky that floats around and dances around because of my dainty little hands. But aside from that it's just natural movement. I'm not really…. I kind of high-five myself on the laptop because I'm happy with the sound, but beyond that it's not really a gesture that I'm trying to give to the audience, like a dance. It's more like: "Wow, I actually hit that." It's all for myself. I'm not trying to make it any more than it is.

Beyond making practical movements, or showing personal gratification for a

sound that works for him, Christiaan keeps movement to a minimum when he

can.

Scott Cazan generally uses a laptop, a mixer, and either a contact microphone or a bare quarter-inch jack. When I asked Scott about the nature of expression in his work, he asked me what I meant, so I then said, "Are you trying to express yourself?" The following is our exchange.

> SC: No. I think if you define expression that way then no. In fact, in a way I'm trying to remove myself from it. Like I was saying—I think like what you were saying actually—it's something that you learn something from. I want to learn something from the system. I don't really want the system to learn…., well I can learn something like that. I don't like pushing myself onto this thing. That being said, if I insert myself into the system, then I definitely like to play with the system, and I guess there's a kind of inherent expression in that. It's hard to get away from.
>
> DM: How does expression change the sonic experience?
>
> SC: I think it creates more gesture.
>
> DM: Physical gesture?
>
> SC: No, sonic gestures. You say it enhances…, what is the question again?
>
> DM: How does expression change the sonic experience?
>
> SC: Oh ok, that's weird. I thought you said 'enhance.' I think if you express things, you run the danger of becoming a romantic. It's not so much that I would like to remove expressionism as much as I would like to remove romanticism from the music. And romanticism is boring, I think.

Scott seems to be taking a Cagian stance on expression by trying to remove himself from it; and yet he is clearly also interested in David Tudor's approach to the circuit board by trying to learn what the circuit could teach him (we had this discussion earlier in the interview). He says that expression changes the sonic experience by creating more sonic gesture, but then seems to misunderstand the question. In any case, Scott is clear that what he is trying to avoid is romanticism. I had just been reading a chapter in Richard Taruskin's *The Danger*

of Music: And Other Anti-Utopian Essays called "Early Music: Truly Old Fashioned

at Last?" and my ears perked up. I asked Scott how he defined romanticism.

> SC: I think of it as nostalgia. It becomes something outside of the music. It becomes something that's not about the music. I think a good example of romanticism is violin players in orchestras. They don't sit there and just play. They have to get up there and do this whole thing; and there's the hair and this motion and this feeling of emotions pouring out, and all that. And to me that's just kind of bullshit. I don't think it really exists. It's more like theatre. So romanticism to me is a kind of a theatre. It's like not being honest about your material.

Scott claims that romanticism is about nostalgia. Nostalgia for what? Nostalgia

for a time when musicians *moved* to the music as an integral part of their

performativity, or perhaps, at least for a time that it was believed or imagined

that musicians moved in such a way. He finds such gestures to be theatrical,

extrasonic gibberish. Scott seems to be more interested in a sonic experience

that is about sound, not gesture. I then asked him if he thought *his* music was

emotional.

> SC: I think it's affecting. I would never cry with one of my pieces [laughs]. I don't think it's emotional in that sense. What kind of emotion are we talking about?

> DM: Emotions. Any emotion. Even pleasantness.

> SC: Sure, I think it can be very pleasant. The results of the music are often emotional for people, which is like anger [laughs]. I've gotten some lectures afterward from people who are angry with me, so there has definitely been emotion [laughs], I guess, from the music. I think I have a connection to it, and I feel like that's the split—and I don't really talk about it that much—there's the music, and I feel like you open it up to people, and I hope that it doesn't have any inherent emotions involved. That's really what I'm trying to say, I guess. For me, I have a very emotional connection, like as a kid. If people have an emotional connection to the music that's great, but I seriously doubt we have the same emotional connection. I don't think there's one way to read it. I don't think it necessarily sounds angry or sad or pleasant, or anything like that. I think you can experience that sort of event any way you like, depending on who you are or what state of mind you're in. I think that's probably a better way to describe it for me.

For Scott, the sounds he makes can facilitate a range of emotions, but he is not trying to express any particular emotion in his work ("I hope that it doesn't have any inherent emotions involved"). I then asked him how he uses his body in performance.

> SC: Lately I've been using it a lot for—again, it's part of the network, so people are used to seeing me with a quarter-inch jack, letting things flow through me. Now there's a bit of romanticism, I can say [laughs], in that I like this idea of me being part of the network, literally, in that I put this quarter-inch jack and I can touch things and change the music based off that. So as I put it in my mouth—and it's usually connected to my tongue—and depending on how I slide my tongue around the quarter-inch jack I'll get different effects. But then I can touch the computer and you can hear the different way that electricity is flowing. So that's really cool for me, because then I feel like I'm not just riding along. Somehow what I was battling against was—'What is the element that's not just programmed by me?' And so my body sometimes becomes that element that I can't control in some way.

By manipulating the signal path with a quarter-inch jack in his mouth, Scott connects himself to the computer and thus becomes part of the circuit. He thought of such a gesture as 'romantic,' which implies that the body itself is the source of romanticism (while Taruskin was more interested in the vulgarity of gesture against stoicism). I then asked if the sound he makes incites him to move in performance.

> SC: Yeah. It's the listening—right?—that makes me move in a certain way. I don't get dancy about it, or theatrical, as you probably noticed I hope. I guess it doesn't matter. When I'm doing the violin, for instance, I'm usually pretty focused, and I'm moving it—you have to move it in very specific ways to make the system pop up a little bit, or things like that. And then the gestures that you make are based off how you're listening, so if it's a very quiet sort of thing and you don't want to disturb and you want to move slightly. There's the awareness of being on stage too, because in some ways you don't want to…: I don't know, that's not true. I don't really think about that though. But I think when I'm listening I'm not just simply listening and then stop listening and move. I feel like when I'm listening, I'm still listening, and so this causes me to move in specific ways.

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The internal struggle apparent in the passage above shows that Scott is trying to best articulate his ideas on how movement and gesture affect sound, especially in the context of small, delicate sounds. He claims that his listening practices cause him to articulate sound during his performances in certain ways.

Michael Winter uses algorithmic methods to make his work. I had read his dissertation and I was intrigued by his idea of *intuition* and I connected it to expression. Michael did not find the connection relevant. In any case, we had a lively exchange. I started out by reminding him that we had much earlier discussed communication as part of Claude Shannon's approach and as part of John Cage's writings on communication in *Silence*. Below is our exchange.

> DM: How does expression figure into your music? We talked about communication: how about expression?
>
> MW: Expression of what?
>
> DM: You tell me. Are you trying to express yourself?
>
> MW: I don't know. I'm not sure. I think it's something that takes care of itself whether or not I'm trying to or I am. I don't worry about it too much. I don't think about it.
>
> DM: I wanted you to talk about 'musical intuition' because in your dissertation you wrote, I'm going to quote you here: "We just start relying on what many musicians already rely on: intuition."
>
> MW: That was taken out of context.
>
> DM: That was in a mathematical context.
>
> MW: The context was—and Greg Chaitin says this a lot—was that because we're not sure…—what's the best way to say this?—we may not be sure of something so we have to rely on our intuition.
>
> DM: Ok.
>
> MW: We may not know that something is the best solution, but what we do is that we rely on our intuition.
>
> DM: I guess my question here is: What's the nature of intuition?

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MW: Intuition is something that…, I guess it's kind of a gift, if anything else. Imagination is another gift—the gift to imagine a different situation, a different set up, a different music. I think intuition is perhaps somewhat related to inspiration. It's the thing that you don't know but that you trust that you'll make the right decision, or that you trust that you're in the right direction. So when I first started composing, or when I first started composing algorithmic music, I said to myself: "I'm putting my intuition aside. I'm separating myself from the, you know, the music. And as I make more music I'm bringing those things back together because I *am* a computer program. That's a fundamental idea of digital philosophy, and really what intuition is, is being able to make decisions and choices not because of any prescribed rigorous adherence to some process, but to trust in yourself. I talk about search software spaces and looking for music. Tom Johnson has been really great. He coined the term the *found mathematical object*, which is after Duchamp's ready-made. The idea is that you're searching for things, and you find something, and you trust yourself that that something and its application to music is interesting: that's intuition. That's my application of intuition. Or it's a trust that maybe I don't like something and I go and look somewhere else. That's trust in intuition.

DM: So isn't intuition in relation to your personal aesthetics?

MW: What do you mean?

DM: In terms of making decisions whether you like stuff or not?

MW: Oh yeah. It's pretty arbitrary, and it's based on how I like it. It's based on my interests; it's based on what I've been exposed to; it's based on my experiences. So those things inform how I like and dislike things. Maybe it's not intuition though. I guess what I'm saying is that intuition is that thing that is unknown; that can't be explained mathematically.

DM: Is it expression?

MW: No, I don't think so. Expression, I think, has to do with the message you were talking about earlier: whether or not you are trying to purvey a message, and often it means the expression of emotion, which I'm generally not that interested in. But expression, I'm sure, can extend to many things. But I think that intuition is that thing that you can't explain. It's that thing that you know, and that knowledge is a gift.

DM: So in a sense it's almost antithetical to an epistemology.

MW: It's what's not provably knowable. So no, it's completely about epistemology.

DM: Ok! [cool!]

MW: Intuition is that which you do but cannot explain. So it's data that you embrace or that you find or that you trust. I think. I'm not sure. Epistemology is talking about the limits of knowledge.

DM: Yeah.

MW: But there are two sides to that limit: there's what you can know and what you can't know. What I'm saying is that intuition is that which you implement when you don't know.

DM: Ok. I don't have a good definition for intuition either. I'm just exploring this idea of intuition which you discuss in your dissertation and also in our conversation here.

Michael defines intuition as knowledge that cannot be explained. He says, "I think intuition is perhaps somewhat related to inspiration. It's the thing that you don't know but that you trust that you'll make the right decision, or that you trust that you're in the right direction." What I find interesting is that Michael compares intuition to inspiration: the prefix in- is favored over the prefix ex- in this conversation. While I was trying to draw a connection to his use of intuition as a form of expression—or even the very act of sharing his intuitive ideas, motions, gestures—while Michael rigorously combatted the notion. In any case, Michael links the notion of expression to communication and messages. In our earlier discussion on the definitions of 'noise,' Michael was most intrigued by Shannon's definition, but criticized its application toward art. Below is our exchange connecting Shannon with Cage.

MW: It's a beautiful paper. But we're talking about art. We're not talking about getting a message across per se. I like Shannon a lot. [He is] One of the people that I'm very influenced by, and I think that information theory is the kind of fundamental theory of everything. They're all related—information theory, algorithmic information theory, computer theory, the computational complexity of all these things—but Shannon was looking at it through a particular lens, which was not an artistic one per se, and I think that really gets to the core of what art is: *is a system that embraces noisy channels to varying degrees*. I think romanticism, for example, is trying to mitigate the noise in the channel. It's trying to purvey an emotion, whereas maybe more modern musics are embracing

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the noise in the system and these cognitive dissonances. So from Shannon's perspective it was about getting a message across—and music, generally, by virtue of its abstract nature…, that's a part of it. It may not be music if there were not a noisy channel. It would be a message I was trying to tell you.

DM: Cage has this whole thing about whether music is supposed to communicate or not in one of his famous essays in *Silence*. For him, at that particular point in his life, he decided that music didn't communicate. Before we had his notion that it *did* communicate, even if we were unsure of what it was communicating.

MW: I adopt that.

DM: Which one?

MW: The latter [music communicates even if we're unsure of what it is]. *I think it is a message*. It's of varying degrees of noisy channels. What is communicated is almost out of your control. I've talked to [artist] Madison Brookshire about this. He strictly says that art is not communication, and I disagree. I think you can't say whether or not it's communication. Something is being communicated. It's like earlier when I said that someone heard whale calls in a piece of mine where I was using this very rigorous mathematical process. They were communicating that. It's not up to me, or us. We can try to control it, but ultimately a message is received, and what that message is likely varies from person to person by what they bring to the table and depending on the noisy channels. I see everything as a computer program. The program takes as input something and then outputs something. In this case, we are the program, we take as input this information being musical information, and we output our thoughts on it, we output new musical ideas, we regurgitate old musical ideas, and where we are in that process is constantly changing because we are constantly running. So, we might hate a piece one day, and because we didn't hear something or you did hear something, and then the next day, you hear the same noisy channel but you're in a different point in your life, it might mean the world to you. And these are just things that happen. There's no real total control there.

Michael is not trying to express himself; rather, he is sending sonic messages to his audiences to freely interpret. The content of the message is rich in entropy, and the reception of the message is out of the sender's control. I then asked Michael how he uses his body in performance.

MW: Again, it's something that takes care of itself. I try to be pretty still. I get very nervous, so I shake. I often get really nervous and I get tremors. In fact, I have back pains too. But generally I like performers to be

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reasonably still. But it's funny, I had these pieces—one of these Sound-On-Sound pieces. The sound part was 45 minutes, the dot part was 3.5 minutes, and then 45 minutes after that. It was really long. The players don't do much. They don't do anything except in the middle, and they chose to sit. I didn't even think about it. And then once they played they stood because they wanted to stretch. And that became such an integral part of the piece, completely not…, I hadn't thought about it. It's one of those happy accidents where maybe it wasn't my intention but it became something interesting that was fundamentally part of that performance. Maybe if they performed it again they would stay seated or stay standing. I'm generally a pretty still person with respect to everything we've talked about.

The movements of Michael's body, he claims, are incidental, but he describes them as nervous shaking, tremors, and even back pains. These gestures remind me of the intentionally conceived *I Am Sitting in A Room* by Alvin Lucier, but in that case the incidental gestures of Lucier's condition became the amplified content of the piece through a feedback loop resonating the room it was performed in. Ultimately, Michael is communicating in his work, and even if he says he is not expressing himself, he also said, "I think it's something that takes care of itself whether or not I'm trying to or I am."

GX Jupitter-Larsen was born for theatre, in a sense. According to him, his father named him with the hope that he would perform as a pro wrestler, and in fact, he did perform in some pro wrestling circuits. When I asked about the role of expression in his work, if he was expressing himself, he gave the following reply.

GX: Certainly. I think it most certainly is. I think that the fact that I only use the sounds I like, and I use them in a fashion which is most interesting to me, that alone simply makes it an expression of myself. The titles are sometimes personal references or they could be cultural references or political references, but I always have the final say and the final cut in everything I do. Even in collaborations, I am very picky with who I collaborate with. Sometimes collaborations work out great because these other people will bring other agendas that I normally wouldn't be all that interested in, so it forces me to have a broader vocabulary than I

normally would have, and that's one of the reasons why I think my collaborations are actually really successful. At least for me personally.

GX believes that his work is an expression of himself because he is doing it, because he is making decisions about what he wants. When I asked him how he uses his body in performance, he said, simply, "Sparingly." I prodded him to further his thoughts by asking specifically how he moves his sonic luggage in all of its subtlety. The following is our exchange.

> GX: Well because you're trying to extend a single action for a length of time, it forces the people to hear the subtleties that are within that action. You're going to notice change even if it's not there. You're going to notice changes in frequency or tonal qualities, or what have you. But as a performer you want to bring that out more. You really want those changes to be actual, not just perceived. You have to move very sparingly, but you have to move, very deliberately and very slightly, because the smallest changes have the biggest impact. And it certainly gives you the most control over those changes. The light-sensitive suitcase actually is the most sensitive thing I've ever made. It's easy to lose the tone, because light moving or you moving too much in one direction or another, so you're forced to really pay attention. So you really have to prevent your body from doing too much of anything, really.

> DM: So part of the point is to try to hold steady an action. So it's a kind of endurance test in a sense.

> GX: I know it seems that way, but from my point of view, it's so much fun it doesn't feel like endurance. It just feels like… well, fun. It feels more like meditation. If meditation is endurance, then I guess it is.

> DM: It can be.

> GX: But it feels very meditative. I think maybe that's the most accurate way. Especially when you really get into the zone, and you really find that tone, and whatever it is you're doing you have to try to maintain that function as well as you can in order to maintain that sound. So it's kind of like a cat and mouse game between the performer and the resulting sound.

GX's consort of amplified sonic luggage is very sensitive to movement, so movement is an integral aspect of his performance. Since his instructions are to maintain a sound for as long as possible, the performers must choose a motion

that they can maintain for long periods of time. For GX, making and maintaining

a motion, and listening to the sound for its consistency, is an enjoyable form of

meditation.

Casey Anderson's performances usually involve a laptop, a contact

microphone amplifying small objects, and a mixer, though sometimes he

performs using a computer tablet to remotely control the sonic situation front the

vantage point of the audience. When I asked him about the nature of expression

in his work, we had the following exchange.

> CA: I don't think it's possible *not* to express yourself. I think what the difference is, is the goal is not expression, it's just a byproduct of what you're doing to perform the piece or do it.
>
> DM: With Cage's methodologies he would construct all these algorithms to try to eliminate [expression]…
>
> CA: Yeah, I understand that. So that's a great example because he still chose the chance procedures. He still chose the algorithms. It still comes from somewhere, and he's still a person. I appreciate that one hundred percent. That's fine with me, but it's inescapable.
>
> DM: It's still expression.
>
> CA: Yeah, exactly. It's the same thing when you think about it. You can write a computer program that does the most random stuff in the world, but you still have to define the parameters for its randomness. So until we get to a point where there's something that constructs itself somehow…; I'm not even so sure that that would get away from expression. It comes from somewhere, so isn't that expression? I think it's more a question of weighing factors against each other. Is your primary mode of communication a vehicle for self-expression? That was something I was talking to with a friend of mine about a couple of weeks ago. He said, "I feel like all of my pieces have been concerned with me expressing myself in specific experiences." And he was comparing that to me, where that's not something that I think about, but also the ideas I have for pieces come out of what, you could argue, I think, is an expressive place. "I think this is interesting." Or "It could be interesting if" etcetera, blah blah blah. And so that comes from me based on my own interests, and that is in that sense expressive.

For Casey expression is unavoidable, even in the circumstances of trying to program a random number generator. He examines a discussion he had with someone who belabored the idea of self-expression as a primary mode of creativity, and contemplated a way out. For Casey, expression is an inescapable part of presenting art, but it does not have to be the primary mode. When I asked him about how he used his body in performance, he said:

> CA: I normally try to be pretty still. I don't actively think about it a lot when I'm performing because I try to be really there and really listening. I would imagine that you can pick up that I have this habit of being very critical of what I'm doing in the moment while I'm performing, especially based on the things that I've been saying, and so I'm trying to maintain that sense of criticality without doing it so much that I'm not listening. I have really bad tendonitis—I have for years—so I try to focus on being relaxed and stuff like that. I don't move around a lot because I don't really need to.

Here I reminded Casey of the physical activity he does when performing with the objects in the bowl, coaxing sounds to be amplified.

> CA: Oh, totally. Right. And that part is really important because I like the precision aspect of performing. So in that part that is really worked out and I'm really specific about that. But I try not to move outside of that. There are all these people I'm thinking of right now who move around a ton—and that's fine and everything. I don't have a problem with that. If that's what you do when you play, that's fine. But I do feel like at a certain point it inhibits what you're actually able to do and do well. And so that's a concern to me. What I'm doing involves movement; even with the computer, it involves some moving around.

Casey claims that every movement is calculated. I know that he also improvises in these performances, so I wish I would have asked about the nature of calculated movement with improvisation, not to say that the two are antithetical to one another, but to further understand the connection between the two. For Casey, movement is restricted to the functional motions necessary for performance.

Damion Romero's work typically involves oscillators disturbing and exciting the space inside a small box with magnets and transducers, fed into a mixer, and output to the amplification system. I asked him about the role of expression in his work, and more specifically, if he was trying to express himself.

> DR: I don't really know. I don't think so. Maybe. I'm trying to express something: I don't know if it's myself. I don't think I'm trying to express myself. I'm definitely not expressing myself. Maybe I'm sharing with people, or trying to turn on to something. It's some kind of appreciation of a natural, physical, phenomenon that I'm trying to make happen, I guess.

Damion's struggle with the question was typical of our interview. His uncertainty was his way of working through the question. Instead of expression, Damion decides that he is sharing sounds he has discovered, or that he is capable of coaxing certain kinds of sounds using the methods he employs. When I asked him how he used his body in performance, his response was:

> DR: Not much. There's a really delicate balance that happens. I do use my body, and I move, but it's usually pretty imperceptible. I feel like it's a little boring, and there's not much to look at, but I don't think having…. It's not so much part of the performance all the time. I guess it can be. A lot of it is, I touch my instruments, and so they respond to pressure, so it's a dampening or freeing it to be able to vibrate in one way or another. So it's definitely physical, but it might not look like it. Most of it has to do…, it's almost persuading the equipment to vibrate in just the right way. It really depends on the situation and the space. It could almost be like wrestling in a way. It's definitely physical, and I definitely do use my body to control what's happening, or to direct the vibrations into the right… I don't know, it's hard to say: a lot of really slow and not-so-visual movement.

Damion uses his body subtly to enact the movement necessary to change or maintain sounds. He admits that the subtle movements are visually boring for some people. What is interesting is how he describes the process as both delicate and like "wrestling," but there is nothing particularly brutal or macho about the deliberate movements he makes.

Don performs experimental 'noise' mainly with Joseph Hammer in Kitten Sparkles. When I asked him how expression figured into his performances—if he was trying to express himself—he said: "No, there's no room for that." When I asked him how he used his body in performance—particularly in the context that he stays mostly hidden from the audience—he said:

> DB: That's what I do, because it's not about me. I don't want people to even think about a person being there doing that. I want to just be there in the moment with the sound and light. I don't even want them to know that I exist: it would just get in the way.

Elsewhere Don discussed his goggles as a uniform to adorn his performance.

> DB: There's not much performance involved. I'll wear some goggles so people know they're in for a space thing that's going to be kind of an avant-garde trip, going off into some weird inner-space ride. It is pretty intense.

Strangely the use of the body—an object Don generally emphasizes through his extravagant style as a rock performer—is hidden in his performances to excite the audience with an intense strobe light.

Bob Bellerue often uses a computer or two, a few effect pedals, and a mixer. He discussed the idea of expression in the context of performance.

> BB: I think the performance element is really important. It's about expression. At Cal Arts I think the reason I got a little burned out about laptops is that everyone is so proud of their masterpiece that they're slaving away over, and yet, they don't really feel present. The joke is that they're doing their email when they're up there.

Bob makes the old cliché that artists that perform with laptop computers are checking their email. The clinical glow of the laptop screen seems to indicate the cubicle employee, not the artist. Classical modes of aesthetic reception, through expressive cues, are then mitigated if not negated. Yet Bob still uses a familiar PD patch and "a patch that I wrote on Supercollider that I've been using for ten

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years," so certainly he is not completely immune to taking pride in his

programmed "masterpieces." In any case, Bob's criticism is that *those* composers

seem to not be "present" in their works. The performative element is somehow

lost. After all, for Bob, "[i]t's about expression." When I asked him specifically

how expression figured into his work, if he was trying to express himself, he said:

> BB: Certainly. It *is* an art form. I'm not trying to say anything specific.
> This kind of gives me problems when I'm trying to get gigs in the art
> world, is that I don't have a lot of smart concepts behind what I'm doing.
> Usually the biggest one I have—the most consistent one I have—is [in a
> goofy voice], "Witness the miracle of sound!" It's this joke I have, because
> I think, "Why do I need an idea behind what I do?" I just do it because
> this is what I do. It's the sound I make in the same way as…: Why does
> Jimi Hendrix play electric guitar. It's just what we're drawn to do. So it's
> more of a ritualistic thing. If it's anything it's to witness the sound and
> dive in. Dive in head first. Go for it: why not? I don't necessarily mean
> that in terms of trying to identify myself as any different than other noise
> artists. I think certainly in terms of the overall musical world, that's
> definitely a part of a noise sensibility: "Loudness is fun;" "Wildness is fun."

Bob launches into a discussion of justifying his form of expression as an

experimental 'noise' artist to the art world and academic world. He emotes his

frustration to those who need an "idea" behind the sounds beyond—what is

obvious to him—the notion that "loudness is fun," and "wildness is fun." I then

asked him about the use of his body in performance, particularly in the context

he gave concerning laptop performers who lack presence (to him).

> BB: Well I get into moving with the sound. I feel it internally and I think I
> have a lot of internal tension and movement when I'm adjusting just the
> little knob, and a lot of times I'm closing my eyes and really listening and
> feeling it, and I definitely get into moving with the feeling, almost like a
> Sufi thing or whatever—just throbbing with the sound.
>
> DM: Is there a *way* you move the knob, or is there a physical something
> to it that's more than just a simple sterile movement?
>
> BB: It varies. Sometimes it's sterile; sometimes it's "Is this working?" but
> usually I get it to that point where the clusterfuck begins and it's this
> combination of things and I can't tell which is doing what, and then I can

just ride that level just a little bit and turn things slowly up and down and go with it. But I think for me, I want to enjoy myself during my set.

Bob seems to be discussing a mode of losing control of parts of the sound to hear and discover new sounds to enjoy. The "clusterfuck" represents combinations of sounds he has lost control over. The listening itself becomes an important mode of expressivity as Bob finds a way to move through the sonic mayhem.

Joe Potts often performs with a mixer routed through reverbs, delays, modulation effects, and a Koassilator interface. When I asked him how expression figured into his performance; if he was trying to be expressive, he began his response with a hearty guffaw.

> JP: Yeah, unsuccessfully. I have this view of everything in layers, and most of it is not visible in the world. There are these layers of things crashing into each other. That's kind of my vision of the world, and most of the stuff I do ends up being a reflection of that vision, which ends up being this multilayered thing with pieces crashing into each other. I don't think people really get that as me expressing my vision of the world.

Joe has a vision of crashing objects that informs his work, but the crashing is not necessarily manifested audibly; rather the multiple layers of sound in his performances are audibly apparent. When I asked him how he uses his body in performance, he said:

> JP: I do, but it's not conscious. It's not like Carl Stone, where he puts a flourish while moving a slide pot on a mixer or something. Usually I hunch over like I'm trying to ride out of a storm or something. That's generally my mode of performance.

Joseph Hammer had given a similar answer concerning some of the painful bad posture habits he developed while performing with the reel-to-reel machine. I asked Joe, "Is it uncomfortable?"

> JP: No, not really. I think it comes more from concentrating, and like what we were talking about in the beginning about trying to listen and refine

what you're doing, and if you're playing with other people, try to follow them. If you're not, try to respond to the sound qualities of the room and the response to the audience.

Joe sets himself apart from experimental performers like Carl Stone, who Joe described as adding extrasonic expressive gestures in his performances. By contrast, Joe describes his performance posture as "hunched" out of a sense of purpose and introspective listening. The movements he makes are deliberate and economical to achieve his sonic goals.

Maria Garcia's set-up usually involves a few pedals, including a loop sampler, a contact microphone, and mixer (and sometimes a mandolin). When I asked her about the role of expression in her work, she said:

> MG: I think playing music is more of a venting thing for me. It's a release thing more than I'm trying to give a message or anything. I think one of the beauties of noise is that anyone can feel however they want about somebody else's piece. You can feel like it was really aggressive and it made you feel really aggressive, or it made you feel really positive, and that person can feel a completely different way: you don't have to feel a certain way about noise. For me it's kind of a venting thing, and I can feel either really ecstatic when I'm playing, or I can feel really angry, and people can take out of it whatever they want.

> DM: So you are expressing yourself, it's just whatever someone wants out of it.

> MG: Yeah.

> DM: What kinds of things are you expressing? I mean, when you say you feel angry, are you trying to express that to others?

> MG: No, I don't know if it's that way. I don't know if it's necessarily, "I feel angry. I want you to know that I feel angry," or that that's the intent. It's not cut and dry as angry or happy or anything like that. I definitely have emotions. I'm feeling something when I'm making the music, and I'm feeling something when I'm recording or playing, but I don't know if there's necessarily an intent with it for what I want people to feel when they… [listen].

In this exchange, Maria says that she is expressing something in her

performance—joy, anger, ecstasy, so forth—but that her expressions that inform

and inspire the performance are *not* the messages she is communicating. Rather,

the message consists of the juxtaposition of sounds; those are available to her

audiences to interpret how they wish: "people can take out of it whatever they

want." I then asked Maria how she uses her body in performance.

> MG: I don't feel like I'm all that physical when I'm performing, honestly. I
> must have some sort of extra *umph* about it. I don't think there's much
> thought until I'm going to do this. I think it just all comes from the
> performance and what I'm feeling while I'm playing. I played recently and
> used this little chisel on that wooden board I was telling you about, and I
> felt like I got really physical with that. But for the most part it's never like
> a conscious thought that I'm going be really aggressive or really physical
> about this performance.

Maria's performances, in my experience, are not clinical or motionless, but they

certainly are not extravagantly physical either. Rather, she moves to make the

sounds necessary for the performance.

Samur Khouja tends to be very calculated in his approach to making

sound, whether he is working as a recording engineer or as Conscious Summary,

his experimental 'noise' project. Below is a long passage that speaks to the role

of expression in his work.

> SK: I feel like I am more of a composer than a virtuoso at any sort of
> instrument. Conscious Summary is me channeling that kind of improv,
> and the improviser in me that has always been messing with sound. I love
> the improvisational part of what I do, but it's all centered around stuff I've
> composed, or a destination I want to get it to, or an arrangement of
> sound. So it's a process for me to get this kind of nebulous sound that I
> have in my head. So if it's guitar pedals…. I feel like my rig is definitely
> more at home for me; the stuff I can put together. The pedals or the stuff
> I built or whatever it is: I feel like I can…. An instrument is nice when you
> can sing it in your head—sing the sounds of the instrument in your head—
> and you hear it and you can use your body and your muscles to do that to
> execute it. So I feel like in that sense my muscle memory works with what
> I feel in my head. I feel like the more…. My noise rig basically… I'm more
> of an extension than a guitar. But at the same time, I feel really close to

the guitar because I spent a lot of time getting my chops up with that too. I think about that a lot. I get a lot of anxiety because it's hard to see myself as a composer when I know it's kind of the truth. I have the chops, but I'm so busy recording all the time, and I sleep two hours a night, or every other night, and I'm doing a lot of work for other people and I can enjoy it. I work on a lot of other people's music and try to sneak writing in whenever I can—a few hours a day—but it's hard to really become excellent at one thing. Especially for the stuff that I write: it's not really guitar-based or synth-based, or it doesn't have a lot of beats to it, or it depends. It's more what's driving me at the time. It's weird because I'll get working on nine or ten different projects at a time for other people, and I'll have all of their songs in my head at once, and then I'll have whatever emotive qualities I'm going through—whatever stress or -not-stress. Literally, I hear all those songs playing at once. Sometimes it's catchy music; sometimes it's really weird. I'll get the mistakes stuck in my head a lot—people singing out of tune, or mess-ups in rhythms and interesting clashes of sound that happen from hearing something over and over again. Or if you're editing a lot on the computer, you have this loop that you're listening to. You're listening for a syllable or a vocal edit or a drum hit, and whatever you have is making this really weird arhythmic loop where it's half of a chord or it's a chord progression that's just chopped up in some weird way, and it's very familiar because it's a song you've been working on with other people for months or days or hours, and then you're hearing one tiny fragment of it looped repeatedly—sometimes for hours—and it becomes another entity. And you combine that with other people's projects and I guess I have to almost vomit some sort of thing from my body when I finally get around to recording or making something. It's kind of getting all that stuff out of my head; those weird clashes of sound, because it kind of sticks with me. Especially with the lack of sleep.

The passage is rich in amalgamated detail. Samur's mind plays feedback loops of sounds he has been hearing throughout the day as a recording engineer, or he hears several sonic ideas at once ("Literally, I hear all those songs at once"). I was reminded of Charles Ives' upbringing as the son of a bandleader, and recalling the sound of two different marching bands playing different tunes in different keys and marching away from each other. These were the stimuli that informed much of his music. Surely Samur possesses an acute attentiveness toward sound. His grueling schedule leaves limited time for work that is more personal to him. I asked Samur how he used his body in performance.

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SK: I usually sit very still and make really small, calculated moves. In Conscious Summary it's very precise movement. There's no dancing or any performance aspect in that regard. It's mostly just about the sound and really deep listening. In the death metal band there's a lot of movement and energy and acrobatics: so I'm able to do both.

I asked Samur if he was familiar with Pauline Oliveros' work on "deep listening," but he was not. Since our interview spanned a few days, I inadvertently asked Samur again about how he moves his body in performance.

SK: I'm pretty stationary. I have been told that I nod my head out of time [laughs] with what's going on; that I have this weird counter-sway. Especially if I'm leading a band or a part that does have a rhythm. But I've been noticing—especially lately—I've been so busy, and I haven't been performing, and I released a bunch of stuff last month, so I've just been recording stuff, and I've been mostly going home and having twenty minutes out of the entire day to…; I've kept twenty minutes of free time for the last three weeks a day, and I just go home and [mouth noise]— *pkhhhh*—and just let it out, and just play noise for as long as I can. It's been really nice, like a release. Yesterday morning it was six in the morning. I woke up here at the studio [Encino] and I had to drive Downtown before eight in the morning. I worked here until four in the morning and I fell asleep at the console, and I wake up at six in the morning and thought, "Oh fuck, I've gotta drive!" So I just ran out [laughs]. I slept like two hours and I had to run and drive Downtown. And as soon as I got home, and I do what I have to do, then I just turn my speakers up loud and fuckin' kind of let it loose. I definitely caught myself dancing and swaying around. It's nice when you can feel, and you can move around and dance, and be kind of unconscious—caught unconsciously moving—and still executing and making these sounds happen with these movements of your body, and it's nice.

For Samur, making 'noise' is a release: it is letting loose. It is the exploration of the accumulation of sounds that his work as a sound engineer has instilled in him, every earworm and sonic peculiarity, and mistake. When he gets home to Seahorse Studios at (the) Handbag Factory after an exhausting stretch of work, he activates his equipment and *pkhhhhhhhh*. These sounds move him: they move him to act on various sound-making devices; they act on him to nod his

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head and sway his body; and sometimes they even act on him to dance in the privacy of his home.

Summary—Expression and Body

This section has discussed the issue of the role of the body in experimental 'noise' and the issue of expressivity as it relates to performance. I have found three basic ways to categorize the performative body in experimental 'noise'—1) minimal usage, 2) maximal usage, and 3) flourishes. The first category, *minimal usage*, is the most common mode to render the performative body in experimental 'noise.' For many performers, the body is a distraction from the sonic performance. Many performers have even attempted to perform off stage to avoid the distraction, but in most cases, having *no performer* had proven to be more distracting than having a performer as a visual focal point. The second category is *maximal usage*. Some practitioners require an explosive corporeal display to properly perform their works. Although I only interviewed a few of the explosive performers, there are many more in the experimental 'noise' scenes of Los Angeles. The final category, *flourishes*, are extratechnical gestures for articulating the performance. Joe Potts somewhat caricatured Carl Stone when I asked him how he used his body in performance: "I do, but it's not conscious. It's not like Carl Stone, where he puts a flourish while moving a slide pot on a mixer or something." Though *maximal usage* performers tend to use extravagant flourishes and gestures to articulate their equipment as part of their performance practice, most flourishes are typically subtler. For example, Greh Holger said: "I move with the music I'm making, certainly. And there's a way to turn a knob or there's a way to *turn a knob*." Though Elden Man mostly derided

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extraneous gestures in favor of economical movements, he said that there are

exceptions: "[when] you're anticipating the sound, hoping it's going to be what's

in your mind, then yeah that's natural actually." In my experience, performative

flourishes are either extreme, in the case of the more explosive performers, or

they are subtle (if not vaguely flamboyant).

Finally, there are two basic ways to categorize the role of expression in

performance. A few practitioners claimed to be expressing their emotions—

though for Maria Garcia, she made clear that she was *not* trying to communicate

her emotions—while most other practitioners I interviewed claimed to only be

expressing the content of the performance through their decisions.

Conclusions—Instruments, Techniques, and Practices

This chapter set out to understand how the practitioners in the Los Angeles experimental 'noise' scenes perform through their choices concerning instruments, organizational principles, the function of various parameters—timbre; volume; rhythm, meter, and duration—their expressivity, and how they use their bodies.

Practitioners in the experimental 'noise' scenes tend to improvise within a loose structure for fifteen to twenty minutes. The form is divisible by sections and events articulated by changes in volume and timbre, and measured by duration. Rhythm, beats, and pulses sometimes occur as sounds caused by two or more frequencies: these kinds of rhythms, beats, and pulses are not typical of Western music, but are the byproducts of acoustical phenomena (usually difference tones and difference rhythms). Metered rhythm has a strong tendency to be discouraged in experimental 'noise,' in favor of unmetered, irregular rhythm, or what I am calling *entropic rhythm*. What we learn from entropic rhythm is that rhythm is not the issue to avoid in experimental 'noise' (for those who wished to avoid it), meter—as the organization of beats or pulses, usually divisible by twos, threes, or a combination of twos and threes at a regular tempo—is the issue. Or as GX Jupitter-Larsen said in our interview, "I don't care about organization of sound, I care about the sound." The rhythm of the sound of fire is an example of entropic rhythm. There is no beat or meter in fire, but fire can sound faster or slower depending on how vigorous its energy is. But within its relative speed, it changes at random intervals of time—therefore the sound of fire is an example of entropic rhythm.

Volume is an important parameter in experimental 'noise.' Many prefer unchanging volume—static volume. Of these practitioners, most choose extreme volume from very loud to as loud as possible. Loud volume has an immersive quality in an acoustic space that can eradicate other ambient sounds—*noise in 'noise'*—and when the volume is extremely loud, sound becomes not only audible but also tangible. A few practitioners have experimented with extreme soft volume that requires strained listening for sonic events and the changes of those events over time. Many performers use volume dynamically; when volume is used dynamically, it organizes the performance by its relatively loud and soft sections, and the rates of increase and decrease (crescendo and diminuendo). Volume affects timbre in three ways: by increasing the volume of certain frequencies or frequency bands, by determining the rates of increased and decreased amplitudes in its envelope signature, and through the overall increase or decrease of volume, since volume does not increase all frequencies equally (this is the reason for the term "equalizer"—an equalizer is used to make up for perceptive increases and decreases in the frequencies of the overall volume by adjusting its parameters).

Timbre is conceived of and manipulated by practitioners in a variety of ways. The nomenclature of timbre usually resorts to metaphor. It is generally manipulated by combinations of sources, the equalization of sources, and the different gain stages of the audio signal, and through random processes, like the unstable nature of mixer feedback technique. A few common ways to manipulate the timbre of a sound is by adding a noise generator to a signal, modulating a signal with a noise generator, or to randomly modulate the delay time parameter on a delay device. Many practitioners are interested in timbres particularly as

they relate to other timbres and other parameters of sound (Michael, Casey, Scott, John)—thus timbre becomes a function of form. Finally, timbre—a synonym for *sounds* in an art form that does *not* fetishize pitch and the distances of pitch into scales, intervals, and harmonies—is an idealized source of worship for some performers (Damion, Greh), the main object of listening for others (Christiaan, Casey), and the entirety of the category of experimental 'noise' for still others (Joseph, Scott)—"extreme timbre"—"timbre is ontology."

Most experimental 'noise' practitioners are only interested in expressing themselves *minimally* through sharing their work with an audience. They tend to make minimal, economic movements to articulate and enact the sounds and processes of their performances. However, some practitioners express themselves through a release of emotional energy. Those who express themselves as a release tend to use their bodies explosively and aggressively as a *maximal* corporeal display of energy. Some performers criticize this form of performance as a presentation of egoistic masculine energy. I refer to extraneous movements as *flourishes*. Flourishes are often derided as wasted movements that have nothing to do with the sounds; however, some practitioners believe that in some cases, understated flourishes are a natural mode of performance.

CHAPTER 5
EXPERIMENTAL NOISE AESTHETICS

> *To ask* "what does it mean?" *is death for music; but to ask* "what has it meant?" *can be illuminating.*
>
> Richard Taruskin

> *For better or for worse, [music] socializes us.*
>
> Susan McClary

The basic definition of aesthetics is that it is the study of beauty, and that beauty comes from the senses. I define aesthetics *not* as the study of the beautiful, but as the study of what *we think* is the beautiful. My strategy then absolves us from trying to figure out what the beautiful *is*, and instead is focused on what *we think it is*. Therefore the beautiful is dependent on the communication and politics of a community: the *we*. Who is *the we*? which is to say, What is the community? The interest on the community makes the analysis of aesthetics infinitely more complex than to find a universal definition for the beautiful (and by extension, for the sublime). I imagine individual ontologies as complexes of competing internal ideas, and each of those ideas in turn are a part of a community outside itself. In other words, I believe that individuals are not only a part of communities outside of themselves, but that they are communities unto themselves. Therefore the question Who is *the we*? is complex within a community of individuals and within a singular individual—(since the question Who (or what) am I? is also the question Who (or what) are the various competing '*Is*' (pluralities) within the mind that speaks singularly as an ontological agent).

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In this chapter I endeavor to learn about experimental 'noise' aesthetics in Los Angeles through the testimony of the people I interviewed. The questions I asked the participants in the Los Angeles experimental 'noise' scenes are intended to explore the values and modes of behavior that erect the 'noise' superstructure in their respective scenes. The conclusions cannot generate a fully unified theory of experimental 'noise'—the conclusions, rather, will stipulate the accumulated testimony that will proffer a thick description concerning the natures of the various scenes in Los Angeles.

The final section of the questionnaire carries the heading "Aesthetic Issues in Noise Music." I asked the participants over thirty questions including follow-up questions for clarification. These questions are intended to understand the aesthetic and ethical values of the experimental 'noise' scenes. While interviewing Nial Morgan, I asked him the follow-up question, "Are there mistakes in noise music?" and I then added that question to the questionnaire because I realized that for some participants there are no rules, and if there are no rules there can be no transgressions, and therefore no mistakes; and yet, if there are no mistakes, and every performance is equally valid, then there can be no standard of judgment concerning the quality of the work. This also means that experimental 'noise' cannot aspire to any form of idealism or purism, but I suspect many of the people I interviewed secretly advocate GX Jupitter-Larsen's confession: "I'm a purist, even if I pretend not to be." These kinds of confessional answers, of course, are among the most interesting insights. This chapter will concentrate the questions I asked into four broad categories: 1) values, 2) listening habits, 3) permissions and errors, and 4) rules. These categories are not

mutually exclusive and will inevitably overlap with each other and with other categories in previous chapters.

We choose our values, and these choices represent our aesthetic interests. Through the process of writing the questionnaire for this dissertation, I came to realize that the question "What is 'good' noise music to *you*" is not only the most important question I could ask, but to distill the question to "What is 'good' music to *you*"—in the context of the subject of study—is perhaps the most important question a musicologist could ask. What is considered 'good' determines how we judge a piece of music, a performance, a composer, a compositional technique, and so forth: therefore it must be a fundamental question of research for the musicologist, the ethnomusicologist, and by extension, to any discipline that is concerned with sociological and anthropological research: if anthropology is the study of what it means to be human, then my question concerns what humans value: or more pointedly and personally, what humans value in music. My personal findings, of course, cannot be considered new, but they have informed my methodology greatly to consider the question to be the chief concern of any discipline that purports to analyze human activity, since human activity concerns aesthetic decisions that create values. According to Wittgenstein in a parenthetical aside in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, "(Ethics and aesthetics are one)"[341] (Wittgenstein's parentheses). I have always felt that aesthetics is higher than ethics because we *choose* our ethical codes based on our preferences. Perhaps, then, when an aesthetic choice becomes adopted and naturalized as a coded set of rules, they then become ideological as ethical constructs.

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[341] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. Frank P. Ramsey and Charles Kay Ogden (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1922), 6.421.

The first questions addressed in this section, as outlined in my

questionnaire are:

- What is 'good' noise music to *you*?
- How do you know when you are hearing it?
- What is 'bad' noise music?
- What is 'real' or 'authentic' noise music?
- What lies at the edges of noise music?—just inside, just outside.
- What is '*tasteful*' noise music?
- What sounds do you value?
- What sound or technique do you consider cliché?

This section will use combinations of these questions to assess the overall values

of the experimental 'noise' scenes in Los Angeles. These questions touch not only

on a personal aesthetic of 'noise,' but also a search for the real or authentic.

Though I personally do not believe in a realm called the 'authentic' or the 'real,' I

know that some of the people I interviewed *do* think in these terms, especially

those who refer to a 'noise purism,' like Eddie Giles and GX Jupitter-Larsen. My

point in asking these questions is not to knock them down (although there are

times when I have been critical during the interview session, thus the "critical

ethnographic" approach); rather, what I am interested in is honing the ideological

center of the category of experimental 'noise,' even if there is no pure center.

Learning what different people *believe* is the ideological center of experimental

'noise' speaks to the aesthetic (if not ethical) values of the practitioners: 'noise'

doxa. The competing ideologies on authentic 'noise' and 'noise purism' will thus

help to forge the *we* in terms of the people who make up the experimental 'noise'

scenes in Los Angeles. Some participants—like Scott Cazan and Narin

Dickerson—deny any claim to authenticity, and I agree with them; nevertheless,

we orbit an imaginary center around an activity that I and others refer to as the

activity of performing and listening to experimental 'noise'—Christopher Small

would perhaps call these activities "noisicking."

The second section, listening habits, will address the following basic

questions:

- What do you listen for in noise music?
- What do you expect to hear when listening to noise music?
- What do you think your audiences are listening for at noise music events?

There are other questions I asked in this section that I use to bolster the

testimony from the questions above, for example:

- Can you describe a particularly power noise music performance?
- Can you describe a situation in which a listener was repulsed by what they were listening to? Have you ever been booed?
- Can you describe a situation in which a listener was elated by what they were listening to?

These questions allow for a complex, multileveled narrative to emerge through

the stories told by my informants.

The third section is concerned with permissions granted to performers, or

rather, the liberties of performance. There are two main questions here, that will

necessarily elide with other sections including the final section. The central

question here is, "Can anyone make noise music?" This question speaks to who is

permitted to make experimental 'noise.' "Now that I've emancipated dissonance,

anybody can be a composer" said Schoenberg as quoted by Taruskin in a fashion

he interpreted as mockery.[342] I read the quote well after the interviews were

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[342] Richard Taruskin, "The Poietic Fallacy" (2004), in *The Danger of Music: And other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 321.
I could not track down what source Taruskin was quoting Schoenberg from, since he left no citation; an internet search revealed no results beyond Taruskin's article. Let me again emphasize that Taruskin believes Schoenberg's quote to be a tongue-in-cheek consequence of his claim that he "emancipated the dissonance."

completed and transcribed: let it be a springboard for the questions in this

section.

- Can anyone make noise music?
- Can anyone make 'good' noise music?
- Are there mistakes in noise music?
- Can you tell when someone is making a mistake?

The first two questions speak to the entry level and competence in this art form.

They are designed in part to challenge the divide between the practitioners who

come from a background in academic music studies and those who are either

self-taught or have never stepped foot in a music school. My favorite anomaly in

this respect is Bob Bellerue. He attended Cal Arts in the MFA writing program

under the tutelage of sociologist Dick Hebdige. After taking a course with Morton

Subotnick, he ditched writing and decided to pursue an MFA in composition and

integrated media. Bob has little traditional training in music—"I can't write music.

I understand the principles of musical notation, and looking at something I can

kind of get a general gist," said Bob—but with mentors like Mark Trayle, Tom

Erbe, Clay Chaplin, Sarah Roberts, Morton Subotnick, James Tenney, and David

Rosenboom, he completed the MFA in composition at Cal Arts. So I find a

connection between the hypothetical question, "Can anyone complete an MFA in

music without Western music literacy?" and my question, "Can anyone make

noise music." Bob is proof—through Bourdieu's notion of the "institutional state of

cultural capital" through certificates and academic degrees—that one can

complete an advanced degree in music without the rigors of music literacy.

Perhaps then the nuance is in the "*anyone*"—not anyone can, but a few people

like Bob possess the ability. The second pair of questions in this fourth section

concerns the nature of mistakes. When Nial Morgan inspired me to ask this

question, I was thinking of an interview I saw with John Cage. A woman asked

him: "How would you feel if someone made some rude bodily noise in the middle

of your piece, *4′33″*?"—Cage said, "I would simply listen."[343] I made a connection

between inappropriate sounds and mistakes, which might be defined as perceived

inappropriate sounds created by the performer in performance (an unintended

sound) or as perceived by the audience. In an idiomatic setting where the rules

are relatively clear—the rules for tonality and harmonic progression, for

example—a mistake may be easy to catch. But in a far-less idiomatic setting—a

setting that endeavors toward the non-idiomatic—where the rules are unclear,

what counts as a mistake may also be unclear. This pair of questions is thus

designed to learn about 'good' practices through slight transgressions in

experimental 'noise' performance.

The fourth and final section concerns proper experimental noise practices

in the scenes through unwritten codes.

- What is the role of rules in noise music? What *are* the rules?

The notion that "anything goes" would imply a sonic anarchy, and certainly some

people hold that position. But if everything is permitted in experimental 'noise,'

then so too are the histories of codified practices in music and the performing

arts. Such a proposition and liberal openness is *not* the case. Venues that

establish themselves as catering to the experimental music crowd do not throw in

a country-western band to establish their openness (unless that band uses an

unusual amount of dissonance and noise). In other words, there *are* rules and

transgressions, as well as permissions and artistic licenses. Such conservatism is

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[343] Allan Miller and Vivian Perlis, *John Cage: I Have Nothing to Say and I Am Saying It*. (American Masters, 1990).

not a slight, but an interesting phenomenon that Cage dealt with as a composer (especially after a performance of his *Atlas Eclipticalis* with Leonard Bernstein at the baton with the New York Philharmonic in 1964!). The rules help establish the definition of experimental 'noise,' and the modes of aesthetic judgment for assessing the quality of a performance. Performances that move well beyond the boundaries set by the rules will not be recognized as experimental 'noise' or may perhaps be considered *bad* (many people I interviewed said that 'bad noise' simply could not be categorized as 'noise'), while performances that lie at the edge between experimental 'noise' and something else may be read contentiously as 'noise.' Since the rules for experimental 'noise' are not unified, disagreements will inevitably arise concerning artists who may be permitted to perform and artists who may not.

I. Experimental 'Noise' Values

This section will use the answers given to me by the subjects I interviewed concerning their personal basic aesthetic values with concern to the experimental 'noise' scenes. The primary question that informs this section is: "*What is 'good' noise music to* you*?*" bolstered by the question, "*What sounds do you value?*" Other relevant questions from this section of the interview, or from others, may be used to augment the answer or to even substitute for the question.

David Kendall was one of the first people I interviewed, and I have known him personally since the early 2000s. In more recent years he has performed less in the experimental 'noise' scenes, but he still manages to perform at least a few times a year. Below is our exchange concerning the nature of value in experimental 'noise.'

> DM: What is 'good' noise music to you?
>
> DK: Good noise music is clear—clear-headed. Good noise music—the decisions are clearly made and they stand out on their own to be considered within the context of the other decisions that have been made about the music. That's really simple, but…. That clarity suggests a level of mastery. It suggests that someone knows what they want very clearly before setting out to do it and then setting out to do that, and then successfully achieving it. That's what I listen for; that's what I like when I hear good noise.
>
> DM: Do you know when you're hearing it that way?
>
> DK: You can just hear it. It's different every time. But it can be anything from a conceptual idea that is really interesting and works well in performance, or it could be like a good clean synth jam, like the Rene Hell performance last night which I thought was very good; it was tight and it was focused. He was really going for something really upfront and in your face, and he managed to achieve it; managed to build up to this energy

level and keep it going. So that's where the clarity was. He clearly comes into it with the idea of taking the synthesizer and making something really focused and dynamic, and then he did it. I just want to avoid the temptation to just compare it to something that would be 'bad' in a similar vein.

DM: That's my next question: What is bad noise music?

DK: Well, that's the thing that was so impressive about Rene Hell is that with the synth, it's actually harder to make good noise than it is with similar tools. Distortion and mixer feedback: that's always going to make good noise that sounds really in your face. I've heard bad synth noise before. Usually it always just sounds like the guy hasn't played it that much. It's like the typical bad synth sample—like someone maybe collected a bunch of samples; a bunch of synths; and then kind of like hooks them up. There's no back and forth between the audience. There's no kind of narrative, because there's no clear goal as far as sound. So a typical bad synth noise thing would be like if that guy would just go on for like three or four hours… like one of those shows…. I'm just [thinking] off the top of my head what a bad synth would be. If I was to go to a show and there were five bands, and one guy had all these synths, like a big table full of junk and just kind of gets it going, and is like "it's going great" and then he ends up playing too long because he's just playing with his toys. That would be kind of bad.

DM: So bad is kind of related to duration?

DK: No, not specifically. If someone feels like they can jam for hours, that doesn't mean it's bad.

David's notion of 'good' noise is that the performance is somehow clearly stated.

"Clarity suggests a level of mastery," says David. I wish I had pressed him on the

nature of mastery, but I also did not want to interrupt his flow. He used as an

example a performance we had both attended at Dem Passwords the week

before our interview that included performances by Positive Shadow (Henry

Glover) and Rene Hell (Jeff Witscher). David was impressed by Jeff's performance

using a Korg MS2000 analog-modeling synthesizer as his only noise instrument (I

was also impressed because I own that synthesizer, and I would not know how to

make sounds as effectively as Jeff). 'Good' noise is clear and has some sort of

narrative flow through the use of dynamics that is evident to David. 'Bad' noise,

to David, is like watching a kid "playing with his toys" for an extended period of time. Although for some practitioners, the lack of mastery might be an asset, for David there is a seriousness of intention that he values. The serious and masterful practitioner may be able to "jam for hours," but not the unmasterful, unskilled practitioner.

Henry Perez tended to give terse answers. When I asked him about the nature of 'good' and 'bad' noise, he said: "Harsh noise is dope, and ambient noise isn't that fun." I asked him to define both terms. Harsh noise he defined as, "Staticky. Sounds like a vacuum." Ambient noise he defined as, "Really mellow and sounds… like people are trying to send you on a trip." When I asked Henry what kinds of sounds he values, he said, "Any. Anything that comes out."

Nial Morgan's experience in the experimental 'noise' world was vast for his age, and I learned a lot from our interview, especially on the distinction between "harsh noise" and "harsh noise wall." I later read an article by Romain Perrot who corroborated Nial's understanding of "harsh noise wall" as a static, unmoving sound: "No dynamics, No change, No development, No ideas." In that context the exchange below becomes clearer.

> DM: Ok, last line of questioning. Aesthetic issues.
> What is 'good' noise music to you?
>
> NM: For me what defines good noise music is heart and talent as well.
> Well, not so much talent; more heart than talent—heart and soul.
>
> DM: How do you define 'talent.'
>
> NM: I guess, more progress—moving forward—than talent. Because
> anyone can do noise music. But it's about being original and unique, and
> moving forward.
>
> DM: But what about harsh noise walls, that don't change?
>
> NM: Yeah, that's another one. I don't know how to really define that,
> because it's just there.

DM: How do you know when that's good?

NM: I don't really listen to that much harsh noise walls, to be honest. I guess if I just like it. It has lots of texture and substance. But harsh noise walls are just so unchanging, it's hard to say what's good or not.

DM: What's bad noise music?

NM: There's not really any horrible noise music out there, because it's all experimental and weird. I don't know man. People are into what they're into.

DM: Yeah, but what are your preferences in noise music?

NM: My preferences: I just like really full sounding harsh noise that is new… or old. I don't know, I'd have to think about that.

In this exchange Nial begins with the idea that 'good' noise has heart, soul, and talent. The notion of talent intrigued me because of its sociological connotations as outlined by Henry Kingsbury in *Music, Talent, and Performance* where he critiques the notion of talent and what it means to perform *musically*.[344] Nial was quick to walk back the idea of 'talent' and instead maintained the more direct connection to heart and soul—perhaps in more philosophical language he approaches the German notion of Geist at its nexus in ontology. He bolsters this idea with a dialectical agenda: 'good' noise makes progress. And yet, this discussion occurred in the same breath as the 'harsh noise wall,' works that intentionally do not move. My questions were to get him to square the idea of progress with the (seemingly) idea of stasis in the context of the 'harsh noise wall.' He then conceded that he had not heard much 'harsh noise wall,' though earlier in the interview he spoke to its high impact on him. Although Nial could not say with certainty what differentiates a 'good' from a 'bad' noise performance

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[344] "Talent, then, is a representation of differentials of potential for certain socially valued behavior, differentials that are believed to be ordained not in social order but rather by the inherent nature of people." Henry Kingsbury, *Music, Talent, Performance: A Conservatory Cultural System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 63.

beyond the notion of heart, soul, and progress, we may glean that a 'bad'

performance does not include any of those qualities; and even those

performances—without heart, soul, and progress—may appeal to someone's

'weirdness' sensibilities. Later in the interview Nial gave a more definitive

example of 'bad' noise as a copy of someone else's instrumental set-up: "if it's

the exact reproduction of something else, that sucks." Of special note is that Nial

anticipated a question I had concerning whether anyone could make

experimental 'noise.' Nial's answer is in the affirmative.

Greh Holger's primary instruments are vintage analog synthesizers. He

runs the Chondritic Sound record label featuring 'noise' and other forms of

experimental music. Our interview was lengthy and lasted several nights. I began

asking him the question "What is 'good' noise music to you?" but we then decided

to postpone the section for another night, so Greh had plenty of time to think

about the question (in fact, he performed a few shows in New York between the

two interview sessions).

DM: What is 'good' noise music to you?

GH: Yeah, it's still not an easy question to throw into words.
Stuff I like to hear. Sounds I like used. Atmospheres and imagery that are
appealing to me. It runs across all different styles and types. There's not
one genre that I would say is a favorite. There are periods in my life
where I listen to more of one thing than another. I think partly in
composition, or in approach…: I tend to like more rhythmic or more
structured pieces of music these days, than I used to. So noise within a
composed context is more appealing to me than a lot of freeform stuff,
but I still definitely appreciate that stuff too. It's really hard for me to
pinpoint: I don't like this sound; I do like this sound. I think I said in an
earlier question: There are sounds that, say someone like MB [Maurizio
Bianchi] uses, that I would never use in my music, but I love it when he
does it.

DM: What's 'bad' noise music?

GH: Stuff that sounds uninspired, wanky, zoinks, or goofy. I try not to
take myself too seriously, but I like my music to have a seriousness to it,

and so when there are half-assed, lazy, or goofy noise, I have a lot harder time appreciating it, even if I like the sounds of the approach, if it's just wacky that doesn't do it for me.

DM: Is 'costume noise' bad noise music, because of its approach?

GH: No. There are a lot of really great bands that wear costumes. I don't want costumes as a replacement for quality noise. If there is quality noise and someone is wearing a costume, I do have a harder time taking it seriously. But that doesn't mean the noise is bad.

DM: What do you mean by 'quality' noise?

GH: I like really dense, and busy, and heavy, and layered stuff in noise music, so I want a lot going on. I want a lot to focus on and listen to, even if there's not a lot happening in those things, which is probably reflected in Hive Mind. I like a lot of layers even if they're sort of static, I like the way they mingle and collide, and build off each other. Good noise, to me, definitely has that quality. That's what I strive to make as noise I want to listen to: layered, dense, thick, heavy, nice frequency range—those are all bonuses to me. Listening to a lot of European power electronics and industrial kind of stuff, there's the more rhythmic element and more aggressive atmosphere, almost like claustrophobic sounds, grating, grinding, caustic sounds and atmospheres that are put forth by the music you're hearing. I definitely love that. I think that's my answer!

DM: What's 'real' or 'authentic' noise music?

GH: Something that comes from a place with heart, or an idea, or a belief. I tend to stay away from noise for noise's sake. I like stuff that puts forth some sort of agenda or some sort of concept or some sort of atmosphere. Or something like: "Here's noise, listen to this."

DM: What is noise for noise's sake?

GH: Exactly that. Just noise. Noise with no—not that it needs to have an agenda—but noise with no real purpose other than being noise. Noise with no thought or idea or input behind it, aside from: "I'm going to make some noise." And even some of that stuff can sound great: it really can. I just like my noise tied to aesthetics. Imagery is important to me. Atmosphere is important to me. I guess in some way, agenda is important to me. It doesn't mean a political agenda, it just means trying to get a point across, or a message, or an emotion, or a vibe.

DM: What kind of message?

GH: That, to me, is sometimes less important than just having one. It doesn't have to be a specific thing. I tend to like stuff with more atmospheric and psychedelic. While that's not a message, that's an atmosphere, that's a vibe, that's something that I can latch on to.

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Greh constantly referred back to the notion of 'atmospheres' and 'amospherics,' terms that few others used. He draws a distinction between "composed" and "freeform" noise, and though he prefers composed noise, he sometimes enjoys freeform noise as well. Composed noise seems to be related to 'purposeful noise' with a particular message, agenda, or narrative idea, as opposed to "noise for noise's sake." Such 'good' noise has "heart, an idea, or a belief" effectively making a mythology of noise into an aesthetic chronicle. The kind of noise that Greh is drawn to has a form that can be grasped relatively easily by a listener, and incorporates multiple layers. He is also drawn to drone noise—his own work as Hive Mind tends to take the form of drone noise with layers of sound creating a massive, psychedelic drone polyphony. Since Greh owns a record label and works at a record store, he is an expert at classifying music. When I asked him what lies at the edges of 'noise,' what is just inside the genre and just outside the genre, he gave perhaps the most interesting answer.

> GH: My record collection is divided by genre. The stuff that doesn't sit in my noise section, that might be considered noise, would be like synth and drone, and kraut: that stuff all hangs outside of my noise section.

Greh painstakingly catalogs his vast personal collection of recordings in ways he himself finds imprudent, in terms of classification, but he does so to facilitate easy retrieval. For example, he says that he places his own Hive Mind records with his 'noise' records, but jokes that maybe he is guilty of wishful thinking, since his work is very drone-oriented. I should have asked further about his distinction between 'noise' and 'noise drone.'

John Wiese is constantly exhausting approaches toward making sound and discovering new methods. The exchange below represents the elusive quality

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John holds toward categorization. To accommodate his aesthetic, we used his

preferred terminology for the remainder of the interview. To preface this

exchange, I remind the reader that John was ardently against the use of the term

'noise' and 'noise music,' but he agreed that the term would be my starting point

to engage him in conversation.

DM: What is 'good' noise music to you?

JW: It would be hard for me to…. My personal experience up until this
point means that I'm drawn to some things or another, but I would be
hard-pressed to make any criteria that would actually say if something
was good or bad. I think it's not necessarily the best criteria.

DM: But, to *you*.

JW: I don't think there's a standard. There's no standard that I could say
if something was…. Everything is different. Everything is its own
experience.

DM: How do you know when you're having a good experience?

JW: What you're asking for is a criteria that which I could judge whether
or not I'm having a good experience, but if I was having a good
experience I would just know because that's having a good experience. I
wouldn't judge my own experience to determine whether or not it was
good or bad.

DM: But would you ever say: "I really liked that sound."

JW: Yes, sure. But I think what I would say about that particular sound
would be unique to that sound and experience in a context that wouldn't
necessarily apply to anything else.

DM: Ok. What's bad noise music?

JW: I could cite it as a tautological question: noise music being
experimental music which is actually genre music, which is then not
interesting to me. So inherently all noise music is bad.

DM: Do you think that?

JW: Um…. Well, but what…

DM: Ok. Experimental music. [Is all experimental music bad?]

JW: Hmmm.

DM: What's uninteresting experimental music?

JW: Genre music. So I guess things that don't seek to explore more than precoded signifiers of experimental…

DM: So can I say that you think that interesting music is *anti-genre*?

JW: Yes. Ok. I'll accept that.

DM: Ok.

JK: Actually, yes. That's good. I accept that. Yes.

DM: Slightly different question. What is real or authentic experimental music?

JK: I think what you just said. Work that is genreless. I think that's ideal.

Of course John did not want to say what 'good' noise music is because he denies the term. Furthermore, the way he claims to appreciate art is relatively capricious. He is resistant to assigning criteria and standards on his own modes of aesthetic appreciation. My ardent questioning eventually paid off when I substituted the term "uninteresting experimental music" for "bad noise music." The answer was the *eureka!* moment of my interview with him that was mutually satisfying. "Genre music" was the bogeyman. John further explained that he was interested in work that does *not* "seek to explore more than precoded signifiers." In place of 'precoded' signifiers, we can extrapolate that John prefers to code signifiers freshly, to give new meaning to sounds, and conversely, to find new sounds to give meaning to, even if that meaning is fleeting in the context it was performed in. "Work that is genreless. I think that's ideal." To seek this kind of work, the very act of codification becomes suspicious, and certainly my work as ethnographer was met with some suspicion. Nevertheless, John was generous

with his time. 'Good' sonic work, for John, consists of new or uncoded sounds and meanings.

Elden Man has been an experimental 'noise' performer and enthusiast for several decades, and helped promote the Japanese experimental 'noise' artists in Northern California where he hosted a radio show as a DJ. He is an expert in many genres of music, including experimental 'noise' and black metal. He also took courses in counterpoint in his youth, though he does not hold a degree in music. When I asked him "What is 'good' noise music to you?" he responded in the following manner.

> DM: What is 'good' noise music to you?
>
> EM: I like stuff that's transcendental. I like stuff that's dark. I like stuff that has good production. But that's not to say that, for example, unwanted static, which actually does occur, I don't think that that's necessarily bad, even if it might not be what the composer wanted; it was just because of some faulty equipment or something. I don't think that that's necessarily bad. There are some things that I don't care for, I guess. I can't really put my finger on it. It's one of those things where you know it when you encounter it. I don't know, it's a matter of taste.
>
> DM: What's 'bad' noise music to you?
>
> EM: Stuff that is repetitive but doesn't go anywhere. It doesn't progress. It could be edited; stuff that's not self-edited very well. Maybe a young composer doesn't know how to self-edit yet; they try to do too much all at once. I understand that because I suffered from that early on, and for a long time. Even as recent as my last few solo performances. It's hard to recognize what is self-indulgent and what is not; what's self-indulgent and what's genuine desire to express fresh experimentation.
>
> DM: But isn't self-indulgence one of the reasons why you're drawn to noise music, like what you were talking about much earlier?
>
> EM: Yes. It's hard to explain. There has to be moderation, but then you don't want moderation to lose the edge. There has to be an edge. Things that are adventurous and… I guess 'hard' as opposed to 'soft': you know what I mean?
>
> DM: Hmn. No, what do you mean?

EM: Something that has aggression and…. I might be saying this stuff because I've been listening to extreme metal for so long, but I have always been drawn to stuff that has an aggressive edge as opposed to a soft or flat execution. I mean, I like stuff that's ethereal and might be twee or… I like female vocals.

Elden tended to resort to metaphor to describe experimental 'noise' performances he found to be 'good,' thus his preferences for the transcendental, dark, and hard-edged. The dark and hard-edged aesthetic, he explains, is borrowed from other genres he is familiar with, like extreme forms of metal. He also said he appreciated well-produced performances, but was skeptical of performances that were self-indulgent, repetitive, and lacked progression. When I pressed him on the issue of self-indulgence—since he had said previously in the interview, "That whole self-indulgence thing, that's a good justification for what I'm doing"—he explained that even self-indulgence had to be tempered with moderation. When I asked Elden what kinds of sounds he valued, he said, "I actually like all kinds. Even happy sounds. It's how it's composed. How things are juxtaposed." The manner and the process of artistic production (through focused moderation with 'edge), and the results that ensue have an effect on Elden's judgment of 'good' experimental 'noise.'

Eddie Giles was enormously influenced by Suicide, Throbbing Gristle, White House, and other bands that came out of the noisy early punk era often classified as industrial music and power electronics. I asked him about his aesthetic values concerning 'good' noise music. Eddie gave a characteristic longwinded answer.

DM: What is 'good' noise music to you?

EG: I like it when the gear is doing most of the talking. Some people are real tech-heads or gear-heads, but they touch their gear a lot. I like when people set up a situation where the gear is doing most of the work, and all

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they're doing is controlling contours, or doing very little. I like when they figure out ways to have gear work with one another, or talk with one another, and the sort of strange phenomenon that can happen between disturbance and interference of gear. I don't like when people are touching every knob possible just to create more sounds or change things in rapid directions. I like a consistent steadiness. That seems to work for me. I play keyboards and I usually play very simple lines of notes. I try to touch the settings of the boxes of the effects pedals for my personal work. I try to find other musicians or noise artists that do this similar sort of approach. Otherwise you can live in a closed circuit or a closed loop—a closed system of pure noise, without any outside references. That's for purists only. The harsh wall noise, or harsh noise walls, and stuff like that.

DM: What's 'bad' noise music?

EG: Bad noise music, to me, is anything that's trying to be something that it's not. I don't mind noisy rock bands, but I tend not to like people who use guitars to do noise. But I really like when people use guitars to do ambient sound work, because there's a lot of color in guitars, especially if you process the sounds.

DM: What is real or authentic or genuine noise music?—What's real noise?

EG: I like sounds, and I like noises generated from industrial environments. So to me, the truest sense of noise is natural occurrences. The sounds of traffic, the sounds or air vents or machinery. I really like that, first of all.

DM: Let's talk about purism. What's considered pure, and what's just outside the pure?

EG: You just strip down any other pretension or noise qualities and you stay with one particular sound. You stay with one thing. It's almost like a monochrome painting. There's almost very little, if any, representation or referentiality to it. It just *becomes*: the sound-itself is the piece. It's usually a very dense, long piece, with very little change, and it creates a tension between the listener and the sound itself. So that can be really pure; something that has absolutely no rhythm and seems to have no beginning or end. It just sort of starts and stops. You can just start the tape, start your sound, and stop it, and that whole period of time. The time itself that has lapsed is the purity. So it's purer states of noise that's being produced by the artist.

DM: So what would be impure?

EG: Impure is something more like an improvisation. One is reaching for a peak or a quality, or a communication or language between themselves and the instrument or the sound or other instruments and other sounds. But I really like when noise keeps my attention span. That's another thing too. A lot of purer noise kind of wears down one's attention span.

Though Eddie does not discuss his work in terms of algorithmic methods, he claims that he is interested in automated processes. With his gear, automated processes are relatively limited compared to the vast algorithms a computer program is capable of executing. Nevertheless, there are certainly modes of performing with the kinds of gear that Eddie uses that create long-form automated processes, like field recordings, or keyboard settings that slowly change the timbral make-up of a sound over time (like slow attack, slow sustains, slow decays, and slow releases: these techniques automate the articulated trigger of a sound). Our discussion on 'good noise' turned into a discussion of 'noise purism' through my questions concerning the real and the authentic. Eddie gives two definitions for 'noise purity.' The first concerns ambient sounds as "natural occurrences." What I find fascinating about his answer is that the examples he gives—traffic, air vents, machinery—are all sounds that represent the technological city. Eddie is familiar with the writings of Luigi Russolo, so it makes sense that he would gravitate toward a similar aesthetic that emphasizes the sounds of the city, but perhaps to call them a "natural occurrence" spins the idea of nature into a technocultural human nature. The second definition he gives for 'noise purism,' according to Eddie, tends to turn performance into a search for "sound-itself"—the Cageian ideal. According to Eddie, the harsh noise wall—the sound that never changes—allows for the pure condition of "sound-itself." As a sound that allegedly never changes, the harsh noise wall invites listeners to hear the composition of a timbre in its harmonic complexity.

I met Adam Cahan at an experimental performance at Machine Project. We saw a performer playing a trombone amplified through various effects that reminded me of Gordon Mumma's cybersonic works. He was a frequent audience member at the wulf. and I introduced him to some of the other venues, like (the) Handbag Factory. He took an interest in my project on experimental 'noise' and in turn I asked for his testimony.

> DM: What is 'good' noise music to you?
>
> AC: I guess I judge it by the affect: how it affects me emotionally. And then also aesthetically, in terms of sonics. I really couldn't say. I really enjoyed the Damion Romero concert that I went to with you. That was really good. In general it was more contemplative in some ways. He had more washed-out sounds. I like softer sounds: sounds with softer edges. Space. Even if it's really dissonant and gnarly stuff, I enjoy when there's some sense of balance, even if it's an off one.
>
> DM: What's bad noise music?
>
> AC: I don't really think there is bad. I think it's harder to identify bad music than good music in some ways, because calling something 'bad music' to me is very dangerous. I certainly don't enjoy noise music where the sounds are actually painful. Very high-pitched sounds [are sounds I don't value].

Though Adam had difficulty pinpointing what makes a 'noise' performance good, he did have an example, namely, a performance by Damion Romero. He described the sounds as "softer" and "washed out" despite the level of dissonance, and sense of "balance." Although Adam did not want to say what might make a performance 'bad,' he said that he did not value high-pitched sounds. Some experimental 'noise' performers enjoy exploring sounds that are far higher pitched than what are heard in an orchestra or a rock band; those sounds require more power to amplify at high volumes, and because of their peculiarly strident nature, amplifying them further can become painful for some listeners, while others relish in the sensation. Elsewhere in the interview Adam

said, "I like electronic sounds. I like bleeps and bloops and warm sounds, squelchy sounds." The idea of "bleeps and bloops" is an onomatpoeic code for random formant sounds that evade pitch, while "warm" sounds generally connote sounds rich in mid to low frequencies.

Joseph Hammer's reel-to-reel loop performances always give a multilayered false sense of repetition. When I asked him about the nature of 'good' music, he decided to start with the 'bad.'

DM: What is 'good' noise music to you?

JH: I'm trying to think of what's bad noise music…. I think bad noise music is not noise music anymore. It's like music or something. In other words it has defeated the purpose of noise which is basically to make a new type of music, or a unique voice with the gear. So I guess in a way, good noise music—if you can call it that—noise really, is someone who has managed to differentiate themselves from everyone else, but not in a competitive way by analyzing everyone else, but simply because of their activity as a closeted noise person. They just fucked around in their bedroom or wherever, or even just conceptually in their own head without doing anything, and then put whatever it is together and then did it, and it's like that. What I consider bad noise music is maybe just on the road to being good noise music. Somebody who is performing but maybe hasn't spent enough time, in my opinion, figuring, doing…. I'm leaving that pathway open, because I don't necessarily think there's any good or bad noise music, except in its philosophy. If you're trying to do something that you think other people will like, then that's bad noise music. If you're trying to do that thing that you were trying to do, that somehow you got some weird idea in your head that that's what you're trying to do, or maybe you don't have a clue and you're hopelessly stumbling, that's actually good noise music.

DM: What is the philosophy of noise music?—you used that term.

JH: I think it's that desire to fulfill your inner fantasy. The pursuit of pursuing. The pursuit of satisfying your inner desires. It's something that can never be achieved. I think it has the potential to be the most engaging and long-lived form, in a sense, because the instruments are constantly changing. It could be anything. You can make your instrument out of a computer or out of a piece of tubing, or a rubber band in your mouth. It's whatever you are pursuing is the philosophy of noise music. Noise music is when you don't even know that that exists, and you're over there [laughs]. That's the philosophy of noise music. It's not a response *to*; it could be influenced by—it's an aspect of your personality and it

could be very much influenced by a form of rebellion. You won't get a straight answer out of me [laughs]…

Joseph was having a fantastic time with the questions I asked, and was quite giggly throughout this part of the interview. We can glean from Joseph's answers that 'good noise' has a sense of refinement and knowledge of the equipment; a sense of competence that comes with time spent "closeted" in the "bedroom" or in the "head" (in fact, Joseph made several references to the connection between queer culture and a broader history of experimental performances, from queer black rock n roll to queer bars and venues that allowed for experimental performances to transpire). A sense of introspection is key. He imagined a philosophy of noise determined (but also failing) to satisfy one's "inner desires." 'Noise,' according to Joseph, does not require a strong sense of historical knowledge—one can reinvent sounds discovered by others. When I asked Joseph when he knew he was hearing 'good noise,' he said, "Basically when what they're doing destroys my sense of expectation." I then asked Joseph about the sounds he values.

> DM: What kind of sounds do you value?
>
> JH: It probably sounds really trite, but I value naturally occurring sounds. Like the symphony of nature. I value a lot of man-made sounds too, like the sound of a pneumatic jackhammer or trash truck. I value almost all naturally occurring sounds, and sounds that are happening because it's just day-to-day life. Not somebody specifically trying to make a sound. I actually really value those sounds. I value the mundane sounds of the universe.
>
> DM: But the examples you used were more like city sounds that weren't natural, like jackhammers, and…
>
> JH: Yeah, I said I value them too. But I think what I mean by 'naturally occurring' is that they don't happen consciously as in: "I want to make this sound now." Those I value. What most people would think sound pollution would be, would be the guy jackhammering down the street. I have no trouble with that. I can sleep through that, and I have, just

recently! Somebody was jackhammering up the sidewalk and I actually found it soothing. [Demonstrates] "Rdrdrdrdrdrd. Rdrdr. Rdrdrdrdrrd. Rdrd Rdrdrd." He started with a cold chisel and it sounded like: "Kang!—Kang!-Kang!" I couldn't deal with it because he was consciously making that noise. Even though he was unconsciously making it, it was that rhythm. But what the jackhammer does it's just: "Raaah!"—you know? So I can sleep through that. It's hard to describe, because at one time or another these things can be one or the other. It's the same with my music, and something that sort of grew with time. I noticed when I first made tape loops I would listen to a tape loop and think to myself: "This is just I-don't-know-what—just a bunch of sounds that are meaningless together. There's no music here." And then two or three seconds later I would think: "This is the most beautiful melodic music I've ever heard." And then I'm back to, "This is bullshit. Is this supposed to be good?" Over time I think I've actually developed a better ear for noise and maybe so has the rest of the world—like cosmic consciousness—and something else.

Like many other people I interviewed, Joseph enjoyed the sounds of nature and conflated them with the sounds of the city, as sounds that are not made for sonically aesthetic purposes. What is interesting about the passage is that Joseph demonstrates an ability to listen aesthetically to these sounds: "at one time or another these things can be one thing or the other." He means that sometimes he can appreciate the sonic details of ambient sounds, and sometimes he finds them abhorrent. He felt the same way about his own sounds with the reel-to-reel tape loops he made, and claims that he "developed a better ear for noise." His attempts at reconstructing the sound onomatopoeically demonstrate critical listening behavior. In other words, the act of critical listening brings on the pleasurable experience of sound ('good' sound), more than the empirical sound itself (to the degree that sound-itself exists). The context of the sound can invite or repel critical listening. The vast possibilities of ambient sonic activity provide 'good' sounds for Joseph.

Christiaan Cruz' laptop, effects chain, and mixer set-up is typical for his performances. He also enjoys making experimental 'noise' in his work van: he is

employed as a professional photographer responsible for documenting buildings

in Southern California. When we both lived in Orange County, Christiaan and I

used to attend experimental 'noise' performances and chamber music at LACMA

to watch the Monday Evening Concerts where students were granted free

admission. With his wide sonic palate in mind, I asked him about his sonic values

toward experimental 'noise.'

DM: What is 'good' noise music to you?

CC: Just a new sound that I haven't heard. That alone is good enough for me, even if the composition sucks and there's no rhyme or reason to it. As long as I can hear something new: that alone is enough to make me happy. And I have to be able to hear it too: it can't be hidden somewhere. I have to be able to hear it nice. So the context, where it's presented, and the fact that the listener has to do something extra, I think that makes it noise. So whatever is coming out really isn't that important: it's what the listener is made to do with the information and how they're supposed to process it—that's what makes it special.

DM: That's the next question: How do you know when you're hearing good noise music?

CC: Good amplification; good use of the acoustics—the performer just being aware of how the sound is being transmitted in the room, and being able to control it properly. And being able to use the rests, the cuts in the sound as well: the silences. That overall sense of what is going on. That's an important part of being able to have a good performance; a good piece of noise.

DM: What's bad noise music?

CC: Just playing too much.

DM: What do you mean "too much"?

CC: Too many tracks; too many layers—more than what the listener can hear. Too many gimmicks.

DM: What's a gimmick?

CC: Maybe too many instruments on the stage. Too many different tracks. Just using too much; too much to the point where you're overwhelming the listener and you're not making it a fun experience. You're not allowing the listener to hold on to anything. You're making a confused, cluttered piece. You can make a cluttered piece that's interesting—you can have a

lot of layers and you can make that work—but not being able to step back and give the listener something to hold on to makes it bad.

DM: What do you mean by "making it work"?

CC: You just make it a good experience for the listener. You make it worthwhile to listen to.

DM: What is "real" or "authentic" noise music?

CC: I don't think there is. I don't know if that's really applicable.

DM: What's at the edge of noise music? What's just inside of it and what's just outside of it? Where do the boundaries get blurred?

CC: As soon as you add a techno beat, or it's just an unmanipulated field recording. So if the listener is still able to dance, then maybe that's the edge.

DM: But you'll get some listeners who dance to sound that has no rhythm. They'll create the rhythm.

CC: Because it's loud enough, and they're dancing to volume because they want to fuck. Remember: volume makes you want to fuck. So again, it's just an extension of dancing.

For Christiaan, 'good' noise is connected to the novelty of the sounds used, and the composition as a set of mixed layers. Good amplification—usually understood as clean amplification that does not distort or color the sound—and awareness of the architectural qualities of the performance space can contribute to a 'good' performance. Furthermore, Christiaan values the use of sounds and silences to add dynamic contrast. 'Bad' noise is when too much is going on: either there are too many instruments or too many layers (or both, since instruments add layers). Though Christiaan himself was having some difficulty pinpointing what he meant by "too many layers" and when multiple layers can actually work, I believe what he means is that multiple layers are acceptable as long as there is a sense of clarity involved ("I have to be able to hear it too: it can't be hidden somewhere"). Christiaan gives two criteria for when a performance begins to lose its status as

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noise. The first is when a field recording is played unmanipulated or unmixed (though later in the interview he admitted that there were exceptions, like a piece by Aphex Twin that consisted of an unmanipulated field recording of ants[345]). Secondly, Chrstiaan says that when a performance introduces a danceable beat, the performance begins to lose its status as noise. I interjected that some audience participants will in fact dance at experimental 'noise' performances (I was thinking of Henry Perez). His response was that if the performance was loud enough, some might dance to extreme volume "because they want to fuck. Remember: volume makes you want to fuck. So again, it's just an extension of dancing." There is a context to this response: in the early 2000s when Christiaan and I used to attend experimental 'noise' performances together, he had sent me an article that claimed that loud music affected human libido; that loud rock concerts in particular contributed to sexual stimulus. If true, the connection between loud volume and sexual arousal demonstrated by the affects on the body as *dance* may not be so glib or farfetched,[346] but I do not endorse the connection.

Weronika Zaluska is a visual artist whom I had seen frequently at performance spaces like the wulf., Machine Project, Dem Passwords, and Human Resources. She sought experimental arts to further stimulate her own artistic passions. I asked to interview her to learn what she values in the experimental 'noise' scene.

DM: What is 'good' noise music to you?

WZ: I really appreciate when people have a very intimate knowledge of their instrument, like the trombone player that I saw—Christian Pincock—

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[345] I suspect Christiaan was thinking of Squarepusher, not Aphex Twin.
[346] I remember that the article in question was not a scientific journal. Christiaan's citation of it was jocular.

because he is so well trained, and he's really one with the instrument and it's just an amazing experience to see him. The trombone is just a part of him, of his body. When you amplify an instrument. You can do so much with it even when it doesn't sound like a trombone at all, you can still pick up on the subtleties and you can really get the feeling of this instrument. You can find out about his work, but he's not from LA [laughs]. But I just saw his show here. With Casey [Anderson]—with the saxophone—I think that's a really big part of him. But I also really like the work of Damion [Romero] or Infinite Body [Kyle Parker] or Cole Miller [Human Hands], where it has nothing to do with the classical instruments, but it's about the integrity of the performance. Where they're coming from is so solid. What they're doing is so clear that you don't question it at all. They're so at one with what they're doing. That's really important to me.

DM: How do you know when you're hearing good experimental music?

WZ: I think when I'm not bored. I don't feel like it's clichés when it's stimulating. It draws you in as opposed to pulling you away. I don't really enjoy the disturbing sounds so much. It's not like when people use clichés. I think I find Damion's work very intriguing. It sort of pulls you in even though it's so simple, you just want more and more, and you can spend a long time listening to it, and that's what I think is good experimental music. It's very meditative. The whole vibrational experience: it's more like a…. It's not so much about hearing the music, but it's being there when the music is being made, where you really hear the presence of it being made.

DM: What's bad experimental music?

WZ: When there's not enough subtlety. Where it's too over-the-top, and just reusing typical stuff. I really enjoy when there's less, but plays more on the subtlety and the subtle changes. I think a lot of it maybe comes off too strong—it's too loud and it really hits you very hard and it doesn't pull you in gradually with subtlety. It's too aggressive. I think that's sort of a cliché.

DM: So you value subtlety.

WZ: Yes.

DM: What lies at the edge of noise music?—what's just inside of noise music and what's just outside of noise music?—to you.

WZ: I think the music I like is sort of on the outside of noise music. It uses some noise elements with fluid structure, but it's not really noisy and it's not disturbing.

Weronika began with examples of experimental music involving the manipulation of traditional instruments interfaced with a computer, and then discussed the possibilities of performers using modular synthesizers and custom-built devices to make sound. Cole Miller's work as Human Hands (not be confused the band Human Hands associated with the LAFMS in the 1980s; Cole also performs as Toxic Loincloth) uses modular synthesizer techniques and drum machines with noisy sounds—he often performed with other experimental 'noise' performers at places like Dem Passwords, Pehrspace, and (the) Handbag Factory. Weronika values experimental 'noise' performances that are "clear," "simple," and has a sense of subtlety. 'Bad noise' is "too aggressive" and "too loud." In the case of Damion Romero's work, his performances are always very loud, but for Weronika, the content of his work justifies the volume. Ultimately for Weronika, 'good noise' is meditative and has been an important source of inspiration in her own visual art.

Scott Cazan's performances generally involve a computer, a transducer amplifying the cavity of a violin, a quarter-inch plug that he sometimes moves about his mouth, and a mixer. I asked him about his aesthetic preferences in terms of the experimental 'noise' music scenes.

> DM: What is 'good' experimental noise music to you?
>
> SC: Good experimental noise music is stuff that surprises me. Stuff that makes me interested; stuff that I can engage with. I can say that about art in general. Stuff that brings out things that I find to be worth exploring.
>
> DM: How do you know when you're hearing it?
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> SC: I don't. That's why it surprises me. I know because I'm surprised: I guess that's the real answer. There's a moment when I think: "Wow, something is happening." For a while I thought maybe that could be described as an event; an event that occurs at some point. You never

know when an event occurs, it's just the aftermath of the event. That's a complicated way of putting it.

DM: What's 'bad' experimental music?

SC: I think bad experimental music is music that does not provide that. Which means it's generally pretty flat.
This is funny because I remember when Zbigniew [Karkovski] came the first time I met him, I asked him this, because this was when I was at Cal Arts and he was visiting.
I said: "Can I have a private lesson with you?"
And he said, "Sure."
So he sits down and I show him some stuff and I said: "So what do you think?"
And he said, "It's great."
I asked: "Do you have any comments?"
And he said: "Well no. You can't really go wrong. You just do it and do the next thing."
—which I kind of liked. I really liked that. That actually made me approach my music very differently. There is no bad noise music really. There is music that we can engage with and music that I personally cannot engage with, or maybe need to work harder to engage with, or that I'm just not in the mood to engage with at the time. So I don't think there's necessarily bad noise music.

DM: What's 'real' or 'authentic' experimental noise music?

SC: I don't know. That doesn't exist. I think the whole idea of authenticity and the real is bullshit.

Scott Cazan claims that 'good' experimental music is the kind that surprises him and explores sounds he finds worthy of exploration. I wish I had asked him about the sounds he felt were worthy of exploration, though in some sense I did: when I asked him what kinds of sounds he valued, he said, "I like clicky sounds a lot. You don't hear them much in experimental music, which is funny. Curtis Rhodes uses those things a lot. For some reason those are incredibly satisfying." Beyond "clicky" sounds, he enjoys a general sense of surprise, as both a listener and a performer. "Bad experimental music" thus provides no surprises: it is "flat." Scott then launched into an interesting story about how he met the late Polish composer Zbigniew Karkowski, known for his experimental 'noise' performances.

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Scott's interaction with Zbnigniew changed his approach to sound in some way. He learned—either from Zbnigniew or through some other general education—that there was no *bad* 'noise,' there were only performances that interested him in that moment, and performances, that did not interest him in that moment. When I asked him about "authentic" experimental 'noise,' he denied that it existed, and I agreed with him (though I tried not to be in the habit of confirming or denying how my interview subjects felt about a topic).

Narin Dickerson is known as an aesthete in a variety of art circles and music circles throughout Los Angeles. I have heard people at various venues refer to him as their favorite listener, undoubtedly because he himself is not a performer, and most people who attend events in the arts are themselves involved as artists themselves. He had been a radio DJ when he attended Princeton University, and has a wide-range of knowledge concerning experimental music. Below is our exchange concerning his aesthetic preferences.

DM: What is good noise music to you?

ND: That's a really hard question to answer, though it was actually what I had been thinking about before, is defining a center of the noise scene and defining things in the way we've been talking about before, it didn't necessarily focus on the music that I enjoy the most, because the music that I talk about and the music that I think about isn't necessarily the music that I enjoy listening to the most. I think good noise music, to me, is music that's, I think, really thoughtful and well thought out. It might be improvised or composed, but it's something that a lot has going into it to create something that might not be very long in performance, but is something…—what is good noise music? I've seen it and enjoyed it: I've listened to it and enjoyed it, and it's difficult for me to separate individual artists from my personal connection with them within the scene. I'm friends with a lot of the people that are involved in making and producing this music and it's difficult for me to completely step back and objectively critique what I enjoy when I see my friends do what is a good performance. That can be really enjoyable in a way, and it's difficult for me to separate that out from the music that I find the absolute most enjoyable, whether that's created by a friend or not.

DM: Ok. What's bad noise music?

ND: Examples of bad noise music are people making noisy things on really expensive equipment that they haven't particularly learned how to use, and not doing it in an interesting way. I've seen that and not enjoyed it. There's noise music that I felt was more for the sake of provocation than about sound. Some of it I don't think was very interesting or good, at least for me it wasn't something that I could really appreciate. I guess I appreciate noise music that seems to have some sort of thought or framework behind it, and isn't just someone making loud noises, and trying to make them as loud as possible. It's hard for me to define it exactly, but there's music that I don't appreciate as much, and some of it I think is where the music is coming from in terms of the emotional energy, and I think there's some noise music that's about the personal channeling of angry emotion that can be very powerful and good, but some of it that I think without any sort of structural framework can be really boring, because it can be great to pound on things and get out anger, but I don't necessarily need to see that as a performance. The performances that I really appreciate are people that really work on honing their craft. They may be working in a nontraditional instrument and not rehearsing in a traditional way, but they're not just pulling something out and making some noise. That's one reason I'd be reluctant to perform as a musician, because I don't spend that much time…. I can tinker around and make some things that I think sound nice, and make some other things that I don't want to hear. But the stuff that really interests me, the stuff that I think is really important for people to share is stuff that people have really worked on or are really passionate about working on and honing that technique and craft. Whether it necessarily sounds refined…, it might sound really crude, but I think even the people that make music that sounds crude, in terms of means of production and sonic production quality, are usually working at it quite a bit. So I think that's part of what connects to me in terms of how I've thought about it. But I don't know if that's necessarily true, because also sometimes, if I'm expected to like something and I don't like it, that's something that I end up disliking more than something that I come in with a low expectation of and I happen to like it.

Narin's basic conception of 'good noise' is connected to the knowledge the performer has with the instruments they've chosen for the performance, and their ability to perform something that sounds like they have been working on. 'Bad noise' is made by someone who seems to not understand the instruments they are using and seems to have an inability to structure their performances. When Narin mentions the use of 'expensive equipment' he strongly implies that performers who seek expensive devices may be hoping that the manufacturer of

the device can aid them in creating new sounds, while those who use inexpensive

instruments would seem to have a more limited palate. Narin finds fault with that

approach. Narin is also critical of performers who use experimental 'noise' as a

means to exorcise strong emotions, like anger. Though he admits that some

performances of that nature can be compelling, mostly the performances are

uninteresting to him. Narin also speaks to how expectations can alter his

aesthetic perception. When Narin comes to a performance with low expectations,

he is excited to be surprised by a good performance he was not anticipating.

Continuing with Narin:

> DM: What is real or authentic noise music? When do you feel like you're
> hearing the authentic thing?

> ND: My initial response to your question was bullshit [laughs], before you
> added the additional…, when you just asked, "What is real authentic noise
> music?" I'm definitely influenced by a friend who is very much against this
> idea of authenticity, and that authenticity is a bunch of bullshit, but I
> think, especially so far as it comes with noise music, I think that's… not a
> question that's going to lead anywhere very interesting. It's interesting to
> explore ideas of authenticity in noise music, but what is authentic in real
> noise music?

> DM: I'm on the side that thinks it's a bullshit question.

> ND: Ok. But you're asking it.

> DM: I'm asking it because I think someone might think that it's relevant…

> ND: And there are definitely people that do, and I think there's a lot of
> history of noise music…. I think there are so many loose boundaries on
> the edge of noise music that defining something as authentic noise
> music…, defining any kind of music as authentic….

> DM: Well that's the next question: What lies at the edges of noise music?
> What's just inside and what's just outside? This is the kind of a question
> we've been skirting around through the entire interview: the borders.

> ND: I think there's so much on the edge of noise music. There are so
> many things that are connected to noise music, and things that you
> wouldn't necessarily connect with noise music.

Like Scott Cazan, Narin was critical of the question concerning the nature of "real" or "authentic" experimental music. I admitted that I am too, but explained that the question was necessary for those who feel that authenticity could be achieved. Instead Narin was interested in the boundaries of what might be considered just inside a posited definition of 'noise' and what would lie just beyond it. He said that experimental 'noise' in fact borders on a wide range of music practices.

Michael Winter is constantly composing new works at the computer, either for computer or for an ensemble of some sort. Our longwinded one-night interview took a sinuous path and was very exhausting, but I found it fruitful, especially since Michael was interested in the questions, even if many of them were answered similarly according to his metric. In this case I will start the conversation concerning the nature of 'good' experimental 'noise' with a discussion of the nature of beauty according to Michael.

> MW: I think that beauty has something to do with the experience of new information. I'm still working this out, as I was working it out at the time. But there's something there. There's something about what it means to experience something, and that something I'm using here is the word 'truth.' But really what I'm leaning towards now is that beauty has something to do with the experience of novel information, and that is what I've been talking about all along: this idea of a new experience, and the fact that it can exist is a truth.

> DM: Is there such thing as 'classical beauty'?

> MW: What is…, I don't….

> DM: Well you were saying that beauty is something that's new, but something that's classical implies that it's old.

> MW: What I think—and I've been thinking about this for a while and I still have not come to any definitive conclusions—is that we appreciate things for their original novelty. So for example, something that was at one point new, we appreciate that it was new back in the day. Of course we've grown over time to understand that…, just like my oracle-generating program, you find a new program that halts and you add that to the list of

things that you know, and over time you find more programs that halt on that same output and they might be smaller programs so you switch them out. It means that you have a better understanding of it. In that sense the novelty fades, and I think that's something that happens. Novelty fades over time. Fortunately we're pretty complex beings—we're pretty complex machines—so we can reinvent our ways of listening. So something might maintain its novelty, in the sense that we're constantly hearing new things, or we're in a different mindspace such that we're either hearing new things or hearing it in a different way, so something can remain novel probably indefinitely, but generally, I think it wanes over time, because that's the general progression of things.

DM: Do you ever worry that novelty might lose its novelty?

MW: Yeah. I think it has to.

DM: But I mean the concept of novelty itself.

MW: Oh. No. I think it's fundamental. I think it's in our nature. It's what we do as machines—as sophisticated machines: I say this in a positive way—that we're constantly at an arms race for knowledge, and it's not going to stop. We're never going to know everything because there's a limitless number of things to know. And in fact, we have to. In some sense we have to empirically decide what we believe. So we have to say, "I believe this to be true, even though there's nothing that proves it without a shadow of doubt." I think in mathematics there are very easy examples of that until they get proven, and then they're provably true. Like the Riemann Hypothesis, or these long outstanding questions that no one can seem to solve. Maybe they're true, but they might not be provably true. And that's one of the problems I have. I think that first statement is wrong. I said: "I suppose truth is revealed in understanding whether or not something can or cannot exist." I'm not sure that's right. I think truths might exist.

DM: What about the second part?—the beauty part.

MW: So my idea now is that beauty has something to do with experiencing something new. So that is the experience of a truth: something that exists that you were unaware of before. Does that make sense?

DM: So beauty is new truth?

MW: Maybe that's one way of saying it. I'm not settling on any of this stuff.

Moments like these were exciting to me. I enjoyed when people I interviewed

actively reworked their ideas on the fly. I tried not to interfere too much

concerning the veracity of their new insights, except to continue asking questions

I found relevant (even though I was aware that such questions precisely

concerned veracity and clarification). Michael's discussion on truth and beauty

was fascinating and undoubtedly informs the questions I asked next: aesthetic

issues in experimental 'noise.' His basic position is that beauty is concerned with

uncovering new truths, or that uncovering new ideas reveals a true experience;

but admittedly, he is "not settling on any of this stuff." Whether or not he is

settled in his initial assertion, below is our exchange.

> DM: What is 'good' noise music to you? What is good experimental music to you?
>
> MW: It's good, to me, if I like it. It seems like my constant metric on this is whether or not it's a new experience.
>
> DM: The next question is epistemological: How do you know when you're hearing it? When you have a new experience?
>
> MW: Right, well that's the metric again.
>
> DM: What is 'bad' experimental music?
>
> MW: Something that's not new.
>
> DM: Really? If you've heard it before it's bad?
>
> MW: Yeah, but like I said earlier: we're complex machines. I might hear the same thing on two different occasions, and the first time it feels like I've heard it before, and the second time I start hearing new things about it. So it's not new or old by virtue of how one experiences of it. We change.
>
> DM: What is 'real' or 'authentic' experimental music?
>
> MW: I'm going to keep running with this thread: because it's true to me.
>
> DM: That's ok, you can be consistent.
>
> MW: Part of its authenticity perhaps is its quest for new experience. Maybe that's another way you could rephrase this whole idea of the marketing and the monetary evaluation of music, is that actually that has the potential to turn anything into something that you've experienced before that something whose value is measured by its monetary value.

That's not new. So I think that's one of the threads is that you monetize it and then it loses its potential for being anything but that measure—that quantification.

DM: In terms of noise music, what lies at the edges of noise music?—what's just inside and what's just outside?

MW: It's whether or not it's considering what randomness is and how that's used in the process of creating music.
Another caveat to the last question: I don't really believe in good or bad. I believe in the purity of intention. There's only personal metrics on good or bad. A person either likes or dislikes it. There's nothing that universally makes it good or bad.

DM: What do you mean by "purity of intention"?

MW: For example, my metric is that part of making music is about new experiences, and I remain faithful to it, I'd like to think. But I think, for example—not that this happens—but making any kind of music for monetary gain—which has nothing to do with learning or any of that—is not a metric: it's a non-metric. That's not pure. So in my opinion that makes a music good or bad. But that's an opinion.

In this exchange Michael reasserts the idea that experimental 'noise' must be connected with entropy and randomness to be considered as such. A 'good' experience must do at least one of two things: 1) the performer must provide a new experience to be consumed, or 2) the listener must be provided a new context to consume the performance. "We change," says Michael. Our moods alter our ability to listen and interpret. This idea connects to Michael's caveat, namely, that he does not "really believe in good or bad," and then thrusts into his assertion: "I believe in the purity of intention." Beyond the virtues of learning, he could not say for sure what counted as a pure intention; but he did provide an example for *impure intentions*; namely, music made for money. Music made for money—as a quantifiable value—in Michael's opinion, is impure if not bad. When I asked Michael what kinds of sounds he valued, he continued to discuss his interest in comparisons.

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DM: What kinds of sounds do you value?

MW: This question has shifted significantly. It's not necessarily a sound that I value, but it's more of the succession of sounds that I value, or an organization of sounds or noises that I tend to become interested in. A lot of the music I like it's the idea that something is going on, I'm not sure what, and it makes me interested. I learn more, I listen more, and as I learn more I see that there's more to learn. I like that carrot to remain dangling.

Instead of sound objects, Michael is interested in temporal relationships and modes of comparison articulated by new sounds: in a sense, he seems to be chiefly interested in form, as the relationship and comparison of salient events.

GX Jupitter-Larsen is a long time veteran in experimental 'noise' and performance art circles. For him the visual aspect and the sonic aspect work together to create the performative experience. GX was strongly influenced by punk until he felt that punk was no longer connected to the philosophy that attracted him to it in the first place, a philosophy that might by summed for him as a movement against virtuosic, and even competent, displays of performance. The move against competence would allow for novel modes of performance and reception to emerge. Though GX's early punk bands used traditional rock instruments, he insisted that if the performer was competent in one instrument that they must play a different one. Eventually, GX lost interest in the instruments themselves, seeing them as symbols of conformism. Below is our exchange on the aesthetics of experimental 'noise,' the ideology of 'noise purism,' and the politics of music.

DM: What is 'good' noise music to you?

GX: I think it's noise that surprises me. It has to be something I haven't heard before that doesn't involve either guitars or drums. I hate drums and I hate guitars. I don't like the way they sound. I don't like percussion at all. I find percussion really boring because I find it too pushy. That's why I like rubbing. I don't like hitting, I like rubbing. All my sounds are

generated by erosions that involve rubbing, they don't involve percussion per se. I like sound that doesn't involve musical instruments, period. If you can do something interesting with something that doesn't involve what you normally would do with it…. And drumsticks on the neck or back of a guitar doesn't count. That's just a bad excuse for a drum. It has to surprise me. It has to be something that I haven't heard before, and it can't involve any musical instruments.

DM: How do you know when you're hearing good noise music?

GX: Because I haven't heard it before, because it surprised me somehow, and because it stimulates my imagination.

DM: But you talked about Joseph and Damion as being consistent in their methodologies.

GX: Yeah, they're consistent in their methodologies but they don't stop surprising me. Especially with Damion: he'll come up with frequencies that I definitely haven't heard before or haven't heard that often. What makes for great noise—and it's true for great cinema or great literature, but the one thing that happens to me when I'm getting overwhelmed with audio stimulus that works for me, that's effective—is when it excites my imagination. I start to drift off in my own Idaho. Or it inspires images or thoughts in my head that I otherwise wouldn't have had if I was just standing there quietly. To me that's what I want to experience.

DM: That's what Joseph said too. He wants to inspire hallucinations and visuals.

GX: Yes! And good noise always does that.

DM: Does it always inspire visuals? Could it inspire ultra-audio?

GX: I don't know. Because I have to say that even when I've experienced some of the better performances by Con-Dom [Control-Domination] in England…, visually he had a lot of projections and he's doing stuff on stage, but his best performances inspired a very visual quality in my imagination. I'd have to say that pretty much all of my performances somehow excited my imagination. And I'm very visually oriented, so if you excite my imagination then it's the visual part of my brain that is going to get excited first because I think that's just the biggest part of my brain.

DM: But you said that when you listen you usually close your eye.

GX: Yeah, and I start seeing things.

DM: What's bad noise?

GX: Drumsticks on the back of a fucking guitar is on the top of my list. Overuse of drums with drumsticks. I've seen some interesting use of

drums that don't involve percussion whatsoever. That's great. I've seen people incorporate the soundboard of a piano never once touching the keys. That's fantastic. I don't want to fucking see a musical instrument being touched by a musician. I hate that stuff. I hate fucking guitars. Keyboards: I don't want to see them unless you're not using them, or you've found some way to trigger them without using fingers. Ok, I'll give it a chance, but musical instruments: there's no room for them in noise.

DM: How about modular synthesizers?

GX: Yeah, modular synthesizers, I can tolerate them. I don't have an aesthetic problem with electronics or electronic gear as long as it doesn't involve drumsticks or guitar strings.

DM: So you prefer the Buchla synthesizer to the Moog synthesizer since the Buchla has no keyboard.

GX: Absolutely. I'm a purist. Even if I pretend not to be, I really am. Even though I like to mix things up, I'm still a purist. I think that was the biggest mistake anyone did to the synthesizer, was to fucking connect it to keyboards. That just ruined the whole thing.
Relying too much on pedals. I think not trying to find your own answers and your own solutions and relying too much on what other people are doing on stage is problematic. But my biggest complaint is the use of musical instruments in a musical fashion. I just don't think it has a place in noise.

GX's basic metric for determining the aesthetic of 'good noise' is if the performed

sounds surprise him. I pushed him to elaborate his thought, since he had

previously mentioned that he appreciated the consistency of approach by some

artists whose work he values, like Joseph Hammer and Damion Romero. His

answer is that *their* consistency consistently led to the experience of new sounds

("frequencies"). But the most important aspect of 'good noise' for GX is that it

must inspire internal visions. As I mentioned in this interview, Joseph Hammer

had a similar response: that good performances inspire synaesthetic visual

hallucinations. 'Bad noise,' on the other hand, is connected to the use of

traditional instruments. A particularly bad use of instruments for GX is the

electric guitar played with a drumstick; this technique has been popularized by

noise rock band Sonic Youth.[347] I then asked about his attitude toward modular

synthesizers and synthesizers with built-in keyboards. Predictably, he expressed

his loathing for keyboard manuals. Not so predictably, he also went after noise

performers who rely "too much on pedals," even though GX himself uses a pedal

or two in his performances. GX's dislike for too many pedals surely has to do with

the history of experimental 'noise,' since many performers use pedals. Even more

to the point, GX values objects and devices made for the purpose *by the artist*,

rather than bought at a store. "I think not trying to find your own answers and

your own solutions, and relying too much on what other people are doing on

stage is problematic." Continuing our conversation from that point, I asked:

> DM: Is it the historical context?

> GX: The historical, the social, the political, the artistic contexts, and the fact that I think for the most part—with a few exceptions, and there are certainly…, you know, when Sun Ra got into keyboards he made it interesting. There was this Canadian group Tunnel Canary, and the lead guy played guitar with a saw. Half the time it didn't sound anything like a guitar. Even if you could imagine what a guitar would sound like playing it with a saw, it still didn't really sound like that, because the way he interacted the saw with the guitar. It's how he combined the two that gave it a really unique sound. So I'm not saying it's impossible to do something unique and creative and imaginative and fresh with a musical instrument, it just almost never happens. People fall into line. They're too easily distracted by conformity. The trouble with music is that it promotes conformity. And I don't care what kind of music you're talking about. With very few exceptions, the vast majority of music ever composed anywhere in the world promotes conformity. You march to the drummer, and you march to the drummer that you most identify with. The whole point of drumming is to set up social boundaries between people. This is the whole purpose of music. This is why you have the punks and the whatever, the headbangers, and whatever. Music—popular music in particular—it's all about conforming to the wishes of the status quo. And I don't care how grandiose and how overdramatic that sounds. This is my conclusion after nearly forty years in this nonsense, is that music serves a purpose for the

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[347] A short digression: a few years after this interview I had asked Michael Winter, Chelsea Rector, Matt Purse (Fenian), and Damion Romero to perform for an experimental sound series I curated called ffff—Series. Michael's performance used a small guitar that he tuned carefully according to his algorithmic plan. GX was at the performance, and I asked him if he enjoyed this performance, given his caustic attitude he espoused toward traditional instruments in our interview. He said that he in fact enjoyed the performance.

status quo. The Catholic Church banned music until they figured out how they could use music to help them keep the population in line. The thing that I appreciate about noise—at least until recently—is the complete lack of conformity. You encounter individuals with their own voice. People don't even know how to use the term noise music. They feel uncomfortable with it because they're not sure what they're experiencing unless they become initiated to it and they become exposed to it through multiple examples. But noise, to most people, still just sounds like noise. That's partly why you can still call the noise scene the last great secret society, because the very nature of noise is like a secret handshake. And it's a secret handshake that's different for each person you encounter. This is why noise is more about attitude and not style. It has to do with a complete nonconformity, and music doesn't do that. Even academic music, there's a certain conformity to the sounds that are expected and that nature of the composition that's expected. Now mind you it's very unlike popular music. It doesn't conform to the mainstream popular culture. Nevertheless I think it's hard for anyone to argue that academic improvisational music doesn't have a very narrow vocabulary. Which is not to say that there isn't some great examples of nonconformity within that dialogue, but that's not the prime mission of that whole aesthetic. That whole aesthetic has a very narrowly defined debate and dialogue going on between its participants. And those that stray too far from that usually end up in whatever their version of the aesthetic ghetto happens to be.

A sense of conformism is against GX's good sensibilities. He provides an interesting analysis of how music has been made to promote a sense of conformity, even citing the Catholic Church's appropriation of music.[348] This passage is perhaps the best explanation of GX's dislike for music—that it promotes conformity. Musicologist Susan McClary writes, "For better or worse [music] socializes us." For GX it seems to be for the worse. However, art does the same thing—it socializes us and thus promotes conformity. One cannot exist in a society without a code (or language) to live by, and that code must be agreed upon by those in the society—thus a form of conformity. Even GX's works socialize people and bring people together who share a particular set of aural and extra-aural values (aesthetic values). He concedes that it requires an act of

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[348] I imagine he means the history of Western notation in terms of the disciplined time-management of the various teachings in a medieval mass.

initiation and multiple examples (repetition and learning), and that its

participants are part of a "secret society" with a "secret handshake." And even if

those handshakes are personalized (in terms of attitude), there still must be

some common thread that sets 'noise' scenes apart from other scenes, and those

common threads are its conformities, no matter how mimimal. GX's conclusion,

as grandiose and overdramatic as he realizes it is, might not be so farfetched.

When he talks about music and status quo through the repetitive beat of the

drummer, he comes close to Horkheimer and Adorno, and Adorno:

> But if the nomadic savage, despite his subjection, could still
> participate in the magic which defined the limits of that world, and
> could disguise himself as his quarry in order to stalk it, in later
> periods the intercourse with spirits and the subjection were
> assigned to different classes of humanity: power to one side,
> obedience to the other. The recurring, never-changing natural
> processes were drummed into the subjects, either by other tribes
> or by their own cliques, as the rhythm of work, to the beat of the
> club and the rod, which reechoed in every barbaric drum, in each
> monotonous ritual. The symbols take on the expression of the
> fetish.[349]
>
> *Horkheimer and Adorno*

> The method becomes trapped in its own net. For while it must
> constantly promise its listeners something different, excite their
> attention and keep itself from becoming run-of-the-mill, it is not
> allowed to leave the beaten path; it must be always new, always
> the same.
> Standard procedures… which have been perfected… produce
> standard reactions.[350]
>
> *Adorno*

GX is concerned with the facile, passive listening of music as commodified sound,

especially when a drumbeat can be interpreted to have a strong tendency to keep

people in line. One of the most fascinating parts of our conversation deals with

his notion of noise purism in relation to the borders of the definition of 'noise.'

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[349] Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment (1947)*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 15-16.
[350] Theodor Adorno, "Perennial Fashion" in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 126.

DM: What lies at the edges of noise? What's just inside and what's just outside?

GX: Yeah, but you have the noise purists, and that can mean different things to different people. People who are really into, I guess, the core noise issues, aesthetics, dialogues. But you do have a few academics that do kind of cross over a little bit, and you have some noise people who cross over into academia a little bit. You certainly have noise people that cross over into the alternative music, rock, grindcore, heavy metal, death metal, black metal, and vice versa—there's definitely some crossbreeding going on in those aesthetics. And there's certainly pop musicians and DJs that incorporate noisical elements in whatever it is that they do. So there's a lot of cross polinization [sic] among all the scenes really. But none of it is mainstream. It's such a grey area. For me—and part of it is that maybe I'm a little jaded or I have just been overexposed to it—to me it's *not so grey*, but for a lot of people maybe it's that grindcore-black metal crossover where there's a lot of feedback and distortion, and feedback and distortion alone is not enough to say that it's noise. I certainly see—especially on the East Coast—a lot of noise bands with drummers and guitarists—and you already know how I feel about that.

Furthermore GX explicated earlier: "I'm a purist, even if I pretend not to be." His purism links noise to nonconformity and the use of musical instruments played by musicians (in their historical and traditional contexts). According to him—like the "secret handshake"—'noise purism' "can mean different things to different people." GX's purism is perhaps mollified when he says that he "pretend[s] not to be" [a purist]. He realizes that purism cannot be part of noise, but persists nonetheless with a closeted purist ideology. Ideologies, after all, are inevitable, while 'noise' has the tendency to thwart history by attempting to abandon older forms. Paul Hegarty reminds us of the consequences of such a purism.

[N]oise and noise music are not purist, and therefore cannot complain about being adulterated, without also losing their status as noise. Occupying this paradoxical space is what noise is (not) about.[351]

Hegarty

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[351] Hegarty, *Noise/Music*, 126.

When I asked GX what kinds of sounds he valued, I was surprised that he

actually ordered and ranked them.

> DM: What kinds of sounds do you value?

> GX: My very favorite sound is probably the sound of breaking glass. I think that's still my very absolute favorite sound. Fire crackle is maybe my second favorite. A good car crash is maybe my third favorite sound, maybe tied with explosions. Probably the sound that I deal with the most is maybe my fourth or fifth, which is that of sandpaper or physical erosion. Although it's an interesting sound to play with, I have used the other sounds quite a bit in the past, either by rerecording or sampling or editing or what have you. The sounds of entropy. I guess in terms of a theme and also in terms of conceptual thematic context, it just seems to match my interest in entropy in general. To me they are very life affirming because you have to be alive to get damaged. But those are my favorite sounds.

Expectedly, the theme of GX's list of sounds is entropy.

1. Breaking glass
2. Fire crackle
3. Good Car Crash tied with Explosions
4. Sandpaper tied with erosion

Casey Anderson's work is inspired by improvisation and chance operations

developed through computer algorithms. As a teacher at Art Center College of

Design, some of his duties include the assessment of artistic endeavors presented

by his students. Below is our conversation concerning some aesthetic issues in

experimental 'noise.'

> DM: What is 'good' noise music to you?

> CA: I like things that are very detail-oriented and feel precise and deal with both sound and silence, or have an obvious care with thinking about…—how do I say this?—that have an interesting relationship to duration, or really work with making odd diversions. That's the most general way I can answer that.

> DM: Earlier what you said about the LA scene is that it's not very clean and precise. But you value things that are more precise?

> CA: Yeah, but I think that that has more of a relationship with one's ideas and how that comes across in the performance, than with the pedigree of

it…, or excuse me…. I just immediately contradicted myself—than the polished aspect of it. You can do things carefully, but still be investigating them. When things become super overly technical, that's less interesting to me.

DM: How do you know when you're hearing something you like?

CA: That's hard to say. I try to always be open to things that I know that I tend to not like because I feel like my mind can change at any point. I don't like no silence [intentional double negative]. I don't like no variety for no reason. I'm not super interested in techno beats with weird noises over the top. What else? Sometimes the things that are used are turn-offs to me. Aside from the Joseph Hammer looping technique that you were talking about—that sounds really interesting to me; Jason Lescalleet does similar stuff. Looping I think is boring—just plain looping—because the form ends up being the same. What I hate are the things that are always like the tent structure: start quiet, build in intensity and volume, and then die off. That's fucking super boring.

DM: So you hate Tenney's *Having Never Written a Note for Percussion*?
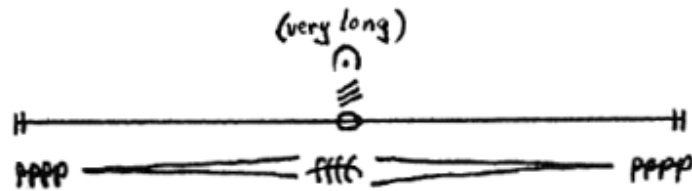
Figure 18: *Having Never Written A Note For Percussion*, James Tenney. (Complete score)

CA: Oh no, I love that piece.

DM: But that's what that is!

CA: I know. But that's a totally different thing. That's *all* it's about.

DM: I know. It almost seems like that piece is mocking that form.

CA: Yeah. But that's… I mean… that's a good retort. But that's what's great about those postal pieces is how simple they are, and they totally exhaust what they set out to do. However, there are things that just become a tent structure out of what seems like laziness, and that I don't like. I don't like laziness.

DM: What's 'bad' noise music to you?

CA: It's lazy. Or I don't like doing big fat weird loud things just because you can. That's not super interesting to me. Or millions of unintelligible effects in this big uninteresting wall. If it's an interesting wall, that's great. If it has a specific character to it, and kind of an interesting sound, or if the concept is strong enough to carry the fact that it's supposed to be bland, or something like that. I have more of a problem when someone seems to set up standards that then aren't met by the actual manifestation of the piece, than with a particular way of doing something.

DM: What's 'real' or 'authentic' noise music?

CA: I don't know. That's an interesting question. I guess, based on how you and I have been talking about it today, I feel like anything that's in the spirit of what we've already been talking about. For example, I like things that have an experimental aspect in the sense that they are experiments, or that there's a wider space of possibilities, and this is a particular iteration of that; or that deal with sound in a way that highlights how rich it can be, but also deals with the environment that it finds itself in, in some way, and makes an argument for doing things that way—that has been carefully considered to the degree possible. I like when people try things too. I think there's a lot to be said about that, even if something is a failure, it can still be interesting.

DM: What's a failure?

CA: I have this way of listening to things where I feel like I can pick out…—I guess it's pretty analytical, I suppose, and that's what I mean when I say things like, "This piece seems to be about being a big fat drone, but the problem is that it's not interesting enough to be a twenty minute piece," or something like that. I feel like you should be provided with the information you need to interpret the piece based on the moment-to-moment experience of the piece. So if that doesn't happen, or if it just seems tedious for no benefit, I really don't like that. And I really don't like things that are the equivalent of what I felt like I was seeing a lot at Cal Arts in the visual art program, where it's like, "I totally forgot that I had a gallery opening tonight. I better grab some trash out of the dumpster and shove it up in the corner." There are definitely a lot of examples of that in avant-garde music generally. Just because you can

call something not-standard, or noise, or experimental, or avant-garde, doesn't mean that there isn't a more successful way of doing things. It's totally scalable to the particular piece, but I think each piece should set up its own criteria for what makes it work, and you should get that by listening. And so when those criteria aren't met, or when there's no criteria that you're given, and it's just nothing, then it's a failure, I think.

Casey values performances that are precise and detailed, and that tend to have a formal dynamism. Earlier when Casey spoke of using a particularly loud volume in performance, he felt the very act of listeners acclimating to a sonic environment was already an important structural change in the performance itself. These days he is as likely to juxtapose sounds and silences, or to attempt to perform sounds at the ambient sound levels of the performance space. 'Good' performances, for Casey, justify themselves through their internal logic: "I feel like you should be provided with the information you need to interpret the piece based on the moment-to-moment experience of the piece. So if that doesn't happen, or if it just seems tedious for no benefit, I really don't like that." The display of an internal logic, and the fulfillment of that logic, is the basic critical method Casey uses to justify a performance. A failed performance betrays its internal logic or is perceived to simply not have one. I then asked Casey about the nature of sounds he values.

> DM: What kinds of sounds do you value?
>
> CA: I would like to say 'all' [laughs]. Unexpected ones. I like really designed instrumental ones. I like incidental sounds. I think computers can make really great sounds. I think natural things, when put under a microscope or amplified are really great, and I like accidental or undesigned or unplanned combinations of sounds.
>
> DM: Is there any sound that you can analyze and say, "I like the sound of filtered noise at this much percentage mixed with this much…"?
>
> CA: No, but you know what sound I like a lot that's an easy one for me to point out? is when you're on the beach and the waves are coming in. I like

after the wave has come in and it starts to go back in—I like that sound a lot. That's a really great sound.

Casey reels off a list of sounds he enjoys: incidental sounds, designed sounds, amplified small sounds, the sounds of waves returning to sea, but he stops himself at "all" sounds. *Not* all sounds please Casey, and this fact speaks to his critical ear toward sound-based performances and perhaps to his self-described conservatism.

Sebastian Demian is the art director at Dem Passwords, a gallery and venue originally set up to display the artworks of reggae legend Lee "Scratch" Perry. Dem Passwords, at its West Hollywood location, soon became a hotbed for experimental 'noise' performers (though other kinds of performances and movie screenings were also common). Sebastian is not an experimental 'noise' artist himself: he is a promoter of the scene and an avid listener. The following exchange concerning the aesthetics of experimental 'noise' is from my interview with him.

DM: What is 'good' noise music to you?

SD: For me it's about the artist. It's about the bigger picture. It's bigger than one composition. It's about what the artist is doing and why they're doing it, and how they came to do it. So the noise music that's good to me is something that's fully formed, or it could be brand new. I'm not saying it has to be fully formed.

DM: Why do you think they do it? How do they come to do it? These are the questions I ask too.

SD: Well, it's fun, and people need a release. They need to express themselves, and there are any number of ways you can express yourself, and it's exciting and esoteric; it's undesirable, ostensibly to some people, and that's attractive. I think you're only always going to have people that find it…; it's a fetish. People who are into different sounds and different styles; these people that like these sounds find each other.

DM: How do you know when you're listening to a good piece of noise music?

SD: Sometimes I'll forget; I'll space out and think about other things, and it will be easy for me to go elsewhere in my mind—that's kind of when I know it's working for me. I'm thinking about Peter Kolovos' latest album called *Black Cloud*;[352] or I'm not sure. It's not called *Black Cloud*. Something black; I'm not sure. I have to look back at it, I've only listened to it once, but I played it all the way through and he really got me fired up. I was working on my other work—on business stuff—and it really got me going and got my mind going, and before I knew it the album was done, and it was great. It got me excited and stimulated. There was something going on there that got into my brain. It hit different frequencies. I like to think about music in terms of frequencies and what those different frequencies can do potentially. I don't know, I'm not a scientist. I'm not into mysticism for that matter either.

DM: What's 'bad' noise music?

SD: Thoughtless or careless, where it's not coming from a place that's interesting.

DM: What would be a place that's interesting?

SD: Some place that's developed. I respect someone who has been pursuing a line too. Peter Kolovos, for example, has been pursuing a sound for a long time. You can think what you want about his sound, but he's got a line, he has a hallmark, and that's interesting to me. You can pick his music out of a lineup. That's great about it, and it's unique. It's a fingerprint—that's him. It's his expression. Music isn't good or bad, in a weird way. It has different uses for different people. I go to what I have a use for.

DM: What's 'real' or 'authentic' noise music?

SD: I don't think there's such thing as 'real' or 'fake' when it comes to noise music. Anyone can do it. It's folk—it's a folk tradition. Anyone can pick up a cassette tape and turn the volume up and do something via a distortion pedal. Anyone can make a contact mic in ten minutes. Anyone can do it; nothing is real or fake, it's about what you're doing. I guess if you're fake noise: you know what?—fake noise is the people who call their music noise and it's not noise. That's what fake noise is: people that mislabel their own music [as] noise. You see that a lot I think. They're in some rock band or something and they say, "I make noise music," or they'll say, "Our band is noise;" and I say, "No it's not. There's nothing noise about that." I think maybe it's attractive as a label. I don't know. I couldn't imagine it is attractive to people as a label, but I've seen some bands say, "Our music is noise," and you hear it and it sounds like industrial music; "This isn't noise music."

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[352] Sebastian is probably thinking of *Black Ligaments* by Peter Kolovos.

DM: What lies at the edges of noise music? What's just inside and what's just outside of what you would call noise music?

SD: Artists experimenting with volume—that's very close. Modern composers and modern classical music is very close to noise music.

DM: So that would be just outside or just inside?

SD: That would be just outside. They should be closer to each other. There should be more noise music and experimental music at the Disney Hall if you ask me. Because noise musicians, a lot of times they're thinking about their pieces as pieces, as compositions. A rock musician might think about a three-and-a-half minute song—verse-chorus-verse-chorus-bridge, whatever. But a modern composer might think about a fifteen minute piece with all the parts of classical music. Noise musicians might think of their work more like that. So I think that's close to it.

Sebastian values artists that have spent a considerable amount of time at their craft and have developed a voice through their knowledge of the equipment and the experiments they conduct to learn what the equipment can do. He knows when an experimental 'noise' performance is good because his mind will drift while he listens. Elsewhere he discussed the importance of a narrative[353] that he could follow: "I respect someone who have been pursuing a line." Sebastian rejected the notion of 'authentic' or 'real' noise, and contrasted the idea with the notion of a 'fake' noise. He then demonstrated what 'fake' noise was: namely, music that could be categorized by a term that already exists, like industrial music or even rock. Though I did not feel that he fully understood my question concerning the boundaries of experimental 'noise,' he did make an interesting observation about the proximity of experimental 'noise' with classical music. For Sebastian, experimental 'noise' artists put the same amount of care and formal consideration into their works as classically trained composers, and therefore the

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[353] Sebastian Damian said, "To me it gets good when there's a story. That's when it gets good to me. Where there's a narrative; when there's something I can sink my teeth into."

performances should be showcased at a venue as prestigious as the Walt Disney

Concert Hall.

Though Damion Romero has not played the Walt Disney Concert Hall, I did

attend one of his performances at the REDCAT (Roy and Edna Disney Cal Arts

Theater) behind the concert hall. He has hosted a weekly radio program on KXLU

devoted to experimental audio for over twenty years. Below is our exchange

concerning aesthetic issues in the experimental 'noise' scenes.

DM: What is 'good' noise music to you?

DR: It's a really broad thing. It could be a lot of things. Usually there's a certain kind of energy that people have. Not necessary like it's energetic, but definitely not something I could speak well about. There's just a certain feeling you get from feeling certain things, and it really depends on the type of stuff that you're talking about too. It's really about hearing it. Probably the better it is the less you can actually describe what's good about it.

DM: How do you know when you're hearing something you like?

DR: I don't know. There's a lot of stuff that can change. It really depends. It's complicated because of what it is. Sometimes there might be some kind of other context that you're hearing it in, or other times it might be something that isn't related in any way to other things. So I don't really know how to answer that because it could be a lot of things.
I generally tend to like…—and this maybe not even be true anymore either—but I remember thinking a lot about sounds that aren't really so easily identifiable in general. I guess it's similar in the way that… if you're watching a movie or seeing somebody acting, it's usually good when you don't really think about it, when there's not much distraction. Whatever it is you're hearing…. I don't know, I'm not really explaining too well. It's nice when you don't know what's causing the sounds, I guess, but that's not always necessary, but it's nice when you can get lost in it and not… think of…. Sometimes things will make me think of what they were doing to make that sound, which can be distracting, is basically what I'm trying to say. But that's not just what makes it good. I probably can't really say.

DM: What's 'bad' noise music?

DR: I don't know about that either. It's easy to make judgments about things. It really depends. It's almost a really personal question too. I'm thinking in terms of live performance versus recorded stuff. I don't know if I have an answer for that either.

DM: What do you find uninteresting? What's easy to say, "I don't like it?"

DR: A lot of times things seem really derivative of other things, but that's not necessarily always a bad thing either. With noise, sometimes there's a certain kind of aesthetic that's beyond the sound, so you have to think of the other works by the same artist in context. But there are so many different approaches, so sometimes what someone is doing is only about the sound; sometimes it's a little more conceptual. You have to take all those things into consideration. Some things just sound good and some things don't, I guess. I don't know where to go with this.

DM: What's 'real' or 'authentic' noise music?

DR: No, I can't do that one either. Everyone is doing their own thing, and it's good when people have their own thing to do. It's good when people do things that are original, but how do you judge that exactly? It's cool when somebody was doing something that nobody else was doing at the time, but I don't know how to judge what's authentic or not. In hindsight a lot of older artists seem really old school or original or pioneers. In the context of what everybody is doing at the time. It's always changing too, so it's really hard to say, because something can sound different when you hear it years later.

DM: Has there ever been anything that sounded better now than it did when it first came out?

DR: I'm sure. I can't think of anything specifically. It's nice when something doesn't sound dated; but then again, sometimes it's nice when it does sound dated. I guess with my own stuff I don't like to use sounds that might be identified as anything, really, whether it's dated or what. For me it's cool when something could be anything any time. I don't know, I'm a little bit lost.

DM: What lies at the edges of noise music? What's just inside and what's just outside?

DR: I don't really have a very interesting thing to say as far as how that goes. Wolf Eyes was the perfect rock-slash-noise crossover.

Damion was characteristically hesitant to discuss what counts as 'good noise,' and in fact, perhaps more than anyone I interviewed, he began many of his answers with "I don't know." But he does give us some hints: "Probably the better it is the less you can actually describe what's good about it." This idea is counter to the modes of knowledge creation found in the academy. The

justification of works, according to Susan Sontag, has a history beginning with

Plato's philosophy of art as essentially mimetic.

> The fact is, all Western consciousness of and reflection upon art
> have remained within the confines staked out by the Greek theory
> of art as mimesis and representation. It is through this theory that
> art as such—above and beyond given works of art—becomes
> problematic, in need of defense. And it is the defense of art which
> gives birth to the odd vision by which something we have learned
> to call "form" is separated off from something we have learned to
> call "content," and to the well-intentioned move which makes
> content essential and form accessory.
> But it is still assumed… that a work of art by definition *says*
> something. ("What X is saying is…," "What X is trying to say
> is…").[354]
>
> *Sontag*

Damion's statement that the better the experience of the work is, the less you

can say about it, moves against the Greek legacy of interpreting and judging

works by their mimetic character, or by their ability to "say" something. He then

alludes to a time when he particularly enjoyed sounds that were difficult to

identify, suggesting that Damion was keen to try to identify the source or method

of sound production, then admitted that such intellection can be a distraction

itself to the experience of the performance. In other words, Damion often finds a

(linguistically) hermeneutic mode of listening to be a distraction, and instead

favors a corporeal mode of listening. Damion imagines the experimental 'noise'

scenes as undergoing a variety of strategies to achieve their aims: some are

more theatrical and visual with the sound while others are mostly interested in

sound. Although he sees no value in the notion of authenticity, he is drawn to

originality. Damion claims that 'good' experimental sound also resists dating: in

other words, 'good' experimental 'noise' recordings would be difficult to

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[354] Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 1966), 4.

determine when they were produced solely by their sound. In this sense, the notion of progress in experimental 'noise' is ironically nullified, because even though people who perform experimental 'noise' are actively seeking new sounds, those new sounds are as likely to come from older technologies than from newer technologies. When I asked Damion specifically about the nature of 'bad noise,' he gave an answer that was revealing and felt like a punch to the gut: "It's almost a really personal question." I realized when I heard his answer that *all* of my questions were deeply personal; that the questions I asked spoke not only to the artistic ideologies of the people I interviewed, but to their very ontologies through their aesthetic choices.

Don Bolles has always been influenced by "weird" sounds, from Stockhausen recordings he would find at the record store when he was ten years old to an assortment of krautrock from the 1970s. His sound explorations from shortwave radio to the experiments he conducted at KDIL in Scottsdale, Arizona informed his outlook on music in general, and his stature throughout the 1980s as the former drummer of the Germs and 45 Grave, and front-person of Vox Pop has placed him near the center of several contemporary music scenes in Los Angeles. As a noicisian he is known as one half of the psychedelic noise duo Kitten Sparkles (with Joseph Hammer). I asked him about his aesthetic outlook concerning experimental 'noise.'

DM: What is 'good' noise music to you?

DB: It's got to be engaging. I liken that to a process piece. Watching someone grind a microphone down to a nub on a grinder is pretty cool, and listening to it is even cooler [referencing the Haters]. Just the act of that carries a weight: that's awesome. I think that kind of thing is cool: that's engaging. I think someone like Alvin Lucier putting a little speaker in a teapot and then lifting the lid in different ways to make it sound different: that's fucking awesome too. A good process piece is usually a good way to go. Anything that can expand the consciousness and explore

a weird concept that maybe other people wouldn't explore. I'm really into that. Sometimes it works; sometimes it doesn't. The things that work; that kicks ass. When someone can take some simple concept like the phase relations between two identical tape loops and then make this ass-kicking thing out of it. Also I like shit that sounds cool, not just that it's noisy.

DM: What sounds cool?

DB: Lots of echo can be used to sound really cool; I think it still kind of is. It needs to be psychedelic sounding: kind of confusing and kind of beautiful and kind of hideous at the same time. Kind of frightening and beautiful. That's what I like.

DM: How do you know when you're hearing something that's beautiful or good?

DB: When you know. I've been walking down the street and think: "Oh my god, what the hell is that?" You just hear some weird sound from off in the distance. Those kinds of things are always are good. Any sound that makes me go "huh?" [laughs]—I like that.

DM: What's bad noise music?

DB: Somebody who is doing noise music to be part of the noise boys scene. That's not necessary for me to go hear.

DM: What's real noise music?

DB: I guess the people who have no choice but to do that, or the people that have such great ideas and are doing really sincere experiments. People who really think in those ways. You can kind of tell the difference. People that really have something to say with it. Or they have nothing to say, and that's what their saying.

DM: That's the Cage thing. "I have nothing to say and I'm saying it."

DB: Yeah. I like that. I love John Cage. That guy, to me, saved music.

DM: What lies at the edges of noise music? What's just inside noise music and just outside noise music?

DB: [Solid Eye] screwed up that edge. It's not really noise, it's sound, and it's very musical in its way, and it's not blaring out at you. I don't really like blaring out things. I like stuff that draws you in a little more. Stuff that creates a world, whether it's a monolithic world, like [French composer] Elaine Radigue. That stuff is very minimal, and it pulls you in. Some of the MB [Maurizio Bianchi] stuff that's like "eeeeer"—I don't like that so much. But I think some of his stuff is genius, but other things are not so good.

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Don Bolles' basic metrics for determining what is 'good' in any kind of art relies on its "weirdness" and its "psychedelic" content—these ideas are engaging to him. He also finds pieces that involve simple processes to be engaging, like the Haters' performances that involve grinding microphones, or the phase pieces by Steve Reich. He knows he is hearing something interesting when he is surprised by it, and asks himself "On my god, what the hell is that?" In another part of my interview with Don, he elaborated on the gendered modes of masculinity found in some experimental 'noise' scenes.

> DB: All these yahoos are doing it, and it sort of got to be like a noise boys kind of thing. All these macho drunken people going out and being boisterous with their noise, trying to get laid and drink a bunch of beer. It's really weird to see that. It used to be weird, little introverted faggy guys doing this stuff. And then it got to be these sort of macho people.

We can glean from Don's critique of a macho "noise boys" scene the violent performative displays that are sometimes found in harsh noise circles, with the image of the angry noise artist screaming into a distorted microphone or similarly-fashioned transducer (a Walkman with an internal microphone, for example). 'Real noise' for Don is linked to "sincerity" and the authentic; he implies a certain mastery of the sounds to be used, either through the equipment, or as a conceptual idea. He claims he can hear the difference between someone who is an experienced explorer in sound versus someone who is dabbling with electronics. At the edge of experimental 'noise,' Don names the band Solid Eye—Joseph Hammer, Rick Potts, and Steve Thomsen—as a group that straddles the line between 'noise' and not noise. Don enjoys performances that draw the listener in with an interesting sound or concept.

Bob Bellerue is not only a well respected experimental 'noise' artist, he has also been an important promoter of experimental performance arts. He currently promotes experimental performances in New York, but in the early 2000s he had cofounded the East Hollywood venue Il Corral in Los Angeles. Il Corral was an important venue that brought together composers working with electronics and computers at Cal Arts—where he graduated with an MFA in 2003—with performers from non-academic backgrounds. I learned a lot about experimental music and listening practices while attending performances at the small venue on Melrose and Heliotrope. Below is our exchange concerning some of his aesthetic ideas on experimental 'noise.'

DM: What is 'good' noise music to you?

BB: I always wonder about that: How do you differentiate? I think, to me, it's gotta be—and everyone of these can be broken by the person who can do it better—but generally it has to be practiced, knowledgeable and smart historically as well as technically…

DM: Is that what you mean by 'better'?

BB: Yeah. All of these things together. Maybe confidence. But everything is so arbitrary and subjective. You can have somebody who contradicts all those axioms and still plays really well. But usually there's variation. There can be musical forms to it, which makes it more satisfying, repetitions or relationships in timbre and rhythm, but I always wondered about that.

DM: What's 'bad' noise music?

BB: That could just be not having control over your equipment. Not trying very hard, in the case of musicians who are invited to play at a noise festival.

DM: Can you tell when someone's not trying very hard?

BB: I think more like if somebody's performing with the idea of noise, or people who are moving more than they're making sound [laughs]. Sometimes people will pick up an amplified can of some sort, and you can see them but you can't really hear necessarily the sound. You can't hear any creation of what's happening from them yelling into this thing. But in terms of 'not trying very hard' I think it's more a problem of musicians

who are trying to play noise, or playing with the idea of noise, rather than actually having an experience of what that means technically.

DM: What's 'real' or 'authentic' noise music?

BB: It can be anything. It's just how you approach it. To me, real noise music is absent of regular rhythm and…. To me, real noise music has less predictability. For instance, there are people who play noise but they use all predictable instruments, like keyboards, tape decks, drum machines, microphones, instruments. And even though they can do abstract sound, at the same time it's much more guaranteed what's going to happen. There will be variation in the playback, sequencing. So I sometimes wonder how much of that is noise. Of course you can have a noise tape deck recording or whatever, some pedals with your keyboard. Of course it's noise, but I sometimes think that that unpredictability…: I think that's part of what I really appreciate about noise, is when people are there, live, in the moment, and there's something they do that's really going to affect the sound, and it may not be intentional, but they're also going to go with it. So sometimes that confidence, I think, helps me appreciate things. Not getting concerned if they're making a mistake. They'll roll with it.

DM: Is there anyone who straddles just inside and just outside. I'm just trying to figure out where this border is where something becomes noise music or something isn't noise music anymore.

BB: I don't know. It gets a little heavy hairsplitting.

DM: Split the hair!

BB: Then you start to get to these metalevels of…: "Is John Wiese a noise artist or not?" Of course he is. But at the same time he's been doing the same thing for so long. Where does it become just his music? Or, there's this guy, when I was on tour in May, I was with Dylan [Hay] from Isa Christ and he was talking about this kid Sam [Hooker] who was from Detroit and is in a band called Tar Pit. He talked about how Sam is from this generation of kids who just came of age being exposed to so much hardcore and noise and stuff that to them it's just what they do. It's not like they learned an instrument and decided to abandon it and do noise. To them it's just all music. Or Mr. Matthews. He's got all these homemade synthesizers and he just hooks them up and plays with them all. So there's a lot of unpredictability to it. At the same time, they are electronic circuits that are going to be relatively reliable.

DM: Are there a lot of electronic builders in New York?

BB: Yeah. Everyone is usually tinkering with something. People have their own little device. Maybe that's another idea for what makes noise as a hands-on element to creating your equipment, or your software, or your instruments, or whatever. But there are definitely a lot of people that

build stuff, but then there are a lot of people that just buy equipment because they can. They're too busy to build, which is fine. There's a new store that just opened up [in New York] that's for modular synths.

For Bob, a knowledge of the instruments the performer intends to use through hours of practice and experimentation (the development of skills) combined with some knowledge of the history of experimental practices (how others have used similar instruments at performances) will generally generate a performer that may produce performances that would be recognized and qualified as acceptable or 'good' performances. And yet, Bob also says that *confidence* is an important part of the performance; in other words, the performer must appear to know how to perform. A performer who possesses a knowledge of building traditional music forms—including the use of iterative structures and salient events so that listeners can differentiate one part from another—can facilitate listeners who enjoy a narrative form to follow the performance. 'Bad' experimental 'noise' can result from someone who has not gained a sufficient level of competency with the equipment chosen to perform. It can also result from someone who does not take the art of crafting experimental 'noise' seriously; from someone who glibly finds experimental 'noise' to be the work of an untrained dilettante. According to Bob 'real' noise precludes rhythm and endeavors to create unpredictable—thus perpetually surprising—output. At this point in the interview, some of Bob's consciously contradictory statements begin to pile up, as he finds the aspects of knowledge and the mastery of equipment at odds with the blissfully frenzied sonic experience while making decisions in the moment that can harness the chaotic elements or send the performance beyond the expectation of the performer and listener alike. A 'good' performer is confident, and will "roll with

it." Perhaps Bob's notion of the confident experimental 'noise' artist is congruent with GX's notion of the noise artist as having a particular attitude toward making sound, instead of developing a "style." And yet, "[y]ou can have somebody who contradicts all those axioms and still plays really well." In other words, these methods (do not) ensure a 'good' performance.[355] When I asked Bob about the boundaries of experimental 'noise,' he gave John Wiese as an awkward example. The consistency of John's performances, for Bob, would seem to impede him from inclusion as a 'noise' artist, yet he admits that nobody would deny that he does 'noise.' When Bob says that John has "been doing the same thing for so long," he seems to indicate that a history is antithetical to 'noise' performance (to be sure, most people find that what is consistent about John's work is that he is always trying something different). He then discusses the idea that there is a generation of youths emerging that understands experimental 'noise' as a genre like any other genre of music. He also discusses the idea that some artists are masters of synthesizers, and that their expert knowledge of instruments tends to preclude the exploration of equipment that Bob wonders is necessary for a proper experimental 'noise' performance. Bob's testimony uniquely highlights the antinomy between mastery and exploration concerning 'good' experimental 'noise' performance.

Joe Potts continues to perform in a few ensembles and configurations as cofounder of the Los Angeles Free Music Society. He is also on the SASSAS[356] board of directors. With an arts career that spans five decades, Joe has been a pioneer in experimental 'noise,' even as he distances himself from some of the

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[355] I use parentheses around "(do not)" to denote what I call the *Hegartian dialectic*, from his book *Noise/Music*. Paul Hegarty himself as authorized and endorsed my usage of the term.
[356] The Society for the Activation of Social Space through Art and Sound (SASSAS)

more extreme forms, like harsh noise. Below is our exchange on the nature of

'good' experimental 'noise.'

DM: What is 'good' noise music to you?

JP: I have this shtick about all art and music that the people whose work I appreciate seems to exist in their world—their own little realm—and the work they do is an extension of that realm, whether it's Joseph Hammer or Damion Romero. Their work is an extension of this strange place which they live, and that's what I appreciate in art and in sound, is people that have their own viewpoint and are consistent with it. Albert Ortega is another one.

DM: How do you know when you're hearing something that's good to you?

JP: I think it relates to that other answer. It takes me into that world a little bit.

DM: What's 'bad' noise music?

JP: That's a good one. How do you express that? I guess what I would consider 'bad' is work that unintentionally uses clichés. Just like in any genre, in noise there are clichés. Like what I was talking about: the structural arc: depending on how that's done. For people doing noise work with guitar there's a million different clichés: putting the drumstick in the strings. I'm sure there are ways to do that that are great, but there are certain things that seem like Noise-101. And then like I said, not being aware of the sounds you're making; not really listening. If it's an ensemble, not listening to other people. If it's solo, not listening to the sounds you're making and how they're interacting with the space.

DM: What is Noise-101?

JP: [Laughs] I think it's…

DM: If you were teaching a class on Noise Techniques 101: first is listening…

JP: It's like I said, listening and being aware of the sounds you're making and how they interact with the space. As far as when you're playing in an…—well I guess it could be solo too—but I think about when you're playing in an ensemble, you're trying to become one entity. The sound you're forming is almost like sculpting together in clay, and trying to build this thing that gets more and more elaborate until maybe at some point it collapses. At it's best, you're acting is one entity, rather than a bunch of individuals.

DM: You mentioned clichés, which is a few questions down on my list. What are some noise music clichés? And then after that I'll ask how those

noise clichés might fit into a Noise Music Techniques 101 course. What are some clichés? I think you said, delay…

JP: With stringed instruments there are typical ways that you prepare the strings with inserting things, playing them with motors. With delays there's using the delay pedal to the point of feedback. I think it's easy to fall into clichés with the looping stuff too, but I'm kind of partial to the whole Terry Riley thing, so I get suckered into that.

DM: What's real or authentic noise music?

JP: I think I answered that. For me there's a level of consistency with the world that you live in and the sound you're making.

DM: What lies at the edges of noise music? What's just inside and what's just outside? Where's that border where it becomes noise music or not noise music?

JP: That's tough, because there are exceptions to everything. You would think that there was something noise-related that had a strong beat and a melody line that it would not be noise, but I think there are exceptions. I think Smegma does stuff that would fit that description and still fall within the noise genre. Le Forte Four has done stuff and Doo-Dooettes has done stuff.

DM: What about Sonic Youth? Where does Sonic Youth lie for you?

JP: Actually, Noise Guitar 101 would be some of Thurston Moore's performances: his solo stuff. As a band I think they're great.

For Joe, 'good' experimental 'noise' is reliant on the idiosyncratic worlds that the artists build for themselves. They design their own criteria though their unique combination of instruments—or better yet, by designing and building their own instruments—and finding creative ways to implement their ideas in sound. 'Bad noise' uses unintentional clichés already understood in the genre (in other words, intentional clichés would be validated as mockery, rather than derivative). Like GX, Joe mentions the use of guitars with drumsticks as a particular cliché. He then discusses the idea of a Noise-101 course. I probed into Joe's syllabus for a hypothetical Noise-101 course. Such methods would include first and foremost *listening techniques*—especially in the context of an ensemble, but also in the

context of a performance space. An example of Noise-101 listening would include

Thurston Moore's work from Sonic Youth, the band that perhaps pioneered the

technique of using drumsticks between the strings of an electric guitar. When I

asked Joe about the borders of what could be considered just inside and just

outside the 'noise' category, he mused over the idea of 'noise' performance with

beats, like some of the work of his colleagues in the early LAFMS: Smegma, Doo-

Dooettes, and Le Forte Four. My guess is that Joe meant that metered rhythms

lie at the edge of experimental 'noise,' neither entirely inside nor entirely outside.

Maria Garcia's performances have become a staple in the experimental

'noise' scenes. Her performances at (the) Handbag Factory, Dem Passwords,

Human Resources, and her own venue, Mata Noise, have garnered her respect

amongst her peers. I asked Maria about her interests in experimental 'noise' to

learn about her aesthetic values, beginning by asking what she considers to be a

'good' performance.

> DM: What is 'good' noise music to you?

> MG: Usually it's the music done by my friends, people I go out to see. For the most part it's really visceral; you can feel it. Somebody you can tell obviously put a lot of thought into their piece. No matter what is, it's pretty good.

> DM: How do you know when you're hearing something that's good?

> MG: I enjoy it [laughs]. That's how I know I like it.

> DM: What's 'bad' noise music?

> MG: Maybe it's a little less composed, or there's a little bit less thought put into it. It really depends on the show, I think; or the set. At times someone can come in and just throw a bunch of gear down and it just be completely improv'ed and completely not structured at all. Then sometimes you see somebody do something really structured and really thought out, and that can be really great. I guess it really depends on the set; it really depends on what the person is doing.

> DM: What's 'real' or 'authentic' noise music?

MG: That's the beauty of noise. It can really be whatever you decide it to be.

DM: I guess the counterpoint here would be, Is there something you would hear and determine, "Nah, that's not really noise music."

MG: Usually if it's a song—if it's a song structure—then it's not noise. Like Tater Bug, for example: he does a lot of singer-songwriter stuff, but he also incorporates a lot of tape collage, and I still consider that noisy; I still consider that in the vein of noise, even though it's not necessarily straight-up just putting together harsh noise.

DM: Well you know, there are bands who use noise, like Sonic Youth, and then there are bands that are mostly noise. So this leads into the next question: What lies at the borders or edges of noise? What's just inside noise music and what's outside?

MG: Like what you were saying: Where people just incorporate certain elements of it. But like I was saying before: I really think noise can be… pretty much it's a collection of sounds that you decide you want to use. It can be pretty much whatever you like, in my opinion of what noise is. There are definitely things that sound harsher. For example, Shannon: I still consider it noise, but she's not using harsh sound. She's manipulating different tones that she's making it through acoustic instruments or metal pieces, but it's not necessarily like she's generating static or creating a harsh tone. She's just manipulating the light tones that she has and making noise.

Maria touches on the social aspect of the experimental 'noise' scene in Los Angeles: "Usually it's the music done by my friends." Other people I interviewed, like Damion Romero and John Wiese, said similar things in various parts of our interviews.[357] This situation often moves in both directions: 'good' experimental noise is made by your friends; people who make 'good' experimental noise are people you may want to become friends with: thus, the experience of 'good' experimental noise performances socializes the scene. When I asked Maria about the nature of 'bad' music, she began saying that perhaps it was less thought out

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[357] For example, in my interview with Damion Romero, he said, "I think that the artist-to-artist friendship is really important because there are some pretty strong bonds between people because of their music. It almost determines who you're friends with."
When I asked John Wiese who he asks to go see a noise show in Los Angeles, he said: "You're just asking who my friends are."

and less composed, and then conceded that a powerful performer could improvise a compelling set without giving much thought to structure. For Maria, some 'good' experimental noise is structured, while others may not need to be. Maria's thoughts on the nature of 'real' or 'authentic' noise were not specific; rather, she said it could be whatever the performer wanted the performance to be. But when I asked her what was inside and outside the category of noise, she said that songs with traditional song structures moved beyond the confines of experimental 'noise' performance. She offered the performances of Shannon Kennedy as an example—who performs as Pedestrian Deposit with her partner Jon Borges, and as Nephila as a solo artist. Shannon is known for playing an amplified cello through guitar effects pedals (lately she has been playing a strung branch which she bows and plucks, and is then amplified through guitar effects pedals). Her performances often incorporate a pitched drone with tonal melodic passages, or a noisy background to accompany her tonal melodic passages; the melodic passages are often countered with other noise elements (non-pitched). Shannon's work provides a good example of performances that do not endeavor toward a 'pure' experimental noise performance, since melodic pitch material, and even rhythm, is present in her work. Yet her performances are also full with noise. She is not merely using noise in her music—like a noise rock band like Sonic Youth would—rather, she seems to be using some elements of traditional music as part of her noise performance. I then asked Maria about the sounds she values.

> DM: What kind of sound do you value?
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> MG: I really enjoy high frequencies. I like what they can do to your ear. I like that they're just so piercing, even though they may sound so quiet, they're so piercing that you can walk away from it and be completely frazzled. With an extremely high pitch, you almost don't even hear it. I

like high frequencies a lot. I like crackly sounds. I like a lot of natural sounds. The sounds I use are a lot of natural sounds, like water, animal sounds, crickets chirping, [their dog barks], I've used dogs barking as part of pieces that I've made. A lot of natural sounds from everyday life. When I see a set, I really like high tones and crackly tones.

Crackling sounds and extreme high pitches tickle Maria's fancy. She enjoys the knife-in-ear treble frequencies, even at softer volumes. She also enjoys the pedestrian ambient sounds found everyday, anywhere, but the sounds she alluded to in our interview took place in her home with noisician Patrick Murch (Sissisters).

Samur Khouja's work as a professional sound engineer and producer means that he has to make aesthetic judgments in a way that other kinds of artists do not; in other words, his judgments must often meet a certain criteria that will maximize the success of the tune in a competitive radio market. These skills trickle into some of his more adventurous artistic pursuits in death metal and experimental 'noise.' Below is our exchange on the nature of 'good noise.'

DM: What is 'good' noise music to you?

SK: I think, like I said before: I like good, honest music. It's something that you feel is from that person's heart. I tend to watch people a lot when they play: facial expressions and eye movement; how graceful they are. Those, to me, are indicators of where they are mentally or preparation-wise. Not to say that preparation is always necessary, but you can kind of wade through whether someone has just bought a box that makes noise, versus someone who is using a tool to create something that's honest. To me that's good noise.

DM: How do you know when you're hearing it? You mentioned visual cues are indicators.

SK: You can feel it. Whatever gives you a good feeling. Honesty usually feels good.

DM: How do you know when it's honest?

SK: You kind of just have to listen to your gut.

DM: How do you know when it's dishonest?

SK: Also listening to your gut. And also being open-minded. Sometimes people will prove you wrong, and that's always something I think about. I'm constantly getting proved wrong, and I'm constantly always following my gut and proving myself to be correct. So you have to be able to…. If you don't like something, you don't like it. How negative you want to destroy it in your brain, or how negative you want it to affect you and make you irritated to where…. If you don't like something, what do you do? What does it matter if you don't like anything unless it causes you to talk shit or to feel a certain way, or to cut yourself or to steal or be angry to your girlfriend or something. It doesn't matter if you don't like something. If it rubs you the wrong way enough to do something, most of that is just you—it's you internalizing something odd. So it's very subjective.

DM: But that's what the question calls for: subjectivity. What's 'bad' noise music?

SK: The same answer as something that's…. A lot of times you'll see somebody with some really expensive piece of equipment and you can just tell they're not doing anything with it, or they're not really using it to its full potential. And who's to say about that? But you know, there have been instances where people's idea of something is just not being executed well. You can kind of tell. And then it's up to you to judge it. I, personally, don't like to hear crazy filter sweeps. It's kind of like a cheese sound to me. I don't like when people are sweeping their oscillators up and down and you can hear it going [mouth noise]: "NNnnneerrrrooooOOOO" [from top sweeping down, and then sweeping back up]. Those are really annoying sounds to me. I'm very precise when I move my oscillator, even if it's a full-range oscillator. I'm pretty precise to moving it to the frequency that I want. Those are just part of, to me, my chops. It's like finding the right note on the guitar immediately, or the note that you want. Not to say that I don't like the sounds, but a lot of times I'll hear them and they'll freak me out a little bit [laughs], and they kind of rub me the wrong way. That's it, really.

DM: Do they sound too automatic to you?

SK: Yeah, it just sounds very…

DM: Lazy, maybe?

SK: Lazy, or uncontrolled, or maybe…, I don't know. But generally, when I hear someone searching for the frequency and sweeping back and forth, it's just a sound I don't like.

DM: What's 'real' or 'authentic' noise music? You talked about 'honest.' Maybe that covered it a little bit. What do you think is 'real' noise music?

SK: Well I answered that with the honesty thing.

DM: Ok.
What lies at the edges of noise music? What's just inside and what's just outside the boundaries?

SK: You can say that noise rock—like the noise rock bands—maybe aren't rock enough for rock bands and aren't noisy enough for most noise guys or girls. Stuff that's kind of a hybrid may not be accepted by traditionalists. Take Ezra, our friend. Ezra is arguably not a noise guy all the time. It depends. But if you were to take an average of his sets—that I've seen anyway; the last solo sets for the last couple of years—if you took a mean of those, he fucking does great on noise bills. He kills it. It's brutal. But at the same time it's not. It kind of stands in its own thing. You can say that it's composed; it's also improvised. It's just this beautiful hybrid of stuff, and he's a virtuoso in a lot of ways. All these hybrid bands, like Conscious Summary, the set will be harsh noise, and then other times it will just be like a folk band. It really depends. With the hybrid bands I'm trying to think of a…. It's hard to say. Noise is so varied. Unless it's a band with a lot of traditional instruments, it's hard to say because at that point it's really your…. Like HoraFlora, for example. His last set he did here was mostly balloons attached to different mouth pieces—trumpet or something—and he was creating drones from that with really large balloons, and he had little things on them to control the air. That might not be noise to a lot of people because it doesn't involve electronics or any sort of static or anything. That might be jazz. I think he could play on a jazz bill with that set. It would have to be more of a free jazz show, but that really is open to interpretation at that point. I have a hard time separating things like that. To me, anything is noise.

For Samur, 'good noise' is artistically honest. Visual cues and facial expressions serve as indicators for the probity of a performance. 'Bad noise' is created by someone who seems to be unfamiliar with their equipment, particularly if the equipment is expensive; or when someone is using basic, easy-to-achieve sounds from an expensive synthesizer. Samur also discusses some clichéd sounds: filter sweeps and oscillator sweeps. In a sense, he is talking about overt glissandi, since such a technique is easy to achieve on a synthesizer. He links these modes of sound-making to an undisciplined approach to making experimental 'noise'— these techniques are "uncontrolled." These methods are in contradistinction to Samur's approach, which is very methodical and disciplined, since he has spent a

lot of his time exploring the sonic potentials of various equipment. Someone who lacks control of the equipment is prone to give poorly executed performances. And yet, Samur claims that he is often surprised by how often his assumptions are incorrect; an open mind toward the modes of execution—beyond facial cues and poor equipment familiarity—can sometimes still lead to 'good' results. When I asked Samur about the limits of the experimental 'noise' category—what is just inside and what is just outside—he discussed performers like Ezra Buchla, HoraFlora, and himself. Ezra performs experimental music in a variety of ways: sometimes his works seem to be unpitched, while many of his performances involve his viola through some effects pedals, a mixer, and computer, and vocal mic. Samur's own performances as Conscious Summary—at least the many that I have attended—tend toward experimental 'noise,' but some of his recordings I have heard sometimes explore and integrate tonal idioms, perhaps in passing, or to provide contrast (or even relief) to the passages of noise drone and more aggressive sonic explorations. The example of HoraFlora—performing drones with balloons and the mouthpieces from brass instruments—is interesting because it implies that Samur understands that many people in the experimental 'noise' scene believe that it is made with electronics. These "hybrid" spaces straddle the line because, for Samur, they use elements beyond the restrictive confines of experimental 'noise'—in the case of Ezra and Samur's Conscious Summary it is because tonal elements are possibilities for them as artists, or in the case of HoraFlora, because the use of acoustic instruments may lie beyond the focal point of most experimental 'noise.' To be sure, such strict definitions are only hypothetical, and he is much more interested in an open approach than strict confines. "To me, anything is noise," says Samur, but he admits that to others

'noise' may have a narrower definition; "That might not be noise to a lot of people…." I then asked Samur about the kinds of sounds he values.

> DM: What kinds of sounds do you value?

> SK: A lot of new sounds. If it's new; if it's something I haven't heard before, or if it's a piece of real life that has become surreal because an artist is using it in a new way, or creating a sound from it—found sounds: those are always beautiful. I love things that kind of sound like a human voice, especially one in peril. You know, a distressed human voice. I try to tune my synthesizers, or find things that sound like a woman dying or something, but all of a sudden you can control the pitch of that, and it's an instrument now. Or anything, like a beautiful person singing this vibrato—that's what it sounds like—but it's some odd sound source. Those are really exciting for me. Anything that tweaks your head and makes you feel a little lucid.

Samur values new sounds, or sounds that are presented in a new way, using a new technique or are interrelated in a formal juxtaposition. In particular, he enjoys formant humanoid sounds that mimic the expression of distress and sorrow, either through synthesis or the through the manipulation of field-recorded sounds. I then asked him to elaborate on an excursion he made to Arizona where he found himself in a creative situation, recording sounds in the desert and performing with the environment. The passage below reveals in part how Samur chooses sounds to record and how he manipulates them.

> DM: What were your favorite sounds when you recorded recently in Arizona that you were really picking up on?

> SK: There was this woodpecker that kept nailing this metal sign, and it was bouncing back off this big, giant glass wall behind me and echoing out into the canyon, and it was relentless, and it sounded insane. The woodpecker: I heard all the attack, and then I would hear the steel pole resonating and decaying, and then I'd hear the slap-back off the back wall, and then I would hear very distant echoes with completely no high-end, and it was great. I did that. There was this turtle—I recorded some footsteps. I recorded it crunching through the sand, and I gated those and pitched them down and they were like [mouth noises]—QUKKKHHH-Khhhhhh—and then they kind of modulated themselves. So that was really nice.

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Oh, I got a speaker and taped a contact mic to it—and I had never used phase shifter before, but I was manipulating the phase—and then filtering that feedback. I did that with just a couple of small battery-powered things and some electrical tape, and I spent three hours just dancing with that. It kind of sounded like a dying rat.

The sound of a woodpecker beak on a metal sign echoing off a giant glass window and out over the canyon provides an interesting sonic impression. The echos—from the reverberating metal sign, to the bounce off the window, and out into the canyon—provide layers of natural slap-back delay and reverberation: typical methods of creating sound with effects pedals. And then the recording of the footsteps of a turtle in sand manipulated by a gate (either a noise gate or a compressor gate, that would probably emphasize the attack parameters of the sound and cut the tail resonance of the sound) could provide a large, percussive sound. Finally, Samur taped a contact mic to a speaker that would surely cause a raucous feedback loop. In between the microphone and the speaker he had a Small Stone Phase Shifter (a phase modulator pedal with a single knob to control the speed of modulation and a switch to switch between two different resonant phase modes (one deep and one shallow)). To imagine a dancing noise maker is to imagine a happy person.

General Concluding Thoughts on 'Good Noise'

The aesthetics of experimental 'noise' varies from scene to scene and person to person, but there are ideas between the scenes that point in a similar direction. From the interviews I conducted, I have found three important categories that people in experimental 'noise' scenes tend to value in experimental performances: 1) the new and unique experience, 2) mastery, and 3) intentionality and clarity.

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For most of the practitioners I interviewed, the search for new sounds was a priority for experimental 'noise' performance. 'Good' performances create new, unique experiences, and often these experiences come in the form of a surprise: either as a surprising moment (or a stream of surprising moments) or the performance overall was a surprise. Expectations are either fulfilled or surpassed when the performance is deemed 'good.' Some listeners experience the unique not necessarily as a unique moment, but as a unique performer who has constructed their own sound world distinct from other experimental performers. The experience of the unique—as the 'good' experimental 'noise' performance— tends to have at least one of these three consequences in the listener. Firstly, some listeners 'space out' as a result of experiencing a 'good' experience. Secondly, some listeners experience internal 'visual' stimulus or hallucinations as a result of having a 'good' experience. Thirdly, some listeners feel they have learned something: either about the piece, about the performer, or about themselves. This learning can often lead to interesting discussions with the performer about the performance, or amongst other audience members who also heard the piece. Learning can also take the shape of critical listening, as sound sources influence each other and fill a performance space at extreme loud volumes or even at extreme low volumes. These experiences, stimulated by the experience of the new and unique experimental 'noise' performance, are considered pleasurable.

Mastery is considered an important element for achieving a 'good' performance. Mastery means knowing the equipment used for performance and executing tasks accurately. Many listeners demand the proper execution of performative actions because the specter of proper execution means that the

performer appears to be in control. Audiences demand that the performers appear to be in control, even if the resultant sounds seem chaotic. A particular annoyance for many audiences is to watch performers use expensive equipment in a manner that seems that they are learning how to use the equipment during the performance: such a spectacle is evidence of a lack of control. Although many performances are explorations of equipment or of other kinds of systems, the exploration itself must appear masterful by the confident executer: the masterful performer.

Even though 'noise' seems antithetical to clarity, many audiences feel that performers should have clear intentions to make experimental 'noise.' These clear intentions are often framed conceptually as a set of criteria that a performance has that justifies itself by fulfilling that criteria. In other words, for some, the performance has a goal, and the performance *progresses* toward that goal. If the performance does not reach that goal—if a piece does not fulfill its criteria for judgment—then the piece may be deemed a failure. Performances that are clearly stated help to simplify the details of the materials used: these details, the sounds, are often complex. Intentionality and clarity gives form to complex materials in experimental 'noise.' An ugly sound may be justified if the intention of the performer was to make an ugly sound. A relatively stagnant sound may be justified if the performer intended to create a stagnant sound (perhaps to listen to it in relation to other sounds, or the performance space). Paradoxically, clarity in structural intentionality can heighten and focus sonic ambiguities in the experience of 'noise.' Therefore, unintentional ugly or stagnant sounds may be justified if they are discovered through a rigorous performance

with clear intentions. These unintentional events may then be registered as felicitous surprises.

II. Listening Habits

This section will address the listening habits of the people I interviewed.

Most of the information will come from the questions I asked below, particularly

the first question:

- What do you listen for in noise music?
- What do you expect to hear when listening to noise music?
- What do you think your audiences are listening for at noise music events?

In some case, the stories garnered provided vivid details about the listening

experience as both a performer and an audience member in the experimental

'noise' scenes in Los Angeles. I will sometimes use these stories from various

parts of the interview. Below are a few questions that often led to interesting

exchanges concerning the listening behaviors in the field.

- Can you describe a particularly power noise music performance?
- Can you describe a situation in which a listener was repulsed by what they were listening to? Have you ever been booed?
- Can you describe a situation in which a listener was elated by what they were listening to?

The aim of this section is to expose the reader to the polyphony of stories that

will then help to narrow the scope of listening behaviors found at experimental

'noise' scenes.

Listening behaviors can speak to methodologies of composition as a

critical means of exploring how particular sounds are achieved, either through

their instrumentation or through certain techniques (for example, listening to

oscillators or filters ramping up and down is a also a way of describing a

technique). Listening behaviors can also lead to poetic descriptions of sonic

phenomena. Although such descriptors can be read as unnecessary cockamamie,

for some performers, an uncritical dreamlike state is the highest form of aesthetic appreciation. Joseph Hammer, for example, hopes to elicit an introspective visual experience from his sounds. Michael Winter claims that he often enjoys performances that induce him to sleep. In both cases critical listening has given way to a different kind of listening: one that might be termed 'erotic,' as opposed to hermeneutic, as proposed by Susan Sontag in her essay "Against Interpretation." If an erotics of music can be used to further a hermeneutics of music—as Robert Fink proposes in his essay "Elvis Everywhere"[358]—then erotic listening is a mode of listening that appeals to the idiosyncratic ontological body. The analysis of erotic listening would concern itself with how sound moves us physically, and emotionally. Questions concerning how a sonic experience *sounds like* and how it *feels like* find themselves in an ambiguous space. Extreme soft sounds necessitate a body that struggles to hear them; extreme loud sounds can cause the skin itself to vibrate. I intend to apprehend an erotics of listening in these two ways: 1) listening that involves the body as ear, and 2) the poetic (metaphorical) descriptions used to describe sonic experiences. Learning how people in the experimental 'noise' scenes listen to performances will not only tell us about the language they use to describe performative phenomena, but will also tell us about their expectations and values at these events.

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[358] Robert Fink, "Elvis Everywhere: Musicology and Popular Music Studies at the Twilight of the Canon." *American Music* 16:2: (Summer 1998), 164. The section in question regarding Sontag's call for a erotics of art is called "[Fourth Turn.] Dancing about Architecture, or, Toward an Erotics of Music."
"[W]e have to acknowledge that popular music study, no less than classical music study, is still struggling to answer Susan Sontag's demand for a descriptive vocabulary of form that can give insight into the new sensibility-in particular, into the way popular music works materially to "program sensations." The common goal is a formal vocabulary developed free of the compulsion to produce form-as-content, and free of the crippling burden of validating the canon of Great Music."

David Kendall was studying composition at Cal Arts when I met him in the early 2000s. His laptop performances were algorithmically derived using PD or Supercollider. As a computer programmer, one might expect the sort of attention to detail to differ from some of the more corporeally active performers, particularly in his listening habits. David's answers below in many ways corroborate my own feelings about the proximity of academic experimental music, free jazz, experimental 'noise' in general, and the harsh noise scene in the early 2000s. When I asked him, "What do you listen for in noise music?" his answer was simply, "It depends on the performance." David was more interested in discussing his expectations at the performances he attends: "What I would expect is… a couple of different sound designs and transitions between them. That would be the compositional components." David is listening for a few formal (if not dialectical) elements to differentiate one part from another. To further understand David's listening habits I asked him to describe a particularly powerful performance: below was our exchange.

> DM: Can you describe a particularly powerful performance? And how did it make you feel? Maybe one or two performances that you've heard in the last five or ten years that was just like "Wow, that really blows me away."

> DK: I'm just drawing a blank, that's just too vague. I've seen lots of good performances. Very rarely have I just been so… not since I was new to shows have I ever felt like anything was so unexpected and mind-blowing.

> DM: Then how about when you were new to [experimental noise] shows. Can you think of a show that was really…? Or maybe a performance that did something you really didn't expect in a positive way.

> DK: Maybe Borbetomagus. That's my answer. Borbeto, back in 2007.

> DM: What was it about it?

> DK: They do amplified saxophones. It's like two saxophone players and a guitarist. And just with that setup they do this loud harsh noise thing. They play the saxophones—I think they have a mic in the bell of the saxophone, and they put the bells of the saxophones together. It's a really

harsh noise, but with saxophones so there's this really, really wooden resonant, organic sound to this harsh noise wall. It was a really special sound that I haven't heard before since. It helps that it was the one time that I ever heard them, after listening to them for years. But yeah, that was just so…. It was all that over-the-top energy of hash noise with that kind of earthy physical feeling that you get from big scruffy free jazz. Really getting that kind of super physical sounding monkey [Monk-y(?)] free jazz. In LA you never hear it. And even on the East coast or Europe, where that happens more often, you barely rarely get this complete jazz energy. It doesn't happen that often. So to hear that, raised to this level, just this complete wash of sound pushed to its limits… it was really… it was amazing.

DM: Is there a difference between how performers listen and how nonperformers listen?

DK: I think nonperformers tend to come up with really out-there descriptions of what the music sounds like and how it makes them feel. But otherwise I can't really put myself in that position. The only difference is that performers would be able to talk about some of the technical details a little bit. But otherwise I don't think that there's that much of a difference, but it's hard at noise shows. It's easy to go around not talking to audience members who aren't somehow involved.

David begins the exchange above by realizing that only when he was new to the experimental 'noise' scene had he had his expectations shattered. This is important information because many people involved in experimental 'noise' involve themselves precisely to eschew their expectations. I then asked him about a powerful experience when he was new to 'noise.' Instead, David cited a performance by Borbetomagus in 2007 (well after being introduced to experimental practices). He described a performance that used instruments associated with jazz—saxophones and guitars—that were made to make "really harsh noise" through the use of amplification. The result was a "complete wash of sound pushed to its limits." When I asked David about the difference between how performers and non-performers listen, he said that non-performers tend to use fantastic descriptions, rather than technical lingo to describe their experiences.

Henry Perez' explosive performances are like pithy bursts of energy.

Perhaps the same can be said of the answers he gave, particularly to questions

concerning the listening experience at experimental 'noise' performances.

DM: What do you listen for in noise music? What are you listening for?

HP: The brown noise.

DM: The noise that makes you shit your pants?

HP: Uhuh.

DM: What else?

HP: I don't know. Mostly something that just makes me want to shit myself.

DM: What are some sounds that make you want to shit yourself?

HP: Something really distorted; like really fuzzy. Someone trying to play the trombone.

DM: Can you describe a particularly powerful noise music performance? How did it make you feel? Who was it?

HP: I have to say probably the last person that scared the shit out of me. I can't remember some of them. I know Cherry Point [Phil Blankenship] scared the shit out of me.

DM: This last time? [August 7, 2011 at "Heavy Metal House"]

HP: Yeah. Recently. It made me feel kind of weird. Like if I had a headache, I didn't. [Like] if someone just walked up to me and punched me in the face.

Henry referenced the brown sound as brown noise in his answer. The urban

legend of the so-called brown frequency supposedly induces a bowel movement,

but no scientific study (including the television show *Mythbusters*) has found a

frequency that induces the effect. Nevertheless, the notion of a sound that would

induce such an infelicitous unglamorous corporeal response is a way of

communicating an overwhelming experience. After all, "Holy shit!" is a colloquial

exclamation that pronounces the sublimity of the divine. Pushing through the vulgarity, Henry cited "distorted" and "fuzzy" sounds as those he valued in the listening experience. Distortion pedals and fuzz pedals are two types that many performers use as part of their gear of instruments. When I asked him about a particularly powerful experience he had had at a 'noise' event, he cited a performance by the Cherry Point. Phil Blankenship, who performs as the Cherry Point, rarely gives performances these days, but his performance at "Heavy Metal House" (Greh Holger's home on Maltman Avenue) was indeed inspired (afterward John Wiese performed a six-channel version of his "Laugh Therapy" musique concrète piece). Phil's piece left an impact on Henry, not only scatologically, but it also made him feel *as if he had a headache*, and furthermore, the experience was powerful like a punch in the face. These descriptors are intended to describe a very positive powerful experience for Henry.

At well over six foot, Nial Morgan towers over his audiences in his fiery performative displays. In the exchange below Nial points toward a critical listening practice, even if, as he admits, he has not found the right way to articulate it yet.

> DM: What do you listen for in noise music? What are you listening for?
>
> NM: Definitely dynamics. Hidden melodies that surface through all the white noise.
>
> DM: How would you define 'melody'? Because I know you don't mean a tune.
>
> NM: Like ambience. I'd have to think about that, too. I'm not really articulate today.
>
> DM: What do you expect to hear when listening to noise music?
>
> NM: I just try to keep an open mind and take it as it is. I never really go in with expectations, like, 'Oh, this guy is definitely going to sound like

this,' because mistakes and accidents are always prone to happen for a lot of harsh noise artists.

Nial cites "dynamics" as the primary element he listens for in experimental 'noise.' Dynamics including the variety of changes to any and all sonic parameter—volume, pitch, timbre, duration—but also the rate of changes. He glosses over the notion that 'noise' has melody, and when I pressed him he nearly recanted. Greh Holger also briefly waxed on a conception of melody in 'noise'—a conception that was *not based on pitch*. When I asked Nial what he expected to hear, he implied that an open mind toward a performance was more important than a set of expectations, specifically because "mistakes and accidents" that were bound to occur during a given performance would not only thwart the expectations of the audience, but also the expectations of the performer. Nial's answer inspired me to include the question, "Are there mistakes in noise?" to every subsequent person I interviewed.[359] I will take his answer to the question in consideration in the next section. Continuing with the line of questioning, I asked Nial about what he thought his audiences listened for.

> DM: What do you think your audiences listen for in noise music?
>
> NM: It's a focused audience that is into noise music. They probably listen for all of the different changes and structures involved because there's a lot to look for because so many people have played harsh noise. People that listen to harsh noise, that are really into harsh noise, know what's bullshitting and what isn't.
> So whenever I play I try to be as original as I can. I try to have as unique a sound as I can get. But I think that's what they look for. Like almost critiquing it.

Nial paints a picture of the focused experimental 'noise' listener who can follow and critique a multitude of changes and structural shifts because they have

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[359] David Kendall and Henry Perez were not asked the question concerning mistakes in noise performance.

accumulated an intimate knowledge of the art. Such enthusiasts, Nial claims,

"know what's bullshitting." I should have asked Nial what "bullshitting" was in the

context of experimental 'noise' performance, but I moved on to the next question

too quickly. Such a question may have spoken to authentic and inauthentic

performance practices.

Greh Holger was part of the Detroit experimental 'noise' scene before he

moved to Los Angeles in the late first decade of the twentieth century. He

brought with him his vintage synthesizers and extensive record collection that

seems to constantly grow: it seemed that every time I saw him he had a record,

a tape, or a CD in hand. When I asked him about the nature of his listening

techniques, he pointed out that we had covered that issue in another part of the

interview. Up to that point, I had not specifically asked about listening

techniques, but I knew that Greh had addressed the issue, at least in part. The

discussion on listening stemmed from the question I asked in a previous chapter

concerning the general aims of the practitioners of experimental 'noise.'

> DM: What do you think the general aims of the noise music community
> are? What do you think most practitioners are going for?
>
> GH: I think it's about pure sound worship. I think noise listeners are
> people who listen to a lot of music and a lot of different sounds to a lot of
> different types of things and appreciate different sounds. And I think that
> the creation of noise and the listening to noise are both done out of
> appreciating sound in a way that a lot of people don't. One can be deemed
> ugly sound or unappealing sound in a way that people who listen to rock
> music don't understand or aren't wired to think, or haven't learned to
> appreciate. I don't know that there's a specific goal in mind—aside from
> the creation of sound that is in some way fulfilling to get lost in or
> appreciate and to have consume you, or fulfill you in some way by
> hearing. People listen to music for the same reasons I think that people
> listen to and create noise music.

Greh's response suggests that people who engage with experimental 'noise' listen

differently than people who engage with other types of music. In the last

sentence, Greh moves from the listener of experimental 'noise' to the performer of experimental 'noise.' People who listen to and make experimental 'noise' are chiefly concerned with "pure sound worship"—the fetishization of sound. Both the listener and the performer begin with an interest in disparate sounds. Greh's answer resonated with some of my own ideas. In some of my interviews I felt the need to launch into a discussion based on the answers given by the interviewee. The interview would then take on a more conversational tone; my questions, that were intended to give a broad and open narrative, then became an exchange of ideas. These moments can often lead to exciting responses and exciting conversations, but I also tried to temper *my responses* so that my ideas would not interfere with the ideology of the interviewee. An important part of critical ethnography is to have these two-way exchanges. In collecting data from interviews, my goal cannot be to educate or indoctrinate the interviewee with my ideas, and yet, at times withholding my biases seems equally sinful, since no one is without an agenda. Striking the right balance can be a delicate juggling issue. The questions themselves already steer discussions down a certain path. Discussions, like the one inspired by Greh's response above to *my response* below, can be interpreted as establishing an uncomfortable hierarchical relation between interviewer and interviewee, or they can be interpreted as leveling the playing field. From Greh's statement that listeners and creators of experimental 'noise' are both concerned with the worship of sound, we had the following exchange.

> DM: Sometimes I wonder, is it really the sound that's being made, or is the *listener making the sound*. But that's just kind of an aside. Like when you did… [I dropped the same object that Greh had dropped to demonstrate a critical listening technique] that. I thought: "Well that was pretty pleasant." I chose to hear it that way. If what you were saying initially were true, then the reason I heard it that way is because you

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must have had some talent for throwing it [the object] that way. You know what I mean? So what I'm suggesting is: Is it necessarily the musician, or is it often the listener? Anyway, maybe I shouldn't even interject.

GH: No, no. I don't think it's bad to bring that up right now. It ties into what we're talking about. Listeners of noise music listen to that music for different reasons than people who listen to rock music. They also listen to it for some of the same reasons. And people who listen to noise music have learned how to listen to things differently than someone who has never tried or understood that type of music. I definitely hear things now differently than I did fifteen years ago. I definitely appreciate that chirping, and the sound of a car passing by, and the sound of someone closing a car door, and the sound of someone walking by more than I ever did before. Because I've trained myself to listen for unusual sounds, and to appreciate sounds that aren't what I expect or what I know. Even though we all know the sound of a car passing by, but….

DM: But we don't necessarily pay attention to it.

GH: Right. But if you do, if you stand up on a freeway overpass and listen to the cars on the freeway going down at high speed, that can be a beautiful sound. The din of cars passing by constantly. One's going by and one's replacing them. That's something you have to learn how to hear, it's not something you can…. Not even learn, you have to…. I just think we hear sound in different ways, and that's why there's so many different types of noise, and there will be a new type of noise in six months or so. People are trying to produce sounds in a different way, and trying to appreciate the sounds that are being made. A lot of it has to do with the listener. It's more of a listener-specific genre than rock music is, because you and I will pick different things that we like out of any given noise recording. Not to say that that's not true of rock music, but I think it's universally true of noise music. The people listening to it have different things in what they really like and appreciate; and it's because they've learned to hear these different sounds, and to appreciate them in the context of music. It's not uncommon to talk to someone about one of my favorite Merzbow records and discuss liking the same things about it, but when we're listening to it, I think we're still picking up different aspects of it.

My interjection proved fruitful, and reinforced Greh's conviction that people who listen to experimental 'noise' listen differently, not only from people who listen to other genres, like rock, but even amongst themselves. Greh imagines that listeners of experimental 'noise' share a certain autodidactic ear-training that in many ways is highly idiosyncratic, and yet, the people who emerge in

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experimental 'noise' scenes seems to share aspects of this ear-training in common. I was reminded of Stanley Fish's notion of "interpretive communities." Fish poses two challenging questions to the reading and interpretation of texts. The first question: "why do different texts give rise to different sequences of interpretive acts?"[360] ('why do different sonic works or performances give rise to different listening habits?'). Fish answers: "*they don't have to*."[361] The second question: "why will different readers execute the same interpretive strategy when faced with the 'same' text?"[362] ('why will different listeners implement the same listening strategies when confronted with the 'same' sonic stimulus?'). Fish answers, "*they don't have to.*"[363] But if they *do*, then Fish claims that they do because they are members of an *interpretive community*. "Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts."[364] In other words, interpretive strategies lead to a mode of creative reading: the creative reading of texts is what Fish calls "writing texts." Moving back to my discussion with Greh Holger, for him, the locus of the experimental 'noise' scene (community) centered around listeners and performers who worshipped sound. This idea led to my question: "is it really the sound that's being made, or is the *listener making the sound*." What is seemingly different about experimental 'noise' is that its interpretive community—the listening community: the members of experimental 'noise' scenes—listens to the same sonic stimuli from noise performances in a

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[360] Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 170.
[361] Ibid.
[362] Ibid.
[363] Ibid.
[364] Ibid., 171.

relatively individualistic manner.[365] I believe this is because the "worship of sound" has been less important in the Western tradition of music listening, a tradition that has prioritized the listening to melody and harmonic functions.

John Wiese made a decision to devote himself to his artistic endeavors as a lifestyle, choosing to forgo more permanent forms of employment, partially so that he could tour the country or the world at will. Such a decision shows a high level of dedication to his work, and leaves little room for other activities, including listening to the recordings of others. John said: "In my life I spend a lot of time working on recordings, editing recordings, things like that, so I listen to a lot of things that I've made; I spend a lot of time working on things that I'm making. I tour a lot so I'm constantly getting records from other people. I don't always have time to listen to all of them, and I don't always have a stereo to listen to them." When I asked John how expression figured into his work, he not only mentioned how crucial it was, but he answered in a way that prioritized the listening aspect: "When I'm listening to sound or music, the experience that I have is more or less an internal one." Responses from other parts of the interview set up the questions I had for John specifically regarding the listening experience. The answers led to an interesting epistemological discussion on aesthetic reception.

> DM: What do you listen for in experimental music?
>
> JW: I feel like it's covered with the genreless, but also… I know it when I hear it. I feel dumb for saying that, but I don't think I have anything new to say about that.
>
> DM: What do you expect to hear?

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[365] Continuing the digression: how can these people participate in the same scene if they all listen differently? and how do they know they are part of the same scene? Fish claims that no one can for sure: "The only 'proof' of membership is fellowship, the nod of recognition from someone in the same community, someone who says to you what neither of us could ever prove to a third party: 'we know.'" Ibid., 173.

JW: What I would like to be is surprised. But what I expect to hear: I don't know. Unless I'm going to see someone that I specifically know what they consistently do. I think it's more interesting to…. One time I was talking about—not this specifically—I was talking with a friend of mine and he was talking about people who want to tell you that they *get it*. And he was saying: "Don't fucking *get* it. Stop *getting* it. Stop trying to *get* it. Just check it out. Stop trying to *get* what I'm doing, and just check out what I'm doing." You don't have to expect anything, you don't have to like it, you don't have to dislike it. Just check it out and then you'll know." And then the question's enter: "Did you like it? Didn't you like it? What was it?" So many people do these conventional things consistently and I think a more conventional audience is used to that. They're used to a band playing songs that they know. And when you take that out, and you don't know what's going to happen, you don't know what they're going to do, you don't know what kind of things they do: it goes to the whole concept to just experience it, and then you know.

This exchange began with a simple answer—an answer so simple and seemingly trite that John was embarrassed to say it: "I know it when I hear it." He changed the meaning of the question from one that was intended to tease out methods and techniques of listening, to a question of listening as a mode of ontology. My question, "What do you listen *for*…?" was intended to seek and understand the objects of listening, but John's statement implies that he is not listening *for* an object until, when he is in the moment of listening, he hears something of interest, and can then turn his attention toward it. When I asked what he expected to hear, he first answered that he would prefer to be surprised, and then gave a less idealistic answer: namely, that if he knew who the performer was, and they performed consistently a certain way, then he would expect something similar to fulfill the consistency. From this idea, John launched into an interesting discussion concerned with understanding experimental 'noise,' and perhaps by extension, any experimental performance. The issue was how to *get it*—how to understand, grasp, and consume this kind of art. To understand, in this context, means to know or to master the reified object of contemplation in

some way. In John's ideology the understanding comes from the experience, *not* the reified object. In this sense, the reified object is illusory: a performance cannot really be objectified (and a recording of a performance cannot fully stand in for the performance). Therefore, the experience itself is the only thing to *get*, and the experience is the combination of the empirical stimulus and the interpretation of the experience of taking in and apprehending that stimulus (tempered by the interpreter's entire history). John's message is: 'stop trying to *get* it; experience it, and then you will know whether you like it or not.' Not through any particular mastery or listening techniques, or modes of understanding the components of composition (instrumentation, harmonic content, repetitive components, melody, etcetera), but through, perhaps, a more open form of sonic reception (listening). In summary, for John, listening to experimental sound works is not a mode of understanding, it is a mode of experience.

Elden Man perhaps has one of the more eclectic music palates of anyone I interviewed in Los Angeles, ranging from bebop, free jazz, death metal, black metal, punk, post-punk, and even new wave and pop. A few years after our interview, the *L.A. Weekly* published a piece on him called "Wombleton Records' Elden M. Knows More About Obscure Music Than You Do."[366] He also has some training in music theory that he acquired while living in the Bay Area where he was also a DJ. When I asked Elden about his listening habits, he explained how the listening process made him feel, rather than to give an account of listening techniques.

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[366] Peter Holslin, "Wombleton Records' Elden M. Knows More About Obscure Music Than You Do," *L.A. Weekly* (June 10, 2015): 1, http://www.laweekly.com/music/wombleton-records-elden-m-knows-more-about-obscure-music-than-you-do-5667441 (accessed September 20, 2015).

DM: What do you listen for in noise music?

EM: I listen for… some sort of linear progression, where there are points of activity along the way that keep you from being bored. A good example is…, I actually heard the streaming mp3 versions of Greh's new album [*Elemental Disgrace*]—they are side-long pieces but they're never boring. There's always stuff going on. I guess that's it: avoiding boredom, because that's what I listen for.

DM: What's boring to you?

EM: Stuff that goes on and on without any dynamic, without any points of activity or points of reference or arrival during the linear progression or whatever. Something that's five or ten minutes could be edited to one minute maybe.

DM: When you go to a noise music show or when you listen to a noise music record, what do you expect to hear?

EM: That's a wide open question, because depending on who you're playing [on a stereo], you can expect to hear all kinds of things. Hopefully it's not the same thing as what was released before. You definitely expect to hear something new, fresh. My personal tastes: I want to hear something aggressive. It doesn't have to be extreme but I like that. I like to hear stuff that's dark.

DM: What would be 'light' noise?

EM: Light noise?

DM: I just mean that if you're going to use the adjective 'dark' then I would assume that it's opposed to 'light.'

EM: 'Light' would be happy and… there was a term that I used to use…. It's hard to describe.

DM: What are 'happy' sounds? Or, what's 'happy' noise?

EM: I don't think there is happy noise.

DM: So is it all dark already?

EM: No. It's either dark or it's not.

DM: Ok. So it's not dark or light, it's just dark or not dark.

EM: It's just dark or not dark but there…. It's hard to describe.

DM: I'm not trying to play gotcha…

EM: No, no, I understand your question, because, like when I was describing how certain frequencies can affect the listeners, I think a lot of it is also the intent of the performer to affect that listener. So the use of those combinations of intervals and frequencies, in the context of a composition, is heavily dependent on the intent of the performer.

DM: What if a performer doesn't have certain intentions, and still comes up with those combinations of sounds? Is it not dark?

EM: I would say that if that happens, then that performer doesn't have any control over what they're doing. It's like a haphazard execution of manipulating these frequencies.

DM: So darkness is intention?

EM: [Hesitant] Yeah. Yeah, I think so, because if you're trying to achieve a dark mood you're going to just use certain elements and avoid other elements that would not be in keeping with a certain mood. If you're trying to achieve a mood, it's a different type of approach as say, someone who is academic and there is no light or dark or emotion. You know?

DM: So you think that academic music tends to be emotionless?

EM: Yeah, sometimes it's very sterile. But then the emotion might arise unintentionally because the piece is beautiful, and again that's another personal thing. Like that album that just came in from that guy that he gave us [Terry Riley]. Right from the first note I could tell that it was really beautiful music. It might be sterile, but there's a joy in hearing that type of stuff. There's a beauty that brings on a joy.

The goal of listening, for Elden, is to avoid boredom, and the performer achieves that goal through providing a "a linear progression, where there are points of activity along the way that keep you from being bored." In other words, Elden is listening for form. One who listens formally hears progression from one salient element to the next, and compares salient elements from the past with elements heard in the present, and may perhaps try to predict what will happen in the future of the performance, and then compare their expectations to what will actually happen. Like Casey Anderson, Elden imagines that some material could be condensed in time to avoid boredom. Boredom is induced by stagnant activity.

This method of listening would seemingly not be very conducive to listening to "wall noise" (or harsh noise wall), since "wall noise" is intended to remain stagnant. And yet, intentionality is very important to Elden, and contributes to its "darkness." When a piece is 'dark' the performer's intentions are properly communicated to the listener. 'Dark noise' is not opposed to 'light noise' music or 'happy noise,' but is more simply opposed to 'noise' that is not dark. 'Darkness' has to do with the intention of the performer. When I asked Elden, "So darkness is intention?" he hesitantly answered positively, and defended his position. He then contrasted 'noise' performers with academic performers, who claimed that their experimental works—presumably the ones bordering on 'noise'—tended to be "sterile." In other words, a 'noise' performance that is 'dark' is not simply one rife with intentionality; rather, 'dark noise' must be understood as emotional, or emotionally dark. Perhaps when the performer successfully conveys an emotionally dark message to the listener, the listener then interprets a sense of struggle to achieve the sounds, and perhaps that struggle is what Elden values in 'noise' he hears as 'dark.'

Eddie Giles readily admits that he has had no formal training in music, nor has he sought to become competent by any traditional measure. Nevertheless he has often asserted a tonal language in his collaborative improvisations with noise projects like +Dog+, Bacteria Cult, and others. His tonal contributions are often heard as chordal pads in the background of an unrelenting din by his collaborators. Being aware of his collaborators in performance is a virtue Eddie is proud of, even if he often wonders if they are listening to him. The unedited passage below begins with a question concerning listening, and then cycles through technique and aesthetics.

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DM: What do you listen for in noise music?

EG: I'm listening for density and a sort of dexterity; a sensitivity between doing something that's raw and dense, but also giving a little bit of play for other events to happen during the events of the noise presentation or set. I'll give you an example: Jay[Howard] from Circuit Wound knows what every single effects box does, and he's very careful with how he touches the controls. He'll know exactly how much he'll be getting out of each knob; out of each control. So he actually practices each piece. It's very controlled. I appreciate that because he really works on his work instead of just plugging in and letting it go.

DM: The question is: What do you listen for? Do you listen for technique?—is that what you're trying to say?

EG: Yes, I do. I listen for technique and I also try to listen for the telltale signs that the artist is not struggling with his sounds; that they know what they're doing; that there's a competency going on there.

DM: If someone is struggling with the sounds does it make it bad?

EG: It could be. If they seem like they're struggling to get where they want to go, the whole set could just be that one struggle where they're just trying to find, what I call the "sweet spot." Noise artists usually know where they're at when they've reached that peak where the gear is running right and they're working into it and they're developing that sound. But sometimes they're just working at it. Some of it is very futile and they're frustrated and they wreck their gear. And if that's the effect that they're trying to achieve then I have to respect it for what it is, but I like when people know what they're doing and they just go for it. There's a sort of skill. There's some quality to skill. There's a competency going on there. It's not like: "I wonder what this does?"

DM: Let's go back to the other question we asked yesterday: What are some basic noise music skills? You mentioned listening before.

EG: Well listening I think is number one.

DM: That's interesting because the question I asked here was: What do you listen for?

EG: Right.

DM: So you listen for skill, and skill is listening.

EG: I don't mind the antics of someone mad-dogging their gear and going completely berserk. Bob from Xome does that. He'll go ape-shit on his gear and turn every knob and go berzerky. He comes up with some really interesting stuff. But I also like when guys sit there and listen to what they're doing, and they know they're going to turn this, and they're going

to bring this down a little bit, and they're going to get this a little denser. So they're shaping it up, but they're taking their time and they're not getting impatient with the sound.

DM: So other noise music skills would include….

EG: Patience.

DM: Competency with the equipment.

EG: Good listening and patience.

For Eddie, listening is one of the key ingredients to making and consuming experimental 'noise.' He counts it as one of the most important skills. He listens specifically to the techniques used to make the sounds, and to the "density" of the sounds themselves. "Density" seems to imply the quality of sound as a thickness—perhaps through intensity (volume) or timbre—but should also allow room for other voices to emerge ("giving a little bit of play for other events to happen"). The second aspect is what Eddie calls "dexterity"—it speaks to the skill of the performers to work with each other by allowing space for their contributions. Another important aspect for him is the mastery of the equipment. Eddie appreciates listening to a competent performer who fully understands the instruments used to make experimental 'noise.' Yet Eddie realizes that there are other methods for making experimental 'noise' that utilize different modes of competency that may perhaps rely less on the mastery of the equipment. He cites Sacramento noise artist Xome (Bob Scott) as a performer using some less traditional methods of performance that perhaps rely less on equipment mastery. In another part of our interview, Eddie discussed the importance of good listening. It piqued my interest, and I followed up with a question concerning the nature of good listening.

EG: I also like to say that I'm a really good audience member, because I'm attendant and I pay attention. I'm a listener. I try to think that I'm a good listener. I'm not really, but I think I'm a good listener.

DM: What's a good listener?

EG: Dude, that's a very good question. A good listener is someone who can answer the questions [we laugh] without going on a crazy tangent. My poor wife has gone through hell with me. A very good listener is really a very good musician. There are lots of good listeners that don't play a single note of music.
I think that a good listener is someone who is listening to the intent that the artist wanted without putting their perception or take on things. It's a discipline because I think that you can have a CD and you can read the liner notes and you can come to your own conclusions or thoughts about it. It's that idea of free will. You can free it up. You can keep it locked in the idea of what the artist wanted, and some artists are control freaks, to such an extent that they wouldn't want to put their CDs out because they wouldn't want them to be interpreted in any other way but as they are—'You must interpret this as it is'—and that's almost like computer programming. What you read is what you will get. If there's a mistake you will get an error, and you have to rewrite it to be perfect. I think if you make some mistakes and you don't have a heuristic interpreter—which is a software that can read flaws in other software; I know there are self-regulating machines in software. If you have a dot, and you put the dot here, as opposed to here or here, you change up the entire context of the language. This book explains the history of the dot, and how even in computer language if you put the dot here as opposed to here, you change up the whole idea of the language or program. So a good listener doesn't do that. A good listener takes it as it is and tries to give good feedback. Once again there's an interesting observation or talk that we can have that if an artist is such an uptight person and says, 'You must interpret my art like this'—I think Wagner was like that and maybe some others—'You must accept it as it is. It is written this way.' I think a lot of classical music suffers from that.

For Eddie, good listening is simultaneously wrapped in the freedom to listen individually and with extracting the intentions the artist has toward the work they are presenting. In another words, good listening creates a dialectical relationship between the active listener receiving the artistic information and the active artist producing the artistic information. Furthermore, Eddie fancifully surmises that a "very good listener is really a very good musician," whether or not they play an instrument. This idea resonated with me, since I have found myself joking that

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perhaps the experimental 'noise' scene is really a community of listeners, and

perhaps a music canon of the future could be composed as a hierarchy of *great*

listeners instead of great composers or performers (though really the notion of

"greatness" is one of the issues that critical musicology has continued to struggle

with). Eddie believes that good listening is a trait of experimental 'noise'

audiences. When I asked Eddie about what he thought about the relations were

between performers and listeners, he gave the following response.

> DM: How you describe the relation between noise music performers and listeners?—like in a live context, how does the audience react to a live music performance in terms of the performers?—and how do the performers react to the audience?
>
> EG: I really feel that people that go to noise shows with the intent of hearing noise are some of the best listeners you'll find in any audience. I think that there is a patience and a discipline and an inner calmness. I also think that the people who go to noise shows have the intent of listening and giving themselves over entirely to the noise or to the person. So there is a direct relationship to the listeners and people who attend noise shows and the artists themselves. I think they're the best behaved; I think that they are the ones who are listening. I watch people sometimes from the stage, or while a noise performance is going on, I actually watch how people are sitting: they're not shuffling around, they're not texting—most people aren't. I know that there's a degree of decorum that I find unlike any other place I go, except for high-end, fine art noise avant-garde shows at the Whitney or LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art] or something, or the Hammer. But for the most part I think that they are well behaved and they come to listen and support, so I really like that. I think that's really refreshing. It's unlike a club-like atmosphere.

The reverence Eddie holds for the experimental 'noise' scene in Los Angeles is as

high as official "high" art, and the reason is because for him the scene is

populated with good listeners.

Adam Cahan is an avid seeker of a variety of live music performances,

though he himself rarely if ever performs music. With an ear toward eclectic

sounds, I asked him about his listening habits.

> DM: What do you listen for in noise music?—*you*.

AC: I listen for sounds. I listen for pulses. With noise music I do like to pay attention, in some ways, more to how the music makes me feel than the music itself. So I listen in that way. I listen for voices. I think good noise music has clear voices, which is also a frequency thing, which isn't to say that there's separation or that the voices are…, not 'clear voices' in the sense of the clarinet and the trumpet. It might be like the big wooshing sound and then some other small clanking noise, or something like that. It's good when those aren't getting in the way of each other. When you have muddy frequencies then that's not good. There are technical elements of sound production which, for me, make any sort of music more pleasant to listen to. And being able to control really loud, aggressive sounds, or sounds with lots of distortion or crackling like that, or feedback when it's ear-splitting feedback—that's not good; that's bad— then being able to control that feedback, whether you have something else—some sort of compressor/limiter or whatever on it—that is good. You can tell that that's happening. You know that there's skill involved.

For Adam, the clarity of voices—the ability to hear sounds in separation from one another in terms of harmonic texture—is a virtue. Some sounds that are too muddy might obfuscate other sounds of interest. So for Adam, the ability to hear different voices clearly is a value. A skillful experimental performer would be able to create the separation of sounds through production techniques, like equalization and compression, to give each voice its own life, not necessarily within a clearly delineated frequency band (especially when dealing with "wooshing" sounds—filter sweeps as glissandi—that can move though a large frequency spectrum), but with timbral clarity in a way that does not interfere with other voices. Another virtue is when a performer can control sounds and prevent unpleasant frequency spikes that can occur accidentally, often from an unruly delay or reverb device, an unruly mixer feedback loop, or a dirt pedal (overdrive, distortion, or fuzz) set too high when activated. These sounds can be especially troublesome when they cause a high frequency spike, resulting in "ear-splitting feedback." Control over the sounds, and the clear separation of voices are the ingredients that make for an interesting listening experience for Adam.

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Joseph Hammer's style is dependent on repetition and the obfuscation of repetition through the constant recording and erasing of sonic events on a tape loop with a fixed measurement. His method purposefully tricks listeners into hearing repetition and false repetition, thus confusing the perception of his listeners through inducing what he describes as a form of aural hypnosis or trance. I asked Joseph about his methods of listening to experimental 'noise.'

> DM: What do you listen for in noise music or experimental music or free music?

> JH: In a way I don't listen for anything. I'm listening for that moment when I start to think thoughts that I wasn't thinking prior to that time: that I feel that the thought was motivated by the sounds that I'm listening to.

> DM: So in a sense, you're listening for something that is going to cause you to space out? I wonder if that's….

> JH: Something that's going to cause me to focus my thoughts. In a way that's spacing out, because in a way I'm no longer paying attention to their music because I'm no longer thinking: "I'm me and you're you, and I am going to politely listen to you." It's more like I have transformed myself into them, and I'm not thinking: "If I were you I'd be doing this now." I'm actually me, over there, doing something else, and I'm actually having new ideas. And in a way they are influencing my performance.

> DM: So in way, you stop listening and you go inward?

> JH: Yeah. It's a trance. I'm concentrating on the music in a trance with my eyes open, and half paying attention to the social aspects of what's going on, and my position in the room physically and socially.

The idea of 'spacing out' seems really important in the context of experimental 'noise,' but also other kinds of trance-inducing musics. In spacing out one is no longer listening to the music analytically. When we listen to the music analytically we focus our thoughts on particular aspects of the music: usually the melodies, harmonies, formal structures, tempo and rhythm, intensity, etc. But in trance-inducing music the opposite is the case. These kinds of musics turn the listener

inward, often in a state of non-listening that can induce trance. Trance-induction

is also associated with "carnival time" and Victor Turner's idea of

"communitas."[367] Joseph discussed his ideas on trance induction through

performance in an earlier part of the interview.

> DM: What other elements are important to your music?
>
> JH: There's an element of listening and quietness that's pretty important to my music.
>
> DM: What do you mean by 'quietness?'
>
> JH: My music probably doesn't fair well in a noisy environment. Although there are aspects to that, and that's part of what I've been interested in lately. There's a lot of obscuring that goes on, almost like the comb filter. There are other sounds and experiences that are interfering with the actual music and forming another experience, like listening to music in the car—there are all these vibrations and other sounds that actually obscure the sound, and what you're listening to you may not even realize is not what you're really listening to, but it accentuates that idea of an interpretation; a complete fabrication in your mind based on the suggestions potentially of what you're hearing. That's actually a pretty important factor in my music: is this idea that there's a lot of distraction and distracting—confusion: overwhelming stimulus—to the point where you lose a certain amount of the ability to… you're forced to go into automatic mode.
>
> DM: The listener is?
>
> JH: Yeah, the listener; and I am. My technique to getting them there is by going there myself. I am doing stuff that's more like a hypnotic induction. I'm using techniques that are found in hypnosis as a performer.
>
> DM: Like what?

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[367] Turner's defines communitas as "an unmediated relationship between historical, idiosyncratic, concrete individuals." For Turner, communitas "preserves the individual distinctiveness." Furthermore, "When even two people believe that they experience unity, all people are felt by those two, even if only for a flash, to be one. Feeling generalizes more readily than thought, it would seem! The great difficulty is to keep the intuition alive—regular drugging won't do it, repeated sexual union won't do it, constant immersion in great literature won't do it. We thus encounter the paradox that the experience of communitas becomes the memory of communitas…." The trance-inducing experience Joseph Hammer has while listening and performing experimental 'noise' is thus similar to Turner's notion of communitas by the way Joseph describes the experience: "I have transformed myself into them."
Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAF, 1982), 45-47.

JH: Confusion. Overwhelming the audience. I have a prestigious position. I'm up on stage. I have a reputation as a performer, and there's a prestige associated with that, and you're given permission to put yourself in my hands entirely. After all, you're sitting there comfortably, and there are no threats [laughs]. I'm a sonic terrorist of the highest order.

Although Joseph was having fun with the notion of being a "sonic terrorist," what is important is that he sees himself as a hypnotist, but for the hypnosis to work, he must himself undergo the procedure. The procedure involves layering multiple sound sources on a tape loop in a manner that is confusing to the audience, but it can only be confusing if the audience is listening to the performance. The sounds then overwhelm the audience beyond their ability to analyze the work, and instead they engage in "quietness," or the "automatic mode," or "spacing out." Joseph says, "you lose your ability to…" and then changes direction. I believe he meant that the listener loses their ability to analyze and organize the elements of sonic production created by the performer. Analysis is suspended, and instead, the hypnotic state induces other thoughts and "visual" stimuli. Joseph stressed the importance of sonically induced visual stimuli: listening becomes seeing.

DM: What do you mean by the 'visual quality of sound?'

JH: The visual quality of sound. Maybe it's like synaesthesia.

DM: Ok, so mental images.

JH: Mental images created from listening. Even beyond mental images, but the imagining of a world or a cosmology. Like how in a film there's a story: it invites you to suspend your disbelief and just start to take in information based on the images that you're seeing in the film. And so you start with a set sense that it's like your own society. And then as you see things that contradict any of those preexisting feelings you let those things go because you're watching a movie. You're safe in watching something that's not actually happening to you, so you can allow yourself that luxury to not think of your survival at that time, and basically to fantasize. I think that my experience listening to records and the radio triggers that special ability to see that perspective mechanism—or not the perspective mechanism but the practice of simply imagining freely.

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In other words, Joseph is trying to create a synaesthetic response with his sonic procedures that will induce the imagination, and the imagination, for Joseph, is a visually narrative imagination, like a movie. He is trying to invoke a dream state that is highly visual. In other words, Joseph's work is more than the memory of sound through pseudo-cyclic tape looping, it is also the instigation and promotion of the imagination—he makes sounds to evoke a sense of the internal cinematic.

Chrstiaan Cruz took me to my first experimental music and experimental 'noise' shows in the late 1990s. He seems to have always had an ear for strange and unusual sounds. I asked him what he listened for when engaging with experimental 'noise'.

> DM: What do you listen for in noise music?

> CC: That new thing; that new sound. Something I haven't heard before.

> DM: How do you listen *to hear* a new sound?

> CC: I get enough space from the speakers. I find the sweet spot of the room of the acoustical space. I listen with my ear plugs in and with them out. And I just make sure I've gone to the bathroom and I'm not too hungry [laughs]. I'm just comfortable and ready to listen. Drinking too much beer affects it too, because I have that thing where too much alcohol in my blood throbs my blood vessels, and then I get all weird, and I'm not listening right. It's just taking care of the ears and being able to hear things properly with the right head. It's good stuff.

> DM: What do you expect to hear when listening to noise music?

> CC: No melodies, no poetry, no love [laughs], no love songs, no teenaged angst. None of the clichés you get with pop music. It's just sound.

Christiaan emphasizes the physical placement of his body within the performance space and wearing ear protection, since experimental 'noise' performances are often performed at high volume levels. In passing he discussed the effects that excessive alcohol has on his listening ability. But ultimately, proper placement within the sonic space and having the "right head"—being in the proper

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disposition and mood to enjoy a 'noise' performance—are conducive to a positive

listening experience. In another part of my interview with Christiaan, he

discussed the importance of listening to timbre, and discussed the temperament

of a good listener.

> DM: What is the function of timbre in your music?

> CC: It's pretty important. That's what I'm mostly listening for when I'm listening to recordings on my own or listening to someone else perform. A lot of the times it's just this neutral sound, neutral color over everything. Towards the end there will be a punch in the face of something else, like a weird frequency on top of the color that just pops out at you. If there's a good listener out in the audience, it will be something that will make them smile or make them feel interested in the performance and the piece.

> DM: What is a good listener?

> CC: Someone who can hear more than just regular music or regular compositions. Someone who is…, god I've been talking about it throughout the interview and I can't really say. Someone who can hear something interesting out of noise and random bits. Someone who can tell that something interesting is happening, as opposed to just listening for something that they want—like a pop song or specific genres of music or something they grew up with. Someone who can find something new out of noise or a piece or a performance. That's what's interesting. If you can go to a show and you can listen to these noise pieces and be able to find something different out of…. Yeah, that makes you a more valid listener.

According to Christiaan, timbre is what he is "mostly listening for" in

experimental 'nosie.' A "good listener" is someone who can "find something new

out of noise," something "interesting." If timbre is what Christiaan thinks is the

most important element to listen for, then we can surmise that listening for

something new will most likely be a function of timbre.

Weronika Zaluska is a Los Angeles-based artist who draws inspiration

from experimental music and 'noise' artists. In my interview with her, she

returned time and again to the notion of 'subtlety' as a chief value in

experimental 'noise' for her. In our exchange below concerning her listening

strategies, she expands on the idea of subtlety.

> DM: What do you listen for in experimental music? And how does your
> identity as an artist effect how you listen?
>
> WZ: I think I just have to go back to what I said before about the
> subtlety. I really enjoy the subtlety in the experience. Damion's music is
> all about very subtle changes: it's gradual. And I like some indeterminate
> quality of sound pieces, especially when it's performed in an audience. The
> structure. How it doesn't really have a very clear structure. It's almost like
> a block of time. I really get the luxury of having enough time to
> experience it—a long stretch of time. For instance with Damion, I really
> loved how he ended his performance. Last time I saw him he just kept
> going and then he just stopped in the middle. He just ended it. He cut it
> off without any gradual ending, and I thought that was a very successful
> way to end it. What I'm looking for is this indeterminate quality where you
> feel like it doesn't really have a beginning or an end.

Weronika seems to value works that, in some sense, give the feeling of the

suspension of time. Damion Romero's performances tend to provide this

sensation in her. She likes that he tends to sever the work at a particular

moment that does not seem predetermined; he achieves this ending by cutting

the sound suddenly, rather than providing a fade out, or other cadential gesture.

If the listener is entranced by the sound, the sudden cessation of sound will

undoubtedly shock the listener out of the trance, and for some, the sudden

realization that they were having an internal experience can be an enormous

source of enjoyment for some listeners like Weronika. The suspension of time is

achieved through ambiguous ("unclear") time structures that change slowly and

gradually over time, with few sharp, salient moments that would mark particular

sections. Therefore, subtle changes over time gradually elide different sonic

experiences into a large "block of time" rather than easily delineated formal

structures.

Scott Cazan is an enduring performer at the wulf. and performs often at BetaLevel in Chinatown. During our interview he was giddy to confess that he reads books on electronics and synthesis to relax. As an algorithmic composer he easily allies himself with the experimental computer music tradition. The issue of listening and the listening experience was a topic Scott continually returned to in our interview. When I had asked him about some basic and advanced skills in experimental 'noise,' he cited listening as among the most important technique. "I think listening. I think that's an incredibly advanced technique." Elsewhere he said: "It's listening I guess. That's the main thing really. I feel like you perform by listening, that's what I like about experimental music." Listening is important to Scott as a form of critical analysis while making improvisational choices and carrying them out. Listening is also important for Scott to make accurate predictions for how his choices will affect the succession of sounds in performance. In this sense, listening facilitates a positivistic approach to experimental music—making predictions on the outcomes of certain actions—while also listening for surprises: surprises are events that evade prediction. This dialectical arrangement—events that are accurately predicted and events that occur as a surprise to both the performer and the audience—is key to Scott's performances. And even if being surprised is a goal for Scott, the nature of the surprise is itself a surprise. I asked Scott what he listened for in particular when listening to experimental music and 'noise.'

DM: What do you listen for in experimental music?

SC: It's the same as what I expect or what I'm hoping to get out of it. I listen for everything. Depending on the context I listen for interactions between sounds, the way that sounds bounce together, the way that sounds sit in a space and activate a space, and the way that a sound can be interpreted in different ways, especially in long performances when you're listening and constantly zooming into a sound to get all that detail,

and I'm listening for those moments when suddenly I hear everything in a new light. That's the brilliant moment. That's hard to describe. There's a moment when your perception shifts and you're kind of surprised by it. But sonically it's all these relations between different sounds and how they collide together to create new objects.

DM: What do you expect to hear when listening to experimental music?

SC: These days I don't have much expectation because I feel like it's getting much more varied. Maybe a year ago I would expect very little sound. I would expect quiet in experimental music. I would expect mostly the sound of the space or the sound of the outside. If it were a noise concert I would expect mostly extremely loud noise. Of course it depends on the context. These days they are kind of blending, which is nice: people are getting more gutsy.

Scott listens for the relations and interactions between various sounds. More than one sound in space can synthesize—to mix and blend—to create a new sound or a new relationship: a new chord, or a new timbre, or perhaps even a new rhythm. Scott uses the term *zoom* to explain how he focuses his attention to a particular sound or relationship between sounds to further scrutinize its properties. "I love the zooming in effect, when you have a sound and I want to know the nature of that sound in all the details and bathe in it." Such scrutiny can lend itself to a form of mastery—as a deep understanding of the sonic content and its relationships—but such mastery through listening can lend itself to another form of deep joy, as expectations are thwarted and the element of surprise eclipses mastery.

Narin Dickerson was a DJ at Princeton University before moving to Los Angeles. When I interviewed him he was working at the Laemle Theater in Santa Monica that features independent films and foreign films. Narin enjoys a wide range of art forms, including experimental performance, but he is not a performer. He frequents a number of scenes in the Los Angeles area; in fact, I run into him all the time at experimental 'noise' events and other kinds of events

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that are seemingly unrelated—or perhaps remotely related—to experimental

sound. Narin emphasized the importance of listening when I asked him a general

question concerning the goals of experimental 'noise' artists.

> DM: What do you think are some of the general aims of the practitioners of noise music?
>
> ND: I think they're pretty diverse.
>
> DM: As a whole is there anything that they're going for in the broadest sense?
>
> ND: In the broadest sense I'd say that a lot of it is going towards attentive listening to a very diverse range of sounds and frequencies and things that are physically difficult to listen to, to things that are extraordinarily quiet and difficult to hear.

"Attentive listening," paying attention to sounds in their complexity, and listening

to sounds that are difficult to listen to—either because they are too loud or too

soft, or their harmonic content (through an amalgamation of frequencies)—are

goals that Narin cited that were important for experimental 'noise' practitioners. I

then asked Narin specifically what he listened for when attending an experimental

'noise' performance.

> DM: What do you listen for in noise music?
>
> ND: Different things at different times. Sometimes I just want to lie back and be able to just appreciate the vibration of the sounds. Sometimes I'm listening to interesting changes and transitions. Sometimes I'm listening to the way that an object becomes sound. Sometimes I'm listening to the way that the sound is affected by the rooms it's in. If I'm seeing a performer in a different space than what I've seen the performer in before, I might be particularly attentive to the way that it sounds completely different in a different space.
>
> DM: Do you try to figure out how the sounds are being made?
>
> ND: Sometimes. Not always.
>
> DM: How are you affected by volume?

ND: I have fairly sensitive hearing, so if something is really loud I have to put on earplugs, or I would prefer to put on earplugs so that I don't feel like I'm damaging my hearing, which definitely affects the way that I hear it. But If I'm lying down and appreciating the vibrations of the pieces that I mentioned earlier, then the volume definitely affects that: then the loud volume is needed for me to feel it with more than just ears.

DM: Do you enjoy loud volume?

ND: On occasions. I don't like it exclusively. I feel that sometimes things are turned way louder than they need to be. I've had to leave shows because they were too loud, because I just couldn't physically appreciate them.

DM: Do you enjoy soft sounds?

ND: I do. I enjoy quiet sounds and microsounds. I think those can be a really important part of performance. I think there are composers and performers who use those to really powerful effect. It somewhat depends: not all live performance lends itself to the ability to be able to use those effectively. If you're in a space that has a fair bit of ambient noise, it doesn't necessarily work.

Narin cites four different modes of listening: 1) appreciation from a comfortable vantage point, 2) the general succession of changes and transitions, 3) the transformation of objects to sounds, 4) the way that acoustic space influences and transforms sounds. A comfortable vantage point for listening—from a supine position—can connote a passive or an active mode of listening. The passive mode of listening may perhaps be an uncritical form of listening or one that implies "zoning out"—but a supine position can also enable a critical form of listening, as the other modes require. The other three modes of listening all explicate the listening to the metamorphosis of sounds (though I confess that that I am not entirely clear what Narin had in mind when discussing how an object becomes a sound—perhaps he meant how a physical object vibrates to create a sound, like the clang from a piece of metal). In other words, we can reduce the four modes of listening that Narin cited to two modes: the first is listening from a relaxed

position; the second is to listen for changes. The two modes are not mutually

exclusive. I then asked Narin some follow-up questions focused on how volume

affects his listening experience. He said that he enjoyed performances that were

concerned with "quiet sounds and microsounds" because or their ability to induce

a powerful effect by an effective performer in a space that had low ambient

noise. For louder performances he often wears earplugs, and for some extremely

loud performances he may leave the space due to discomfort. I have seen Narin

at many performances with very high volume levels and very low volume levels.

Michael Winter has devoted himself to his artistic practice by specifically

choosing a residence that could double as an experimental performance venue:

thus the wulf. Michael composes and programs—processes he finds to be

identical—everyday. And since his home is also a performance space, he has the

opportunity to listen and learn from a variety of local and international artists.

Many of Michael's answers to my questions addressed the search for the *new*.

"New music: new listening,"[368] said John Cage. In our exchange below, I

struggled to lead Michael toward an explication of methods he uses to explore

and uncover the new.

> DM: What do you listen for as a listener?
>
> MW: I've got to say the same thing. [Something new.]
>
> DM: What do you expect to hear when listening to experimental music? Something new, right?
>
> MW: I really don't have any expectations. What can I know? How would I know? Or are you saying maybe….
>
> DM: That's a great way to approach the question: How would you know? But let's say you're at a performance at the wulf., and someone you've never really heard perform was playing, what would you expect? So on the one hand there's, How would you know?—but on the other hand, there

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[368] Cage, *Silence*, 10.

are in fact…, you're in a scene in which certain kinds of sounds are expected. You wouldn't expect to hear…

MW: Yeah, there are all these things that you expect. In fact, I don't always really expect to have a new experience. I want a new experience, but in fact, usually it's often *not* the case. Maybe not in the scenes that I role in, but in the more music-in-general scenes, I expect to hear something that's not new. It's nice when I get at what I want.

The new, for Michael, refers to something he has never heard before: a sound, or a succession of sounds. Michael is also listening for complexities and simplicities: "So when I hear something that sounds complex, I'm thinking about whether or not it's complex by the other definitions. So it has become part of the way I listen." Michael's idea of complexity is ambiguous.

MW: So I would say that most noise music—maybe barring the traditional, or the definition that is maybe more accepted or common—is not noisy at all. We just perceive it as noisy, as complex. But these people are often doing pretty simple processes. For example, feedback. Feedback loops that generate noisy textures. So we have to disambiguate 'noisy' as in perception and 'noisy' as in the Platonic definition. But really what it is is a very simple algorithm that's very chaotic; that's very sensitive to initial conditions. So by the algorithmic information theory definition, it's not noisy at all: it's very structured.

The notion of complexity itself, for Michael has multiple levels. Michael's point is that creating a feedback loop in a mixer is a simple process, and the controls are sensitive, so that small movements can cause dramatic shifts that filter the noise generation process (there is no white noise generator using mixer-feedback technique), but even those shifts are simple processes, even if those processes result in complex sounds and unpredictable changes. Michael wants "to disambiguate 'noisy' as in perception and 'noisy' as in the Platonic definition"; by the "Platonic definition," I believe he is referring to pure white noise—pure randomness—as the Platonic ideal. Mixer feedback approximates pure randomness, but the means to achieve it are in fact, according to Michael, "very

structured." What Michael is really in search for is listening for complexity in a manner that he can learn from. In this way, mixer feedback is a method he already understands. New listening, for Michael, should lead to new learning. He insists that the essence of the learning he is after is subjective.

> DM: Other than the sonic part, is the analytical part important for you to express to audiences in some way?
>
> MW: No, not at all. If I had this quasi-rigorous process and someone hears whale calls, that's fine. I can't control that and I can't control whether or not they like it—it's great when they do. And I like to hear about how they experience it, and if they're interested I'll tell them about the process of the piece. But generally everyone should feel free to listen on their own terms. In many respects I'm hesitant to fetter with them. Often I don't want to [laughs]. So when people listen, I think that they're entitled to listen however they want. I think that Jim Tenney was probably one of my greatest influences, and he's someone whose music I care about a lot. What I often say about his music—and this is something that I appreciate when someone says this to me—is that I don't necessarily know what's going on per se, but you know that something it going on, that there's some process under the hood in a lot of the pieces—not all of them. And there's actually this kind of mystery. The funny thing is that when you analyze these pieces—which I've done a lot of, particularly for Jim's music, and particularly for his use of randomness in his music—you see that it only adds to the… not mystery of the piece, but…, the more you understand the more you have to learn. So it's a never-ending process. It's not like you totally figure it out by analyzing something. So I think that how people analyze something is very important. I was talking before about the process and about the experience and the sharing of experience, but one of the greatest ontologies is just learning in general. So when you listen to music you learn something about yourself and about life and about the piece, and that's a never-ending process, I think. I would hate to feel like I was not learning something.

Although Michael implicitly derides listeners who hear "whale calls" in his work, he does not provide an explicit methodology for listening to experimental 'noise'—"So when people listen, I think that they're entitled to listen however they want." Learning—as the exploration of new material—is a priority for Michael. Like David Tudor's ambition to explore circuits to learn what the circuits

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could teach him, Michael listens not only to explore, but specifically to learn. A piece in its complexity can inspire an endless loop of questions *ad infinitum*.

Although GX Jupitter-Larsen is known primarily as a noise artist and performance artist, he is also a novelist, and has written several "noise novels." In *Adventure on the High Seas* he wrote:

> Explorers explore because they want to go to places no one has ever seen before. Philosophers think so much because they hope to ask questions no one has ever asked before. Noisicians do noise because they want to hear sounds no one has ever heard before.[369]

In this quote from his novel, he compares noisicians to explorers and philosophers, all three in search for something new: new places for the explorer, new questions for the philosopher, new sounds for the noisician. The spirit of exploration is important for GX. When I asked him what he listened for in experimental noise, he responded similarly.

> DM: What do you listen for in noise?
>
> GX: Something I haven't heard before. That really is it: something I haven't heard before. That could mean any number of things. It could mean a combination of sounds, like with AMK's CD when he's combing bird sounds with broken skipping records, the pops and the cracks. Not so much the music in between the pops and the cracks, but just the pops and the cracks and the bird sounds. It was a combination that…, I wouldn't have thought of it, and certainly not in the way he thought of it. I've been to performances by Damion where it really affected my vision. The colour spectrum shifted off to one side. The physical presence was so complete and overpowering. That's something I don't experience very often.
> So it's basically something, some event, some action, some colour, or some sound that I haven't seen or experienced before, either at all, or in some combination. That's why I don't listen to music, because I've heard that a trillion times. I've heard it done badly, I've heard it done well, but drums sound like drums, guitars sound like guitars. I don't care about what they're playing, they sound like the instruments that they are.

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[369] GX Jupitter-Larsen, *Adventure on the High Seas* (London, Ontario: Enigmatic Ink, 2010), 22.

This was the last question of this segment of our interview. During the next

segment of our interview, days later, I asked the question again.

> DM: So the last question I asked was, What do you listen for in noise
> music? Well, let's start again with that one.

> GX: I don't remember what I said before.

> DM: I think you said that you listen for something new.

> GX: Oh, to be surprised.

> DM: Ok, to be surprised.

> GX: That hasn't changed. What could I add to that? Yeah, to be surprised
> somehow. Either by the frequencies or the actual physical presence or just
> the conceptual context on some level.

> DM: What do you expect to hear when listening to noise art?

> GX: Hopefully something I haven't heard before.

These redundancies serve to reinforce the importance of the element of surprise,

and the quest to hear new sounds. Redundancies in sound are against GX's

aesthetic interests. That is why he is impatient with music (he has heard it "a

trillion times")—that guitars sound like guitars and drums sound like drums

obviates the element of surprise for GX. In other words, if one plays instruments

in a manner that "sounds like the instruments that they are"—as GX charges—

then we can glean that if instruments are to be used, they should be used to

sound *other than what they are*. Thus GX is opposed to the homologous (one-to-

one) relationships between a sound and its source. In another part of our

interview, I asked a particular question about the future that was off-script.

> DM: How do you think the sound of noise will change?

> GX: In noise people get accustomed to this deep listening and
> understanding how a medium will actually affect the nature of a sound. So
> how a particular tone or frequency…: how the medium affects that—vinyl,
> as opposed to CD, as opposed to mp3, as opposed to a wire recorder, as

opposed to 8-track, cassette—all these different storage mediums actually affect how the frequency is translated. It's definitely part of the noise debate regardless if people are conscious of it or not. Even on a casual level you can't help but notice the way the sounds are affected, and that becomes part of the dialogue.

DM: You used the term 'deep listening.' Was that a reference to Pauline Oliveros?

GX: Of course, yeah. Absolutely. It's a great term because it really vividly describes what's going on. People are very lazy listeners. People don't really listen to sounds. For me that's hard. I've always been an active listener. I've always been interested in the tones and frequencies and the architecture of the air; this invisible architecture that's constantly in flux in the air. It has always fascinated me even as a kid before I knew how to articulate what the interest was.

In the passage above GX describes his listening habits as "*deep listening*,"[370] a term associated with and coined by Pauline Oliveros. GX uses the term to describe two basic modes of listening: listening to recordings, and listening to a live performance. On one hand, listening to recordings from various media provide different sonic results, so that the medium plays a role in the timbral ontology of the listening experience. On the other hand—and most important for this section on listening methods—GX describes an analytical and critical listening methodology concerned with frequency and its combination as timbre (he uses the term "tone"), and the particular interactions of sounds in the performance space, where the architecture of the room plays a role as a timbral instrument. The comparison is apt: just as various recording media—vinyl, magnetic tape (cassette, 8-track, larger reel-to-reel types), and digital formats (CD, mp3, etcetera)—provide different timbral environments for the listener, so do different performance spaces, since their architectural designs provide unique listening experiences and opportunities for performers to exploit.

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[370] Oliveros, xxiv.

Casey Anderson is equally at home improvising on the saxophone as he is running computer algorithms and experimenting with acoustic and amplified objects. He is also an avid reader of philosophical texts: I remember when I pointed out his copy of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, he enthusiastically expressed his preference for the Joan Stambaugh translation (implying that he his familiar with other translations of the classic tome). Heidegger ended *Being and Time* with a meditation on the importance of listening in terms of ontology. When I asked him what were some basic skills necessary in experimental 'noise,' he referred to a piece for listener by David Dunn. The following passage proffers a thick description of some of Casey's listening habits.

DM: What are some basic noise music skills?

CA: Listening. Well…, I still thinking listening. There's this great David Dunn piece called *Purposeful Listening in Complex States of Time*.

DM: I think I studied it about four years ago.

CA: It's great. It's a piece for listener.

DM: Oh yeah, I do know that!

CA: It's totally great. I feel like that's where everything should start. When I think about a question like that, it's hard to think about that without my teacher hat on.

DM: That's fine.

CA: Yeah, totally. I think listening, and an appreciation of different types of sounds. I think being able to think about situations. I think one of the biggest skills that I have, aside from things that are related to listening, is problem solving and critical thinking. There are certain fields—computer programming is an example of a certain field where the assumed skill is being able to abstract a certain process over as many different outcomes as possible, and use that as a kind of way to run through where you're going to run into problems. So I think there's a similar skill that goes on in dealing with noise or unconventional music, especially when you're looking at a score that deals with indeterminacy. So imagination, I guess. Or critically thinking through possibilities, and thinking about how that has an impact on a piece. So however you describe that. I really think a lot about

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the relationship between sound and silence, and I think that's really crucial. I think about density and pacing a lot.

DM: What do you mean by 'density?'

CA: Overall sonic density on a vertical level, just in terms of moment-to-moment, how much sound is happening, and how many different types of sound. But also horizontally on a time access when you're thinking about how much information over time is being put out. Those are really important to me, whether improvising or doing a fixed recording, or something like that. And I would tie that into this having a way to be able to perform and not lose track of time. So it might be easier to explain those things with an example. I see a lot of performers where people—the way I normally describe it is—never stop, ever. And I hate that shit, so much. It will be super loud the entire time and there's no silence, and it's just super busy. That quickly becomes just *shhhhhh*. It becomes the same just because of the way our listening habits work and the way our brain interprets sound. What's interesting to me is that it's great to be spare, or to put people in an intensive situation, but it makes me skeptical when I just hear a big fat drone thing that doesn't do much, and it's twenty minutes long. I'll ask, "Why was there no space? Why was it always the same all the time? Did it really need to be that long?" Things like that. I think a lot of those things come both out of improvisation and having a formal classical music background, because I think that's really what you're talking about when you're talking about form. So it's something that I appreciate a lot given my background.

DM: Yes. The question was on basic noise music skills, but I love that you went into this thing about form.

CA: Right.

DM: The next question is, What are some more advanced skills? You did just already give me some, but give me some more.

CA: Right, totally. So I guess you can think of form, not necessarily in a classical music sense per se, but really thinking about long-term implications of ideas and the relationship between parts and the whole, and trying to think about dealing with memory. There are all these records—Graham Lambkin is really good at this—where one thing will happen once over the course of an entire thirty-minute piece, and so it makes that one thing really special, and it's something that you would almost miss the first time. So I think all these basic things, the more you look at them, the more complex they actually seem. So I still feel like advanced skills would still be that, but at a higher level of detail.

DM: In composition? Or, it sounds like, in listening?

CA: Both. I feel like composition and listening are the same thing.

For Casey, listening is paramount. He immediately referred to *Purposeful Listening in Complex States* for solo listener by David Dunn. Listening, for Casey, is tied to critical thinking and analysis, implying the interpretation and judgment of sounds: "problem solving and critical thinking." Since listening is not just the passive hearing of sounds, but the active and interpretive hearing of sounds, then listening is already the thinking about sound. Casey claims that he thinks about "density" of sound, which he discusses in terms of the vertical and horizontal relationships of sound. The vertical aspects of sounds concern harmony as simultaneous sounds, sound sources (voices), and frequencies (timbres), while the verticality speaks to the temporal aspects of sound, or how they unfold through time. Casey prefers dynamic densities—performances that change in density—and that is why he posed the hypothetical question leveled at drone-type music: "Why was there no space? Why was it always the same all the time? Did it really need to be that long?" If music is sometimes referred to as the composition of sounds and silences, the question can then be understood as, 'What about the silences?' ('silences' may refer to overall silence, or the silencing of some voices to shift focus and reprioritize the salience of other voices or frequencies). Casey is listening for formal characteristics: juxtapositions and successions of sounds and sound events. Advanced skills, for Casey, primarily involve more detailed listening habits. Finally, for this part of the interview, when I asked Casey if these detailed skills applied to composition or to listening, he proclaimed that the two were one and the same. Perhaps David Dunn's piece exemplifies Casey's sentiment concerning composing and listening, as creative and interpretive act. So when I finally asked him explicitly what he listened for in experimental 'noise,' his answer confirmed what we had already discussed.

DM: What do you listen for in noise music?

CA: What I've been saying: I like interesting sounds. I like people pushing themselves to do different things. I like things that make a case about the relationship between sound and silence in some way, or have that as part of the piece. Things that are unique and unconventional.

DM: What do you expect to hear when listening to noise music?

CA: I don't try to have a lot of expectations because in a way it's a meaningless genre name, to a degree. So I try not to come with too much in the way of expectations. However, I think I normally expect something to be, at the very least, novel or interesting, and ideally it would be revelatory in some way.

DM: How do you feel when your expectations are not met?

CA: It's more a question of whether those were correct expectations to have, or whether that's something that has to do with my own listening habits and tastes, or whether it's actually something about the work itself. It normally takes me a couple of days of mulling over things to decide how much I like something; or if I liked it; if I didn't like it, why I didn't like it. So it's in the back of my head for a while. I'll have an immediate reaction, and then that will start this process of thinking about that immediate reaction. I'm like that with everything. It's the same thing with books. I read everything multiple times.

Casey listens hypercritically. For him, experimental 'noise'—and other arts and literature—tend to exist dialectically, and they can be judged by the terms and criteria of their materials. His level of criticism includes the criticism of his own listening habits ("It's more a question of whether those were correct expectations to have"). From dialectic to dialogic, Casey hopes that listening will result in good conversation. In another part of our interview, Casey said, "I feel like if the piece or whatever it is results in an interesting conversation with people I like to have conversations with, then that's successful." For some noisicians, experimental 'noise' can aid in confusion, disorientation, hallucination, and other modes of listening that tend toward the irrational as a state of auditory enjoyment. For Casey, experimental 'noise' provokes questions and problem solving through the

measuring of sounds against themselves (vertically and horizontally), and

dialectical terms as the unfolding of their syntheses.

Sebastian Demian[371], artistic director at Dem Passwords, has promoted

and co-promoted a variety of experimental 'noise' events at its former West

Hollywood location and its current location in Culver City. Sebastian claimed that

Dem Passwords is a gallery for rebellious art forms: these include the paintings of

reggae pioneer Lee "Scratch" Perry, experimental film, fringe varieties of hip hop,

rap, punk, and metal, and experimental 'noise.' Experimental 'noise' is not the

sole passion of Sebastian's sonic tastes, but one of a variety of forms of music

and art that he moves toward to suit his mood and provide "balance" within

himself. When I asked him what he listened for in experimental 'noise,' he

provided the following remarks.

> DM: What do you listen for in noise music?
>
> SD: I'm not listening for any one thing. I'm just looking for a transcendent experience. I'm looking for fun. I'm looking to get lost in something. I want to *feel* something. Noise music is sort of the opposite of pop music…, maybe. Sometimes you need that; you need a balance.
>
> DM: You also mentioned before that you're listening for a narrative.
>
> SD: I like to know about a narrative. That's interesting to me—if there's a bigger body of work.

Sebastian says he is "looking for a transcendent experience" and "to get lost in

something. I want to *feel* something." These modes of listening are, in a sense,

supercritical (in the sense that that these modes of listening are *beyond* the

critical). Instead of scrutinizing sound, the way Casey Anderson and other

listeners prefer, Sebastian provides an experience that is immersive—lost in

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[371] In other parts of this dissertation I have discussed Sebastian's listening tendencies in parallel contexts to this one, but it must be reiterated here—even if reimagined and reinterpreted—for the sake of comparison in this section devoted to listening.

immersion—in order to *feel* something. Sound is sensuous, or even supersensuous, moving toward transcendence, implying a metaphysical state with aspirations to exist beyond the capacity to rationalize the experience: the particular experience, and all human experience in general. In other parts of our interview, Sebastian stressed the importance of a "narrative"—a narrative suggests a dialectical unfolding as a micro-history of the sonic experience (within a performance) and between one performance and another by the same artist. But this dialectic between performances is probably grasped after the performance (can Sebastian simultaneously be lost *and* able to compare performances *during* a performance to recognize an historical narrative?— perhaps). Perhaps if Sebastian achieved sonic transcendence, he would move beyond listening, a critical mode, and *toward* hearing*, as unadulterated reception of empirical sound*. Whether such a transcendental ontological state is possible or not is less important than the desire to achieve it. Sebastian claims he is "looking for a transcendental experience" in terms of "looking to get lost"—seeking for nothingness—seeking to find *un*seeking through the experience of immersive sound as a mode of listening.

Damion Romero's work seems to stress the interaction of frequencies that can lead to pulses, complex rhythms and undulations, and even other pitches. Elements of randomness caused by slight determinations in space elude predictabilities and precision, nevertheless, he approaches his performances in a directed fashion: he knows approximately what will happen, and the level of indeterminacy that arises from his performances is thus a circumstantial issue— he knows what he is doing even if he does not know exactly what the result will be. Despite the level of mastery he brings to his performances—in terms of the

electronic devices he builds himself and his knowledge of acoustics—Damion was

reluctant to discuss the details of his work. In the passage below, I asked Damion

what he listened for experimental 'noise.'

> DM: What do you listen for in noise music, when you're listening to someone else? Are there things you focus on in particular?
>
> DR: Sounds that I like, I guess. It's like you were saying, 'Dancing about architecture.' It's not very easy for me to describe a sound that I like.
>
> DM: What do you expect to hear when you're listening?
>
> DR: What do I expect to hear?
>
> DM: Yes.
>
> DR: I don't really expect to hear anything, unless I'm seeing someone play I'm familiar with, which is usually not the case with noise or experimental music. I suppose I expect to hear whatever I might know about what I'm about to hear, but if I don't know what I'm about to hear, I can only see what happens as it goes. It depends. Some people you kind of know what to expect. Sometimes you don't get what you expect. I don't particularly expect anything, I guess.
>
> DM: What kinds of sounds do you value? Are there go-to sounds that you like? You tend to use a lot of bass frequencies, for example.
>
> DR: Yeah. I suppose.

In this tortuous passage, Damion answers the question elusively with terse

answers. Unfortunately I was not able to steer the interview the way I had hoped

to extract the salient strategies Damion uses to listen to experimental 'noise.' I

had hoped that by bringing up the adage that 'writing about music is like dancing

about architecture'—often attributed to comedian Steve Martin—would set him

(and others I interviewed) at ease, implying that there are no wrong answers.

Instead, Damion was careful with his words, and claimed that discussing how he

listens is a complex matter: "It's not very easy for me to describe a sound that I

like." Since he shifted the question from listening techniques to aesthetics—as

'sounds that he likes'—I asked him about what kind of sounds he values. Unfortunately, I continued the question from an open-ended question, to one that focused and personalized Damion's practice of using low-frequency sounds. The strategy backfired: he answered the binary question ("Yeah, I suppose") instead of engaging with sounds he values. In another part of our interview, I asked Damion how he moved his body when listening to someone else perform.

>DM: Do you move when you're listening to someone else perform?

>DR: I don't so much dance. I might move a little bit, but not particularly. Occasionally when something is really good and my mind is being taken somewhere else, I'll sort of twitch sometimes. My neck will kind of twitch or something. I don't know what that is, but that happens sometimes when I'm listening to things that are going to another level. Solid Eye use to do that to me a lot. It's like transcendental stuff; it just blows your mind. But no, I don't so much. I probably do—it depends on what it is—bob my head, or I don't know.

In this passage we can glean that when Damion is listening to a powerful experimental 'noise' performance, his mind will be "taken somewhere else," to "another level," and that the experience moves toward the "transcendental," and the experience will cause his neck to twitch. These sentiments illustrate the powerful effects that listening to experimental 'noise' can have for Damion. However, my endeavor to extract a useful answer that described Damion's listening habits was mostly unsuccessful.

Don Bolles is an easily recognizable character in a variety of music scenes in Los Angeles. His colorful appearance is often augmented with a large, fuzzy, bear hat, and when he plays in his glam rock band, Fancy Space People, he often adorns himself in a tight silver suit with elaborate makeup. This same individual is also notorious as the groundbreaking drummer for the Germs, 45 Grave, and Celebrity Skin, but he also has a history with experimental sound as a DJ and a

performer. His occasional performances with Joseph Hammer as the duo Kitten

Sparkles ensures his relevance in Los Angeles' experimental 'noise' scenes as

more than just his novel personality. Once in a while a Germs fan or a 45 Grave

fan will come to a Kitten Sparkles show to find out what kind of punk music Don

is doing now, only to be hit with overwhelming sound and a blinding strobe

light—fixtures of Kitten Sparkles performances. Don was playing punk when punk

was, in a sense, *supposed to be bad*; he later played in bands that required a

certain level of skill and mastery, as a drummer or a guitarist; and his music

upbringing included many avant-garde electronic music composers,

Stockhausen's total serial electronic works and Reich's early tape works. With

Don's depth of sonic literature in mind, I asked him about the nature of his

listening habits.

DM: What do you listen for in noise music?

DB: Something that takes me away. Just like psychedelic music: sounds
that can take you away from the regular reality.

DM: What are those sounds?

DB: It depends. Different people have different ones that they can
manipulate successfully; or that they choose to manipulate successfully.

DM: Are they frequencies, or frequency bands, or volume levels?

DB: All those things are tools. Some things are really good when you have
to struggle to hear them, and then other things are best when they
obliterate all thought because they're so loud. So it depends on what
you're doing. I've gotten something out of both of those things. Like
Francois Bayle: that guy is so quiet. Some of those things are so quiet
that you have to have CDs. Vinyl just doesn't do it justice because any
surface noise completely distracts.

DM: What do you expect to hear when listening to noise music?

DB: Something that I didn't expect.

DM: What kinds of sounds do you value?

DB: Anything that's confusing.

In general, Don listens to experimental 'noise' to get "away from the regular reality," to evade the rational world and bathe in the irregular and the weird. He often refers to the experimental world as psychedelic, and even alludes to the use of psychedelic drugs to enhance the experimental 'noise' experience. Don cites two modes of listening that are paramount to listening habits. The first mode is the struggle to listen. He invokes the recordings of Francois Bayle as an example whose works are purposefully difficult to listen to and require a high fidelity recording and high fidelity audio equipment, thus one must struggle to distinguish sounds from one to the other. The second mode is the immersive qualities of extreme loud sound. For Don, extreme loud sound has the capability to "obliterate all thought." This mode of listening perhaps is not a mode of listening at all, but one of empirical hearing prior to interpretation. Perhaps if a listener was capable of hearing immersive sound designed to eradicate thought, then the struggle to listen—as in the first mode of listening (to small sounds)—is also applicable: the struggle to make sense of sound while its extreme intensity attempts to obscure thought, as sound is made physical. When I asked Don about the sounds that he values, his answer was that he likes sounds that are confusing. Confusion is also an aesthetic goal of his partner in Kitten Sparkles, Joseph Hammer, who is also concerned with overwhelming and confusing his audiences. Confusion and the state of being overwhelmed are also terms often used to describe the drug-induced psychedelic experience, particularly with hallucinogens, a favorite recreation for Don. When I asked him about some basic experimental 'noise' skills, he gave the following answer.

DM: Speaking of skills, what are some basic noise music skills?

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DB: You have to listen. That's pretty much the *basickest* one. You have to listen and then either be innately gifted as a channeler of the space gods of noise, or learn what doesn't suck to do by doing it. You just have to do it a lot. And that's the beauty of it. You can do it a lot. Noise is something you can do. You can just be sitting there twiddling the knob on the radio in your car and you're making noise. If you're thinking about it like that, like John Cage, like your world is your composition, the sounds that are your soundtrack, if they were amplified a little bit, how cool would they sound? The sounds are just walking around. The sounds of this thing [fan] blowing in my ear: pretty cool. There's never a shortage of sounds. All you have to do is think of them as Luc Ferrari stuff or think of them as more highly amplified. You can enjoy them as avant compositions and such.

For Don, listening is the basic skill needed in experimental 'noise.' Through listening alone, one can compose their immediate sonic world, by thinking about the sounds available in earshot; and perhaps then make a performance by amplifying those sounds.

Bob Bellerue is one of a number of artists who began in one medium and ended up in another. He enrolled in the graduate program in creative writing at Cal Arts and, while taking a course that was jointly taught by media theorist Dick Hebdige and experimental composer Morton Subotnick, he decided he was more passionate about sound than about writing. Having never studied music academically before, he was now taking courses with Mark Trayle, Tom Erbe, James Tenney, and David Rosenboom. Whatever Bob lacked in a traditional education in music (perhaps 'lack' is not the right word) he certainly made up for it with an open ear. Bob launched one of the most important, short-lived, experimental venues of the early twenty-first century, Il Corral: a place for experimental 'noise' from both the academic world (particularly Cal Arts composition students) and the broader underworld of experimentalists and electronic music tinkerers in Los Angeles. We had a brief discussion about the old Il Corral days.

DM: For me what was awesome about it [Il Corral] was that it was a place where you could have the academic composers with the non-academic composers together, and it didn't seem unnatural at all. That was really important to me.

BB: Yeah. People were really attentive. That's the other thing. The outsider shows—the noise shows and experimental stuff—people really were listening. I think I helped enforce that because I really can't stand when people are talking during a show. And even with friends of mine I'm wiling to say, "Why don't you guys go outside to talk" or whatever; or "Why don't we listen to the band because they're performing for us, so we should show them respect." I don't mind doing that, and I think it's just an important thing.

For Bob, Il Corral was a sacred place to listen to experimental sound. Even though most of the audience members were already keyed in on listening, he still would move to police the behaviors of the audiences, making sure that those who were talking during a performance be escorted outside to carry on their conversations so that collective listening could continue inside. For the most part, Bob described the behavior of attendees as "attentive"—a place where "people really were listening." Every kind of movement is defined by its boundaries, and Bob helped enforce those boundaries by keeping listeners in. Those who were escorted out were seldom "kicked out," rather, they were shown the door until they were ready to listen. Of course, Bob was sometimes impatient with louder guests, but only because the salient activity for him was listening to experimental 'noise' performance. When I asked him what he listened for in experimental 'noise,' we had the following exchange.

DM: What do you listen for in noise music?

BB: I like ecstatic states. I like being enveloped in sound and moved. Let the sound permeate you and then it moves you from within. It's like the same kind of reaction you have to music, it's just that it's different equipment and styles. So I like it when people can take sonic energy and manipulate it to move and reshape the molecules in the room, create airflow patterns, and to cause people to move and react and to make them think about what *they* could do. That's what I do a lot of times at

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concerts. I think about stuff I want to work on and ideas I have. Sometimes I'll be listening to a show and I'll be recontextualizing or rescoring or rearranging something. Sometimes that's a reaction of me noticing, "I don't like this," or "I'm not excited about this performance," and sometimes it's because I think, "Wow, this is so fucking good. I gotta get my shit together."

DM: I find that too. I find a lot of times when I'm listening to something I like, I start getting inspired and thinking about what I could do.

BB: Yeah.

DM: What do you expect to hear when you go to a noise music show?

BB: I don't generally have expectations, but I hope for certain things, like I talked about. What I hope for is a good PA and a decent turn-out so it's not a bummer empty room. But I don't generally have expectations. If I'm expecting anything it's usually because I'm in a bad mood and I'm expecting that there's going to be a good PA, or I'm expecting there will be a good crowd. But musically, to me, noise is always about being present in the moment, both as a performer and as a listener too, and you can't assume you know where anything is going to go. You have to sit there and ride the wave and be present, right on the cusp. And expectations are just things you generally try to avoid. But if I know I'm going to see Death By Audio, then I expect to see, or at least hear, whatever is happening through a giant ferocious PA, and the room may smell like piss [laughs].

In this passage, Bob talks to how the sounds should affect him, rather than how he listens for the sounds. He imagines that the sound should bring him to a state of ecstasy, or should move him, perhaps spiritually or emotionally. He also speaks to how the sound can inspire him to make his own sounds. Even with passions toward the future, Bob believes that listening to experimental 'noise' is an activity of the present; that one must "ride the wave," since predicting the unfolding of a performance is impossible. Bob sites listening as an advanced technique for any experimental 'noise' artist and audience member. He does not specify what exactly to listen for, but is instead concerned with the immersive experience of sound, resulting in sonic ecstasy.

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Joe Potts has been involved with experimental art and music since the early-1970s. The early LAFMS experiments—made by Joe and his brother, Rick Potts, and later with Tom Recchion—seemed to have much in common with the Fluxus movement, but Joe denied Fluxus as an influence, despite his interest in the work of Allan Kaprow and Yoko Ono. Allan Kaprow pondered about the nature of art as a mode of paying attention.[372] Then music could be understood as paying attention to sound: listening. I asked Joe about his methods of listening to experimental sound.

> DM: What do you listen for in noise music?
>
> JP: I've been trying to listen that way, almost like Maryanne Amacher—the third ear kind of thing. Try to listen in 3-D and try to listen through the music. Sometimes it gives me a headache, but sometimes…
>
> DM: She's my favorite!
>
> JP: More and more I've been trying to concentrate on really… kind of listening with crossed ears—become aware of both of your ears and try and merge them when I listen to noise. Try to open up into another realm of listening.
>
> DM: Are there things you listen for in particular?—like what instruments are being used, or the sound sources, or anything like that?
>
> JP: No, I'm more obsessed with layering and interaction than individual noise sources.

Joe's listening technique may be summarized as listening for sonic juxtapositions and syntheses, focusing on "layering and interaction" rather than "individual noise sources." When viewing stereoscopically through binoculars, the two lenses meld into a single lens to create a focused and unified vision by amplifying distance visually. With stereophonic ears, Joe seems to be training himself to be able to hear using the two ears together to hear a unified sound, and the two

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[372] Allan Kaprow, "Performing Life" (1979) in *Essay on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 202. "What if I were to think art was just paying attention?"

ears together to hear sounds differently, in the manner Maryanne Amacher's music inspires. Many of her works use frequencies that create beats and sounds internally: they are sounds that are *not recorded*, but are created in the mind using sonic stimuli. She calls this technique making "ear tones," or later she referred to them as "otoacoustic emissions"—she exploited this technique on her record *Sound Characters (Making the Third Ear)*.[373] Though for Marianne Amacher, her work, when played at a sufficient volume level, induces otoacoustic emissions (ear tones) in humans, Joe has been inspired to try to listen for ear tones, perhaps as random byproducts of the integrations of sounds that may momentarily produce the sensation. When I asked Joe what he thought were some basic experimental music skills, he said, "I think listening. If you're playing with…, well even by yourself, I think being able to listen is probably crucial. It sounds pretty basic, but I think it's important, and I think a lot of times people who are just starting out get more involved in making the sound than listening to it." Later in the interview, Joe quipped about noise clichés one would learn in a hypothetical course he called "Noise-101," with "not listening" as a foul. I took him up on that thought.

> DM: What is Noise-101? If you were teaching a class on Noise Techniques 101, first is listening…
>
> JP: Yeah. It's like I said, listening and being aware of the sounds you're making and how they interact with the space. As far as when you're playing in an…—well I guess it could be solo too—but I think about when you're playing in an ensemble, you're trying to become one entity. The sound you're forming is almost like sculpting together in clay, and trying to build this thing that gets more and more elaborate until maybe at some point it collapses. At it's best, you're acting as one entity, rather than a bunch of individuals.

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[373] Maryanne Amacher, *Sound Characters: Making the Third Ear*, CD, (Tzadik, 1999). Liner notes: "[E]ars act as instruments and emit sounds as well as receive them."

In this passage, Joe again distinguishes between the separation of parts and the integrated whole: he is consistently interested in not only the integrated whole, but the process of integrating toward the whole.

Maria Garcia is one of the younger performers I interviewed for this project, and one of the few women actively performing in the Los Angeles experimental 'noise' scene between 2010 and 2014. She and her partner Pat Murch became champions of the scene by opening their own live-workspace called Mata Noise, that hosted local and touring sound experimentalists and performance artists. I asked her what she listened for in experimental 'noise,' continuing my questions to include what she *expected* to hear at these performances.

> DM: What do you listen for in noise music?
>
> MG: Mostly what I'm expecting is something that moves me in some way, that catches my attention in some way. It's hard to say because projects vary so much that I can't go in expecting just one sort of thing. I can't go in expecting: "I want it to just be brutally harsh." Even going to see someone like John Wiese perform, or Greh [Holger] perform: I've seen them several times but their performances vary so much I don't know what to expect, and that's kind of the cool thing about it. It's not like: "I want to go hear them play that song."
>
> DM: Right.
>
> MG: I just want to see what they've been working on.
>
> DM: That's the next question: What do you expect to hear when listening to noise music? Do you have a set of expectations?
>
> MG: Do you mean listening to it at home, or going to a show?
>
> DM: Mostly at a show, because when you listen at home, you're listening to a recording that's going to sound the same, or at least have the same content.
>
> MG: Mostly what I was saying is that I just go in hoping to hear something surprising that this person is doing—something different than they're doing. Or maybe in the same vein of things that they have been doing before that made me want to come out to see them again.

DM: Do you enjoy unexpected sounds?

MG: I do. I feel like I listen for them all day. Just in my daily life I listen. The fucking radiator is bubbling weird, and I'm like, "What is that sound?" and I feel like that's probably what makes someone interested in a genre like this, is that they're interested in the little sounds that make up your daily life that don't normally catch someone's attention. A different person can go through life all day and not actually hear that that engine sound sounds really amazing. It's got this high squeal. The shower—when I turn it on—has this piercing squeal sound for some reason. That's how I go through my daily life: listening to things.

Maria's general technique for listening is analytical, and she demonstrates that the same sonic investigative techniques she uses to explore the everyday sonic world and soundscapes are helpful to listening to experimental 'noise' performances. "What is *that* sound?" she asks herself rhetorically concerning sounds in her immediate environment: the car engine, the shower, the radiator, etcetera. She is listening for unique sounds and sounds that can surprise her—by her description, bubbly sounds and high pitches are sounds she finds exciting— and not reproducible "songs." Maria tries to release her expectations because she has attended varied performances by the same artist, so that every performance by an artist is part of a continuation of their ever-evolving artistic personalities. When I asked Maria about what she thought were some basic 'noise' skills, she constructed a hypothetical model of teaching such skills.

DM: What are some basic noise music skills?

MG: I think if I were teaching it to a kid that would be it: just really listen. There's so much that can be music: the simplest sounds.

Maria sums up her basic experimental 'noise' music skills to listening; "that would be it." If experimental 'noise' is mostly thought of as the complex integration of

frequencies, Maria shows that even the "simplest sounds" can be made aesthetically accessible through directed listening skills.

(The) Handbag Factory is Samur Khouja's living room and kitchen. Downstairs is his professional recording studio, Seahorse Sound Studios. As a professional audio engineer, he has worked with many artists from the rock, pop, and hip hop world, and works with local metal and punk bands also. In his professional audio experience, listening to the juxtapositions of sounds is an important part of his profession. When I asked him about the spatial placement of sound in a stereo mix, he provided the following insight.

> SK: Location and the relationship to the other sounds and how they're affecting each other; because I have to think about that when I'm mixing a lot. What's taking up the low end? What's taking up the mid range? What's taking up the high end? Really I split it up into twenty sections in my brain. And that's not low, mid, high. I have these frequency groups in my brain that I listen to and see which part of the pyramid is being filled out.

Samur's special ability to separate and analyze various frequency bands—like a twenty-band equalizer—speaks to his awareness of sound in the frequency spectrum as its timbral makeup. These skills certainly aid in his listening to experimental 'noise' performances, and in performing his own experimental works: *or* perhaps listening to experimental sound has aided his ability to listen to and analyze sound as a professional sound engineer: or perhaps the two modes of listening have been mutually beneficial. In any case, Samur's developed listening techniques are the issue here.

> DM: What do you listen for in noise music?

> SK: It depends on the mood. Sometimes I'll want something to chill out to, or something that's going to increase your morale.

DM: But I mean, when you're listening, what are you listening for? I would imagine it would be something kind of similar with what you do with your work, because you spend so much time listening so intently.

SK: Usually if I put something on or if I'm listening to something noise-wise it's because I kind of want a certain mood. Noise is a lot about moods, like I said. So maybe I feel like hearing something that's going to inspire me to think, but not be intrusive, so I want to hear some minimal John Cage piece or something like what HoraFlora would do with their sparse, minimal music that blends into the atmosphere well, that becomes part of the room. Or maybe I just got out of the shower and I want to put on Actuary full blast, or Merzbow full blast, or Wrong Hole full blast, and just be pumped up about my day, or maybe I'm having dinner on a date and Sun Ra is great.

DM: But when you're at a performance listening to someone else perform, what do you hear? What are you listening for?

SK: Trying to understand what they're trying to do. If it's something like Actuary where it's like a wall of sound, you want to make sure all your frequencies are colored—lows, mids, highs. The dynamics: making sure there's dynamics, that they're aware of the space and the playback system and the acoustics. Also hearing if there are multiple performers in a group interacting with each other, not stepping on each other while they're playing.

DM: Do you try to figure out what each performer is doing and how each movement is affecting the sound?

SK: I don't know if I…. I mean, I'm aware of it. It's not something I actively try to do. It's just something that just happens anyways as an observer; as my observing.

DM: What do you expect to hear when listening to noise music? What are your expectations?

SK: You can't have any expectations when listening to noise music. Hopefully you want to have fun, or you want to be social, but you can't expect to hear…: if you're going to a show, even if you're going to see a particular group, just the nature of noise artists and bands, they don't repeat a lot of their stuff: it's not repeatable, so you don't know what you're going to get, and I think that's kind of the exciting part about being a fan of noise or an attendee at a noise show.

DM: Would you have rough expectations, like "This performer is going to really play loud," or "This performer…"

SK: Yeah. You get excited. Like, "Man, so and so is going to play like shit." If I have a band playing here like Nuclear Death Wish, I hope they don't burn my studio down [laughs]. I've seen them before, and I've heard

stories, and you hear that they destroy things and break down walls, or you go see Rubber O Cement [Grux] and you expect him to go out into the street [laughs] and run around like crazy. I think a lot of noise bands are very open-minded. So you might expect to see something, but at the same time I think the nature of the music is more forgiving toward having a very unexpected show.

In this passage I had difficulty trying to get Samur to discuss how he listens to experimental 'noise' as a technique; rather, he spoke to how different performances conjure up different moods, or how different frequency bands and different voices interact. An important insight concerning expectations at experimental 'noise' performances is that they are not repeatable, and this lack of repeatability forces listeners to have an open mind toward the sonic natures of the performances on any given night. In another part of my interview with Samur, he gave some insight on how he listened when I asked him how he moved his body in performance.

DM: How do you use your body when you perform?

SK: I usually sit very still and make really small, calculated moves. In Conscious Summary it's very precise movement. There's no dancing or any performance aspect in that regard. It's mostly just about the sound and really deep listening. In the death metal band there's a lot of movement and energy and acrobatics: so I'm able to do both.

DM: When you said 'deep listening' did you get that from Pauline Oliveros? Do you know that term 'deep listening?'

SK: No.

DM: Ok. That's something Pauline Oliveros developed in the 70s in San Francisco.[374] She did a lot of experimental music and that was her term.

SK: That's something that I practice a lot.

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[374] I incorrectly attributed the founding of "deep listening" to the 1970s: the mid-1980s is more accurate.

Samur's notion of "deep listening" was arrived at independently of Pauline

Oliveros'—her usage invokes meditation and ontology: the faculty of listening to

ones listening.[375] Samur's deep listening is clearly related, even if he never

formulated a theory of deep listening. An elevated awareness of sound to *the*

awareness of the elevated awareness of sound is a short leap, in my estimation.

So how does Samur engage in deep listening? Before our interview, Samur had

recently returned from a trip to Arizona. While there, he recorded the sounds of

his surroundings, and performed with the sounds. I had asked him what kinds of

sounds he valued, and as a follow-up question, I asked him about the sounds he

recorded in Arizona.

> DM: What were your favorite sounds when you recorded recently in
> Arizona that you were really picking up on?
>
> SK: There was this woodpecker that kept nailing this metal sign, and it
> was bouncing back off this big, giant glass wall behind me and echoing out
> into the canyon, and it was relentless, and it sounded insane. The
> woodpecker: I heard all the attack, and then I would hear the steel pole
> resonating and decaying, and then I'd hear the slap-back off the back
> wall, and then I would hear very distant echoes with completely no high-
> end, and it was great. I did that. There was this turtle—I recorded some
> footsteps. I recorded it crunching through the sand, and I gated those and
> pitched them down and they were like [mouth noises]—QUKKKHHH-
> Khhhhhh—and then they kind of modulated themselves. So that was
> really nice.
> Oh, I found… I got a speaker and taped a contact mic to it—and I had
> never used phase shifter before, but I was manipulating the phase—and
> then filtering that feedback. I did that with just a couple of small battery-
> powered things and some electrical tape, and I spent three hours just
> dancing with that. It kind of sounded like a dying rat.
>
> DM: What kind of phase shifter?
>
> SK: A Small Stone [by Electro-Harmonix].

In this passage Samur is clearly having fun discussing the amazing sounds he

discovered, while augmenting those sounds with some simple technology. He

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[375] Oliveros, xxiv.

described animals making sounds in their acoustic environment in studio terms: "The woodpecker: I heard all the attack, and then I would hear the steel pole resonating and decaying, and then I'd hear the slap-back off the back wall, and then I would hear very distant echoes with completely no high-end…." Attack, decay, sustain, release (ADSR)—these are the basic functions of an envelope filter. On a studio delay device, common parameters include delay time, feedback, and level. A slap-back effect is achieved by using a short delay time and short feedback setting, usually only allowing one echo from the original signal. And then Samur discussed the turtle: "I recorded some footsteps. I recorded it crunching through the sand, and I gated those and pitched them down—and then they kind of modulated themselves." In this exploration, Samur interacted with the sounds by using a gating technique—probably similar to how an engineer would use a gate to control drum sounds—and then using a pitch shifter, he pitched those sounds down by an unspecified interval. Shifting the pitch an octave or two, and amplifying the signal would have created a thunderous sound. He then claims that the turtles' footsteps modulated themselves. Studio modulation generally occurs with a signal that is slightly delayed and slightly detuned. With turtle steps—four feet—moving through uneven sand, the impact of each step will differ from one foot to another, and the timing of those steps may all differ, possibly creating a sense of modulation to the human ear. Samur also used a phase shifter, or a phaser, to create a different kind of modulation effect that sweeps through a given frequency band. The phaser he used is commonly found at guitar shops. Samur concluded that the sound experiment resulted in the sound of a "dying rat." Most importantly,

the passage gives insight to how Samur deeply listens to sound, and the language he uses to describe it.

Summary: Listening Habits

This section discussed some of the listening habits of the people I interviewed in the Los Angeles experimental 'noise' scenes. I tried my best to learn how the participants listen and what they listen for. How they focus their attention will allow us to further understand their values. I have found that the listening techniques that most of the people I interviewed fall under one or more of the following four categories: 1) new sounds, 2) unique extrasonic experiences, 3) mastery and intentionality, and 4) formal and analytical modes of listening. Many of the participants I interviewed fit into more than one of these categories. The categories themselves are also not mutually exclusive. Thus—to exhaust all four categories—a *new sound* can enable a *unique extrasonic experience* by a *masterful performer* who *intends* to make those sounds using *strict formal devices*.

Almost all of the participants I interviewed hope to hear sounds they never heard before: new sounds. Hearing new sounds means hearing new superimpositions: timbre. New timbres are generally made by superimposing sounds or sonic materials together (additive synthesis), filtering sounds (subtractive synthesis), and affecting their morphology (perhaps using an envelope filter, if manipulated electronically), but sounds can also be affected by the spaces they occupy, thus furthering their alteration. Superimposing sounds, in a sense, means harmony, as the simultaneity of frequencies. Thus, participants spoke of their desire to hear sounds they have not heard before, or

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unusual sounds, or sounds different from the ones they are used to hearing, or unconventional sounds, novel sounds, unique sounds, and sounds that are difficult to reproduce. Listening to these kinds of sounds—new timbres—is an important value amongst the participants that I interviewed.

Secondly, most of the participants I interviewed seek a unique experience. The unique experience can be achieved from unique sounds (category one) and their morphology (timbre), but often the empirical sonic activity of a performance is the stimulus and catalyst for an extrasonic experience. Inducing the extrasonic experience can take the form of an overwhelming experience. Overwhelming experiences may occur through sheer volume or an overabundance of sonic information, or even a lack of information that might necessitate strained and focused listening. In some cases the overwhelming experience includes overwhelming the capacity to analyze the sonic performance. Another common way to achieve a unique experience is through the experience of *surprise*. Surprise can either take the form of a surprising event—perhaps as a unique sound, or as a surprising juxtaposition of formal elements in the performance—or it can be a surprising revelation. The listener becomes aware of a new truth— perhaps learns how the sound was made, or that it was there the whole time; or perhaps the revelation is introspective and personal and has nothing to do with sound (extrasonic), beyond the fact that sound (or performance in general) inspired the revelation. The unique experience is an emotional experience. For some people it can be *psychedelic*, inducing visual imagery and hallucinations. For others it can induce a feeling of transcendence or catharsis, obscuring and suspending the intuition of time. The experience of overwhelming sound that induces transcendence and catharsis is often made palpable, inscribed directly on

the body, as well as the ear. Sound that is *felt* is sound made erotic as the body

either struggles to *feel* it or is paralyzed by its encompassing effect (in the case

of extreme loud sound). For still others, the unique experience can lead to

learning something about the piece or about themselves, thus leading to

stimulating conversations and introspective revelations. These experiences—as

surprises, transcendence, and deep introspection—are important stimuli for the

participants in the experimental 'noise' scenes.

A third category for the participants I interviewed is listening to the

performer's mastery, intentionality, and control of the performance. Many

audiences require that the performer understand the equipment they use and

perform with a purpose. The purpose is to carry their intentions as a performer.

Some audience members require that the terms and criteria of judgment be

imbedded somehow in the performance. For example, the experience of watching

a performer struggle may be uneasy for some listeners: the performer may

struggle to find the sounds they feel are necessary for the performance. If

struggling is part of the performance, then performances may be validated by

some listeners who perceive the performer as intentionally struggling *as part of

the performance*. In other cases, some listeners will view a struggling performer

as someone who is unfamiliar with their equipment and thus unmasterful. These

kinds of unmasterful performances may be categorized as poor performances.

The fourth category of listening is to listen analytically and critically for

formal events in the course of a performance. This listening technique is used by

those chiefly interested in the relationships between various events, prioritizing

events internally as successions of sounds. This method requires memory, to

relate sounds to other sounds, and prediction. Misread predictions take the form

of surprises (category two) that can often times create powerful moments in the listening experience by thwarting expectations; in some cases a misread prediction can cause irritation for the listener, if they were expecting a powerful experience that was not fulfilled. For some listeners, a lack of salient events may create an amorphous performance also lacking in content suitable for a pleasurable listening experience.

Listeners in the experimental 'noise' scenes use different strategies for determining the validity of a performance or the enjoyment of a performance. Some listeners using similar strategies may have vastly different experiences: some may enjoy a performance for different reasons. Some may have found performances lacking while others found it stimulating. Listeners in the experimental 'noise' scenes—like listeners in any kind of music or sound art scene—do not listen with the same ear. Ultimately, aesthetic hermeneutics is always an ultrasonic judgment through the memory of interpretation.

III. Permissions and Errors

This section is concerned with the fundamental permissions and errors found in the Los Angeles experimental 'noise' scenes. The two main questions in this section are "*Can anyone make noise music?*" bolstered by "*Can anyone make 'good' noise music?*" as a couplet. In one sense, if anyone can do it, and anyone can do it *well*, then perhaps there can be no skill set necessary, excluding even the skill that most of my informants cited as necessary: namely, *listening*. This question couplet leads to the next question couplet: "Are there mistakes in noise music?" bolstered by "Can you tell when someone is making a mistake?" These questions were inspired in the course of my interview with Nial Morgan, who was the third person I interviewed. The subject of mistakes arose when I asked Nial what he expected to hear in experimental 'noise.'

> DM: What do you *expect* to hear when listening to noise music?

> NM: I just try to keep an open mind and take it as it is. I never really go in with expectations, like, 'Oh, this guy is definitely going to sound like this,' because *mistakes and accidents* [my emphasis] are always prone to happen for a lot of harsh noise artists.

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[376] John Cage, *Silence*, 17.

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DM: What's a mistake? How do you know when you're hearing a mistake? You know when you're *making* a mistake, but how do you know when you're *hearing* a mistake?

The passage above inspired me to ask the follow-up question, "What's a mistake?" I found the question to be so fundamental to an understanding of experimental 'noise' that I immediately added it to the questionnaire. (I will allow Nial's answer to appear in the order of interviews.) If everything is permitted in experimental 'noise' there can be no transgressions, no mistakes, and no accidents; no one can be 'good' or 'bad' at doing it, and there can be no skills necessary for making it. If we contrast the question, "Can anyone play in a professional symphonic orchestra?" (Who is permitted to play in a symphonic orchestra?) with "Can anyone make noise music?" (Who is permitted to play in a symphonic orchestra?), we can more immediately understand the gravity of the question. Symphonic orchestras have a restricted number of musicians who can join, so only those deemed to be the *best* performers—who have the necessary literacy skills, instrumental skills, temperament, and so on—are permitted to play in a symphonic orchestra. The perceived difference is between a high bar and high standards and little to no bar with ambiguous standards or idealized as having no standards at all. This section will explore these issues through the testimony of my informants, and will necessary overlap and elide with other answers from other sections.

I met David Kendall early in the first decade of the 2000s through a friend of mine who he dated and remains his partner to this day. We conducted the interview at my home, and before we began the interview, I had seen him flipping through my copy of *Cracked Media* by Caleb Kelly, but apparently he was

also flipping through my copy of *Image, Music, Text* by Roland Barthes. I asked

David about the relationship between performers and audience members, and in

this context we segued to the question concerning who could do experimental

'noise.' David made the transition himself from audience to performer, since

according to him: "It's a very low barrier to entry."

> DM: How would you describe the relation between noise music performers and listeners?

> DK: There's a close relationship. A lot of shows it seems like the audience are all performers themselves. It's a very low barrier to entry.

> DM: What do you mean by that?

> DK: I was looking at one of your books last time we were here, and the guy was talking about the difference between music that you listen to because it makes you want to do it yourself, or music that you listen to as something that you could never do, like a display of special virtuosity. And noise is very much on the side of music like parlor piano, where you hear someone playing and you'll want to sing along, or if you have an acoustic guitar, or a lot of times when people listen to guitar music it's because they want to be able to play like that, and noise is like that. Noise is something you go and see. And one way of really engaging in it is to want to feel yourself doing it.

> DM: Can anyone do it?

> DK: No. No it definitely takes a certain spirit: some people have it and some people don't. I mean anyone can try. And that's the beauty of it. It's participatory.

> DM: What was that book?

> DK: Maybe it was in the Barthes?

> > [David pulled out *Image, Music, Text*—a book that consists of a collection of essays written by Barthes].

> DM: Really?

> DK: This is a collection of essays. [Finding the passage, and then reading it.]

> Yeah. "There are two musics: the music one listens to and the music one plays. These two musics are two totally different arts, each with its own

history, its own sociology, its own aesthetics, its own erotic…." [Skipping the rest of the paragraph]

"The music one plays comes from an activity that is very little auditory, being above all manual." [Skipping a few sentences] "[Y]ou or I can play it alone or among friends…." [Skipping a few sentences] "[A] muscular music…." And then some philosophical stuff. "Seated at the keyboard or the music stand, the body controls, conducts, having itself to transcribe what it reads, making sound and meaning, the body as inscriber and not just transmitter, a simple receiver." [Skipping more] "Concurrently, passive, receptive…"[377]

[Stops himself.] Let's see. Anyway.

DM: That's a fantastic quote. What kind of music do you consider the kind that you make?

DK: I think that all music is kind of in the middle somewhere; or most of it is anyway; on that surface level. So I don't know. I think that it's probably one listens to, since it's computer stuff that people wouldn't know. I don't necessarily think that people can get up and do it themselves. But then again, there's a lot of simple stuff, so; it might fall into the other category. I'm not really sure.

On the one hand, David says that there is a "low barrier to entry," but on the other hand, he explains that though the actual performance is full with "simple stuff"—simple procedures and simple sounds, I presume—that there is in fact a learning curve for the kinds of work he does, since it requires computer programming, and computer programming has a steeper learning curve. But for David, the beauty of experimental 'noise' is that "anyone can try" to do it, but ultimately it "takes a certain spirit." What is that *spirit* that would want to make experimental sound? That spirit seems to be the one who listens to an experimental 'noise' performance and is inspired to want to make it themselves; the spirit that says, "I can do that." Perhaps David is saying that the kind of

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[377] Roland Barthes, "Musica Practica," (1970) in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 149.

people who are drawn to attend an experimental 'noise' show are also the kind of people who would be inspired to make experimental 'noise' themselves.[378]

Nial Morgan perhaps inspired much of this entire section with his answers. As an explosive harsh noise performer who moves between exerting control over his equipment and purposefully creating situations that move beyond his control to reach new areas of sonic exploration and extreme listening experiences, he shows that the line between mistakes, accidents, experiments, success, and failures are not only blurred, but that their blurring is integral to experimental 'noise' performance. Nial claims that mistakes are inevitable in harsh noise performances and are therefore to be expected—thus the following passage was inspired by my question concerning expectations in experimental 'noise' performance. We then launched into a very interesting discussion on the nature of mistakes as a generative mode of performing experimental 'noise.'

> DM: What do you expect to hear when listening to noise music?
>
> NM: I just try to keep an open mind and take it as it is. I never really go in with expectations, like, 'Oh, this guy is definitely going to sound like this,' because mistakes and accidents are always prone to happen for a lot of harsh noise artists.
>
> DM: What's a mistake? How do you know when you're hearing a mistake? You know when you're *making* a mistake, but how do you know when you're *hearing* a mistake?
>
> NM: I guess that kind of defines what good harsh noise is to me, when people are able to take mistakes and make it better, or just make it sound good. But: What is a mistake to me?....

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[378] This kind of DIY thinking is reminiscent of the early punk experience—the old adage that *everyone who saw the Ramones (or the Sex Pistols) started a band*—but the earliest source I could find on this sentiment was a statement by Brian Eno concerning Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground. "I was talking to Lou Reed the other day and he said that the first Velvet Underground record sold 30,000 copies in the first five years. The sales have picked up in the past few years, but I mean, that record was such an important record for so many people. I think everyone who bought one of those 30,000 copies started a band!" Kristine McKenna, "Eno: Voyages in Time and Perception" in *Musician* (October 1982). Available online: http://music.hyperreal.org/artists/brian_eno/interviews/musn82.htm.

DM: Well again, you know when you're making one, but how do you know when you're hearing one from someone else? Have you ever listened to something and you thought, "Oh, they fucked up right there"?

NM: Yeah. I've experienced many problems in all the time I've been recording, and I can hear when a cable gets fucked up, or you hear that ground buzz—the ground is fucked up. Or just the expression on someone's face. But then again I've seen people play where they have the weirdest expressions on their face, as if they were fucking up. This guy Brendan Nichol: I saw him play once: the entire time he was playing on his laptop he looked like he was super confused, and he kept going back and forth with an anxious look on his face, but then my friend told me he went up to him afterwards and asked him what he thought of his set, and he said: "Yeah, it was perfect." [Laughs] That's weird, but yeah.

DM: When you perform, sometimes you'll throw your instruments and devices around, and it looks like they fucked up. Or sometimes it looks like you're throwing them around to *get them to fuck up*. So you're implementing mistakes in a sense. So I guess I'm still interested in this idea of 'mistakes.'

NM: A lot of my equipment is already half-broken. So in order to take advantage of the malfunctions in my equipment, I have to do that.

DM: So when you hear a cable that isn't grounded right: that doesn't necessarily mean it's a mistake, right? Or is that the nature of the equipment?

NM: I think probably the most technical problem I would have is a cable that's not grounded. That's the one mistake I can't really do much about because it just sounds like *pbpbpbpb* [motorboat sound]. I'll get pissed off if that happens.

The question on mistakes is clearly an important one, and in fact, part of Nial's aesthetics as a listener and as a performer are reliant on these mistakes: "I guess that kind of defines what good harsh noise is to me, when people are able to take mistakes and make it better, or just make it sound good. But: What is a mistake to me?" Making a mistake into a pleasant sonic experience is a virtue; but then Nial notices the ambiguity: then *what is a mistake*? Perhaps this method is a mode of stochastic resonance. Stochastic resonance is a technique that involves adding white noise to a system to amplify and clarify the resonances

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already existing in the system, like using sand to lift fingerprints. Creating

something new, in a dialectical sense, typically involves bringing something

foreign to an already existing system: the synthesis of the foreign element with

the known elements creates something new. In Nial's case, manufacturing

mistakes with equipment that is already broken or flawed has the possibility of

creating new and unexpected sonic results. These procedures (throwing

equipment around, for example) are used to entice an entropic response that can

lead to new sounds and new juxtapositions of sound. The one kind of response

that Nial does not find pleasing is when a cable breaks, either creating

unintended and uncontrollable sounds or halting the audio signals from reaching

their destinations, the amplifier and loudspeakers. In my interview with Nial, he

claims that "anyone can do noise music. But it's about being original and unique,

and moving forward." "Moving forward" means that being original and unique is

making progress in experimental 'noise.' Anyone can make a new sonic

experience. By extension, a performance that is not original and unique does not

fulfill the requirements of experimental 'noise.'

Greh Holger spoke at length about the control of the instruments and

devices he uses to make experimental 'noise.' The loss of control could lead to a

mistake that may compromise the intentions of the performer. In this context I

asked him about the nature of mistakes in experimental 'noise.'

DM: Are there mistakes in noise music?

GH: Absolutely. I don't know that I've ever liked this term, but I've heard
of people refer to them as "happy" accidents. When you're doing
something and it turns out *good*.

DM: How do you know when you hear a mistake? How do you know when
you make a mistake?

GH: I know when I make a mistake, because I do something that I didn't mean to do, and that translates to the sound. Sometimes my whole setup is a mistake. Sometimes you're recording with something that didn't come out the way you want, but you're trying to make it work as best you can. Sometimes you make an obvious flub and there's a cat meowing in the middle of the dark ambient piece. Sometimes you adjust something and it sounds terrible. Sometimes you turn something off or turn something on that you didn't mean to, or that you meant to, but it's reacting in an unpredictable way. And that comes again from knowing your equipment; knowing your setup.

DM: I'm interested in this idea of 'control' and 'mistakes' and now I'm interested in this idea of 'predictability' and 'unpredictability.' What if something that you do is unpredictable? What is a 'happy' accident? Or what's an 'unhappy' accident?

GH: A happy accident is something that you do that maybe you didn't mean to do, or that happens during the course of a recording or a performance that was unintentional, but you feel enriches the piece, or lets you take it to a new place. So if I adjust something and that wasn't necessarily what I meant to do, but it sounds good, and I can ride that, and I can take it from there, that's learning something new, and utilizing it and making it beneficial. An unhappy accident is when I do something that needs to be edited out, or that I absolutely hate the way it sounds.

In the exchange above, Greh discusses mistakes in terms of intentionality—the volitional actions of the artist and the desired results from those actions. Like a scientist making an experiment, the scientist begins with a hypothesis, and then tests the hypothesis to see if the hypothesis is correct. For the experimental sound artist, they may believe that given the equipment they choose to use, an assortment of measurable parameters—dials and faders on a mixer, synthesizer, or guitar pedals—should lead to a predictable result. But there are other obstacles to the fulfillment of these predictions, and some of the obstacles are self-inflicted. In the case of the meowing cat, this means that a recording is being made with a live microphone, and so the acoustic space can play an unpredictable role in the recorded sound; or perhaps the cat is meowing during a performance with a live audience, and creates an unwanted disturbance. Greh

invokes the term "happy accidents" for mistakes that turn out felicitously, and

adopts my coinage of the opposite, "unhappy accidents," to describe a sound or

passage he finds abominable. So when is an accident happy and when is an

accident unhappy?

> DM: Has there ever been a performance that you hated, but that everyone loved?

> GH: That Oakland performance: I got a lot of positive feedback on it.

> DM: But who was right?

> GH: Everyone's right.

If there are no right or wrong answers, at least concerning the merit or demerit

of mistakes, then does that mean that anyone can make experimental 'noise?'

When I asked Greh about the nature of his artistic aspirations as an experimental

'noise' artist, he gave a complex and thought-provoking answer.

> DM: So what are your artistic goals and aspirations as a musician?

> GH: I think for a while I was content with doing what I do, and just making the sounds that I want to hear and making the sound that I like, and now I really feel the need to push myself conceptually, in terms of designing, creating, architecting, an atmosphere and a sound and telling a story. Perhaps not in a literal way: not a Pink Floyd or a concept album, but definitely that an emotional response that I talked about: more driving and drifting towards pushing myself in terms of composition, in terms of structure, whether or not it's an obvious structure. Pushing my music and my piece to evolve in new ways; trying new things and getting back to what got me into noise music in the first place, which was: that anyone could do it, and that it was experimenting. I was trying new things.

In this passage, he claims that anyone can make experimental 'noise,' but he

also alludes to a notion of personal progress that would take in more conceptual

strategies to making experimental 'noise' records and performances. These

modes seem more rational in the sense that he uses terms like structure,

composition, architecting, and story telling to describe what he imagines is the

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next step in his approach. These modes would return him to what excited him about experimental 'noise' in the beginning. Is Greh wedged in a subtle contradiction? or a nuanced mode of creation? Later when I asked specifically if anyone could make experimental 'noise,' he gave the following response.

DM: Can anyone make noise music?

GH: Everyone can make noise music. The first time you pick up a guitar is probably noise music. It ties back to my thoughts on everyday sound being noise. Throwing a bottle opener.

DM: Anyone can make noise music. Can anyone make 'good' noise music?

GH: No. It's one of those things that takes practice and dedication. People make noise, but it's learning and understanding what you like and what you don't like. Someone's first noise recordings can be the best thing on the planet. There's natural ability, there's all those things.

DM: What's natural ability?

GH: Some people take to playing guitar much faster and much [better]. That's why we think of Hendrix as a guitar god and Billy Corgan [Smashing Pumpkins] not in the same light. It's part creativity and part drive and vision and gift to play something. That's why some people will make better programmers, because their brains work in a different way or their upbringing taught them that. So I guess it can be a nature versus nurture kind of thing, where it's things you've learned in your life that you lead you to that, and give you that drive to perfect something or understanding when you get it in your hands or when you're actually doing it and how natural it feels to you…. So I think people are drawn to noise because it's something that's an accessible thing that they can make—you can do that. People who bought a guitar and have some pedals can now sit down and lean their guitar against an amp and they're a noise musician, and then learn how to modulate and adjust an effect and take it from there.

DM: *Metal Machine Music* [Lou Reed, 1975].

GH: That's specifically what I'm referencing. But it's also one of those things that everyone who has ever owned an electric guitar and an amp has heard feedback. And by taking that and using it is something you're either prone to do because of the things you've heard and the things you've done and the way your brain works, or something you want to shut off. So natural ability and natural proclivity to try those things and experiment with those things and continue to push yourself. Find me a five-year-old that hasn't banged pots and pans together or held a seashell up to their ear. That stuff is all part of noise music. It might not be what I

want to listen to on a record, but it's still included there. It's still an unusual and perhaps undesirable sound. But taking that and turning it into something like Z'ev or SPK or Neubauten with metal percussion from banging on pots and pans is something that takes either learning or having that idea: that seed planted somehow. A desire to experiment and try that stuff.

For Greh, anyone can make experimental 'noise,' and in fact, his hypothesis is that *everyone* does *make experimental 'noise'*—or at least everyone who has ever been five-years old in their life has done it. The banal nature and low bar for making it clearly has an impact on the dismissal of this art form. But can anyone make it 'good?' Greh says, 'no,' though he admits that some people have made their first experimental 'noise' performance successfully. Perhaps they were lucky! Another importance nuance to Greh's answer is that people who make 'good' experimental 'noise' have a "natural proclivity" to do so. The young electric guitarist who turns the guitar amplifier loud enough to achieve feedback, for Greh, will either find the feedback unwanted, and will find a way to abate the noise, or they will be fascinated by the entropic phenomena of feedback and will seek to explore and exploit it artistically.

My interview with John Wiese was one of the few interviews that I conducted all in one day. Unlike other experimental 'noise' artists in Los Angeles, John had spent a considerable amount of time touring throughout Europe and North America, and performed solo and in collaboration with many others, including his thrash band, Sissy Spacek. He pointed me toward an interview he did that showcased his displeasure for the term "noise music," and railed against the author that the very mentioning of the term was unnecessary. So for my interview with John, we settled on the term "genreless music" for the course of the interview. This nuance seems to make his work sacrosanct in a certain way—

the art (or genre of art) with no name. Can art that cannot be named also not be defined? (Well, that is an exaggeration: John takes great care in providing titles for his works.) John's answers were everywhere nuanced: a search of the interview document will reveal how often he begins a sentence with: "It depends…." Our exchange below encapsulates the subject of this section: the nature of mistakes in this mode of making art, and who is permitted to make it.

DM: Can anyone make experimental, genreless music?

JW: Yes, definitely.

DM: What sound or technique do you consider cliché?

JW: I don't know.

DM: Are there mistakes in genreless music?

JW: It depends.

DM: How can you tell?

JW: It depends on how opaque their concept is. If there's a work that's presented that seems to also display a criteria for its judgment, you could possibly judge whether or not it's successful or not. Sometimes there is work that has no criteria for judgment.

DM: That's what I'm talking about to some degree. Are there mistakes in work that has no criteria for judgment? That's what I'm getting at. Or if we were talking about noise music, I would ask the question: "Does noise have noise"?

JW: It's very subjective. It would go toward the viewer's experience. So there's no answer.

DM: So you don't have a good answer whether there are mistakes?

JW: It appears you didn't like my answer. [Laughs hard]

DM: No no.

JW: You said it wasn't a good answer.

DM: I didn't say it wasn't a good answer.

JW: I think you did. You said: "You have no good answer." But I did answer.

DM: I thought you said—we can check the recording—I thought you said that you didn't have a good answer, so I was just reiterating that.

JW: Anyway, I'm just joking.

When I asked John if there were mistakes in genreless music, he said, "It depends." Depends on what, exactly? Here, I was surprised that John fell in line with some of the academic composers I interviewed, like Casey Anderson, who believes that an art work or performance can set up the criteria for its own judgment, and then we can decide whether the work or performance succeeded or not. Then John mused that some works have "no criteria for judgment." He then laughed and proclaimed that the judgment was subjective: "So there's no answer," he said. *John was right, I did not like his answer*. His answer to the question of mistakes in genreless music is "It depends;" and then after attempting to set up a system for judging art internally (by its own criteria), he claimed that since the judgment was subjective, the judgment would be nullified. My flawed follow-up question was, "So you don't have a good answer whether there are mistakes?" '*Good*' was the wrong term here. I should have asked more simply, "So you don't have an answer whether there are mistakes?" since John said, "So there's no answer." So John was right, I did not like his answer. The reason is because I wanted to find out John's subjective feelings: his aesthetic ideology. I wanted to know what criteria *he* used to judge genreless music through the prism of how he judged a mistake. Of course judgment depends on a set of criteria: what are John's criteria? That is what I wanted to know. Clearly he was being elusive, but I do not think he was being elusive for the sake of being elusive (if that can be called a mode of being at all); rather I think, like many

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experimental artists, he was trying through his words, his works, and performances, to achieve the goal of reaching something new, and the experience of the new is elusive, almost by definition. The exchange was not hostile or heated (the audio will corroborate my claim), but I *was* embarrassed for rightfully being called out. The word 'good'—one of the most important words in this dissertation—should have been left out in this context, since my interview technique is to *attempt* to be indifferent to the answers I am given (to not judge the *goodness* or *badness* of an answer), and to learn what makes viable, important, or significant experimental 'noise' in the context of what is deemed 'good' to the people who participate in the scene.

Elden Man shared a story with me concerning what was permitted in experimental 'noise' in the context of my question on expectations. He said that if an audience is expecting noise, he might play Beethoven in the middle of his set. When I pushed him on this topic with the question, "Is that noise?" (playing Beethoven in the middle of an experimental 'noise' set) he recounted a story about a time he played noise with Hijokaidan—one of the most important pioneering Japanese noise groups headed by Jojo Hiroshige.

DM: Is that noise?

EM: It is, because it's unwanted from their point of view. They don't want to hear that. And it occurred actually between me and another performer on stage. When I played with Hijokaidan, I started playing some chords on the piano at the very end of the show, and Jojo actually came over to me and put his hands on my hands to tell me to stop playing; which, number one, that's very bad etiquette, because you don't do that to another performer. I don't care what's going on. I would never do that to him. Yet he did it to me. And then a couple of years later he released a CD called *Slap Happy Humphrey*. What it is is him doing noise with a girl singing and playing music over the noise. So I was thinking: "Where did he get that idea from?"

DM: So in that instance, who was playing noise?

EM: We both were, but then toward the end, during a period of lull and quiet, I started playing chords.

DM: Were the chords noise?

EM: No. They were like a major or minor chord.

DM: But how about in the context of…

EM: In the context of providing a contrast that… well you heard some noise, here's some music, just to be different. To him, that was unwanted, so it's noise, it's extraneous sound. In that case, I actually succeeded in pushing the boundaries of what is noise, because music can be noise.

DM: That's where I'm going with this.

EM: And it pissed him off, but it pissed me off that he did that, that he tried to censor me.

DM: Do you think that maybe in that instance, you might have…—this is going to sound weird—do you think you might have *out-noised* him?

EM: No, I don't think so, because from my position, I didn't want to try to out-noise him. I was playing more of a subordinate role throughout the whole set. In a jazz context, you don't want to upstage the star that's soloing.

DM: I see. So there's a political aspect.

EM: Yes, definitely. There is a dynamic relationship.

DM: Was it a politics of 'what is noise,' or was it politics of improvisation, or was it politics of stardom?

EM: No, the first one. It was a politics of 'what is noise', and playing chords is not noise to him, but it was noise because it was extraneous to him [laughs], it was unwanted. That's something that I will always remember.

Elden had transgressed, for Jojo, the limits of (Japanese) noise by introducing historically known sounds—major and minor chords on a piano—into a set intended to be heard as noise. Jojo heard these sounds as unwanted—perhaps as dissonances; perhaps as mistakes—and so he halted them. For Elden, these sounds were perfect for providing contrast to the expectations of the audience (or

at least Jojo), who would have been accustomed to expect noise. In this case,

Elden clung to one of the definitions of 'noise' as unwanted sound (though

certainly there are other definitions: for example, 'noise' as 'random sound'

would have made the choice for chords on a piano less appealing). The context

is, *Who is permitted to make noise?* and in this case, Jojo served as judge and

struck down Elden's chordal contribution. The decision was political and

reinforced the power of the leader, Jojo, at the expense of an unforgettable story

that left Elden embittered. Thus was Elden's story about the time he was

forbidden to play. The exchange below represents what he feels about who is

permitted to make experimental 'noise' and on the nature of mistakes.

> DM: Can anyone make noise music?

> EM: Sure, why not. I think anyone can. I've seen it happen many times.

> DM: Can anyone make 'good' noise music?

> EM: No. Not anyone can make good noise music. Everyone can cook, but not everyone can cook good food that's good for eating. Anyone can drive, but there are a lot of bad drivers out there. I saw this one noise artist—it would be obvious who I'm talking about so I'm not going to say if they were a male or a female—and they came from a pretty recognizable town. When this person came, everybody was fawning over them. They are very much respected, but when they had their performance, they were trying something new that just totally did not work. The people I talked to said: "This wasn't that great. They've been better before." And… I forgot what my point was now. It's just that not everyone can do everything well all the time. It could be bad sometimes. Even the great artists have bad spells sometimes.

> DM: What made it bad?

> EM: They were trying something with vocals that didn't work, and it wasn't coordinating with the keyboard, and it was just really flat and lifeless. It's hard to explain. As soon as it was happening, you could feel from the audience a disappointment, like a big let down. It was weird, it was really strange. But I guess I've encountered that before, like when I was telling you about Soviet France.

> DM: Are there mistakes in noise music?

EM: I guess you can say there are or there could be. It's just like any kind of performance. I would say 'yes' if I talked to the performer and they actually admit that they were disappointed or pissed off about some kind of glitch or mistake or malfunction. But a lot of audience members don't know. It's like in conventional music, if you make a mistake you don't dwell on it, you just go to the next measure as if nothing happened, like the mistake never occurred. In terms of improvisation, there's a typical rule that says that if you make a mistake, just repeat it over again, repeat it a couple of times, and it's not a mistake anymore, it's like you meant to do that.

DM: Can malfunctions be desirable?

EM: Yes, definitely; because it will force you to improvise…; you have to leave your comfort zone and make do with what happens. It has happened to me before, it has happened many times.

For Elden, anyone can make experimental 'noise,' but not everyone can make 'good' experimental 'noise.' He recounted a touring performer who had garnered high expectations and then fell flat during their performance. At least part of the flatness came from malfunctioning equipment: the performer was intoning but no resultant sound was heard, so many audience members left dissatisfied. When I asked Elden about the nature of mistakes in experimental 'noise,' he said that mistakes were determined by the success of the intentions of the performer. However, when I asked if malfunctions could be desirable (an unscripted follow-up question), he said "Yes, definitely; because it will force you to improvise." In this context, malfunctions—perhaps read as technological mistakes—are the stimulus of quick-thinking that can lead to new and interesting sonic results. Evidence of quick-thinking imparts an element of risk, and creating a successful performance at the risk of failure imparts the sensation of victory and triumph. So mistakes can lead to a dispassionate performance, or they can foment a powerful one.

Eddie Giles came to noise from the punk and industrial years of the early 1980s in New York. Unlike other people I interviewed, Eddie gravitated toward the spectacle of the rockstar figure exemplified by Alan Vega, the frontman from Suicide, as his performative model. Eddie himself would front his own power electronics band, the Final Solution, in the early 1990s. The making of their only record involved three people making sounds on a Roland SH-101 synthesizer and Eddie's misanthropic caterwauls. None of the three band members had formal training in music nor did they have an understanding of traditional Western harmony; but such training may not have been useful in the making of the noisy record. An alarming set of circumstances involving drugs and violence led Eddie to move from New York to Los Angeles where he cleaned up and began making experimental 'noise' in different projects. Although Eddie is an autodidact of sorts, who is conversant in a variety of philosophical subjects, he never had the patience to learn the literate tradition of Western music. Nevertheless, he makes sound.

DM: Can anyone make noise?

EG: Yeah, if they attempt to, sure. As people go on they kind of shrug off their earlier work. They find their knack; their pitch. It usually happens after two or three releases. I usually notice that people's first few releases are…, they're interesting and they're good: they're good attempts. But as they go on they tend to leave that sound behind and find their true sound. It might take a few years or a few releases. But there are not very many artists I know that from the beginning all the way on through their career have they stood with their first, initial sounds. They've moved on through their gear or the recording process got better.

DM: So can anyone make noise music?

EG: Sure. I think so.

DM: Can anyone make 'good' noise music?

EG: Not everyone. It also goes for what people's tastes are. A lot of people love Half Japanese and give them a great deal of credit. I think

their stuff is ok, but I can't listen to it all the time. I can't listen to Daniel Johnston. I just think that it's ok for what it is, but I would much prefer to listen to other things. I understand it and I accept it, but I won't be listening to it too often. It's taste. It's what you're in the mood for.

DM: Are there mistakes in noise music?

EG: Yeah. I think that if people are playing around with their gear too much, and they have a really good thing going on—like a really good rhythm, or a really good build-up—they can kill it by turning one simple knob; unless that's what they're trying to achieve. It's like playing a sour note. Things are really great and then you decide to go a completely different direction and it just kills it. Sometimes it's perfect if you know what you're doing.

DM: Are there sour notes in noise music?

EG: Yeah. There are some mistakes, but they're more like technical glitches, where an artist might think he's turning something on and he misses his pedal and turns something else on, and it will drop out. And you can tell that he's trying to go back to that sound, and he thinks: "Oh, fuck." He fucked up. He'll try to get back into that momentum. Or a plug will come out. Everything is going well and then somehow he does something really erratic and a plug comes out and blows everything, and he thinks, "Oh, fuck," and then he plugs it back in but it kills the momentum.
So there are mistakes, but they're more like technical mistakes. As far as making sonic mistakes, I think maybe bad blending, like trying to blend certain instrumental sounds, like if things are really good in their pure sense, and then trying to have a guitar sound.

For Eddie, anyone can make experimental 'noise,' however, there does seem to be a learning curve. He believes that the first recordings of a new artist are usually not their best, and that it takes some experience and experimentation to carve of their own niche. They learn something about the capabilities of the equipment they're working with and how best to exploit them for their purposes. Concerning mistakes, Eddie believes that if someone "is playing around with their gear too much" that it might disrupt a favorable sound or a favorable juxtaposition of sonic events. In other words, for Eddie a mistake may arise when the artist loses control of the resultant sound. He then offers up the idea of a

"sour note," which is a way of reframing my question concerning mistakes, so I asked him about the nature of sour notes he referred to as mistakes. Mistakes include unintentional equipment malfunctions, losing control, other human errors, and "bad blending," referring to the infelicitous juxtaposition of sounds: Eddie sites the combination of guitar with certain sounds as "bad blending."

Adam Cahan is one of the listeners I interviewed who does not himself make experimental 'noise.' Nevertheless, Adam listens to many kinds of musics, including bebop, hip hop, and rap, and he is also keen to make his own recordings, mostly for his private use and to share with a few friends. I decided to interview him because I had seen him at various experimental venues, and I believe that he had a keen ear for experimental practices. When I asked him about the nature of mistakes in experimental 'noise,' we had the following exchange.

DM: Are there mistakes in noise music?

AC: Yes.

DM: How do you know when you're listening to them?

AC: You might not.

DM: What?

AC: You might not know that there are mistakes. In general when I think I recognize a musical mistake, it's because I feel like I can tell that the performer was…; I feel like I have a sense of the performer's intent. I can tell when they goofed, when they slipped, when they didn't do that, and so in that sense a mistake is really only a mistake if the person playing the music feels like they've made a mistake, and my ability to recognize that mistake comes from that feeling that I have a sense of what the performer is trying to do. With noise music—because there is less of a binary…, or not binary, but discreet series of choices—there's no melodic line, there aren't always melodic lines happening where you can hear that there is something very specific that's suppose to happen next in the series, there's always more choices open. So I imagine that maybe mistakes in noise music would be more like a reaction that didn't happen, like a slow fizzle, or unhoped for potentials which were not reached,

because when I think of noise music I think of music that doesn't have as many rules and structures, so there aren't as many things to be broken. There aren't as many expectations.

For Adam, a mistake seems to be a mistake in character; a wince of personal disapproval for the consequence of an unintended action. In other words, a mistake is, in a sense, *visual*. One *sees* the mistake on the face of the performer, and connects the visual evidence with a resultant sound and recognizes the mistake. The mistake itself, however, does not necessarily have to be *heard*, or if it is heard, it may be heard in a context that perhaps should not have occurred. An intense visual cue, for example, that occurs with no intense sonic result, but instead "fizzles," may be read as a mistake because the intense visual cue did not reach its sonic potential. When I asked Adam if anyone could make experimental 'noise,' he initially gave a terse answer: "yes." However, toward the end of our interview, I asked Adam if he thought there was a correlation between noise and freedom. He took the question in a political direction, citing the famous television debate between Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault.

> AC: There was some sentence where Chomsky…, where they were arguing about good society or something. Chomsky talks about justice, and that we have to make a stab at justice, and Foucault says that the things that we don't like, the evil things, what those come from are inseparable from our very ideas of morality and justice, and so in order to move forward we have to leave those ideas of morality and justice behind, and come up with different ideas. And I think about that with noise. And in a certain fantasy, like the communist future, everyone plays noise music. Somehow it's kind of communist too in that sense, because there's that total destruction and separation from the newest thing and the flatness.
>
> DM: The flattening of skills, the flattening of aesthetic.
>
> AC: Yeah, the flattening of skills, the flattening of aesthetics. Which is really more of an equalization in terms of opportunity. Anyone can play noise music, like that should be the official music of the communists, would be noise music, because you can do it with anything. Really, I think, proper noise music, anything electronic that you can get sound out of…, from what I know. By now I'm sure there are more conventions and

cultural expectations, which is what the electronic stuff is: it's just an expectation; a cultural kind of thing.

Adam connects the freedom found in experimental 'noise' performance as a flattening and equalizing not only of aesthetics, but of society in general. He mused that experimental 'noise' should be the favored art form for communists, precisely because it required no special skill, or perhaps no skill at all. And since anyone can do it, and none can be said to be better than another, then, in a sense, equality will have been achieved. However, Adam already begins to point toward a possible flaw in the argument through the "conventions of cultural expectations" where techniques are developed and a rationalization, training, and disciplining of the body (in the Foucauldian sense).

Joseph Hammer's long cyclical tape loops incorporates amalgamations of sounds, often from pop songs from various genres and generations to classical music recordings and film music. In other words, his source material generally consists of music using traditional Western harmony, but the way he records, erases, and arranges these materials on his tape loop plays on memory in many ways. The result is an overwhelming sense of sonic confusion that becomes nearly impossible to follow and predict, despite using materials that lend themselves to a certain amount of predictability (like the treatment of harmony leading to traditional cadential figures). In other words, he makes noise with traditional music. Such a technique would seemingly put Joseph's methods at the nexus of Steve Reich's early tape pieces and William Burroughs' cut-up technique applied to speech on magnetic tape. In a sense, Joseph's technique is a real-time performance of the cut-up technique. The performative aspect may lead to unintended actions, and such actions may constitute a mistake.

DM: Are there mistakes in noise music?

JH: Only the noise musician, or noisician, will know for sure.

DM: Do you make mistakes?

JH: Yeah…, and they are very important parts of my performance. But they can also truly be mistakes, like something that comes in too loud and becomes a distraction. So yeah, I think there can be mistakes in noise music, but it's in the mind of the person who is making the music. Otherwise, from the audience perspective, it could be entirely a mistake. I don't know how many times I've heard people say: "Is this a sound check or the performance?"

DM: Can you tell when other people make a mistake?

JH: Yeah, I think so.

DM: Does noise have noise?
     [Perhaps I should have asked: *Does distraction have distraction*?]

JH: It's almost like music is the noise. If you would imagine yourself to be someone who is a noise purist, they would hate music. And if you went somewhere and somebody made music you would react like [makes a grimace]; that [traditional] response to noise.

DM: Yeah.

JH: You know who is like that is Johannes Bergmark. He's on a crusade to eliminate music from public space, because it's noise pollution. He's brilliant. I agree with him entirely. I'm traumatized by music. Not really, because I love music. But I love being traumatized [laughs heartily].

DM: I guess what I actually mean by that question is: If there are mistakes in noise music, it's noise already. So does noise have noise? In a sense, does unwanted sound have unwanted sound? I'm playing with this idea.

JH: For me it's really technical. For me it's philosophical in the sense that the mistake is only technical, because I'm interested in the mistakes more than anything. I want errors to happen. I just don't want them to be distracting errors.

DM: That's a fun contradiction too, because a lot of what you're trying to do is a distraction.

JH: It's really the dragon chasing the tail, or eating its tail, or whatever it is. I know there are other people who have a really specific idea of what they're trying to pull off, and it just didn't go right at all. They will tell you that things didn't go right, and they made this mistake and that mistake.

I'd say 99.99% of the people will say it was one of the most insanely great performances. And it's the same with me: I've done performances where a big mistake happened—my tape recorder actually stopped working—so during the performance I wasn't making a sound. People came up to me and said it was one of the best performances they'd ever seen.

"I'm contradicting myself, as usual" Joseph heartily quipped before the question on mistakes. Despite the contradiction he made when he claimed first that only the noisician will know if a mistake had occurred, and then said that he believed that he could tell if another noisician made a mistake, Joseph made the important insight that mistakes were in fact an important element of his practice. He juxtaposed these functional mistakes with *true mistakes* that he referred to as *distractions*, at least for him. He then hypothesized that for the audience the entire performance may be a mistake! Joseph was very lighthearted about these questions and the answers he gave, and found his own contradictions fascinating and illuminating to himself. Mistakes could be used as generative material to create new sounds and sonic juxtapositions. But as distraction, a mistake takes away from the artist's intention. And yet, distraction is also an important element in Joseph's work. In an early part of our interview, Joseph said: "That's actually a pretty important factor in my music: is this idea that there's a lot of distraction and distracting—confusion: overwhelming stimulus—to the point where you lose a certain amount of the ability to… you're forced to go into automatic mode." Such contradiction would also constitute a felicitous contradiction for Joseph, who reveled in the exploration of his practice with me. And yet, the meaning of the term 'distraction' is clearly functioning differently. The kinds of distractions Joseph likes are the kinds that transport listeners to a sonically induced state of hypnosis. The kinds of distractions he does not like have to do with the loss of

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control over the performance, like suddenly loud sounds that seem to have no

context for being suddenly loud. In a sense, an important part of Joseph's

practice is controlling errors, and using them to generate new modes of sonic

hypnosis by synthesizing familiar and unfamiliar sonic material into very

unfamiliar soundscapes; soundscapes that reappropriate music as if through a

grinder, transforming the sounds into a form that many so-called "noise purists"

(GX Jupitter-Larsen, for example) can appreciate. I then asked Joseph if anyone

could make experimental 'noise.'

> DM: Can anyone make noise music?

> JH: Yeah, why not?

> DM: I'm just asking the question.

> JH: Sure, anyone can make noise music. Anyone who wants to.

> DM: Can anyone make 'good' noise music?

> JH: Yeah, I think so. I couldn't imagine why anyone couldn't make good noise music. Whether they like to or not, frankly. That's what I think is great. You may not even have the slightest clue on how to make good noise music and make great noise music. It may actually be a technique. Frankly, there's that Zen-of-the-first-take kind of thing, where in a way there's these cosmic bottlenecks of creative energy. And for people who have never done anything creative, the first time they do it, it just comes shooting out, and it forms itself into ways that I perceive as being tasteful—well-shaped, easy-flowing or something like that: natural.
> As I used to say to some people back in the day, because I've been doing painting conservation for a long time. And certainly when I was younger I remember somebody actually saying to me: "My three-year-old kid could do something like that." And I said: "Really? I would really like to see your child's work!" [laughs heartily] "Because your child must be very talented." Of course then the guy looked at me like I was out of my fucking mind, ready to take a swing thinking: "You smart-ass jerk!"

Joseph's unequivocal answer that anyone could do experimental 'noise' nearly

fetishizes the new with the uninitiated: a person's first creative act. His story

about a talented three-year-old kid who could allegedly make good art work was

thrilling to Joseph, because new art—art from a fresh perspective—is thrilling to him.

Christiaan Cruz introduced me to the world of experimental sound in the late 1990s. We also had mutual friends who were part of the art world. I remembered one particularly powerful performance during that time with Christiaan and Rob Pash at an art gallery in the artist district in Downtown Los Angeles: Rob had fastened a number of mini cassette tape recorders to a piece of wood that was strapped around his body and randomly played and stopped the tapes. The tapes were fed to Christiaan's 8-track studio cassette recorder for further manipulation with guitar pedals and other devices. Christiaan, Rob, and I were all in the high school marching band—we were musically literate amateurs, but we all turned to experimentalism in our artistic pursuits. These kinds of experimental performances were like a restart in our aesthetic interests; and for us, it was a daring new way. Not everyone could read music; not everyone could achieve proficiency at the saxophone or the trumpet. We were now approaching the non-literate world of music making and listening. If anyone could do it, could we?

DM: Can anyone make noise music?

CC: Yeah [laughs].

DM: Can anyone make 'good' noise music?

CC: Yeah, because it's up to the listener. So there's a symphony going on the freeway right now, and nobody is making it, it's just happening on its own: it's brilliant.

DM: But a listener can "make it," in a sense [right?].

CC: Yeah, the listener makes it.

For Christian, making 'good' experimental noise is contingent on and the responsibility of the listener. The listener decides what sonic experiences are worth appreciation, and if one chooses to derive pleasure from listening to the freeway as a symphonic juxtaposition of sounds, one might hear it as "brilliant"— if one chooses to. A focused performance on the other hand may pit the listener and the performer at odds in a politically charged space; one with risk and error. Thus I asked the question concerning mistakes in experimental 'noise.'

> DM: Are there mistakes in noise music?

> CC: Yeah. Like we were talking: turning off your system sounds, the little volume "bing" on the Macs and PCs. What else do people do? You can tell. The performers and the audience will give each other the same look in those "You fucked up" moments. When you touch your contact mic when all the sound drops out. I see people do that all the time. The sound will drop out all of a sudden because you lose control of your feedback and there's no more sound, and then all of sudden you accidently touch the contact mic, and you can see it. It's bad. I mean, it's not bad, you can just tell that the performer didn't mean to do that, because you get all nervous because you lost control of the feedback and the feedback control was the most important thing in your set, because that's what you're doing, you're controlling the sound. It drops out and then you get nervous and touch the contact mic accidentally when you didn't want people to hear that.

Christiaan believes that mistakes are registered in the interaction between performer and audience member when the performer makes an unintended action or has an unintended sonic result, and the audience member *sees* the reaction of the performer making the unintended action or acknowledging the unintended result. The mutual recognition is the most obvious mistake. Other mistakes include the goofy sounds a computer makes for raising or lowering the volume (not all computers have that feature, but Apple computers are known for that sound). Other mistakes are explicated as losses of control.

As an experimental artist who studied fine art in Boston and attended Alfred University for graduate school, there is no surprise that Weronika Zaluska

would come across experimental music and performance, since she herself in an experimental artist. Though she is not a musician and has not worked in experimental music, we crossed paths many times at the wulf. and at other venues that specialize in experimental 'noise,' like Dem Passwords and (the) Handbag Factory. I asked her if anyone could make experimental 'noise.'

> DM: Can anyone make noise music?
>
> WZ: I don't know. I think they can. I can make music, but I just don't because I don't really feel like I'm a musician, and I don't feel the need to do it. I think anyone can, but I don't think they will. It takes a specific kind of person to feel that there's a reason for them to make this kind of music.

For Weronika, anyone can make experimental 'noise,' but it takes a particular kind of person to actually decide to do it.

Scott Cazan is as confortable reading philosophy and critical theory as he is reading the *Computer Music Tutorial*, a tome the size of a phone book with well over one thousand pages, by Curtis Roads, professor at University of California, Santa Barbara where Scott attended. With his academic pedigree, I asked him if anyone could make experimental 'noise.'

> DM: Can anyone make noise music?
>
> SC: Sure.
>
> DM: Can anyone make experimental music?
>
> SC: Yes.
>
> DM: Can anyone make 'good' experimental music?
>
> SC: No. We talked about good and bad. I contradicted myself. I'll put it this way: I'll say yes: anybody can make good experimental music. But who it's *good to* is dependent. Like I said before: am I going to be wanting to engage with it? That's the hard part, is making something that someone is going to want to engage with, and if you make good noise music or experimental music…, if you make good music that your family enjoys, then that's good. If you make good experimental music that I

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have no interest in, that's also fine. I don't think it matters, but I'll certainly say whether I like it or not.

DM: Really? You don't think it matters?

SC: I don't know. I don't think it does because that's part of it. Like I said: there's a lot of stuff that I have in there that I do that I like personally, but I have no interest in sharing, because I don't think it really has any appeal beyond me. So me sitting in front of a bunch of people and showing it to them—a bunch of people that don't care—I have no interest in doing that. But it doesn't mean that it's bad. I think that's kind of part of it. It's that stupid thing when you say: "I don't make music for the audience, I make it for me" [laughs]. I think that's bullshit, but I don't think that has to do with good or bad necessarily. I guess it's the terminology that's the problem. It's more about music that provokes thought versus music that doesn't, and it's going to be different for different people.

For Scott, anyone can make experimental music. He also claims that anyone can make 'good' experimental music, but then says that who the music will be good *for* is dependent on the listener, and he makes clear that when he is listening to experimental music, he is the arbitrator who will decide (for himself) what constitutes a 'good' experience. "If you make good experimental music that I have no interest in, that's also fine. I don't think it matters, but I'll certainly say whether I like it or not." Ultimately, anyone *can* make 'good' experimental music for Scott, but 'good' is then defined by the music's ability to "provoke thought" in him. What is also revealing in Scott's answer is that he implicitly refers to a community of listeners. "It's that stupid thing when you say: 'I don't make music for the audience, I make it for me.' I think that's bullshit…." In other words, Scott attends performances of a certain kind, and there must be certain expectations that he holds to judge an experimental music performance. Stanley Fish refers to this phenomenon as an "interpretive community," a community of people with like-minded ideas that can make judgments within the community. For Scott, the judgment of 'good experimental music' must have as its central criterion the

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provocation and induction of thought. In other words, the question "Can anyone

make 'good' noise music?" is congruent with the question "Can anyone provoke

thought through experimental music?" I then asked Scott about the nature of

mistakes in experimental music.

> DM: Are there mistakes in experimental music?
>
> SC: Good question. I think about that a lot. Yes and no. Not in the traditional sense. The mistake is thinking that there are mistakes. I think that's the biggest mistake you can make. For instance, if you make a mistake—this is the old improvising thing—if you make a mistake do it again: problem solved. In experimental music mistakes are never an issue unless you make them an issue, and the only mistake you can make is treating it like a mistake. Toshi Nakamura said that, basically. Someone asked him: "Do you ever worry about things suddenly being too loud?" This was after he performed, and he did a lot of quiet stuff, and every once in a while something would get really loud and explode, and then turn off. His answer was basically: "No, I don't worry about that. Sometimes things get loud." I thought that was the right answer. Sometimes you hit that button and it makes things really loud, and you think: "Ok, that's where it is now." Because you're guiding the system so much as it's guiding you in a way. So the answer is, no, unless you treat mistakes as mistakes, then you're making a mistake. There are no audible mistakes, I think. I don't think there are any sorts of sonic mistakes that you can make.

Scott makes clear that "there are no audible" mistakes; that mistakes are, in a

sense, mistakes in character. A visible mistake in the performer distracts more

from the sonic performance than sudden extreme shifts in sound. The

experimental music performers, for Scott, will be accepting of the sonic outcome

of various actions that could be used to alter the trajectory of the sound, and will

adjust accordingly. The accepting performer is the who one will best retain

control of the sonic performance because unintended sonic consequences are

part of most systems used to generate and alter sound, whether they derive from

computer algorithms and code, analog synthesis and guitar pedals, or even

modes of noise-making performance that do not rely on electronics. In a practice

that uses random elements to induce new sonic outcomes, even spikes and drops

in volume—the most egregiously understood error—can be incorporated and accepted as a valid aspect of experimental music listening. Unlike most people I interviewed, Scott positions himself in a space that does not have artistically audible mistakes. And yet, a mistake, for him, is a mistake in (performance) character marked by visible dissatisfaction and the feeling that the performer has lost control.

Narin Dickerson is not an experimental 'noise' performer but he has enthusiastically attended experimental music and noise performances for years. In another part of our interview I asked if he had ever tried to make experimental music in the privacy of his own home. His answer was in the affirmative, but he cautioned that his experiments were nothing he would care to share with others. I asked him if anyone could make experimental 'noise.'

> DM: Can anyone make noise music?
>
> ND: Yeah. I don't think there's any kind of barrier to entry. Kids can make noise music, old people can make noise music. Large groups of people can make good noise music.
>
> DM: Can anyone make 'good' noise music?
>
> ND: I think so. But they'd have to work at it. I don't think anyone can just automatically make good noise music. That's not something that's instantaneous or automatic. But I don't know. I'm defining "good noise music" as noise music that I like. I don't think I can make an assessment of "what is good noise music" in some sort of objective category of good or bad. I dislike criticism that does that.

According to Narin anyone can make experimental 'noise,' but to do it well requires *work* ("But they'd have to work at it"). He then backpedaled and personalized the answer. To summarize, for Narin, *good* 'noise' requires work if it is to impress him; other's, he admits, may have different (subjective) criteria. I presume that *working at making 'good' experimental 'noise'* includes some

familiarization of the common instruments and practices, and time to develop as an artist, since, as Narin says, "good noise music" is "not something instantaneous and automatic." When I asked Narin about the nature of mistakes in experimental 'noise,' we had the following exchange.

> DM: Are there mistakes in noise music?

> ND: Yeah.

> DM: Can you tell when someone is making a mistake?

> ND: Sometimes; sometimes not. Sometimes the mistakes become part of the music. Sometimes there are technical errors where I think it can be identified as a mistake or an accident. It's not necessarily that it's going to make something worse than what it would have been without it. But you can sometimes detect an accident, where someone clearly meant to push one thing, or the machine does not react in the way that the person expects, and you can see the reaction on their face that they're not happy with what just happened. Yeah, I think mistakes happen.

Narin claims that mistakes can be detected by carefully observing the performer, particularly for infelicitous facial cues and other corporeal cues (a missed push of a button, for example). Other kinds of mistakes that are quickly appropriated into the performance are then generative accidents (or generative errors) and may not be considered mistakes at all.

Michael Winter's approach to making experimental sound is more formal, in a sense. He is keenly aware of the relationships between sonic events and their juxtapositions; his process involves creating computer programs to achieve his goals. When I asked him if anyone could make experimental 'noise,' he said unequivocally "yes." He also answered in the affirmative whether anyone could make 'good' experimental 'noise,' but then provided the following caveat.

> MW: Another caveat to the last question: I don't really believe in good or bad. I believe in the purity of intention. There's only personal metrics on good or bad. A person either likes or dislikes it. There's nothing that universally makes it good or bad.

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DM: What do you mean by "purity of intention"?

MW: For example, my metric is that part of making music is about new experiences, and I remain faithful to it, I'd like to think. But I think, for example—not that this happens, but—making any kind of music for monetary gain—which has nothing to do with learning or any of that—is not a metric: it's a non-metric. That's not pure. So in my opinion that makes a music good or bad. But that's an opinion.

For Michael, anyone can make experimental 'noise' so long as they have *pure intentions*. Pure intentions in making experimental 'noise' will need to constitute new experiences, and these new experiences, for Michael, constitute a form of learning. Experimental works that do not teach the listener—or that do not at least aspire to teach the listener—show evidence of impure intentions. Experimental works created and performed with monetary gain or prospects for monetary gain rank as 'bad' expressions of experimental work. He is very clear, however, that these metrics for judging such works are his personal aesthetics. I then asked Michael about the nature of mistakes in experimental music.

DM: Are there mistakes in noise music? I ask this question in the spirit that a lot of it is improvised, and you're music is *not* so improvised.

MW: I think there are mistakes. I don't think a mistake is necessarily a bad thing though. It may be an introduction of noise into the system that actually can benefit the situation. It might actually be the thing that leads to a novel experience: and I've had that happen before. I have this piece, it's called *Line and Cypher*. I was really excited about the idea, but frankly, it didn't work on the level I was hoping it would. It was Scott Cazan, he was playing these chimes, and he was supposed to be hitting the soft part of the mallet on the chimes and tremoloing, and then all of a sudden, just once, he hit the wood part of the mallet. It was the only time in the whole piece, but that was like this incredible experience for me. I thought: "Woah! How dissonant was that?" That was really a perceptual shift. There's another thing I've always thought about in music. In the auditory scene—it's really easy to quickly shift [visual] scenes, or flip a picture or turn your head, and you're kind of out of the other scene—but in noise and in sound we have reverb and the decay of the room, and it's really near impossible to have an immediate shift of sonic scenery, not like a picture. In pictures it seems more instantaneous. Of course, there are also delays, for example if you see a dot and you might have a residue of

that dot once you move your eyes. But generally it seems more instantaneous in the visual domain. We're a bit more sensitive in the auditory domain. And there are all these factors, like decay and things like that. But that was one of the first times when I thought, "Woah!" It totally changed the auditory scene. And that was a mistake. So that led me to write another piece for Scott which has not been performed called *Slip and Stitch*. It's from the ideas that he fucked up and now I'm stitching it into this new piece. And really all it is, it starts out with a tremolo on the soft part of the mallet, and then slowly he starts hitting the hard part of the mallet, and then hits more and more and then less and less.

DM: What would be the new mistake?

MW: We'll see. Maybe I should get Scott to play that piece.

DM: The question I ask next is, if there *are* mistakes in noise music, then I like to ask the question: Does noise have noise?

MW: Well that's exactly what I just said. I think it's essential. Noise is the thing that leads us to something new. It's the same in evolution. Look at biology. You have two people, they mate, but what makes the thing new is the mutations, or the combination of the fact that it's fifty percent of each other's genes, but maybe the real power there is the fact that genes are randomly changing. So I think it's fundamental. Everything that I've been saying about new experience relies on noise in the system, on the introduction of new information, and there's no way you can evolve that system at the speed at which we do simply by rearranging things.

Noise introduces novel material to a system that did not already have it, and the novel material can create a drastic or dramatic change in the performance. What is interesting to me about Michael's account is his interpretation of a mistake in the performance of his piece, *Line and Cypher*. A mistake occurred, thus introducing a foreign sonic element: a noise element, as unwanted or unintended event: the accidental use of the hard part of the mallet, instead of the soft part of the mallet, as the score called for. Michael could have chosen to find the noise element detrimental to the execution of the piece by Scott Cazan, but instead he chose to interpret the event as an exciting new event; a salient event in the performance that, in a sense, brought clarity to the listening experience as a *perceptual shift*. "It might actually be the thing that leads to a novel experience."

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Using randomness, entropy, or noise to induce clarity is called *stochastic resonance*, sometimes referred to as "noise benefit." Michael was explicit on that account: "I don't think a mistake is necessarily a bad thing though. It may be an introduction of noise into the system that actually can benefit the situation." He then followed up with a new composition that included the new material in a piece called *Slip and Stitch*. The mistake from Scott's performance of *Line and Cypher* thus led first to a heightened performance of *Line and Cypher*, and secondly to the genesis of *Slip and Stitch*. "Noise is the thing that leads us to something new. It's the same in evolution." *Slip and Stitch* evolved from the mistake—as unintended noise in the system—from *Line and Cypher*.

GX Jupitter-Larsen's art is informed by the origins of punk sentimentality, theatre (especially professional wrestling), and literature. When I asked GX about his interest in professional wrestling, he said: "The only thing that even comes close to a 1960s local pro wrestling event is late 70s punk rock, where the audience was screaming at the band and throwing stuff, and there was all this noise and excitement. To me they were very similar." The nexus between regional professional wresting events and early punk in the 1970s was a way for GX to bring together theatrical performance art and an aesthetics of musical ineptitude. A person who was versed in the historical methods of playing an instrument was detrimental to the sonic aims of GX and his theatre troupe as band, the Haters.

> DM: I remember you telling me about that before, that when you started putting together bands, you were also looking for people who *couldn't* play their instruments.
>
> GX: Oh, absolutely! If you knew how to play an instrument, that's it. There's no way you're getting in the band unless I really like you. So if I liked you and you knew how to play, you could still get in the band, but you couldn't play the instrument you knew how to play. So I had a

guitarist once and I put him on drums. You know, that kind of stuff. That whole kind of silliness didn't last too long, because actually I really got very interested in performance art. I really preferred the more theatrical nature of the stage performance as opposed to just going up there and playing music. At the same time, the project was always disguised like a band, but it's much easier to get shows, to get gigs, if people thought you were going to play music. You can do almost anything on stage, but they had to at least *think* that you were supposed to be a band. So the whole Haters motif was just done as a way to sneak onto stage, because there were no venues for the kind of performance art that I wanted to do.

The passage above speaks to the permissions concerning who can perform with GX and the Haters, and also what kind of performance is permitted to take a particular kind of stage. Since more conventional theatre stages were out of the question, and music venues were readily available, GX used punk venues in the early 1980s to stage his performances with the Haters. I then asked GX who is permitted to make noise.

DM: Can anyone make noise?

GX: Yes, absolutely any can.

DM: Can anyone make 'good' noise?

GX: Well, apparently not. I used to always think that anyone with the right intent could, and actually I think that's still true. Maybe not everyone has the right intent. But I think if you're really sincere and if you really feel like this is something that you absolutely have to do, and the techniques or the aesthetics of the mechanical sounds really speak to you on a genuine level somewhere, then yes, you will actually make not just good noise but *great noise*. I think it has to do with sincerity. Do you really mean it? Or are you just posing?—are you going through the motion for whatever motivation you might have for doing so? But anyone who I felt was sincere about it, if they didn't do it right away they certainly quickly evolved into something that was really breathtaking.

DM: Can an insincere performer satisfy you?

GX: It hasn't happened yet.

DM: You have mentioned once that you accept being misinterpreted.

GX: Yes.

DM: Could you satisfyingly misinterpret an insincere performer.

[GX laughed heartily. I asked a good question and he recognized it with biting humour, however GX continued.]

GX: You mean, can I be fooled by insincerity? NEVER! That has never happened and it never will! I can spot insincerity a fucking mile away. Unless it deals with my love life, and then all bets are off, at least in the past. Luckily I'm happily married and we have a very good understanding and that's just beautiful. But on stage I can pick them out. I can smell them. I've had very complicated relationships with a lot of artists, many of whom I quickly lose all respect for, and it's because of the weird little games they play and it's because of their insincerity to their own message and their own mediums. I don't think you have to pay a lot of attention. I think it becomes very painfully obvious when someone doesn't really mean it. It really comes through, especially when you meet them. Maybe not necessarily from a record or a CD, but on stage, or if you meet them face-to-face, I think insincerity colors everything, and I think you can spot that color if you're sincere yourself. If you're insincere to yourself, then yes, I'm sure you can be fooled by someone else's insincerity. And you can fool yourself if you don't want to believe the person's insincerity, but I think it's a pretty bright color. It's a pretty glaring and annoying color, at least to you.

In the passage above GX concludes that anyone make experimental 'noise,' but to make 'good' experimental 'noise' one must have the right intentions and be sincere in their endeavor. In other words, experimental 'noise' artists create authentic works and performances when they themselves are authentic and sincere. However, in another part of our interview GX recalled a story in the mid-1980s when one of his performances induced a couple in the audience to waltz on the floor.

DM: How did the waltzing thing make you feel?

GX: I thought it was hysterically funny. I knew that this couple was trying to be ironic, but this is how they responded to it. The couple obviously saw no cultural references what-so-ever, and they felt that they had to project a cultural reference onto the performance. But that's a very valid reaction. There are no invalid reactions. To a large degree I welcome misinterpretation, of what it is I do. It annoys me, but at the same time I welcome it because it gives me a better understanding of what it is I actually meant to begin with. It's like calibration. You need something neutral in order to measure the element in question.

DM: A lot of time in calibration you use a noise generator.

GX: Well yes you do, don't you? And in this case I was using dancing. But I mean calibration in anything, not just in sound, but there are all kinds of physical calibration that's done by rulers or some kind of measuring device. I compare people's misinterpretation to my original intent, and it gives me a much deeper understanding of my own aesthetic, my own agenda, my own means of logic—how faulty logic usually is [laughs]. But it helps me become a better communicator to myself as well as to others.

DM: Is your intent important?

GX: It is to me, for myself.

GX claims that he welcomes misinterpretation, even if he sometimes finds himself annoyed by its form. He concedes that waltzing to one of his performances is a valid reaction, but also blasts it as a projection of traditional cultural values onto a non-traditional performance. But he then explained that he learned something from the cultural dissonance between the two performances—experimental 'noise' and waltzing—that helped clarify his own intentions. This is an example of stochastic resonance, a process that uses noise to clarify a system. In this case, the waltz was the noise. The connection I am making here is that for GX, 'good' experimental 'noise' is made by artists with the correct (authentic) intentions. Now, if misinterpretation is welcome, what happens when GX misinterprets an experimental 'noise' performance? Thus my follow-up question: "Could you satisfyingly misinterpret an insincere performer?" GX understood immediately the contradiction and laughed during our interview, exclaiming, "You mean, can I be fooled by insincerity? NEVER! That has never happened and it never will!" But the exchange was ambiguous: GX seemed both sarcastic and sincere in his conviction that he could sniff out insincere artists. But such ability would be little more than a belief that could not be substantiated: a

metaphysical trap. Onto the nature of mistakes: could someone who had sincere

intentions to make 'good noise' make a mistake?

> DM: Are there mistakes in noise?
>
> GX: [Proceeding carefully] Well yes. The mistake is thinking that you should be doing the same thing that your neighbor is doing—I mean that metaphorically. If you see someone using a particular set up of pedals…. I see kids going up on stage and taking snap shots of a person's set up. And if you're doing that it should be so you know what *not* to do, even if you loved what they did, all the more reason to *not* do it. A mistake is thinking that somebody else has your answers. Noise was always [about] coming up with your own answers. If you don't know how to make a contact mic then don't use contact mics, or learn yourself, but if you can't learn then don't use them—do something else. There's supposed to be an open-ended dialog—open-ended vocabulary. That was the great thing about noise of the 80s and 90s was that anything goes, as long as you meant it. Volume wasn't the issue; pedals weren't the issue; technique, attitude, politics wasn't the issue. The issue was: This is what you came up with.

In a sense, GX is saying the mistake is mimicry: "doing the same thing that your

neighbor is doing." GX values difference and negation: the sincere experimental

'noise' artist proceeds by engaging in methods *other than* what others have done.

As "open-ended dialog," making 'noise' is engaging dialectically with the history

of 'noise' practices and negating it to create new syntheses. The "issue" is the

result, the synthesis, the creation: "This is what you came up with." I then

pushed GX on the subject of mistakes. If GX could tell when an artist was

performing insincerely, then he may also be able to shed light as to when an

artist is making a performative mistake. In the exchange below, GX gives some

very interesting testimony concerning experimental 'noise' aesthetics in the

context of mistakes.

> DM: Back on the idea of mistakes: Can you tell when someone is making a mistake? The way you defined it, it seemed like your idea of a mistake had to do with the duplication process of someone else's aesthetic.

GX: I know what you're trying to get at [laughs]. The only thing that comes to mind, and this was a very unfortunate performance, was actually one of the opening acts of a performance I did in San Francisco in 1988, the one where we used the hind end of a Porsche. We were smashing everything up. One of the opening acts was this chap from Seattle, Black Humor. He was a very dear fried of mine who used to be involved in the Haters in the early Seattle, Pacific Northwest days. He always uses human voice; he only ever uses human voice. He won't even use ready-made voices. At the time in 88 he was still using a keyboard sampler. He had borrowed a keyboard from Kim Cascone, I believe it was, and he wasn't used to the keyboard. He had downloaded his voices onto the sampler, but not being used to it, he kept making mistakes. Voices would pop up that he didn't want. Now of course none of us in the audience had the slightest clue as to how it was supposed to sound, so he could have done anything and I'm sure everyone would have been thoroughly entertained or mystified by it, but he didn't have a very good poker face [laughs]. You could tell by the expression on his face every time he fucked up. And if he had had a better poker face…. Actually in later performances he started using dark sunglasses or reflective sunglasses so it wouldn't give away his disappointment and his choreography or his performances, and he would try so hard to not have any expression. But it was very distracting because you could see his immediate disappointment, which was unmistakable in what was otherwise a very interesting sonic performance.

DM: I heard of a guy who made these facial expressions that seemed to be mistakes, and then afterward people would ask him how he thought the show went, and the guy would say, "It was perfect."

GX: Yeah. I think a mistake, and for me the most obvious mistake is if you blow the PA or blow the circuits and everything goes dead, I think it's a huge mistake to wait until the power comes back and then continue. I think theatrically that has never worked. I think theatrically it's much more powerful to blow all the circuits in the room and then just take a bow and leave, regardless of how far into the performance you got. For me it's three seconds. That's the shortest I ever got to when I blew the PA, but it was a great three seconds. I've seen other performers wait for the power to come back on and then continue, but to me they always lose momentum. It's like they're doing two different pieces, but you don't hear a different piece. You hear them doing an inferior version of the first piece. That's how it always sounds to me.

DM: Concerning mistakes, the question I end up asking is, Does noise have noise?

GX: Well yeah, I would say it would be guitars and drums. The thing is, if you're dealing with an individual who is very concerned with oversaturating the whole audio spectrum, then of course no, it doesn't. The more the better. Distortion on top of distortion. I've seen performers with a hundred pedals, and of course you only need two or three, and

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beyond that it's purely just aesthetic fanaticism for the sake of fanaticism. That's fine. If that's you're thing, the more the better, I guess. But if you're the type of noisician who actually is interested in either very specific frequencies or very particular literal sounds—like a field recording or animal sounds, or in my case, the sounds of things falling apart—you probably want the sounds to be recognizable. So for someone like Black Humor—who uses strictly human voice—yes: noise has way too much noise. He really wants to try to isolate just the sounds that came out of that person's head. So it depends. It depends on the nature of your dialog. It depends if you actually have an audio fetish that is literally recognizable or if you're after a more generic effect. The generic effect of noise has no noise; I guess except silence maybe, that might be considered noise. A lot of noisicians—well not so many nowadays—in the past there were a lot more artists that had very specific audio obsessions. Obsessions with very specific types of sounds. Black Humor was obsessed with the human voice. Originally he wanted to make the human voice unlikeable. He wanted to create the ugliest human voice possible. But that quickly evolved into something very different, and actually something very life-affirming and very positive utilizing the recorded human voice as an extension of literature is what he eventually became interested in.

GX tells the story of a friend who performed as Black Humor, and occasionally

performed with GX in the Haters. Black Humor's performances were rife with

errors that were made obvious by his facial expressions. Tortuous visual facial

cues are obvious mistakes for GX, even after I told the story Nial Morgan told

me, about the performer who seemed to be dissatisfied with his performance, but

then claimed it as a success afterward. Beyond twisted facial visual cues and the

use of traditional instruments to make not-so-convincing noise (to play

instruments pseudo-conventionally), mechanical mishaps also count as errors: a

blown amplifier or a blown fuse from a circuit breaker are the examples GX uses.

And then the follow-up mistake is to continue a performance after the abrupt

cessation of sound. On the subject of my peculiar question, "Does noise have

noise?" GX gave an interesting answer. He says that if noise is generated from a

field recording using familiar sounds, and the intent is to explore those sounds (in

GX's case, the sounds of destruction), then the fidelity of those sounds should

remain intact. But if the sounds are generated electronically, then noise does *not* have noise, "distortion on top of distortion": noise all the way down. These two methods are akin to the French musique concrète techniques (field recording and manipulation) versus the German elektronische Musik techniques ("pure" electronic sound generators). GX believes that making 'good noise' requires sincere intentions and that mistakes can be avoided if a performer does not resort to conventional (historical) modes of performance and has a good poker face, even in the face of a technical disaster.

Casey Anderson is an educator and a musician dedicated to experimental music. He believes that art works should have an internal logic that serves as the basis for the judgment of the work. Yet he is permissive as to who can make experimental 'noise' performances.

DM: Can anyone make noise music?

CA: Sure.

DM: Can anyone make 'good' noise music?

CA: Yeah—totally.

Casey's answers concerning who is permitted to make experimental 'noise' and if anyone can do it well, might be clarified in the context that the work or performance must have an internal logic; in other words, Casey implies that any artist can create an internal logic, though success of such an internal logic is not guaranteed by the logic. Perhaps an unsuccessful performance would then be one that lacks an internal logic, or one that has an internal logic with results that are not compelling. So what happens when an error occurs in the performance?

DM: Are there mistakes in noise music?

CA: Relative to what I perceive with what the piece is after—yes. But inherently—no.

DM: Can you tell when someone is making a mistake?

CA: Yeah, but that might be based on my interpretation, so normally that's something that…; what I'll frequently do, unless I decide that I totally hate what I'm seeing, I'll go talk to the person, and in a backwards way I'll ask about that. So that becomes the real turning point or possible turning point.

DM: As far as 'noise' as unwanted sound is concerned, does noise have noise?

CA: [Laughs] No. I think that's redundant. I just think of it as everything has noise. You can think of it as unwanted information, or unnecessary information, or something like that; so I think there's a way to dial back that definition to make it so noise has no noise.

DM: I guess what I'm getting with that is…

CA: Is there unwanted information within the realm of noise?

DM: Yes, but also, you were talking about how you cornered Nakamura and you were asking, "What if there's a mistake?" and he said, "That's ok."[379] So in the realm of noise music and mistakes…

CA: I think for Nakamura there are no mistakes. I think he just came up with a cutesy way of answering that question.

DM: I think Cage might agree. I think in his writings he might say that there aren't mistakes…

CA: He spent most of his life complaining about people not doing his work correctly. So for me, I think there are more issues between a misfire between a concept and execution, and that's something that I would call a 'mistake.' But that reflects only to a particular piece. I wouldn't hold one piece to the same standard to another piece. I think of everything as being scalable or mapable to what I perceive to be what it sets out to do; which could be wrong because it's my interpretation.

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[379] Casey Anderson's actual question to Toshimaru Nakamura—how he portrayed it to me—was, "What happens if you lose control of what you're doing?" The dialog Casey orated to me is provided below.
Casey: Do you practice?
Nakamura: No.
Casey: What happens if you lose control of what you're doing?
Nakamura: That's ok.
Casey: Do you set up your mixer the same way?
Nakamura: No, I can never remember what I did.
Casey: Do you guys talk about what you're doing?
Nakamura: No, we just drink beer and hang out.

DM: Is your interpretation ever wrong?

CA: Yeah, frequently [laughs]. I can remember myself confirming that my interpretation was wrong, but still having a problem with something just because I still thought my interpretation and the issues that stemmed from that were too much for me to get past, and it just drove me crazy. But I think at a certain point, there's only so much intellectualization that even I am able to do about this stuff, and at a certain point it just gets to a simple, "I just don't like it." I don't like things like that.

DM: You don't like when you get to that point?

CA: Oh no no no. I just mean that all I can say is that I don't like things like that. No, I don't have a problem with that. I think that's totally valid. At a certain point it's got to get that simple. There's got to be room for that.

For Casey there are no mistakes until he begins to interpret the work or performance in question, and then he begins to build interpretive parameters for the proper way to judge the performance. In other words, Casey not only interprets the performance, he also interprets its mistakes. Unless Casey was completely turned off by the performance, the next step for him is to have a conversation with the artist. This is an important step for Casey because he believes that good art inspires conversation: "I feel like if the piece, or whatever it is, results in an interesting conversation with people I like to have conversations with, then that's successful." When Casey engages in dialog about a piece with another person, or the performer of the piece, his experience is enriched. The experience can lead to fond memories of the performer, the performance, or even simply the conversation itself. In a sense, the performance is never about the performance, but is about good times, defined by good experiences and good conversations. Musicologist Susan McClary's words are relevant here: "For better or for worse, [music] socializes us." A good music

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experience must be followed by a good extramusic experience, either through

deep internal dialog, or dialog with someone else. Sartre's language is apt here:

> No rule of general morality can show you what you ought to do: no
> signs are vouchsafed in this world. The Catholics will reply, "Oh,
> but they are!" Very well; still, it is I myself, in every case, who has
> to interpret the signs.[380]

So when I asked Casey if there were mistakes in experimental 'noise,' his answer

followed suit: "Relative to what I perceive with what the piece is after—yes. But

inherently—no." In other words, he interprets the signs.

Sebastian Demian has been instrumental to the experimental arts scene

on the West side of Los Angeles, first in West Hollywood where the original

location for Dem Passwords was located, and then in Culver City, where it

currently resides. Although he has helped put together many experimental 'noise'

nights at Dem Passwords, his favorite shows mix different kinds of musics and

arts together to encourage more open, eclectic audiences, pulling from rap, hip

hop, punk, metal, experimental 'noise,' film, painting, installation art, and so on.

Before I could ask Sebastian my particular question concerning who can make

experimental 'noise,' he answered the question in the context of 'real' or

'authentic' noise.

> DM: What's 'real' or 'authentic' noise music?
>
> SD: I don't think there's such thing as 'real' or 'fake' when it comes to
> noise music. Anyone can do it. It's folk—it's a folk tradition. Anyone can
> pick up a cassette tape and turn the volume up and do something via a
> distortion pedal. Anyone can make a contact mic in ten minutes. Anyone
> can do it; nothing is real or fake, it's about what you're doing.

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[380] Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Humanism of Existentialism" (1946), in *Essays in Existentialism*, trans.
Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel Press, 1965), 45.

Placing experimental 'noise' in the realm of the "folk" inadvertently invoked an idea proposed by Gordon Mumma in the 1970s.[381] He advocated for composers to use junk and junk electronics to build one's own music technology. For Gordon Mumma, the advantage of this approach was that composers could make new instruments that were not standard and mass-produced: thus, he called this approach a means to make experimental "folk art" or a folk mode of forging instruments leading to new kinds of sounds and performances: the implication—which perhaps did or did not come true—is that anyone can appropriate junk electronics to produce their own instruments and music, and if anyone could do it, then it would create a tradition of folk art centered around electronics. Sebastian invoked the same sentiment toward the possibilities of experimental 'noise.' When I asked him the particular question, he answered in the following manner.

DM: You kind of answered this already. Can anyone make noise music?

SD: Yeah, anyone can make noise music.

DM: Can anyone make 'good' noise music?

SD: Yeah, potentially. To me it gets good when there's a story. That's when it gets good to me. Where there's a narrative; when there's something I can sink my teeth into. When you can look at a greater body of work. That's when it gets good to me. So anyone can pick it up, but that doesn't mean someone can't come and be a prodigy, or get me, as a listener, to some sort of transcendent space. Anyone can do that. Someone can walk in and plug something in and get me into a transcendent space. I'd love to think that that could happen tomorrow from someone who never did what they did before. So anything can happen; anything is possible.

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[381] Robert Ashley, "Music with Roots in the Aether: Opera for Television. Tape 4: Gordon Mumma" (video), 1976, http://ubu.com/film/aether_mumma.html (accessed March 21, 2014).

For Sebastian, anyone can make experimental 'noise' and anyone can even make 'good noise.' 'Good' is dependent on the performer's ability to create a sonic narrative that can induce a "transcendent space."

Damion Romero's vast knowledge of experimental music and electronics has informed his work as a 'noise' artist since the early 1990s. A high degree of knowledge and experience would seem to imply a high level of competence; but the world of experimental 'noise' seems to have the tendency to either eschew technique as a value, or to obfuscate technique toward a personalized formula for making effective work. Damion seems to have created such a personal formula: he creates many of his own instruments that then demand novel techniques for creating sounds. Thus developing a theory for how Damion makes experimental 'noise' is difficult because one would have to know how to create the kinds of instruments he makes, and then learn the kinds of techniques he uses to fulfill his sonic goals. Describing and imitating Damion's procedures would be difficult, since he begins with basic electronics, starting with simple transducers in an acoustic enclosure. With Damion's knowledge and experience in mind, I asked if anyone could make experimental 'noise.'

DM: Can anyone make noise?

DR: I suppose so.

DM: Can anyone make 'good' noise?

DR: Probably not. It depends on what somebody wants to do or not. No, I guess not.

DM: Why not? What would it take to make good noise?

DR: I don't know. There are too many possibilities there. It would probably be really easy to make something bad. This is way too complicated for my brain to try to explain. It's similar to the cliché that someone sees a Picasso drawing and says, "Anybody can do that." It's the same thing.

For Damion, anyone can make experimental 'noise' but to do it well it depends on the performer's intentions and their sonic goals: "what somebody wants to do or not." His conclusion is that not everyone can make 'good' experimental 'noise' because they would have to have some experience in achieving the sounds they want to achieve. This further implies that experimental performers should have some sonic idea in mind, and then use the instruments to create that sound, at least to some extent. Damion was frustrated with this question because he recognized the complexity of its implications. He then provided an analogy to how someone might view and comment on Pablo Picasso's visual art works: "'Anybody can do that'" says Damion, quoting a hypothetical person. The implication is that such a hypothetical person is either wrong, or does not understand the complexity of the work, both through its meticulous technique displayed by Picasso, and through the complexity of supertechnical procedures (as chance elements and entropic procedures, or the specter (through abstraction) of chance elements and entropic procedures). Picasso was very calculated and technical in his renderings and so is Damion Romero, who perhaps relies less on entropic procedures than other experimental 'noise' artists in Los Angeles: so his example was apropos, even though he did not actually compare himself to Picasso. To achieve a level of proficiency—to be good at something—one reduces error. And yet error is an important element—a source material—for experimental 'noise.'

> DM: Are there mistakes in noise music?
>
> DR: Yeah, sure, I suppose. It depends on who is doing what they're doing.
>
> DM: Can you tell when someone is making a mistake?
>
> DR: [Laughs] That's a ridiculous question. I feel like I know what you're saying, and I'm answering in a certain way, but I don't know that…. Yeah,

sometimes you can tell when someone did something that they didn't want to do.

DM: One of the definitions of 'noise' is 'unwanted sound,' so if you make a mistake I guess it's an unwanted sound…. So anyway, that's just a definition of that word.

DR: Right.

DM: And so the idea of mistakes is interesting to me, and the idea of intentionality in general.

DR: We don't have enough words in the English language…

DM: Especially in sound.

DR: …because, there may be people doing noise that are trying to do sounds that they don't want to make, but as far as…. It depends on whose…; it's unwanted to some, and not to others. When you make a mistake you don't think of it as noise necessarily. I guess if somebody makes…

      [I should not have cut him off.]

DM: That's actually the next question: Does noise have noise? So you're saying no.

DR: What?

DM: You said if you make a mistake, you don't necessarily think of it as noise.

DR: It's just something that was unintended if you had an intention to begin with. Because a lot of people just let things be a lot more random.

DM: Do you have intention in your work?

DR: Yeah, I suppose so. I make mistakes, or things I wasn't trying to do happen sometimes when I'm trying to channel something into one zone or something, and it all of a sudden changes. The way I do things it can be sort of delicate and a little tricky. It's not that I make mistakes. Maybe I do make mistakes. I'll turn the wrong knob or something. What was the question? Do I have intention?

DM: Yes.

DR: Not a specific thing. There's just sort of *something* I'm usually going after, and I try to get the sounds I'm making to do that. But I'm following it, as well as trying to guide it, so it really… [thinks]

DM: In your method or technique is there the threat of extreme volume in a short amount of time? Is that a concern? Would it be easy to get an extreme amount of feedback quickly? Is that something you're trying to control?

DR: Yeah, usually. The stuff that I'm doing can be really unpredictable, especially with feedback and a lot of amplification. Things can just jump way out of control pretty easily, and that's not my intent usually. So I try to design around that I guess.

Damion again refers to the intentionality of the performer. A performer who makes an action or sound they did not want is making a mistake. And yet, he allows for some performers who have a more open aesthetic: "a lot of people just let things be a lot more random." Such performers have a looser field of intentionality. Since one of the common mistakes people have cited is loss of control over volume, either resulting in little or no volume, or a spike to extreme volume, I asked him a question pertaining to such volume spikes. This question led to an interesting answer from Damion, namely, that since his work includes a level of "unpredictability," loss of control due to the rapid escalation of volume can create some unintentional results, and one of his aesthetic aims is to "design around" such potential problems. Apart from drastic volume spikes (usually due to copious amounts of feedback), Damion implies that he does make mistakes in performances—"It's not that I make mistakes. Maybe I do make mistakes"—but it seems that the kinds of mistakes he makes are typically on a small scale, and can either be quickly mitigated or abated, or can be used to foment new sounds or new sonic directions in the overall form of the performance.

Don Bolles was the second drummer to one of the first and most influential punk bands in the 1970s, the Germs. Part of the aesthetic of the early punk practitioners was the incorporation of a certain amount of ineptitude as a valued source of new material and novel experience; the progression toward

mastery in punk (even if mastery was not achieved) was a contentious aspect of early punk practice, and perhaps was one of the reasons why punk rose in the mid-1970s and was first pronounced dead by the late 1970s. Punk was near and dear to the do-it-yourself experience, that encouraged autodidacticism, experimentation, and finding unique solutions to (artistic) problems. Don spent his late adolescence at a radio station in Phoenix where he loved to listen to and play records from the European avant-garde alongside his favorite glam rock bands, like Hawkwind. He also learned to make sounds using reel-to-reel tape machines and high quality mixers. His studio training was not formal, and relied heavily on experimentation and acute listening. With this context, I asked Don if anyone could make experimental 'noise.'

> DM: Can anyone make noise?

> DB: Yeah. Everyone does.

> DM: Can anyone make good noise?

> DB: Yeah, you could. Some people can. It depends on what your agenda is. If you're really truly listening to the…. If you truly listen then you can make a really good thing that's worth listening to. People who don't just think [in crazy voice]: "Yeah, I can make a noise! I've been doing noise for years! I'm really into noise!" You'll hear their noise and it's like, "Ok. You're copying some noise people. Great." It's just the trappings of noise without any of the substance, once again. But if you listen, you have to be John Cage-like to all the sounds around you, and then you can distill that into some *thing*. A lot of times you can find something that obliterates all the sound and it's still aesthetically pure, and that's pretty cool. It's people that at least know how to listen that will make the good sounds.

For Don, anyone can make experimental 'noise' but what makes a 'good' practitioner is someone who has the right intentions ("agenda") and who "truly" listens. Cage wrote, "New music: new listening. [...] Just an attention to the

activity of sounds."[382] Authenticity, for Don, comes from the open mode of

listening Cage advocated for throughout his writings, and this mode of listening

to sounds is the key to creating good sounds. Are mistakes possible with such an

open mode of listening?

> DM: Are there mistakes in noise music?
>
> DB: I guess. Sure. I've seen plenty of Damion Romero pieces fail. I know what he's trying to do, and it fails miserably a lot of times because there'll be a certain condition that won't be present in the room when he tries to do this thing and it doesn't work. But his failures are pretty glamorous. Just that he's trying to do this great thing: it's glamorous.
>
> DM: That's the question: Are there mistakes?
>
> DB: Yeah. But I think just like in punk music and the Shaggs music, or anything like that, you gotta appreciate those too. Mistakes are really what help us get to hardcore truths. If everything went along with our intent, how shallow would the world be? Everybody would just be getting laid and spending money all the time. that'd be all they'd do.
>
> DM: Can you tell when someone is making a mistake? and you said, "yes."
>
> DB: Yeah, you can tell. Sometimes you can't. Sometimes it's all about the mistakes; sometimes it's not: but you can appreciate where the mistakes take it to: it takes it to a different spot.

On the question of mistakes in experimental 'noise,' Don begins with the

"glamorous" failures of some of Damion Romero's performances. Don embraces

mistakes not only in noise performance, but also in life: "*Mistakes are really what*

help us get to hardcore truths" (my emphasis). In other words, mistakes help to

focus our attention and can be used as a metric to assess the world around the

mistake. I believe this sentence is also an example of stochastic resonance:

entropy is used to clarify an object or an event. Don concludes his thought: "If

everything went along with our intent, how shallow would the world be?

Everybody would just be getting laid and spending money all the time." In this

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[382] Cage, *Silience*, 10.

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passage, he explains that intentionality is important, but errors (concerning artistic intentions) would lead to a disastrous dystopian world. Next, Don hypothesizes that for some practitioners, "it's all about the mistakes," and furthermore, even when mistakes thwart the intentions of the performer, they can still be worthy of appreciation, and can take the performance to a new sonic space. Don illustrates a dialect between a performer's intentions and their negation through mistakes: their syntheses can create new pleasurable experiences.

Bob Bellerue has been influential in the first half of the first decade of the twenty-first century not only for his experimental 'noise' performances but also for booking experimental artists at the venue Il Corral, where he also lived. He now lives in New York where he continues to promote experimental 'noise' events, but throughout the years he has also returned to Los Angeles to spend time with friends and family, and give performances. On one of these return trips he found the time for our interview, and although he may not have remembered me from the Il Corral days, he could tell I had spent time there by the stories we shared during Il Corral's short but influential tenure. I find Bob interesting because he graduated with an MFA in composition at Cal Arts yet he does not possess traditional Western music literacy. If one can eschew music literacy and standard Western music canonic knowledge in academia (or at least at Cal Arts), then can anyone make experimental 'noise' music?

DM: Can anyone make noise music?

BB: Sure.

DM: Can anyone make 'good' noise music?

BB: Sure, if they practice. Just like anybody can play good guitar. But that's such a general way when you say it that way. When you say 'good'

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noise, it almost sounds more like, "Can they be a good composer?" Whereas, when you say, "Can someone play good guitar?" they can be more like a musician.

DM: Are the two analogous?

BB: So it's somewhere in between. *Noise artist…*, I think being a *noise* player is somewhere in between because it's both, How do you make the sound? and What do you do with it? Just like anything: if you invest yourself in it and keep working at it….

DM: What does it mean to be a talented noise artist?

BB: I don't know. I think having a sensibility about how circuits work and how PAs work and how to make sound, and also how to control things in a live setting. So it's technical skills—having an ease with technical skills as well as having an idea about pacing and sequencing and things like that. I've seen a lot of amazing work over the years from a lot of people, but especially from those younger crews, like the Men Who Can't Love [Los Angeles]. In New York there's the Red Light District scene, which is the guys from the Halflings and Yellow Tears, and the Throat people are from that scene. In general they do really good, solid, amazing work. I think a lot of it is that they've been playing for a long time. They probably started playing in bands when they were little kids. And so they have the discipline to practice…

For Bob, anyone can make experimental 'noise,' but to do it well, one must invest the time to familiarize their self with and understand the basic equipment generally used in noise performance. Since much of the instrumentation is based on electronics, an understanding on how to wire devices together and a how to use an amplifier are some important basic skills. Then one must learn to coax sounds from the devices. These processes take practical skills and knowledge: practice. Being an experimental 'noise' artist takes technical skill and creative energy, since nearly all of these artists are composer-performers. Furthermore, Bob's work is largely improvisational, though sometimes he uses a rough sketch of general directions and procedures to explore during a performance. Performance practice tends to consist of trial and error as the general dialectic

that guides improvisation. I asked Bob about the nature of error in the context of

mistakes.

> DM: Are there mistakes in noise music?

> BB: I personally subscribe to both John Cage and Miles Davis' idea on mistakes. With Cage, there are no mistakes. There's only an inability to keep up with the present moment. With Miles Davis it's, if you make a mistake just do it again. So no. I don't really think there are mistakes, but you can show that you've made a mistake by your reactions. But really the only mistake I think is not playing.

> DM: Those two philosophies—the Cage and the Davis—are different. Is there one that you prefer?

> BB: Mainly that there are no mistakes. But if you do something…. I approach it that there are no mistakes, and if you do something that you weren't prepared for then maybe that's the cosmos saying that this is what you should do, or at least you should explore that, so you might as well try it out.

> DM: Can you tell when someone is making a mistake?

> BB: It varies. Sometimes people are really obvious. If they're moving around and saying, "Wait, what? oh?" that's a good sign because that means they're trying to figure out if they can try to hear something, like if the pedal is not working.

> DM: Does noise have noise?

> BB: There is, I guess…, I don't know. It can be so noisy and so good at playing noise that then you're too slick. There can definitely be sounds that you don't want to hear. So there can be noise, like when you think of noise ultimately as unintentional or unwanted sound, then sure there can be noise in a noise set, which could be somebody talking in the background, or something doesn't work right. There's the kind of sounds that people make when they're young and getting started. Mixer feedback has certain kinds of sounds. If it goes [descending mouth sound] *Eeeeooo*. Those kinds of sounds can be cliché, but can also be desirable. For me, I don't like… I can't stand that kind of stuff, even though I wish I could just get over it. I guess what it is, is that part of the nature of making noise is that in the process of getting the sound you want, you're going to get through some territory that you don't want. So, in mixer feedback, if you throw it on and you're trying to make a tone that you're expecting, and then it comes in and it's a different tone, then you have to accept the fact that it's a different tone and then you have to further dial it in. So sometimes it's easy to avoid. So if there are broken cables and there are dead batteries and there's stupid shit that happens. So I guess that's a long way of saying 'yes,' there can be noise in noise.

Bob cites the ideologies of John Cage and Miles Davis on the issue of mistakes. Bob says that for Cage there are no mistakes. For Davis, a mistake can be rectified by repeating it. Repetition is an important device for making the unknowable knowable: knowledge and mastery are dependent on repetition. For Cage, judgment between intentionality and mistake is irrelevant because he is not interested in judgment and cares little for compositional intentionality. So these two ideologies are in fact not the same, but they have led Bob to the conclusion that there are no mistakes. Nevertheless, Bob does judge experimental 'noise' performances, at least for himself, and has found that there are some sounds he has no interest in listening to. Like David Kendall, Bob finds that mixer feedback technique can lead to some unpleasant sounds, either as cliché or because mixer feedback techniques have the potential to leap beyond the performer's control instantly. On the other hand, Bob recognizes that a certain amount of loss of control can lead to moments of frustration as well as moments of exciting new sounds and sonic juxtapositions, and riding the (sound) wave to new territories—usually as formal sections of a performance, dividing one part from another—can lead to a pleasurable listening experience. "[P]art of the nature of making noise is that in the process of getting the sound you want, you're going to get through some territory that you don't want." These losses of control exhibit an element of risk, and mastery is exhibited in experimental 'noise' performance through the specter of control, especially when the performance is most chaotic. Thus, Bob cites as a mistake the dissatisfying visual cues a performer gives when the sounds or the processes are at odds with the performer's intentions. Other kinds of mishaps are possible, like broken cables,

gear, and other equipment malfunctions. Therefore Bob concludes from my question, "Does noise have noise?"—"Yes, there can be noise in noise" as unwanted sounds and processes during an experimental 'noise' performance.

Joe Potts, his brother Rick, and their friends founded the Los Angeles Free Music Society in the mid-1970s as a joke, but to this day most of them have been dedicated artists in music, sound, and other media. For the Potts brothers the childhood inclinations to build forts and other forms of collective entertainment led to collaborative artistic endeavors in the DIY tradition. With little formal training, they made music and experimental 'noise' that partially led, at least in the case of Joe, to Otis Art School. I asked Joe if anyone could make experimental 'noise.'

DM: Can anyone make noise?

JP: Yeah. I'm big on context.

DM: Can anyone make 'good' noise?

JP: Oh ok [laughs]. I don't know. I kind of already defined 'good noise' as being consistent, so I would say that if they're making noise it's an extension of their own strange little world then it probably would be 'good noise.'

DM: Are there mistakes in noise music?

JP: Yeah [laughs]. I've done it.

From what I have read from Joe's childhood, he and his friends have been involved in making things without training from a young age, so I was not surprised that he felt that anyone could make experimental 'noise.' However, to make 'good noise' Joe feels that there must be a level consistency. To be consistent is to be replicable, thus creating a body of knowledge of what is possible and expected, thus the forging of one's "own strange little world."

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I first saw Maria Garcia perform during the first year of the founding of

(the) Handbag Factory in Downtown Los Angeles in 2011. She would often begin

with a mandolin, or a harmony captured on a looper pedal before breaking out

into an explosive noise performance. At the time there were fewer women

working in experimental 'noise' than I had remembered in Los Angeles. She was

then calling her project Concrete Shiva, but these days she often performs as

Unica. In my interview with Maria I had asked her about experimental 'noise'

skills, and she told me a story about how she was teaching her sister and other

kids how to make noise by manipulating the echo effect built into a karaoke

machine to alter the sound of the voice, combined with microphone feedback.

The kids greatly enjoyed screaming into a microphone and making noise and

feedback. If kids could do it, perhaps anyone could.

DM: Can anyone make noise music?

MG: I think so.

DM: Can anyone make good noise?

MG: That's hard to say. Like I said: in my opinion it depends on the person. It depends on what their ideas about it are [and] what they're trying to get out of it. I think anyone can make noise. I don't know if anyone can make good noise, but I think anyone can do it. That's kind of the appeal of it to me, is that anyone with a couple of guitar pedals can do it, but I don't know if it's necessarily good.

DM: What sound or technique do you consider cliché in noise music?

MG: The warbly sound like [mouth noise] *beeerrrrrrrrrr*. You know what I'm talking about.

DM: Just fucking around with the oscillator.

MG: Yeah. That is, definitely…

For Maria anyone can make experimental 'noise' but whether one can do it well

or not depends on their ideas about the nature of experimental 'noise' and their

intentions for doing it. Anyone can make experimental 'noise' but some will resort to cliché techniques, like sweeping an oscillator rapidly up and down, or sweeping the delay time on an analog delay up and down. These cliché techniques are intentional and can lead to predictable and bland results, causing a performance to suffer in the minds of many performers in the experimental 'noise' scenes in Los Angeles. Are these techniques mistakes? What is the nature of mistakes in the context of experimental 'noise' for Maria?

> DM: Are there mistakes in noise music?

> MG: I think [there are] for the performer; maybe not necessarily for the audience. There have been so many shows I've gone to where it's obviously not what the performer wanted to get out of that set, but the audience still felt really great about it. For example, that Nephila set is the most clear in my mind: at the end of the set I talked to Shannon [Kennedy] for a bit and she said that she was a little disappointed. She said there were too many speakers and it was feeding back in a way that she didn't expect it to. Then I talked to a ton of people who were in the audience who listened to it, and we all agreed that we really liked it, that we really enjoyed the set—we really liked what she did. So, for the performer, there may be mistakes, but for the audience, who knows? It just depends on how they feel about it. A lot of it is about viewing the actual live performance. Sometimes you can see the person stumble or feel uncomfortable about a sound that's being made, but not necessarily that it's a bad sound or it seems like it doesn't fit or anything. It's just that maybe that's not what they had anticipated coming out of it.

Maria feels that mistakes tend to be mistakes by and for the performer, but that the audience rarely registers mistakes unless they are detecting overt "stumbles" and visual expressions of discomfort—facial expression and so on. In this sense, we can imagine a performer making and correcting trivial errors in front of an audience with the audience never knowing that any error had been made; and perhaps such trivial errors are hardly registered by the performer as errors, and are instead interpreted as constant (and even natural) adjustments. Maria cited one of Shannon Kennedy's solo performances as Nephila as a example when the

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performer was not completely happy with the performance—in this case due to excessive and uncontrollable feedback—while Maria and other audience members found the performance satisfying. She concludes, "So, for the performer, there may be mistakes, but for the audience, who knows?"

Samur Khouja's work as a professional recording engineer has informed his experimental 'noise' performances in profound ways, and in return, experimental 'noise' performance has had an affect and sometimes informed his recording and producing process. Samur is also an accomplished death metal guitarist and singer, and has practiced tirelessly to achieve mastery in these realms. Thus he holds a unique position in experimental 'noise' because his mastery is deep, and what may seem like randomness to some audiences and even some practitioners is often an expert display of knowledge, techniques, and practices. Samur's testimony is also interesting because his job as a producer and recording engineer requires him to make important judgments on the quality of music that will be recorded with radio airplay in mind for a mass audience. In the lengthy passage below, I questioned Samur on the nature of who can make experimental 'noise,' if anyone can do it well, on the nature of talent in the context of experimental 'noise,' on the nature of clichés, and the importance of control.

DM: Can anyone make noise music?

SK: Yeah.

DM: Can anyone make 'good' noise music?

SK: Sure.

DM: Ok. What do you think is the role of 'talent' in noise music? Is there such thing as…. What does it mean to be 'talented' in noise music?

SK: I guess being affective.

DM: How do you mean 'affective?'

SK: Whatever your hopes are, or aspirations are and what your intentions are, I think if you're affective in your intentions, there's your success: your talent. If you want to go and shock people; if you want to put people to sleep; if you want to really be an open canvas and let people see this human side to you and see you struggling, see you improvising with whatever medium and it ending in a creation that you both share, because you're both part of that experience in creating that—if you're affective and it worked, then that's probably considered 'talented' then.

DM: What sound or technique do you consider cliché in noise music? You mentioned before [sweeping] oscillators…

SK: Oscillators are fine, but not tuning an oscillator…

DM: Yeah.

SK: … just kind of sweeping and going [mouth noises]—*WweeeoooeeewWweeeooo*—it's almost like…, you know. I also think it's kind of cliché to turn your feedback all the way up on your delay and let it self-oscillate. That's a good way to have a sound-source, but then things can happen after that that are great. It's kind of like a stock sound to turn your feedback all the way up and then turn your delay down and do these slow down affects. They can be great and affective and awesome, but timing them well…; having that be the basis of your set can be pretty monotonous.

DM: So you mean—*RreeoooWrrr*—you mean those kinds of sounds?

SK: Yeah, you know what I'm talking about. But from there you can get three delay pedals and build a chord out to those feedbacks, and then you have this great instrument now—a multitimbral, polyphonic instrument out of three delay pedals, and then you can take those and those various effects. Or you can have an amazing crescendo and use those feedback things perfectly timed and executed with some dexterity. But having those sounds just be there could be cliché. Those are definitely things that make you go, "Oh God, what's going on?!"

DM: Anything else?

SK: That's it. I, for the longest time—to let something personal out—I've sang death metal for twelve years now. It's always been something you refine and practice, and so when I was first experiencing people screaming in noise, a lot of it turned me off because it was uncontrolled screaming and it wasn't…. I've got my screaming down to a science [laughs], so it was just hearing…. But a lot of times it could be amazing. Sometimes you just see people screaming and it's not affective. It's really weak. Other times…, I wasn't used to it because I was still getting used to the idea of

noise being a genre and blah blah blah, so to see people screaming, it was weird. But then you get someone that's great and they're using their voice as an instrument and they're controlling their electronics and manipulating it live, and it's great. So just the idea of vocals in noise was also a little new to me. Most of it was just completely vocal-based. But then, I think it's great.

DM: A lot of that [screaming] tends to come from either the power electronics side or the grindcore stuff.

SK: Yeah, to me, it took away from the power because, maybe my ears are just more sensitive to *control*. If you spent ten years making yourself sound like a monster and be able to control your pitch and breathing and rhythm over fast tempos [laughs]…: I may be a little bit of a snob [laughs].

DM: That's ok.

SK: But I'm not. I love to see people doing anything with their voice now.

DM: Well in your profession, 'control' is very important. Talk about, maybe, the *element of the lack of control that might be useful*?

SK: Oh yeah, like I said: When you really put yourself out there and your set is very uncontrolled and the crowd can feel it and they can feel your vulnerability, but maybe there's a triumph, or maybe things just worked out in a great way, and the audience saw your struggle, whatever it is. It can be anything from just, your set is about the energy, whether it's flailing yourself around or destroying yourself or destroying equipment or just being very erratic and wild, but nailing all your targets, that's great. Or you'll have something like Ezra [Buchla], where he constantly has technical [laughs] difficulties—not constantly, but for the most part he just does—but it has just worked his way into his personality and his set, and you realize how fragile his equipment is, and also his voice in music is very fragile, so it works out excellent.

DM: Are there mistakes in noise music?

SK: Yeah.

DM: Can you tell when someone is making a mistake?

SK: If you're paying attention enough, yeah. You can always…. As a performer you can kind of relate to other people, so if you're paying attention and looking for mistakes you'll find them. Whether or not it still sounded good is up to you.

DM: Are mistakes something that become incorporated easily? How do you know when someone is making a mistake if…(?)

SK: Anything. You have people that, say, for instance…. And a lot of people use mistakes to…; use mistakes as part of a way to…

DM: generate material… [?]

SK: Generate material or even to move [to] another movement. Say you're improvising and you're just going off on a sound and you develop a rhythm with the way you're working your pedals or something. Maybe you miscalculated one, so now whatever sound you were building up is altered or shifted. Now that's a different rhythm, and now you are going to go off that. So that could have been a mistake, but now it dictated where the sound is going, and a lot of improvisers work that way. So maybe your mistake was, "I was hitting that oscillator every three seconds after I was turning this knob and it was creating this pulse, and it actually had a tempo going" or something. "I missed it once and it skipped a beat, and now the whole frequency shifted" blah blah blah.

DM: Well in your case, you said that in your work a lot of times you'll hone in on the various mistakes of your work and then you'll come back here and you'll vomit those mistakes, or you'll hear those mistakes all day long.[383]

SK: Right.

DM: You mentioned that in the first installment of this interview.

SK: A lot of times when I'm listening to a certain section of music, I either try to edit or investigate an error, and then that just becomes a loop and ends up becoming its own entity.

DM: Does noise have noise?

SK: Oh yeah. In a lot of ways, literal and figurative.

For Samur, anyone can make experimental 'noise,' but to do it well, one must be affective, and being affective entails intentionality: reaching the goals set out by the performer. If one's intention is to scare the audience, and the audience has

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[383] My question was derived from an earlier passage in my interview with Samur Khouja. "I'll get the mistakes stuck in my head a lot—people singing out of tune, or mess-ups in rhythms and interesting clashes of sound that happen from hearing something over and over again. Or if you're editing a lot on the computer, you have this loop that you're listening to. You're listening for a syllable or a vocal edit or a drum hit, and whatever you have is making this really weird arhythmic loop where it's half of a chord or it's a chord progression that's just chopped up in some weird way, and it's very familiar because it's a song you've been working on with other people for months or days or hours, and then you're hearing one tiny fragment of it looped repeatedly—sometimes for hours—and it becomes another entity. And you combine that with other people's projects and I guess I have to almost vomit some sort of thing from my body when I finally get around to recording or making something."

been scared, the performance is then affective. The *talented* performer attains

the goals they set forth for themselves. Anyone can make 'good noise,' but there

are pitfalls and methods of making noise that are common and obvious clichés.

Twisting oscillator knobs to create fast glissandi and making a delay pedal self-

oscillate by maximizing the feedback control (and tweaking the delay control) are

cliché techniques for Samur: these techniques are too easy and lack

sophistication. My simple follow-up question to Samur—"Anything else?"—

provoked an interesting response concerning screaming technique. Samur's

experience as a death metal vocalist inspired him to study screaming vocal

techniques in considerable depth to control his voice in the style appropriate for

that kind of music. When he began hearing some experimental 'noise' vocalists,

he felt critical toward their approach, because they did not have the control over

their voice that meticulous training afforded Samur. Some 'noise' artists that

used vocals did so ineffectively for Samur, thus the performance "took away from

the power because, maybe my ears are just more sensitive to *control*." He

quickly learned to relax his criticism concerning vocals and withhold judgment: "I

love to see people doing anything with their voice now." I then asked specifically

about the nature of *control* leading into the question on mistakes, since a lack of

control or the loss of control could be registered as a mistake. Samur's response:

"When you really put yourself out there and your set is very uncontrolled and the

crowd can feel it and they can feel your vulnerability, but maybe there's a

triumph, or maybe things just worked out in a great way, and the audience saw

your struggle, whatever it is." This passage is revealing because it shows the

importance of the element of risk. Overcoming a struggle in a performance gives

the appearance of a victorious performer who overcame the hardships of making

'good noise.' Samur referenced performances by Ezra Buchla, who typically performs with an amplified viola through guitar effects and computer software, and voice. The sensitive nature of his equipment can lead to sudden errors that will either be quickly rectified or absorbed into the performance. We then pivoted to the nature of mistakes. When Samur was explaining that performers use mistakes, I offered the answer, to "generate material." He agreed that mistakes can be used to generate material and to move toward a new section in the performance. Performative miscalculations are negated or absorbed. For Samur, anyone can make experimental 'noise,' but to do it well the performer must be skilled in the treatment of mistakes, often to generate new material or pivot to a new section for further investigation.

Summary: Permission and Errors

This section focused on two basic questions. The first question asked if anyone could make experimental 'noise,' and then if anyone could do it *well*. *Every person* I talked to said that *anyone could make experimental 'noise.'* However, not everyone said that it could be done well. There were two basic criteria that were necessary to do experimental 'noise' *well*. First, one must practice to do 'good noise.' Most of the people I interviewed made some reference to practice as a necessary mode of making a good performance. I have interpreted any kind of work, skills, or learning as part of practice. Joseph Hammer said that anyone could potentially do 'good noise' in the context of what he called "the Zen of the first take"—in other words, beginner's luck. Nevertheless, Joseph himself practices nearly everyday for hours. Practice does not necessarily mean that one practices with precision how one will perform.

Some practitioners practice exactly what they will do, and others practice in a more general way. Still others have already practiced the skills necessary for their performances: they have reached a level of proficiency, and now make an aesthetic to *not* practice. Proficiency is the issue here. Anyone can make 'noise,' but to do it well, one must have a level of proficiency. Proficiency is a form of the *embodied state* of cultural capital, as espoused by Pierre Bourdieu: it requires the investment of time to acquire it, and cannot be immediately transferred. The embodied state of cultural capital means self-improvement. Thus, education, skills, and the development of muscles (etcetera) are forms of cultural capital in the embodied state. In the context of experimental 'noise,' the embodied state means the knowledge and skills necessary to make experimental 'noise,' developed by practice. Anyone can do it, but to do it well requires practice.

A second criterion that many people I interviewed determined was necessary for a 'good' experimental 'noise' performance was the merits of the *intentions* of the performer. Michael Winter in particular discussed the importance of the "purity of intention" as a necessary precondition for a 'good' performance. GX Jupitter-Larsen insisted that if the performer was "sincere" in their intentions that not only would they make a good performance, they would make a great performance. Many other people, like Casey Anderson, like to judge works based on the internal criteria of the work. The internal criteria, then, must be interpreted as the performer's intentionality. Intentionality implies that there is a goal that one can reach, so when Nial Morgan says that a performance must make "progress," I assume the progress is toward a postulated goal, and therefore requires intentionality.

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If practice is a necessary requirement for experimental 'noise,' we may

assume that it comes at the risk of error; error, in a limited sense, may thwart

ones intentions. The second question I asked in this section concerned the nature

of mistakes in experimental 'noise' performance. The context of mistakes is also

highly reliant on the intentions of the performer. Many people I interviewed

believe that errors must be measured in the context of the performer's

intentions. Errors are either human errors (corporeal miscues and misfires) or

they are equipment malfunctions. When they are spotted, they are normally

spotted visually as facial cues (grimaces) and gestures. Not all of these kinds of

errors are infelicitous.

Many "mistakes" are incorporated and appropriated by the performer to

further the performance. Some performers actually try to instigate mistakes

specifically as a means to work through performative problems. Working through

such problems is evidence of struggle: the successful performance provides a

sense of satisfaction in the context of struggle (but not in the same way that a

perfect authentic cadence does in the tradition of Western harmony). Rather,

these kinds of mistakes aid in the trajectory of a performance. These kinds of

mistakes show evidence of the use of *stochastic resonance.*

> *Stochastic resonance* means noise benefit. A system shows
> stochastic resonance or exhibits SR behavior if adding noise
> improves the system. The noise can be white or colored noise or
> chaos or any other energetic disturbance that interferes with some
> signal of interest present in the system.[384]

In other words, stochastic resonance helps clarify a system. In the context of

experimental 'noise' performance, mistakes—as unwanted or unintended sounds,

events, or actions—are appropriated to benefit the performance. A "happy

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[384] Bart Kosko, *Noise* (New York: Viking, 2006), 148-149.

accident" is an example of a performative event that was not intended that provided clarity to the performance. Samur Khouja explained how mistakes could force adaptation and generate new material. Joseph Hammer finds mistakes very useful, and even hypothesized that perhaps the entire performance was a mistake!

In the experimental 'noise' scenes in Los Angeles, anyone can make experimental 'noise,' but to do it well, one must practice to fulfill the intentions of their performance. Mistakes can be used to elevate a performance through the exploration of new territory instigated by the mistake. The only *real* mistakes are breaking the PA, blowing an electrical fuse, and advertising to the audience ones ill feelings toward an accident that thwarted the intentions of the performer.

IV. The Role of Rules in Experimental 'Noise'

The last question I asked the participants of my project was "*What is the role of rules in noise music?*" sometimes augmented with "*Are there rules* (in noise music)*?*" and "*What are some of the rules of noise music?*" I had previously asked questions like "How would you define and characterize noise music?" and "What is '*good*' noise music?" These kinds of questions are designed to learn the essence of experimental 'noise,' not because a particular essence exists, but because I believe that the 'truth' must lie near where the fingers point. I hope to come close to a "total musical fact"[385]—as Nattiez would call it (taken from Marcel Mauss' "total social fact")—by the plurality of the testimonies I have accumulated. The "fact" concerning the definition of experimental 'noise' I am seeking, however, is *not* total (no facts are total). Nevertheless, the question concerning the role of rules in experimental 'noise' is the last trick I have for extracting meaning from the participants. Many participants anticipated the question and gave answers concerning rules in other parts of our interview. A set of rules for experimental 'noise' would imply that a 'theory of experimental noise' and an instructional cookbook with methods for making 'noise' could be constructed. And yet such historical knowledge for how others have made experimental 'noise' is often frowned upon: especially copying someone's set-up and gear, using cliché techniques like oscillator glissandi and self-oscillating delay pedals, mixer feedback (connecting the output of the effects loop to a channel), and shaker boxes (a contact microphone attached to a tin box (like a can of Altoids breath minds) with coins inside is a common way to make a shaker box).

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[385] Nattiez, *Music and Discourse*, 34.

Rules govern what is possible and what is impossible; what is permitted, and what is forbidden. In the realm of experimental 'noise' performance, there is a feeling of openness, yet there are some performances that are recognized as 'poor' representations of experimental 'noise,' and there are actions considered mistakes. Transgressors will either exist beyond the limits of acceptable practice, or they may be dismissed as 'bad.' In other words, there is a certain *'noise' conservatism*: one is *not* free to do whatever they want in the name of experimental 'noise.' And yet, there are noisicians like GX Jupitter-Larsen who criticize the idea of 'noise purism' while simultaneously admitting that they are one of the 'noise purists.' The notion of a 'noise purist' implies that there are rules, and that those who transgress those rules are not 'noise purists,' do not make *real* (*authentic*) 'noise,' and that such transgressors may not even be doing 'noise' at all. 'Noise purism' implies the judgment of what works and performances are pure and what works and performances are less than pure: impure. But the sarcastic tone GX had toward 'noise purism' hinted that 'noise purism' was not real, not definable, and existed as a "secret handshake," as GX liked to say: "I'm a [noise] purist. Even if I pretend not to be, I really am." GX also referred to the disparate views that 'noise purists' might hold: "but you have the noise purists, and that can mean different things to different people. People who are really into, I guess, the core noise issues, aesthetics, dialogues." The "core noise issues" are what this study is about.

Those who are familiar with the tendencies of the academic world of Western music from the twentieth century to the present often begin with a definition of *experimental music*. John Cage's definition is usually the one cited.

> An experimental action is one the outcome of which is not forseen [sic]. Being unforseen, this action is not concerned with its excuse.

> Like the land, the air, it needs none. A performance of a
> composition which is indeterminate of its performance is
> necessarily unique. It cannot be repeated. When performed for a
> second time, the outcome is other than it was. Nothing therefore is
> accomplished by such a performance, since that performance
> cannot be grasped as an object in time. A recording of such a work
> has no more value than a postcard; it provides a knowledge of
> something that happened, whereas the action was a non-
> knowledge of something that had not yet happened.[386]

We can glean from Cage's manifesto that for those who come from an

experimental music point of view—if they subscribe to Cage's dictum—that the

rules of experimental music must have outcomes beyond the knowledge of the

performer. Furthermore, such a performance does not *produce* knowledge

beyond its own transpiration, and to capture a performance through a recording

serves little value beyond the documentation of a performance that happened,

but by itself does not serve an aesthetic means.[387] The production of knowledge

through the codification of procedures—rules—is the concern of this section. With

Cage's dictum, easily recognizable idioms and sounds—or at least their

juxtaposition—may lie beyond the realm of experimental music. Also, since these

actions are "unforeseen," they also cannot be judged as aesthetically valid or

invalid—good or bad. Or rather, if they are to be judged, they can be judged as

'good' only on the basis that the experience actually brought sounds together

that were not expected, while performances that had results that were easily

predictable would either not be recognized as experimental music, or they would

perhaps be judged as 'bad' for transgressing the rule.

Not everyone subscribes to Cage's definition of experimental music. Scott

Cazan had told me that he took a course with Michael Pisaro at Cal Arts on the

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[386] Cage, *Silence*, 39.
[387] Cage's idea of a recording of an experimental performance is interesting because in Los Angeles experimental 'noise' scenes, many practitioners prefer attending a performance rather than listening to an experimental 'noise' recording.

nature of experimental music, and by the end of the term there was still no consensus on the meaning of experimental music. This section hopes to learn some of the practices and procedures of experimental 'noise' through its codification into rules, as perceived by the participants in this study.

David Kendall was the first person I interviewed. He was a frequent performer at Il Corral in the early 2000s, and one of the few times I performed experimental 'noise' was when he asked me to perform with one of his groups there. He was finishing the MFA program in composition at Cal Arts during this time and was heavily into computer music. During my first year at UC Riverside (where I finished an MA in musicology), I asked David to teach me some basic techniques in PD (Pure Data), a software program developed by Miller Puckette (who also developed Max/MSP). I hoped that learning PD would help me to create experimental 'noise'—learning a program is learning its rules of operation. In the context of experimental 'noise,' we might think that if one learned some of the rules for making experimental 'noise,' then one might be able to reverse engineer a performance. I asked David about the role of rules in experimental 'noise.'

DM: What is the role of rules in noise music?

DK: I think that there are a few rules in the noise scene. Like if you're in a rock band there are a lot more ways that you can do things incorrectly that people will pick up on. But I think the rules are still there. They're just kind of ever-changing.

DM: What are they?

DK: I don't know. I don't know what the rules are. Just however you can determine the difference between good and bad.

DM: What do you think is forbidden? Like, 'You can't do this and still have it be noise.'

DK: Not play noise. Do not play to the noise scene. That's the only thing that's not noise. Anything else is fair game. And then it's just a matter of whether or not you can be able to convince the people that this is interesting. So there's no specific…. Again, unlike rock, there's no specific thing that they can play that you can say "That's wrong. That's not noise. You're breaking the rules." But on the other hand, they can just fail to work. The performance can fail to work and then clearly some rules have been violated by then.

DM: Well like you said, you didn't like it when things got too 'synthy,' and by synthy you had something greater in mind. That seemed like a rule that was broken. Or is that just your personal opinion.

DK: No, I don't think that's a rule. I think a rule is: 'Sound like you know what you're doing.' [Laughs] I think that's the rule. Maybe that's the only rule. Synthy 70s horror movie sounding pieces can still kind of exist in the noise scene, whether or not they fit the genre description, they still have a place in the scene. It works. And if it works, it sounds good.

David was ambiguous about what the rules were, but he did give some examples. The first example is to *play noise in the noise scene*. This rule can be gleaned from its negative: "Do not play to the noise scene." Secondly, and explicitly: "Sound like you know what you're doing." This rule is not as trivial as it seems at first glance. Many practitioners I interviewed stated that a *mistake* often occurs when the audience perceives the performer to be making a mistake through visual cues. In other words, a mistake, for many practitioners, is precisely not looking like one knows what they are doing. So if the rule is to "sound like you know what you're doing," then to make a mistake is to break that rule.

Henry Perez' convulsive performances are visually impactful. Though he says he circuit-bends his effects pedals, in performance he flails about the floor, turning effects on and off in an improvised manner that seems erratic.

DM: What is the role of rules in noise music? Does noise music have rules?

HP: I don't think so. I don't think there's any rules in noise music. I'm pretty sure it's more of a freedom-type thing.

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Sometimes, either just before or just after I asked the question on rules, I would

ask the participants if they thought there was a connection between experimental

'noise' and freedom. Henry believes that the lack of rules is connected to "a

freedom-type thing."

Nial Morgan's explosive performances have sometimes involved various

forms of audience participation that can be thought of as highly emotional and

even theatric. His work as Wrong Hole is generally considered part of the "harsh

noise" subgenre of experimental 'noise,' usually involving loud sounds and rapid

changes. Our exchange below details Nial's thoughts on the role of rules in

experimental 'noise.'

> DM: Does noise music have rules? What's the role of rules in noise music?

> NM: I think that's the point, that there shouldn't be any rules for noise
> music. It should just be an experiment almost. But there's definitely like….
> Well, I would hope there aren't any rules for noise music.

What I find fascinating about Nial's answer is that he transposes the question

meant to uncover aesthetic issues in experimental 'noise' to a question of ethics:

"there *shouldn't* be any rules for noise music" (my emphasis). In a perfect world

experimental 'noise' would not have rules: but there's a caveat! "But there's

definitely like…." Nial cuts himself off: *definitely like what?!* I should have asked.

The imperfect experimental 'noise' world is met with the "*hope*" that there are no

rules to govern its form: his hesitance implies that perhaps there *are* rules.

Because of the hidden ethical imperative Nial alludes to, I surmise that the

restrictions to experimental 'noise' are perhaps political restrictions.

Greh Holger moved to Los Angeles in early 2010 and quickly established

himself as an experimental 'noise' artist in the area. Prior to his move he had

already made friends with some of the salient experimental 'noise' artists in Los

Angeles. Greh had started out as a bombastic harsh noise performer by the

moniker Black Sand Desert, but he is known principally for his work as Hive Mind.

In the context of the question, "How would you define the characteristics of noise

music?" Greh alluded to the idea of "normal noise," so I asked him if "normal

noise music" existed.

> DM: Is there normal noise music?

> GH: There's genre-type noise music, and rules. Whether they're written or not there are certainly accepted types of noise music that things fall into, and there are people who desire to push outside of that too. I can say 'harsh noise' or 'wall noise' or 'drone' or 'industrial noise' or 'cut-up noise.' These are different specifics. So in terms of it being normal there is definitely accepted types or brands of noise music just like there are with rock music. You got your psych rock, your garage, your indie, your pop, punk, hardcore punk. Whatever. There's normal and accepted classifications and types and methods of approaching noise within what's an alienating and underground subgenre of music.

> DM: What are the normal characteristics of noise music?

> GH: When I think noise I think atmosphere. That's a word I use a lot that doesn't necessarily have a tangible thing to go along with it, but in terms of aesthetic and sound is something that helps to capture my imagination and conjure a mental association with the music. Dissonance and abrasive or unusual sounds are characteristic of noise to me.

In this passage Greh acknowledges that there are rules, specifically in the

context of "genre-type noise music," or from the context we can glean that there

are subgenres of experimental 'noise' that include harsh noise, wall noise, drone,

industrial noise, and cut-up noise. The characteristics of "normal noise,"

according to Greh, include dissonance, abrasive sounds, and unusual sounds.

When I asked Greh more pointedly about the role of rules in experimental 'noise,'

we had the following exchange.

> DM: What is the role of rules in noise music?

GM: I personally have rules for Hive Mind: it's a noise project—it makes what I would consider noise music, and what some other people consider noise music. But I've imposed rules on myself, maybe to define it, to keep it being a certain type of thing, as opposed to free ranging. Leather Bath has rules. We've discussed a new project where there's not rules, or at least not the same rules as Leather Bath: there are different rules. I like structure, and rules, and knowing that something…, having to work within certain confines is very comforting, I think, for a lot of people. I like having to work with specific equipment or with a specific sound in mind. It helps me focus. It might be ADD [attention deficit disorder], it might just be that I like to give myself some direction and take things a certain way. I have to imagine other people feel the same way. So I think rules serve to help us shape things in the way we want to shape them. [Thinks] For lack of a better way to explain this, even operating with specific gear, the equipment you use and the medium you use to record to is a set of rules. It constricts what you can do and how you can do it in that way. So I think choosing those is healthier than letting them be chosen for you, maybe.

DM: Is there a conflict between setting rules in noise music, and freeing yourself from rules?

GH: I don't know that I ever got into noise to free myself from any specific rules. I got into it because I liked the sound and I wanted to create something. And I wanted to listen to something that was…. I think the rules are the same as a painter operating on canvas with oil paints. I don't think it's necessarily detrimental. I think it confines what you work in, because that's what you've chosen to work in. Letting other people impose rules is a whole different discussion. But I don't think it's contradictory to noise music. It's still free. You're choosing to impart these upon yourself. Like I said: someone else imposing rules on you, or telling you how to make your music, or what it should sound like, is a whole different thing, and that's foolish. Doing what you want, and the way you want, if you want to call it "rules" or if you want to call it "choices," I feel like it's the same thing. That's maybe just how I think about it. There are choices I've made with Leather Bath or with Hive Mind, but as a rule, I don't do this, I don't do [gesture] , I don't do this. I do do this, I use this, I don't use this. Those sorts of things. They're choices. If you want to call them rules, because they confine something, that makes sense too, but I don't think it's negative and I don't think it's contradictory. I'm choosing to do that…, in the same way that I choose what I listen to. In the way same that I choose what I eat for lunch. In the way that I choose what beer I drink. I'm imposing that upon myself: I'm choosing to do that myself. I have the freedom of choice.

Greh's basic answer is that experimental 'noise' does not have rules; rather, the

practitioners of experimental 'noise' use self-imposed rules. Self-imposed rules

restrict what might be sonically possible and aids in focusing the work in a certain direction, as a field of possibilities. Greh explains that one might call these self-imposed restrictions "rules" but he calls them "choices"—choices that he makes freely.

John Wiese is one of the most prolific experimental sound artists in Los Angeles. I attended the gathering for his one-hundredth seven-inch release and quickly read his book that he was also releasing. One of the one-hundred seven-inch records was given to me by David Kendall when it was released in 2004 at the height of the Il Corral scene. *Heat Directors Volume 1* included four tracks by Mitchell Brown, David Kendall, Damion Romero, and John Wiese. For John's prolific output, many of the records seem like they could have been made by one-hundred different people, and that is how he likes it. But for his seemingly ephemeral style—or perhaps his *disinterest in style*—John has an interesting take on the possibilities of art. Early in the interview I asked him if he had been interested in other kinds of art forms, and how that related to his work in experimental sound. He revealed his interest in type design and typography, since type design seems to assume that a character has a form.

> DM: I'm interested that you're interested in type design, because it seems to me that maybe there's a parallel between trying to design a particular letter and trying to design a sound.

> JW: Yes. The thing that's interesting about typography is that you have a set of letters that's more or less agreed upon by everyone, and you're making a particular form or design of those letters that have to work together in a particular way. They represent a sort of rules that all of the letters will obey or defy depending on your concept. And you then use all of those things to communicate: specifically to read. Which is different than lettering, which is it's own thing. You're creating a particular word or phrase, and it can have its own logic that doesn't need to apply to an alphabet set, or a system for producing letters, or creating a typographic system. So yes: I find all kinds of correlations, like you said. Yes.

In this passage John discusses the design of a character as part of a system of characters that serve a certain utility: reading. Thus, John considers the parallel between type design and sound design from a particular sound as part of an overall system as the sonic piece. In typography, however, there are rules concerning the morphology of the characters that John says are "more or less agreed upon." So how do rules work in experimental 'noise'? or *anti-genre music*?—a term that he preferred.

> DM: Last question: What is the role of rules?
>
> JW: I think it's interesting to have rules. I think it's interesting to sometimes not have rules. I think a lot of my scores are based on typography, which clearly is a product of having rules as they relate to typographic formant systems, and how they can relate to individual players, and their instruments and playing in time. You can basically have everything both ways: you can play with rules or you can play without a sense of rules. Both are fine. So it would just be a matter of how someone was approaching either one, because either could be interesting or not.
>
> DM: Does anti-genre music have rules?
>
> JW: If you decide. If you're genre is to have rules. If you're sub-take on…. Yes. I've done work with rules and I've done work without rules. *Who is going to stop me*?

John's sonic works—as experimental 'noise' or anti-genre music—may or may not have rules. What is important for John is not the rules but whether the outcome is interesting or boring to him. "Both are fine," say John. I was reminded of Jasper Johns' attitude toward his paintings:

> Sometimes I see it and then paint it. Other times I paint it and then see it. Both are impure situations, and I prefer neither.[388]

I remember clearly the last words from our interview; he said them with sardonic (almost smug) swagger: "*Who is going to stop me?*"

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[388] John Cage, "Jasper Johns: Stories and Ideas" (1964), in *A Year From Monday* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), 74.

Elden Man has a long history of noise-making and promoting experimental 'noise' activities. He has performed alongside some of the most well known of the Japanese noise artists: Masami Akita (Merzbow), Mayuko Hino (CCCC), and Jojo Hiroshige (Hijokaidan). In a previous section I wrote about Elden's story playing with Hijokaidan in Japan. Toward the end of the noise set, Elden decided to play conventional chords (major and minor) on a nearby piano. Jojo Hiroshige obstructed Elden's hands from continuing the piano chords. Elden's transgression was not tolerated.

DM: So in that instance, who was playing noise?

EM: We both were, but then toward the end, during a period of lull and quiet, I started playing chords.

DM: Were the chords noise?

EM: No. They were like a major or minor chord.

DM: But how about in the context of…

EM: In the context of providing a contrast that… well you heard some noise, here's some music, just to be different. To him, that was unwanted, so it's noise, it's extraneous sound. In that case, I actually succeeded in pushing the boundaries of what is noise, because music can be noise.

Elden transgressed Jojo's conception of noise. His piano chords disturbed the performance. Elden went beyond the rules.

DM: What is the role of rules in noise music?

EM: They're made to be bent or broken. Like anything: you can stick to them or…. The thing about noise is that it's not like conventional music, it's anything goes. And that's why I *am* able to use theory or music in a noise context is because there's no rule against. I mean, there are, but that's just people's narrow prejudices. So I say that it's wide open, and that rules basically: make them up as you go.

Elden takes the rebellious point of view that rules are made to be broken. He insists that there are no rules in experimental 'noise' performance beyond some

people's prejudices. Experimental 'noise' is open to offend anyone's aesthetic

sensibilities. Yet Elden also prescribes that one should make up the rules in real

time. In other words, rules, in a sense, are improvised.

My interview with Eddie Giles was my longest endurance test, taking place

over several days: the total time was about thirteen hours. The last question—

What is the role of rules in noise music?—prompted several pages of responses

and discussion. I summarize the salient points below.

> DM: Ok, so last question: What is the role of rules in noise music? Are
> there rules in noise music?

> EG: Some people limit themselves because they want a particular sound
> or they want a particular approach to things, so they don't use everything
> in the kitchen sink. They basically use what works. This is what rules are
> good for: rules are really good to protect the artist from making a lot of
> stupid mistakes.

The definition of 'white noise' (white sound) is a synthesis of all humanly audible

frequencies at random amplitudes with each firing off with equal energy per unit

frequency. In a sense, white noise is the 'everything *and* the "kitchen sink"' of

sound. So first Eddie says that rules are used to limit the field of sounds.

Secondly, rules help prevent artists from making mistakes. In a sense, making a

mistake in experimental 'noise' is synonymous with breaking a rule. Eddie brings

forth more insight to his conception of rules in experimental 'noise.'

> EG: So rules: there are rules. I use some. I think rules are important. I
> think there are rules not only in the idea of texture, completion,
> technique, or approach of music, but there are also music of what stays
> and what goes. I guess I'm using this idea of rules as a sort of quality
> control. I'm always talking about the quality of what's going out the door,
> and that there should be a rule that the artist imposes upon themselves
> that says: "I'll only create good music" or "I will only create stuff that I
> feel confident about." That's one rule. Another rule is that sometimes you
> think: "I'm only going to use this piece of equipment or this gear to create
> a certain sound."

Rules help institute *quality control*. Of course I had asked Eddie what the nature of 'quality' is to him as a follow-up, but in an earlier part of the interview, Eddie confessed his consternation toward the idea of value. "I just feel that what the noise scene has offered me is that the only way to bring the value—once again I have problems with value…." Elsewhere, "I think that I have problems with the value of things." Eddie's issue with 'quality' and 'value' is that he seems to be searching for a yardstick to measure the aesthetically 'good.' In any case, Eddie offers two rules. The first is "only create good music." Of course, this rule is contingent on an understanding of what 'good music' means. The second rule is a restriction to use a limited amount of instruments to create a sound. These two rules together help constitute a form of *quality control* for Eddie.

Though Adam Cahan loves hip hop and rap, he also enjoys experimental musics, like electronic music and free jazz. He is not an experimental 'noise' practitioner but he does attend experimental concerts sometimes. His input from a listener's perspective is why I chose to interview him. When I asked him specifically about the role of rules in experimental 'noise,' we had the following exchange.

> DM: What is the role of rules in noise music? What are the rules of noise music?
>
> AC: I don't think any music has rules. It has conventions, expectations, or forms. You can talk about some classical form where it is very strict, and there are rules inside that. But those kinds of rules develop from conventions. People decide: We like this, we want to keep doing this. And then do it over and over, and it becomes a rules. Or even if someone made the rule: at some point the rule is broken and it's ok within that context. Or maybe one day the whole thing is abandoned. I think it's like hiking around and there are a bunch of different paths that you can take, and they all go…. I don't know.
>
> DM: So does noise music have rules, or does it have conventions?
>
> AC: Yeah, it has conventions.

DM: What are those conventions?

AC: Against melody, against time…

DM: Are they all negative? [Adam thinks] Anyway, continue.

AC: I don't know. They can't all be negative. No, that's a really good point.

DM: Why not? [Adam thinks] Let me ask you another way: What is noise music *for*?

AC: Oh, well that's just…. What's noise music for? Noise music is for turning knobs.

DM: What else is it against? You said it was against melody and against time….

AC: It's against….

DM: What did you mean by 'time?'

AC: Meter, rhythm. I don't know if it's really against any of those things. The more I think about it, it's a really difficult question.

Adam's initial point is that music does not have rules, rather, it has conventions.

His point is actually true, even though the history of Western music has—in many

eras and styles—imposed those conventions stringently, ruling intervals as

consonances and dissonances, with treatments that were acceptable and

treatments that were forbidden. He also points out that conventions are solidified

as rules through repetition. Repetition normalizes and naturalizes certain

practices. Since Adam preferred the term 'conventions,' I asked him about

conventional practices in experimental 'noise.' He began listing these conventions

in negative terms: what is forbidden—"Against melody, against time." I then

asked, "What is noise *for*?" What I meant was that since Adam was discussing

what experimental 'noise' was *against*, I thought that asking what experimental

'noise' was *for* would clarify his conception. Unfortunately, the question has the

double meaning for the *utility* of experimental 'noise' (What is it *for*?). When focusing on his notion of time, he clarified that experimental 'noise' is against meter and rhythm, but then questioned if that was true. Elsewhere, in the context of my question, *What do you think are the general aims of the practitioners of noise music?*, he said:

> AC: I think a lot of them are looking to express emotion. I think that personal expression is a huge element of noise music. I guess I think of noise music as aggressive, generally, in terms of the loud and difficult…—I guess 'difficult' is kind of a problematic word—loud and difficult and dissonant, and with a lot of musics like that, not just noise. I do think that if someone is playing music that way then there's something that they want to get out there. Well maybe with all music. So I think that's a big thing; and expressing things more directly, because you don't need to have formal musical training to make noise music because there are no rules for the tools, yet.

Adam was unsure what rules or conventions applied to experimental 'noise,' but he did give some clues: namely, he thinks of aggression, loudness, dissonance, and the 'difficult.' He stopped himself at 'difficult' realizing it was difficult to define. The term has been used in Los Angeles experimental 'noise' scenes in the twenty-first century, including a magazine in circulation called *Everybody Loves Difficult Music* associated with Machine Project. They held concerts with familiar artists associated with the wulf. scene (associated with Cal Arts) before the wulf. was established: Adam Overton, Mark So, Michael Pisaro, Liam Mooney, Corey Fogel, Mark Trayle, and even Harris Wulfson (the composer whose name inspired Michael Winter and Eric KM Clark to call their venue the wulf.). I met Adam Cahan at a Machine Project concert, so perhaps he picked up the term from the venue. Though Adam dismissed his initial attempt at codifying or specifying the function of rules in experimental 'noise,' he did reiterate two common characteristics: loudness and dissonance.

Joseph Hammer's reel-to-reel performances have been a mainstay in Los Angeles experimental music scenes since the early 1980s. Unlike other artists working in experimental 'noise,' Joseph practices frequently—"almost everyday for decades." Through constant practice Joseph has developed highly individualized techniques to manipulate his equipment. Nevertheless, Joseph rarely if ever rehearses with others for collaborative performances. In this context we can imagine techniques and practices as unwritten rules. But do they apply to Joseph's improvisational tape pieces?

> DM: What is the role of rules in noise music?

> JH: It's something to help you out, potentially. It's a crutch to get the ball rolling. I don't think there are any rules to noise music.

For Joseph there are no rules beyond self-imposed rules used to initiate the process of making experimental 'noise.'

Christiaan Cruz and I used to drive from Orange County, where we lived in the early 2000s, to Los Angeles to attend experimental music and 'noise' performances and other kinds of art openings. During this time we attended concerts at Il Corral, Line-Space-Line, Beyond Baroque, and the Smell. Sometimes we even tried to make experimental 'noise.' How does one do it, and are there rules that can be learned to make affective experimental 'noise'? I asked Christiaan these questions.

> DM: What is the role of rules in noise music? Do you use rules?

> CC: Yeah, specifically for a piece, so I'll construct rules and restrictions for a piece, because if not then it'll be the crazy stuff I was talking about earlier. The stuff where it's just too much clutter; too much mess. So just for my own…, for the way I like a piece to be I try to limit it and try to make it focused, and those are rules enough for the piece.

> DM: What kind of rules do you use?

CC: I stick with simple procedures; I stick with simple patches; I stick with limitations on the instruments, limitations on the number of sounds I'm using. Yeah, I just keep things simple. I don't want to overwhelm the listener or overwhelm myself.

DM: So what's the overall role of rules?

CC: Just common sense for the piece. It's pretty easy: just basic common sense. Our brains can only process so much, so you don't really want to overwhelm our little heads.

Unlike Joseph Hammer—who uses the notion of overwhelming the audience and himself as an aesthetic principle—Christiaan uses limitations to restrict and focus the scope of sonic activities. The limitations are simple self-imposed rules to achieve the desired effect.

Weronika Zaluska is an art teacher in Orange County. One way she draws inspiration from her own artwork is to view and listen to experimental artists around her. Though she does not make experimental 'noise' herself, I asked her how she thought some of the artists she respects use rules to facilitate their works.

DM: What is the role of rules in experimental and noise music?

WZ: I don't really know. I don't know enough about it.

DM: Well maybe talk about Casey or Scott's work: how do rules come into their work?

WZ: Well they really like to get the control out of their hands, and that's where the rules sort of take on that role of decision-making, so it's a very important role where they just make that choice to let go of their control and set up these systems. I saw a beautiful piece by Mike Winter for four guitars. They were working with a timer and they just played each chord. Not even a chord, just each string on the timer every second I think, and each person had a different sequence and they had headphones, so they really couldn't hear each other, and it was really an incredible piece. It had a very incredible sense of freedom because there was an algorithm they were following. Each player had a mathematically determined sequence. But they were not really interacting as much. They were just following on the clock. So that was the unifying aspect. I thought that was a very powerful piece.

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Weronika recognizes that rules can create unity in experimental performances, especially in ensembles. Rules can be strung together to create algorithms as automatic functions for making sound works. These methods are similar to John Cage's methods, and their goals are also similar, as attempts to withdraw ones ego from the performance (though the very act of selecting the rules already maintains the ego). Weronika finds value, beauty, and power in these kinds of well-executed processes.

Scott Cazan's performances often remind me of the first experimental music concert I attended in the late 1990s: specifically a duo featuring John DS Adams and D'Arcy Philip Gray performing with materials appropriated from David Tudor's *Neural Network Plus*. Scott is undoubtedly affiliated with that tradition of circuit exploration cultivated by the Composers Inside Electronics collective. The gifted pianist Tudor took up electronic music in his mature years as an exploration of the potential of prefabricated circuits, and probed them for their sonic potential, hoping to learn something from the circuit. In my exchange with Scott, we discussed rules in terms of the choices of materials artists use to work with, and rules implicit in the materials themselves.

> DM: Last question. What is the role of rules in experimental and noise music?
>
> SC: Pretty crucial. I think the rule is pretty large, because I think most experimental music—I don't know that it has to be, but it has been I think—most experimental music, if not all experimental music, I think, is driven by rules. Tudor certainly is. The whole idea of the circuit is a set of rules; it's a set of logics.
>
> DM: Ok, if you want to put it that way.
>
> SC: Algorithms are simply just rules, and that's exactly what you're defining in experimental music. Here are the rules, here's the input, what

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is the output. Otherwise what is experimental music without the rules? It's nothing. What are you designing exactly?

DM: I think of Tudor like: Here's the circuit, let's do this and this and see what happens. It's interesting to think about that in terms of rules.

SC: That is the rule, absolutely. These two things are connected and they're going to communicate over this line, versus this other thing. And they can only communicate over that line. So you're defining all the rules in the system: in the software or on a mixer or whatever it might be, you're defining the limits of the system and containing it. So I think it's absolutely crucial. What do you think?

DM: Rules is interesting to me. Going back to this idea of trying to free yourself from reason, reason is all about rules.

SC: Freedom is all about rules, I think.

Before our interview, I had considered choices as idioms, with histories attached to those idioms. When reading Derek Bailey's *Improvisation*, one of my (many) criticisms concerning 'non-idiomatic improvisation' is that the selection of an instrument already constitutes an idiom through the history of its usage: by choosing the electric guitar, not only does one choose an instrument with six strings, generally tuned a certain way, with strings at a certain length and thickness, and hardware that accommodates the strings and a shape that accommodates the ergonomics of the body, one also chooses a history that extends even beyond the lute and beyond the oud, the ancestors to the guitar. Scott's testimony furthers the argument that the process of selection itself, as compositional choices—scores, algorithms, instruments, etc.—already constitute rules. If choices are a form of rules, then one who advocates for the freedom of choice also advocates for the freedom of rules; or as Scott says, "Freedom is all about rules, I think."

Narin Dickerson graduated from Princeton University where he also served as a DJ for the campus radio station. His introduction to experimental music

began with old records from John Cage and Iannis Xenakis. At Princeton he

learned more about experimental music at the radio station. He also attended

new music concerts by the student composers at Princeton. One of the shows he

attended from that time was Jessica Rylan performing as Can't. Jessica is an East

Coast experimental 'noise' artist who is known for designing her own analog

circuits. Narin is a frequent attendee of a variety of art forms in Los Angeles,

including its experimental music and 'noise' scenes. Performers appreciate Narin

because he is not a performer, so he does not come to share his work with

others, but only to listen. His patronage is valued in a scene where most of the

audience is made up of other artists. As an experienced listener of experimental

'noise' Narin has a general idea of what to expect at a performance. Our

exchange below delves into the topic of rules and how they are used by

experimental sound artists.

> DM: Last question. What is the role of rules in noise music? Are there rules?

> ND: I think sometimes there are rules and I think sometimes there are silly rules which are imposed within the scene, and sometimes there are rules that performers make for themselves that I think are really important to the way they perform.

> DM: What are the 'silly' rules?

> ND: I think, in terms of how we were talking about noise defining itself very narrowly, and maybe only performers who play harsh noise being booked at a show, and defining itself sort of narrowly in that way, can be kind of silly. There are shows where it's exclusively harsh noise, but that doesn't necessarily connect the artists who are performing at it in an interesting way. It just means that they're all playing at a loud volume. Or at least they were the last time the person saw them play a show. Some of these people might do lighter stuff as well. That's sort of what I was thinking about. There are probably other examples that could be thought of; but maybe I'm making up something that doesn't exist; making up some sort of rules of exclusion that aren't formalized in any way. But that would be what kind of rules would be silly: ones that excluded performers.

> DM: Any other kind of general rules?

ND: I think a lot of interesting things about noise music and how it is structured is those rules the performers have made for themselves, and that they work within, and try to work within these restraints and frameworks to try and not just…. Noise can include almost anything, so usually the performer is trying to narrow and restrict what they're working with, and trying to define the scope of what they're doing in a way that they can actually do something, and do something that they can feel passionate about and work within, and define…, I don't know. I think there are rules that exist, but I think they should be questioned too. People that are coming up with rules; people that are coming up with those boundaries; we should look at where they're coming from and how arbitrary they are and who is coming up with them and what they do, and not just what they intend to do, but what they're unintended consequences are. That if you're defining a show as its only performers who identify as noise performers. Maybe that makes sense in terms of: you want to keep a coherent scene together. But is there an unintended consequence? Are you excluding people who don't want to identify as a noise musician for other reasons. Who don't want to identify exclusively as a noise musician, or who just don't want to identify as a category like that? I think it's a scene that can become bogged down in rules sometimes.

DM: It has too many rules?

ND: It can become bogged down. I didn't say it had too many. But it can become bogged down in certain rules of what is and is not noise music. Or what are the boundaries of noise music. But I think those should be questioned in terms of what is and is not noise music, and where those boundaries lie, because there's so much going on that's related in a way to noise music and is concerned with a lot of the same things, but might not define itself as noise music and might not want to define itself as noise music, and I think there's a tendency to sometimes exclude those things because they want to define themselves as something else. Maybe there's a place for that, to make sure that noise music isn't just some of sort of watered down overlap of a few other things. Maybe that's a fear, that is actually a something, and in defining the boundaries of that something that noise music is, we should be aware of our defining those boundaries and what we're putting in and out, and what we're defining as an outsider to noise music; what we're defining as a welcome outsider; what we're defining as an unwelcome outsider. What is contrary to noise music? Is noise music in opposition to something? Is music in opposition to other music? Is there something that's not noise music? Why, how, when? Who gets to define those rules, if rules are being defined? Are they defined by people who will define rules in such a way that they end up in a position of power within the community?

DM: Who do you think is making these kinds of decisions? What kinds of institutions create these rules? Certain people at the top of the scene? Certain composers?

ND: Probably people who book shows have a lot of influence in terms of what is and is not included in the show. I would say they have a pretty big influence. How people put shows together. Who they think to include.

Narin's take on rules extends toward an entire politics of the Los Angeles experimental 'noise' scenes. Many of the questions he asks are the same ones I had already asked him; questions I also find important concerning power relations within the scene. In our discussions on rules Narin discussed two kinds of rules: 'silly rules' and self-imposed rules, or to quote Narin: "rules the performers have made for themselves." 'Silly rules' constitute exclusionary practices that speak to a politics of the experimental 'noise' scenes: who is permitted or forbidden to perform. According to Narin, these 'silly rules' are drawn predominantly by people who book shows; they speak toward a cliquish cronyism. He criticizes these rules because they give authority and power to the people booking shows to decide what counts as 'noise' and what does not based on their decisions to continuously book certain artists, thus narrowing the field of acceptable practices through the performance practices of those who are allowed to perform. Narin gave no example of who in particular makes these 'silly rules.' The second kinds of rules Narin discusses are the self-imposed rules that performers use to generate and "structure" their performances. These kinds of rules help focus and give definition to an experimental 'noise' performance. Narin then pivots from self-imposed rules back to 'silly' rules and scene politics, eliding the two kinds of rules. Narin believes that the rules—both the 'silly rules' and the self-imposed rules—should be criticized as boundaries of acceptable experimental 'noise' practice.

Michael Winter has been instrumental to the experimental music and 'noise' community in Los Angeles by providing a space for experimental performance: the wulf. He has studied with some of the salient composers in the twentieth century experimental music tradition, and though he holds a position of power as cofounder of the wulf., he is a strong critic of power structures, and believes in a benevolent mode of sharing music and artistic experiences with people at the wulf. In his own practice Michael designs software to carry out algorithms and scores for experimental performances. I asked him about the role of rules in experimental music.

> DM: Last question: What is the role of rules in noise music?

> MW: My guess is that there are a lot of them. But they're kind of self-defined. There's not a policing of what music should or should not be. I'm talking about the art domain—in my domain. I think that's exactly what capitalism is in the domain of pop music: it's a strict regimenting and policing of what is consumed. What I'm saying is that as people who make music, we're always abiding by rules. I think it might be a farce to think otherwise. Even in spontaneous composition we are limited by the rules of our technical capacity: what we consider as something interesting. I think the difference here is who is levying those rules. It should be something that is not violent. I think, for example, that someone would say, in the more traditional stance of the composer and the performer, the performer should be aware or accepting of…. No, let me backtrack. The rules are either self-imposed or imposed by another party willingly, or the rules set forth by another party are abided by willingly. So you decided to adhere to the rules of the piece because you've said, "Ok, I'm going to forsake trying to go do a new place. To have a new experience I'm going to listen to the process that this person has set into motion." That's a nonviolent adherence to rules. Whereas I think in our modern day world—our capitalist world—we have rules enforced upon us that are involuntary, and we have no choice about it. We can't choose to opt out. In music, if you don't like the rules, just don't play. But we don't have that choice in our day-to-day lives. And that's a violent way of looking at power and rules.

Michael postulates an opposition between the "art domain" and the "domain of pop music" characterized by its capitalist proclivities. In either domain, Michael defines rules as limitations, and considers that everyone must abide by rules of

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some sort, whether they are limitations of the body (what one is capable of performing as technique), or limitations on what counts as acceptable music for popular consumption. He then discusses rules in terms of a score that a composer writes for performers to follow. Performers voluntarily choose these rules (as notes on a staff or instructions to follow). These rules stand in contradistinction to rules imposed on people by capitalist structures. Capitalist structures, for Michael, are forms of violence that he wishes to avoid. His implication is that through choosing to experience experimental performances, people can free themselves from violence. Throughout my interview with Michael he spoke passionately about his desire to create a benevolent world through art and learning as part of his "digital philosophy." It made me recall a passage from *Silence* by John Cage.

> I went to a concert upstairs in Town Hall. The composer whose works were being performed had provided program notes. One of these notes was to the effect that there is too much pain in the world. After the concert I was walking along with the composer and he was telling me how the performances had not been quite up to snuff. So I said, "Well, I enjoyed the music, but I didn't agree with that program note about there being too much pain in the world." He said, "What? Don't you think there's enough?" I said, "I think there's just the right amount."[389]

I wonder if Michael agrees with Cage's zenful statement. In either case, Michael believes that rules should be freely adhered to, and that even if they are broken, there is no policing for transgressors, since the policing of aesthetic choices is considered violent.

By the time GX Jupitter-Larsen wanted to start a punk band, his attitude was, "Let's make some noise!"

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[389] Cage, *Silence*, 93.

GX: In punk, punk was this attitude, and it was, "Let's make some noise and cause commotion." When I heard that from people, I took them very seriously—literally. I said, "Yeah, let's make noise!" But of course, that's not what people really meant when they said that. They just wanted to make noisy music that would get attention so they could sign onto a label.

Punk had quickly been absorbed by a mainstream consumerism that codified its sound and style that could be read by its signifying practices: rules. For GX, the allure of punk was precisely its original battle cry to make noise and explore entropy. I finally asked GX about the role of rules in experimental 'noise.'

DM: This is the last written question: What is the role of rules in noise?

GX: Probably the same as it is in anything, really. I'm sure people will say, "Rules are meant to be broken," and I ultimately think that's kind of true. But noise has to follow the same laws of thermodynamics like anything else.

DM: But those are laws. Does noise have rules?

GX: More so than it used to, because it is much more narrowly defined than it used to be.

DM: What are those rules?

GX: Oh. Number one, to be loud. I think that's the number one rule for noise for over 10 or 15 years is this obsession with loud volume like that's your only choice. Another rule is that it has to be somehow controversial, be it in the packaging of the themes, and the unfortunate influence that power electronics has had on the scene as a whole. There's a lot more macho egoism involved in noise than their used to be, and I think there's a rule to encourage and reinforce that. There's this kind of, I don't want to say self-loathing, but there's definitely a lot more self-loathing going on in noise than there used to be, almost to a point that it's a rule. But these are relatively recent developments, and I think that noise has always been a scene that has reinvented itself over a 9-12 year period, and I would like to think that noise will once again redefine and reinvent itself because of new people getting involved who are not as connected to what happened before them.

Beyond the empirical aspects of sound and its adherence to thermodynamics, GX's first inclination is to make as a general rule that rules are made to be broken. He infers that the rules for experimental 'noise' have evolved over time,

and that their evolution takes the form of a shifting narrowness, though he only alludes to a rough history of the shift. He then enumerates four rules of the current era of experimental 'noise' practices that he has seen in recent years: *loud volume*, *controversy*, *macho egoism*, and *self-loathing*. Loud volume—as my discussion with GX revealed earlier—is an overrated feature of experimental 'noise' for him: "Volume is actually not as important to me as some people might think." Although he often engages in loud performances, he does not believe that performances need to be excessively loud. Controversy is a feature of experimental 'noise' that GX has embraced since he began making noise, and I believe that he personally still embraces this feature. Macho egoism is also a feature GX has engaged in, proclaiming himself once upon a time as a vulgar "young brute."

> GX: Everybody wants to be loud now, and it's too bad, because again, the vocabulary has been narrowed and simplified. In the 80s you didn't always have to be loud. Some of us were loud because we were brutes: we were young, brutish men. But not all of us were. Some of us—not including myself—were smarter than that, and would sometimes do very quiet pieces if the quality of the sound demanded low volumes.

Thus loudness and machismo went hand-in-hand. Finally, GX finds that self-loathing is so rampant that it *almost* constitutes a rule. Though he has repeatedly repudiated the positionality of self-loathing as mostly unsophisticated, two passages in my lengthy interview with GX espouse his ideas on the merits and demerits of the self-loathing 'noise' practitioner.

> GX: …there's so much dysfunctionality about the participants and the medium and the aesthetics that quite often the people involved stumble upon brilliance despite themselves. There are people who, for all intents and purposes, should not be making great art because they are so self-loathing or so socially dysfunctional, but oh my goodness, so often I come across sights and sounds and words that are just awesome with such an

amazing brilliance despite who a lot of these people are. That's the power of the scene…

GX: There were a lot of dysfunctional people: there was a lot of self-loathing in power electronics disguised as misogyny, disguised as the ultra-rightwing politics, but most of that had to do with the fact that they weren't articulate enough to be able to really express what they were actually feeling.

Like the obsession for loudness, dysfunctional self-loathing is linked to macho egoism for GX. Perhaps even contrarianism is linked to macho egoism. These rules that GX enumerates only speak to the current era of experimental 'noise,' even though he provides evidence of them from past generations of artists. What is important is that GX believes that the rules shift over time, and that the rules, as he has postulated them, are not ideal, and only represent the narrowing of the larger category of experimental 'noise' that has more to do with entropy and unorthodoxy: "The thing that I appreciate about noise—at least until recently—is the complete lack of conformity." Contrarianism and unconformity can be read as dialectic negations, like dissonance to consonance.

On his Facebook page, Casey Anderson bills himself as "Chief Noise Maker at Art Center College of Design" where he has taught since 2011. Casey has been a staple of the wulf. scene and the BetaLevel scene for at least as long. He favors compositional approaches that establish relationships between different actions and sonic objects. How he establishes those relationships are through self-imposed rules.

DM: Last question: What is the role of rules in noise music?

CA: I think they are self-imposed rules, and I think that comes out of structure. I think that's a good way to work through ideas. I don't know how to create art that is one-hundred percent free of structure. So for me, it's necessary in order to do things. And I've always been interested in work like that. There are lots of different ways of doing it, but there are some tasks, or there's a structure, or there's something that sets things in

motion. So I think that's what rules do, is they actually set things in motion. I don't think of them as inhibiting by any stretch. I think actually trying to do something free of all rules would be much harder and less satisfying. It kind of loses all the things that I really like when you don't think about things in a rigorous way.

Self-imposed rules, for Casey, allow for the potential for interesting results. He says he is unsure if he would be able to make work free form structure, but perhaps something free from structure may not even be recognized as art. Rules "set things in motion" (Joseph Hammer said almost the same thing: "It's a crutch to get the ball rolling"). Casey believes that a work of art can be judged by its own criteria; perhaps the criteria is to be read precisely as the self-imposed rules that govern its realization.

Sebastian Demian is a promoter and manager of music and art. His interest in "rebel art" is inspired by his dedication to the music and paintings of Lee "Scratch" Perry, a Jamaican pioneer in dub and reggae who produced some of Bob Marley's first tracks. Sebastian is an important promoter at Dem Passwords who helped organize some of the most interesting experimental 'noise' shows between 2010 and 2013. Though he does not make experimental 'noise,' his involvement in promotion positions him in a place of privilege for deciding who is permitted to perform. These decisions are based on various criteria, and such criteria can be viewed as rules.

DM: Last question: Are there rules in noise music?

SD: No, but you'll see sometimes those conferences like the INC—the International Noise Conference. They'll do that and then I'll see on the flyer; they'll write something like, "No mixing boards," or sometimes they'll impose their own rules. One time I asked John Wiese if there was any rules to… a Sissy Spacek show I think it was, and he said, "No phaser;" he said, "No phase shifter. Everything is fine except for no phase shifter." So I don't think there are any rules, but maybe in certain instances there are.

Sebastian answers the question if there are rules with a cautious "no." Nevertheless he cites the rallying cry for the International Noise Conference: "No laptops. No mixers. No droning." Every year the INC schedules a lengthy show in Los Angeles filled with short sets (less than fifteen minutes) as part of an ongoing world tour. Sebastian clearly disagrees with the rules set out by the INC. Dem Passwords in particular has had some very powerful experimental 'noise' performances that transgress those rules, like Jeff Witscher's laptop performances as Rene Hell, or the many drone noise performances. Furthermore, mixers are a staple of most experimental 'noise' artists (even though no-input mixer feedback is often considered a cliché technique). John Wiese's grindcore Sissy Spacek can be described as a noise metal band (if "grindcore" does not already suffice). One might hear hints of sarcasm and hints of truth with the dictum, "no phaser." But in the experimental 'noise' world, Joseph Hammer is the only person I know who use a phase shifting pedal. For Sebastian there are no rules for experimental 'noise,' but the fact that he was able to think of a few situations in which an instrument or technique was considered forbidden— laptops, mixers, drones, phasers—was enough to give circumspect pause.

I interviewed Damion Romero in the car on the way to the radio station at Loyola Marymount University where he has hosted the program Psychotechnics on KXLU every Wednesday morning from midnight to 2:00 AM for some twenty years. We would continue the interview in the DJ booth while he endeavored to play the entire catalog of the works of Arizona experimentalist Hands To over several weeks. When I asked Damion about the format of the show he said, "it's experimental music or field recordings or noise or whatever you want to call it." Damion's involvement in the Los Angeles experimental 'noise' scenes can be

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traced back to the early 1990s when he played bass in the band Slug. He used the name Speculum Fight for his solo experimental 'noise' project throughout the mid-1990s when he ditched the moniker and began performing and recording under his own name. Other than the members of the LAFMS, few people surpass Damion's longevity in the Los Angeles experimental 'noise' scenes. I asked him my final question.

> DM: Last question for now—What's the role of rules in noise music? Are there rules?
>
> DR: I don't think there really are any rules, but, I think other people can answer that better. Don't play music? [That's Damion's attempt at a rule. We laugh] I don't know. It's all blurred a lot. Some stuff has sort of a…. I don't know about rules as a way to describe it. I think rules kind of implies, for everybody. You can make rules for yourself, which is fine, but they're your own rules, and you're not really expecting anybody else to follow them, so there's a difference, maybe. So I don't really think there are so many rules except follow your own rules.

Damion doubts there are rules in experimental 'noise.' He begins to imagine what rules might be in the context of a subgenre that had narrower parameters of engagement, but cut himself off. "Don't play music?" he retorted sarcastically. He then said, "I think rules implies, for everybody." Of course that is the spirit of the question: by learning what people think the rules are, I hope to construct a rough experimental 'noise' ideology through a set of axioms. Ultimately, Damion admitted that the only rules were the ones that artists make to set the parameters of creativity: self-imposed rules.

Don Bolles has been engaged with sound experiments since he developed an obsession with shortwave radio in his youth. Stockhausen had left a remarkable impression on him, but so had Hawkwind, Captain Beefheart, and the German krautock bands of the 1970s. Don has always been drawn to anything that might be termed 'weird'—to him weird is a synonym for cool. His punk, rock,

goth, and glam bands also fall under the weird banner for him; but also his

psychedelic experimental 'noise' duo with Joseph Hammer, Kitten Sparkles. With

Don's aesthetic of weirdness in mind, let us consider his answers concerning the

role rules in experimental 'noise.'

> DM: Last question: What is the role of rules in noise music?
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> DB: I think it makes it more…. If you don't have any rules at all, you have to invent some in order to make anything happen. No rules means total randomness. You might as well not do anything, which I also like.
>
> DM: Are there rules?
>
> DB: Of course there are rules. With noise and noise music you break them too, and the breaking of rules is part of that.
>
> DM: What *are* the rules of noise music?
>
> DB: To have it sound totally random and sound extremely noisy. I think those are it. And to avoid musicality.
>
> DM: What is 'musicality'?
>
> DB: Composed sequences of tones and rhythms. I like music that doesn't have melodies and doesn't have beats. Then a lot of people say, "Then it can't be music." Not to me. That's where the music really is, to me, is in those *weird* parameters that are outside of those things.

Rules are necessary, says Don. They allow a performance to begin, and breaking

rules allows a performance to transform in an unexpected way. "No rules means

total randomness," says Don. Yet if he is correct in his assertion—that no rules

means total randomness—then experimental 'noise' perhaps is *not* about "total

randomness." In sonic terms, total randomness is characterized by the purity of

white noise; but since the experience of white noise in its purity is an

impossibility—a view corroborated by Henry Cowell in his essay "The Joy of

Noise"—then its existence as the totality of audible frequencies cannot register as

art. If one plays a white noise generator in a room, what one hears is not just the

white noise generator, but the acoustics of the room carving out certain frequencies giving the room an acoustic identity. When I asked Don about the rules of 'noise' he said: "To have it sound totally random and sound extremely noisy. I think those are it. And to avoid musicality." To have something 'sound' totally random is to have something sound *as if* it were totally random, but to not have necessarily achieved the state of randomness. Next, one must avoid 'musicality.' Don defines 'musicality' as "composed sequences of tones and rhythms." He continues by saying "that's where the music really is…, in those *weird* parameters that are outside of those things." 'Weird' parameters outside of the commonly understood notions of music, as defined by Don, is paradoxically where the "music really is." Implicit in Don's testimony is that not only are there self-imposed rules, but one of the self-imposed rules mandates the breaking of even those rules.

Bob Bellerue left Los Angeles in 2007 for Portland, Oregon where he continued to perform in the experimental 'noise' scene there. During the one year that he stayed in Oregon, a documentary on the Portland noise scene was shot—*People Who Do Noise*—and Bob was a part of it. By 2008 he was living in New York and not long afterward friends were calling for him to organize a noise festival: thus was born "Ende Tymes: Festival of Noise and Liberation." In the context of noise and liberation, our discussion on the role of rules is prefaced with our discussion on the connection between experimental noise and freedom.

> DM: [I]s there a connection between noise music and freedom?
>
> BB: Freedom is weird. Freedom is the ability to do whatever you want, right? That's the idea. So yeah, you can do whatever you want in noise, but you may not be able to play Rachmaninoff or something. So you can't necessarily do everything you want in noise. But you can amplify a shovel and play a record with it like GX does. You can amplify the trees—record

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the trees for sixty hours and condense it, like Damion did. You can play bicycles.

DM: Like Zappa.

BB: Or the Portland Bike Ensemble. They use contact mics and bikes. No pedals or anything. So you can do anything you want, but that doesn't mean you can do everything. You can play Rachmaninoff through a pedal. You could somehow create a system….

DM: Last question. What's the role of rules in noise music? Are there rules in noise music?

BB: Rules?

DM: Yeah. You mentioned that you can't play Rachmaninoff.

BB: That's not a rule, that's just a reality. I think there are more concrete realities than rules. Rules can be useful for compositional reasons, but in terms of noise, I think the only rule is that you can do anything, but you can't do everything, which I just made up. The only rule is, don't break the PA, learn your shit, and bring it on. Those are the only rules to me. You have to know how to hook your own shit up; no one else is going to do it for you.

Bob's basic message is that one is free to make certain choices, but one cannot choose to do everything. Choices are necessary, and they presuppose options that are not chosen. The fact that Bob says that a performance of Rachmaninoff is off limits also speaks to what is possible with experimental 'noise'—traditional performance is thus beyond the limits. Nevertheless, one can recontextualize a piece by Rachmaninoff by playing a recording of it and sending it through an effects pedal, or perhaps mixing it with other kinds of materials. Joseph Hammer, for example, might take a track by Rachmaninoff and record a few seconds of it onto his tape loop juxtaposed with other fragments of sound torn from their temporality and recontextualized as a continuous performance. The noisician can do whatever they want, but cannot do everything: that is Bob's impromptu position. He then gives three fundamental rules: 1) do not destroy the

amplification system, 2) learn, 3) do noise, assertively. The first rule is an ethical imperative: it implies that one should not destroy the house amplification system; one should not destroy the property of others. The second rule, "learn your shit," may seem somewhat ambiguous, because in the context of improvisation the element of surprise often entails a level of ignorance. In another part of the interview concerned with organization techniques for structuring an experimental 'noise' performance, Bob said: "I get to know whatever my setup is. I use the same setup, often times the same cables—the same exact setup—and then I just get to know it really well so I can have a basic structure and just wing it…." In another words rule two, "learn your shit," means to learn the capabilities of the equipment you are using to perform with. This rule can also be invoked to explain Bob's final annoyance: "You have to know how to hook your own shit up." The third and final rule is to "bring it on." I interpret this rule to mean that one should perform experimental 'noise' with vigor, or to perform like one knows what they are doing. When I asked Bob if he could tell when someone was making a mistake, he said, "[s]ometimes people are really obvious. If they're moving around and saying, 'Wait, what? oh?' that's a good sign [that they are making a mistake] because that means they're trying to figure out if they can try to hear something, like if the pedal's not working." Performing with recognizable diffidence is a mistake, and a violation of the third rule.

Joe Potts' performances with his band AIRWAY were considered some of the loudest performances anyone had heard. Using his "sonic fascism" technique, which entailed electrically connecting the instruments of the members of the band to his mixer so that only he could decide what sounds would be output

through the loudspeakers, Joe's early performances were examples of

experimental 'noise' as sounds were made tangible through extreme volume. The

brothers Joe and Rick Potts along with Chip Chapman were the founding

members of the Los Angeles Free Music Society, designed to sound more serious

than it was—and then it became a little serious! But what did "free" music mean?

Was it really free? I asked Joe about the connection between noise music and

freedom, and we continued to a discussion on rules.

> DM: Is there a connection between noise music and freedom?
>
> JP:I don't know. That's a weird one. You want to say 'yes,' but like what we just talked about, there *are* rules, even though you don't want there to be, if you're talking about a specific genre. There are rules and things about beat. My brother Rick likes to work with beats, and I think people would rather he didn't even though he's doing it in a weird way. So I think there are definitely rules for noise, although…
>
> DM: You've started to answer the last question: What is the role of rules in noise music? Are there rules?
>
> JP: As it has become a specific genre, there are rules. Like I said, one of them is the whole rhythmic thing. It's that John Cage explanation. The: when you have regular rhythms, you're creating—by chopping the music into segments—you're creating these unintended structures; when you're improvising, specifically. The example I give is this fantasy where this great painter moves to New York and one of her paintings gets damaged in shipping so she's about to throw the canvas out with the grid on it, and then Jackson Pollock, who is kind of feeling broke, asks her if he could have it, so he takes it home and does a splatter painting on it, and after he sobers up and comes back and looks at it, all he can say is "What the fuck?" because the grid had turned all his splashes and expressionism into a tile pattern, and that's kind of what happens when you do a free improvisation over a regular rhythm: you end up with these tile patterns, which is why people do things like try to shift the beat out of phase and create more complexities, or deal with rhythms as individual sound samples that they plug in as occasional elements.

Joe hesitates to make the connection between experimental 'noise' and freedom.

Though he wishes music *could* be free, he laments that there are rules dictated

by a genre. He uses the example of his brother, Rick Potts, who uses beats in his

work with the LAFMS to the consternation of some others. By offending

someone's aesthetic sensibilities, the offence becomes ethical. The (perceived)

rule forbids meter, the organization of rhythm. Joe's example of Jackson Pollock

making a 'splatter painting' on a grid is apt: the grid gives form and regularity to

a process that is intended (in this case) to be irregular. Similarly, a simple

rhythm with a regular meter will draw the ear to formulate irregular sounds by

proximity to the beat. Joe believes that 'noise music' has become a *thing*. A *thing*

means a definable and knowable object. The LAFMS initially discussed their works

in terms of 'noise' at a time when experimental 'noise' was not a term used in

parlance. The aesthetics of the LAFMS, however, were perhaps better self-

characterized by their "messiness" and the stance against purity, as advocated

by the DooDooettes.

I interviewed Maria shortly after she moved from Long Beach to

Hollywood. I had seen her perform as Concrete Shiva and as Unica, and I had

even seen her perform a few choreographed pieces accompanied by 'noise' at the

performance space she opened with Patrick Murch called Mata Noise. Mata Noise

was established after my interview with Maria: the fact that she and Patrick

founded a venue for experimental performances shows their dedication to the Los

Angeles experimental 'noise' scenes.

> DM: Last question—What is the role of rules in noise music? Are there
> rules in noise music?

> MG: I don't think there are, honestly. Can you give me an example of
> what somebody might think is a rule in noise music? In my mind I don't
> know if there really are.

> DM: I suppose like if you put a typical beat or play a chord progression.
> You try and play country music or something.

> MG: I bet there are, for the real purists, there probably are a set of rules,
> but I have a pretty open scape of what I consider noise, personally. For

me, a lot of it is about the person. It's usually one piece going on throughout.

I've seen really amazing [things]—what I'd still consider noise pieces— that have rhythmic beats, or have some sort of melodic feel to them that I'd still consider noise. I really don't think there are a set of rules. I don't think there should be a set of rules. I understand for wall noise—that's a specific kind of thing. I don't want to say it's a lack of structure, because some of the pieces I've seen are so composed and so structured. I guess not a song is the only thing in my mind. I don't know how to describe it. I've even seen noise pieces where they obviously have lyrics, and they're singing or screaming or doing whatever, but it's still affective to this point: Yeah, they're using vocals, but it's not necessarily not noise because they're using vocals. That's one thing I don't ever want to say is not noise, is the use of vocals, because I think the human voice is such an interesting element when people use it in noise. You can do so much with it, and I think it's really interesting to see. But for me, I don't have any criteria besides it not being…—I was going to say, "No drums," but I've seen people do really amazing things with drums, though. We saw that guy John Benson, who used to be in that band A Minor Forest. He lives in the Bay. He was running the Noise Bus for a while, where he'd have shows on this old dilapidated bus that he had converted into a show space. It was really awesome. He did this cool thing with a drum where he had put some sort of vibrating machine underneath it, and he poured milk on top of it, and it was vibrating the drum, or whatever he had put under it. It was vibrating the top of the drum so much that it made these really distinct patterns on the drum, and it was really beautiful. Then they poured goat's blood on top of that. So you can use whatever you want. It's just how you use it. Other than that, I don't think I have any rules for it. I'm interested though. I'm interested in what people think…

DM: Me too!

In our exchange, Maria turned the question back on me! I hoped that my answer would prod her to construct a set of maxims, but she found exceptions to nearly every rule she could think of. She distances herself from the "real purists" who she surmises have developed a set of rules, but Maria answered the question personally: for her there are no rules for experimental 'noise.' The only pseudo-rule is no songs. But 'no songs,' for Maria, does *not* mean no singing. She explains that she has witness several performances of what she considers 'noise' to use the voice in interesting ways. She has witnessed performances of 'noise' that used beats (perhaps Positive Shadow, or Cole Miller as Human Hands or

Toxic Loincloth). She has even witnessed melody in the context of what she considers 'noise' (perhaps Shannon Kennedy's performances with strung branches as Nephila. Not only does Maria not think there are rules for experimental 'noise,' she says, "I don't think there should be a set of rules." Concurring with Nial's ethical position that experimental 'noise' *should* be free from rules, Maria views it as an open form of sonic art.

Samur Khouja was the last person I interviewed. Each of the three-day installments of our interview took place at a recording studio—the first two were at a mansion in the Valley; the final interview took place at Sea Horse Studios at (the) Handbag Factory. Samur is not only a death metal singer and experimental 'noise' artist, he is also a well-respected professional recording engineer and producer. As a promoter of experimental 'noise' performances, he makes decisions on how to bring various experimental 'noise' artists together, or he decides who can help book a show at his place, (the) Handbag Factory. To be able to make decisions concerning who can and cannot perform implies an unwritten ideology for what is possible. I asked Samur about these rules and how they function.

> DM: Last question: What is the role of rules in noise music? Are there rules in noise music?
>
> SK: Yeah, there's politics. It really just comes down to the subgenre. Or if you really care. Or the demographics. I feel like if you're influenced by a lot of different kinds of music and different kinds of noise and subgenres of noise and subgenres of other types of music, you're aware of it, but you could give a shit less about the boundaries. There's a three-day noise fest, and they promote the fact that there's no computers or mixers involved in all the noise bands that they invite to play. And so that right there is kind of weird, because traditionally, noise is just supposed to be noise, but now the source matters. So people who have a thing against laptops are proud of the fact that they're not using laptops. I don't think laptops are good or bad, but there are definitely a lot of noise fans that may think otherwise. So that's kind of interesting because the listeners and fans are taking something that's free and compartmentalizing it themselves, and that

creates more new music that has thinned out, and then it's just weird how the thing kind of spider-webs out.

DM: What are the rules in noise? Are there any?

SK: Not for me, no. There are things I like and things I don't like. But there aren't any rules.

Samur immediately grasped the political nature of the question. He imagines a field of concentric circles of genres and concentric circles of (types of) people that would be drawn toward or against a certain form of expression. The knowledgeable noisician is aware of the various types of experimental 'noise' but moves freely between them. He then cites a "three-day noise fest" that strictly forbids the use of laptops and mixers—clearly Samur is citing the International Noise Conference (INC) with their dictum: "No laptops. No mixers. No droning." Samur then alludes to a notion of 'traditional noise'—[what are the rules for 'traditional noise'?]—and then criticizes the festival without naming it: "traditionally, noise is just supposed to be noise, but now the source matters." To be sure, the source does not matter for Samur. Some of his experimental 'noise' recordings vacillate between arpeggiated chords and full-spectrum noise, thus blurring the boundaries and noising noise. For Samur there are no rules in experimental 'noise'—there are only sonic experiences he enjoys and those that are less enjoyable.

Summary: Experimental 'Noise' Rules

Noise as art may seem to be truly unruly, but this section has shown experimental 'noise' artists contextualize their work in the context of rules. For only a few people experimental 'noise' has no rules at all. For others, experimental 'noise' may not have rules but individuals can judge the merits of

performance the way they see fit: in a sense, the listener imparts rules and rubrics for judgment. Then there are general guidelines for performance: do not break the PA; do not blow the circuit breaker. Narin Dickerson hypothesizes "silly rules"—that boil down to scene politics—as a slight. Thus the INC (International Noise Conference) with their dictum—"No laptops. No mixers. No droning"— constitutes "silly rules." One important rule, which has often been generated from mistakes, is, as David Kendall tells us: "Sound like you know what you're doing." Confidence is important, and to not have it is to make a mistake. So confidence is the rule. GX Jupitter-Larsen, Maria Garcia, and Samur Khouja alluded to the idea that subgenres of 'noise' have rules. Drone noise implies that there should be drones. Harsh noise implies that it should sound harsh. Wall noise has explicit rules that say that it cannot move—thus it is called 'wall noise' or 'harsh noise wall.' John Wiese says that some successful performances use rules while others do not.

By far the most agreed upon rules in experimental 'noise' are self-imposed rules. In its simplest form, self-imposed rules are *choices*. Every choice made is a rule. Choosing an instrument is choosing the history of performance practices with that instrument.[390] As Scott Cazan points out, every circuit board is an algorithm, meaning that it is a set of rules that carries out a variety of functions. Every kind of score, or performance plan, is a set of guidelines dictating what will be done—rules. Self-imposed rules are limitations that performers use to hone

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[390]One is then informed by those historical performance practices to either utilize them or to ignore them and attempt a new way to perform. For example, one might play the guitar conventionally; but if one smashes the guitar, they are abiding by the practices set in motion by Pete Townshend of the Who, or if one places a drum stick behind the guitar strings on the neck, then one follows the tradition of guitar performances made popular by Sonic Youth. The guitar in particular has a tradition that GX Jupitter-Larsen has found unbearable for experimental 'noise' performance precisely because most techniques with the instrument have been exhausted and normalized.

their performances and focus the energy in a particular direction. They are used to define a project as "an extension of their own strange little world," as Joe Potts believes. Greh Holger uses different rules for different 'noise' projects. Eddie Giles believes that rules are helpful for the "quality control" of a performance. Elden Man says that "rules should be made up on the fly"—in other words, rules are improvised. Don Bolles says that not only are rules for experimental 'noise' necessary, but one of the rules is to break the rules: to break ones own rules.

Bob Bellerue's response was perhaps the most poetic and factual at the same time: "You can do anything, but you can't do everything." If one cannot do everything, there must be limitations for what is beyond the scope of experimental 'noise.'

Conclusions—Experimental 'Noise' Aesthetics

This chapter explored many of the aesthetic concerns and positions of experimental 'noise' artists working in Los Angeles. It focused on the epistemic nature of 'good' performances, the listening habits used to assess those judgments, who is permitted to make experimental 'noise,' the nature of mistakes, and the role of rules. Listeners in the experimental 'noise' scenes value new sounds, masterful performances, and clear intentions. They listen for new sounds, new experiences, masterful performances, and the relationships between events in the context of the performance. Anyone can make experimental 'noise,' but to do it well one should familiarize themselves (through practice) with the tools and instruments used in performance. Infelicitous mistakes include breaking someone else's equipment and showing malcontent toward a failure through facial cues and gestures. Felicitous mistakes are opportunities for adaptive improvisation to explore new sound worlds in performance. Experimental 'noise' artists make choices that limit the course of performance. These choices and limitations are rules. Experimental 'noise'—excepting its subgenres—attempts to resist stringent codification.

CONCLUSIONS AND SYNTHESES

This dissertation has now explored the Los Angeles noisescape through the stories of the practitioners, audiences, and venues that provide the basic superstructure and infrastructure that constitute the salient experimental 'noise' scenes in Los Angeles in the early twenty-first century. It has explored and attempted to defend the usage of the term 'noise' to describe the idiom in question; the instruments, techniques, and practices of the practitioners I interviewed in the scene; and investigated the aesthetic ideologies and listening practices of the scene by the people who are involved with it. I will now use the testimony of the participants I interviewed in Los Angeles to corroborate my claims.

Throughout this dissertation I endeavor to provide evidence for my theses summarized below:

  I.   Two criteria characterize experimental 'noise.'
      1. Experimental 'noise' prioritizes timbre over pitch.
      2. Experimental 'noise' avoids periodic and metrical regularity.
 II.   Experimental 'noise' is *like* the North Pole; all other idioms are south of it.
III.   Stochastic resonance (noise benefit) is induced by experimental 'noise.'

Many of the chapters in this dissertation have ended with a summary to synthesize the main points and findings of the chapter. This dissertation conclusion will include information from other chapters and their summaries to corroborate the theses.

I. Characterizing Experimental 'Noise'

1. The Prioritization of Timbre over Pitch

When I first attempted a definition for experimental 'noise,' I knew immediately that timbre was a key component. I described experimental 'noise' in terms of its being *about* timbre. I felt that 'noise' had little to do with pitch and its codification into scales measured by the division of the octave, and the resulting histories and theories of melody and harmony. If sound is the basic material of music, Western music had tended to obsess over pitch. On the other hand, timbre, in Western music, came from the instruments used to render pitch and its relations to melody and harmony, and resultant histories on how to make acceptable sounds with those instruments. I also knew from taking years of trumpet lessons that instrumental pedagogy often stressed the importance of obtaining a "musical" sound, and, in the case of trumpet pedagogy, of obtaining a "warm" sound. To have a "warm" sound meant that one had "good tone." Terms like "musical" and "warm" irritated me. To play "musically" meant to play 'well'; to play 'good' music.[391] At the time, that seemed easy enough to understand. But to play "warm" meant something particular, and the term was often contrasted with the way *I* played, which was considered too "bright" or sometimes even "brittle." One day I finally asked my band director if a "warm" sound meant one that had less treble and more bass and mids, like the controls on a radio, and the answer was *yes*. As a young student I was dumbfounded by the lack of clarity on this issue of "tone." In this case, tone is a synonym for timbre.

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[391] Henry Kingsbury's *Music, Talent, and Performance*, devotes the third chapter, "The Cream Rises," to understanding politically what the terms "musical" and "talent" mean in the context of the New England Conservatory where he conducted his ethnographic research.

At the time I was crafting a description for 'noise' for the prospectus of this dissertation, my advisor, Professor Leta Miller, suggested to me that what I was trying to say was that 'noise' *prioritizes* timbre over pitch. The term "priority" has the advantage of establishing, hierarchizing, and subordinating one term over another without completely discarding it. Thus, stable pitches are sometimes heard in experimental 'noise,' but they are rarely the focal point for making or listening to 'noise.' Timbre is the first key to understanding experimental 'noise.'

> The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides the following definition for timbre:
>
> The character or quality of a musical or vocal sound (distinct from its pitch and intensity) depending on the particular voice or instrument producing it, and distinguishing it from sounds proceeding from other sources; caused by the proportion in which the fundamental tone is combined with the harmonics of overtones (=German *klangfarbe*).[392]

This standard definition, as a whole, is not helpful toward a general understanding of timbre. First of all, the term "musical" implies that the timbre is strictly an element of music. Secondly, the term "vocal" is strangely contrasted with "musical." Thirdly, the definition proffered necessitates that timbre exists in relation to a fundamental tone (or pitch). The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition for timbre could be rectified with the following omissions:

> The character or quality of a ~~musical or vocal~~ sound (distinct from its pitch and intensity) depending on the particular voice or instrument producing it, and distinguishing it from sounds proceeding from other sources; ~~caused by the proportion in which the fundamental tone is combined with the harmonics of overtones (=German *klangfarbe*)~~.[393]

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[392] *Oxford English Dictionary*, "Timbre,"
http://www.oed.com.oca.ucsc.edu/search?searchType=dictionary&q=timbre&_searchBtn=Search
(accessed October 4, 2010).
[393] My strikethroughs.

I recognize that timbre is the character or quality of sound that is distinct from pitch and volume (intensity), and distinct from other timbres. "Timbre," according to McAdams and Bregman in the Computer Music Journal, "tends to be the psychoacoustician's multidimensional waste-basket category for everything that cannot be labeled pitch or loudness."[394] Their sardonic account is telling: one might surmise that timbre as a "waste-basket" category is full of noise as unwanted sound. But there is another definition of noise that refers to its aperidocity, contrasted to the periodicity of pitch, as proffered by nineteenth century physicist Herman Helmholtz: "*The sensation of a musical tone is due to a rapid periodic motion of the sonorous body; the sensation of a noise to non-periodic motions.*"[395]

My goal is to define timbre in a way that does not depend on pitch—as a periodic sound—and therefore does not depend on partials or overtones, since partials and overtones are byproducts of pitch as the fundamental frequency. Noise—defined by its aperiodicity—has timbre; or as Luigi Russolo loudly proclaimed in the "Futurist Manifesto" of 1913, "Futurist musicians should substitute for the limited variety of timbres that the orchestra possesses today the infinite variety of timbres in noises…."[396] I have defined timbre in this dissertation in two important ways. The first is that timbre is characterized by the harmonic content of a sound. Secondly timbre is characterized by the morphology of a sound expressed by its envelope characteristics as they affect either amplitude or frequency. I have also said in this dissertation that *timbre is harmony*. Since harmony is defined by the simultaneity of pitches, and pitches

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[394] Steven McAdams and Albert Bregman, "Hearing Musical Streams," *Computer Music Journal* 3, no. 4 (December 1979): 60.
[395] Hermann Helmholtz, *On the Sensations of Tone* (1862), trans. Alexander Ellis (New York: Dover, 1954), 8.
[396] Russolo, 28.

are frequencies, I have said that timbre is harmony because it is characterized by the simultaneity of frequencies. In a discussion on simple and compound tones— in this context *'tone' means pitch*—Helmholtz wrote:

> The facts here adduced shew us then that every musical tone in which harmonic upper partial tones can be distinguished, although produced by a single instrument, may really be considered as in itself a chord or combination of various simple tones.[397]

In other words, an instrument that produces a single pitch is in fact producing a "chord" through the multiplicity of "simple tones" or frequencies. James Tenney called for a radical reexamination of the potentials for harmony, but settled for the old definition of harmony as "a harmonic relation between pitches."[398] I believe that Tenney—who was keenly interested in timbre—could have consummated his interest in harmony and timbre had he conceived of harmony as the simultaneity of frequency.

Timbre is not a commonly used term; perhaps only musicians and scholars of the literate Western tradition are aware of the term. When considering the majority of electric guitarists—who generally are not literate with regard to staff notation, but may be literate in terms of the recognition of chords and tablature-style notations—the preferred term is "tone," defined generally as the color of sound, and obtained by manipulating bass, middle, and treble frequencies on a guitar amplifier, the volumes and tone controls on the guitar itself, and the specific manner that one plays the instrument: *tone is in the fingers* is a common mantra amongst electric guitarists (and probably also amongst acoustic guitarists, I would assume). Since experimental 'noise' often appropriates some of the same tools as the electric guitarist—namely, electric

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[397] Helmholtz, 24.
[398] James Tenney, "John Cage and the Theory of Harmony," 34.

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guitar pedals: overdrive, distortion, fuzz, modulation, delay, reverberation, and so on—the comparison is worthy of note.

So when we ask, "How does it sound?" or "What does it sound like?" the question either means: 1) "What is the quality of the sound?", which is to say, "How would you describe the timbre of the sound?" or 2) "What is the style or genre of music?" The first way of describing sound has important consequences for an understanding of timbre, since asking the question "How does it sound?" or "What does it sound like?" is synonymous with asking the question, "How would you describe the timbre of the sound?" Therefore I claim that when practitioners and audiences in the experimental 'noise' scene claim that they are interested in *new sounds*, they mean *new timbres*. This claim is further corroborated by the entry for timbre in *Grove Music Online*. After the general definition, it provides an addendum: "*See also* SOUND, §6." When clicking on SOUND, §6, the user is taken to the section of the definition of *sound* labeled, "6. Origins of quality and tonal differences," with the first subsection labeled "(i) Complex mixtures of pure tones."[399] In other words, the definition of 'timbre' is embedded as part of the definition of 'sound.' Therefore I have used the testimony from my interviews that deal with timbre and sound to answer questions on timbre. Specifically, I have focused on three principal questions that speak to issues of timbre:

- What is the function of timbre in your work?
- What do you listen for in noise music?
- What kinds of sounds do you value?

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[399] *Grove Music Online*. http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/27973?q=timbre&search=quick&source=omo_gmo&pos=2&_start=1#firsthit (accessed December 3, 2016).

Answers from other questions in my interviews that speak to timbre may also

prove useful and relevant, and I will choose such answers as they corroborate my

thesis. Of course, much of this work has already been undertaken in Chapter 5,

specifically on the function of timbre. I determined from the answers that timbre

was often spoken about in terms of metaphor, the instruments used, the

methods of achieving it, as ideology, and in terms of its novelty. The following list

of quotes corroborates the first criterion of the thesis that experimental 'noise'

prioritizes timbre of pitch.

> DK: I'm interested in a sound that has a lot of features and… a single sound where there's a lot of detail to hear.

> HP: I want to hear something like really loud and just distorted and chaotic.

> NM: I… try to make that sound as interesting as I can: hunt for it; *hunt for the tone*. For me I'll have to sit down and fine-tune all of my EQ and distortion to where it's just the right rumble.

> GH: I think it's about pure sound worship. I think noise listeners are people who listen to a lot of music and a lot of different sounds to a lot of different types of things and appreciate different sounds. And I think that the creation of noise and the listening to noise are both done out of appreciating sound in a way that a lot of people don't.

> JW: I think I would hope to hear something that felt like an exploration or possibly even a discovery of something new and interesting. Something that I've tried to do consistently is to make a work that's really inconsistent.

> EM: Timbre makes each instrument unique: that's basically it. So each instrument that you need can serve its own purpose in the context of a composition, a live execution. As far as electronics, the timbre is whatever you plug into it, whatever sound design that you try to achieve. That's basically manipulating sine waves and getting the sound that you want from filters and oscillators and whatever.

> EG: What sounds do I value? I like cityscapes. I like natural sounds and urban or suburban sounds. The drones of machinery or coolers, heaters, stuff like that. To me, those things are comforting.
> If they are musicians themselves, I think they're listening for texture. When you ask me what I mean by that, I think that if someone goes up

there with their gear and they're trying to produce a certain sound or a certain mood or tone….

AC: Timbre, I think that's the right word. Timbre. Not really tone but the sound.

JH: It's all timbre. It's extreme timbre. Extreme, high resolution timbre. High resolution, wide range, wide band—timbre. And that's part of that business with why I'm obsessed with high fidelity, is because I'm too much interested in that—timbre. And if it's going to be really grungy and shit like that, I want it to be truly really grungy and shit like that. If it's lo-fi, it's got to be lo-fi in a very particular way, without insipid discoloration—or I shouldn't say 'insipid discoloration,' I should say coloration.

CC: [Timbre]'s pretty important. That's what I'm mostly listening for when I'm listening to recordings on my own or listening to someone else perform. If there's a good listener out in the audience, it will be something that will make them smile or make them feel interested in the performance and the piece.
That new thing; that new sound. Something I haven't heard before.

SC: Timbre is everything. Especially in electronic music, because it's the only thing that can differentiate one thing from another—one process from another.
Timbre is a kind of ontology: the discovery of motives and content.

ND: Sometimes I just want to lie back and be able to just appreciate the vibration of the sounds. Sometimes I'm listening to interesting changes and transitions. Sometimes I'm listening to the way that an object becomes sound. Sometimes I'm listening to the way that the sound is affected by the rooms it's in. I might be particularly attentive to the way that it sounds completely different in a different space.

MW: It's not necessarily a sound that I value, but it's more of the succession of sounds that I value, or an organization of sounds or noises that I tend to become interested in.
I think extreme parameters, very soft music, very loud music. But it could be anything. It's really *how*. It's not *what*, it's how it's implemented and for what reasons. My ultimate metric is looking for something *new*.

GX: For me it's more of a tactile experience. It's how it *feels* to me, the texture, the feeling. I want a sound that feels like sandpaper. I think sonically it's a very tactile and textual kind of thing.
A rough texture that is dissolving, that is in perpetually dissolving; that perfect moment of entropy where you just have this thing that looks crippled that's just about to evaporate, but never does. It's like this moment in time that's just frozen. That's what I'm after.
Something I haven't heard before. That really is it: something I haven't heard before.

CA: That's one of the things I'm most interested in, different types of sounds, and really perceiving them, or trying to. So I think that's critical.

DR: I try to get certain sounds. I idealize sounds in my head and think about a sound that I would like to hear. In a sense it's some sort of noise. Not so much like a pure white noise, but kind of.

DB: Whenever there was noise in music, I liked that music a lot better. I didn't like music that was just nice little sounds that went together in a certain way. I didn't like that at all. I liked chaos and noise.

BB: In terms of the pedals and the routing and all the various settings. Basically everything affects the timbre.
In general I work more with textures I think: extreme visceral textures, getting a lot of stuff together, rather than it being either really static or like an individual instrument.

JP: Layered sounds and hypnotic sounds.
I see it more as a collection of sounds and an interaction of those sounds, rather than something following any kind of structured, melodic, predetermined score: a sample of sounds that are interacting.

MG: I really enjoy high frequencies. I like what they can do to your ear. I like that they're just so piercing, even though they may sound so quiet, they're so piercing that you can walk away from it and being completely frazzled. With an extremely high pitch, you almost don't even hear it. I like high frequencies a lot. I like crackly sounds.

SK: A lot of new sounds. If it's new; if it's something I haven't heard before, or if it's a piece of real life that has become surreal because an artist is using it in a new way, or creating a sound from it—found sounds: those are always beautiful.
It's mostly just about the sound and really deep listening.

In the world of experimental 'noise,' the concept of the octave—as twice or half the vibrations of any given pitch—is rarely discussed. In my compilation of interviews, numbering more than 1600 pages, the term "octave" was used only ten times. Two of those times were times that I had mentioned the octave. A few of those times referred to the use of "octave pedals" that can be used to synthesize either a fundamental tone or to further complicate a noise timbre. For Greh Holger, the octave was a nuisance: "I didn't want that increase in note or

octave to come through in my music." For Joseph Hammer, using a relatively lo-fi

digital sampler—namely, the twelve-bit Roland S-330 Digital Sampler—to excite

octaves was a way to create more noise: "So if you make a sample of a very

high-pitched sound and then pitch it down like four or five octaves and run it

through the analog filter section, it makes some really beautiful noises." The

octave—as the second harmonic overtone in the naturally occurring harmonic

series—is perhaps the first step that highlights Western music's obsessive

tendency toward harmony. I surmise that the reason octaves were rarely

discussed in my interviews is because their use is superfluous: octaves are

related to pitch, and pitch is subordinate to timbre in experimental 'noise.'

Devices used to make sounds higher or lower by octaves are used to stimulate

new timbres in experimental 'noise.'

2. Toward Ametricality and Aperiodicity

    To reiterate Helmholtz' dictum—"*The sensation of a musical tone is due to

a rapid periodic motion of the sonorous body; the sensation of a noise to non-

periodic motions."* The empirical nature of noise is defined by its aperiodicity.

Experimental 'noise' is also characterized by its tendency toward aperiodicity (or

its tendency against periodicity).

    The first important method of achieving this result is by excluding meter.

Meter—or rather, the sensation of meter[400]—is characterized by the organization

of consistent beats or pulses into regular and repeatable groups. These groups

are easy to grasp because of their repetitive quality, and therefore, through their

regularity, they create an understanding of meter: a knowledge of meter. Pulse is

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[400] One could use a variety of strict meters to create a chaotic effect that could provide the feeling of irregularity. Therefore I speak of the *sensation of meter* as a caveat to impart a feeling regularity.

periodic motion on a slower scale than pitch: instead of 440 cycles per second (the note A), one speaks of 120 beats per minute as a pulse with a rate of 2 cycles per second. To organize those pulses into even groups—generally delineated by the first pulse of each group heard more strongly than the others (intro strong and weak beats)—provides the sensation of meter (if the meter stays consistent). Experimental 'noise' performances tend to eschew meter: it tends toward ametricality.

Pulse is sometimes heard in experimental 'noise' but is rarely a salient feature of experimental 'noise.' Pulse is generally achieved in two different ways. The first way is with an LFO (low frequency oscillator). As oscillator creates a periodic motion generally to achieve a pitch: for example, a pitch that oscillates at 440 cycles per second. A low frequency oscillator is an oscillator that makes periodic motions that are perceived as very low sounds or bass sounds; but can also be used in the infrasonic range below the threshold of the sensation of pitch—namely, periodic sounds generally under 20 cycles per second. Below 20 cycles (a sharp D-sharp), humans hear pulse; so 15 cycles per second can be *counted as a discreet pulse*, while 22 cycles per second is *heard as the note F*. Low frequency oscillators can thus provide a regular pulse. If the timbre of the LFO is complex, and set in the infrasonic range, the pulse may have a rhythmic character—a sort of *micro-meter* (a regular meter lasting under one second); but this micro-meter quality will be registered in terms of pulse, and not meter, as generally understood. A second way to create pulse is to use two oscillators. If two oscillators are set so that their cyclic difference ranges between 20 cycles per second about 0.5 cycles per second, they will produce a difference tone or

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difference pulse.[401] For example, if two oscillators are set so that one oscillator is

set to 220 cycles per second and the other oscillator is set to 218 cycles per

second, a difference beat of 2 cycles (120 beats per minute) may be heard. There

are other complicated methods of achieving pulse based on similar mathematical

principles that affect auditory sensations, but the two I have described—a single

low frequency oscillator, or two oscillators set so that their difference lies

between 20 cycles and 0.5 cycles—are most likely the most common ways that

these effects are heard. A similar method is to use a delay effect, but its effect is

the same; namely, by setting the delay time between one or two seconds (0.5 or

1 cycles per second) or faster.

In practical terms, experimental 'noise' performers generally do not use

strict time configurations to achieve these effects of pulse and micro-meter. They

mostly use their ears to create the desired effect. The notable exception is the

algorithmically-oriented performers. While they generally do not specify particular

frequencies to work with, they do often think in terms of proportional

relationships. Thus, one might set up a program that if a given frequency were

used, then it may be followed by or accompanied by a frequency that is x times

different. Without specifying a particular frequency, the ratio between frequencies

(or other processes) can create sonic juxtapositions that may not have been

expected, especially since the x factor tends to be achieved through entropic,

improvisational, or whimsical means.

There is one mode of using meter that is generally accepted, namely, by

using loops. The most common method of using loops is by using a loop sampler,

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[401] When tuning a stringed instrument, one string against the other, if one string is out of tune, it will create a 'beat' or 'beating.' This beating is a difference beat between the two strings vibrating at difference frequencies.

or *looper*. A loop sampler is a digital device that records a swatch of time, and then replays that swatch of time until the user is done with the sample. This process is called a "loop" because it was first created by using a segment of magnetic tape so that the beginning and end were spliced together to create a literal continuous loop of tape that repeats until the user is done hearing it. Joseph Hammer uses an old hi-fi analog tape machine to make his noise: his loops can literally be measured in meters. Either as analog tape machines or as digital loopers, these devices are generally used to record sound onto a loop, to overdub (superimpose) more sounds on the loop, and then to make further manipulations. Loops can also be slowed down or sped up to change the metrical rate; some digital loopers also allow for reverse (retrograde) playback. So even though loop samplers are capable of achieving periodic sounds, the way they are generally used by experimental 'noise' practitioners tends to greatly obfuscate the feeling of metrical regularity. Loop samplers are thus an excellent way for practitioners to create complex sounds and entropic-sounding processes, even though the operation of a loop sampler is relatively uncomplicated.

In Chapter 5 I explored the function of rhythm, meter, and duration through the testimonies of the practitioners I interviewed. The quotations below corroborate the second criterion of my characterization of experimental 'noise,' namely, the tendency toward ametricality and aperiodicity.

> HP: I don't think there is (rhythm). There's no style, so I just go off on it. I just let loose on the noise. I probably just make a beat in my head. [It is no longer noise] when it starts having a beat.

> NM: I don't really use rhythm too much in Wrong Hole. But sometimes I'll trigger two bass frequencies to trigger a wave form to cancel out some of the higher frequencies I'm hearing when I'm playing live, and I'll make it kind of rhythmic like: wa-wa-wa-wa-wa-wa.

GH: There's generally not a punctuated rhythm or something that's on time. It's generally a polyrhythmic experience with those tones, those oscillations rising and falling, and maybe lining up and maybe not, but creating that using those sorts of sounds, even if they're really slow or slow to morph, as rhythm. So there's definitely a pulse and a heartbeat and vibe to the stuff I do, and it's not a drummer's rhythm by any means, but there's a slow churn of a rhythm to a lot of the stuff I do.

JW: I think that a lot of my works have a rhythm to them, but typically they are fairly irregular. I've never employed much sense of a typical or regular rhythm in my work. That has never been particularly interesting to me. It depends on what piece, but you can get a sense for it. I think that something that is interesting in a lot of my older works that are more full-on loud, is that there will be this sense of speed achieved by lots of cuts. It's not rhythm in a percussive sense, or a repetitive sense, since in my work there is typically no repetition at all, but there is a sense of rhythm in the sense that there is a sense of speed or velocity in the pieces.

EM: I do use it sometimes, but then a lot of times I don't use it because it's too regimented, but, for example, when you use samples, or any type of loop, there is a pulse. So in terms of rhythm, sometimes you can't get away from it, even if you're doing just pure all-out white noise, there's an underlying pulse underneath because of the way electronics are created, or the way a secondary source is looped. I have, in the past, attempted to obliterate any type of rhythm, and the way I've been successful is by using random echo and delay. So you do have the pulse of the original sound, but that is mixed way low, and when it's coming through the effects, the effect is random, and so you don't hear a regimented pulse: you hear a chaotic pulse.

EG: [I]f you listen to anything—even the most diverse music, even the most scattered music or freeform music—what happens, I think, on a very natural scale is that it starts to converge and starts to come together in a sort of unity. And if you listen to it, there are habitual rhythms going on. They're almost intuitive.

JH: I guess it's the overall structure, because I deal with a loop of tape. So that cycle, and the rhythm that is created simply because it's a loop of tape, that's pretty important. So it's not rhythm in the sense of a beat, but it's rhythm in the sense that the beat is usually in a particular type of rhythm.

CC: If it's noise, probably not too much concerned with time. I guess there's just the beginning and an end. It doesn't really play much of a role.

SC: Meter doesn't exist. I like John Cage's outlook on rhythm: rhythm is a relationship of frames: something starts and something ends at some point, and that's all I really care about in rhythm. I think of rhythm as

form. Specific rhythms are again, part of that mesh that comes out of things being slammed together.

MW: Sometimes I use meter, sometimes I don't. Different pieces call for different explorations. Duration takes care of itself. I think music is inherently a time-based linear thing. Our only means against that is memory: we can remember something from the past. That's the only thing that makes it's alinear to some extent.
I'll say 'play this for some time.' So I have these pieces that all started with one piece called *Sound On Sound*. The idea is, it's a really simple ABA form, but the B is really small and the A is really long. I have a lot of pieces that have this structure. What I'll specify is that the A—the sound— is significantly longer, like five times longer than the B on both sides. So it's a relationship. It's a structural thing. I also do a lot of things where I use a strict unit of time.

GX: Not deliberately, no. In fact I try to avoid it. The only duration I care about is to quit before I get bored. [Pulse] happens but it's an accidental byproduct. If it's there it doesn't serve a structural purpose.

CA: I don't regularly use a strict meter at all in anything I do, but I like thinking of proportional rhythms and really highlighting that. I think that's part of what I mean when I say 'density' in what I was talking about on a horizontal aspect. So being rhythmic is interesting to me. Just the way I do it might be spread out over a long period of time.

DR: Duration is relative. As far as meter goes, I think I try to strip out anything that's arbitrary. There are beats and there can be… [p]ulses, and all of that. But I don't so much try to create a beat in the way that you would think of music having a beat.

DB: I use pulses only; I use the rhythm of the whole piece in its entirety; and I use the human rhythms, like the pulses that the Dream Machine frequencies that put you into the alpha state. So I try to keep around that with that part of it, and then the other stuff is more slowly moving waves that pull you along and pull you into the thing.

BB: [U]sually I'm working on an internal feedback system and there'll be that point where it's unstable, and I'll try to find that place for a rhythm to come out.

JP: It's primarily not rhythmic, and in fact, there's a tendency that if rhythm develops to try to cancel it by either dealing with it as something sampled out of context that repeats a few times, or by having it go out of sync to create these chaotic patterns….

MG: It's definitely not just blasting harsh noise. Not that that doesn't have some sort of rhythm…. I think the way I get rhythm is by looping a lot of things. By looping you get almost like a droney beat at the end, and

usually I do a lot of building up when I play, so you get a heavier and heavier beat by the end of it.

SK: [Concerning rhythm and meter] In my noise music specifically, not much.

Many of the practitioners I interviewed understood meter more colloquially as rhythm or 'the beat.' Others thought of meter and other temporal aspects of their work in terms of the overall formal structure of a performance: the division of the overall duration into sectional parts. Algorithmic-oriented practitioners tended to structure rules to give proportion to duration. Some practitioners reveled in exploring pulses caused by the heterodyning of frequencies to create difference pulses, like Nial Morgan's testimony that two LFOs together can create a "wa-wa-wa-wa-wa-wa" rhythmic sound. And in fact, one can immediately grasp the micro-metric aspect in the very envelope shape the mouth makes when enunciating the "wa" sound, as the formant slides from *ooh* to *ah* to create *wa*. Looping techniques can be used to create meter by the very length of the loop, but practitioners of experimental 'noise' tend to use loops to superimpose sounds, and these sounds, often times, are noise sounds, so their superimposition amounts of an additive synthesis, in a similar manner as one uses two or more oscillators on a synthesizer and mixes them together to create a synthesized timbre. In fact, a synthesizer can be defined as an electronic device used to synthesize timbres. In other words, the practice of looping can be thought of as a metical way to superimpose sounds to create new timbres. Finally, John Wiese's notion of rhythm as speed to describe the "irregular" or aperdiodic changes of duration—"cuts"[402]—is a technique used by many

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[402] "Cuts" refers to the technique of cutting or splicing magnetic tape or photographic film. One uses the term in digital audio as an analogy from its analogic roots in the physical cutting of the medium.

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practitioners. I call this rhythmic technique *entropic rhythm*, but could also be called *entropic tempo*. Entropic rhythm can be estimated by the general rate of changes in terms of fast, medium, slow: or the speed can accelerate or decelerate, and then entropic speed can be estimated by the general rate of acceleration, deceleration, or the mixture of the two.

Summary of the First Thesis

One simple pitch is similar to a pulse at a given tempo: both are frequencies; that is to say that both have periodic motion. The organization of pulses into regular groups—meter—is generally avoided in experimental 'noise.' Likewise, consistent pitches that are superimposed with other pitches are also rare in experimental 'noise.' Traditional devices in most Western music—like key signatures and time signatures, or the specter of their use—lie beyond the scope of experimental 'noise.' Pitches and pulses are possible in experimental 'noise,' but in most performances the complexity of timbres and the juxtaposition of aperiodic segments are the salient aspects.

What lies at the heart of the obsession of timbre (as "sound worship") and the tendency against metricality and periodicity is a desire to avoid repetition. The avoidance of repetition has two salient consequences. The first consequence is that it renders every event a new event; it fosters constant novelty. The second consequence is that it attempts to evade the confines of knowledge.

Instead of cutting physical lengths of film or tape that corresponds to lengths of time (duration), one "cuts" only the duration. So a "cut" in digital audio means to cut the duration of a unit of audio into a smaller unit. This analogy can also be used in the sense of turning off an audio channel, thus cutting the entirety of its duration. In experimental 'noise' performance "cuts" are generally made my turning off a source. "Cuts" are considered 'fast' when the duration of an audio signal is short and displaced by another separate audio signal (or even by silence), which is then also cut short in duration, followed by another signal (or back to the first one), and so on.

II. Experimental 'Noise' is Like the North Pole

If music is characterized as the organization of sound, as Varèse once postulated—or as humanly organized sound, as Blacking held—then one can imagine that before music, sound was humanly *disorganized*. For this reason Varèse also characterized music as the organization of noise (as did Jacques Attali). The history of Western music demonstrates the ordering and disciplining of sounds, especially by relations of pitch. This history has also sought to rationalize an ideology of dissonance and consonance as tension and release. Noise sounds veer toward the dissonant, and therefore can be conceptualized as exhibiting the sensation of tension. By the mid- to late-Romantic era, some of the most daring composers were experimenting with timbres by cleverly combining instruments in their orchestrations and exploring advanced harmonic relationships that were challenging the ears of their audiences. Nietzsche's early fondness for the music of Richard Wagner led to a short-lived friendship and the inspiration for his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*. He proposed that tragedy shared with music a Dionysian thirst for the ugly that gave aesthetic justification to the world.

> [I]t is precisely the tragic myth that has to convince us that even the ugly and disharmonic are part of an artistic game that *the will* in the eternal amplitude of its pleasure plays with itself. But this primordial phenomenon of Dionysian art is difficult to grasp, and there is only one direct way to make it intelligible and grasp it immediately: through the wonderful significance of *musical dissonance*. Quite generally, only music, placed beside the world, can give us an idea of what is meant by the justification of the world as an aesthetic phenomenon. The joy aroused by the tragic myth has the same origin as the joyous sensation of dissonance in music.[403]

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[403] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1968), 141.

Nietzsche's interesting conclusion is that tragedy imitates the struggling life of the Greek hero; it imitates the hero's sacrifices: "The content of the tragic myth is, first of all, an epic event and the glorification of the hero."[404] To be the audience of a tragic comedy is to celebrate the hero's life through these struggles and sacrifices; its imitation thus functions as the sacrificial scapegoat. One does not have to repeat the actions of the hero, which is to say, one does not have to become a warrior—the tragic myth imitates the experience for the spectator in the context of the ugliness of the warrior's struggle. In music, sensations of the ugly and the sacrificial are represented as dissonance. This is precisely why Attali referred to music—"channelization of noise"—as a "simulacrum of ritualized murder."[405] Instead of the experience of the hero engaged in the brutality of actual war, the tragedy and the cacophony in music symbolizes and synthesizes the hero's terrifying and ugly journey to greatness. Dissonance serves as the scapegoat; the substitute for actual war (murder). The experience of the artistic representation in dissonant music provides, according to Nietzsche, "the justification of the world as an aesthetic phenomenon." He concludes:

> Referring to the artistically employed dissonances, we should have to characterize the corresponding state by saying that we desire to hear, and at the same time, long to get beyond all hearing. That striving for the infinite, the wing-beat of longing that accompanies the highest delight… reveals to us the playful construction and destruction of the individual world as the overflow of a primordial delight.[406]

Dissonance, for the young Nietzsche, moves beyond sound, toward the infinite: its excess and superabundance builds and destroys the listener without undergoing the defeats and victories of the glorious hero. In this conception,

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[404] Ibid., 140.
[405] Attali, 24-26.
[406] Nietzsche, 141-142.

dissonances and sonic cacophonies—the representational sounds of war—elevate aesthetic pleasure.[407] Noise is not a synonym for dissonance, since dissonance stands in relation to consonance; rather, noise is the sublimation of dissonance.

There are two ways of understanding the notion of experimental 'noise' as the North Pole. The first is to conceptualize noise empirically. The second is to conceptualize 'noise' as a genre or idiom.

Material Sound at the North Pole

Noise as sonic material is the first way to conceptualize noise as the North Pole. Recalling Peter Yates' diagram (founder of Evenings on the Roof concerts in Los Angeles), he too postulated a regional notion of noise in contradistinction to pitches in a chart he called, "The Field of Sound."

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[407] Of course, the equivalence of the ugly experiences of the struggling mythic hero and the sensation of dissonance is theoretical: perhaps Nietzsche is literally wrong. But if Nietzsche's interpretation is read as poetic, it may further my final thesis concerning 'noise' and stochastic resonance.
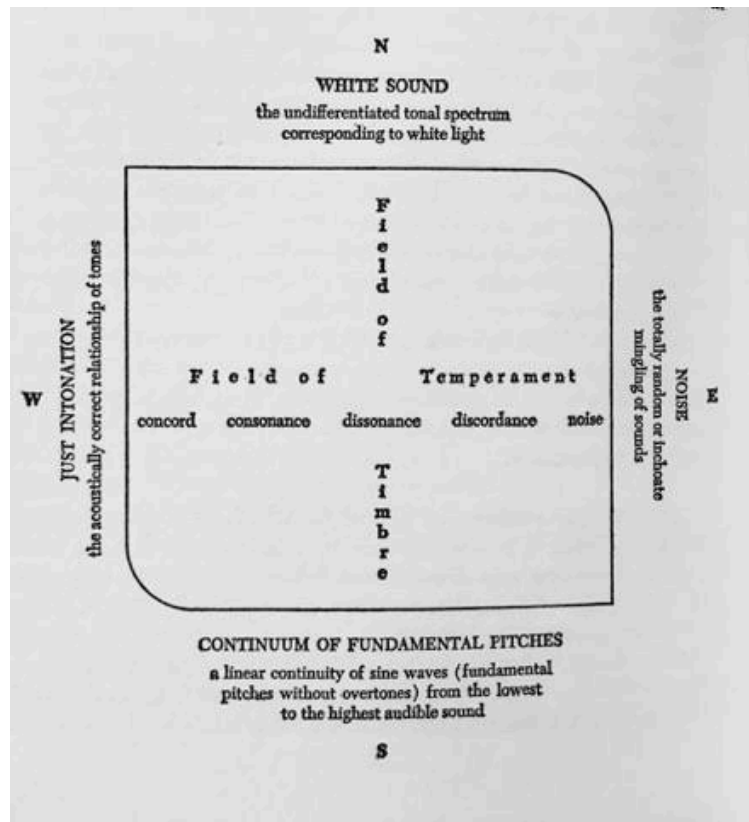
His chart recognizes four regions.

> NORTH   *WHITE SOUND*: the undifferentiated tonal spectrum, corresponding to white light.

> EAST   *NOISE*: the totally random or inchoate mingling of pitches.

> SOUTH   *CONTINUUM OF FUNDAMENTAL PITCHES*: a linear continuity of sine waves from the lowest to the highest audible amplitude.

> WEST   *JUST INTONATION*: the acoustically correct intervallic relationship of tones.[408]

Yates explains that the rounded corners in his chart indicate that North and East

are connected—*white sound* and *noise*—whereas South and West are connected—

continuum of fundamental pitches and *just intonation*. White noise is a synonym

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[408] Yates, 12.

for white sound. Oddly, *white sound* as North region seems to be synonymous

with its opposite region in the South as the *continuum of fundamental pitches*,

since the simultaneity of that continuum of fundamental pitches produces white

sound; or more precisely, white sound is "a mixture of all audible frequencies at

random amplitudes… having equal energy *per unit frequency*."[409] Yates must

mean that the West region describes discrete pitches, and not their total

simultaneity. In any case, Yates' regional chart differs from my polar conception

of noise.

Similarly to Yates' chart, I place white noise—or white sound—at the North

Pole. White noise, as material, encompasses all frequencies. Any frequency or

combination of frequencies is possible given an infinite amount of sine waves

(pure frequencies), thus theoretically white noise may contain the sonic material

needed to synthesize any sound and all sound. Since white noise (or white

sound) contains all of these frequencies necessary for human aurality, the

empirical nature of pure white noise stands at the North Pole. However, pure

white noise is acoustically impossible for humans to hear, not only because

human ears are tuned to favor sounds around 2000 cycles per second, but also

because the purity of the sound is adulterated by any acoustic environment.

Unlike Yates' regional conception of sound, I place white noise at the

North Pole; all other sounds are south of the conceptual purity of white noise.

Yates' conception of the East region—*noise* as the "totally random or inchoate

mingling of pitches" (I would refer to 'frequency' rather 'pitch')—is in my

conception *south of white noise* (as North Pole). But only slightly south. Yates is

making a distinction between the totalizing randomness of white sound and other

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[409] Strange, 21.

forms of entropic sounds that are not like white sound. For example, the sounds

of fire would qualify as Eastern noise in Yates' conception, since such entropic

sounds are in fact random minglings, but the sounds of fire would never be

confused with white sound. GX Jupitter-Larsen made a field recording of fire for

one of his releases with his group, the Haters. For experimental 'noise'—and

other forms that attempt or approach the non-idiomatic—the closer one comes to

white sound, the closer one approaches the sonic North Pole. Perhaps non-

idiomatic music and white sound are identical.

A Sonic Idiom at the North Pole

The second way to imagine experimental 'noise' is to consider it as an

idiom or genre at the North Pole—all other genres are either south of

experimental 'noise,' or perhaps indistinguishable from it. In other words, to

locate experimental 'noise' at the North Pole, one must be sure that there can be

no other idiom more extreme—*more north*. For example, Derek Bailey's

conception of non-idiomatic improvisation, as practiced in his free jazz, in many

respects may be conceptualized as identical to experimental 'noise,' the way I

have conceptualized it; or rather, many practitioners who partake in

experimental 'noise' use non-idiomatic improvisation as an explicit or implicit

strategy. For this reason, many adherents of non-idiomatic improvisation—like

George Lewis—have performed with and alongside experimental 'noise' artists.

However, the analogy of the North Pole must only be thought of as a metaphor.

There is no *pure* North Pole. Even Earth's North Pole has a "wobble"—its location

is not fixed. Perhaps this lack of purity in nature also works with the lack of purity

inherent in electronically generated white sound. Similarly, there is no truly non-

idiomatic improvisation: one must always characterize non-idiomatic improvisation as a movement *toward* the non-idiomatic. In any case, if one were to *transcend* past the North Pole, one would find oneself speeding fast in a southerly direction down the globe. So often many noisicians eventually return to making more conventional forms of music and art after working at the extremity of 'noise,' or they have parallel lives in more codified genres.

Experimental 'noise' has a variety of subgenres in its orbit. Some of these have already been discussed. Wall noise is perhaps the most codified: it is characterized by a sound that purportedly never changes. To be precise: "Wall noise: A massive, seemingly unchanging harsh noise 'wall' of electronic distortion, crunch, and rumble."[410] That fact that such a genre has been codified and even politicized is interesting by itself. The wall noise works I have heard *do* change. Perhaps their main characteristic is their relatively static volume that only uses silence to articulate their beginnings and endings. There is no recognized definition for harsh noise, yet the experience of listening to it is as brutal as its name implies. Many people conflate experimental 'noise' only with harsh noise; such conflation has presented some issues in nomenclature. Harsh noise sometimes uses screaming vocals to accompany the electronic sounds. The vocal manifestations of harsh noise often link this subgenre to extreme forms of metal, especially grindcore, death metal, and black metal. In my interview with Eddie Giles, he said: "A lot of grindcore bands verge on noise to a point where it's almost ridiculous." Harsh noise sometimes uses silences to more thoroughly punctuate its shocking volume. Drone noise is somewhat related to noise wall. Although there are subgenres of experimental 'noise,' audiences are more likely

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[410] Sam McKinlay, "The Politics of HNW," 14. HNW means harsh noise wall.

to use these terms more loosely. One might say, "it's droney," or "that was harsh," but even these characterizations are seldom heard.

Experimental 'noise' as a genre is also troubling because there are many ways to do 'noise' around the North Pole. Many of my questions were geared toward a discussion of genre. John Wiese was by far the most hostile to the notion of genre, and of any codification of the work he involves himself with.

> JW: To me this goes back to the least interesting aspect of experimental music, which is this sort of genre codifier that nullifies your whole scene. Experimental music. If it's noise, and it's music, then it's not that experimental anymore. I guess I would question artists that would accept a term like that, because…: does it describe them? Do they really feel comfortable using it? Do they identify with it? Do they feel like they're coming into a predetermined, established, codified scene or genre of music that they're just rehashing? I'm highly suspect.

John makes an interesting point: if you know what you are going to hear, then how can it be new? Would it not simply be a "rehash" or repetition of something else? He then conceded: "It can be a genre, but it can't be defined." This answer immediately made me think of gods who could not be named because there could never be a sound holy enough to describe them, though I am sure that is not what John intended. John ultimately responded positively to the conception of his work as "genreless." Casey Anderson was more cheerful in his conception.

> CA: So how do you even compare these? How do you compare a Mark So piece to a Liam Mooney piece? You can't, right? How do you compare John Wiese to anybody else? So that's a great point. So how do you account for that critically?—I'm not quite sure. Everybody gets their own microgenre, with endless words hyphenated: word-after-word-after-word connected by hyphens!

Bob Bellerue similarly remarked: "So it's just more about how fine the hairs are you want to split. If you're really into specifying genres, it will be more than just noise. It will be like [in a funny voice] 'East Williamsburg 2012 noise.'" Samur

Khouja was skeptical of a 'noise' genre. "I refer to it as noise music a lot of times. Sometimes I feel like I'm being lazy when I say it, but at the same time it's easier. It's already a genre. There's no real avoiding it." Nevertheless, he concludes: "I don't know if I can speak for everybody, but I think they feel like they're part of something new and special; or not entirely new, but different." Experimental 'noise' is certainly different. Damion Romero also had reservations:

> DR: People that I see at a lot of shows that come to see things; they're probably just interested in a lot of the different things that are going on. To call it a 'genre' is really…. It's not, and it's really loose. It's almost more like 'other,' because it doesn't fit…. Genre, I don't know, seems a little bit specific. I don't know how something that's so diverse can be unique exactly.

Damion's issue with 'noise' as genre stemmed from his perception that the differences from performer to performer are too diverse, and that perhaps "other"—like John's conception of genre that "can't be described"—might make a more viable category than 'noise.' Nevertheless, I am still arguing for the term experimental 'noise' at the nexus of its materiality as timbre and status as an extreme idiom.

The irony of placing experimental 'noise' at the North Pole is that when you go to the North Pole of sound, there can be as many ways to perceive the similarities between performances as much as there certainly exist extreme differences. There is a reason why experimental 'noise' is often dismissed as "*just noise*."[411] The irony dissipates when one considers the fixation on timbre and the tendency against meter. Acoustic engineer Pierre Schaeffer spent his whole life

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[411] In the movie *Juno*, a teenaged girl named Juno becomes pregnant and decides to look for a family to adopt her unborn child to. She comes across a young couple and becomes friends with the would-be dad. They bond over music, and he introduces her to Sonic Youth. During a low point in their friendship she screams, "I bought another Sonic Youth album and it sucked! It's just noise." Sonic Youth is generally known as a noise rock band, but the album in question was most likely one of their instrumental noise albums on their own SYR (Sonic Youth Records) label. Juno's pronouncement is clearly the negative judgment of noise as unwanted sound.

trying to codify sounds into a dictionary of sounds or a simplified sonic spectrum

similar to the color wheel. Schaeffer concluded: "It took me forty years to

conclude that nothing is possible outside DoReMi…. In other words, I wasted my

life."[412] Timbres are not easily isolated, codified, and named; there is little

literature on the classification and nomenclature of timbres. Therefore as a sonic

category, timbre is often overlooked because there are few words to describe it—

there is little in the way of an accepted knowledge of timbres. For this same

reason, hearing performances that specifically focus on timbre lends itself to

unique listening experiences, even if similar sounds are heard. Their juxtaposition

is more nuanced and particular—this also means that the acoustic space plays a

larger role in the perception of sound (as a perception of timbre) than the sounds

of a string quartet or an electric guitar, because audiences will tend to hear the

successions and simultaneities of pitches before timbres.

Once a listener learns to focus on listening to timbres, an entire sonic

world becomes available: an environmental soundscape, or a new mode of

listening to music in general. Experimental 'noise' performances may then

provide an important stimulus in their lives. Greh Holger's testimony corroborates

this claim

> GH: I think that noise fans are noise fans because they're noise fans, and they tend to listen to more than a couple of bands in the noise genre. Once you're exposed to it, there's a digging deeper that happens with a lot of people: looking into more of it, and becoming a fan of more of it through exposure.

But not everyone will care about listening aesthetically to timbre as the complex

juxtaposition and morphology of frequencies. If listeners do not care about

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[412] Pierre Schaeffer, interviewed by Tim Hodgkinson, in *Recommended Records Quarterly* .(March, 1987). http://www.ele-mental.org/ele_ment/said&did/schaeffer_interview.html (accessed February 20, 2015), 5.

timbre, they are sure to hear "just noise" when engaging with experimental 'noise' performances.

Summary to Second Thesis: Toward the Zenith of 'Noise'

Perhaps the future of experimental 'noise' will develop toward a variety of idiosyncratic genres, all with distinctly codified boundaries that are easier to tell apart. But as long as white sound exists as the material North Pole of sound, such artistic practices will not get much noisier; nevertheless, they may become more idiosyncratic. The liminal zone ("southern noise") where advanced sound practices become tempered enough to be considered 'music' is another consideration that has a longer history than the noise music of the Italian Futurists. Hegarty proclaimed his interest in how "music becomes an avant-garde, and in so doing is always, initially, at least, identified as noise. Only later does the old noise come to be seen as legitimate."[413] Noise is entropic, untethered, unintelligible, *un*rationalized sound. The truly new sound—or at least the experience of hearing a new sound—must come from noise. As a sound is tempered and rationalized—that is, made into a knowledge—the sound no longer registers as noise. Artistic practices have a history of fighting fiercely as an avant-garde toward new and undiscovered territories. These subterritories, as subgenres, will eventually risk losing their status as 'experimental' and as 'noise' through the history of their codification and the repetition of their practices (thus John Wiese's objection to the definition of the genre inclusive of his work). Repetition, representation, and concepts of their ilk (iteration, mimicry, semblance, simulacrum, etc.) are the destroyers and deconstructors of noise and

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[413] Hegarty, 10.

the death of novelty: the knowledge of any and all sound. Experimental 'noise'

will continue to synthesize dialectically toward sonic *aufhebung* for those who are

passionate about sound; passionate about timbre. The only *thing* noisier than

white sound is extremely loud white noise: extremely tangible white noise:

extremely *felt* white noise.

III. Stochastic Resonance: Materiality and Ontology

When noise is added to a weak signal and the signal is then strengthened or clarified, that clarification is referred to as stochastic resonance (SR). Stochastic resonance means that a weak signal has been strengthened and clarified using noise. Dithering is the process of creating stochastic resonance. White noise generators have been used to test electronic equipment or structural surfaces to identify resonating frequencies. In information theory, noise is not only defined as unwanted sound, but also as unwanted signal. White noise can also be described as sonic entropy. In Kosko's book *Noise*, he shows how pixelated noise can be used to clarify a visual object.

(a)　　　　(b)　　　　(c)　　　　(d)
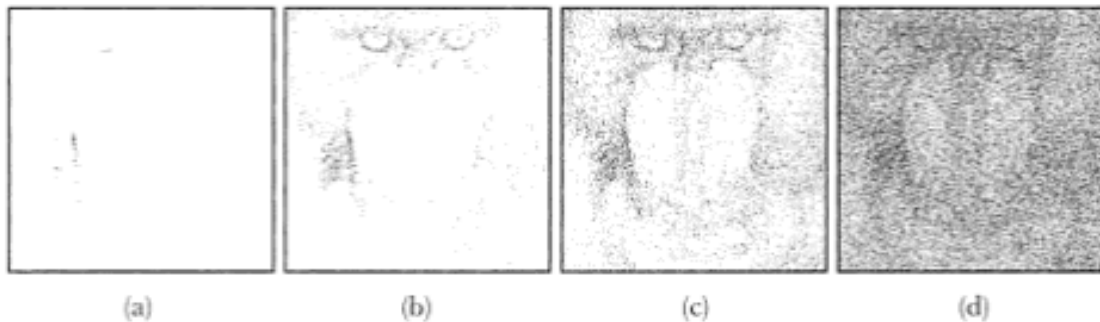
Figure 19: White Laplace noise added to an image of a baboon.

The images above depict the face of a baboon.[414] Image (a) shows the original image. Images (b), (c), and (d) have been amplified using "white Laplace noise" dither to the pixels in the original image (a). Image (c) is perhaps the most "clarified" image, while image (d) has been over-strengthened with noise.

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[414] Kosko, 151.

Dithering is used in digital audio and digital photography to enhance audio and visual signals.

White noise is not the only way to enhance a signal to create stochastic resonance. Other forms of entropic signals can be used to varying effect to amplify, clarify, or enhance a signal. Since the experience of listening to experimental 'noise' tends to eschew common forms of understanding regarding its structural processes by mastering a theory of 'noise' that could be analyzed, explained, and replicated with precision—the way a trained music theorist comprehends and transcribes melodic and harmonic dictation in Western tonal music—I believe that the experience of listening to experimental 'noise' can be grasped as stochastic resonance. In other words, the experience of listening to 'noise'—perhaps at any volume—resonates the mind. In this negative mode of listening, listeners do not learn something about *the music*; rather, they learn something about themselves. Attali arrived at a similar conclusion, also in the context of information theory.

> In each network, as in each message, music is capable of creating order. Speaking generally and theoretically, in the framework of information theory, the information received while listening to a note of music reduces the listener's uncertainty about the state of the world…: beauty as negentropy.[415]

I would modify Attali's formulation to understand the listening of a "note of music" to listening to the complex timbres of 'noise,' and that the reduction of uncertainty is personalized to the listener's clarification of their own conception of the "state of the world." Negentropy is a portmanteau—negative entropy. It is the opposite of randomness stimulated from entropy; it is the resonating remnants of a stochastic process. My final claim is two-fold. First, stochastic

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[415] Attali, 33.

procedures are used to generate and stimulate the treatment of sonic material. Secondly, experimental 'noise' provides idiosyncratic ontological clarity to some of its most ardent listeners—not an understanding of the sonic experience in performance, but a self-understanding.

Stochastic Events as Performative Stimulus

Many of the practitioners I interviewed have benefited from the use and treatment of stochastic events as generative material. These events are often characterized as mistakes, accidents (especially *happy accidents*), and failures. In other words, they are ruptures in intentionality that force the practitioner to improvise to treat the ruptures from an unstable condition (or perhaps an infelicitous condition) to a more stable condition, understood as a condition that resonates more with the intentions of the practitioner. These ruptures, inspired by the question concerning mistakes, led me to ask some of the practitioners "Does noise have noise?" What I meant by the question is somewhat paradoxical: *Does experimental 'noise' have noise (as unwanted sound)?* Unfortunately the question probably came off as trite (especially in my interview with Greh Holger when I asked: "*Does noisy noise have noise?*"). Nevertheless, my aim was to understand the liminal space—the sonic estuary—where the materiality of noise mingles with idiomatic 'noise.'

Kim Cascone's interest in aesthetic failure to generate new sounds, sonic conditions, and sonic relationships is relevant in the context of stochastic resonances. He cites Colson White concerning the nature of the aesthetics of failure as "failure that guides evolution; perfection offers no incentive for improvement." In this formation, failure leads to improvement and learning.

Dialectically, failure is the negation that leads to a new synthesis, which is in turn, further negated, resolved, negated, *ad nauseam*.[416] Cascone expands the mantra in the context of the use of failure in generative artistic practices.

> [I]t is from the "failure" of… technology that this new work has emerged: glitches, bugs, application errors, system crashes, clipping, aliasing, distortion, quantization noise, and even the noise floor of computer sound cards are the raw materials composers seek to incorporate in their music.
> Indeed, "failure" has become a prominent aesthetic in many of the arts in the late 20th century, reminding us that our control of technology is an illusion…. New techniques are often discovered by accident or by the failure of an intended technique or experiment.
> There are many types of… audio failure. Sometimes, it results in horrible noise, while other times it can produce wondrous tapestries of sound. (To more adventurous ears, these are quite often the same.)[417]

The thesis is that failure and accident can generate sounds and lead to generative processes. These failures and accidents are "noises" in the information theory sense: noise as unwanted superfluous information. Exploring superfluous information (sonic excess) gives rise to new sounds and new techniques. Like the sounds generated from stochastic processes, these techniques are discovered improvisationally and experimentally. Experimentation and improvisation—usually in the fast-paced context of an experimental 'noise' performance—are the general methods used to address unintended events (as sounds and processes). These events may temporarily escape the control of the performer and can cause infelicitous consequences if not handled quickly. The handling of these events showcases the skill and alacrity of the experimental 'noise' performer as a

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[416] Keep in mind that the term 'noise' comes from the term 'nausea,' meaning *seasickness*. A synonym for *ad nauseam* is *ad infinitum*. White noise may be defined as encompassing the infinite range of *all audible frequencies* available to the human ear. Nevertheless, this particular connection between *ad nauseam* and *ad infinitum* is probably coincidental, but worthy of note.

[417] Kim Cascone, "The Aesthetics of Failure: 'Post-Digital' Tendencies in Contemporary Computer Music," 393.

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problem to solve;[418] the problem is then either an aesthetic problem (*Do I like how this sound is developing?*) or perhaps a technical problem (*Is the event in danger of damaging my equipment or the house (venue's) equipment?*).[419] Just as material noise and performative 'noise' mix in a liminal space, so too does intentionality and accident (*unintentionality*).

The following quotes from my interviews corroborate the thesis that stochastic events—mistakes, accidents, failures, and other unintended events—are used as stimuli in experimental 'noise' performances.

> NM: I guess that kind of defines what *good* harsh noise is to me, when people are able to take mistakes and make it better, or just make it sound good.

> GH: A happy accident is something that you do that maybe you didn't mean to do, or that happens during the course of a recording or a performance that was unintentional, but you feel enriches the piece, or lets you take it to a new place. So if I adjust something and that wasn't necessarily what I meant to do, but it sounds good, and I can ride that, and I can take it from there, that's learning something new, and utilizing it and making it beneficial.

> JH: For me it's philosophical in the sense that the mistake is only technical, because I'm interested in the mistakes more than anything. I want errors to happen.

> MW: I think there are mistakes. I don't think a mistake is necessarily a bad thing though. It may be an introduction of noise into the system that actually can benefit the situation.
> It's one of those happy accidents where maybe it wasn't my intention but it became something interesting that was fundamentally part of that performance.
> I don't really care about genres. I care about what noise is, and how it impacts our situation. We were talking about the mistake that's perhaps necessary to stumble upon something new.

> DB: Mistakes are really what help us get to hardcore truths. If everything went along with our intent, how shallow would the world be?
> I've seen plenty of Damion Romero pieces fail. But his failures are pretty glamorous. Just that he's trying to do this great thing: it's glamorous.

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[418] "Sound like you know what you're doing" (David Kendall). See Chapter 6, section IV. The Role of Rules in Experimental 'Noise.'
[419] "The only rule is, don't break the PA" (Bob Bellerue). See Chapter 6, section IV. The Role of Rules in Experimental 'Noise.'

> SK: [A] lot of people… use mistakes as part of a way to… generate material or even to move [to] another movement. Say you're improvising and you're just going off on a sound and you develop a rhythm with the way you're working your pedals or something. Maybe you miscalculated one, so now whatever sound you were building up is altered or shifted. Now that's a different rhythm, and now you are going to go off that. So that could have been a mistake, but now it dictated where the sound is going, and a lot of improvisers work that way.

Stochastic events as performative stimulus create new experiences in experimental 'noise' by creating stochastic resonances (noise benefits). Don Bolles, for example, finds great pleasure in watching Damion Romero struggle with his performances; perhaps few would describe them as he does, as "glamorous." Another important aspect of making 'noise' involves creating systems that can generate these modes of instability as failures and mistakes that then lead to stochastic events. In other words, artistically creating problems to solve artistically: actions that thwart expectations and regularity. New York composer and (free) improviser John Zorn codified these irregularities in his group improvisation piece *Cobra*. Though the piece is conceived as a series of conceptual on/off switches selected by a "conductor" who improvises the form by making decisions concerning which musicians play based on a list of hand signals from the musicians, the piece has a built-in mechanism that can thwart the agency of the conductor. Zorn called these mechanisms "Guerrilla Systems" described as deliberate methods of "fucking up the structure."[420] Most experimental 'noise' performers ''fuck up the structure' in far less codified ways, and since many of the performers are solo artists, the antagonistic element is not an ensemble of guerrilla agents; rather, it is more likely to be the limitations of

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[420] Edward Strickland, *American Composers: Dialogues on Contemporary Music* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 136.

the knowledge of the instruments and equipment used and the limitations of the equipment itself.

Stochastic Resonances as Ontological Stimulus

Experimental 'noise' attempts to eschew rationality and knowledge. Its material is noise or noises, where sound and noise are synonymous, and periodic sound—pitch—is reduced to one of several possibilities. If noise at various strengths and intensities—as mistakes, accidents, failures, disturbances, inchoate minglings, and the randomness of sounds covering the bandwidth of human audibility (white noise)—can clarify a system, I believe that experimental 'noise' can clarify something about the mind, and the knowledge gleaned from that internal clarification teaches us something about our identity. When 'noise' stimulates the mind, sound can be transduced into extrasonic impressions as feelings and thoughts. The overwhelming experience, the shock of surprise, the sensation of catharsis and the transcendental, the induction of visual hallucinations, the mindful spacing out, and even the soporific effect that sobers and quiets the mind: these experiences can lead to intense introspection and pleasure for some listeners. These modes of sonic reception can be deeply stimulating for the individual who has had certain nodal points resonated through the experience of experimental 'noise.'

Music critic Simon Reynolds claims that pleasure is achieved through the obliteration of meaning and the paradoxical space between meaning and nonmeaning concerning the experimental 'noise' experience: the urge to organize and master, and the urge to achieve the unadulterated, uncritical experience.

Reynolds locates the problem internally as a critique to Attali's proclamation that

noise is a weapon.

> [T]he whole discourse of noise-as-threat is bankrupt, positively
> inimical to the remnants of power that still cling to noise. Forget
> subversion. The point is self-subversion, overthrowing the power
> structure in your own head. The enemy is the mind's tendency to
> systematize, sew up experience, place a distance between itself
> and immediacy….
> The goal is OBLIVION (aka jouissance, the sublime, the ineffable).
> [R]esistance does not take the form of becoming a subject, but
> through becoming an object. Refusing to deploy power over the
> self; to escape, for a few blissful moments, the network of meaning
> and concern.[421]

The powerful experimental 'noise' experience is dialectically negotiated in the

liminal space between subject and object. To feel oneself as object for just a

fleeting moment—in a sense, to cease to feel—is one of the chief purposes of

experimental 'noise.' "Purposeful purposelessness"[422] as Cage would have it.

Listening to 'noise' is self-experimentation. To listen to the succession,

simultaneity, and development of new timbres as uncodified, unnamed, unknown

sounds, is one of the most powerful ways to achieve this experience. What is

known is not the experience, but the memory of the experience—an abstraction:

memory as representation.

One of the most powerful insights I gleaned from my interviews came

from Scott Cazan. When I asked him about the function of timbre in his work, I

was met with the perfect articulation for what I had been thinking concerning the

importance and significance of experimental 'noise.' *Timbre as ontology*.

> SC: Timbre is everything. Especially in electronic music, because it's the
> only thing that can differentiate one thing from another—one process from
> another. To me, timbre is ontology essentially. It's separating out objects,
> and when those timbres sort of merge and blend, that becomes really

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[421] Ibid., 57.
[422] Cage, *Silence*, 12.

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interesting, where you start to perceive certain types of shapes and certain types of motives that come out of these systems. That's a really cool moment, like when that pops out and you think: "Oh man, there's this thing happening" [laughs]. It's not like a synthesizer where you have a melody—I mean a synthesizer in a disco tune or something, with a keyboard and you have a melody and that has one timbre, and then you have another melody and that's another timbre—but when you have this mass of timbres, and from that mass comes these sorts of timbres that relate to all the timbres, or to multiple timbres. They just kind of interact and become like an object. So that's how I view timbre a lot. Timbre is a kind of ontology: the discovery of motives and content.

Timbre is already its plural: timbres. I have described timbre as harmony—as the simultaneity of frequencies—and timbre as morphology—how a sound changes in time. To superimpose two timbres is the same as to superimpose frequencies. Timbre is often described as the *quality* of sound. Ontology—the study of being—can be characterized as the idiosyncratic *quality* of being and its morphology through time.

Sonic being can be considered in two ways. First, timbre as sonic being is not only its characteristic identity as the juxtaposition of frequencies, but is also those changes of identity in time. One waveform attacks quickly and stabilizes, another decays slowly, and yet another drifts at a leisurely pace ramping up and down, and so on. These vibrations mingle harmonically and contrapuntally, and give form and character—*being*—to sound. Timbre is the ontology of sound.

Secondly, the experience of timbre is already its analysis: the interpretation of sound. When the analyst does analysis, there is always a part of the analyst that adulterates the analysis. In this sense, analysis says something about the analyst; interpretation says something about the interpreter. The self-critical sonic analyst as interpreter of sound not only learns about sound, but also learns about how the analyst analyzes. When experiencing experimental 'noise,'

stochastic processes ignore intellectual redundancies and resonates the unique

characteristics of the individual. Timbre stimulates ontology.

Closing Meditation

If art and the avant-garde fetishizes the new and novel experience, experimental 'noise'—made either by a credentialed academic composer with algorithmically controlled chaos, or by a musically illiterate punk feverishly twiddling knobs on cheap guitar pedals and mixing boards—might bring an excess of new sounds to interpret. Experimental 'noise,' I believe, is the closest music has come to the Western romantic ideals of the nineteenth century that tended to strive toward transcendental freedom in the arts. Its trajectory moves toward the zenith of the cult of the avant-garde; but its attempt is also already its failure. Experimental 'noise' is elusive from knowledge. It can be improvised freely in its immediacy or well-prepared with algorithms that follow strict rules given a certain set of circumstances and parameters. Just like the difference between the total serialists and John Cage's indeterminate works from the 1950s, the sonic results are nearly imperceptible to most listeners: "just noise," perhaps. Such similarity may come across to some people as scandalous, as the difference between academically trained composers and self-taught sound enthusiasts is reduced to politics. Trying to codify and explain the power of a 'noise' performance is either superfluous or scandalous. Hopefully in the noise of such a scandal, I have unearthed something useful from the entropic pile of sonic rubble. A chunk of knowledge! A mythic riddle! *A new timbre!*

Afterword

This dissertation—the research, the collection of data, the field notes, the interviews, the writing and rewriting—has been a major undertaking for me. Though I conceived of this project in the early 2000s, it was when I decided that it should rely on ethnographic methods that I knew that this dissertation would be intimidatingly colossal to write. I knew that I wanted a large sample size, rather than relying on the testimonies of only a few "masters" of the scene. I also knew that I wanted to avoid creating a canon of "great" 'noise' artists. Surely a hierarchy exists: one can even piece one together in this dissertation by reading the influences certain practitioners have had on others, or by referring to Appendices II, III, IV, and V, and counting how often each performer played, or Tables 1, 2, and 3, that detail specifically the frequency of performers allowed to perform at the three venues studied. These numbers, in fact, *can* speak to a 'noise' canon in Los Angeles, but I have chosen not to use the data to serve that purpose, not because I want to deny hierarchies, but because experimental 'noise' is about listening to new sounds—new timbres—and newness is difficult concept to great a hierarchy for, especially since much of newness is highly idiosyncratic: i.e. what counts as newness varies not only from person to person, but the same person might hear something new the second or third time hearing it; or if listening is idiosyncratic, a creative listener may *always* hear something new at any time. Such idiosyncrasy does not easily lend itself to canonization because 'noise' avoids knowledge; a canon must be constructed by some of understanding that can be explained and replicated: a knowledge.

This dissertation provides ways of understanding the values and aesthetics of experimental 'noise' as practiced in Los Angeles, and even elucidates some of

the instruments, techniques, and practices found. But to make a prescription of these tendencies would be perilously missing the point, or as GX said: "I think not trying to find your own answers and your own solutions and relying too much on what other people are doing on stage is problematic." To replicate someone else's solution is a mistake. And yet, there are tendencies that I have outlined in this dissertation, and forbidden modes of making legitimate 'noise,' the first is to simply *not* make 'noise.'

The three venues I have discussed have continued to have 'noise' shows, though only (the) Handbag Factory has persisted in the same form it has from when I began research. Dem Passwords has moved has holds 'noise' events much less frequently. Since Michael Winter left the country for South America, the wulf. has moved from its downtown location to a newer venue called Coaxial. The 'noise' scenes are healthy and thriving in Los Angeles.

Steven Feld ended his book *Sound and Sentiment* with a Postscript where he used a technique called "dialogic editing." It entails having the participants of an ethnography read the monograph to see if the author "got it right." Since my dissertation defense I have send the PDF to most of the participants. I sent the PDF in particular to several members of the LAFMS, and I have received some feedback that included some inaccuracies. Chip Chapman let me know that his Pyramid Headphones were not quadrophonic, as described by Rick Potts, but were in simple stereo. Dialogic editing has aided so far in that correction. Hopefully a much-truncated book version of this dissertation will appear, and perhaps more dialogic editing can be included to provide the most accurate information.

I continue to attend experimental 'noise' events in Los Angeles, and I still see many of the people I interviewed at these events. Sometimes I see as many as ten participants in a single night. Though a few have moved outside of Los Angeles—like Michael Winter and Eddie Giles—many of them are still around and active. I am friendly with all the practitioners I interviewed, who have sometimes given me moral support to complete this project. I have learned so much from their testimony and I am forever grateful for it. I hope that when they read this dissertation, they find themselves accurately portrayed.

APPENDIX I

PEOPLE IN THE SCENES

[**Bold** = people interviewed]

Performers

David Kendall
Henry Perez (Cuddly Cactus)
Nial Morgan (Wrong Hole)
Greh Holger (Hive Mind)
John Wiese
Eddie Giles (+Dog+)
Joseph Hammer
Scott Cazan
GX Jupitter-Larsen (the Haters)
Casey Anderson
Damion Romero
Don Bolles (Kitten Sparkles)
Bob Bellerue (KILT) [Il Corral]
Joe Potts (Le Forte Four, Airway)
Maria Garcia (Concrete Shiva)
Mark So
Adam Overton
Albert Ortega [FeedtheDragon, $&C*ls
David Rothbaum (Monsturo)
Ezra Buchla (Monstro)
Liam Mooney
Jeremy Drake
Aidan Reynolds
Rick Potts (Le Forte Four, Airway)
Tom Recchion (Doo-Dooettes)
AMK (Anthony King)
Tom Grimley
Jarett Silberman [Skull Sküll]
Aimee Artz (Bastard Noise)
Eric Wood (Bastard Noise)
Jessie Applehans (Bastard Noise, Upsilon Acrux)
Evan Pacewicz (Moth Drakula)
Kathleen Kim (Lady Noise)
Mitchell Brown
David Schaefer
Pete Majors (Harrassor)
Sandor Finta (Harrassor, AndorKappen, KILT)
Erik Hoffman [Spastic Colon]
Peter Kolovos
Phil Blankenship (The Cherry Point)
Steve Davis (+Dog+)
Chris Lazard (Moment Trigger)

Tierra Williams (Moment Trigger)
William Hutson (Rale)
Shannon Kennedy (Pedestrian Deposit)
Jon Borges (Pedestrian Deposit)
Jeff Witscher (Rene Hell)
Alex Twomey (Mirror-To-Mirror)
Matthew Sullivan (Earn, Privy Seals)
Cole Miller (Human Hands)
Patrick Murch (Sissistors)
Kevin Greenspon
Kevin McEleney (Droughter)
Henry Glover (Positive Shadow)
Kyle Parker (Infinite Body)
Sean McCann
Scott LeFever (Goth Chix)
Luke Fischbeck (LuckyDragons)
Sarah 'Rara' Andersen (LuckyDragons)
David Scott Stone
Dustin Johnston (Actuary)
Anthony Masoe (Actuary)*
Jeff Wellman (Actuary)
E. Diffner (Actuary)
M. Milligan (Actuary)
Jay Howard (Bacteria Cult, Circuit Wound)
Kevin 'Fetus' Bernier (Bacteria Cult)
Chris Dodge (Bacteria Cult)
David Lucien Matheke (Endometrium Cuntplow, Cessation)
Grant Capes (Cessation)
Chelsea Rector
Jay Gambit (Crowhurst)
Adrian Dimond (Xdugef,Pulsating Cyst)
George Jensen (Sneaky Snake)
Tom Hall

Frequent Listeners

Elden Mann (Allegory Chapel LTD)
Adam Cahan
Christiaan Cruz
Narin Dickerson
Weronika Zaluska
Jorgen Ramstead
Bridget Marrin
Mark Lovasz
Michelle M. Myers [Mark Lovacz' gf]
Jeff Williams
Ryan Williams
Issa Khoury
Alex Nercessian (Samur's brother)

Jess Coble
Katherine Mirescu
Adriana Yugovich
Katherine Giles

<u>Women Listeners</u>

Weronika Zaluska
Bridget Marrin
Elizabeth DiGiovanni
Katherine Mirescu
Adriana Yugovich (Liam's [x-]gf)
Michelle M. Myers [Mark L's gf]
Katherine Giles

<u>Women Performers</u>

Maria Garcia (Concrete Shiva)
Shannon Kennedy (PD)
Jessica King (The Haters)
Chelsea Rector
Aimee Artz (Bastard Noise)
Kathleen Kim (Lady Noise)
Nicole Chambers [IDES]
Sara 'Rara' Andersen (LuckyDragons)
Laura Steenberge [Wulf]
Heather Lockie [Wulf]
Christine Tavolacci [Wulf]
Jessica Catron
Tierra Williams (Moment Trigger)
Matthew Purse (Fenian)
Leah Peah-Purse
Eva Aguila (Kevin Shields)

<u>LA Promoters</u>

Mike Winter [the wulf.]
Sebastian Demian [Dem Passwords]
Samur Khouja [Handbag Factory]
Bob Bellerue [Il Corral]
Eric Clark [the wulf.]
Stephen Touchton [HomeRoom101]
Sean Carnage [PehrSpace]
Grant Capes [Echo Curio, Human R]
Daniel Muñoz/Elizabeth DG [—*ffff*—]

<u>Radio Shows and Other Shows</u>

Damion Romero [Psychotechnics]
Don Bolles [All Night Truck Driver Show (MarsFM), ThreeeGeniuses (public access)]
David Kendall [Claremont KSPC]
Mitchell Brown [Professor Cantaloupe]
Eva Aguila [Experimental Half Hour]
John Duncan, Paul McCarthy [Close Radio]

LA Record Company Owners

Greh Holger [Chondritic Sound]
Bob Bellerue [Anarchy Moon Recordings]
Damion Romero [P-Tapes]
John Wiese [Helicopter]
GX Jupitter-Larsen [Noisopoly, Zelphabet]
John Duncan [AQM, All Questions]
Phil Blankenship [Troniks/PACrec]
AMK [Banned Productions]
Sandor Finta [Bastardized/UniversalConsciousness]
Jon Borges [Monorail Trespassing]
Jeff Witscher [Callow God]
Alex Twomey [Jugular Forest]
Matthew Sullivan [Ekhein]
Sean McCann [Recital]
David L Matheke [Love Torture Records]
Kevin Greenspon [Bridgetown Records]
Kevin McEleney [Heavy Psych]
Adrian Dimond [Obfuscated Records; Canned Beef Records]
Nicole Chambers [IDES]
Steve Davis [Love Earth Music]
George Jensen [Complicated Dance Steps]
Cali Dewitt [Teenage Teardrops]
Erik Hoffman [Pinch A Loaf, Ground Fault]
Geoff Brandin (Fin) [Catorce Index]
Wyatt Penn Keusch [Khalija]
Jay Howard [Sentient Records]
[Vomitcore]
David Rothbaum [emr (experimental music research)]

Venues

the wulf.
(The) Handbag Factory
Dem Passwords
Human Resources
BetaLevel
The Smell

Machine Project
Beyond Baroque
PehrSpace
FFFF-Space
Graff Lab
Mata Gallery

Closed Venues

Home Room 101
Beauty Is Pain [BIP]
Women of Crenshaw
Synchronicity Space
Il Corral
Line-Space-Line
Echo-Curio
Cold Storage

Cal Arts Affiliates

David Kendall
John Wiese (design)
Scott Cazan
Casey Anderson
Bob Bellerue
Mike Winter
Mark So
Adam Overton
Albert Ortega
David Rothbaum
Ezra Buchla (didn't graduate)
Liam Mooney
Jeremy Drake
Eric Clark
Christine Tavolacci
Michael Pizaro
Ulrich Krieger
Sepand Shahab
Wyatt Penn Keusch
Corey Fogel
Raven Chacon
James Klopfleisch
Daniel Corral
Eva Aguila (Kevin Shields, Experimental ½ Hour)
Aidan Reynolds

No Longer Living In LA

Smegma	Left in 1976
John Duncan	Left in 1982
Bob Bellerue [KILT]	Left in 2007
Raven Chacon [KILT, DogShitTaco]	Left in 2007
Kraig Grady	Left in 2007ish
Henry Glover [Positive Shadow]	Left in 2012
Justin Borer [Cornelius F. Van Stafrin III]	Left in 2012
Tom Recchion [Airway, Dinosaurs With Horns, Doo-Dooettes]	Left in 2012

Suicides

Mike Kelley	January 2012
Damian Bisciglia	December 2012

APPENDIX II

Schedule of 'Noise' Performance

Date	Venue	Artist(s)
3/9/11	the wulf.	Michael Pisaro, Manfred Werder
3/31/11	The Smell	Ezra Buchla
4/1/11	The Smell	Upsilon Acrux
4/7/11	the wulf.	Phil Niblock
4/7/11	Dem Passwords	Andrew W.K. Pink Dollaz, KIT, and Jarrett Silberman
4/8/11	the wulf.	New Music for Double Bass
4/10/11	MOCA	Craig Grady, Joseph Hammer
4/16/11	F Haus	Robert Piotrowicz, Damion Romero, Monsturo
4/18/11	Pehrspace	Give Noise a Chance [an UnNoisy show]
4/18/11	Handbag Factory	Lazy Monday: Ezra Buchla
4/19/11	Dem Passwords	Crank Sturgeon, PCRB, The Haters, Robert Piotrowicz
4/30/11	Poo-Bah Records	Doo-Dah at Poo-Bah: Mitchell
30-Apr	Machine Project	Paranoia, Mania, and Melancholy
5/1/11	the wulf.	Natacha Diels with Miller Puckette
5/7/11	Handbag Factory	Night of Noise: Pulsating Catalyst, Pedestrian Deposit, Actuary, Droughter, +Dog+, Conscious Summary
5/15/11	Graff Lab	Chickenhead Church
5/16/11	Human Resources	New Brutalists
5/22/11	the wulf.	Mark Trayle, Casey Anderson
5/29/11	Machine Project	Sound Around the Home, with Rick Potts
6/2/11	the wulf.	Mark So and Eileen Myles
6/4/11	Human Resources	Say You're an Artist
6/5/11	MOCA	the wulf. at MOCA
6/10/11	REDCAT	Harry Partch: At the Edge of the World
6/10/11	F Haus	Noise Night
6/11/11	Handbag Factory	Noise Night
6/25/11	Handbag Factory	Noise Night
6/25/11	Boulevard Café	Bastard Noise
6/26/11	the wulf.	Morton Feldman: For Philip Guston
6/29/11	Mudd Duck (billiard)	Lifeguards Watching People with Accents: Cuddly Cactus
7/3/11	MOCA	the wulf. at MOCA: Mark So, Ezra Buchla, etc.
7/3/11	F Haus	Upsilon Acrux
7/3/11	Dem Passwords	Russian Tsarlag, Secret Boyfriend, SHV,

		Human Hands
7/5/11	Handbag Factory	Human Hands, Wrong Hole, Sissistors, Droughter, Concrete Shiva, Goth Chix
7/7/11	Cedar House [LBC]	Concrete Shiva, Sissistors, Itchy Palms, Wrong Hole, Lazy Marcus
7/8/11	Handbag Factory	Ezra Buchla, Sungsang, Heat Wave, Pedestrian Deposit, Earn
7/8/11	Dem Passwords	Extreme Animals, MTV RiffRaf
7/9/11	Synchronicity Space	Not Not Fun Yard Sale
7/10/11	Graff Lab	Cuddly Cactus, Wrong Hole, Sister Shiva, Sissistors
7/10/11	N/A	Dog Star Orchestra
7/13/11	the wulf.	Dog Star Orchestra: Fields of Sines and Strings
7/16/11	the wulf.	Dog Star Orchestra
7/16/11	Public Fiction	Bill Orcutt, Peter Kolovos, Metal Rouge
7/17/11	Downtown LA	Group Scrying (with Adam Overton)
7/22/11	the wulf.	Carl Stone
7/22/11	Dem Passwords	Pedestrian Deposit et al
7/23/11	Eagle Rock Center	Tonalism: Ambient. Damion Romero
Jul-11	Vlad the Retailer	Cuddly Cactus, Dithyramb, bad comedians
7/30/11	Human Resources	Lady Noise: Material Utterances
8/4/11	LACE	Docompositions: The Haters, Gil Kuno, Crank Sturgeon, Styrofoam Sanchez, Tiffany Trenda
8/4/11	Dem Passwords	Peter Kolobos, Sepand Shahab
8/7/11	Maltman House	The Cherry Point, John Wiese
8/17/11	Cat Nap	Scum Eating, Ezra Buchla, Human Hands, Santa Claus
8/21/11	Handbag Factory	CFVS III, Droughter, Wrong Hole, Pedestrian Deposit
8/24/11	Dem Passwords	Damion Romero, Positive Shadow, Twin, Regee, C Giovando
8/25/11	Dem Passwords	Rene Hell, Earn, Pedestrian Deposit, Preggers
9/3/11	Handbag Factory	Pedestrian Deposit, and some punk bands
9/12/11	Pehrspace	Positive Shadow, Rene Hell
9/21/11	Atwater Crossing	Damion Romero, Jason Kahn with Devin Sarno
9/23/11	Betalevel	Scott Cazan, Jason Kahn, Casey Anderson
9/30/11	Dem Passwords	Leather Bath, Positive Shadow, Pat from Portland
10/1/11	Downtown LBC	Sound Walk (David Kendall)
10/2/11	the wulf.	Mark So, Erik (Dickie) Bahto
10/7/11	Cat Nap	Techno Party [noisicians making beats]
10/14/11	the wulf.	Experimental Yearbook: Hans Koch
10/16/11	Baldwin Hills	Alex Cine, Lady Noise

10/16/11	Bootleg Bar	David Scott Stone, ESP
10/17/11	Family Bookstore	John Wiese: 100 Seven Inch Records
10/21/11	Betalevel	Experimental Yearbook: Bischoff, Cazan, GX, Trayle
10/22/11	the wulf.	Experimental Yearbook: A Ortega, C Anderson, JP Hastings, CS Yeh
10/23/11	The Smell	AWOTT, Human Hands
10/25/11	The Smell	Occupy Music #1 - Ezra Buchla, Anna Oxygen, Emily Lacy
10/29/11	Echo Park Film Center	Tashi Wada with Clipson
11/3/11	Dem Passwords	Earn, Mirror to Mirror, Rene Hell, Matthew David
11/4/11	The Smell	Earn
11/5/11	the wulf.	Elusive Gnarwhallaby (chamber ensemble)
11/5/11	The Smell	John Wiese
11/11/11	the wulf.	Isaac Schankler
11/11/11	Handbag Factory	1111111(ExperiMentalPortal)1111111
11/12/11	Home Room 101	Ex Im Ot: S&ndC&stl&, Infinite Body, Leah Peah
11/12/11	Handbag Factory	Noise vs Grind
11/12/11	Peiter	Mark So: Thirteen Constructions
11/13/11	Family Bookstore	John Wiese
11/20/11	the wulf.	Acierto, Epstein, Wambsgans
11/23/11	Take Off (Van Nuys)	John Wiese, Nate Young, Infinite Body
11/25/11	Vacation Records	Hive Mind record release (Elemental Disgrace)
11/25/11	Dem Passwords	Hive Mind, Joseph Hammer, Nate Young, Drainolith
11/26/11	F Haus	John Wiese, Amps for Christ, Alexander Turnquist, M Geddes Gengras
11/27/11	EchoPlex	Melt Banana
12/2/11	Handbag Factory	Pedestrian Deposit, Queef Richards, Sean McCann, Fake Hospital, White Gourd
12/3/11	The Getty	LAFMS: Smegma et all (Paul McCarthy)
12/3/11	Dem Passwords	Hive Mind, Positive Shadow
12/5/11	The Smell	Sissy Spacek, Hive Mind with Harrassor
12/6/11	Take Off (Van Nuys)	Sissy Spacek
12/9/11	Handbag Factory	Blood&Smoke:A/V Hell - Human Hands, Droughter, Vasculae, Wrong Hole, Concerte Shiva, Sissistors
12/9/11	the wulf.	Michael Pisaro
12/10/11	Handbag Factory	Dog, Wrong Hole, Sissistors, Damion Romero
12/16/11	the wulf.	Christian Wolff (Performances including Burdocks)
12/17/11	Handbag Factory	An Evening of Sound Servitude

APPENDIX III

(The) Handbag Factory—Schedule of Events

1336 South Grand Avenue (Downtown Los Angeles)

2011

April 18, 2011	Lazy Monday, Fishwives, Ezra Buchla, Actuary, Emily Lacy, Pete von Petrin
May 7, 2011	Pulsating Cyst, Pedestrian Deposit, Actuary, +Dog+, Conscious Summary
June 11, 2011	Actuary, Tom Hall, +Dog+, Riververb, Memorial Cervix, Endometrium Cuntplow, Cuddly Cactus, Modern Concert
June 25, 2011	Mike Zorman, Positive Shadow, Rale, Wrong Hole, Human Hands
July 1, 2011	Whisperlights, Underground Cities, Sean Shan, AV Club
July 5, 2011	Human Hands, Wrong Hole, Sissisters, Droughter, Concrete Shiva, Goth Chix
July 8, 2011	Sungsang, Heat Wave, Earn, Pedestrian Deposit, Ezra Buchla
July 23, 2011	Cryptic Gallbladder Splatter, Bedlam of Cacophony, Dystrophic, Nuclear Death Wish, Actuary, Nether Regions, Lord Dying
August 2, 2011	Submissions, M Geddes, Gengras, Mjolnir, Echo Beds
August 4, 2011	Proclamation, Sanguis Imperem, Vomit Ritual, Mutalacion [Metal/Thrash]
August 6, 2011	+Dog+, Endometrium Cuntplow, Obscurer, Tom Hall, Conscious Summary, Modern Concert, Sunken Landscapes
August 20, 2011	Codex Necro: Post-Mortem Photography w/MOAB
August 21, 2011	Cornelius F Van Stafrin III, Droughter, Wrong Hole, Pedestrian Deposit, Goth Chix

Saturday 3, 2011	Scrappers, Lords of Outland, Pedestrian Deposit, ECP
September 10, 2011	Upsilon Acrux, Corima, Van Exel, Innerds, 2UP, DJ Mnstrpsy
September 17, 2011	+Dog+, AMK, Phog Masheen, Conscious Summary, Black Artiodactyla, Pretty Agony, Modern Concert, Motordrone
September 30, 2011	Before the Eyewall, 19ADD, Rituals, Bereft, Hurt Model
October 11, 2011	Premonition 13 (featuring Wino), Witch Mountain, The Knives, Bastard
October 13, 2011	Prizehog, hepa/Titus, Iron MTN, Conscious Summary
November 2, 2011	Kathryn Calder (of New Pornographers), The Strangers Family Band
November 12, 2011	Gorgonized Dorks, Fetus Eaters, Actuary, Too Many Screaming Children, +Dog+, Bruce Campbell
November 18, 2011	The Atlas Moth, Kowloon Walled City
December 2, 2011	Pedestrian Deposit, Queef Richards, Sean McCann, Fake Hospital, White Gourd
December 3, 2011	Just an Animal, Iron Tom, Burroughs, Ryan Traster, Sandy Pussy
December 5, 2011	Sleepy Sun, Dahga Bloom, The Strangers Family Band, Highlands
December 9, 2011	Human Hands, Vasculae, Wrong Hole, Concrete Shiva and Sissisters, Goth Chix
December 10, 2011	Live Soundracks: +Dog+, DegletNoorFakirs, Chthulus Performances: Conscious Summary, Sissisters, Toms Hall, Wrong Hole, Dracula Spacecraft
December 17, 2011	Bastard Noise, Winters in Osaka, Actuary, Bacteria Cult, GX Jupitter-Larsen, Amps for Christ
December 29, 2011	Grex, Greenlief Liebig Stinson, Crooked Cowboy and the Freshwater Indians, Conscious Summary, Cornelius F Van Stafin III

2012

January 6, 2012   Andy Ortmann, MV Carbon, Positive Shadow

January 13, 2012   Witchaven, Exmortus, Scrapmetal, Internal Corrosion, Disruptor [metal]

January 14, 2012   Tom Hall, Endometrium Cuntplow, Leah Peah, Razzle Blaster, Derek Rogers, Xdugef, Joey Molinaro, Rest In Piss

January 20, 2012   Richard Devine, Surachai, Drumcell, Hyperactice, [D]Squared (Baseck), the Tleilaxu Music Machine, Nero's Day at Disneyland, Eezir, Modesty, Howie {Dance Music Night}

January 21, 2012   Greampus, Free Sample, Rusty/Phil/Phil, Frit Sender and Captain Seahorse, Sir Emmett William Thatcher III and BEN

February 14, 2012   Cut Hands (William Bennett), Baseck, Hive Mind

March 1, 2012   Sult, Ezra Buchla, Conscious Summary, Greampus

March 16, 2012   Paul Metzger, Amps for Christ, Ezra Buchla, Ryan McGregor

March 17, 2012   Actuary, Marlo Eggplant, Riververb, Tom Hall, Conscious Summary, +Dog+, Endometrium Cuntplow

March 24, 2012   Blac Jesus and the Experimentalists, Crooked Cowboy, Poor Sons, Dani and the Scarlet Fevers, Kera and the Lesbians, Cogitos

March 30, 2012   UPSTAIRS
Hive Mind, Silvia Kastel and Ninni Morgia, Jeweled Snakes (Sharkiface), Conscious Summary

DOWNSTAIRS
Fetus Eaters, Black Sheep Wall, CHON, Bedlam of Cacophony, Exhausted Prayer, Burning at the Stake

April 21, 2012   Skyline Electric, Baseck, Pretty Agony, Swords of Fatima, Push Play {Dance}

April 28, 2012   Bastard Noise, Actuary, Amps For Christ, Pulsating Cyst, Andorkappen, Conscious Summary

May 3, 2012	Styrofoam Sanchez, Horaflora, AMK, Conscious Summary, Torn by Teeth, Jonah Rust, Cuddly Cactus
June 16, 2012	Smegma, Color Buk, Actuary, Bacteria Cult, Pulsating Cyst, +Dog+
November 15, 2012	Aimee Artz' birthday: Bastard Noise, Actuary, Conscious Summary, +Dog+, Tom Hall

2013

January 9, 2013	Chris Forsyth, Lucky Dragons, Kim Free, Skin Town
February 10, 2013	Terminator 2, Wrong Hole, Constrain, Actuary, Sissisters, +Dog+
March 3, 2013	Bran(…)Pos, Jason Soliday, Pulsating Cyst, S&ndC&stl&
March 29, 2013	Grex, Conscious Summary, Tone Drift, Naama Kates, Eyear
March 30, 2013	Clutch, Emu, Akaida, Habit, Tibet {Dance}
April 7, 2013	Amps for Christ, Koonda Holaa, Actuary, Conscious Summary, DJ PeteMajors
April 12, 2013	Cock ESP, Actuary, Bacteria Cult, Pigeon Wing, Lords of Outland
May 29, 2013	INTERNATIONAL NOISE CONFERENCE. 10 minute sets, No LapTops, No Drone Cops, Vehicle Reversing Systems, Endometrium Cuntplow, Crowhurst, Mavis Leonard, Conscious Summary, Ezra Buchla, Steve Touchton, S&ndc&stl&, Unica, Sissisters, Constrain, Sissy Cobb, Eva Aguila, Leah Peah, BPNM, Damion Romero, Burak, Laundry Room Squelchers
June 7, 2013	Robedoor, Clipping, Cooling Prongs, Aloonaluna, Invisible
June 11, 2013	Joey Molinaro, Dotson and Gualtieri Duo, Ezra Buchla, Corey Fogel, Jake Rosenzweig
July 2, 2013	Breakdancing Ronald Reagan, Sex Bruises, Dromez, Dakota Hogback, Unica, Vasculae, Crowhurst
August 8, 2013	Wreck and Reference, Botanist, Harassor [Metal night]

September 15, 2013	LA DISSONANCE PARTY: Cron, Northern Bastard, Crowhurst, Key West, Conscious Summary, Ancient Animals, Stripper Pussy, Cerebroil Roil, Pigeon Wing, Pulsating Cyst, Cessation, +Dog+
October 12, 2013	Sissy Spacek, Harassor, Fenian, VRS, Experimental Half Hour
October 18, 2013	Horse Lords, Warm Climate, Rob Magill
November 7, 2013	Echo Corps, Blackberry Tongues, Yassou Benedict, Fell Runner {indie}
November 16, 2013	Damion Romero, Tecumseh, Telecaves, Oolies
November 20, 2013	Totally Radd!! 10 year vinyl release [pop]
December 14, 2013	Youth Code, Death of Lovers, Ssleaze, Them Are Us Too {ElectorIndustrial}

2014

January 11, 2014	Unexamine, Madoka Kuono and Sissisters, Constrain, Deglet Noor Fakirs, +Dog+
January 18, 2014	Lazy Magnet, Rind, Noise Nomads, Tether, Dungeon Broads
January 25, 2014	Burmese, Sons of Bitches, Behavior, Elliot Levin with HMS
March 22, 2014	White Gourds, Telecaves, Effigy Mounds, Little Debbie, DJ Baseck
March 30, 2014	Brain Scraper, Angst, Trapped within Burning Machinery, Casual {Punk}
April 16, 2014	Newton and Embarker, AMK, Eva Aguila and Suzy Poling, Shelter Death
April 24, 2014	Adam Lipman, Whitman and Corey Fogel, Nicole Kidman, Emily Lacy
May 18, 2014	Helm, Fejhed, Damion Romero, Pod Blotz, the Haters
May 23, 2014	Bedlam of Cacophony, the Last of Lucy, Gigan
May 26, 2014	Father Murphy, Ezra Buchla, Telecaves, Mawdryn
June 3, 2014	Pedestrian Deposit, Points of Friction, Unmanned

June 14, 2014	Common Eider King Eider, Sutekh, Boxed, Shelter Death, Harassor {black metal}
July 19, 2014	Ritual Howls, Nove Mura, Shelter Death, Men of Bissau
July 25, 2014	Laren Bousfield, Rind, Raul de Nieves, Xina Xurner
August 1, 2014	Celestial Error, Monochromacy, Steve Flato, Endometrium Cuntplow, The Bruxists
September 14, 2014	Harassor, Styrofoam Sanchez, Bulbs, Mynamesiann!, Bandito Overlord, Actuary

APPENDIX IV

Dem Passwords—Schedule of Events

7914-B Santa Monica Blvd, 90046 (West Hollywood)

OLD LOCATION

2010

September 11, 2010   Pink Dollaz, Diamond Catalog, JCiocci2000, Damion Romero, Kyle Mabson

October 9, 2010   Sean Carnage: KILT, Cloud Nothings, Batwings Catwings, Nicole Kidman and Kevin Greenspon

November 13, 2010   *Lee Perry "Secret Education"*

November 20, 2010   Aeon Crunc Tesla, Fortress of Amplitude, Peter Kolovos, Obstacle Corpse

November 21, 2010   Mark Lord, Hive Mind, Coppertone

November 30, 2010   Tashi Wada and Mark So, John Krausbauer, Laura Steenberge and Julia Holter

December 11, 2010   *Lee Perry "Secret Education" closing party*

December 17, 2010   Nazi Knife opening reception (Jim Ferraro) [Pat Maher, Nate Young]

December 26, 2010   Rene Hell, Damion Romero, Brandon Nickell, M Geddes Gengras

2011

January 2, 2011   Dave Emory lecture; music by Jon Keskitalo; art by Ethan Higbee

January 20, 2011   *Frank Santoro: New Values. Opening Reception*

February 5, 2011   Moses Campbell, KIT, Arms and Legs, Batwings Catwings

February 19, 2011   *Dave Emory, Jon Keskitao, Ethan Higbee*

February 26, 2011	*Jessica Cioci "Poetry in Motion 2" opening reception*
March 2, 2011	Damon Packard, Preggers, Earn
March 3, 2011	*KIFF (Kandy, Sri Lanka International Film Festival) screening*
March 24, 2011	Joseph Hammer, John Krausbauer/Ezra Buchla, Josh Churchill, Brown
March 25, 2011	Caldera Lakes, Opera Mort, The Tenses (members of Smegma), John Wiese, Pedestrian Deposit
March 30, 2011	Timothy Wind, Tracey Trance, Human Hands, Heller Keller, Jarret Silberman, Bleakend at Bernies, Fielded, Wrong Hole
April 7, 2011	Andrew WK, Pink Dollaz, KIT, Jarrett Silberman
April 8, 2011	Where's Your Child with David Scott Stone
April 19, 2011	Crank Sturgeon, PCRV, Styrofoam Sanchez, The Haters, Robert Piotrosicz
April 22, 2011	*"The Upsetter" screening*
May 6, 2011	Luca Forcucci, Garbaj Kaetz
May 14, 2011	El Franco Lee II (thru 6/11)
May 21, 2011	*Video Works of Vice Cooler*
June 18, 2011	*Matthew Ryan Barton (thru 7/16)*
July 3, 2011	Russian Tsarlag, Secret Boyfriend, SHV, Human Hands
July 8, 2011	Extreme Animals, MTV Riff Raff, James Ferraro, Naomi Elizabeth
July 22, 2011	Daily Live Midlife Vacation, Lucky Dragons, Pedestrian Deposit
August 3, 2011	Monopoly Child Star Searchers, Orphan Fairytale, LA Vampires
August 4, 2011	Park Details Band, Peter Kolovos, Sepand Shahab
August 24, 2011	Damion Romero, Chiara Giovando, Positive Shadow, Twin, Regeee

August 25, 2011	Rene Hell, Earn, Pedestrian Deposit, Preggers
September 30, 2011	Leather Bath, Indignant Senility Rot Ton Bone and Eliza, Positive Shadow
October 14, 2011	*"Selective Memory" by Greg Hunt*
November 25, 2011	Regression (Wolf Eyes), Drainolith, AIDS Wolf, Hive Mind, Joseph Hammer
December 3, 2011	Bestial Mouths, King Dude, Hive Mind
December 8, 2011	Jaws, Judy Experience, Rind, Mother, Total Freedom [Hip Hop]
December 19, 2011	Sewn Leather, Lever Anchorage, Bleak End, FALARON, Pedestrian Deposit

2012

January 17, 2012	Adam Schwarz, Mark Brown, Blok, Kyle Mabson [hiphop]
January 20, 2012	Veiled, Castlefreak, MsG, Concrete Shiva, Sissisters
February 18, 2012	Joseph Hammer, Damion Romero, John Krausbauer, Ezra Buchla, Mitchell Brown
February 24, 2012	*Danny Perez, "Abusement"*
February 25, 2012	Infinite Body, Garrincha, Excavations, Kevin Greenspon
February 28, 2012	Dracula Lewis, JAWS, Human Hands, Rene Hell
March 4, 2012	Names Divine, Terrors, Illadox, Human Hands, Bleak End
April 2, 2012	Peter Kolovos, Yek Koo, Purple Pilgrims, LA Lakers
April 7, 2012	Weyes Blood, Horse Bladder, Sean McCann, Regal Degal
April 14, 2012	Sudden Infant, the Haters, Garritt Wittmer, Damion Romero
April 15, 2012	Astromero, Kitten Sparkles, Hive Mind

April 23, 2012	Liable for Abuse, Stray Executioner, David Rothbaum, Vortal Curb, Vasculae
May 14, 2012	Sudden Infant, the Haters, Garritt Wittmer, Damion Romero
May 28, 2012	Million Brazillions, Street Buddy
June 16, 2012	Nautical Almanac, Stunnaman (the Pack), Sexting, I.E.
July 7, 2012	Marshstepper, Sewn Leather, Anti-Civilization Mask
September 8, 2012	*Lee Jaffe "Legalize It" opening reception*
October 9, 2012	*Kevin Kunishi—LA Book Signing*
October 13, 2012	Pat Maher "Mucoid Plaque" Reception plus performance
October 23, 2012	Antwon, Sex Wounds, Moon Pearl, Fat Tony, Tom Cruz
October 27, 2012	Rodger Stella, Hive Mind, John Wiese, Damion Romero
November 10, 2012	Damion Romero, Bad News, Vortal Curb, Fairlight Empress
December 6, 2012	*Steve Roggenbuck reading*
December 10, 2012	White Wards, Condition, Sewn Leather, Gag
December 13, 2012	Thrones, Ace Farren Ford and John Wiese, William Strangeland, Peter Kolovos
December 15, 2012	*Zane Reynolds, "San Fernando Valley Heady" opening reception*

2013

January 11, 2013	CRASH, John Wiese
January 26, 2013	Jessica Ciocci opening reception
February 20, 2013	Juiceboxxx, Big Dad, Signals, Tik/Tik, Schwarz [hiphop]

February 28, 2013	Evidence, (Stephan Moore + Scott Smallwood), Ace Farren Ford + John Wiese, Casey Anderson, Scott Benzell
March 2, 2013	SuicideClub pt2, VortalCurb, SFV Acid, 333Boyz, Dangel XXX [hiphop]
March 9, 2013	*Annie Pearlman "Inside the Groove" opening reception*
April 20, 2013	*Lee "Scratch" Perry "Repent Americans" opening reception*

2014

5413 W Adams Blvd, 90016 (near Culver City)

NEW LOCATION   (noise shows documented only)

January 10, 2014	Damion Romero
April 11, 2014	Rodger Stella, Pedestrian Deposit, Hive Mind, Damion Romero
July 11, 2014	Sissy Space

the wulf.—Schedule of Events

1026 S Santa Fe Avenue #203 (Downtown Los Angeles)

* Below is a list of shows since I joined the wulf. mailing list.

2011

March 13, 2011	Eva-Maria Houben, Mark So
March 25, 2011	Christine Tavolacci play Carlo Inderhees
April 7, 2011	Phil Niblock and Katherine Liberovskaya
April 8, 2011	Laura Steenberge, James Klopfleisch, Brendan Carn, Jake Rosenzweig, David Tranchina
April 9, 2011	Michael Pisaro and Manfred Werder
April 18, 2011	Andras Blazsek, BA (Besorolas Alatt)
May 1, 2011	Natacha Diels, Miller Puckette, Bryan Jacobs
May 5, 2011	Chico Mello presents
May 7, 2011	Ulrich Krieger, Emma Nilsson, Casey Butler, Casey Anderson Works by Cage
May 8, 2011	Jennifer Torrence performs Matt Sargents and Lewis Nielson
May 14, 2011	Laura Steenberge, Cat Lamb, Julia Holter, Casey Anderson, Orin Hildestad, Mike Winter
May 22, 2011	Mark Trayle and Casey Anderson
June 2, 2011	Mark So and Eileen Myles
June 5, 2011	the wulf. at MOCA: workshops. Casey Anderson, Dicky Bahto, Matt Barbier, Ezra Buchla, Eric Clark, Scott Cazan, Daniel Corral, Corey Fogel, mari, James Klopfleisch, Liam Mooney, Alan Nakagawa, Adam Overton, Gary Schultz, Cassia Streb, Christine Tavalocci, Michael Winter

June 10, 2011	Chico Mello and Fernanda Farah
June 15, 2011	"Mutual Assent: Notifications"—Untitled Collective
June 19, 2011	Scott Cazan, Dick Higgins, Gerhard Schultz, Volker Straebel
June 26, 2011	Dogstar 7: Morton Feldman, *For Philip Guston*, performed by Rachel Beetz, Dustin Donahue, Martin Hiendl
July 3, 2011	the wulf. at MOCA: workshops. Ezra Buchla, Scott Cazan, Casey Anderson, Daniel Corral, Dicky Bahto, Mark So, Harris Wulfson, Christine Tavolacci, Tashi Wada, Matt Barbier and Luke Storm, Wolfgang von Schweintz, Larry Polansky, Mike Winter, Eric Clark, Laura Steenberge, Heather Lockie, Colin Woodford, Colin Wambsgans, Liam Mooney, Alan Nakagawa
July 13, 2011	Dogstar 7: Scott Cazan, Gary Schultz, Sepand Shahab, Stephen Touchton
July 16, 2011	Dogstar 7: Michael Winter, Tom Johnson, Andrew McIntosh, Casey Anderson, Michael Pisaro, Christine Tavolacci, Eric Clark, Archie Carey, Casey Anderson, Ingrid Lee, Douglas Wadle, Daniel Corral, Alex Sramek, Julia Holter, Scott Cazan, Odeya Nini, Liam Mooney, Corey Fogel, Orin Hildestad, Brian Walsh, Jim Sullivan
July 22, 2011	Carl Stone
July 23, 2011	Andrew McIntosh performs Tom Johnson
<the wulf. takes a break>	
October 2, 2011	Dickie Bahto, Mark So
October 14, 2011	Experimental Yearbook: Hans Koch
October 22, 2011	Experimental Yearbook: Casey Anderson, John P Hastings, Albert Ortega, C Spencer Yeh
November 5, 2011	Elusive Gnarwhallaby (Brian Walsh, Derek Stein, Matt Barbier, Richard Valitutto) plays: Marc Sabat, Wtodzimierz Kotonski, Steffen Schleiermacher, Henry Gorecki, Edison Denisov, Morton Muzczny
November 6, 2011	uploaddownloadperform.net Birthdayganza (3 years).

	Adam Overton Francesco Gagliardi
November 11, 2011	Isaac Schankler
November 19, 2011	Free Reed Conspiracy led by Daniel Corral: James Tenney, Gygorgi Ligeti, Christian Wolff, Isaac Schankler
November 20, 2011	Alejandro Acierto, Nomi Epstein, Colin Wambsgans
December 9, 2011	Michael Pisaro works featuring Brenda Byrnes, Ingrid Lee, Chaz Underriner
December 12, 2011	Christian Wolff *Burdocks, Stones, Sticks*. Christine Tavolacci, Ezra Buchla, Archie Carey, Carolyn Chen, Eric Clark, Daniel Corral, Corey Fogel, April Guthrie, Orin Hildestad, Anna Inuzuka, Mari, Adam Overton, Laura Steenberge

2012

January 20, 2012	*Lessons I've Learned from Tammy Wynette* Karl Berger, Luciano Berio, David Koblitz, Barbara Kolb, Elisabeth Lutyens, Tammy Wynette Performed by Stephanie Aston, April Guthrie, Moira Smiley, Christina Tavolacci.
February 5, 2012	Dogstar Orchestra with Taku Sugimoto and Michael Pisaro
February 11, 2012	Odeya Nini, Andrea Young, Denis Kolokol
February 24, 2012	Joshua Trio (Archie Carey Claire Chenette, Richard Valitutto) plays: Tenney, Wolff, Cage, Finnissy, Klopfleisch
February 29, 2012	Jaap Blonk
March 10, 2012	Omoi for Japan, "One For All" tribute for earthquake victims
March 17, 2012	Laurence Crane, Tim Parkinson, James Saunders.
March 25, 2012	Casey Anderson: *Solo, Many, All*.
March 29, 2012	Giacomo Fiore plays Harrison, Polansky, Nagorcka, Hosokawa
March 30, 2012	Casey Anderson, Scott Cazan, Chris Kallmyer,

Colin Wambsgan

March 31, 2012	Joseph Kudirka played by Mark So Madison Brookshire and Tashi Wada
April 7, 2012	*the wulf. at Inglewood Library*. Casey Anderson, Matt Barbier, Daniel Corral, Corey Fogel, Mona Kasra, James Klopfleisch, Heather Lockie, Jeffrey James Mohr, Liam Mooney, Alan Nakagawa, Steve Roden, Christine Tavolacci, Rick Bahto, Madison Brookshire, Eric Clark, Sepand Shehab, Mike Winter
April 8, 2012	James Moore plays Harrison, Polansky, Thompson, Zorn
April 20, 2012	Music of Anastassis Philippakopoulos. Performed by Mark So, William Powell, Kathy Pisaro, Christine Tavolacci Michael Pisaro plays Antoine Beuger
April 27, 2012	Toomai String Quartet plays Cazan, Raikhel, Tenney
May 4, 2012	Julia Holter and Dickie Bahto, Julia Holter and Yelena Zhelezov, Heather Lockie and Susanna Battin
May 11, 2012	"Come On You Fuckers"—Paul Fraser, Odeya Nini, Archie Carey, Louis Lopez, Kevin Robinson, Kate Hall, Tracy Jeanne Rosenthal, Adeline Newmann, Matt Broach, Max Gualtieri
May 19, 2012	Los Angeles Trombone Collective + James Miller (Electronics) John Cage, Julian Valdieso, Tommy Pederson
May 26, 2012	*Sigilis* by David Kendall
June 1, 2012	Films by Paul Clipson, Rick Bahto, Hayley Elliott Sound by Paul Clipson and Rene Hell
June 2, 2012	Liam Mooney—Brass chines, dry ice; electric fan, plastic bottles
August 31, 2012	Dog Star 8: Almanacs
September 2, 2012	Dog Star 8. Compositions by James Saunders and Tim Parkinson
September 6, 2012	Dog Star 8: Indeterminacy (Part 17). Dante Boom, Juan Cristobal Cerillo, Mike Winter

September 7, 2012	Dog Star 8: Sign/Symbol/Sound(s) *For Anne LeBaron*. Eric Clark, Orin Hildestad, Stephanie Smith, Matt Barbier *Juniper Foam*. Casey Anderson, Scott Cazan ,James Klopfleisch *AlmostEveryPieceMarkSoHasEverWritten* by James Klopfleisch
September 8, 2012	Dog Star 8: Circular Music by Jürg Frey Trio Kobayashi: Zara Teicher, Matt Barbier, Luke Storm
September 19, 2012	Mantra Percussion. Music of Eric Clark and Michael Gordon
September 21, 2012	Scott Cazan, Pierce Warnecke, Casey Anderson, Mike Winter, Wyatt Penn Keusch
September 22, 2012	the wulf. at Torrance Art Museum The Subterraneans: Eric Clark and Mike Winter
September 30, 2012	Daniel Corral
October 1, 2012	Rick Bahto: images
October 12, 2012	Cat Lamb and Bryan Eubanks
October 14, 2012	UDP Birthdayganza! Uploaddownloadperform.net Performers: John Burtle, Andrew Choate, Allison D'Amato, Adam Overton
October 19, 2012	Bryan Eubanks and Cat Lamb [again]
November 2, 2012	Lewis Keller, Mark So
November 17, 2012	Tashi Wada
December 1, 2012	Lucie Vitkova
December 13, 2012	the wulf. at ArtShare. Casey Anderson, Scott Cazan, Aidan Reynolds, Mike Winter, Corey Fogel, Todd Lerew, Matt Barbier, Eric Clark, Christine Tavalocci
December 16, 2012	Ingrid Lee, Aidan Reynolds, Alvin Lucier

2013

January 6, 2013	Taylan Susam and Antoine Beuger

January 16, 2013	*Ryonaji* by John Cage. *The Narrow Isle to the Deep North* by Nat Evans
January 25, 2013	James Klopfleisch. *John Lithgow 1*.
January 27, 2013	Scott Cazan, Wyatt Keusch, Rale, Raphael Arar
February 3, 2013	Wolfgang von Schweinitz at 60
February 9, 2013	*Experimental Yearbook*. Jaap Blonk, Roc Jimenez de Cisneros, Christian Kesten, James Klopfleisch, Scott Cazan, Laura Steenberge
February 15, 2013	the wulf. at ArtShare. Tom Johnson
February 20, 2013	Tom Johnson, Brian Parks, Michael Winter
February 22, 2013	Tom Johnson
February 28, 2013	Dante Boon
March 10, 2013	*Experimental Yearbook*: Adam Overton "Ripe for Embarrassment: For a New Musical Masochism"
March 23, 2013	The Royal US (Max Kutner, Heather Lockie, Stina Haraldsdottir); Max Kutner
March 31, 2013	Michael Winter
April 12, 2013	Colin Wambsgans presents *Music for Drunk, Still Drinking*
April 13, 2013	Sarah Hugues, David Stent, and Michael Pisaro Works by Hughes, Farmer, Tenney, Pisaro
April 19, 2013	Lewis Keller; Max Markowitz
April 25, 2013	Ulrich Krieger, Ted Byrnes, Scott Kazan, Wyatt Keusch
May 3, 2013	Michael Pisaro and Greg Stuart
May 12, 2013	Aidan Reynolds. *Mother's Day Music*.
May 24, 2013	James Klopfleisch, Sepand Shahab
May 25, 2013	Sepand Shahab, James Klopfleisch
June 29, 2013	Ingrid Lee, Edward Davis, Alvin Lucier

July 12, 2013	Josh Gerowitz
July 14, 2013	Community Meeting: Share ideas about the wulf.
July 20, 2013	Liam Mooney
September 13, 2013	Page+Noonan+Marshall; Rubio; Weathers; Rogers
September 20, 2013	*Fundraising Party*. Performances and Installations
September 21, 2013	Reading, Writing, Pictures, Sound. Guy Brookshire, Andrew Choate, Jen Hofer, David Hughes, Danielle Roderick, Mark So, Adrian Tenney
September 27, 2013	*Hive*, Padua Playwrights
September 29, 2013	Georgia Bell, Jake Rosenzsweig, Daniel Eaton
October 4, 2013	Dean Rosenthal
October 19, 2013	Reiner van Houdt
October 18, 2013	Andrew Young
October 27, 2013	*Broken Signals—An Evening of (Mostly) Local Noise in Downtown LA*. Joseph Hammer, Coward, Ross Wallace Chait, Adrian Rew.
November 01, 2013	Tim Feeney, Matt Ingalis, Ken Ueno
November 23, 2013	Todd Lerew, Conal Ryan
December 1, 2013	Mark So, *Some Keyboard Miscellany, with Tapes*
December 15, 2013	*Rounds* Record Release Party
December 17, 2013	Ted Byrnes

2014

January 17, 2014	*New Films, New Videos, New Surprises*. Ryan Betschart, Tyler Betschart, Andrew Kim, Sofia Canales, Ekkaphob Sumsirpong, Walter Vargas
January 24, 2014	Jack Wright, Ben Wright, Corey Fogel
January 29, 2014	Bonnie Jones, Andrea Neumann, Suzanne Thorpe

January 31, 2014	ThaBeesTeaBoiz. Aidan Reynolds, Andy Young
February 8, 2014	Bob Ostertag [second concert in LA]
February 15, 2014	Ulrich Krieger, Josh Carro
February 22, 2014	John Eagle
February 23, 2014	Sepand Shahab; Mark So
February 27, 2014	Three Thirds Records Release: "Buffalo Skinner" tribute to Woody Guthrie
March 7, 2014	Rich Bahto, Ashkey Bellouin, Ben Bracken, +
March 13, 2014	KRAAK's Lieven Martes Moana; Floris Vanhoof with Beyt at Tapes
March 22, 2014	Reiner Van Houdt
March 26, 2014	Nomi Epstein
March 29, 2014	Bob Bellerue, Jonathan Borges and William Hutson
March 30, 2014	The Montreal-New York Quartet Works by Tim Brady, John Cage, Erik Griswold, Christian Wolff, Annea Lockwood
April 4, 2014	Casey Anderson
April 12, 2014	Casey Anderson; Scott Cazan
April 20, 2014	Todd Lerew and Ingrid Lee
April 26, 2014	*Fare Thee Well California*: Marcus Rubio; Michael Winter
May 4, 2014	Scott Perry and Casey Anderson
May 9, 2014	Clay Chaplin, *Anamnesis*
May 11, 2014	Carolyn Chen, *Hoods* [opera]
May 14, 2014	Rob Holliday
May 25, 2014	Jonas Reinahardt. Screening of *Ganymede*
May 30, 2014	John P Hastings, 'Folk Music'

June 1, 2014	Dogstar 10: *The Witness*—Stephen Touchton, Guy Klucevsek, Sepand Shahab, Pauline Oliveros
June 5, 2014	Dogstar 10: *Degrees of Darkness*—Alvin Lucier, Joseph Kudirka
June 6, 2014	Dogstar 10: "Counting Duets"—Tom Johnson, John Eagle
June 9, 2014	Dogstar 10: *It's Just a Number*—Andy Young, Ben Levinson, Casey Anderson, Coleman Zurkowski, Chuck Gloria, Drew Straus, Ingrid Lee, James Klopfleisch, Jack Doutt, Liam Mooney, Marcus Rubio, Morgan Gerstmar, Robert Holliday, Scott Cazan, Stephanie Smith, Todd Lerew, and Mari.
June 10, 2014	Dogstar 10: Robert Lax. Three Pieces for Networked Speakers
July 1, 2014	Yiannis Christofides
July 10, 2014	Daniel Pearce and Teddy Rankin-Parker
July 11, 2014	John Eagle, Todd Lerew, Christoffer Schunk, Danny Wood
August 3, 2014	Liam Mooney—Balloons and Fiberglass
September 4, 2014	Elliot Simpson plays Walter Zimmerman, David Doty, Larry Polansky, Ezequiel Menalled, Horatiu Radulescu
September 13, 2014	*the wulf. Play the LA River*. Stephanie Cheng Smith, Michael Winter, Liam Mooney, Andrew Young, Corey Fogel
October 25, 2014	*Experimental Yearbook*. Olivia Block, James Saunders, John Lely, Anne Guthrie and Billy Gomberg, Matt Marble, Nomi Epstein

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Los Angeles Noisescapes

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