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A Study of the Los Angeles DIY Experimental Music Scene:
Reflections on the Promise of the Possible

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnomusicology

by

Andrew John Kluth

2018
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A Study of the Los Angeles DIY Experimental Music Scene:

Reflections on the Promise of the Possible

by

Andrew John Kluth

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnomusicology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Roger Savage, Chair

This dissertation comprises an ethnography and mixed methodological analysis of Los Angeles’ contemporary DIY experimental music scene. By means of information gathered through participant observation and interviews, I describe the scene in the context of its historical precedents and its present state. From these observations I discern a sensibility of alterity and openness as a primary characteristic of the scene. This manifests as an investment in musical experimentalism as a mode of research into the unknown, anticipating as-yet unrealized possibilities of the as if. This leads to further reflections regarding how the aesthetics and practices of musical experimentalism that eschew conventionally-musical sound terms are nonetheless capable of affecting their auditors. I note that the common lack of typical analytical handles (melody, harmony, etc.) can confound some of contemporary musicology’s methodological frameworks. Following clues about ontological openness and musical meaning
suggested by the act of listening, I deploy an explanatory methodological intervention offered by philosophical hermeneutics to negotiate this problem. This theoretical scaffolding helps to make sense of connections between the silences, non-musical, and un-structured sounds deployed in Los Angeles’ DIY experimental music scene and connected testimonies of aesthetic experiences occasioned thereby to refigure listeners’ horizons of understanding. The dissertation culminates in chapters that consider implications of philosophical hermeneutics in terms of musical experimentalism as related to sociological theories of the judgment of taste, and a metamodern characterization of the Los Angeles DIY experimental music scene’s post-postmodern structure of feeling.
This dissertation of Andrew John Kluth is approved.

Robert W Fink

Steven J Loza

James Weldon Newton

Roger Savage, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2018
Dedication

For Carolin: The Rogers to my (clumsy) Astaire.
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Copyright and Reuse

My thanks to the copyright holders of works presented in my appendix who have granted me permission to reproduce their works in part or in whole in this dissertation. The generosity of
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Of course, I must thank my family—my parents Michael and Elaine Kluth and my sister Amanda Kugel—for their continued open-mindedness to my life so far as a perpetually itinerant musician and student. No matter how esoteric or specialized the interests I pursue, or how geographically far those interests take me from my hometown of Green Bay, Wisconsin, I know they always have my back. I am eternally grateful for their love and support.

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Vita

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2015 Re-territorializing the Los Angeles John Zorn Marathon. In Ethnomusicology Review’s “Sounding Board” (http://ethnomusicologyreview.ucla.edu/content/re-territorializing-los-angeles-john-zorn-marathon)

2014c  *Accounting for Meaning in Improvisation: Embracing New Research in Embodiment.* In *Ethnomusicology Review*’s “Sounding Board” (http://ethnomusicologyreview.ucla.edu/content/accounting-meaning-improvisation-embracing-new-research-embodiment)


**CONFERENCES**

4/18  2018 Association for Art History Conference: “Soundscape, Memory, and Meaning: Thoughts on Alan Nakagawa’s *Peace Resonance,*” Courtauld Institute of Art and King’s College London.


4/17  *American Society for Aesthetics, Pacific Division:* Commenter, Music and Ontology Panel, Asilomar, CA

2/17  Society for Ethnomusicology, Southern California and Hawaii Chapter: “In, but not of the (commercial) world? A consideration of Los Angeles’ Dog Star Orchestra experimental music festival,” California State University Fullerton


8/16  11th International Conference on The Arts in Society: “Plurality in Experimental Music: Appropriation and Philosophical Hermeneutics,” University of California, Los Angeles


7/14  *Summer Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation as Practice Based Research:* “A Consideration of the Worlding Power of Music in Tigran Hamasyan’s *Shadow Theater,*” Memorial University
Chapter One: Locating a DIY Experimental Music Scene in Los Angeles

There’s this idea of perceptual curiosity, of innovation, of new experiences [in the Los Angeles experimental music scene] that can manifest in many ways…and this type of questioning is accessible to everybody. Because everybody has the potential to be up for the challenge.

—Michael Winter (interview, 24 August 2016)

On a Saturday night in Los Angeles’ warehouse district, thirty people are sitting quietly in second-hand chairs. Reverberating sound fills the space, seemingly conjured out of the air by a man crouching in the middle of the room. He kneels with a tablet computer in front of what looks like a secret message scrawled on the floor in red chalk. This is, in fact, a performance by Scott Cazan of his piece Grammar, in which he live-codes the work that is then realized by his computer and PA system. Those sounds resonating throughout the performance space—called the wulf.—are a sonic realization of those red chalk scribbles, the score of the piece. The music is ambient, atmospheric, glitchy, noisy, and its sounds seem to be somewhere between being digitally- and acoustically-produced. By turns peaceful and raucous, tonal and strident, sparse and dense, and perhaps reminding one as much of Brian Eno as Merzbow, the sounds taper off after about twenty minutes. After a final moment of silence, the crowd of mostly mid-twenties, bohemian-looking White men responds with energetic and sustained applause.

On another weekend evening at the wulf. that same season, a similar crowd in attendance witnessed locals Ted Byrnes and William Hutson performing rambunctious improvised duets with a drum kit, found items, and live-sampled magnetic tape loops. Loud and kinetic with both musicians jabbing and parrying, the two inflect one another’s performative decisions as they aurally push and prod.
But perhaps more representative of the type of music commonly heard in this scene was another performance occurring a few weeks later in the form of two simultaneous duos. One, written for ebow-ed electric guitars and laptops, was composed and partially performed by influential local composer, teacher, and Wandelweiser Collective member, Michael Pisaro. Its companion was another duo for laptop and upright bass, composed and partially performed by visiting artist Seth Cluett, a disciple of the then-recently-deceased Tony Conrad. Though heard together, they were performed as if mutually exclusive of one another, as if the musicians were in different rooms. Seemingly tonal with a cloudy, ambient texture of cluster chords passing around a droning tonal center, these durational pieces were structured by the realization of timed, but openly interpretable actions indicated in text or graphic scores. They were often so quiet that the performances featured the sounds of the city and the room—the nearby interstate, conversations in other units of the building, sirens going by, audience members crossing their legs, and even a man snoring—just as much as the measured and soft sounds intentionally produced by the musicians. The ringing applause that broke out after forty-five minutes were exponentially louder than the music that had occasioned them.

The music in question is not easily accessible for most listeners, either in terms of actually listening to it (which can sometimes feel more like enduring it) or in terms of learning about its very existence and finding live performances. Like other experimental music performance spaces in Los Angeles, the wulf. is neither well-publicized nor well-appointed. Still, more than one-hundred DIY, underground performances of experimental music in Los Angeles are enthusiastically attended there and elsewhere by a small but dedicated community every year.

The scene’s very existence may be a surprise to some as one is more likely to think of New York City, Chicago, or even Baltimore before considering the Western metropolis when
considering experimental music in the United States. Los Angeles’ reputation as a sun-drenched land of shallow glamor seems antithetical to the eccentric, intellectual, and parochial world of experimental music. Due to generations of media representation as a dystopic megalopolis and cultural wasteland—see Thom Anderson’s film essay *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2004), for example—some might expect a city overwhelmingly characterizable by “lowbrow culture”: economically-instrumentalized machinations of Hollywood, reality television, popular music, video games, technology, and even pornography. Still, upon my relocation to the city from Brooklyn in 2013 for studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), I refused to believe that a city boasting something like eighteen-million residents would not have some kind of experimental scene. In this dissertation I reflect on my own experience as I set out to find it.

Having previously lived and worked as a saxophonist and woodwind doubler in Chicago for most of the 2000s, I had enjoyed a healthy music scene that freely mixed jazz, blues, rock, world musics, European art music, and various experimentalisms. Live music was bursting out from venues on both the North and South sides of Chicago most nights of the week. My experience was similar during my two-year tenure in New York City (2011-13) where one can easily stumble into a multitude of bars, clubs, lofts, or repurposed spaces most nights of the week to find world class experimental music of many sensibilities and a strong, supportive community. Though ostensibly there for non-musically-related graduate studies at New York University, I quickly found myself working four nights a week as a saxophonist in commercial, as well as more experimentally-oriented projects. This was not to be the case in Los Angeles.

Relocating to Los Angeles from Brooklyn for my doctoral studies, I made the rookie mistake of taking an apartment in Hollywood. From my perspective (the sanitized perspective of Google Maps, really), it seemed equidistant from UCLA in Westwood, where I would be
spending much of my time, as from other parts of the city whose culture and nightlife I wanted to explore. But after a year of balancing my studies in the day and going out in the evenings with the intention of finding challenging music, I had only found the most obvious, well-advertised, and commercially-oriented spots. Hollywood, West Hollywood, the Sunset Strip, Downtown Los Angeles (DTLA), and the hipper, slightly more Eastern neighborhoods of Silver Lake, Echo Park, Highland Park, and Frogtown (Elysian Fields) offer a large number of rock-, punk-, and singer-songwriter-oriented clubs. And, of course, there are also clubs playing electronic dance music of all categories late into the night.¹

Most working musicians in these scenes I met were carefully coiffed, chic, sporting Urban Outfitters styles and writing radio-friendly music ready to be synced with films, added to coffee shop playlists and car commercials. And in spite of claiming influences from The Beatles to Mr. Bungle—or even Zappa to Zorn—most were playing formulaic, three-minute pop songs. They were in Los Angeles to “make it” in the commercial music world. This is, of course, no crime. And much of this music was very good as were the musicians writing, performing, and recording it. Still, I was curious to locate the more non-commercial, restless, searching, challenging music.

It was not until an internet search engine turned up information about a space in the warehouse district called the wulf: sometime in 2014 (thanks again, Google) that I began to find the relatively, sometimes literally, underground archipelago of non-commercial DIY (DIY here as “Do It Yourself”) venues dotting the city’s patchwork of neighborhoods. As I was to learn, Los Angeles harbors a surprisingly robust network of venues that offer artists and listeners places to gather and experience the work of composer/performers, experimentalists, sound artists,

¹ Los Angeles no longer boasts an excess of jazz clubs, but those few that exist such as The Blue Whale in Little Tokyo, The Catalina Jazz Club in Hollywood, The Baked Potato in North Hollywood, and of course The World Stage in Leimert Park, are doing good work for a small, dedicated community.
programmers, artists, or whatever appellation they might prefer, in environments insulated from the commercially-oriented economic and aesthetic standards to which the arts in Los Angeles are so often beholden.

Los Angeles is a world capitol for commercial music production, and much of the music produced there is part of what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1987, 94-136) suspiciously referred to as the “culture industry”—that is, music both tied to the amassment of economic capital and complicit in the production and maintenance of the ideological domination or deformation of social reality. This present study is not explicitly interested in that type of musical production in Los Angeles, except perhaps as a foil. Rather, it is concerned with the contemporary musical experimentalism in Los Angeles and its attendant communities that I found to be flourishing in that culture industry’s shadow. It is more particularly concerned with those DIY communities of composers, performers, and listeners that maintain this music scene not only outside of the “authorized” physical, economic, and media spaces of music production, presentation, reception, and circulation, but far outside of “authorized,” culturally-normalized musical aesthetics.

I have found the DIY experimental music scene in Los Angeles to be profoundly “weird” in that its music is often fantastic, bizarre, and demanding - but I have also found it to be rewarding. Concerts tend to feature musics oriented toward different species of silences, harsh noise, chance-oriented and process musics, traditional instruments, laptops, found or made objects, and very serious performances of newly composed music by virtuoso-level musicians as much as non-musicians (in the traditional sense). In this post-postmodern city whose commercial music production often defines the aesthetic tastes of the globally-distributed culture industry, the discovery of a persistent community that supports these musical practices and presents them
in underground spaces on little to no budget—sometimes several times a week—was, for me, a revelation.

**Animating Questions**

Though obscure by the standards of popular music production, Los Angeles’ DIY experimental community springs from a legacy of experimentalism in Southern California. With roots traceable to communities of outsider artists as well as those ensconced in culturally-legitimated institutions, contemporary communities of experimental music practices in Los Angeles comprise an influential but under-documented scene with an influential presence in international spaces of cultural production. But apart from the observable parameters of musical production, what continues to interest me is the community of musicians and listeners that claim this music—music that lacks many of the traditional theoretical handles exploited in musicological analysis such as melody, harmony, and rhythm—is not just “inert” silence or noise. Rather, it demonstrates a capability to affect them. Like more conventional music, it, too, manifests a power to occasion experiences that alter the auditor’s understanding of the world and their place in it through encounters that are challenging, beautiful, and meaningful.

The appearance in the last five years of theoretically-oriented books considering musical experimentalism speaks to the timeliness of my own study. These include Eldritch Priest’s *Boring Formless Nonsense* (2013), Joseph Panzer’s *The Process That Is the World: Cage/Deleuze/Events/Performances* (2015), G. Douglas Barrett’s *After Sound: Toward a Critical Music* (2016), and Jennie Gottschalk’s *Experimental Music Since 1970* (2016). Broadly speaking, these works relate theoretical positions about experimental music practices informed by cultural materialism to poststructuralist ideas about music’s role in culture. They offer
valuable insight into the subjective and social issues surrounding musical experimentalism. However, like most contemporary musicology, they take for granted that sound as music has the capability to be effective in material as well as immaterial, subjective ways - whether this refers to the maintenance of the status quo via cultural values encoded in musical production, distribution, and reception, or in terms of identity construction, imagination, and resistance. Questions about how subjects’ interactions with music are related to their aesthetic judgment and matters of ethical, ideological, and social realms are generally presumed or sidestepped entirely with the tacit assertion that music is relevant to people’s lives. After all, this is demonstrably true as otherwise music would not persist as a topic of cultural, anecdotal, or academic discourse.

In considering the profound weirdness of Los Angeles’ DIY experimental scene, I have found it most fruitful to approach it from its relationship to and engagement with imagination and its implication in the building of a subject’s world. More than simply a diversionary ability to build castles in the sky for a moment, imagination is a complex capacity that engages our past memories, present experiences, and protended ideas of the future that is itself implicated in meaning-making and the construction of identity.

More conventional musical practices feature structures (melodic, harmonic, rhythmic) that are more easily identified and theorized as meaningful texts—markers for subjects by which to make meaning in the matrix of symbols and practices that comprise a culture’s plastic-but-persistent social realities (Geertz 1973). However, much of the music I have investigated in the scene that is the topic of the study simply lacks those facile musical structures, which some critics and theorist maintain are culturally encoded with meaning; interpretable signs that might reward the casual listener with the low-hanging fruit of culturally-located meanings to be found
in the power of a Brahms symphony, a romantic Latin Bolero, or a four-on-the-floor House track.

Even though much of experimental music lacks the theoretical accessibility and nomic generalities afforded by the aforementioned practical and theoretical handles, some listeners insist that it is somehow still capable of occasioning the production of meaning and augmentation of understanding as do more conventional musics. As such, I began this project from the broad idea that it is somehow aesthetic experience itself as related to imagination and listening that is a clue to music’s efficaciousness, broadly defined. This study is, then, an opportunity to introduce a theoretical intervention that can situate the power of musical experience in a theoretical grounding capable of making sense of experimental music’s challenges and claims—one that has transferrable significance to studies of more conventional musical topics. It is experimental music’s weirdness—that by many criteria experimental music is not music at all, but rather time artfully arranged for aurally-oriented aesthetic experience—that opens the window to this intervention.

As part of this study I have generated an ethnography of the Los Angeles DIY experimental music scene that I utilize as a theoretical springboard. Again, despite its formal and aesthetic challenges, scene participants report that their experiences with experimental music somehow affect and change them. They insist it has value in occasioning productive cognitive labor and promoting processes of meaning-making. If taken seriously, this assertion testifies to music’s perceived capacity (experimental or otherwise) to join subjects’ practical understanding in their material and social situatedness with their imagination for novel futures and ways of being. I ask how we might make sense of the connections between silences and non-musical, unstructured sounds in experimental music and reports of experiences that refigure horizons of
understanding. As such, rather than a stand-alone monograph about a Los Angeles community of musical experimentalism, this dissertation seeks to investigate how musical experiences, at a primary level, engage with the grounding of subjects’ understanding of their worlds. I intend to show how experimentalism’s counter-intuitive affectual efficacy highlights the value of a theoretical framing from philosophical hermeneutics that relates aesthetic experience to understanding.

**Critical Approach**

To address this series of challenges, I have adopted a theoretical framework from philosophical hermeneutics. This approach derives from an intellectual history that attempts to make sense of profound existential questions. In short, this might be summarized by the notion that humans exist understandingly—that our being-in-the-world is a continual project wherein historically-situated, meaning-making subjects are continually engaged in the construction of self. Following Schleiermacher and Dilthey’s expansion of hermeneutics from biblical exegesis to a general science of understanding, it was Heidegger’s later development of hermeneutics that suggested the act of interpretation as integral to a subjects’ inherence in the world. Moving beyond the idea of hermeneutics as simply a theory of interpretation, Heidegger’s description of *Dasein* (there-being, or, the grounded presencing of a subject’s being-in-the-world) describes a hermeneutical process that characterizes a subject’s identity and ontological status—one in which aesthetic experience plays an important role. I deploy some of Heidegger’s ideas in this dissertation, but it is the further developments of these ideas by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur that I find most elucidatory.
Originating as it does in the interpretive study of texts, Gadamer’s and Ricoeur’s developments of hermeneutic theory build on Heidegger’s characterization of interpretation.² Going further, they schematize how a subject might engage with texts to navigate present states of affairs, but also to open subjects’ horizons of understanding anew. The significances of philosophical hermeneutics’ implications as such have enjoyed much consideration and publication in fields of textual exegesis, linguistics, philosophy, politics, and more (Weinsheimer 1991; Grondin 1994; Evans 1995; Dauenhauer 1998; Davey 2006; Vlacos 2014).

Furthermore, since the post-structural characterization of a text in terms larger than the strictly logocentric, an interpretable “text” can be understood as any perceivable phenomenon available to be included in the construction of meaningful symbolic wholes during the synthetic operation carried out by a subject’s imagination: colors, signs, textures, and sounds. This study builds on the work of scholars who have extended the epistemological and ontological implications already established to questions of music’s multi-modal significance. Roger Savage has done the most to incorporate these ideas into musicological discourse (2005; 2009; 2009/2010; 2010; 2013; 2015a; 2015b; 2018), and the influence of his work on this study will become evident as it unfolds.

While focusing here on experimentalism, many (if not all) of the methodological critiques I pursue are applicable to the study of other musical and performance art worlds that hold assumptions of art’s efficacy in common. Informed by postmodern Anglo-American musicology’s radical doubt in the logic of “structural listening” (Subotnik 1995) and its assumed

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² It is important to note that while Gadamer’s and Ricoeur’s respective developments of hermeneutic theory are related, they differ in important ways as they compare to one another, but even as they developed during the career of each thinker. Gadamer often used the term “philosophical hermeneutics” (Gadamer 1977), with “hermeneutic phenomenology” (Ihde 1971) sometimes used to refer to Ricoeur’s body of work. The subtle (though significant) differences of these terms and the methodological contexts and intellectual histories they and others imply are too great for the scope of this dissertation. Therefore, in what follows I refer to the general methodological developments their work has initiated as “philosophical hermeneutics.”
efficacy of autonomous musical structure, I affirm the meaning of music to be found in its socially contingent content. However, contemporary analytical methods may be contested by experimental musics that influence listeners through their resistance to conceptual apprehension, lack of structure, non-repeatability, or framing of time through silence. As such, this study seeks to complement extant theoretical work that mediates ontological and epistemological questions in studies of sound as noise, avant-garde and experimental musics, acousmatic sound, performance art, and more (Schafer 1977; Born 1995, 2010; Kahn 1999, 2001; Becker 2004; Borgo 2005; LaBelle 2006; Hegarty 2007; Nancy [2002] 2007; Demers 2010; Kane 2014; Lipari 2014; Hutson 2015).


Unfolding my own study of experimental musical practices in Los Angeles, which I then employ for meta-methodological critique, I draw from many theoretical wells. As such, this dissertation “does not run a straight course from beginning to end. It hunts…[a]nd it counts not the kill but what is learned of the territory explored” (Goodman 1978, ix).3 Subsequent sections

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3 I respectfully borrow this description from Norman Goodman’s forward to Ways of Worldmaking (1978). My hope is that my own project’s attitude of collection and exploration might reflect a degree of the humility and
of the dissertation address different questions and sets of challenges and, as such, I offer relevant literature reviews as chapters progress. In addition to the ethnography mentioned, a primary objective of this study remains the exploration of the utility of philosophical hermeneutics to ground musical study in terms of the affectual efficacy of experimental musics. This is conceived in the service of better characterizing the relevance of aesthetic experiences occasioned by music to modes of interpretation and understanding in a hyper-pluralist world, an effort to clarify the relationship of art to both ideological inscription and utopic imagination.

**Chapter Breakdown**

This dissertation offers an ambitious, three-part contribution to musicological discourse. The first part, addressed in chapters two and three, include a circumscription of my ethnography of a community of experimental music makers in Los Angeles and a circumscription of the topic’s relationship to ethnomusicology. Furthermore, I offer a review of the “way of ideas” in musicological methods to frame and show the necessity of my theoretical intervention of philosophical hermeneutics. The second part offers historical context for the contemporary musical scene in question in Los Angeles and sets the table for my ethnography. The final part of the dissertation locates gaps in several musicological approaches and demonstrates how the conceptual framework regarding the efficacy of aesthetic experience offered by philosophical hermeneutics helps mediate said gaps and may expand their elucidatory capacity.

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ambitiousness reflected in his full characterization, which reads: “This book does not run a straight course from beginning to end. It hunts; and in the hunting, it sometimes worries the same raccoon in different trees, or different raccoons in the same tree, or even what turns out to be no raccoon in any tree. It finds itself balking more than once at the same barrier and taking off on other trails. It drinks often from the same streams, and stumbles over some cruel country. And it counts not the kill but what is learned of the territory explored” (ix).
Chapter One

This introductory chapter serves to introduce my topic and the questions that animate the unfolding of this project. After having characterized my critical approach, I have clarified some practical and theoretical nomenclature by which I proceed. As the dissertation has several mutually inflecting moving parts, this framework clears a space from which to jump off into my methodological review and criticism that sets up my proposed theoretical intervention.

Chapter Two

Following the introductory chapter, Chapter Two reviews extant approaches to the study of musical experimentalism to locate both its persisting challenges as well as claims of its efficacy—in terms of its relationship to “right living,” affect, politics, etc.—maintained by its practitioners. I begin by considering musical experimentalism’s relevance to the project of ethnomusicology. In particular, I mean ethnomusicology’s objective of understanding differing sociocultural realities and music’s multitude of significances, most often pursued through the method of ethnography. Assuming the “musical human” and that music can have a significant role in orienting subjects in their greater social organization, I establish that experimentalism’s ability to bring people together for the activity of social music-making and listening demonstrates that, in spite of its lack of many customary musical characteristics, it nonetheless functions similarly to more conventional musics, and with similar results. This leads to an appraisal of how postmodern musicology’s development has replaced previous musicological ideas of music’s aesthetic autonomy and the revelation of transcendent truths to be derived therefrom with assertions concerning music’s relationship to structures of power, identity, resistance, and social facts. Considering developments in postmodern musicology out of
positivistically-oriented methods and epistemologies, I show how another contemporary focus on phenomenology and embodied knowledge is connected to an understanding of the power of sound and listening in Sound Studies. All of this serves to show that, in their diversity, musicological methods have approached experimentalism with the assumption that it can be socially relevant—that it somehow does social work. This assertion deploys theoretical frameworks that portray its relationship to human affairs in terms of ideologically inscribed modes of cultural production and reception, embodied knowledge, imagination, and resistance without rigorously investigating the significance of these modes’ relationship to another. Along my path to join these together in a greater theoretical field via philosophical hermeneutics, I look to the power of listening as a clue to their mutual significance.

Chapter Three

Acting as a connector between some of experimentalism’s challenges and claims in Chapter Two and the theoretically-oriented work of Chapter Four, Chapter Three focuses on the act of listening as the site of music’s affective efficaciousness. Composers, theorists, and listeners alike have naturally assumed that listening is, at bottom, the “mechanism” of music’s efficaciousness. Just how that listening functions in this capacity, though, is not so clear. In this chapter, I consider how sound, noise, and music are related to the construction of auditors’ worlds, and the lifeworlds shared by inhabitants of communities. I find that for both Cage and Heidegger, subjects’ mode of intentional listening is implicated in how they might authentically be in and open-to the world. This is then related to claims of how experimental music has been anecdotally related to ideas of “right living,” before moving on to more rigorous developments of listening to plurality and the construction and maintenance of communities. Moving then to
Jean-Luc Nancy’s analysis of listening’s reflexive finding of self in sound leads to the idea of “interlistening,” meaning-making, and world building. Following this, based on the work of Eugene Gendlin, I reflect on the relationship of conceptual knowledge to that tension created by a felt openness implicit in listening—an idea that finally leads us back to the later Heidegger and his development of the idea of Gellasenheit (releasement) as related to a waiting, listening openness in meditative thinking. This waiting performs the activity of “regioning,” of opening up into future time and ideas, that space where being becomes itself.

Chapter Four

After having reviewed challenges and claims of musical experimentalism and some of the ways theorists have made sense of them, we come to the primary theoretical intervention of this dissertation in my explication and deployment of philosophical hermeneutics. Earlier hints regarding music’s efficacy and the role of listening lead to a focus on the primacy of an ontology of openness. Those hints in previous chapters are made good upon here, where the role of imagination is described as that which has the capacity to connect and refigure the relationship of ideology and utopia. The theoretical path that leads to the hermeneutical turn must go through previous aesthetic theories. To collect ideas and show how said turn is beneficial in musicological discourse, I review present aesthetic frameworks in the music scene in question and go back to visit Kant’s and Hegel’s ideas that have variously informed contemporary studies, to which the methods of contemporary theoretical frameworks react. Following philosophical hermeneutics’ development through Heidegger to Gadamer and Ricoeur, I unfold my argument for its consequence in music study—especially in the case of the experimental musical topic at hand. I show how, rather than replacing contemporary musicological methods, it offers
Chapter Five

To better situate my ethnographic study of the contemporary DIY experimental music scene, chapter five looks to the development of musical experimentalism in Los Angeles throughout the twentieth century. Though an Afrological sensibility of experimentalism in the Central Avenue scene of the mid-century existed almost mutually exclusively from Los Angeles’ Eurological musical manifestations in cultural and educational institutions, I show how these became intermingled in the last quarter of the twentieth century. In spite of said intermingling—which has indeed led to a plural-minded scene—I show how disruptions in funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and natural disasters and civil unrest disrupted the establishment of robust, well-funded arts networks in Los Angeles, helping to keep experimental music and its supporting communities bound in non-culturally-legitimized, DIY contexts. Descriptions of Los Angeles experimental music venues from the 1990s through the 2000s—their histories and musical subjectivities—lay the groundwork for my primary ethnographic chapter to immediately follow.

Chapter Six

It is finally in chapter six that I present the ethnographic research I undertook in Los Angeles’ DIY experimental music scene during 2016. After a discussion of my analytic
approach, locations and descriptions of my research sites are reviewed. My discussion of the community’s attitudes, practices, people, and places are informed by information gleaned through interviews and direct observation. After a reflection on the scene’s trans-locality by way of its relationship to other experimental music scenes and sensibilities, I consider the scene’s identity characterized by musical plurality and “openness” in terms significant in earlier chapters. This “identity of openness” characterizes the community by its commitment to change, plasticity, and a diversity of perspectives which is further demonstrated through descriptions of venues, performances, experiences, and musical values in the DIY experimental community. I also look at some of the ways those values of openness and diversity are confounded by racial and socioeconomic histories of inequity and oppression in Los Angeles.

Chapter Seven

The last chapters of this dissertation build on the previous theoretical and ethnographic elements to demonstrate contributions of the hermeneutic turn in mediating methodological shortcomings. Chapter seven considers the DIY experimental music scene in Los Angeles through a Bourdieusian sociological framework. As is borne out by the effectiveness of his own work on aesthetic phenomena, Bourdieu’s model of art’s relationship to social reality makes sense of a great amount of the ways art’s shifting values and significances. However, it is unable to make sense of the intuitive, non-rational transcendence of empirically-observable social realities so often reported by musical auditors. After describing the DIY Los Angeles experimental in terms of Bourdieu’s idea of the economic field of power, I move to explore the possibility that the findings available therefrom are limited in their ability to account for the reality of agency and innovation in the field of artistic production. Addressing this theoretical
deficiency, I critique Bourdieu’s empirical understanding of the role of aesthetic judgment in structuring social reality in favor of its role as understood in the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer. In doing so I augment the closed logic of the sociologically-informed field of practice. This provides a theoretical structure describing the open ontological ground that is the condition for the possibility of Bourdieu’s closed, epistemic structures.

Chapter Eight

Following the sociological investigation, I move on to an examination of the common characterization of musical experimentalism as a postmodern phenomenon. Among other things, experimental modes of musical production violate previously dominant rules of form, embrace historical, structural and sonic fragmentation, and shift the onus of meaning-making from the composer to the listener. These practices all check the taxonomical boxes of postmodernity. Yet, contemporary experimental musicians and listeners in Los Angeles often report that they experience these works in ways that do not agree with a “standard” postmodern subjectivity. Instead, these works seem to play simultaneously with subjectivities—or, structures of feeling, as Raymond Williams has described these fundamental but non-discursive cultural categories—representative of “modern” as well as “postmodern” tropes. To theorize this quixotic contemporary structure of feeling in ascendancy, I employ recent work from Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker (2010, 2015) that describes this new cultural structure of feeling as metamodern.

Characterized as manifesting an “informed naïveté” or “pragmatic idealism,” a metamodern subjectivity inhabits a position of metaxis, a paradoxical in-betweenness between modern and postmodern; one that oscillates between enthusiasm and irony, hope and
melancholy, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity. In spite of the End of History suggested by postmodernity’s rejection of telos and metanarratives in general, the metamodern concept tries to make sense of how artists have nonetheless begun to create works that function as if an historical horizon still exists. Thus, as it is inspired by a modern naiveté yet informed by postmodern skepticism, the metamodern discourse consciously commits itself to an impossible possibility. By again adopting a theoretical underpinning from philosophical hermeneutics I explain the character of aesthetic experience as one that still holds out the promise of meaning in spite of the logic of postmodernity being played out in Los Angeles.

**Conclusion**

Having depicted the need for a supportive theoretical intervention of in music study’s tacet assumption of music’s efficacy, I conclude that philosophical hermeneutics’ utility has been demonstrated to help make sense of listener’s experiences of challenging musical practices. The theoretical assumption of music as a phenomenon that engages with listeners’ ability to make meaning has been addressed with theoretical insights connecting subjects’ being-in-the-world—replete with ideological inscription and material implications as well as its refiguring, transformative power—to open horizons of understanding. Philosophical hermeneutics asserts that, at bottom, the power of aesthetic experience is its capacity to engage the imagination and risk the self for imagined alternatives in the not-yet realized worlds of the *as if*.

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4 In this dissertation I deploy the terms “the *as if*” and the “promise of the possible” interchangeably to indicate the indeterminate nature of the future and the fictive, as-yet unrealized potential realities glimpsed, implied, alluded-to, or otherwise somehow made knowable through the work of imagination occasioned by aesthetic experience. Due to the many ways in which the concept of futurity and “the possible” have been theoretically approached, the very use of the words is a semantically-charged act that can unintentionally mobilize whole systems of thought (Anderson 2002; van der Helm 2006; Hudson 1982). My use of “the *as if*” and the “promise of the possible” gesture toward
poetic property of music—by which I mean its implication in the process by which cultures create the symbols and practices by which they construct their self-understanding—relates musically-occasioned aesthetic experience to the construction of identity and the construction and maintenance of social realities. Recognizing this as the first-order significance of music, it is shown in a theoretically-rigorous manner that music is not an object or commodity, not only a symbol or culturally-coded phenomenon, but an experience capable of engendering new understandings, pushing at the set boundaries of present states of affairs. Furthermore, I have shown that the Los Angeles DIY music scene engages in experimental sound practices, at root, as a mode of self-realization. In spite of the structuring cultural constraints of Los Angeles’ culture industry, the DIY experimental music scene inheres in the unbounded promise of the possible.

Ernst Bloch’s ([1959] 1996) idea of the “not-yet” explored in The Principle of Hope (though it is, due to the variety of my explorations, admittedly less consistently-theorized than Bloch’s). His Marxist dialectical materialism that acknowledges existing material realities while also acknowledging the roles of imagination, hope, and expectation in encouraging changes in social reality is influential. This is discussed further in Chapter Eight.

My use in this dissertation of the terms “first-order,” “second-order,” etc., do not mean “more significant” or “less significant.” They refer instead to foundational relationships of grounding-of-possibility. “First-order” phenomena ground “second-order” phenomena; e.g. how the world’s “first-order” ontological character of Bedeutsamkeit (relationality) grounds “second-order” truth claims in epistemologically-established frameworks.
Chapter Two: Approaching Experimentalism

Rather than affirm a world whose terms and relations are fixed, the experimental designates the way and the degree to which a musical occasion traces an adventure through time and space, bringing disparate phenomena to interaction and invention.

– Eldritch Priest (2013, 17)

In this chapter I review some of the means by which scholars have addressed analytical and theoretical challenges posed by experimental music. I begin with the question of how to locate the study of experimental music in the purview of ethnomusicological inquiry and its characterization of the musical human. Establishing musical experimentalism’s similarities in effect—if not practice—to more conventional musics, I move to consider related developments in postmodern musicology and connections to Sound Studies. By reviewing the shared histories and assumptions of these methods, I demonstrate that while they portray a relationship between music and human affairs in terms of ideologically inscribed modes of cultural production and reception, embodied knowledge, imagination, and resistance, they sometimes do so without rigorously investigating how music effectuates its influence. By collecting these methodologies and showing their shared assumptions, I demonstrate the necessity of a methodological perspective that puts them in conversation.

Relating Experimentalism to Ethnomusicology

The branches of musicological discourse were teased apart in the early days of modern Western academic discourse’s development (Mugglestone 1981). Regardless of differentiations in their methods and topics of study, differing musicological approaches have nonetheless assumed the reality of Plato’s (Republic) and Aristotle’s (Politics) early recognition of music’s capacity to influence a listener’s conduct and character, influencing patterns of thought as much
as movements of bodies. Accordingly, the comparative musicology (Vergleichende Musikwissenschaft) of the nineteenth-century has developed into a contemporary ethnomusicological discourse that asserts music to be a meaningful and universal human activity implicit in the definition, reproduction, and change of the defining cultural features of individual subjects and social groups.

With regard to how ethnomusicologists have defined their topic of study, experimental music is an outlier. It is not exactly a cultivated art music nor pop music, nor is it folk music in any traditional sense involving oral transmission of practice. Rather, it is a plural musical practice invested in the work of listening, the aesthetics of failure, the play of boundary, boredom and limit-experiences. As a genre, it is perhaps only definable by its convention to be against convention, to be challenging at all costs (Arias 2002, 31). To invoke the methodologies of some of the earliest ethnomusicological analyses seeking to study musics other than European art music, experimental music could certainly be studied via a universalist impulse to taxonomize and catalogue—through the transcription and analysis of recordings for comparison (Hornbostel 1906; Gilman 1909). It is unlikely, however, that very much would be gleaned from such procedures aimed at musical and cultural comparison. Rather the strongest connection any study of this music might have to ethnomusicology is the assertion that, within the realities of differing cultures, the study of music can shed light upon other domains of experience and knowledge.

A crucial element of this dissertation is composed of an ethnography and, in its conception as such, owes a debt to previous critical ethnographies of experimental communities. To name only a few of these, I offer Travis Jackson’s Blowin’ the Blues Away: Performance and

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6 I mean “critical” ethnography here in the sense offered by D. Soyini Madison (2005): that which approaches ethnography reflexively and tempers it with critical social theory in order address methods of interpretation and knowledge production with the intended aim of “emancipatory knowledge and discourses of social justice” (5).
Meaning on the New York Jazz Scene (2012) and David Novak’s Japnoise: Music at the Edge of Circulation (2013) as well as the recent University of California system dissertations of Jason Robinson (2005), Charles Sharp (2008), Barbara Moroncini (2008), and Daniel Munoz (2017). These studies all investigate the cultures, structures, and practices of experimental music communities and the relationships of their production to their attendant cultural significances and material realities.

This kind of study assumes the reality of Alan P. Merriam’s (1960) idea of music as culture. His division of ethnomusicological study into (1) instruments; (2) words of songs; (3) native typology and classification of music; (4) role and status of musicians; (5) function of music in relation to other aspects of the culture is inextricably relevant to my work (109-10). The interdisciplinarity of my mixed methodological approach (ethnographic, but also sociological and philosophical) has a further precedent in ethnomusicologically-oriented works by Timothy Rice (1997), Judith Becker (2004), David Borgo (2005), and especially Roger Savage (2010) and Steven Wilson (2014). Finally, the most obvious ways in which my research fits with the history and methods of ethnomusicology are its “musical study of contemporary man” (Chase 1958, 7), and the classical division of ethnomusicological research into field work and what Curt Sachs called “desk work,” or, theory (1962, 16). And as I have sometimes performed with the musical experimentalists in question in ways that have been foreign to me, I have also undertaken a kind of bi-musicality reminiscent of that described by Mantle Hood (1957, 2-8).

With regard to my ethnography, in spite of my fieldwork occurring in the city in which I have long resided (Los Angeles) among a group of people ostensibly similar to myself (White, male, college-educated), the community in question is eccentric in its practices and hermetic in its social milieu. I have approached this community as an outsider with the common problems of
representation and interpretation—emic, etic, etc. (Harris 1968; 1990)—experienced by researchers in fields less ostensibly familiar as are more common in ethnographic study. The musical practices maintained by these experimentalists, in some respects, is by design as foreign or “other” as any other social group whose cultural production may be of interest.

**Decoding Musical Meanings**

In addition to its methodological debt to ethnomusicology, this project affirms the methodological authority of the postmodern turn in what has been called the “New Musicology” (which, in what follows I will refer to as postmodern musicology). Moreover, it takes a cue from mixed-methodology approaches often deployed therein. Works like Susan McClary’s *Feminine Endings* (1991) and Lawrence Kramer’s *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (1995) set precedents for the incorporation of feminist, poststructuralist, and deconstructionist methods into the discourse of musical study that subverted the influence of previous musicological methods. This new musicology upset the methodological apple cart of more than a century of knowledge production. It augmented historical musicology’s study of music in the frame of historical context while also moving further away from positivist methodological approaches—those that were, in very general terms, an outgrowth of Eduard Hanslick’s 1856 assertion that the historical and emotional baggage associated with music is strictly second-order and that music itself is only “tonally moving forms” ([1856] 1986, 29).

As it became further inflected by notions of beauty charged with aesthetic autonomy, metaphysical dignity, the role of genius, and teleological striving for the perfection of the human

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7 This authority refers to the rightful implication of music in the construction and maintenance of cultural values. Postmodern musicology does not, however, rigorously account for that implication (or, rather, does not in any unified manner), for which I employ a theoretical approach influenced by the hermeneutic turn described in Chapter Four.
spirit, a mix of German-born ideas defined the science of Musikwissenschaft. Conclusions drawn from formal analysis and music theory came to inform the values of the Western academic systems of criticism, canon formation, and value assignment to non-referential (or self-referential), absolute musical works. Emboldened by the New Criticism in the middle decades of the twentieth century—which asserted the self-referential and autonomous meaning of literary texts—formal analysis that relied on the implicit aesthetic autonomy of musical works remained commonplace in the field of American musicology until late into the second half of the twentieth century. The advent of postmodern musicology moved to deny the aesthetic autonomy of musical works and the modes of criticism and evaluation associated with them:

[A]s the years and decades go by, the predominant position of analysis grows more and more paradoxical; paradoxical because the great German tradition of instrumental music, which analysis supports, no longer enjoys the unique status it did for the generation of [Heinrich] Schenker and [Sir Donald] Tovey and [Arnold] Schoenberg...It is not that we see less, now, in German masters; but they no longer shut out our perspective on great bodies of other music, new and old. (Kerman 1980, 319)

Growing scholarly interest in popular music and musical traditions from around the world as well as a pervasive and growing disbelief in hierarchies of value demanded a methodological shift that could make sense of the roles music plays in the lives of composers, performers, and listeners in all of its various significances. This collapse of the divide between “low” and “high” art questioned the division of elitist and populist styles as well as observation of then extant musical conventions of production and criticism. Lawrence Kramer finally announced in 1995 that: “the Autonomous Artwork”—and ostensibly all of its cultural, metaphysical, and theoretical implications—“is as dead as Elvis” (1995, 227).

McClary famously eschewed theorizations characterized solely by the significance of music’s formal, aesthetically autonomous properties in favor of a focus on the social situatedness
and implication of those formal properties. Reversing the idea of deriving musical meaning from the location and relationship of autonomous formal structures, McClary (2000) instead locates it in

content—social, historically contingent content…Moreover…music (like other kinds of human artifacts) is assembled of heterogeneous elements that lead away from the autonomy of the work to intersect with endless chains of other pieces, multiple—even contradictory—cultural codes, various moments of reception, and so on. If music can be said to be meaningful, it cannot be reduced to a single, totalized, stable meaning. (7)

This builds on the idea that music functions as a part of the “general circulation of regulated practices and valuations—part, in other words, of the continuous production and reproduction of culture” (Kramer 1990, 1). Subverting the idealist notion that meaning can only be instantiated by an apodictic or objectively demonstrable truth claim, this attitude forwards a deconstructionist characterization of music’s constructed and subjective meaning and its availability to criticism, that music is a text that resists fully disclosing itself. As such, an analyst may not exhaustively describe a work’s meaning, but may indeed open a hermeneutic window “through which the discourse of our understanding can pass” (Ibid., 6).

The critical model of postmodern musicology asserts that music’s significances can be decoded in musical structures isomorphically relatable to social structures (un-fixed as they might be), acknowledging elements of music’s production and reception, in a sense, as a coded play of society by musical means. This assertion that music fulfills social functions and is complicit in the structuring and reproduction of ideological structures is clearly portrayed in analytical works of postmodern musicology. This analytical strategy’s elucidatory and interpretive capability lies in its correct assumption that music “does” something—that music

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8 For example, Susan McClary’s (1992) location and analysis of patriarchal-informed dynamics of sexualized power in Bizet’s Carmen: Don José’s morally laudable masculinity exemplified by formal harmonic functionality versus Carmen’s dangerous feminine sexuality exemplified by non-functional chromaticism.
can be demonstrated to work efficaciously in the lived experience of individuals and communities. But how this assumption of music’s multi-modal efficacy manifests—its availability to be wielded instrumentally in the fields of social position and ideological production, to open space for criticism, imaginatively rupture ideologies, inexhaustibly signify, and magnify subjects’ being-in-the-world—calls for further theorization. This critical assumption of music’s efficacy—its cognitive and affective vehemence—is a gap in postmodern musicology’s theoretical apparatus that is shared by ethnomusicology.

**Being, Time, and Embodied Knowledge**

With music no longer acknowledged as an aesthetically autonomous phenomenon, these methodological developments resituated potential values of musical experience away from the metaphysical gravity of Platonic universals toward a derivation in the historically- and socially-situated body. This study adopts the impulse of mid-twentieth-century philosophical projects that deny Cartesian dualism and its implications and work to remarry the body to the mind. To that end, phenomenological considerations in postmodern musicology have worked to extend academic inquiry of musical meaning past cultural or symbolic significance into the subjective experience of the lived human body—what the body *knows*.

This kind of knowledge, however, gets messy. Lacking the elegance of empirical control and its epistemological binary of yes or no, models of knowledge based on phenomenological experience oblige researchers to grapple with the problems of polysemous and even contradictory ideas and affects. This is important, however, as “[t]o subscribe to a theory of musical cognition which cannot deal with the embodiment of music, of the involvement of the senses, the visceral system, and the emotions,” Judith Becker (2006) reminds us, “is to maintain
a Cartesian approach of mind/body dualism” (6). As discussed above, contemporary musicology has moved beyond those analytical apparatuses that consider music as a disembodied, logical, self-referential phenomenon. These methodological shifts testify that musicological discourses persist specifically because of the way in which the mythos of musical experience disrupts and augments the logos of the Western correspondence theory of truth and its attendant concepts of the real. In taking seriously the experience of the body as the site of understanding that grounds being, we must grapple with epistemological challenges of non- or pre-conceptual processes of knowledge production and their implications that might subvert or problematize previous models. Merleau-Ponty characterized this significance and challenge posed by the body to any study of the world in his *Phenomenology of Perception*:

> The theory of the body schema is, implicitly, a theory of perception. We have relearned to feel our body; we have found underneath the objective and detached knowledge of the body that other knowledge which we have of it in virtue of its always being with us and of the fact that we are our body. In the same way we shall need to reawaken our experience of the world as it appears to us in so far as we are in the world with our body. But by thus remaking contact with the body and with the world, we shall also rediscover ourself, since, perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception. ([1945] 1964, 239)

Contemporary musicology has roundly embraced a role of the body as “knower” and “natural self” as much as laborer and sufferer with approaches that recognize embodied knowledge and social contextuality in diverse registers. The continued fractalization of contemporary musicology—recent work in race and gender studies, theorizations of voice and listening, and disability studies—bears out the relevance of embodiment to tracing music’s many significances in social registers as much as in accessing real and imagined worlds.

Furthermore, the study of music’s relationships to altered states (trance) or limit experiences also show connections between musical experience and subjects’ plastic
understandings of socially-inhabited lifeworlds. In their studies of music and trance, Gilbert Rouget (1985) and A. J. Racy (2003) and have asserted that listeners-to and performers-of music may experience time differently and often anecdotally report an augmentation of their sense of being-in-the-world—as vague as that statement is for now. Supporting this, John Blacking’s (1973) significant study *How Musical is Man?*, uncritically gave testimony to the idea that “music can create a world of virtual time” (51) that transforms subjects’ reality. Several of Blacking’s insights regarding how music can intervene or otherwise occasion gaps in culturally-normalized systems of order have entered the ethnomusicological canon. These include: (1) the enduring importance of music’s utopian possibilities for the “musical human” as related to its power and cultural efficacy; (2) the recognition of a difference between music’s prescriptive social function as opposed to its emancipatory significance; and (3) the theme of a “gulf separating Blacking’s inchoate insight into music’s transformative power from the structural-functional analysis of music’s socially prescriptive value” (Savage 2009, 8). Blacking’s recognition of socially-functional music (“music for having,” as he calls it) as differentiated from music that transforms human consciousness (“music for being”) shines a yet another light on the cracks in Western positivistic valuations of cultural products such as music and literature. However, there may be a clue in music’s capacity to alter consciousness in its association with an attendant disclosure of some kind beauty and some kind of truth—the apprehension of both, importantly, engage with the capacity of judgment.

The Persistence of Truth and Beauty

In the conclusion of Guido Adler’s 1885 foundational article, “The Scope, Method, and Aim of Musicology,” he touts the highest value of any rigorous study of music to be the
“Discovery of the True and Advancement of the beautiful” (Mugglestone 1981, 18). Truth and beauty are entwined in both Kant’s and Hegel’s considerations of art in schematizations that are still tacitly influential in much of Western thinking. It is a common assumption in contemporary ethnomusicology that cultural ideals of beauty and truth are socially constructed “social facts” defined and perpetuated by cultural products. Music can bind disparate ideas, memories, and sensations together as well as it can construct identities and social groups. Furthermore, listeners’ testimonies tell us that it can offer intuited “truths” to be felt as much as thought that offer challenges to established ways of thinking and being. The hermeneutic philosophy with which later chapters engage maintains that the multi-faceted ideas of truth and beauty as related to judgment are important in making sense of music’s significance. Furthermore, it suggests that Merriam’s (1964) “uses” and “functions” of music (209-29) so often addressed in musicological discourse are important, but not the whole story as to how music does what it does. I will go so far as to characterize the more observationally-accessible uses and functions of music as second-order in their significance. The first-order significance of music that I wish to demonstrate lies in its capacity to expand the horizons of understanding of a listener. “[T]he chief function of music,” Blacking (1973) says, “is to promote soundly organized humanity by enhancing human consciousness” (101). Amplifying this articulation of music’s power to transcend subjective and social order from within, I assert that the human engagement with music can indeed help us to lead better (or, at least different) lives; perhaps to be more soundly organized.

Despite their myriad variances, I have demonstrated that much of contemporary musicological discourse commonly assumes music’s implication in the social construction of meaning (including ideological inscription) has embraced the challenging implications of embodied knowledge and upholds music’s capability to disclose varieties of truth and beauty.
From this general review, I now look to some of the ways in which musicological discourse has addressed experimentalism in particular. Naturally, the same theoretical assumptions noted above are to be found there as well.

**What We (Have) Talk(ed) About When We Talk About Experimentalism**

The bulk of the historical and analytical work heretofore published discusses techniques pioneered by the New York School of composers—and for good reason. As stimulating today as they were when first introduced in the mid twentieth-century, experimental musical works by composers affiliated with the New York School remain influential in both theory and practice. Morton Feldman, Earle Brown, Christian Wolff, and John Cage seemed to understand the challenge of their works in relation to the musical canon and—setting a precedent still followed—were self-reflexively invested in sharing and theorizing their practices. This is evidenced by their participation in a club that included their New York City painter counterparts as well as critics and writers. “The Club,” as it was called, met intermittently from 1949 until 1962 in a location on Eighth Street in downtown Manhattan (Johnson 2002, 6). Gathered there, the composers, painters, and hangers on would share new works, lecture one another about their ideas, argue theoretical points, and present concerts. While other composers also documented their experience in diaries and essays that would come to be published, it was John Cage’s 1961 publication of a collection of essays, interviews, scores of open works, and ephemera he titled *Silence* that offered the best, most accessible glimpse into his influential musical practice.

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9 For example, see Morton Feldman’s (2000) essay and book of the same name, “Give My Regards to Eighth Street.”
From the pages of *Silence*, which includes a “History of Experimental Music in the United States” that makes claims about experimentalism’s agenda, it becomes obvious that Cage and the other composers affiliated with the New York School are committed to practices that intentionally subvert the Western art music tradition. The very nature of what *is* and *is not* music was being called into question. Modulating the concept of authorship, different kinds of experimental musical works looked away from the notion of music as composed of internally logical, structurally closed, and aesthetically autonomous time-objects as suggested by previous critical frameworks. Rather, they understood musical works as contrivances by which to occasion open-ended experiences that highlight—and perhaps alter—a listener’s being-in-the-world. Though available to observation, what accounts for this character and capacity of experiences occasioned by music remained uncertain. Still, this conceptual change turns on the assumption that intentional attention to any sound, regardless of (or in spite of) the structuring work of a composer, has the potential to augment a listener’s horizon of understanding (to invoke Gadamer’s idea I explore at length in Chapter Four). Like the assumptions outlined earlier in this chapter, this one has significant implications regarding the significance of music and its relationship to social reality. Testimonies of listeners attest that these works that play “non-musically” with sound within the constraints of frequency, amplitude, timbre, and duration can be just as effective—and affecting—as any highly-structured musical work.

**New Virtuosities**

Cage (1961) poses the question: “What is the nature of an experimental action? It is simply an action the outcome of which is not foreseen” (69). If Schoenberg ([1926] 1975) argued for an emancipation of dissonance in the 1920s (260), it is in the avant-garde musics and
experimentalism of the mid twentieth-century that we may note the dissolution of form. Moving from emancipation to emancipation, Cage (1961) points to Edgard Varèse as the emancipator of musical tone and suggests that—for experimental music, at least—questions of tonality and atonality are no longer paramount; sound has, in effect, “come into its own” (68).

In throwing off the shackles of authorship, formal unity, and even the idea of “musical sounds,” much of the burden of meaning-making associated with music is shifted from the composer to the listener. No longer tasked with creating internally logical tonal worlds bound by aesthetic traditions, the experimental composer sets up constraints for the creation of sonic worlds; effectively inventing the rules of a game that demarcate realms of possibility. Works as such challenge anew the issue of the identity of the musical work and need not even be repeatable. Rather, they exist only momentarily in the temporal unfolding of their performance and reception.

Manifesting characteristics that would solidify musical experimentalism as a postmodern phenomenon (including its aversion for rationality, form, authorship, and a sense of historical progress), shifting methods of music production called for a new kind of performer as well as a new kind of listener. Eric Salzman (1963) noted this need for a “new virtuosity” to handle the technical and conceptual demands for performers as well as listeners of the various art musics taking place in New York in the early 1960s that included Elliott Carter’s and Milton Babbitt’s deeply formalist works, incorporations of improvisation in Lukas Foss’s Improvisation Chamber Ensemble and Gunther Schuller’s third-stream efforts, as well as experimentalism—or what he terms “the music of chance and change” (175). Differing wildly with respect to their approaches of composition, performance, and reception, these works call for a *virtuosically open* performer
as well as listener. Additionally, it became clear that a new kind of critic might also be called for, one with not only the context and patience to listen to the new music, but perhaps to understand it from the inside.

Composer and writer Michael Nyman was just such a critic. Beginning in the 1960s, his perceptive reviews of experimental music for British magazine *The Spectator* set a standard for writing on the challenging new musical practice. His touchstone book, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* ([1974] 1999), remains unsurpassed as a generous and insightful primer on the topic. Nyman has a knack not only for describing the histories of composers and their works while alluding to their respective receptions, but he also gets at the theoretical ideas that motivate them. Chapter One, for example, displays his perceptiveness: Nyman notes the importance of new kinds of notation and a focus on process (as situation or domain of possibility) over product (as structure or time-object) that fly in the face of previous musical aesthetics for performers and listeners. The use of chance, people (whose preferences and inconsistencies of performance sometimes inform works), context, repetition, and the then new deployment of electronics show experimentalism to be developing a new kind of musical practice on multiple registers. Furthermore, Nyman identifies the importance of the moment of a work’s realization as unique in its sonic configuration in unfolding time, a point that only works to further obscure the already-problematic identity of the musical work. He writes:

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10 This virtuosity of openness is important, too, in its subversion of the idea of the musical specialist and the value associated therewith. By democratizing composition, performance, and reception of musical works, works fail to generate anything “difficult” and generate nothing to be commodified - thereby challenging the logic of music’s place in a capitalistic economy and class structure (Kudira 2007, 20).

11 This uniqueness of each realization of his scores was important to Cage who believed recordings to be inadequate and sometimes distracting from the present “now-ness” of the unfolding of sound—calling them simply postcards from the event. For a rigorous consideration of Cage’s complicated relationship to recording and the issue of recording experimentalism in the 1960s and onward, see David Grubbs’ *Records Ruin the Landscape: John Cage, the Sixties, and Sound Recording* (2014).
Experimental composers are by and large not concerned with prescribing a defined time-object whose materials, structuring and relationships are calculated and arranged in advance, but are more excited by the prospect of outlining a situation in which sounds may occur, a process of generating action (sounding or otherwise), a field delineated by certain compositional ‘rules.’ (Ibid., 3)

Furthermore, a discussion of new challenges of performance practices of experimental music, including the employment of silence that emphasizes the activity of listening in a new way, throws light on the import of “focus” (Ibid., 24) and the relevance of “music and life” (Ibid., 25).

While perhaps obvious to a contemporary reader, what Nyman did in his influential first chapter in 1974 was identify the challenges that experimental music would continue to pose to performers, listeners, critics, and theorists for the foreseeable future. With compositional methods that employ chance, new kinds of notation, and text and open scores, experimentalism remains notoriously difficult to approach by the methods of formal analysis.12 Outside of works which trace the emergence of experimentalism and consider its historical and cultural relevance (Cameron 1996; Lipman 1979; Yates 1967), theoretical works that deal with the affecting nature of experimentalism that persists despite lack of conventionally musical attributes remained few and far between until the bloom of the new (postmodern) musicology described above. There are, however, notable exceptions. For example, influential composer/theorist James Tenney’s work Meta+Hodos—first published as his Master’s Thesis in 1961 and later republished in the 1980s—considers experimental music in terms of the theoretical framework of gestalt psychology rather than formal analysis. His description of a listener’s envelope of perception relocates the analytical locus from formal structure to the temporal, subjective experience of

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12 In his article “Silent Music,” Andrew Kania (2010) demonstrates some of the methodological struggles faced by formal analysis that persist in attempts to qualify the relationship of sound to silence. He shows that Cage’s seminal silent piece 4’33” remains a problematic work that is, depending on the terms of several seemingly insufficient methods, a performance of silence, a framed focus on ambient sound in the performance space, a theatrical work about music, etc. (345).
sounds (addressed further in Chapter Four). Also significant is *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Jacques Attali’s ([1977] 1985) Marxist analysis of organizations of sound in a capitalist world. Analogizing sonic order with social order, he aligns the “violence” of separating sonic order (music) from chaos (noise) with state sanctioned violence that maintains social order. As such, he paints music as a prophetic sphere of activity and value whereby one might forecast the future of a (capitalist) society as a whole. Interestingly, in his reflections regarding burgeoning experimentalism he refers to the development of free jazz as a re-injection of “noise” into music production. He writes: “in the language of jazz, to improvise is ‘to freak freely’” (142). Noting that improvisation is a kind of composition, he calls it a means by which to take pleasure in the production of differences. “It is thus laden with risk, disquieting, an unstable challenging, an archaic and ominous festival, like a Carnival with an unpredictable outcome” (Ibid.). For Attali, composition of any kind engages with rules and codes while changing them. An open approach to composition then works to demonstrate that rhythms and sounds are the supreme mode of relations between bodies once reduced to screens for the projection of the symbolic (Ibid., 143). As such, “free” composition like free jazz’s improvisation is anti-capitalist and shatters the rules of usage and exchange. Though I am not adopting Attali’s view, I find it interesting to note that, by the logic of his analysis, the refusal of commercial (or even conventional) music’s values in what I am calling experimental music must do the same.

**The View from Sound Studies**

Perhaps the most persistent challenge to consider is the status of experimentalism as music at all. In 1977, R. Murray Schafer’s *The Tuning of the World* inaugurated the field of Sound Studies and aimed to consider the relevance of sound from perspectives separate from its
implication in music’s intellectual history and its attendant prejudices. Though not bound up with purposefully structured works of art that incorporate, manipulate, or otherwise deploy sound, the advent of Sound Studies offers a platform from which to suggest that experimental works are not music. Though the boundaries of the field and its methodologies are still in dispute, more recent attempts at defining the role of sound as well as exploring the relationships of sound, noise, musical sound and the significance of listening continue to develop, reflecting the methodological plurality of postmodern musicology (Hegarty 2007; Kahn 1999; Stanyek and Piekut 2010). In his essay “Sound Art?,” Max Neuhaus ([2000] 2011) defends the term “music” in spite of the cognitive and even curatorial challenges of discerning the boundary between what is “sound” and what is “music” regardless of medium or means of presentation. He goes so far as to suggest that the urge to differently-categorize sonic works into new categories is lazy at best and cowardly at worst (72). For the purposes of this study, I concur with Neuhaus and maintain the term “music” rather than adopt “noise” or “sound art.” Music—as traditionally defined—deals with the structuration (authorially-intended or not) of sounds, so too has it dealt with the structuration of silences. And as Cage demonstrated with his silent piece, the intentional framing of “silence” which negates performative sound can itself occasion compelling experiences.

**Discordant Claims About Experimental Music**

Claims that experimental music models modes of resistance, “means” anything, or demonstrate aesthetic and practical openness have differed depending who one is asking - or

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13 A helpful way of conceptualizing experimentalism’s position comes from Jennie Gottschalk (2016) who models it visually as an “opening between the categories of music and sound,” with “music” illustrated as a perforated circle whose discontinuous demarcation is situated within a greater field of sound—music’s broken line signifying the connecting position inhabited by experimentalism (8).
even when one is asking. In an early prose piece of Cage’s from 1937 entitled “Listening to Music” it is evident that Cage believes that sounds are autonomous, and we should let them simply be themselves without imposing our aesthetic agendas. It is also evident later in the same piece that he believed humans to have a special, affecting relationship to sound: “I believe that listening to music makes for our lives another world, living in which, somehow, our hearts beat faster and a mysterious excitement fills us. And the natural flow of sounds which music is reassures us of an order just as the sequence of the seasons and the regular alternation of night and day do” ([1937] 1993a, 19). And while Cage was elsewhere explicit that his music was not political, he and many others that have invested in musical experimentalism have suggested that silence and the requisite listening it demands are deeply important in changing social reality. Pressed in a 1969 interview about his opinion regarding the use of his music for political or social ends, Cage replied:

I am interested in social ends but not political ends, because politics deals with power, and society deals with numbers of individuals; and I’m interested both in single individuals and large numbers or medium numbers of any kinds of numbers of individuals. In other works, I’m interested in society, not for purposes of power, but for purposes of cooperation and enjoyment. ([1969] 1993c, 115)

This wasn’t the case for all experimentalists. Timothy D. Taylor (1998) notes that Cornelius Cardew’s Scratch Orchestra of the late 1960s took an increasingly Marxist-Leninist-Maoist turn. Cardew’s *The Great Learning* (whose political program he would later disavow) is virtually a catalogue of experimental techniques of the 1960s, combining verbal and musically-notated directions along with a text derived from Confucius. The goal of the music was to model, through process, the development of an ethical, “musical life” (563). Still others have made the political relevance of experimentalism even more explicit, such as theorist Bruce Russel—also a guitarist in New Zealand’s famed noise trio The Dead C—who believes that experimental music
practices, simply by standing outside the confines of “legitimate culture” are always already anarchist and may be directed toward human emancipation (Russel 2012). And in spite of Cage’s 1969 commitment to a-politicism mentioned above, he often used his music as a platform to engage with power. For example, the text of his Solo for Voice 35 (1970)—to be sung under the “flag of Anarchy” or “of the Whole Earth”—is: “The best form of government is no government at all.”

My point in highlighting these inconsistencies is not to show that people are indecisive or that cultural practices take on different meanings in different contexts. Rather, it is simply to note that in spite of attempts (with admittedly mixed motivations) to deny meaning in experimental music, it nonetheless persists for practitioners, listeners, and critics alike. The intentional engagement with the noises and silence of experimental musical practices somehow engage listeners with their practical judgment and imagination. But before I move on to a consideration of listening’s relevance that in turn leads to my main theoretical intervention, it is necessary that I offer a more complete working definition of musical experimentalism by which I frame my own study.

A Working Definition of Musical Experimentalism

**QUESTION:** Then what is the purpose of this “experimental” music?

**ANSWER:** No purpose. Sounds...

**QUESTION:** I mean—But is this music?

**ANSWER:** Ah! You like sounds after all when they are made up of vowels and consonants. You are slow-witted, for you have never brought your mind to the location of urgency. Do you need me or someone else to hold you up? Why don’t you realize as I do that nothing is accomplished by writing, playing, or listening to music? Otherwise, deaf as a doornail, you will never be able to hear anything, even what’s well within earshot.

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14 Borrowed from Henry David Thoreau’s (1866) *Civil Disobedience:* “That government is best which governs least…” Or, “[t]hat government is best which governs not at all” (123).
QUESTION: But, seriously, if this is what music is, I could write it as well as you.
ANSWER: Have I said anything that would lead you think I thought you were stupid? (Cage [1955] 1961, 17)

It is difficult to speak about definitions of musical experimentalism without continually invoking chestnuts of wisdom offered by John Cage. At the early stages of the tradition’s development he often replied to questions about the nature of experimentalism with answers that worked like koans, obfuscating or interrogating the logic of the question rather than give clear answers. As established by Cage’s words above, we are instructed that experimental music is anything yet nothing, and that its practice and audition are meaningless, yet somehow powerful. And if not powerful, they are at least demonstrably significant as teaching moments. These antimonies ring true with much of Cage’s career-long interrogation of Western values surrounding musical composition, performance, and audition. In spite of the implicit circuitousness, a useful starting point offered in “Experimental Music: Doctrine” is the suggestion to understand experimentalism in music as referring not to the success or failure of a musical work, but to the simple description of an act, the outcome of which is unknown (Cage [1955] 1961, 13). Whether judged to be beautiful, meaningful, significant, or nothing of the sort, the act of intentionally engaging in the conceptualization of a field of sound production is contingent upon the imagined as if, the open-ended-ness of experience. This is an important idea in that it leverages the work of imagination, the unknown, and the promise of as-yet-unrealized futures. There is also the implication that listening—even to “nothing”—is efficacious.

Michael Nyman (1974), too, began with this idea in his landmark work on musical experimentalism, Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond (1). Still, while the contemporary DIY experimental music scene in Los Angeles is undoubtedly influenced by those attitudes and techniques traceable to Cage and the New York School of composers, the incorporation of other
experimental sensibilities in the Los Angeles’ contemporary scene is unmistakable. This speaks to the richness of Los Angeles’ cultural and institutional structures that, in addition to Euro-American traditions, includes the histories and influences of multiple modes of musical production. Furthermore, it will become clear that most of the people comprising Los Angeles’s contemporary experimental music scene are *Calartians* (a moniker for graduates of the California Institute for the Arts (CalArts)) - and that this fact is important. The multi-culturalism and richness of music-making traditions taught at CalArts inform the heterogeneous musical practices and attitudes to be found in the works of local composers and performers. Building on Cage’s and Nyman’s implication of the literally unknown, I want to review several helpful ideas characterizing musical experimentalism that helped me frame its significances in this study.

Catherine M. Cameron (1996) offers three “measures” of criteria that characterize experimental music: one – an internally consistent set of ideas that disavows the value of tradition and lauds the pursuit of fundamental music change; two – the deployment of compositional activities that involve the exploration of highly unorthodox sound sources and musical ideas; three – that the “music itself” produced from such standards produces a collection of music that is different from other “radical” (avant-garde) music (4). Cameron furthermore notes that American experimentalism works to differentiate itself from the European cultivated art music tradition to create a radical set of practices which subvert what Charles Seeger (1977, 225) has referred to as the creation of a class system in music that privileges European-born or -trained musical artists and disenfranchises their American-born or -trained counterparts.

A focus on the relationship of failure to privilege characterizes Eldritch Priest’s idea of musical experimentalism in *Boring Formless Nonsense: Experimental Music and the Aesthetics of Failure* (2013). Priest observes that it is necessary to be already in a position of power to be
able to play with failure; to treat boredom, agency-less-ness, non-intentionality, tedious-ness, and nothingness, as aesthetic categories. His commentary is worth quoting at length:

True, everybody can fail, but not anybody can play with failing…That is to say, only a subject whose agency is always (already) secure can put the potential of its own annulment into practice. Likewise, while in theory “everybody” has the potential to fail, in practice only those who have (always) already succeeded as social agents can play with failing, and in Western culture this has traditionally been the prerogative of men, particularly white, straight, and university-educated men. (26-7)

I will further take up this important idea of privilege in my discussion of Eurological and Afrological experimentalisms below. It is, though, important to keep in mind the relevance of privilege, expressed as exposure and access to the arts and arts education, that characterizes the Los Angeles experimental music community. But while failure is an animating principle of some composers in Los Angeles (Todd Lerew’s works, for example), the idea of failure will not be a primary character of my definition of experimentalism.

Further influencing the definition of musical experimentalism with which I work is the work of Bob Gilmore. Eschewing hard definitions in favor of something like Cameron’s measures described above, Gilmore (2014) is critical of any attempt to define musical experimentalism. He explains that any implication that experimentalism stands as some kind of coherent practice with an attendant tradition whose practices might be traced through their historical development is fallacious. Any “Experimental Tradition,” he suggests, must be an invented one; a social construct invented by elites to validate their practices and work toward canonization and the accrual of those types of capital that come with it (25-8). Rather than suggesting a list of defining practices, he—alluding to sociologist Howard Becker (1982)—notes the existence of at least five definitions (or components of definitions) of experimental musical worlds. The first two he names were alluded to by Cage in his “History of Experimental Music in
the United States.” The first, “soft” definition, suggests only the introduction of novel elements into one’s music. The second is the “hard” definition, that which echoes the previously-noted requirement from Cage: the inclusion in compositions of actions for which the outcomes are not foreseen. Gilmore traces the third, more attitudinally-oriented component to Cage’s friend and student, James Tenney—a significant musician and thinker for this study whose name will keep appearing—who noted that all of his music was literally experimental in the sense of research. Many of Tenney’s compositions were, in the scientific sense, exploratory, engaged in pursuing the specifiable aspects of music, and could be understood as consecutively-related and ongoing.

Number four builds on Tenney’s exploratory, prototyping attitude, but moves to place it in a scene, or lifeworld. This includes composers, performers, and listeners, but also further organizing exigencies such as social and ideological positions and position-takings, questions of financial support, etc. The final, fifth component making up experimental music worlds is scholarship—a sustaining element of the “experimental tradition” engaged in by composers and critics, and of which this dissertation seeks to be a part. Scholarship’s observations and arguments, Gilmore notes, aid the promotion and institutional significance of experimentalism.

Throughout this study, I informally pursue the themes of Gilmore’s five worlds of experimental music. Though I would add to these five definitions and concepts a sixth that transects and grounds their motivations and efficacy—the belief (not necessarily explicit) that listening to sound has the capability to “do” something; to affect change in the worlds of auditors. Though far from a unanimous position, my ethnographic research has taught me that the majority of composers, performers, and listeners in the Los Angeles DIY experimental music community believe the “openness” that characterizes their musical practices somehow affects
their understanding of the world. Furthermore, (risking a circularity of argument) that that openness is connected to expressions of “openness” in other domains of their lives.

The experimental music world thriving in Los Angeles has many faces. Its noises and silences are prescribed by many compositional and notational methods; some precedented, some newly contrived by their inventors. It deploys “traditional” musical instruments and performance methods as much as newly invented ones, voice, laptops, electronics, robots, blocks of lumber, found objects, etc. It focuses on scientific, exploration-oriented practices as much as intuitive investigations into the physical properties of objects and spaces, social interactions, places, and the perception of time and duration. As such, it is likely the third definition offered by Gilmore—that one he illustrates by James Tenney’s notion of experimentalism as research—that best characterizes the experimentalism of the DIY experimental music scene in Los Angeles. The inexhaustible curiosity displayed by composers compels them to pursue investigation, process, practical knowledge about the world and ways to navigate it differently—and to thereby occasion widely different aesthetic experiences.15

This is attitude is further demonstrated by Jennie Gottschalk (2016) in her recent book, *Experimental Music Since 1970*. Rather than demarcate a hard definition of experimentalism, she eschews definition in favor of a characterization as a position “of openness, of inquiry, of uncertainty, of discovery. Facts or circumstances or materials are explored for their potential sonic outcomes through activities including composition, performance, improvisation, installation, recording, and listening. These explorations are oriented toward that which is

15 It would seem that this experimental research orientation recommends itself to other modalities. For example, in early 2015, CalArts alumnus and musical experimentalist Archie Carey (MFA 2011) and his friend Saul Alpert-Abrams began distributing experimental, DIY beers under the name Solarc Brewing. These were gruits—medieval-style beers that incorporate bittering agents (wormwood, black tea, turmeric, etc.) other than hops. As Solarc grows in the private market around Los Angeles they remain committed to the experimental arts scene. For example, at the request of WasteLAnd’s Nick Deyoe they created a “Waste(d)LAnd” gruit to serve at the concert series. Solarc also brought several pony kegs of experimental gruit to pour at the last few performances at the wulf.’s original location.
unknown, whether it is remote, complex, opaque, or falsely familiar” (2). Her book unfolds through lenses of these musical attitudes that organize their related musical practices: scientific approaches; physicalities; perception; information, language, and interaction, and place and time.

Like Gilmore’s third and fourth worlds noted above that focus on experimentalism literally as sonic research in a lifeworld, Gottschalk locates the heart of experimentalism in its openness and its orientation toward research. The prevalence of this attitude in the music that is the object of this study further encourages me to maintain the term “experimental” over others, and “music” rather than “noise.” This decision is, however, in contradiction to Daniel Munoz’s enormous dissertation (just over 800 pages) published in 2017, “Los Angeles Noisescapes: Culture and Aesthetics in the Early Twenty-First Century.”16 Both of our projects address experimental sound practices in Los Angeles and include ethnographic research and have an overlap of four interlocutors whom both Munoz and I interviewed for our studies—Casey Anderson, Scott Cazan, Narin Dickerson, and Michael Winter. (Munoz’s own interviews with them occurred in 2012, four years prior to my own research.) Results of his ambitious study are based on ethnography and oral history (twenty-three interviews and research as participant-observer). In addition to (The) Handbag Factory and Dem Passwords, my own primary research site, the wulf., is also included. The organizing purpose of Munoz’s (2017) project is “to describe and characterize the aesthetic concerns of the Los Angeles experimental ‘noise’ scene” (56). Rather than posit social facts or objective truths about the scene’s character, he writes that his

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16 I had heard rumors about Munoz’s project from a few people in the experimental scene, though his ethnographic research seemed to have been completed before I began my own. Though he had been a fixture at the wulf. and other research sites, by the time my own interaction with the scene began he was no longer present. Due to our overlapping interests, several people intended to introduce me to Munoz in person or by email but, sadly, such an introduction has not yet taken place. In fact, I had not known that Munoz had finished and published his ambitious dissertation until I accidently happened upon it in a Google search.
extensive ethnography allows him to offer a Geertzian “thick description” that investigates the values of Los Angeles communities committed to experimental “noise.”

Munoz’s dissertation is rigorous, in-depth, and well-structured. However, at least with regard to the community I have studied in Los Angeles, I am not convinced to take up the term “noise”—especially regarding sound practices at the wulf.—and it seems that members of that community agree. In his interview questionnaire, Munoz included a taxonomical question regarding whether their music was “noise” or something else. Of our four overlapping interlocutors (three of whom answered this question), they responded in the negative, preferring “Experimental Music,” or, in the case of Michael Winter, “Frankly I could care less” (Ibid., 245). As Munoz explored the attitudes of these nomenclature-dissenters, he notes that those from the wulf.’s community offered similar explanations of their preference for “experimental,” with Cazan and Anderson in particular referencing their music’s character of openness and research-orientation.

A Note on Eurological and Afrological Experimentalisms

Race and cultural appropriation are significant topics in any study of contemporary cultural production. To aid in his investigation of how Euro-American experimentalists have borrowed real-time music making techniques from African-American practices, George Lewis (1996) termed Afrological and Eurological as conceptual gripping points for differing experimental music sensibilities. David Borgo (2002) concisely describes the differentiation between these:

An Afrological perspective implies an emphasis on personal narrative and the harmonization of one’s musical personality with social environments, both actual and possible. A Eurological perspective, on the other hand, implies either absolute freedom from personal narrative, culture, and conventions—an autonomy of the aesthetic object—
or the need for a controlling or structuring force in the person and voice of a “composer.”

(171)

While Lewis locates difference in the histories of people groups which inform their sensibilities—and thereby the characteristics of their cultural products—he also identifies a new type of contemporary musical experimentalist who operates in a transcultural and transracial mode. Lewis notes that differing approaches to music making are not reducible to racially essential traits (as such essential traits do not exist) but are rather culturally constructed and historically emergent concepts informed by shared experiences and values. However, in differentiating these musical sensibilities he establishes “that the reality of the ethnic or racial component of a historically emergent sociomusical group must be faced squarely and honestly” (Lewis 1996, 93). Anthony Braxton has stated a complementary attitude regarding the universal availability of the world’s many experimental practices to any curious practitioner invested in modes of multiculturalism and bricolage. He stresses that musicians must respect and responsibly employ differing traditions while recognizing their own socially produced contextual subjectivity:

...I’m not speaking of a concept that says for me not to accept the fact of my limitations by virtue of my life experiences, to negate that and participate in music like we’re in a candy store. Rather, I believe that the underlying components of the universal path of our species can still be used in a way that can be relevant and that can address itself to many different areas inside of a person’s art. But there must be some limitations backed by the fact that, as musicians wanting to be involved in something meaningful, we can’t disrespect our own lives either. It’s kind of like: find your place in the circle, but don’t try to be the circle. (Corbett 1994, 213)

To that point, in the discussions that follow regarding musicians’ attempts to find their place in that circle, I adopt Lewis’ terms. These un-fixed, adaptive and inexhaustive terms are helpful in understanding and locating the constellations of influence in differing experimentalist traditions as they manifest in Los Angeles.
Experimental: Not Minimalism, New Music, Or Indie Classical

Los Angeles’ experimentalism is generally not “minimalist” music (American Minimal Music, or, Repetitive Music), in the way minimalism is most often theorized. The influence of Young, Riley, Glass, Reich and others can of course be found in the deployment of the meditative (or sometimes un-nerving) repetition, drone, and durational musics. However, experimentalism in Los Angeles most often eschews tonality, decenters musical virtuosity, and embraces the indeterminate. Like minimalism, it is at odds with the dialectical nature of romantic harmony and its teleological, end-oriented structures that mirror the (male) libido (Mertens [1980] 1983, 118-124; McClary 1991; Fink 2005, 25-61). But where minimalism most often subverts or suspends any teleological tendency and differently distributes its energy—in repetition and stasis rather than perceived movement toward a goal—Los Angeles’ experimentalism works on exaggerated times scales and, as in the case of much Wandelweiser-related music, approaching total silence.17

Los Angeles’ experimentalism is also not “new” music sometimes defined as contemporary classical or even “indie” classical (Robin 2016, iii). While these terms are broad and purposefully pluralist, they tend to imply musics bound at least by their adherence to the work concept (Werktreue) that binds performances of works to their scores, but that also hierarchically differentiates composer from performer (Goehr 1992, 231). Experimentalism’s attitudes and practices serve to radically interrogated, dissolved, or collapsed these differentiations (Kluth 2018).

17 The influence and character of the Wandelweiser Collective are discussed at length in Chapter Six.
In spite of the multiplicity I have been outlining, it is worth noting an important aligning characteristic that partially defines the scene in question as “experimental” rather than “avant-garde.” I mean, of course, the DIY (“Do It Yourself”) status of Los Angeles’ scene to which I continue to allude. Rather than locate distinctions between the experimental and the avant-garde by means of purely musical and aesthetic considerations (Nyman 1974, 2; Benitez 1978, 54), for this project I focus on a differentiation between experimentalism and the avant-garde defined by their respective relationships to extant remnants of bourgeois “high culture,” its attendant institutions, and class distinctions.

Avant-garde and experimental musics have in common the official claim of renouncing all possible social function and value in the music. But as has been alluded to, the reality of these positions is complex. While the avant-garde has sometimes tacitly reclaimed the idea of aesthetic autonomy in order to value its challenging works, it also relies on a kind of cultural capital—that of prestige—to maintain its existence. Susan McClary (1989) reminds us that “[t]he "prestige value of this music…is inversely correlated with public response and comprehension” (60).18 Experimentalism also appeals to a kind of autonomy, though inconsistently, and in modulating terms. The autonomies claimed by both musical traditions are problematic in that in spite of their supposed autonomy, they nonetheless exist in worlds of valuation and meaning. Experimentalism in particular, in spite of Cage’s and others’ claims to autonomy, seems to exist for its practitioners within a horizon of meaning, judgment, and even “right living.”19

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18 I examine the complex transformations of capital inherent in Los Angeles’ experimental music scene at length in Chapter Seven.

19 This complication to the supposed autonomy of experimentalism is addressed further in Chapter Three.
Peter Bürger’s (1984) theory of the avant-garde is instructive in exposing subtle conceptual and capital-oriented differentiations between the avant-garde and the experimental relevant to this study. Bürger defines different avant-gardes: the historical avant-garde that, though previously engaged in criticism, becomes assimilated into “art as institution” (22) and thereby losing its critical function, and a more persistent neo-avant-garde (which I am calling the “experimental”) that attempts to resists institutional assimilation. The important, and relevant-to-this-study differentiation is the self-reflexive attempt to break with bourgeois cultural institutions complicit in maintaining social class distinctions undertaken by the latter.20 Resonating with this formulation, both Michael Nyman (1974, 4) and Charles Hamm (1997, 279) point to John Cage’s early 1950s works as a postmodern break with modernism and institutional support structures. Cage’s fragmentation of style and structure as well as his attitude toward the role of the art object—the abandonment of conventions of perceived narrative linearity, the questioning of authorship and intentionality, the hegemony of Western culture, the role of the listener in the reception of works, etc.—work to challenge the relationship of music to the institution and previously normative forms of production and reception. Hence, the “experimental” is not only contrary to normalized musical practices, it stands on the fruits of imagination and points to new ways of being outside of institutional, authorized means of cultural production. In insisting on an ontology characterized by openness rather than closure (addressed at length in Chapter Four), an experimentalist attitude points not only to the differently-aesthetic, but also toward the differently-ethical; toward ways of differently being-in-the-world.

20 This cycle is recursive, however, as Bürger (1984) points out that avant-gardists attempts to provoke or escape bourgeois art markets and institutions are not enduringly effective. Rather, they are almost immediately captured and assimilated by the structures they intend to criticize: “Since now the protest of the historical avant-garde against art as institution is accepted as art, the gesture of protest of the neo-avant-garde becomes inauthentic” (52-30).
Art World, Subculture, Or Scene?

In the interest of further clearing the terminological waters already muddied, I briefly characterize my use of the word “scene” in describing Los Angeles’ experimental music community. Like Gilmore’s attitude noted above, I think of the artistic community in question not as a subculture of Los Angeles, but as its own art world (Becker 1982) or nested series of fields (Bourdieu [1979] 1984). I adopt the terms “scene” as it is often used colloquially by community participants and implies the amorphous, rhizomatic, and open nature of this group of composers, performers, administrators, listeners, and hangers-on.

Will Straw (1991) points out that more traditional notions of a musical community (or even musical subcultures) presume 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. The idea of a subculture also presumes that a society has one shared culture from which the subculture is deviant (Peterson and Bennet 2004, 1-9). In a major metropolis driven to constant change by cultural and economic factors such as Los Angeles (Said 1990), the idea of a dominant culture can only be fallacious. Subcultures have representative standards and practices, the presentation of which are faithfully produced and reproduced by the group’s members. And though the Los Angeles music communities mirror the fractured nature of the city itself in its heterogeneity, subcultures certainly exist therein. The DIY experimental music community—for the purposes of this discussion, at least—is not one of them.

It is, rather, a trans-local scene “in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross fertilization” (Straw 1991, 373; Kruse 1993; Harris 2000;
Tying It All Together

This extended literature review and exercise in theoretical situation has been undertaken to establish a few points: the persistence of the assumption of music’s efficacy in multiple areas of musicological discourse, the persistence of that assumption even regarding musics that lack music’s conventional characteristics, the lack of a theoretical grounding capable of putting these musicological methods and claims in conversation, and a circumscription of my approach to Los Angeles’ DIY experimental music community. I want now to turn my attention to the common relevance of the work of imagination in musical experience in modulating the realities (material and otherwise) we inhabit. Over the course of the next two chapters, I want to demonstrate imagination as the operative function upon which music’s efficacy—its worlding power—depends.

Since the postmodern turn of the New Musicology, music’s significance has been successfully located and decoded in webs of sociocultural histories, power structures, and material realities. It is demonstrably correct to assume music’s social power. But for it to be socially efficacious, music must inhabit or engage with a cognitive space implicit in socially-

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21 The precarity of a trans-local characterization defined by openness is further theorized in Chapter Six.
situated subjects’ understanding of historical reality, their navigation of the symbols that characterize their present horizons of understanding, as well as their imagined futures. When it comes to music, listening must be the activity whereby this takes place. Therefore, in my next chapter, I look to theories of listening for clues in how listening itself—regardless of the content of that listening—might be an activity that occasions meaning-making and the re-figuration of realities associated with musical experience.
Chapter Three: The Power of Listening as a Clue to Music’s Efficacy

New music: new listening. Not an attempt to understand something that is being said, for, if something were being said, the sounds would be given the shapes of words. Just an attention to the activity of sounds.

—John Cage ([1957] 1973, 10)

What if I were to think art was just paying attention?

—Allan Kaprow (1983, 202)

Above all else, whatever it is that we call music asks of us that we listen. As outlined in the previous chapter, the organizing question at the bottom of this study—not, “What is music?”; “How does this music inform or reflect culture”; or “What is the ontological status of a non-repeatable, experimental work?”—is the question of how experimental musics whose features differ so greatly from more conventional musics express the same multiple modes of efficacy. This chapter explores the significance of that feature these musics share: an engagement with listening. Other questions more often taken up by ethnomusicological and musicological methodologies are necessary but, as they focus on what I have termed second-order significances of music, they obfuscate the primary significance of music’s relationship of listening to understanding, one that ultimately leads to questions of being.

The social milieu populated by the contemporary urban subject does not make intentional listening easy. Especially in a hyper-plural mega-city such as Los Angeles, any listener is constantly bombarded by the din of the city’s millions of inhabitants. In addition to those noises coming from traffic (foot and street) and construction (and demolition), the noise of advertising media demanding a listener’s attention are ever-present. More than a century ago, Italian Futurist Luigi Russolo ([1913] 2004) related the multiplication of noises—and the modern subject’s growing indifference to them—to the multiplication of machines: “Not only in the noisy
atmosphere of the great cities, but even in the country, which until yesterday was normally silent. Today, the machine has created such a variety of contention of noises that pure sound in its slightness and monotony no longer provokes emotion” (11). Russolo, of course, was arguing for the inclusion of more “modern” sounds into the purview of music to further inspire the then-modern listener. But we must remember that in spite of whatever dis-organized din we might try to shut out with the (perhaps) more-organized din we choose through our earbuds, the world is for hearing. If Heidegger was right, that we exist understandingly, then it must be partially though hearing and listening that we inform that being. As such, the understanding occasioned by sounds and/or noises organized as music necessarily inform how subjects inhere in the world.

The importance of the affectual power of listening to unstructured sounds and silences is at the root of my questions about how experimental music practices inform subjects’ self-understanding and social structuring. Therefore, I want here to follow whatever path there might be to find from listening toward understanding, and how that understanding informs a listener’s being-in-the-world. By sifting through some of what has been said by artists and theorists concerned with listening, the sometimes-fuzzy connection between listening to being begins to coalesce. This is the same connection that my deployment of philosophical hermeneutics seeks to further account for and define, and also likely to strengthen.

**John Cage, Listening, and Other Worlds**

Though sometimes self-contradictory and certainly changed throughout his life, Cage’s own attitudes toward the composition, performance, and listening to music continue to be

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22 Jacques Attali reminds us: “For twenty-five centuries, Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible” ([1977] 1985, 1).
influential when reflecting on experimental music. The kind of experimentalism practiced in the contemporary DIY community in question is no exception. While it is perhaps cliché to keep going back to this historical and theoretical source, it would be irresponsible not to first dip into the hoary well of Cage’s recorded opinions regarding the importance of listening and hearing.

Soon after the emancipations of music from previous restrictions of form and consonance, composers such as Edgard Varèse and Pierre Schaeffer worked like sound scientists in their laboratories to shape new aural experiences. In suitably scientific terms, Varèse ([1936] 2004) wanted his new music to transcend old rules: “Certain transmutations taking place on certain planes will seem to be projected onto other planes, moving at different speeds and at different angles. There will no longer be the old conception of melody or interplay of melodies. The entire work will be a melodic totality. The entire work will flow as a river flows” (17-18). He and others would use scientific terms to describe their work and processes, sometimes mystifying listeners trained in the rules of listening that applied to older Western art music. Following this musical attitude John Cage would often take up these terms and means of organizing sounds. For him, music was sounds organized by five determinants: frequency, amplitude, overtone structure (timbre), duration, and morphology. Academic approaches to listening and judging music, in addition to his own seemingly bloodless approach to music, prompted his lamenting that the average listener was unsure how to listen to music, to describe or judge their reactions. In an early piece of prose, he writes:

> How often we hear people say: I don’t know anything about it but I know what I like. And in the presence of a musician, the high priest who alone reads the books, most people are afraid to admit any reaction to music, for fear it be the wrong one,

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23 In fact, Cage ([1958] 1973) credited Varèse with having established the “present nature of music. This nature does not arise from pitch relations (consonance-dissonance) nor from twelve tones nor seven plus five (Schoenberg-Stravinsky), but arises from an acceptance of all audible phenomena as material proper to music. While others were still discriminating ‘musical’ tones from noises, Varèse moved into the field of sound itself, not splitting it in two by introducing into the perception of it a mental prejudice” (84).
or that they mistook the Development for the Recapitulation. This state existing between audience and musicians amounts to an ever-widening gulf and is largely due to the musicians making music obscure, that is: difficult to understand.

I propose a solution.

Let us take a premise which seems apparent and elementary: music is made of sound. Everyone with ears may hear it. The music is made to be heard. A piece of music is constructed, much as a chair or building is constructed. But there is no greater need to appreciate it through analysis of the details of its construction than there is that need with regard to our own home, or chair. The chair is useful for sitting, the home for dwelling, the music for hearing.

From this point of view, the one which I am proposing, music need not be understood, but rather it must be heard. (italics mine)

Just as the chair is made of materials, wood and cloth, or metal and leather, just as the house is made of stone or glass, so the music is made of sound. The dimensions of this musical material, sound, are four: Duration or rhythm; Frequency or pitch; Amplitude or dynamics, that is, loudness and softness; and last Timbre, or quality of sound… (Cage [1937] 1993a, 17)

This bit of writing from Cage from 1937 is relatively early in his career and belies his later embrace of a total divorce of music from any social function. In a telling admission (previously mentioned in Chapter Two), he suggests that music may in fact have a function:

What can we expect to be the result of attentive listening to music? I believe that listening to music makes for our lives another world, living in which, somehow, our hearts beat faster and a mysterious excitement fills us. And the natural flow of sounds which music is reassures us of order just as the sequence of the seasons and the regular alternation of night and day do. (Ibid., 19)

What can we make of the oft-assumed idea that the act of attentive listening might, so it seems, make for our lives “another world”? This is, of course, in line with the anecdotal assertions of anyone who listens to or studies music. No one would compose, perform, listen to—or even study—music if it didn’t do something. Cage avoids a rigorous analysis of music’s efficacy and how it is builds, guides, or is emblematic of understanding in his suggestion that music need not be understood, only heard. He suggests that the act of attentively listening is what is of first-order importance, not the genius, beauty, or structural form of a work. However, if there is to be any augmentation of a listening subject’s personal horizon of understanding, there must be a
relationship of listening to understanding—one that might refigure a subject’s world. This insight
of Cage’s—unfinished or inconsistent in a theoretical sense as it may be—is as important as it is
disruptive for it overturns the criterion set up by centuries of theorists in their analyses of
effective musical works. This was the same logic he made manifest throughout his career as he
explored new ways to let sounds be themselves and to encourage composers to remove
themselves from the compositional equation as much as possible. To begin to account for the
relationship between listening and understanding, I turn to the work of Martin Heidegger.

Listening to Being with Cage and Heidegger

At first thought, Cage and Heidegger might seem strange bedfellows. While they may
have arrived at their opinions by way of different routes, I will argue they do indeed—at least in
the terms of this present discussion—share some ideas. In defense and praise of his own interest
silence, Cage ([1958] 1961) would lament the loss of the ability of so many of his
contemporaries to really listen:

…Why is it so difficult for so many people to listen?
Why do they start talking when there is something to hear?
Do they have their ears not on the sides of their heads but situated inside their
mouths so that when they hear something, their first impulse is to start talking?
(48-9)

Many of those in contemporary culture have, he mourns, lost their ability to really listen, and
hence, their ability to be authentically themselves in the din of the contemporary world.

Heidegger makes a similar statement in Being and Time as he characterizes Dasein’s (there-
being, or, the grounded presencing of a subject’s being-in-the-world) state of being as lost to an
inauthentic “they” consciousness. Indeed, the very existential-ontological foundation of Dasein’s
consciousness is, Heidegger ([1927] 1962) says, made possible through the fact that “Dasein, as
a Being-with which understands, can listen to Others.” But Dasein’s authentic existence can be threatened if its ability to listen is impeded:

Losing itself [Dasein] in the publicness and the idle talk of the “they” it fails to hear [überhört] its own Self in the listening to the they-self. If Dasein is to be able to get brought back from this lostness of failing to hear itself, and if this is to be done through itself, then it must first be able to find itself—to find itself as something which has failed to hear itself, and which fails to hear in that it listens away to the “they”. (315-6)

Furthermore, for Heidegger, it is only in the quiet, attentive reflexive discourse of Dasein with itself that it can authentically pass over the “they” to hear and respond to the call of its own conscience. This call and the primordial discourse it occasions does not necessarily have content, but rather summons its ownmost potentiality-for-Being:

*What* does the conscience call to him (sic) to whom it appeals? Taken strictly, nothing. The call asserts nothing, gives no information about world-events, has nothing to tell. Least of all does it try to set going a ‘soliloquy’ in the Self to which it has appealed. ‘Nothing’ gets called to [zu-gerufen] this Self, but it has been summoned [aufgerufen] to itself—that is, to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. The tendency of the call is not such as to put up for ‘trial’ the Self to which the appeal is made; but it calls Dasein forth (and ‘forward’) into its ownmost possibilities, as a summons to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self. (Ibid., 318)

Silence, or, reticence (the act of being attentively reserved) is important here as Heidegger tells us that it is only in keeping silent that the conscience calls: “…that is to say, the call comes from the soundlessness of uncanniness…Only in reticence, therefore, is this silent discourse understood appropriately…It takes the words away from the common-sense idle talk of the ‘they’” (Ibid., 343). Cage, of course, does not use these terms. But it would seem that the importance of attentive listening indicated by Cage is supported by Heidegger’s’ description of how listening summons Dasein’s self from lostness in the inauthentic “they” and describes how subjects might authentically be-in and open-to the world. Furthermore, if a singular “I” is to live
in pluralistic community with others, it must maintain an open disposition to those others that compose that community, to use its capability to listen to and be open to a plurality of beings:

Listening to… is Dasein’s existential way of Being-open as Being-with for others. Indeed hearing constitutes the primary and authentic way in which Dasein is open for its ownmost potentiality-for-being—as in hearing the voice of the friend whom every Dasein carries with it. Dasein hears, because it understands. (Ibid., 206)

Heidegger’s later characterization of listening as related to thinking and being further cuts a path to the theoretical developments I want to pursue, but first I want to consider how the importance of listening has been considered by several others.

**Listening and “Right Living”**

For Cage, listening is not first and foremost a matter of communication. Rather, listening is related to how the disinterested but intentional listener might have the world opened to them anew. More than what music is “about,” music and sound are a means to be “transported”; to “gain one’s self.” He tells of his own and some friends’ affecting experiences of having attended concerts of modernist music:

I don’t think it is a matter here of communication (we communicate quite adequately with words) or expressivity. Neither Lou [Harrison] nor Mimi [Wollner] in the case of Ives, nor I in the case of Webern, had the slightest concern with what the music was about. We were simply transported. I think the answer to this riddle is simply that when the music was composed the composers were at one with themselves. The performers became disinterested to the point that they became unself-conscious, and a few listeners in those brief moments of listening forgot themselves, enraptured, and so gained themselves.

It is these moments of completeness that music can give, providing one can concentrate one’s mind on it, that is, give one’s self in return to the music, that are such deep pleasure, and that is why we love the art. (Cage [1948]1993b, 29)

Performance artist and painter Allan Kaprow (1983) (himself a founder and teacher at CalArts from 1966-74) develops Cage’s attitude: “What if I were to think art was just paying
attentive?" (202). This idea of paying attention is related to the idea of listening and posits a relationship between art, understanding, meaning, and intentional openness—a path we will follow backward. In a move that comes dangerously close to openly ethicizing the aesthetic (an issue further addressed in Chapter Eight), Kaprow further argued that this openness, when manifest as listening, can change people and might somehow lead to “right living” that might eventually collapse the aesthetic into the quotidian. In a piece several years later, Kaprow ([1987]1993) noted that much of twentieth-century art was engaged in critiquing or somehow ameliorating the terrible reality perceived by so many in the West. He pointed to how Cage, by means of the cosmology he borrowed from Eastern philosophies, initiated a different sensibility in art that led to different, perhaps “better” living:

In Cage’s cosmology (informed by Asiatic philosophy) the real world was perfect, if we could only hear it, see it, understand it. If we couldn’t, that was because our senses were closed and our minds were filled with preconceptions. Thus we made the world into our misery.

But if the world was perfect just as it is, neither terrible nor good, then it wasn’t necessary to demand that it should improve (one begins to know what to do with difficulties without making such demands). And if our art was no longer required to provide a substitute world, it was okay to give up trying to perfect and control it (hence the chance operations and noises). What happened for some of us was that our newly released art began to perform itself as if following its own natural bent. It may have occurred to us that we might live our lives in the same way.

Most Westerners would find this hard to accept, while for those who accept its wisdom it is much easier said than done. But here, I believe, is the most valuable part of John Cage’s innovations in music: experimental music, or any

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24 Kaprow’s questioning of valuations of art and cultural “givens” is remarkable: “What if I had only a vague idea about ‘art’ but didn’t know the conventions that told me when I was in its presence or was making it? What if I were digging a hole—would that be art? What if I didn’t know about audience and publicity? What if I were to just go shopping? Would that not be art? What if I didn’t realize that art happened at certain times and in certain places? What if I were to lie awake in bed at 4 a.m.? Would that be the wrong place and the wrong time for art? What if I weren’t aware that art was considered more marvelous than life? What if I didn’t know an artist was meant to ‘create’ art? What if I were just to think about art constantly? Could I still make, do, engage in art? Would I be doing something else? Would that be ok?” ([1987] 1993, 201-2)

25 The “real” in this sense invokes a speculative realist conviction that there is a mind-independent reality indifferent to human values and meanings. For an extensive consideration of the implications of this insight, see Ray Brassier’s *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (2007).
other experimental art of our time can be an introduction to right living; and after that introduction art can be bypassed for the main course. (224-5)

Thus, Kaprow suggests that it is by means of an ambivalence to that which is the case (to that “real” which exists independently of human values), but also an open, disinterested ambivalence to that which could be the case—the imagined as if—that which composes a subject’s life might change for the better. Just what is meant by “right living” is difficult to gauge, though it is clear that right living implies acceptance of the world as a subject finds it, acceptance of however the world might change in time, and the extension of an imagined future from a present horizon of understanding. This leads well to further assertions made by others of the relationship of openness and intentional listening to communities of inclusion and plurality - but more on that later.

The Challenge of Deep Listening

Of course, Cage and Heidegger have not been the only ones to implicate listening in the production of open, pluralist community. Deploying experimental music practices to destabilize gender binaries in the Western musical establishment (Taylor 1993, Mockus 2008; Rodgers 2010, 31), Pauline Oliveros incorporated what she referred to as “deep listening” in her musical practice. Having studied at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music in the 1950s, Oliveros had strong ties to California and to modernist, avant-garde musical practices. She had further ties to experimental practices in San Francisco through her involvement with the influential San Francisco Tape Music Center (SFTMC). Involved from its beginning, she later became its director when the SFTMC joined the Mills Center of Contemporary Music in 1966, where she worked and taught.
In addition to her career as a composer, Oliveros devoted herself to developing her concept of Deep Listening:

Deep Listening involves going below the surface of what is heard and also expanding to the whole field of sound whatever one’s usual focus might be. Such forms of listening are essential to the process of unlocking layer after layer of imagination, meaning, and memory down to the cellular level of human experience. (http://www.deeplisting.org)

Judith Becker (2004) has developed Oliveros’ Deep Listening as a kind of secular trancing, “divorced from religious practice but often carrying religious sentiments such as feelings of transcendence or a sense of communion with a power beyond oneself” (2). As such, Becker acknowledges the act of listening—primary to and divorced from the cultural context of whatever music is heard—to proffer extreme affective change.

Oliveros believed that the intentionally active listening to sound pointed past the judgment and enjoyment of the beautiful toward the personal, social, and ethical. In her formulation, Deep Listening is capable of “unlocking” something; changing the consciousness of the listener. But how can the simple act of listening subvert the patriarchy, empower the Other, destabilize concepts of gender binaries? This assertion may seem *jejune* and full of insubstantial new-age wisdom. But there is something materially there in this presupposition. The composer has the power to expand conventional musical vocabularies, but in doing so they also work to expand the audience’s listening habitus by challenging listeners to reflexively notice their habitual responses to sound and then, perhaps, open up to them (Lipari 2014, 56). This in turn might alter how they understand and navigate their field of praxis. But as I will continue to explore, there seems to be something about the active effort of intentional listening, that maintenance of a comportment of openness in listening, that proves more important than even
the sound or musical content listened-to. This assertion is one directly related to contemporary attitudes of experimental music practices in Los Angeles.

**Listening to Being with Nancy**

In his treatise, *Listening (À l’écoute)*, Jean-Luc Nancy ([2002] 2006) intuits the complexities and challenges of listening to understanding. Characterizing the importance of his inquiry, he seeks to “prick up the philosophical ear” (3) and become again open to the question of listening; to consider its relation to communication, understanding, and, of course, being. Nancy suggests, not unlike Heidegger does of being, that theorists have become inured to the problems of listening for its seeming obviousness. It is assumed, he says, that listening is most often understood as the path to communication and to understanding. But is that all?

In a poetic manner customary to Nancy’s philosophical investigations, he points to sound and listening as clues (however commonly over-looked) to humans’ understanding of being and truth. Assuming a subject’s understanding of the world to be always under construction, ever transitive, he suggests that the process of listening reflects how humans make meaning. Truths are continually re-assessed and reconsidered as contexts change, as is a subject’s understanding of and relationship to the world that said truths inform. So, then, he asks, shouldn’t truth be something that is not really, “itself”? “[N]o longer the naked figure emerging from the cistern but the resonance of that cistern—or, if it were possible to express it thus, the echo of the naked figure in the open depths?” (Ibid, 4).

This realization is the opening into his inquiry about sound, listening, and being. As the English word “love” is stretched to mean many things for which other languages have more subtle variations (as the Ancient Greeks differentiated agápe, éros, philía, and storgē as distinct
types of love, for example), Nancy plumbs the depths of French’s écoute (to listen) and entendre (to hear). He notes the semiotic differences afforded the senses, between the designation of the basic capacity and its tense, attentive, or anxious state: seeing and looking, smelling and sniffing, tasting and savoring, touching and feeling, hearing and listening (Ibid., 5). Naturally, it is this difference between hearing and listening he pursues as it manifests linguistically and then into what could be its greater significance.

There is a relationship between sound and sense, Nancy asserts. It is as if they were but two sides of the same coin. He demonstrates that, if the French écoute can be traced to the Italian auscultare (and the Latin auscultō - to lend an ear), then there is something attentive involved; the implication of some kind of intention and will that further implies the presence of a being. Entendre (from the Latin intendō - to turn one’s attention) also means “to hear,” but further implies comprendre, to understand. Communication, he says, is thus implicit in the utterance—the sound of which is perhaps forgotten or assumed—as well as a transparency to sense and thought. Sense and sound, he suggests, are mutually dependent: “[I]f, on the one hand, sense is sought in sound, on the other hand, sound, resonance, is also looked for in sense” (Ibid., 7).

However, though we can perhaps listen to speech for meaning divorced from the “voice itself”—forgetting any significance of its timbre or amplitude—we can also listen to other sounds, such as music, for whatever might be offered apart from the logos of language. This, again, suggests the ability of listening to differentiate and judge, but also to connect differently expressed aural phenomena toward the sentient will of an intelligence. This echoes Nancy’s circular assertion: sense is sought in sound, sound, as resonance, is looked for in sense. The takeaway here is that, for Nancy, this apparent connecting reflexivity of sense and sound in the sonorous register is implicit of a self, of a self-reflexive self entangled in feeling-oneself-feel. Its
location in physical and cognitive space is revealed by the perceived distancing of sonic repeat 
[renvoi] in space, the reverberating resonance that reveals the location of self in the world.

But, in a manner that problematizes the notion of a hermetic, bounded entity, listening is a comportment that trans-mediates spaces and boundaries:

   Sound has no hidden face; it is all in front, in back, and outside inside, inside-out in relation to the most general logic of presence as appearing, as phenomenally or as manifestation, and thus as the visible face of a presence subsisting in self…To listen is to enter that spatiality by which, at the same time, I am penetrated, for it opens up in me as well as around me, and from me as well as toward me: it opens me inside me as well as outside, and it is through such a double, quadruple, or sextuple opening that a “self” can take place. (Ibid., 13-4)26

This kind of boundary-less self-presencing encouraged by listening, then, seems to be related to Oliveros’ claims for Deep Listening. It offers credulity to the claim—or hope—that intentional listening might affect those changes Oliveros hoped for by her music: the dissolving of gender binaries, the empowerment of the Other. This is, quite really, the province of listening, Nancy goes on: “Listening thus forms the perceptible singularity that bears in the most ostensive way the perceptible or sensitive (aesthetic) condition as such: the sharing of an inside/outside, division and participation, de-connection and contagion” (Ibid., 14).

   Silence, for Nancy in his formulation, is recovered from any potential emptiness and meaninglessness into an arrangement of meaningful resonance, for even silence must be heard. Silence, as such, must not be understood as a meaningless privation of sound, “but as an arrangement of resonance: a little—or even exactly…—as when in a perfect condition of silence you hear your own body resonate, your own breath, your heart and all its resounding cave”

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So, then, even a listened-to silence might affirm and hold open the being of the phenomenological subject. These ideas clear the way to my return to a later Heidegger and those ideas that grew from his works into the philosophical hermeneutics I will further deploy.

**Intertextuality to Interlistening: Listening as a Site of Meaning-Making**

A focus on listening that asserts a path to understanding implicitly relates listening to meaning-making. Listening is, then, an operative function by which a subject makes sense of whatever aural event they hear and, perhaps, derive meaning from. This idea has been developed by Ingrid Monson (1996) in the context of jazz studies with the idea of intermusicality, a variant of the idea of intertextuality. Intermusicality, Monson argues, is an idea that can help explain the means by which improvising musicians construct meaningful improvisations of musical works as texts—theirmselves already historically charged with meaning—that reference the past, juxtapose or put unlikely texts in conversation, and infuse a musical world with new texts and requisite meanings.

As a contemporary critical concept, intertextuality got its start in poststructuralists writings of the 1960s and has held varying sway as it has developed. The idea of text in this critical landscape is not confined to those texts that are printed and read in the conventional sense. Rather, the idea of intertextuality avoids the strictly logocentric. “Texts” can be thought of as anything that signifies: colors, signs, textures, sounds (even those other than speech utterances), etc. Silence, then, as heard is also a text to be interpreted. Marko Juvan (2008) offers a general theory of intertextuality that, though long, bears repeating here:

We may understand general intertextuality as a feature of all texts. It is not proper to literature or some of its genres or works. It affects the author, speech act, an utterance’s subject, the process of textualizing, the text itself, its reception,

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27 This statement is reminiscent of John Cage’s oft retold experience in Harvard’s anechoic chamber.
reaction to it, and the reader’s identity: it is a condition of producing texts, their existence, formal and semantic structure, and readability. Any text comes into being, exists, and is comprehensible solely through content and formal ties with other utterances, existing texts, and also sign systems (codes), types of discourse, linguistic registers, stylistic and genre conventions, presuppositions, stereotypes, archetypes, or clichés. A text presupposes or implies these elements and structures from past or contemporary sources, and by means of them can enter into yet other intertextual relations: from actualization of sign systems, paraphrasing, and quoting to derivations and transformations, referring and alluding. (44-5)

In Chapter Two I showed how the idea of music as a text to be situated and interrogated for its meaning and complicity in structures of power has precedent in much of the work postmodern musicology initiated in the 1990s. Perhaps the most important takeaways from intertextuality’s development into intermusicality, is the implicit focus on the phenomenological nature of musical phenomena as well as the importance of intentional, critical listening. The temporality of the unfolding of musical texts as symbols is another clue to what I will call music’s character of “worldmaking” (Goodman 1978) and is related to the capacity attributable to synthetic imagination. Furthermore, it is when the listener engages in the intentional act of listening to these texts—open to the superabundance of significance generated by their perceived structures and inter-relationships of meanings—that the listener’s horizon of understanding might be refigured.

It is in this way, too, that we might find the acts of listening and speaking to be related to be implicit in plurality and ideas of “otherness.” When we listen, we find that others’ worlds differ from ours and that there is no perfect communication of ideas from one to the other. This is the most persistent problem of interpretation and, in spite of Schleiermacher’s aspiration in

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28 While the question of whether we each inhabit unique worlds, share a given world, or inhabit a shared world that permits different perspectives of it—or something that is these or neither—is too great for this study. But in recognizing the real plurality of perspectives with which we engage socially, it is helpful to again borrow a characterization from Goodman: “If I ask about the world, you can offer to tell me how it is under one or more frames of reference; but if insist that you tell me how it is apart from all frames, what can you say? We are confined to ways of describing whatever is described. Our universe, so to speak, consists of these ways rather than of worlds” (Goodman 1978, 3). This study refers to these “frames” and “ways” as “worlds.”
general hermeneutics to an art of avoiding misunderstandings, pure and perfect translation is as impossible as actually *being* another person. As such, our different understandings of the world work to define not only our ways of living in the present, but also our imagined futures.

Listening is, then, an ethical activity implicated in any kind of social plurality. Addressing this character of listening, Lisbeth Lipari (2014) further develops intertextuality as motor of meaning-making into “interlistening,” a description of how listening resonates with echoes of everything we have ever “heard, thought, seen, touched, said, and read throughout our lives” (9). As I have extensively described, listening takes an active role in building understanding and creating a listening subject’s world. Whereas speech (the word) has often been synonymous with logos, a logos that speaks without listening does not lead to understanding, and as such, is not logos at all. Lipari goes further to show how listening is thus necessarily reflexive and situates the listener in a social field, just in the same way that one cannot touch without also being touched. Even when alone and thinking, listening is there - but so is speaking. The two are not really a duality, but two complementary characteristics of a unity. In demonstration, she asks:

> When I’m thinking silently to myself, am I speaking or listening? If I’m speaking (or listening), then who’s listening (or speaking)? And along those lines, do I listen not only to words with my mind, but also to the music of the voice in my ears, and the posture and the gesture of the body with my eyes, the vibrational rhythm of others’ pulsations, movements, and intonations in my body? (Ibid.)

There is an implicit underlying question at the core of Lipari’s characterization of listening’s circular, dependent relationship to speaking: who is speaking and listening, and where do ideas come from? And more than just “ideas,” how do ideas that fit an intended meaning arise? With a slight methodological pivot, we can pursue another line of questioning that

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29 In Part III of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (1994), too, locates language as the universal horizon of hermeneutic experience. Language and the arrival at understandings between subjects implies listening as well as speaking, as the translation and interpretation between worlds is implicit of a plurality of perspectives.
attempts to answer this question by relating embodied, pre-cognitive meaning to discursive, conceptual knowledge.

**Eugene Gendlin and “Gut” Feelings**

Following the way of ideas from Plato, Aristotle, Dilthey, Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Dewey, and McKeon, Eugene Gendlin’s work has contributed to psychological and philosophical quandaries regarding the formation of meaning-making. The crux of Gendlin’s extensive research has been a sort of reconciliation between the ostensibly epistemologically-irreconcilable philosophical traditions of analytic and continental philosophy. To do this, he asserts that the boundaries of a subject’s horizon of understanding are constantly in flux as they interact with their surroundings, make sense of the world, and build the worlds of meaning they inhabit. Echoing Dewey and eschewing potential charges of solipsistic subjectivism perhaps invited by this claim, he invokes interactionism and the necessity of the social realm, boldly stating: “A person is interaction” (Gendlin 1962, 323). Digging under the rug of long-held assumptions regarding how to account for the veracity of truth claims, Gendlin’s work questions the conventional wisdom about the construction of meaning in analytic philosophy. He does this by acceding to the reality of the import of structures and patterns of thought (forms, concepts, definitions, categories, distinctions) in meaning-making, while also shining a light on the underlying *feelings* that inform them. Mark Johnson (2007) describes this thrust of Gendlin’s work this way:

The fateful error, which Gendlin attributes not just to Western philosophy but also to our general cultural understanding and practices, is to overlook much of what goes into making something meaningful to us. Then we are seduced into mistaking the forms for that which they inform, and we fool ourselves into
thinking that it is the forms alone that make something meaningful, real, and knowable.\textsuperscript{30} (80)

Demonstrating the implicit relationship (hinted at above by Lipari’s characterization of listening and speaking) between what Gendlin (1995) calls “natural understanding” and “logical formulations,” he offers an inventive intuition pump that relates “gut” feelings to the production of knowledge:

Suppose you have an oddly gnawing feeling. Then you realize—oh, it’s that you forgot something—what was it? You don’t know, and yet it is there, in that gnawing body-tension. You think of many things you ought to have done today, but no; none of them are “it.” How do you know that none of these is what you forgot? The gnawing knows. It won’t release. You burrow into this gnawing. Then suddenly—you remember: Yes, someone was waiting for you for lunch. Too late now! (547)

Gendlin ingeniously deploys this common experience of “gut” feelings and “hunches” to relate how pre-cognitive, embodied feelings can give rise to and inform what later becomes conceptual thought.

The formal and structural elements of communication described by Gendlin most often take the shape of linguistic utterances. But as Johnson (2007) suggests, what Gendlin repeatedly aligns with the linguistic pertains to all forms of symbolic interaction, “from music to painting to dance to ritual to gesture to sign language” (83). Implicit in this framework of meaning-making, then, is a relationship between aspects of sense experience (the aesthetic), bodily states, and conceptual knowledge.

\textsuperscript{30} Gendlin’s implication in this statement could have been lifted directly from Nietzsche’s \textit{On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense}, an essay that predates Gendlin’s writing by more than a century: “What then is truth? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and; anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions - they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins” ([1873] 1993, 84).
Gendlin’s mixed-epistemological account of the construction of meaning is helpful in connecting the seemingly mutually exclusive worlds of the non-conceptual and the conceptual, but also between the subject’s personal world and the “outside”; the given. This also points to the ever-engaged construction of subjects’ worlds that implies an ontology of openness. To refocus on this process of existing understandingly, I backtrack from Gendlin to Heidegger. While, though he used different terms and situated it in a characteristically complex structure of thought, Heidegger had developed a similar idea regarding thought as related to understanding and being—that of an active and reflexive openness that waits upon thought and, in a sense, occasions being itself.

In the Woods with Heidegger and Meditative Thinking

_Scholar:_ So far as we can wean ourselves from willing, we contribute to the awakening of releasement.

_Teacher:_ Say rather, to keeping awake for releasement.

_Scholar:_ Why not, to the awakening?

_Teacher:_ Because on our own we do not awaken releasement in ourselves.

_Scientist:_ Thus releasement is effected from somewhere else.

_Teacher:_ Not effected, but let in. (Heidegger [1959] 1966b, 60-1)

In 1955, roughly thirty years after the original publication of _Being and Time_ (1927), Heidegger was invited to offer an address at a concert in Messkirch memorializing the 175th birthday of German composer Conradin Kreutzer. He took the opportunity to turn his ostensive discussion about the beauty and import of a musical performance into an opportunity to discuss the need for meditative thinking in contemporary life. In his discussion, Heidegger characterized the beneficial and necessary advancements occasioned by calculative thinking (instrumental reason) as obvious and shallow. He said that, in order to be recovered for right human living,
these achievements must be further considered and deployed by meditative thinking; that kind that connects man’s nature to being—to a mutual openness to the world and its mysteries.31

In *Being and Time* Heidegger had pursued a characterization of Dasein in terms of phenomenologically-characterized ontological structures of experience that were necessarily temporal. These include a subject’s *being toward death, resolve, caring*, etc., that allowed a subject to authentically recognize and participate in their being-in-the-world. It is these ontological structures that (in *Being and Time*, at least) describe the manner of being by which a subject inheres in the world. However, any understanding arrived at from within these structures cannot be apodictic, but by their constructivist character, is necessarily subjective and malleable. Heidegger would continue to pursue the implications of this subjectivity.

The text of Heidegger’s Memorial Address and the dialogue, “Conversation on a Country Path About Thinking” appeared in 1959’s *Gêllasenheit (Discourse on Thinking)*. In these, Heidegger deploys a related, but different method to approach being and its relationship to understanding and truth. He, in a sense, works to subvert, or, re-characterize differentiations between subjective understanding and the “given.” It is helpful to start here with this version of Heidegger’s admittedly challenging formulation of being; to serve my greater project of connecting listening to understanding—and therefore to being. Therefore, I start here with a brief tour of what he refers to as *releasement* and its relationship to meditative thinking.32

31 “Meditative thinking demands of us not to cling one-sidedly to a single idea, nor to run down a one-track-course of ideas. Meditative thinking demands of us that we engage ourselves with what at first sight does not go together at all” ([1959] 1966a, 53). Furthermore: “Yet releasement toward things and openness to the mystery never happen of themselves. They do not befall us accidentally. Both flourish only through persistent, courageous thinking.” (Ibid., 56).

32 See also composer Mark So’s (2007) prose piece “Nearing/Hearing” for another reflection of the relationship Heidegger’s thoughts on meditative thinking as related to experimental music.
For the being of a self to come to a stand, Heidegger ([1959] 1966b) suggests in *Discourse on Thinking*, the presence of a reflexive, chiasmically-dependent relationship between the given and a subject’s horizons of understanding. In characteristically obfuscative fashion, he opens “Conversation on a Country Path About Thinking” thusly: “[T]he question concerning man’s nature is not a question about man” (58). He goes on to explain (through the dialoguing characters of a Scholar, a Teacher, and a Scientist as they walk at nightfall through a wood) that this is ultimately an assertion that thinking (in the meditative sense that connects to being rather than the calculative sense that makes the trains run on time) is not something one does, but rather something one waits upon. And furthermore, this is not the waiting colored by human nature and will (waiting *for*), but rather a waiting without waiting for anything in particular (waiting *upon*). Implicit, then, is the influence on being-as-understanding by that which is outside its horizons. As noted above, he begins to characterize it this way:

*Scholar:* So far as we can wean ourselves from willing, we contribute to the awakening of releasement.
*Teacher:* Say rather, to keeping awake for releasement.
*Scholar:* Why not, to the awakening?
*Teacher:* Because on our own we do not awaken releasement in ourselves.
*Scientist:* Thus releasement is effected from somewhere else.
*Teacher:* Not effected, but let in. (Ibid., 60-1)

Meditative thinking, then, is dependent on a waiting *upon* rather than *for*, and as such is not focused on the content of the world as such but waits for and is open to the emergence of content that “worlds.” This is a consciousness focused on the horizon of understanding rather than the objects of consideration. An openness as such is not easy and, as Heidegger says, may rely on a kind of thinking that lies “behind the distinction between activity and passivity” (Ibid., 61). This is where his idea of *releasement* comes in. What follows is a discussion about the self-presenting of being-as-understanding through a process of “regioning,” that space of being which
gathers itself to itself, abides in its self-presencing and, as such, informs the understanding and Being of the subject.\(^3\)

Like the reflexive, chiasmic openness that connects meditative thinking and its open horizon of understanding to the given, this releasement is two-sided in its being released *from*, and being released *to* (Ibid., 73). Again, suggesting the necessity of looking outside of man for an adequate understanding of thinking, this is where the two-sidedness of releasement implicates the given in the act of disclosure to human understanding. Thinking and understanding are not, in this way, products solely of the human will, but a component of being’s relationship to understanding in the world. Meditative thinking is, then, an openness to the given that is beyond the subject’s present horizon of understanding.

In a kind of summation about meditative thinking, the Teacher hazards: “But by this you say that the nature of thinking is not determined through thinking and so not through waiting as such, but through the other-than-itself, that is, through that-which-regions which as regioning first brings forth this nature” (Ibid., 74). This implies that the nature of thinking is an open in-between-ness. And it is in this open in-between-ness (further characterizable by its temporality) the subject’s horizon of understanding might be risked, being augmented through the work of the hermeneutic circle as a new whole prompted by the perpetual openness to a new part. This augmentation, then, points to the relevance of aesthetic experiences occasioned by music to understanding. As, by thinking and waiting (and listening) with this radical in-between openness,

\(^3\) If this is confusing, that is perfectly alright. Heidegger ([1959] 1966b) seems to admit that this idea operates outside traditional bounds of knowledge produced by the correspondence theory of truth and its attendant logic. He does this as his Scholar interrupts: “I’m not sure I understand what you say now.” To which the Teacher helpfully responds: “I don’t understand it either, if by ‘understanding’ you mean the capacity to re-present what is put before us as if sheltered amid the familiar and so secured; for I, too, lack the familiar in which to place what I tried to say about openness as a region” (65). We are in this discussion, literally and figuratively, in the woods.
a subject risks maintaining the preservation of their present horizon of understanding; their very being-in-the-world.34

This combination of meditative thinking characterized by a radical, waiting openness brings us back, finally, to the relationship of attentive listening to being-as-understanding: listening to music; listening to noise; listening to silence. For attentive listening, as practiced in the Los Angeles DIY experimental music scene, is a listening not for something, but rather an open, meditative listening upon that-which-regions: the opening silence that may refigure a subject’s’ present hermeneutic understanding. This is a clue to the power of silent music and the relationship to social reality already assumed in music study.

The ideas I have collected in this chapter differ in their terms and the intellectual histories they represent. However, they are connected by their recognition of the reflexive relationship between listening and being. We have located that “right living” referred” to by Kaprow in a disinterested waiting openness. Where Oliveros looked to deep listening to unlock layers of imagination and significance, Lipari has shown how those layers of imagination inform one another to make meaning through interpretive interlistening. Gendlin’s ratification of “gut feelings” connecting bodily states and conceptual knowledge indicates a link by which subjects make meaning of texts; relating their interior worlds and the “outside” given. All of this serves to set the interpretive character of listening in conversation with others’ experiences and the task of

34 This open in-between-ness has been further theorized by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht as “presence.” Gumbrecht’s theorization of presence builds on Heidegger’s concept of Gellasenheit but focuses on the substantial, spatialized inherence of beings before interpretation or meaning-making. Importantly, this posits an ontology of being characterized by a material openness as grounding site for the construction of meaning. He says: “The world is the self-disclosing openness of the broad paths of the simple and essential decisions in the destiny of a historical people. The earth is the spontaneous forthcoming of that which is continually self-secluding and to that extent sheltering and concealing” (2004, 73). In criticism of interpretive theories of discursive meaning in literature—which I extend to music—Gumbrecht recognizes the grounding importance of silent waiting: “…culture at large, including literature, was not only about meaning, that even in the teaching of literature and culture we should pause, from time to time, and be silent (for presence cannot use too many words)” (Ibid., 134).
living together ethically. It seems that—in terms of my interrogation of listening’s relationship to understanding—what we listen to is not as important as the intentionally open act of listening. Nancy said that truth’s identity is not “itself,” but its becoming—not the figure emerging from the cistern but that cistern’s resonance. All of these ideas point to the idea that we construct our worlds and know ourselves in them through the operative function of listening. Furthermore, it is evident that imagination and aesthetic judgment are implicated in the construction of worlds. In the next chapter, I will show how philosophical hermeneutics can help to make sense of these and frame our understanding of musical experience in an open ontology of understanding that defies closure and concretization, ideological or otherwise.
Chapter Four: Connecting Listening to Worldmaking Through Philosophical Hermeneutics

Rather than representing [musical] form as an entity ontologically prior to process, the open structure treats process as ontologically prior to form...Ultimately, both the work and the world emerge not as circumscribed objects, but as circumscribing events as art ceases to be an abstraction which tries to imitate, symbolize or transcend reality and becomes, instead, a natural event which embodies the world in flux.

—Thomas DeLio (1981, 360-1)

The plurality of musicological discourses exists in a state of fluid self-critique (Kerman 1985, 1991; Agawu 1997; Williams 2001). Inflected by postmodernity’s rejection of master narratives, the diversity of methods and objects of their study come fluidly in and out of fashion or relevance. Already abundant and effective in framing and deriving meaningful implications about whatever their musical object of study in terms of whatever sort of knowledge they seek, (ethno)musicology is not wanting for new theoretical methodologies. However, unlike music—which is in itself not political (as Tom Waits often says and to which John Cage would likely assent - that music is simply an interesting thing to be doing with the air)—criticism and its attendant knowledge production certainly can be when confronting music’s political and physical embodiment of “self and Other” (Bohlman 1993). Depending on how an analyst frames their categories and modes of inquiry, decoded implications drawn from music can result in narcissistic appropriation, self-reification, and tautological false consciousness as much as productive critiques of ideological, economic, and political structures. Alluding to this in a statement that contains a latent hermeneutical insight, Kevin Korsyn (2003) reminds us that “if you follow your theoretical impulse with absolute fidelity, you will discover historical contingencies as you encounter the culture that has framed the questions in advance by constituting you as a subject” (88). Such is the circular, Ouroboros-like nature of inquiry. But
what remains true in any case is that musical content is experienced first as efficacious and
significant regardless of its theoretical framing, and that its primary significance is disclosed in
listening. This is an important, if seemingly obvious observation.

Regardless of their theoretical variance, contemporary musicological discourses after the
postmodern turn have shifted from an assertion of music’s aesthetic autonomy to its implication
in the construction and maintenance of social realities. In doing so they share the common
inference of a relationship between aesthetic experiences occasioned by music and how subjects
understand and navigate the practical field. In the constitution of this relationship, music is
somehow implicit in both deleterious ideological deformation and the productive work of
critique and identity construction. I suggest that for music to be efficaciousness in these myriad
ways, we must infer that that field in which music has its influence resists ontological closure, is
always under construction, and characterizable by an ontology of openness—and it follows that
listening is an operation of that openness.

My previous chapter’s investigation of listening showed it as a site of meaning-making—
the ground upon which that efficaciousness and significance stands—and in doing so it located
that capacity for meaning-making (worldmaking) that connects the many modes wherein these
significances register. To make better sense of the consistent implication that aesthetic
experiences have the capacity to refigure subjects’ worlds, we must look for a theoretical framing
that resists ontological closure. Philosophical hermeneutics, which understands socially- and
historically-situated subjects to exist in the interpretive construction and navigation their worlds,
is such a framing.

35 The multiplicity of interpretive framings manifest in Andrew Dell’Antonio’s (2004) edited volume, Beyond
Structural Listening, evidences the value of diverse epistemologies and critical methods in musicology. Also, see
James Currie’s (2009) “Music After All” for a virtuosically diagnostic collection of musicological methods and their
significances to criticism, knowledge production, and politics (148-153).
An understanding of listening as an activity of interpretation and its demonstrated relationships to affect and understanding connects experimental music practices to more conventional musical precedents regardless of their structural or aesthetic differences. In terms of the larger project of this dissertation, this finding helps to make sense of the way in which challenging experimental music practices that deploy degrees of chance procedures, noise, and silence can occasion aesthetic experiences. These in turn contribute to the refiguring of a listener’s horizon of understanding and evince an openness to change and plurality in social and ethical realms. Such an understanding compliments experimental music’s own practice, as, in a kind of musical *Cura te Ipsum*, experimental composers have developed theoretical structures to better make sense of their practices and meaningful implications since the early days of its development.

Particularly relevant to the DIY scene in Los Angeles due to the influence of the values that informed his musical explorations, I will situate and explore some of James Tenney’s ideas of music and perception. Tenney’s theoretical developments sought to offer “handles” for analysis of unconventional musics apart from tools available for harmonic and melodic analysis. His novel approach pursues Husserl’s idea of eidetic reduction in an attempt to free music of the weight of musicological history and be evaluated on new terms. His concept of music as research continues to influence contemporary composers. Though, as I will show, his scientistic epistemology—regardless of its phenomenological framing—assumes an historically-autonomous ego (transcendental ego) and cannot connect to the greater ideas of affect or the plural, ethical sphere implied by musical production and reception.
James Tenney’s *Meta+Hodos*

Around the same time that Heidegger was formulating his thoughts about meditative thinking in “Conversation on a Country Path About Thinking” (1959), James Tenney was working on a Masters’ thesis at the University of Illinois. Like Harry Partch’s *Genesis of a Music* (1949), and John Cage’s *Silence* (1961), Tenney was working to tackle the difficulties of both making and talking about then-new musical procedures, particularly how to understand them under the conceptual regime of culturally institutionalized tonal musics. His thesis, called *Meta+Hodos* was finished in 1961 and published in 1964 in the *Journal of Experimental Aesthetics*. The first page of Section I., “The New Musical Materials,” expresses his concerns this way:

> [O]ur descriptive and analytical approaches to this music are still belabored with negatives—“atonal,” “athematic,” etc. —which tell us what the music is not, rather than what it is...Thus even when the novelties of the various styles and techniques of 20th-century music have become thoroughly familiar, certain “complexities” will still remain outside of our present conceptual framework, and it is clear that this conceptual framework is in need of expansion. ([1964] 1988, 4)

The solution Tenney offers in his monograph is to move from analytical methods previously sufficient for tonally functional music (which focused on harmony and melody) toward one which focuses on perception of units of experienced *sound*, free from culturally normalized musical expectation and positivistically-informed conceptual knowledge. Though Tenney is interested in phenomenology via the concept of perception, he is so via the interpretive theoretical framework of psychology. As such, his approach in *Meta+Hodos* remains objective but phenomenologically focused. This is observable in his free borrowing from gestalt

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36 Regarding the monograph’s name, he offers this clarification on the title page: “meth’ od, n. [F. methode, fr. L. methodus, fr. Gr. Methodus, method, investigation following after, fr. meta after + hodos way.].”
psychology and the (then-newly-translated into English) Husserlian theory of internal time-consciousness ([1928] 1964).

While novel, his move toward phenomenal experience is apropos for the period while, as Daniel Belgrad (1998) observes, there was an air of anti-positivism suffusing the postwar American avant-garde manifest in works as well as the theories and concepts in which those works are couched. Such a subjectivity is connected to postwar American cultural movements that embraced anti-positivist ideas from thinkers such as John Dewey’s focus on the relationship of experience and knowledge in art (1934), Alfred North Whitehead’s process cosmology ([1929] 1978), and Carl Jung’s validation of the unconscious ([1916] 1947) that validated the influence of the subconscious in the ostensibly objective, socially shared world. Next to then-contemporary practices of action painting, automatic writing, and interpretive dance, experiments with “chance operations” and improvisation in music are at home. But to theorize and analyze these works that were, in Tenney’s mind, qualitatively different, required an infusion of new ideas into established musicological frameworks. A means to articulate ideas informed by intuition and embodied knowledge meant seeking philosophies that made sense of phenomenal experience and subjectivity.

A decade before Tenney’s integration of gestalt theory in Meta+Hodos, gestalt-informed theories of spontaneity were already turning up in experimental educational programs at Black Mountain College. Painting teacher Robert Motherwell expressed related ideas on the implications of field theory for the visual arts while John Cage and Merce Cunningham created performance pieces that embodied Zen Buddhist versions of the concept. But it was social critic, poet, and philosopher of education Paul Goodman who, in the summer of 1950, brought an integrated gestalt theory and its psychology of spontaneous awareness in a cognitive field to
Black Mountain College (Belgrad 1998, 142). Still, Tenney’s work goes to further lengths to formalize a study of new musics than any of these.

The three quotes with which Tenney opens *Meta+Hodos* speak, respectively, of the tension between theoretical analysis and subjective experience (gestalt psychologist Kurt Koffka), the primacy of the artist’s imagination in inspiration (composer Arnold Schoenberg), and of how an artist’s imagination frames their aesthetic understanding (author James Joyce). Informed as it is by these wells of ideas, it is clear that Tenney’s intention with his monograph is to validate the role of imagination and to free experiences occasioned by new musical materials from the conceptual cage of contemporary musical analysis and fallacious valuations potentially imposed upon them therefrom. This is a recognition for the need to critique and offer alternatives to established analytical methods themselves that, in time, can become metanarratives impinging upon the interpretation of experiences, reducing the number of possible analytical conclusions.

Tenney’s examples of “new materials” that require new tools of analysis include works of modernist composers such as Ives, Schoenberg, Webern, and Varèse. To evade the analytical violence incurred by previous analytical systems, he offers a terminological intervention through the novel use of the word “clang.” As he clarifies, he means to replace discussions of “sound,” “sound configuration,” or “musical idea” with this word clang, a term for sound units borrowed with slight variation from the German “Klang” (sound). Clang, then, is “any sound or sound-configuration which is perceived as a primary musical unit—a singular aural gestalt” (Tenney [1964] 1986, 23). He further labels the constituent parts of any clang as “elements.” He goes on to imply the perceptual work of a listener who synthesizes discreet and temporally-consecutive units of sound into wholes of experiences describable by their 1) attack; 2) steady-state portion;
and 3) decay in amplitude.\textsuperscript{37} This logic of structural perception developed by Tenney—the relationship of clangs that occasions the perceived experience of the listener—is borrowed from work by Max Wertheimer’s (1923) and Kurt Koffka’s (1935) contributions to gestalt theory regarding visual perception.\textsuperscript{38} Framed in this manner, clangs are more than sounds, they are perceptual experiences and the building blocks of meaningful structures. Continuing to build on this logic, Tenney develops his idea’s function from the apprehension of individual clangs to greater perceived sequences thereof, and finally to synthetically-perceived forms as a means to describe musical experiences.

As noted, the examples Tenney offers in this work come from the avant-garde tradition more so than what I have called the experimental. That, however, has not kept contemporary theorists from explicitly extending his theories to the world of contemporary experimentalism.\textsuperscript{39} More importantly to the topic at hand, Tenney’s framework moves the analytic focus in music study to a subjects’ perceptions of time, structure, and ultimately, to meaning. However, the path from clang to perceptual experience to “meaningful” structure remains an epistemological difficulty as it is unclear how the transcendental ego implicit in the Husserlian-influenced theoretical model relates disembodied concepts to meaningful worlds of embodied experience. Tenney ([1964] 1988) is perhaps aware of this, saying: “It seems to be the nature of musical experience to resist our attempts at rationalization, and to contradict our theories.” Implying the

\textsuperscript{37} Though implicit, he does not invoke Kant’s idea of the synthetic operation of imagination by name.

\textsuperscript{38} Of the cross-domain application of Wertheimer’s work on perception and gestalt forms from the visual domain to sound, Tenney remembers: “The article is extremely interesting, and it is structured in such a way that it is immediately applicable across different media. It doesn’t depend on medium, which was the breakthrough for me, because the guy was already making a case for visual form to be understood in certain ways like any other form—conceptual, perceptual, modal, multi-dimensional, whatever. It was almost a cry-out to be made explicitly multi-modal” (Smigel and Krausus, 2007, 31).

\textsuperscript{39} More of Tenney’s theoretical essays—many of which further develop and frame his ideas regarding experimental music as parametric perceptual research—can be found in: \textit{From Scratch: Writings in Music Theory} (2015).
gulf between conceptual knowledge and meaningful experience, he continues: “But the final test of any concept—and the only valid source of any rationale—must be experience itself, and a musical theory that does not maintain a direct and vital connection with musical experience cannot be expected to survive for very long” (83).

While the analytical scheme developed by Tenney has not gained wide acceptance, his attempts at “sciencing about music” (Merriam 1964, 25) remain influential in Los Angeles’ DIY experimental music scene for their tone and orientation toward music as parametric perceptual research. But instead of this epistemological orientation, what we need is a hermeneutic phenomenology that grounds phenomenal experiences as the condition for the possibility of knowledge, one that is always already in the historical world rather than a transcendental one that assumes the autonomy of the ego (Ricoeur 1981a, 55). Therefore, following Heidegger, it is here where we break with implication of essential phenomenological essences and structures implied by Husserlian transcendental phenomenology in favor of a concern with understanding and meaning-making that foregoes tendencies toward Platonism (Mohanty 1978) and resides in the immanent. I will go further here and expand the subject’s field of experience from the horizon of listening perception to that historicized and intertextual manifold of intermusical meaning-making (interlistening) described in Chapter Three. As noted above, a subject whose being-in-the-world is characterized by processes of ongoing meaning-making implies a horizon of understanding that denies ontological closure. This realization describes the long arc (from listening, to meaning, to a subject’s being in a socially-informed reality) of how I intend to connect aesthetic experience to understanding and to the construction of subjects’ social reality.

As obscure as this difference and its relevance to the current study may at first appear, I want here to explore how the idea of aesthetic experience became divorced from knowledge and
understanding in the first place and why it must be recovered. From there we may have a better means of understanding how sound that seemingly lacks structural form and other criteria that allow it to be understood as music might be implicated in listeners’ understanding of the world. For this to make sense, I offer a short review of Kant’s and Hegel’s contributions to aesthetic theory that has informed not only philosophical thinking about the beautiful, but also its relationship to the logic of social and class structures still perceptible in the assignation and accretion of capital (explored at length in Chapter Seven). Then, following the path of hermeneutics from Schleiermacher to Heidegger, and ultimately to Gadamer and Ricoeur, we will recover the aesthetic as a grounding for the possibility of knowledge. This line of reasoning will allow a re-description not only of Tenney’s new musical materials and their efficacy, but of the relationship of the aesthetic to imagination, understanding, and the relationship of ideology to utopia as deployed in musicological discourse.

Kant and the Subjectivization of Aesthetics

To relate musical experimentalism—and ultimately aesthetic experience—to understanding, we begin with Immanuel Kant whose transcendental idealism remains a foundation of modern Western aesthetic theory. The third in his series of inquiries into human understanding, 1790’s *Critique of Judgment (CoJ)* does not forward a general, empirical theory of the beautiful or the aesthetic, but rather casts aesthetics as a subjective universal judgment of taste.\(^{40}\) In the first half of the work, Kant differentiates “determinative judgments”—those which subsume given particulars under known universals—from reflective judgments—those which

\(^{40}\) Alexander Baumgarten’s earlier notion of the “aesthetic” was informed by a positivist inclination to define the aesthetic in scientific, objective terms. Kant, while otherwise a fan of Baumgarten, did not think this viable (Gregor 1983).
seek to find unknown universals for given particulars. These include four possible reflective judgments: the agreeable, the good, the beautiful, and the sublime (Kant [1790] 1987, 126).

While the agreeable is purely subjective and the good is a symbol of the objectively—according to Kant—ethical, the beautiful and the sublime have a character of subjective universality with teleological implications. A complete disquisition of Kant’s critique of the judgment of taste is outside the scope of this dissertation. Rather, it is enough here to offer an abbreviated description of his schematization.

Of the four reflective judgments noted above, Kant notes in Part I of the *Critique of Judgment* that the beautiful is not “brought to concepts,” but is rather, “what we like when we merely judge it (and hence not through any sensation by means of sense in accordance with some concept of understanding)” (Ibid., 126-7). This kind of judgment is the most relevant and worthy of explanation for the project at hand. For Kant, a judgment of beauty is informed by pleasure or displeasure but, in the case of free (non-dependent) beauty, is always only disinterested, pre-cognitive, and non-purposive. The harmony of the free play of the understanding and imagination associated with aesthetic perceptions (a theme that will surface again later) elicits the feeling of pleasure. Understood as such, judgments of taste are not arrived at logically and hence, beauty is not concerned with purpose. Importantly, the concept of aesthetic judgment is a subjective but universal law unsuitable for conceptuality, and therefore—and this is of utmost importance—any standing as a form of knowledge.\(^4\)

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\(^4\) Reinforcing the importance of differentiating determinative from reflective judgment, Kant ([1790] 1987) notes: “There is clearly a big difference between saying that certain things of nature, or even all of nature, could be produced only by a cause that follows intentions in determining itself to action, and in saying that the peculiar character of my cognitive powers is such that the only way I can judge [how] those things are possible and produced is by conceiving, [to account] for this production, a cause that acts according to intentions, and hence a being that produces [things] in a way analogous to the causality of an understanding. If I say the first, I am trying to decide about the object, and am obliged to establish that a concept I have assumed has objective reality. If I say the second, reason determines only [how I must] use my cognitive powers commensurately with their peculiarity and with the essential conditions [imposed by] both their range and their limits. Hence the first is an *objective* principle for
something and is conscious that he himself (sic) does so without any interest, then he (sic) cannot help judging that it must contain a basis for being liked that holds for everyone” (Ibid., §6, 54). Hence, a judgment of taste must involve a claim to universality—the paradox of which is described by a universal but subjective *sensus communis* of taste.⁴²

The idea of true, free beauty in Kant’s theorization problematizes the inherence of beauty in art works. Kant’s free beauty—as found, for example, in the beauty of flowers, birds, crustaceans—has no perfection of any kind, no intrinsic purposiveness, and is therefore autonomous.⁴³ This schematization applied to art works, in effect, gave birth to formalism and aesthetic autonomy in art criticism as a means of analyzing and asserting the beauty of a work. The necessarily dependent beauty present in art works is therefore only possible when the intellectualized, conceptual elements in a represented ideal of beauty do not distract from the aesthetic pleasure derivable from the work’s potential free beauty. The two require the genius of an artist to unite them as one. A genius artist, as described by Kant, by their mysterious and unstudied nature, can unintentionally bring about a harmony of the imagination and understanding while sublimating a purposive concept in a work’s presentation by way of *aesthetic ideas* (Ibid., §49, 318).

The second half of the *Critique of Judgment* is concerned with tying beauty to teleology, thereby asserting Kant’s notion that the beautiful is a symbol of the morally good. His complicated argument for this relationship has been socially influential, but far from airtight

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⁴² For further clarification, see *CoJ* §8, “In a Judgment of Taste the Universality of the Liking Is Presented Only as Subjective,” and *CoJ* §22, where Kant offers: “Beautiful is what without a concept is cognized as the object of a necessary liking.”

⁴³ In *CoJ* §16, Kant also lumps “fantasias” in music and all music not set to words as “free beauties.”
(McCumber 2011, 27). However, the complexity of the theory’s failings is not directly relevant to the project at hand. Regarding this schematization’s influence in music criticism: Kant’s focus on organicism and form evolved into important Romantic ideas of valuation in the nineteenth-century’s sometimes tautological and formalist approaches to music study, while his assertion of the necessity of genius set the stage for the later ascension of nineteenth-century’s aristocratic art religion and the cult of Bildung (self-cultivation).

Hegel, Music, and the Cult of Bildung

From Kant’s attempt to tie an aesthetic theoretical schematization of beauty to the moral law and a notion of humanity’s telos of universal human enlightenment, it is not a far jump to Georg W. F. Hegel’s onto-theological theorization of art. Hegel laid out his aesthetic theory in a series of lectures given in Berlin during the 1820s. Deeply tied to Hegel’s greater overall notions of “History” and a dialectic ascension of “Idea,” art is connected to the movement of Spirit toward the Absolute. I will first offer a brief note on Hegel’s overall characterization of the Idea before connecting that to Hegel’s understanding of art and the beautiful.

Related to Hegel’s attempts to mediate the aporia regarding the possibility of a perceiving subject to have knowledge of any ostensibly existing thing-in-itself versus a more (in Hegel’s view) impoverished knowledge only of a thing’s appearances (as suggested by Kant), Hegel offers the absolute universal, the “Idea,” in order to subvert the extant dialectic. For Hegel, this notion of a synthesis of the objective and subjective, “universal and particular, freedom and necessity, spirit and nature … has now, as the Idea itself, been made the principle of knowledge and existence, and the Idea has become recognized as that which alone is true and actual” (Hegel 1975a, 62-3). The Idea does not exist in stasis, but, in very general terms, manifests itself
temporally as the dialectical development of the universal (God) and particular (Nature), toward their synthesis in the process of history. As related to the universal spirit, mankind’s self-conscious ego is an aspect of the Idea and designates mankind as the highest form of nature. The role of history, then, is crucial for Hegel’s aesthetic theory. As he describes it, the whole course of history should be understood as man’s “multifaceted effort to realize his essential freedom or wholeness—to become what he essentially is—and much of his philosophy is an attempt to reveal patterns within and among the ways men do this” (Karelis 1979, 55). In this sense, artistic activity joins philosophy and religion as an historical, temporally situated activity by which man strives for said freedom and wholeness; by which the Idea or God comes to consciousness.

Contrary to Kant—who went to great pains to assert the moral implications of the beautiful—Hegel (1975a) asserts a different vocation of art:

[T]o unveil the truth in the form of sensuous artistic configuration, to set forth the reconciled opposition just mentioned (between the particular and universal), and so to have its end and aim in itself, in this very setting forth and unveiling. For other ends, like instruction, purification, bettering, financial gain, struggling for fame and honour, have nothing to do with the work of art as such, and do not determine its nature. (55)

The entire scope of Hegel’s further theorization of aesthetics—regarding symbolism in art, the differentiation between the Classical and Romantic arts, etc.—is too great to discuss here. Still, it is perhaps enough here to simplify that in Hegel’s schematization, beauty (the ideal) corresponds to excellence; excellence corresponds to freedom. Art, as he said, is a means by which man can pursue freedom via the beautiful. Music is, Hegel (1975b) suggests, very suitable for this: “Now if in general we may regard activity in the realm of the beautiful as a liberation of the soul, as freedom from oppression and restrictedness…music carries this liberation to the most extreme heights” (895-6). Hegel rigorously theorized that music—even wordless music—has the ability to be a genuine art if it “becomes a spiritually adequate expression in the sensuous medium of
sounds and their varied counterpoint…” (Ibid., 902). Music, then, has the difficult job of expressing a unity of spiritual content and shape in the medium of sound that, by feeling, confronts spirit with itself.

Like all arts, music became implicated in the cult of Bildung. This association of art with the divine manifest in the 19th century as a social phenomenon wherein the privileged and educated bourgeoisie class (Bildungsbürgertum) adopted the attitude that access to art education and experiences differentiated classes and reinforced class structures (Savage 2005). Such an attitude helped to develop a Romantic art religion that valorized art works—be they music, sculpture, painting, etc.—as aesthetically autonomous objects that, according to their degree of beauty, transcended the immanent. Quoting Hegel’s Phänomenologie des Geistes, Reinhart Koselleck (2002) notes that in Hegel’s view, “it is the task of precisely…Bildung to perceive and alleviate alienation in order to mediate reality and self-awareness. How much ‘reality and power’ an individual gets thus depends on his (sic) Bildung” (186). To some degree, then, Kant’s and Hegel’s aesthetic theories have become implicated in the validation of social stratification, the canonization of art works of all kinds, and the rationalization of privileged arts institutionalization. Moreover, socially-normalized understandings of the metaphysical dignity of great music charged burgeoning musicology in the German academy (Musikwissenschaft) with an often Neo-Platonist and tautological importance. The canon of “great” works developed in the nineteenth century was, in effect, great for being great by the terms it had, in this critical and social context, simultaneously invented and apotheosized. Furthermore, beauty was cast as non-conceptual, disinterested, self-referential, and ultimately divorced from knowledge or understanding in the world.
The division between high and low culture normalized in this time and allowed this theoretical structure to maintain dominance until the ascendancy of postmodernity in the mid-twentieth century—and still has a long, slowly dissipating shadow. With the advent of avant-garde, experimental, and popular music studies, earlier analytic markers of greatness (formal unity, organicism, etc.) became insufficient to address the import of more experimental or popular musics; the postmodern turn in musicology ensued. From this discussion of aesthetic theories generated by various strains of idealism, I now move to an introductory discussion of philosophical hermeneutics and its relevance to music study in the shadow of idealism—and postmodernity.

**Recovering Aesthetic Judgment as the Grounding Possibility of Knowledge**

Though first developed in theological scholarship in reference to Bible exegesis and later adopted in philological studies, it was Friedrich Schleiermacher that recast hermeneutics as a “science” or “art” of understanding. His work aimed to develop a general theory of hermeneutics whose principles might serve as a foundation for all kinds of textual interpretation. This move freed hermeneutics from any particular discipline and allowed Wilhelm Dilthey, Schleiermacher’s biographer, to further develop hermeneutics into a generally historically-oriented theory of understanding (Palmer 1969, 40-1). Not until Martin Heidegger’s (1962) assertion that ‘Being’ is “disclosed in the understanding-of-Being which belongs to existent Dasein as a way in which it understands,” (488) was hermeneutic theory again recast as the mode of inquiry into the mode of being of Dasein. The introduction of hermeneutic phenomenology into music study recovers the relationship between aesthetic judgment and understanding that had been denied or obfuscated in aesthetic theory influenced by idealism and,
in an inversion of that, uncritically assumed by postmodern musicology. To be sure, the reality of music’s complicity in ideological deformation is real, but as Roger Savage (2010) reminds us: “Music’s and art’s disappearance into the recesses of the struggle for position and power is not the final word. Beyond the presumed collusion of aesthetics with politics, the power of a work to give direction to the human will calls for judgment (phronesis) in those situations in which we find ourselves” (148). Giving credit to the significance of Blacking’s idea of the “musical human” discussed in Chapter Two, this approach frees music from its confinement to the machinations of ideological reproduction, ethnographic anecdote, or folk psychology, and sets it in a larger frame that better theoretically supports the many otherwise-anecdotally-asserted modes through which humans push at the boundaries of their understanding.

Though generating different philosophical lexicons in building their respective aesthetic models, both Gadamer and Ricoeur engage the ontological position forwarded by Martin Heidegger: that we exist understandingly; as meaning makers, hermeneuts. As described by Robert E. Palmer (1969):

Hermeneutics as a theory of understanding is, in consequence, really a theory of ontological disclosure. Since human existing is itself a process of ontological disclosure, Heidegger will not allow us to see the hermeneutical problem apart from human existing. Hermeneutics in Heidegger, then, is a fundamental theory of how understanding emerges in human existence. His analysis weds hermeneutics to existential ontology and to phenomenology, and it points to a ground for hermeneutics not in subjectivity but in the facticity of world and in the historicality of understanding. (137)

In Heidegger’s theory of being-as-understanding, a subject’s inherence in a world comprises a constant engagement in the process of meaning-making—the “hermeneutic circle.” This engagement is what ultimately builds and maintains the symbolically-charged worlds by
which subjects make sense of themselves and the symbols they encounter. Both Gadamer and Ricoeur argue that the transfiguring power of art works lies in our interaction with them. This can occasion a transcendence within immanence, an epoché manifesting as a recession from the “real.” However, differing from that reduction employed by Tenney in his deployment of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, this recession does not occur outside of time or context but is temporal and immanent. As such, once our encounter with the work has passed and we return to the exigencies of the “real” world, we may find our understanding of it to be refigured or transformed.

Part of the project of philosophical hermeneutics is the recovery of aesthetic judgment as the grounding possibility of knowledge against Kant’s subjectivization of aesthetics described above. Gadamer (1994) writes:

> The fact that through a work of art a truth is experienced that we cannot attain any other way constitutes the philosophic importance of art, which asserts itself against all attempts to rationalize it away. Hence, together with the experience of philosophy, the experience of art is the most insistent admonition to scientific consciousness to acknowledge its own limits. (xxiii)

Both Gadamer and Ricoeur’s reflections on aesthetic experience trade on Heidegger’s notion of “meaningfulness” (*Bedeutsamkeit*) as a primordial characteristic of humanity’s ontological ground. Palmer (1969) notes that, “[a]s such, it [the character of meaningfulness] provides the ontological possibility that words can have meaningful signification; it is the basis for language.” This does not mean, though, that meaning is generated only in our relationship to language, rather, “meaningfulness is something deeper than the logical system of language; it is founded on something prior to language and embedded in the world—the relational whole” (135).

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44 In this never-finished, self-reflexive process, the whole of a subjects’ understanding receives its definition from the parts, and, reciprocally, the parts can only be understood in reference to the whole.
Understood this way, aesthetic experiences occasioned by music can affect performers and listeners meaningfully, pre-conceptually, before experiences are brought to the level of discursive, conceptual thought. This is resonant with Eugene Gendlin’s ratification of “gut” feelings and “hunches” as described in Chapter Three as well as Mark Johnson’s assertion that meaning-making is a relationship between aspects of sense experience (the aesthetic), bodily states, and conceptual knowledge.45

Furthermore, the capability of encounters with music to refigure a subjects’ horizon of understanding implies that said encounters are engaged in a process of worldmaking, one that supports the idea that musical experiences can be initiators of change and resistance. However, as Savage (2010) reminds us, these experiences occur first in that field of meaningfulness that is pre-political:

This distancing relation precedes any subsequent political investment in music and art. (Both the effort to mobilize art in the interest of politics, and critiques aimed at demystifying hidden political agendas forget, or overlook, this fact) . . . Dissembling representations of hegemonic power relations, gendered identities, etc., are in this respect the negative correlate of the heuristic value of cultural works. No one doubts that cultural works reinforce beliefs and practices in the interest of preserving an existing hierarchical order. At the same time, the meaning, value, and even efficacy cultural works have cannot simply be reduced to the ideological phenomenon’s dissimulating function. (141)

Understood this way, it is on that open field of meaning where understanding (and its relationship to the construction and maintenance of identity) is consistently available for augmentation and refiguration. Before going on to relate the work of imagination to ideology and utopia, I consider Gadamer’s characterization of the play of interpretation and Ricoeur’s “productive mimesis.” Both of these ideas work to explain how our intentional engagement with

45 While “affect theory” is implicated by this appeal to non-discursive and embodied knowledge, my project is not prepared to engage with the complex matrix of theoretical worlds implicated therein. When using the term “affect,” I do so in a general, non-discursive manner un-related to other theoretical deployments of the term.
aesthetic experiences—regardless of structure or social situation—might affect subjects’ self-understanding.

“Play” and “Productive Mimesis”

Investigating the mode by which works of art have their being—apart from their structural characteristics—Gadamer (1994) identifies a clue to the ontology of the work of art in the “play” of a subject’s engagement therewith. “…[T]he human sciences are connected to modes of experience that lie outside science: with the experiences of philosophy, of art, and of history itself. These are all modes of experience in which a truth is communicated that cannot be verified by the methodological means proper to science” (xxii). By this turn, Gadamer recovers aesthetic experience as a means of non-propositional practical understanding about the world capable of destabilizing ideological closure. Gadamer’s idea of play is not selfsame as the above-described Kantian idea of beauty as free play between the understanding and imagination. Rather, Gadamer’s phenomenological description of play is a subject’s temporal activity of interacting with a work—what he describes as the to-and-fro movement that brings play to self-presentation (Ibid., 105). The act of play, Gadamer says, is disinterested but serious:

[I]n playing, all those purposive relations that determine active and caring existence have not simply disappeared, but are curiously suspended. The player knows that play is only play and that it exists in a world determined by seriousness of purposes. But he (sic) does not know this in such a way that, as a player, he (sic) actually intends this relation to seriousness. Play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself (sic) in play. (Ibid., 102)

Moreover, Gadamer’s characterization of art pits “knowledge” in the discursive sense against “understanding” in the affectual sense. Experience, he argues, is non-reducible to description. This is an important insight, as it points toward an ontology of openness and denies the possibility of ideological domination effected by knowledge leveraged by instrumental reason.
Also working in the tradition of philosophical hermeneutics, Paul Ricoeur (1998) suggests that art works have the capacity to powerfully affect individuals: “…[I]t is in this that the creativity of art exists, penetrating the world of everyday experience in order to rework it from inside” (173). This assertion is important in that it situates the significance of works of art as rooted in the immanent rather than metaphysical or transcendental realms. Furthermore, our interactions with artworks resist positivist reduction and display a character of inexhaustible and changing signification. When we encounter a work of art,

[w]e are in the presence of an intention to signify that goes far beyond the event and seeks to gather together all of the aspects that will be dispersed in descriptions…[t]here is in the work the capacity to make all these aspects even denser, to intensify them in condensing them. And in speaking of this we can only distribute the polysemy along the different and diverging axes of language. The work alone gathers them together. (Ibid., 172)

In this way, the work of art has an effect comparable to that of metaphor: integrating levels of signification that are overlaid, preserved, and contained together. The work of art, then, bares properties which otherwise would remain invisible and unexplored. Whereas Gadamer (1994) called this character of works the surplus of the activity of play (103), Ricoeur (1991) characterizes it as the productively mimetic work of productive refiguration. The working of the work on the real described above expresses the capacity of art works to restructure a subject’s world with an augmented intertextuality that ultimately can occasion a surplus of meaning.

In his essay “Mimesis and Representation,” Ricoeur (1991) shows how the transfiguring nature of art works might be understood by the mediating, temporal function of mimesis “to lead the text from one side to the other, to transfigure the one side into the other by its configurating power” (139). Encounters with works occur in the practical field wherein interactions with them might intervene to augment a subjects’ practical understanding. Describing a means by which to conceive of the subjects’ interaction with a work, Ricoeur offers a three-stage schematization of
mimesis. This is composed of mimesis\(_1\) as the pre-configuration of the world before its encounter with the work, mimesis\(_2\) as the retreat from the real wherein, via play, the work re-configures the world, and mimesis\(_3\) as the return to a new, transfigured world. Understood this way, we can see how, for Ricoeur, the temporally-situated poetic character of aesthetic experiences occasioned by art works have the power to overturn expectations, connect changing narratives, and alter a subject’s horizon of understanding.

DeLio’s (1981) quote with which I open this chapter is not specifically related to Gadamer or Ricoeur (in the quoted article he refers to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenologically informed teleology of the open work), but his description resonates with the idea of the hermeneutic circle’s process of meaning-making: “…both the work and the world emerge not as circumscribed objects, but as circumscribing…event[s] which embodies the world in flux” (361) This is further echoed in Gadamer’s reflections on how our play with aesthetic experiences can refigure our horizons of understanding and Ricoeur’s reflections on the power of productive-mimesis. But what this study requires is the explicit methodological ability to further situate what Tenney had called the “new musical materials” and their affective efficacy with the concerns of ideology and utopia as deployed in musicological discourse.

**Relating Philosophical Hermeneutics to Experimental Music**

By the logic of postmodern musicological methods, experimental music practices’ implication in social structuring must already infer its social meaning. By their implication in a kind of political resistance (by some relation to (anti)materialist, neoliberal, or otherwise realities), non-conventional musics are often understood as counter-cultural but somehow critical and productive. However, I am not interested simply in the assumption of music’s collusion with
or resistance to ideology or counter-culture, but rather in how those musics that are so “other” in their silence or lack of conventional musical signifiers are still somehow implicated in listeners’ construction of the meaningful worlds they inhabit. This points to my organizing thesis thus far: that it is our intentional attention to sound (listening) that has the power to reorganize our understanding of our spaces of experience and to reorient our relationship to our horizons of expectation. Such a realization—so rigorously supported by philosophical hermeneutics—offers a grounding for the assumptions already informing contemporary, postmodern (ethno)musicology.

The double implication of music in the ideological deformation of social reality as well as its imaginative refiguring is paramount in postmodern musicological method. Philosophical hermeneutics surpasses this possible contradiction, explaining that a subject’s horizons of understanding resists closure in spite of ideological domination; that a utopic hope for a position outside of ideologically inscribed topographies is always held out. The totality of ideological concretization (characterized by the ontologically-closed assertions of Adorno’s ([1966] 1973) *Negative Dialectics* and its dogmatic negation of truth and utopia) is denied and utopia placed in a dialectic with ideology via their mutual reliance on imagination. Recognizing musical phenomena not as things but as aesthetic experiences that engage with the poetic core of social reality, philosophical hermeneutics implicates music in the never-finished process whereby subjects construct their worlds and know themselves therein. Therefore, music’s seemingly conflicted relationship to ideology and utopia is understood not as one or the other, but as

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46 The recognition of ideology as concealment and distortion cannot be a skeptical totalizing characterization of all social reality, but rather points to the role of imagination and the character of ideology as a wedge between material reality and represented reality: “the gap between the unactual (sic) representation in general (religious, political, juridical, ethical, aesthetic, etc.) and the actuality of the life-process” (Ricoeur 1976, 18). This implies ideology in the social imaginary, but also implies subjects’ capacity of looking beyond the scope of ideological structuring.
implicated in a dialectic that relates the two. This is the dialectic Reinhart Koselleck (2004) has characterized between the metahistorical categories of the “space of experience” and the “horizon of expectation” that frame subjects’ experience in the world, showing the concepts of ideology and utopia to be mutually inflecting. Our expectations draw a future that is the product of the configuration of individual and collective experiences, “the one is not to be had without the other. No expectation without experience; no experience without expectation” (257).

This frames the interpretive logic of what Roger Savage (2015a) characterizes as the age of hermeneutical reason and indicates a subject’s refusal either to accede to the pretense to posit itself as the master of meaning or to succumb to the allure of suspicion and doubt in the quest for justice and freedom (10). Rather, the hermeneutical subject acknowledges its being in an open ontology that denies self-foundational claims and trusts in the capacity of imagination to address entrenched social challenges. Furthermore, this position recognizes the transfiguring power of aesthetic experience in facilitating the ability of social actors to intervene in the course of things, asserts the relevance of imagination in continually refiguring subject’s horizon of understanding, and recognizes that exemplary works invite subjects to “think more” and reflectively act to address normalized deleterious social realities. Such an understanding throws the productivity of the synthetic imagination (articulated by Kant) and its capacity to refigure a subject’s horizon of understanding into high relief. By this logic, I refocus the conversation about musical experimentalism from one regarding its means of composition, production, or the sounds and silences themselves to one more concerned with the work of attention and intention.

This study implicates experimental music practices in the intervention made by the hermeneutical turn: that which recognizes these aesthetic practices as engaging with a tension

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47 Paraphrasing a statement by Ricoeur (1992) in *Oneself as Another*. 
between the will to deny the reality of subjects’ self-mastery in an ultra-plural world, while simultaneously abstaining from nihilism. I will demonstrate that experimental music practices, while aesthetically challenging, have their potential affectual efficacy via the same principles that engage subjects’ imaginations in more conventional musical practices. The significance of musical experimentalism cannot be exhaustively characterized by its negative relationship to the ideological inscription of consumer culture, nor is it blithely utopian. Rather, it is characterized by its engagement with the process of building understanding and the constructivist disavowal of self-substantive apodictic “truths” in the objective sense.

In the experimental music community, a seemingly stalled or protracted cognitive process that never “arrives” is often the point of a work; its lack of closure. This demonstrates both experimentalism’s promise and its challenge. In its veneration of the open horizon of the as if promised by aesthetic experience, it engages judgment in play but is often confounded before it can commit to reflectively act on a refigured state of affairs. This would not be a failing if it were a truly autonomous activity and was not situated in social, cultural, and economic realities informed by histories of inequity and oppression. It is true for any artistic practice that, if the different thinking and feeling occasioned by its works do not result in different acting, any persistence of substantial influence in the world is difficult to maintain. This is the greatest stumbling block for a community such as that in Los Angeles, brought together by an experimental music tradition bound between a history of aesthetic and political refusal, institutional legitimization, and the material struggle to thrive counter to established cultural and economic values. The community’s shared identification with conceptual openness is idealistic and fragile, especially as it is situated in cultural and economic systems characterized by instrumental reason and systems of epistemic closure.
In the coming chapters I describe a musico-historical field in Los Angeles that contextualizes the contemporary DIY experimental music scene, and then the scene itself as I found it during my fieldwork in 2016. The chapters that follow deploy those observations as a case study as I explore the implications of the above-described model for experimental music’s efficacy among the epistemological assumptions of Bourdieusian sociology of music and postmodern theories that relate cultural production to socially-constructed structures of feeling.
Chapter Five: Historical Precedents of Musical Experimentalism in Los Angeles

We [Los Angeles] made another Transformers movie last year—no one gives a shit about our weird music...But there’s a lot going on here. It’s really great, but people aren’t really documenting it or asking about it. We’re not getting any press coverage. But this stuff [experimental music] is happening here and it’s better than a lot of places. And it’s a better scene. It’s a more active scene. There’s more interesting people, and it’s got this super long history...It’s not very well documented or even respected...because there’s a sort of assumption that something can’t come from LA that’s not, you know, pornography or mainstream cinema.

– William Hutson (interview, 29 August 2016)

Hutson is right: Los Angeles’ experimental music community is under-represented in scholarly research, has no fan culture, and is often maligned in media (if acknowledged at all). In spite of its legacy and influential connection to other artistic communities of the world, musical experimentalism is hidden in the shadow of Los Angeles’ dominant culture industry of mainstream media production. The scene’s plurality of aesthetic strategies and the inconspicuousness of its spread-out locations make any attempt to draw a circle around who does and who does not represent the experimental music scene in Los Angeles, or even where said scene exists geographically, feel Sisyphean. There are a few general characteristics that I will note, but due to the radically disintegrated and de-centered nature of the city itself—which is more like an archipelago of smaller cities and towns connected by a sprawling freeway system from the desert to the sea—there is no centralized geographic point of meeting or practice. Mike Davis (1990) observed that competing accretions of cultural institutions in Los Angeles (and accompanying cultural capital) have taken place in Downtown Los Angeles as well spaces on the west side of the city (71). Since the publishing of Davis’ now classic rumination on Los Angeles in 1990, gentrification has continued in more central and eastern neighborhoods, including Silver Lake, Echo Park, Highland Park, Eagle Rock, Glendale, and, most recently, Frogtown (Elysian...
Fields). This gentrification of the near east side has promoted a proliferation of performance venues, art galleries, and cafes that sometimes host experimental music outside of more familiar downtown or west-side spaces. And while most of Los Angeles’ universities are still clustered near downtown and on the west side (save for Occidental College in the Eagle Rock neighborhood), these groupings of universities, libraries, and museums and their concomitant performing arts spaces maintain tenuous relationships to one another. Contemporary DIY venues tend to exist in undesirable neighborhoods with relatively inexpensive spaces and flexible zoning laws. Hence, the churning logic of Los Angeles’ gentrification produces a constant ebb and flow of just where DIY spaces can exist to foster the experimental music scene. This is reflected not only in the variance of spaces (lofts, basements, theaters, etc.), but also where performers and listeners reside, and ultimately in who performs and listens where.48

But before detailing the spaces and people that make up the contemporary DIY experimental music scene in Los Angeles, I want to offer a few broad strokes describing the experimentalisms that have blazed trails in the city’s urban wilderness. I begin with two neatly presented (artificially-so) vignettes about Afrological and Eurological experimentalism in the early and mid-twentieth-century. These are far from exhaustively representative, but they help in beginning to sketch histories and influences. I deploy Ornette Coleman and Horace Tapscott as metonyms for the Afrological, while Henry Cowell’s New Music Society, John Cage, and La Monte Young stand in for the Eurological.

48 Because of this mutable nature, the maintenance of a personal presence in the scene is something of a full-time job for performers and listeners alike. The proliferation of social media for the advertisement of events and performances at DIY and pop-up performance spaces has helped to mediate this de-centeredness, with platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter helping to keep participants in the know of shows in real time as they are planned and advertised.
Afrological Experimentalist Precedents in Los Angeles

The Afrological tradition of experimentalism in Los Angeles is traceable to its roots in the cultural scene surrounding Central Avenue in the 1950s. A mecca for Black musicians, nightlife, and culture in mid-twentieth-century Los Angeles, Central Avenue was a melting pot of styles that fostered the blues, swing, R&B, bebop, and more. Densely populated by African-Americans drawn to Los Angeles for its promise of available work and good living conditions, Central Avenue shone as a beacon of culture for locals and travelers. It was this scene that attracted the young saxophonist and composer Ornette Coleman when he arrived from Texas as well as those musicians that would compose his band of locals and transplants: Don Cherry, Ed Blackwell, and Charlie Haden. The jazz music being played on Central Avenue was not the safer, whiter alternative to bebop called “West Coast Cool Jazz” for which Los Angeles was becoming known by the export of its commercial cultural production. Rather, it was full-blooded, sweet, raucous, and community-oriented Black music. In lieu of a full overview of Black music in Los Angeles, which would likely be a foolhardy and incomplete attempt by any standard, I offer here brief histories of Ornette Coleman’s and Horace Tapscott’s work in Los Angeles.\(^{49}\)

During the 1950s, Ornette Coleman’s experimental improvisational music became an important branch of Black musical experimentalism in Los Angeles, along with other Black Los Angeles experimentalists Eric Dolphy, Charles Mingus, Billy Higgins, and Horace Tapscott. Their musical outputs, while respectively unique, were indicative of a greater national movement.

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of Black artists to create works that were increasingly emancipated from Western, white influence. In the case of Coleman, this emancipation took shape in his revolutionary compositional and improvisational approach preserved in his first recordings as a leader, *Something Else!!!!* (1958), *Tomorrow is the Question!* (1959a), *The Shape of Jazz to Come* (1959b), and *Change of the Century* (1959c). While all were recorded in Los Angeles and seemed to point the way for a new aesthetic to emerge, Ornette and his band were lured away from the city to denser and perhaps more experimentally-minded scene in New York City for a now (in)famous residency at the Five Spot, not long after followed by Dolphy and Mingus. Coleman’s music was not commercially viable as its harmonic and rhythmic subversions and soloistic manifestations of the improviser’s personality challenged (and continue to challenge) conventional musical standards. This rebellious, Afrological sensibility reaches back through the Black American experience. George Lewis (1996) notes: “The nonconformist, interstitial reality of jazz exists in its in-between-ness: between commercialism and experimentalism, between Western concert music and entertainment” (95). Furthermore, this experimentalist, counter-commercial music was based in an approach which—while referencing its forebears of the blues, R&B, and bebop—was indeed something challenging, something else. Regarding the subversive nature of Coleman’s music, LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) (1963) wrote: “What these musicians have done, basically, is to restore to jazz its valid separation from, and anarchic disregard of, Western popular forms” (225).

The founder of another important branch of Black experimentalism in Los Angeles, the composer/trombonist/pianist Horace Tapscott, had his musical education along Central Avenue in the 1950s. While receiving an education at Jefferson High School—along with his contemporaries Eric Dolphy, Don Cherry, and other to-be-influential Angelenos—Tapscott
remembered his greatest education coming from local musicians playing in clubs along Central Avenue such as Art Tatum, Red Callender, Billie Holiday, Jimmy Lunceford’s band, Fletcher and Horace Henderson (Bryant 1998, 292). Reflecting the socially-oriented nature of Afrological experimentalism, the local Black musicians union 767 (before the integration of the Black Local 767 and white Local 47 in 1953) offered another fecund educational scene. The young Tapscott, though too young to join, received informal training there from Gerald Wilson, Gil Fuller (a writer for Dizzy Gillespie), John Anderson, and others. Eschewing a formal education at Juilliard School of Music that was in the cards, Tapscott considered SWU—Sidewalk University—the best atmosphere in which to learn (Ibid., 293).

Central Avenue was the place to see and be seen, regardless of race. “In those days, it was “chic” for members of the Hollywood movie community to visit the Alabam and Joe Morris’ Plantation Club,” Bette Yarbrough Cox (1993) writes:

“Some of the showgirls used their obvious talents along with their natural wiles to capture glitter and gold. In addition, the clients often pursued the young women. The racist attitudes and laws that were prevalent in Los Angeles during this era make the case that open fraternization of whites with African American sled to the political and police pressure which ultimately closed down Central Avenue. In addition,…policemen were harassing whites who were intermingling with people of color, and considered it unacceptable behavior” (88).

While the Central Avenue scene disintegrated in the late 50s, due to restrictive white-supremacist housing covenants, commercial zoning changes, and racist police abuse (Davis 1990, 64; Yang 2002), Tapscott recognized the need for community-building art institutions. He went on in the early 1960s to organize the influential and experimentally minded Pan Afrikan People’s Arkestra as well as the larger umbrella group, the Union of God’s Musicians and Artists Ascension (UGMAA) in Los Angeles’ Watts neighborhood.
Important African-American experimentalists that would collaborate whenever passing through town included Rahsaan Roland Kirk as well as Sun Ra, whose own Arkestra would sometimes share bills with Tapscott’s. Regarding the name, Tapscott (2001) suggested that, as the music drew from African peoples around the world - and Arkestra being built off of “Ark,” the Arkestra was a means of preserving Pan-Africanism. Sometimes referring to it as the mothership, he stated: “The mothership was the Ark, the vessel that saves the music after the forty-day flood of commercialism” (178).

It is not difficult to connect Tapscott’s attitude to Pan-African and Afrofuturist movements in which we see similar ideas: from Sun Ra’s assertion that space it the place, to George Clinton and Parliament’s mythology that produced Mothership Connection (1975) a decade later. These musics continued to skirt the lines between entertainment, commercialism, and an attendant escapism with a kind of identity-defining Utopic imagination that went on to put modal, free, and experimental jazz aesthetics in conversation with funk, soul, and R&B.

Tapscott’s community music programs were never solely performance oriented. Rather, he and others used the music as a means of organizing and educating young people. He organized rehearsals and educational programs at local schools such as Foshay Junior High School, Dorsey High, and Locke High as well as at UC Riverside and other universities. The precedents set by Tapscott’s community music programs—that of producing a kind of local “music by us for us” that incorporated agency-affirming improvisation with utopic ideation—are directly traceable in the contemporary popular, but experimentally-leaning musics of Los Angeles musicians Flying Lotus, Thundercat, Kamasi Washington, Terrace Martin, and others.

Though I am making distinctions between Afrological and Eurological experimental musical sensibilities, it is important to reinforce that these tropes are not monolithic, just as the
notion of race or “Blackness” is not monolithic. In spite of the demonstrable characterization of differing sensibilities, it is instructive to note ways in which the music of some African American musicians in mid-twentieth-century Los Angeles transcended these characterizations. In demonstration, I turn briefly to bassist and composer Charles Mingus and reedist and composer Eric Dolphy who, as young African American musicians growing up in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, engaged in the intermingling of musical sensibilities - if not always musics that might be understood as experimental in terms of this project.

Mingus was born in 1922, a portentous year for modernism and mixed avant-gardes. Though born in Nogales, Arizona, his family moved to the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles in 1923, finding a residence near Sabato Rodia’s famous outsider art project, the Watts Towers. With blue eyes and pale skin, his father, Charles Mingus Sr. could pass for white. His mother had a Black mother and a Chinese father born in Hong Kong (Gabbard 2016, 14-5). In spite of his mixed background, Charles Mingus Jr. identified as African American. In spite of this and the complex field of racialized politics and socio-economic power relations the family inhabited, Mingus’ father encouraged his children to think of themselves a superior to the African American men and women of Watts (Ibid., 25). One means of symbolically separating them pursued by Mingus Sr. was to invest in white, Euro-American cultivated musical traditions with classical music constantly on the family radio. Furthermore, young Charles and his sisters were encouraged in their studies of cello, piano, and violin.

Throughout his life, Mingus’ own compositional style was thoroughly inspired by the music of Duke Ellington and the constellation of Black American musics. However, his study

Kevin Jackson’s Constellation of Genius: 1922: Modernism Year One (2012) locates in this year a remarkable density of modernist works, ideas, and events; the publication of T.S. Eliot’s “The Wasteland,” James Joyce’s Ulysses, the opening of King Tutankhamen’s tomb, and Robert J. Flaherty’s “ethnographic” film, Nanook of the North for example.
and admiration of European classical music is notable in much of his work. To Mingus, many of the distinctions made between jazz and classical music were at best arbitrary at best, if not deleterious to jazz music’s valuation. Writing to critic Ralph Gleason in 1951, Mingus stated: “Charlie Parker is in his own way creating complex, clearly thought-out compositions of melodic line every time he plays a solo, as surely as one as ever written down by Brahms or Chopin or Tchaikovsky…Those who have always separated the two into jazz and classical will finally see that it’s all one music we’re playing and what they’ve been buying is just the confusion out of the separation of the two” (Gleason 1951, 7). Outside the sophistication of his writing for small (sometimes not so small) group jazz, this attitude is evidenced in Mingus’ Third Stream compositions such as “Revelations, First Movement,” performed at a 1957 festival of Third Stream music at Brandeis University in Massachusetts. Alongside avant-garde composer Milton Babbitt’s serial work for piano “All Set” (performed by Bill Evans), Gunther Schuller’s orchestral work “Transformations,” and others, “Revelations, First Movement” combined classical and jazz sensibilities for an augmented classical orchestra instrumentation.

However, as evidenced by his “Open Letter to the Avant-Garde” that appeared in Changes Magazine in 1973, Mingus, while a restless innovator, had a conservative streak. From his comments, it is clear that he demanded rigorous study and knowledge of the music’s tradition before he believed one could convincingly push at its boundaries. Regarding the dilettantism he perceived in the experimentalism—which he refers to as avant-garde—of free jazz and New Thing, he levies this criticism: “[M]ost of the ones who do play avant-garde can't play a straight melody and solo on it with the approximate changes.” Speaking to the work of experimental pianist Cecil Taylor as a further example, he said: “I don't know, I've never had a chance to hear him right, I've only heard him when he's plucking inside the piano. I don't listen much to the so-

In his own intermingling of musical sensibilities, virtuoso saxophonist, clarinetist, and flutist Eric Dolphy demonstrated mastery of jazz’s harmonic and rhythmic traditions, transcending them through the development of his own musical language. Coming of age working in the Central Avenue scene with mainstream jazz and R&B acts, Dolphy became an esteemed sideman and leader. Dolphy also saw the connections between the sophistication of European Classical music, jazz, bebop, and the Euro-American avant-gard. One of the many musical directions he pursued, this one led, among other things, to a concert of Experimental Music and Jazz at the Ojai Festival in the spring of 1962. Opening with Dolphy’s performance of Varesé’s *Density 21.5* (1936), the rest of the concert included works by John Cage and Luciano Berio, with performances by Berio himself as well as Cathy Berberian, Lukas Foss, Jean Cunningham, and Morton Subotnik (Simosko and Tepperman 1971, 68). And Dolphy was not alone in his interest in varied musical sensibilities. Two years earlier in mid-May of 1960, he and Ornette Coleman appeared playing Gunther Schuller’s Third Stream music as part of the final program in the Jazz Profiles series at the Circle in the Square Theater in New York City (Simosko and Tepperman 1971, 45). As is further demonstrated by the musical intermingling engaged in by La Monte Young I describe below, it is clear that many agreed with Mingus that it is all one music, and imposed distinctions are often arbitrary at best, if not deleterious.

**Eurological Experimentalist Precedents in Los Angeles**

Traces of what could be termed the Eurological tradition of experimentalism and improvisation can be found in Los Angeles’ musical avant-gardism of the early twentieth
century. The city’s universities regularly employed both European and American composers and theorists, and its bourgeois population supported the Los Angeles Philharmonic as early as 1919. Furthermore, whereas many African-Americans moved to Los Angeles for the promise of jobs and potential relief from the entrenched racism of the East, for many white artists, the lure of Southern California was endless summer and freedom from proscriptive and conservative American attitudes. Already socially-privileged individuals interested in alternative lifestyles and self-determination found Los Angeles a breeding ground for ways of living that fostered a certain “experimentalism.” As examples, I here offer brief histories of the New Music Society, John Cage, and La Monte Young.51

Early institutional glimmerings of Eurological experimentalism in Los Angeles—or, rather, the musical avant-garde that eventually birthed experimentalism—were fostered by composer/theorist Henry Cowell with the founding of his New Music Society in 1925. The music programmed for the first concert was that of American and European “ultra modernists” including Carl Ruggles, Edgard Varèse, Leo Ornstein, and Dane Rudhyar. While apparently well attended by a large and fashionable high-society community, the experimental compositional practices of bi-tonality, tone clusters, dissonances, non-traditional sounds, etc., were not well received; the New Music Society moved to San Francisco only a year later (Mead 1982, 451). Though no longer in Los Angeles, the New Music Society continued to offer concerts for the eleven years of its existence (1925-1936) and organized New Music Workshops from 1933-1935 during which some of the music of the then-young John Cage was rehearsed.

51 Also riding the line between what I have been calling “avant-garde” and “experimental” are the important and influential (and Californian) works of Harry Partch, Lou Harrison, and (some decades later) Pauline Oliveros. Examinations of their thought-provoking musical explorations show them as precedents of the willingness of Californians to play with, question, and remake musical practices—and even instruments, for that matter.
Though often associated with New York City, Cage was born in Los Angeles in 1912. The Euro-American tenor of his training is traceable in his work in Los Angeles under Cowell and Schoenberg. Having left Los Angeles in the early 1940s seeking consistent work and commissions, John Cage arrived in New York City in 1942 after a stay in Chicago.

Another influential experimentalist often associated with New York City, La Monte Young has deep roots in Los Angeles. Before advancing to studies at UCLA, he attended John Marshall high school in South Los Angeles (sometimes playing saxophone and clarinet in bands alongside Eric Dolphy) and Los Angeles City College. While in high school, Young received music theory and composition training from Clyde Sorenson who himself had studied at UCLA with Schoenberg. Further bolstering his association with a Euro-American legacy of training, he studied Euro-American contemporary music with Leonard Stein (the long-time assistant to Schoenberg) and attended Karlheinz Stockhausen’s 1959 lectures at Darmstadt. Finally, after having relocated to New York City in 1960, he studied electronic music with Richard Maxfield at the New School for Social Research (Mertens [1980] 1983, 19). Young’s serial-oriented works of the late 1950s and his work with Fluxus in New York in the early 1960s were deeply influenced by his various training and experiences in Los Angeles. For example, his incorporation of improvisation in his indeterminate music consents to the agency of a performer’s contribution to inform the manifestation of a work. This is in contrast to the related idea of “realization” which often implies a more agency-less use of chance operations and speaks to the admixture of musical training and experiences he had in Los Angeles.

Cowell’s New Music Society, Cage, and Young all display what Cameron (1996) calls an organizing logic of musical apostasy and abandonment. Characterized as “[r]adical composers turned away from the materials and principles of tonal and post-tonal European music; they
threw over what had seemed inevitable as their musical inheritance” (5). And in abandoning those canonized western musical forms, modernist, avant-garde composers often looked to other cultures for inspiration: Henry Cowell to the Greeks; Lou Harrison to Indonesia. Still, many of the works of these avant-garde composers maintained the European “work concept”; that idea that shored up the divide between the inspiration of the genius composer and the worker of the performer manifesting his (and I mean “his”) genius.

Demonstrating the permeable boundaries of experimentalisms alluded to above in my discussion of Mingus and Dolphy, Young demonstrates the great intermingling of influences that would come to characterize the plurality of experimentalism in Los Angeles. In addition to his more formal studies noted above, Young differentiated himself from Cage and avant-garde-composers in the first half of the twentieth century by embracing improvisation, embracing the ego. While still in Los Angeles, he often studied and played jazz saxophone alongside African-American Los Angeles musicians Ornette Coleman, Eric Dolphy, Billy Higgins, and Don Cherry. But like so many others, La Monte Young, too, became a New Yorker, arriving in 1960 to find a geographically denser urbans space that presented a more immediately challenging cultural milieu.

Like the decline of the Los Angeles Black experimental scene, by the 1950s the white, Eurological, experimental scene was in decline due to the decentralized nature of the city that prohibited a critical mass of studios and gallery spaces, a general shift toward arts institutionalism to compete with major cultural centers in the East, and growing suspicion surrounding experimentalism stemming from associations of Europeans, intellectuals, and artists with the Communist party.52 Outside of institutional settings, since the 1960s, musical

52 This is perhaps most visible in the Hollywood entertainment industry blacklists fueled by the McCarthyism of the 1940s and 1950s.
experimentalism in Los Angeles has become increasingly rarified, though seemingly mutually exclusive sensibilities of musical experimentalism manage to inflect one another in spite of geographical and cultural barriers. In a pluralist mode informed by a mix of exposures, studies, and inclinations as was seen with La Monte Young, an interview with Alan Nakagawa illustrates just how a meeting of the worlds of Sidewalk University—in this case complements of Tapscott himself—and institutional education sometimes serves to intermingle experimental musical sensibilities in Los Angeles’ contemporary scene.

**Intermingling Musical Sensibilities: A Conversation with Alan Nakagawa**

An interview with Los Angeles native Alan Nakagawa was very informative regarding the overlapping spaces and crowds supporting the underground, punk, and experimental music scenes of the 1990s. An American of Japanese descent, Nakagawa has lived in the same home with his family in the Koreatown neighborhood much of his life. Having grown up and studied mostly in Los Angeles, he credits the influence of musician and community organizer Horace Tapscott and that of composer and teacher Carl Stone, a professor of Nakagawa’s at Otis Arts Institute of Parsons School of Design.

Horace Tapscott, it turned out, was a family acquaintance (Nakagawa’s aunt’s friend’s husband). Tapscott and his wife Cecilia would eat from time to time at Beni Basha, the Japanese restaurant owned and operated by Nakagawa’s parents on Olympic Boulevard in Koreatown. Whenever Tapscott visited, Alan would be allowed to sit with Horace who, characteristically, would teach him about connections between music, culture, and history. He educated Nakagawa about Langston Hughes, told him stories about the road, and also introduced him to the recording process. When Alan was in high school, Cecilia asked Alan’s parents if he’d be interested in
attending a recording session. Of course, the answer was “yes.” Alan got to visit Sunset Gower Studios in Hollywood where he observed Tapscott working with the engineers while they set up recordings with the Pan Afrikan Peoples Arkestra. He stayed for two hours and was completely overwhelmed with the implications of the recording studio; that every record he’d ever heard came from a similar room. Nakagawa later studied bebop drums as well as design and recording techniques. He credits Tapscott’s invitation to observe their recording session as life changing saying, “I owe him so much. I talk about him as much as I can because I’ll never be able to give him enough praise” (interview, 12 September 2016). This story is a fantastic example of the effectiveness of Tapscott’s approach toward cultivating both community and learning; the importance of Sidewalk University.

The influence of the institution via Carl Stone in Nakagawa’s career, too, shows the influence in Los Angeles’ experimental music community by way of the California Institute of the Arts. Stone studied at CalArts with Morton Subotnick and James Tenney. An electro-acoustic composer, Stone’s work often deploys techniques of collage and appropriation to re-contextualize disparate recorded materials. *Shibucho* (1984), for example, cleverly reconfigures samples from familiar songs out of the Motown catalog to dizzying effect. Nakagawa’s own practices often manifest as collages, be they sound or visual (or both). His long-running Collage Ensemble project continues to develop this theme in the social sphere by exploring collaborative production of visual and musical works with an ever-changing roster of artists. It is not surprising that, for Nakagawa, the relationship between listening and openness is at the core of his interest in visual and aural collage:

What is the mechanism of being tolerant? Well, one is to listen, right? Listen more than you talk, or, at least to let people talk. And to engage. Because by engaging, if you have different opinions about things, then you build a mutual understanding. But then your understanding changes. And so, how else are we
going to progress if we just keep ruminating in the same mindset and not advance with counter-mindsets? (interview, 12 September 2016)

**Precedents to the Contemporary DIY Scene in the 1970s-90s**

As William Hutson noted in the quote that opens this chapter, in spite of being underdocumented, Los Angeles’s community of experimental musicians and listeners has supported a multitude of influential DIY performance spaces for experimental music. Since the 1980s the shifting forms of capital and levels of investment circulating through Los Angeles’s cultural landscape have allowed venues and festivals to spring up and die away in rapid succession. Since the diverging moves toward conservatism and institutionalism of experimental arts initiated in the 1960s, independent musical experimentalists of all varieties have had to struggle to gain a foothold in Los Angeles’ shifting cultural and economic sands. Of the Los Angeles of the 1970s, Mike Davis (1990) notes:

> But the heroic moment of Underground Los Angeles Culture quickly passed . . . The local dearth of jazz clubs and modernist galleries/collectors irresistibly drove part of the late 1950s and early 1960s avant-garde (including L.A.’s *Artforum* magazine) to Manhattan (or, sometimes, in the case of experimental film and poetry, to San Francisco). After a student rebellion in 1966, Disney endowers moved Chouinard Art Institute, reborn as the California Institute of the Arts, to an isolated suburban fringe where their conservative proprietary interests would be maximized. Inner-city cultural institutions, meanwhile, were starved of financial support and media attention. (68)

Whatever did survive of the experimentalist impulse in Los Angeles was to emerge as a mix of the city’s Afrological and Eurological sensibilities. However, due to racial, socioeconomic and even geographic exigencies as well as issues of access and exposure, the most visible musical experimentalists making the cultural realities of Los Angeles experimentalism would be white males. On the popular front, this included rock musicians like Frank Zappa who consciously mingled influences from Eric Dolphy, Cecil Taylor, and Albert Collins with those from Charles
Ives, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Igor Stravinsky for ends of compositional complexity, social commentary, and scatological parody (Smith 1995, 35). In less commercial environs, the music of South Los Angeles pioneers Horace Tapscott, Bobby Bradford, and John Carter transcended the boundaries of neighborhoods.

By the 1970s, the influence of free and experimental jazz had found its way into local rock and experimental scenes in predominantly white communities in West Los Angeles. Alex (drums) and Nels (guitar) Cline along with their friend Lee Kaplan became proponents of free and avant-garde musics and, in their own musical searching, began to connect musical communities across racial lines. Kaplan went on to found an experimental music series at Century City Playhouse that, from 1976-81, presented major international artists such as Oliver Lake, John Zorn, Eugene Chadbourne, and Charlie Haden (Sharp 2008, 159-160). The series would serve as a connecting point for local musicians (including reedist Vinny Golia, then newly-relocated from New York City) with a platform for collaboration with visiting artists. By the early 1980s, The Independent Composers Association (ICA) had been formed with the purpose of providing a space for contemporary composers to share their work outside of the rarified institutional settings then available. Mostly composed of graduates of CalArts, the ICA’s “serious” comportment was a precursor to Los Angeles’ contemporary scene of musical experimentalists. The ICA’s “foil” was and continues to be the Los Angeles Free Music Society (LAFMS). Formed by Chip Chapman, Joe and Rick Potts, and Tom Recchion in 1974, the LAFMS and related bands such as Airway and Smegma deployed more open and performative

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53 Zappa’s obscure list of influences (often referred to simply as “The Freak Out! List”) printed in the gate-fold of *Freak Out!* (1966) served as a pre-internet-era Rosetta Stone for many seeking musics outside the mainstream. Its influence would only be surpassed by the “Nurse With Wound List” list published on British industrial/avant-garde band Nurse With Wound’s *Chance Meeting on a Dissecting Table of a Sewing Machine and an Umbrella* (1979).
styles relatable to contemporary punk and noise scenes.\footnote{William Hutson put it this way: “The LAFMS approached noise by being inept while trying to make surf rock…If you’re that bad at surf rock, it turns into noise” (interview, 29 August 2016).} Fulfilling the community-organizing work the Century City Playhouse series had earlier fulfilled, the California Outside Music Association (COMA) was formed in 1983 by Titus Levi and Eric Potruch. Taking action to increase the exposure of challenging musics, and perhaps influenced by the DIY punk scene, COMA wrote and distributed manifestos about musics on the fringes of commercial genres. More importantly, they worked to connect those fringes on common grounds, to circumvent cultural stagnation via the circulation of ideas until 1991 (Ibid., 303).

Nels Cline’s series at the Alligator Lounge in the early 1990s built a community that transcended boundaries of genre. On the edge of Santa Monica, Cline’s series called New Music Mondays featured Cline as MC and musical collaborator. With a growing reputation for diversity, on a Monday night one might hear famous guitarist Thurston Moore (Sonic Youth), free jazz saxophonist Charles Gayle, rock bands just starting out, or established trumpeter Bobby Bradford. Cline’s attitude was to broaden listeners’ musical horizons, to replace purism with pluralism. His booking attitude was about "a kind of skewed multiculturalism,” that could demonstrate for listeners “the effects of people hearing a lot of stuff—how it changed them, and how they didn't take the tried-and-true path and ended up with their own kind of music" (Burk 1994).

All of these precedents display an attitude of openness, but ultimately of one struggling to make connections and instantiate equity among the realities of well-established racially, gendered, and socioeconomically defined power dynamics. Further threatening any gains made by experimental communities in Los Angeles, neo-conservative political and economic changes in the 1990s would problematize processes of cultural production in the United States.
Culture Wars and Disruptions of Arts Funding in the 1990s

A palimpsest of an urban structure divided by socioeconomic, racial, and cultural lines, the hermetic experimental artistic communities that coalesce in Los Angeles’ shifting neighborhoods have long struggled to fund their activities. In what follows, I focus on the disruption in the funding systems of America’s National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) that in 1992 worked to make unconventional cultural production even more difficult to sustain. The Los Angeles riots of 1992 and the Northridge Earthquake occasioned further interruptions. Added to issues fomented by the continuing logic of urban gentrification, these events helped to create the dynamics of the contemporary experimental arts scene in Los Angeles, inhering in a tension between obscure DIY and mainstream institutionalization (a tension whose transformations of capital I explore more fully in Chapter Seven).

Previous to 1990 it had been commonplace for experimental artists in Los Angeles to seek funding from the federally funded arts promotion agency, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). For example, Kaplan’s series at the Century City Playhouse enjoyed $4,000 a year via a grant from the NEA (Sharp 2008, 155), Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) and the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art (LAICA) both received NEA funding, and Los Angeles clarinetist and composer John Carter received NEA support for performances of sections of Roots and Folklore in Santa Monica in 1989 (Ibid., 245). This all changed after 1989 when conservative politicians and leaders of Christian organizations objected to “obscene” works funded by NEA grants. It was Andres Serrano’s photograph, Immersion (Piss Christ), and Robert Mapplethorpe’s exhibition The Perfect Moment in particular that aroused the ire of conservatives. Serrano’s 1987 photograph depicts a crucifix submerged in a tank of the artist’s urine, while Mapplethorpe’s 1989 retrospective exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in
Washington, D.C. was to feature photos from the artist’s career, many of which feature interracial sexuality and homoeroticism. Though initially well-received in art circles when debuted in New York City, *Immersion (Piss Christ)* caused a stir when sensationalizing reporting brought to the public’s attention that the work was funded by NEA grants. Similarly, *The Perfect Moment* was canceled due to its controversial, “obscene” content and public outcry due to funding from the federally funded NEA (Kammen 1996, 791).

Objections initiated by conservative Christian groups regarding the public funding of “obscene” art, in addition to more formal political objections raised by Republican Senators Jesse Helms, Al D’Amato, and twenty-five other senators, would ultimately end in changes to the NEA’s peer review process of grant awarding. Vitriolic rhetoric of the “culture wars” in this period would reach a fever pitch with conservative groups attempting to sow fear of “progressive culture” in the American psyche. In reaction, the Bush-Quayle era Republican platform of 1992 wanted restricted federal funding of “obscene or blasphemous art” while the Democratic platform advocated unfettered federal funding for the arts. Liam Rector (1992) notes:

> To my knowledge this is the first time [that] funding for the arts has ever been mentioned in any platform statement. Big Bill Bennett, Lynne Chaney, Pat Buchanan, and Pat Robertson could all be seen veritably orgying over “family values” at the Republican convention in August. In a recent fundraising letter to 5,000 Iowa members of the Christian Coalition, Pat Robertson wrote: “The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism, and become lesbians.” (I. Kid. You. Not.) (106)

This attitude is an outgrowth of previous Reagan-era conservatism that, a few years earlier, had manifest in attempts at music censorship when the Parents Music Resource Center’s (PMRC) attempts to label or otherwise censor popular music it deemed obscene. While the personal concern of PMRC founders Tipper Gore (wife of Senator and later Vice President Al Gore),
Susan Baker (wife of Treasury Secretary James Baker), Pam Howar (wife of Washington realtor Raymond Howar), and Sally Nevius (wife of former Washington City Council Chairman John Nevius) is understandable, the political and commercial sway initiated by said concern approached an unconstitutional breach of the First Amendment. Culminating in a piece of political theater in September of 1985, a hearing before the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee backfired by inadvertently allowing musicians Frank Zappa, Dee Snider (Twisted Sister), and John Denver to offer erudite displays of rhetoric in their testimonies defending music as a platform of free speech and the detrimental effects of censorship on civil liberties. Still, in deference to puritanical demands and the growing tide of conservatism in America, the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) voluntarily agreed to label potentially offensive or controversial records with “Parental Advisory” labels.

Displaying a similar logic, beginning in March of 1990, NEA grantees received clauses in their agreements limiting them from producing work that might be considered obscene in the judgment of the NEA. Reagan-era defunding of the NEA (by 50% by the end of the 1980s) and a renewed focus away from experimentalism toward academic and “high” arts worked to further impede artistic expressions that might have been too critical, explanatory, “blasphemous,” or demonstrative of non-mainstream sexualities. The further erosion of First Amendment liberties in arts production funded by federal programs is observable in 1993 changes to the NEA’s mission statement. After 1992, said statement omitted the following sentences: “In implementing its mission the Endowment must exercise care to preserve and improve the environment in which the arts have flourished. It must not, under any circumstances, impose a single aesthetic standard or attempt to direct artistic content” (Rector 1992,104).
The tension between lawmakers and artists came to a head in 1990 with a situation that included artists named as the “NEA Four.” By the late 1980s grant awarding at the NEA worked through two bodies: a policy panel, and a peer review panel that judged the artistic merit of the proposed project. In 1990, performance artists Karen Finley, Holly Hughes, Tim Miller, and John Fleck all had grants which had been approved by policy and peer review panels at the NEA, only to—in an unprecedented overreach—be vetoed by NEA chair, John Frohnmayer. The four would sue, win, and finally be awarded their grants by 1993. Richard Schechner (1990) characterized what he saw as a damning, Faustian pact taking place between top NEA leaders and Congress to maintain fiduciary authorization: “Haven’t the NEA higher-ups struck a deal with [Jesse] Helms, Pat Robertson, and their allies trading the integrity of peer panel selection for the continued existence of the Endowment” (7)? As such, artistic expressions of diverse beliefs and values were being censored in the name of “decency.” By 1998, the case made its way to the Supreme Court as National Endowment for The Arts v. Finley where, in an 8-1 opinion, the Court finally ruled that while the NEA’s means of discrimination for funding were imprecise, they were not unconstitutional.

Still, NEA policies were forever changed in the fallout of these and other scandals with individuals no longer able to receive support. This disruption in funding for artists working to create and maintain experimental music communities in Southern California was further embattled by social unrest in the form of 1992’s Los Angeles Riots. Ignited by the acquittal of four Los Angeles Police Department officers for the usage of excessive force in the arrest and beating of Rodney King, the civil unrest in April and May of 1992 sowed distrust among communities throughout Los Angeles’s already divided neighborhoods. Several of my informants independently mentioned that these riots soured the tone among the arts communities
of the time and that it was more difficult to get people to come out for performances or work together (Nakagawa interview, 12 September 2016). As these communities worked to reform and find a way forward, the Northridge Earthquake of 1994 became another stumbling block. The 6.6-magnitude of January 17, 1994 damaged CalArts’ campus buildings and forced relocation to Temple Beth Shalom in Newhall, CA; a vacant Lockheed research center in nearby Rye Canyon donated by Lockheed; the Magic Moments Theatre at Six Flags Magic Mountain amusement park; the Santa Clarita YMCA; and a health club at the nearby Vista Village strip mall, where tanning salons became dressing rooms for the drama department's costume shop (Haithmann 1994). Taken together, these events served to force cancellations of shows, make travel around the already disintegrated Los Angeles more difficult, and in effect, concretize the institutionalism of experimentalism and systems of patronage I explore in Chapter Seven. Still, a DIY scene persisted in spite of these disruptions, often bolstered by relationships with punk and noise communities. I continue with an exploration of some of these spaces that existed rhizomatically, engendering community among a plurality of underground cultural production.

The DIY Experimental Scene of the 2000s

The seismic shifts reshaping the topos of Los Angeles’ underground music scene gave way to a characteristically disintegrated series of bars, restaurants, and cafes. Both social and performance spaces, these were safe havens for non-commercial artists navigating the ongoing fallout of the culture wars. In Downtown Los Angeles, a café at Alameda and 2nd—across from what would become the Japanese American National Museum—was Atomic Café. This became Troy Café, and then The Eldorado, co-owned by Jorge Martin of Spastic Colon. In the flower district, Gorky’s Cafe and Russian Brewery served young, urban bohemian artist-types all night
and sometimes hosted performances. Having hosted experimental theater and music in the neighborhood since the 1980s (The Wallenboyd Theater at Wall and Boyde) Skid Row also supported Al’s Bar and the American Hotel. Photographer and musician (Small Drone Orchestra) Don Lewis remembers everything in the area as run down and “bohemian” in the worst sense of the word. “Very unpleasant places - which made it good, you know? (interview, 10 September 2016). On the west side, Beyond Baroque in Venice and System M Café in Long Beach persevered as outlets for more exploratory performance, while Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) and Monday Night Concerts at LACMA’s Bing Theater were more conventionally-oriented.

Apart from newspaper listings of performances and blogs, not much formal documentation of these art spaces or the community they occasioned exists. For this review, I have the recollections of Alan Nakagawa, William Hutson, Liam Mooney, Michael Winter, Don Lewis, and Andrew Choate to thank—though many of my other informants mentioned having similar memories and relationships with the venues, communities, and practices in question. A few venues and communities stand out as precursors to the DIY community that now persists in Los Angeles. In the interest of setting the table for a better understanding of what is presently the case, I offer brief histories of several of these influential spaces.\(^5\)

**Cold Storage**

Cold Storage was an unlikely, short lived, and ever-changing performance space in Downtown Los Angeles between 2006 and 2007. Organized by artist Michael Parker, the

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\(^5\) Chapter Two of Daniel Munoz’s dissertation (2017, 156-239) offers extensive histories of several other venues such as (The) Handbag Factory and Dem Passwords. While informative, the communities and musics at these venues differ enough from my own project that I do not include their description here.
“venue” was a warehouse construction site whose open formal features (an unfinished enclosure of a 40,000 square-foot concrete slab) he noticed rising over the period of several months across from his studio. Thanks to the cooperation of a sympathetic owner, the construction site became a creative space conceived as an extension of Parker’s studio where almost forty events were held. The descriptors “underground,” “DIY,” and “independent” are very apt in this case. Serving as a blank canvas for performers’ imaginations, the vastness of the emerging concrete structure inspired new works by its very size and blankness; a “space” yet-to-be- inscribed as a “place.”

Parker writes:

Cold Storage has housed thirty-five projects, one hundred and fifty artists/musicians, dozens of laborers and over fifteen hundred guests. The materials are: the undefined use of a transitional site that is destined to distribute frozen squid, and the action of encouraging others to investigate with little bureaucracy and many unknowns. Cold Storage became a way (a route) to reduce control within my art practice (a method). (http://routesandmethods.org/pgs/cs_manifesto.html)

This space was in many ways an influential prototype of other spaces to come in regard to use of space, but also regarding its inherence as a space for experimentation and social plurality (at least as envisioned if not practically). As a space available to be reimagined and implicated in works themselves, becoming an element and instrument of performances rather than simply a frame, Cold Storage stood as an un-authorized and temporary experiment in the exploration of space through sound. Composer Liam Mooney was part of this musical community and performed several pieces there which were inspired by the space’s unique aesthetic opportunities. The space’s unique presence as an unfinished, as-yet-non-functional structure held out the promise of possibility that continues to inform his compositional practice (interview, 8 August 2016).

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56 According to De Certeau’s (1984) now de rigueur differentiation, "a place is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence”; a place is thus “an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability” (117). “Spaces” are not inscribed with meaning and exist in flux, whereas “places” express a more definite social situatedness and function.
such piece of Mooney’s was performed at the wulf. on July 31, 2015. The timed piece featured performers pushing pieces of lumber held on end across the wulf.’s concrete floor so that they resonated by friction, each stick of lumber (I think) inscribed with a duration of time and number of times to be pushed around the room (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1: A performance of Liam Mooney’s un-named lumber piece, the composition of which was inspired by time spent at Cold Storage. Performed 31 July 2015 at the wulf. Pictured performers from left to right: Mark So, Christine Tavolacci, Liam Mooney, and Michael Winter.

Liam had recalled pushing lumber around the concrete slab at Cold Storage, marveling at the unbounded feeling of the space and the resonance of individual pieces of wood (Ibid.). In its radical independence, Cold Storage was a deeply DIY—it paid no rent, had no formalized
organization, no board of artistic directors, no concept of persistence for future seasons, no organizing principles (save for openness), and not even a roof. As such it is a spiritual forbearer to those DIY spaces presently comprising Los Angeles’ DIY experimental music community.

Il Corral

Located just outside of East Hollywood near the corner of North Heliotrope Drive and Melrose Avenue in what is sometimes called the “Hel Mel” neighborhood, “sub-avant-garde” experimental performance space Il Corral operated from 2005 until 2007. Though the organizer Bob Bellerue was a CalArts alumnus, this venue was a home for the Los Angeles noise scene that existed apart from the sometimes pervasive CalArts community. LA-based producer, composer, and performer, William Hutson—who holds a PhD in theater and performance studies from UCLA—notes that, “of the people there, I think Bob and I were the only people that had been to college” (interview, 29 August 2016). Visiting Il Corral for the first time for an after-party celebrating Detroit noise band Wolf Eyes (probably in 2005), Hutson notes that the place was full of “guys that kind of look like metal heads but do this other stuff instead.” The prolific band Wolf Eyes is a great example of the mixed experimental sensibilities that comprised “this other stuff” often programmed at Il Corral. Mixing wide-ranging influences from avant-garde jazz, punk, and harsh noise, their maximalist, post-industrial music turns skronky alto saxophone, guitar, drums, electronics, feedback, and screaming into brutal walls of sound.

One can witness the mix of noise, punk, and experimentalist tendencies at Il Corral in Sean Carnage’s film, 40 Bands/80 Minutes! (2006). Shot at Il Corral in 2006, this film is exactly what it sounds like and stands as a tremendous document of Los Angeles “underground” music scene. Bands like absurd free jazz/noise outfits Bavab Bavab and Dog Shit Taco (who
The community at Il Corral was brought together by shared aesthetic values as much as a shared economic destabilization (Moroncini 2008, 65). Nonetheless, the egalitarian presentation and stylistic interbreeding of musical sensibilities and practices there influenced Hutson’s future output. Though he had been performing at The Smell and elsewhere as an improvising musician, at Il Corral Hutson felt that a different performance subjectivity reigned, one that was “cooler” and more presentation-oriented. Simply performing under his own name was “super un-cool,” a realization that induced him to change his self-presentation to perform under a pseudonym. In line with what was—in Hutson’s memory—a more stylish crowd and performance subjectivity at Il Corral, his work became “super minimal and compositionally oriented as opposed to process or composition orientation.” Adopting the moniker Rale, he began what has become a prolific career as a “serious” noise artist and producer, presently manifesting in his work as one-third of the experimental hip hop group CLIPPING.

In 2008, Bob Bellerue moved to New York City where he still lives and works as a composer, musician, and creative technician. Unfortunately, Il Corral didn’t survive his move East. A fate which should, perhaps, come as no surprise most DIY spaces rely on the energy and charisma of one or two committed, originating organizers to stay afloat and do not handle the turnover of staff well. The same fate would befall Line Space Line when the last remaining organizer, Jeremy Drake, left Los Angeles for Germany.

Following the dissolution of Il Corral after Bob Bellerue’s relocation to New York City, fellow Il Corral organizers Stane Hubert and Christie Scott founded another space south of Downtown Los Angles. Not strictly an “experimental music” venue, Zero-Point expanded upon
Il Corral’s “sub-avant-garde” subjectivity and organized performances of underground, often socially-subversive and aesthetically challenging noise, free jazz, spoken word, performance art, and more explicitly debauched acts. A review of an early show at Zero-Point’s still-maintained Blogspot page reads:

Again hidden in plain sight (on the second floor of a barnlike warehouse off S. Central), the space is well-suited to partners Christie Scott and Stane Hubert’s announced ambition of inviting artists from various media into “three ring circle acts” and “salon-style rowdiness” … (http://zeropointspace.blogspot.de/)

Serving as a meeting point that collected revelers in the diverse sub-avant-garde community for nearly four years, Zero-Point was not able to maintain its direction and closed its doors in 2011.

**Line Space Line**

A performance series that mingled Afrological and Eurological experimental sensibilities, Line-Space-Line resided at the intersection of free improvisation and “noise.” Chris Heenan, Jeremy Drake, and David Rothbaum founded this roving performance series in 2002 with the intention of representing the “diversity of non-idiomatic improvisation in Los Angeles” (Munoz 2017, 236). The term “non-idiomatic” is connected to influential British guitarist Derek Bailey (1980) and his differentiation of “idiomatic” and “non-idiomatic” improvisation in his book, *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music*. Sharp (2008) notes that at the time of the founding of the series, Heenan and the other founders of Line Space Line were newcomers to Los Angeles and not implicated in the vicissitudes of the scene’s shifting practices (418). Through a series of chance meetings and a determination to study the saxophone and non-idiomatic improvisation, Heenan came to study with Vinny Golia and to found an improvisational series with to-be collaborators Drake and Rothbaum. In 2000 Heenan had attempted to curate performances at The Knitting Factory in Hollywood which proceeded with
difficulty until relocation to Downtown Los Angeles all-ages punk club, The Smell in 2002. Seeking a more comfortable location, they moved to a small venue called the Salvation Theater in the Silver Lake neighborhood where they remained until 2005 (Ibid., 423-7). Though ostensibly interested in pluralistic, open, non-idiomatic music making, Line Space Line has been criticized for promoting that particular improvisational sensibility to the point of making “non-idiomatic” an idiom itself. While likely non-intentionally exclusionary, social and economic exigencies had delimited the pool of musicians that were often features at Line Space Line. Noting that the improvisers featured were overwhelmingly white and male, Sharp notes that this was not due to intentionally-racist booking practices. Rather, if anything, this exemplifies the issues of segregation in Los Angeles encouraged by geography and socioeconomic distinctions (Ibid., 432). The series ended in 2005, but nonetheless, the small amount of attention enjoyed by Line Space Line encouraged others (with differing levels of success) to begin similarly-minded series in rock clubs and more conventional performance spaces.

Machine Project

Nestled in the crescent of Sunset Junction in Silver Lake, Machine Project was a 501-(c)3 non-commercial space for exploration of arts and culture, often in explicitly experimental (in the scientific sense) terms. Founded in 2003, founder Mark Allen describes the space in terms resonant of so many attitudes towards art and experimentation in Los Angeles; as a space to foment research for thinkers and artists whose work was difficult to place in more conventional gallery culture: “I saw this as an exploratory and research project,” he says. “It kind of emerges and shares knowledge and information and then dissolves so that the next thing can emerge” (Miranda 2018).
Since its early days, the space has served as an incubator for artists of many stripes exploring science, horticulture, urban history and architecture, film, experimental theater and performance practices, and more. Machine is concerned with building connections within the local community. Relevant to this study, they supported Carmina Escobar’s invented “communitas ritual of manifestation” called “Fiesta Perpetua!” in Echo Park. Starting at dawn on May 20, 2017, the day-long work featured her as the Lady of the Lake improvisationally vocalizing performances that were something between operatic arias and bird calls from a raft, while Japanese Butoh dancer, Oguri, improvisationally danced on another. Tying the ritual to the heavily Latino local community, the singer’s and dancer’s improvisations interacted with simultaneous performances by the Banda Filarmónica Grandeza Oaxaqueña and Banda Filarmónica Maqueos Music.

Moreover, ten years earlier the organization hosted a series of experimental music performances curated by Mark Allen, James Orsher, and Sara Roberts called “Everybody Loves Difficult Music.” Like the Dog Star Orchestra which started in 2005 (further described in Chapter Six), “Everybody Loves Difficult Music” (2007) and its partner series of performances held at Machine Project, “You Too Can Play Difficult Music,” attempted to break the wall between the “in crowd” of experimentalists in Los Angeles and “regulars”; bringing “difficult music” to the masses. Machine produced an accompanying book in addition to audio and video documentation that details works and commentary. The lion’s share of composers and commenters are Calartians: James Orsher, Aaron Drake, Clay Chaplin, Vinny Golia, Thadius Frazier-Reed, Corey Fogel, Stina Hanson, Liam Mooney, Joseph Kudirka, Michael Kudirka, Phillip Stearns, Harris Wulfson (after whom the wulf. was named), Douglas C. Wadle, Adam
Overton, Mark So, Lorin Edwin Parker, Stephen “Lucky” Mosko, Mark Trayle, Mark Menzies, and Michael Pisaro.

As of this writing, Machine Project has gone the way of so many other independent art/multi-use spaces in Los Angeles and closed. In January of 2018, founder and organizer Mark Allen announced in the most agreeable and open-ended terms: “Everything has a natural lifespan—crickets, planets, sitcoms, and even art spaces. And so it is with both pride and sweet melancholy that I'm writing to tell you that Machine Project is coming to an end” (email, 4 January 2018).

In spite of the support offered by creative communities living and working in concert in Los Angeles, the flux, pluralism, and economic precarity of the city’s experimental music scene also have the tendency to disenfranchise all but the hardiest and most visionary (or bull-headed) artists. In her study of the relationships of site, self, music, and economics in Los Angeles, Barbara Moroncini (2008) investigated the work and lives of Los Angeles experimental composers the paradoxes of Los Angeles as postmodern, globalized metropolis. In the afterword of her study, she shared that the three main musicians in her study—Bob Bellerue, Kraig Grady, and Raven Chacon—had endured strained relationships with the city:

The last time I spoke to Bob Bellerue, Kraig Grady, and Raven Chacon, their situations were as follows, Bellerue had left Il Corral and was sleeping on a big pillow in the corner of a gallery where he was in residence for a week. Grady had lost his job to a back injury and was unsure about his future. Chacon could only afford a place in a part of town he disliked and was not thrilled with it. None of them had medical or dental insurance. (161).

The potential desperation of this state of affairs resonates with anyone who has experienced the sometimes-disempowering process of making non-commercial art. Los Angeles’ decentralized structure serves, paradoxically, to both connect and insulate its urban denizens and the communities they inhabit. Apart from the institutionally-affiliated and less DIY-oriented
organizations noted above (Monday Night Concerts, LACE, etc.), most all of the spaces and communities that have been mentioned in this chapter have dissolved. However, whether by design or accident their attitudes of openness, plurality, and tenacity persist in the contemporary Los Angeles DIY experimental music community to which we now turn.
Chapter Six: Places, Practices, and People

Figure 6.1: the wulf.’s 8.5” x 11” sign always indicated you were in the right place.

As mentioned in Chapter One, even finding the experimental music scene in Los Angeles was, at first, a challenge. With so many performances happening in informal, multi-use, or pop-up spaces, show promotion often relies on a mix of word of mouth, social media, and intermittently-maintained websites. My first experience of what I have been calling the DIY experimental music scene in Los Angeles happened at what would become my primary research site: the wulf. On the evening of November 8, 2014, I made the fourteen-mile drive from my apartment in West Los Angeles to an address in the warehouse district of Downtown Los Angeles. I found the venue at 1026 South Santa Fe Avenue along a spur off the quickly gentrifying neighborhood just south of the already too-expensive-for-artists Arts District. While only a half-mile south of a concentration of chic, “industrial” restaurants and bars, the brick loft building that housed the wulf sits in a corner bounded by the Los Angeles River, the raised Interstate 10 and its knot of ramps, a strip club, and a cold storage warehouse. Parking is ample, and the palm tree-lined streets might still be considered “picturesque” if one is arriving during
sunset. A paper sign (Figure 6.1) stuck to a locked glass door with blue low-tack masking tape told me that I was in the right place.

Once in the building and up the gray stairs, tall broad-leafed potted plants dotted the hallway as I crossed to the east side of the building. A large, brown double door was held open a crack leading into the dimly-lit concrete loft space. The twenty-or-so people already there seemed to know one another and were chatting before the evening’s performance began. There was no ticket table or obvious request for money, though I did notice a dusty glass donation jar half-full of coins near the entrance. Michael Winter, one of the wulf.’s founders, approached me and—as I have now so often seen him do to newcomers—introduced himself. He offered a handshake, a can of Tecate, and conversation. I would learn that the inexpensive Mexican lager was almost an official beverage at the wulf., always on hand by the cooler-full to ameliorate the sweltering Los Angeles heat (the Santa Ana Winds can be brutal, even in November) and lubricate conversation. The evening’s programming featured mostly works by contemporary, local composers, performed by those composers. I sat in the back that night on a white couch next to the refrigerator, which was unplugged for every show to avoid any sonic disruption by the sound of its compressor. One work by violinist and composer Morgan Gerstmar called “Nip, Nic, Notch” stands strongest in my memory. In the work, a large piece of card stock with intersecting lines and dots densely drawn on it—the score, actually—hangs suspended at its corners by strings from the ceiling. With the paper amplified by contact microphones leading to amplifiers, performers use scissors and hole punches to cut along the lines and dots, effectively destroying the materiality of the score while manifesting its sonic concept. The novelty of the industrial space, the friendliness of the people, the eccentricity of the performances - I wanted to learn more. Asking around for recommendations, I quickly learned that the wulf. was one of an
archipelago of DIY spaces mostly around DTLA and East Hollywood that programmed “underground,” experimental music. Intrigued, I decided to check these out and learn more about this aesthetically and economically inverted, bizarre world of music making that somehow exists in one of the world’s capitals of industrial music production.

The multitude of venues and the plurality of experimental music activity I was to find surprised and impressed me. This was not in the least due to the fact that these decidedly non-commercial performance spaces persisted largely without institutional support or support from the general public. Prima facie, their survival on the aesthetic and economic fringes of Los Angeles seemed to be supported by a community organized around the challenge of the aesthetically unknown, an enthusiasm for the weird, or, more formally speaking, for real and imagined alternatives to culturally authorized forms of musical expression.

**Researching as an Outsider-Insider**

The ethnographically-oriented study of Los Angeles’ experimental music scene that follows is based on a formal twelve-month calendar-year of study (interviews beginning in March 2016) that included attendance, sometimes-participation in musical performances, and twenty-six interviews of scene participants. At the beginning of my time with the music scene in question, I was relatively unfamiliar with the histories of the aesthetics, theories, and practices of Los Angeles’ particular scene that I was to encounter. Informed by a multitude of musical communities, histories, and attendant practices as I have laid out in Chapter Five, Los Angeles’ DIY experimental music community is eclipsed by more popular cultural practices in the city and is therefore relatively hermetic. Though in conversation with other scenes around the world (see my characterization of the (trans-) local scene below), it also exhibits traits not found
elsewhere that, due perhaps to their eccentricity and the commitment of its practitioners, I found consistently fascinating and often compelling.

My own background with experimentalism had been primarily informed by my studies in jazz music as a formally-trained saxophonist, but also in my cognate music studies of minimalism and “new music.” Before my formal training as an ethnomusicologist, my career as a saxophonist and multi-instrumentalist in Chicago found me wearing many hats as a performer, composer, arranger, and historian in swing, jazz standards, folk, pop, funk, reggae, Afrobeat, maqam-oriented middle-eastern musics, contemporary jazz, and free jazz scenes. My time in Chicago’s avant-garde free jazz scene, influenced by the AACM, further whet my appetite for aural exploration. I pursued this further while a graduate student at New York University in New York City but swung even more toward experimentalism, focusing on diverging strains of minimalism, “noise,” and free jazz. By the time I arrived in Los Angeles, I was an ideal candidate to be drawn in by its fluctuating musical minimalisms and maximalisms. My formal study, augmented by years of conversations, listening parties with bin diggers, and performances with multitudes of experimental musicians have helped cultivate my interest in those musical practices that push at the boundaries of convention, question the relationship of art to popular culture - and perhaps also eschew “good taste.” More than that, my growing understanding informed by musicological methodology that considers music as social text encouraged me to ask myself why particular communities made the musics they did, to question their values; to look for signals indicating its significance in the music’s production and reception as well by way of its aesthetic components.

I soon found in Los Angeles that, though I was an “insider” with regard to my investment in challenging and obscure musical practices, there were still more musical corners to explore
with which I was yet to be initiated. Moreover, the scene I was to find was inhabited overwhelmingly by “Calartians” (sometimes also referred-to colloquially throughout the world as the CalArts Mafia),\(^{57}\) and traced its history through a legacy of musical experimentalism with which I wasn’t as familiar: conceptual post-Cagean minimalism straddling aesthetic, political, and economic positions between meaningful, borderless diversity of being, and a purposeless, post-human self-concept.\(^{58}\)

The politics of experimental sound practices at CalArts are complex as, generally speaking, they attempt to occupy an explicit position of aesthetic and economic autonomy while being suspended in the aspic of the institutionally-authorized values and systems of power that support and maintain them. They support the Cagean notion of letting sounds be themselves, but are also shot through with liberal values promoting diversity and equitable representation. This is, however, only the first of many appositions that have maintained my interest in the related music scene in Los Angeles which are: socioeconomically and racially privileged but bohemian; ostensibly aesthetically-open though tacitly restricted by idiomatic practices; standing on the shoulders of institutionally-recognized educational and economic giants but laboring in obscurity. I address these appositions throughout this chapter.

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57 Due to its reputation for accepting only the most promising young students and producing influential artists, CalArts is respected throughout the art world at large. While holding a degree from CalArts offers a significant amount of cultural capital in relevant circles, the university itself inhabits a challenging position between spheres of aesthetic and economic exigencies. Richard Hertz (2003) has explored this tension in his *Jack Goldstein and the CalArts Mafia*, which documents early generations of CalArts teachers and students. Hertz notes the original “mafia” comprised of: Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Matt Mullican, David Salle, and James Welling. CalArts itself embraces the term, offering an alumnus “CalArts Mafia” discount for some services.

58 The consideration of this critical and aesthetic shift at CalArts is evidenced by the inclusion of Ray Brassier’s *Nihil Unbound* (2007) and Quentin Meillassoux’s *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (2008) on class reading lists. Both seek to recover a nihilist understanding of being divorced from human systems of valuation. By engaging ideas of the inherence of the world separated from human exigencies, these philosophies (re)engage a conversation about the disenchantment of the world and speculative opportunities potentially gained through jettisoning ideas of meaning or purpose related to human activities. Moreover, they are related to the idea of the “real” outside of human affairs referred to by Kaprow when speaking of Cage’s musical values (Chapter Three).
Analytic Approach

My research process in the Los Angeles DIY experimental music scene comprises a mixed ethnographic approach gathering information through interviews and participant observation at venues during the nine-month period between March and December 2016. By the time my study formally began, I had already been an active participant myself for more than a year. As noted above, my interest in Los Angeles’ DIY experimental music scene was originally fomented by my own musical curiosity and penchant for musical experimentation. My decision to formally study the scene only coalesced later as my interest regarding the community’s position among Los Angeles’ art worlds grew; its precarious relationships to institutions, types of capital, not to mention its challenging aesthetic. The music’s lack of formal features and attendant resistance to interpretation also sparked my interest in exploring philosophical hermeneutics as an explicatory grounding (surveyed at length in Chapter Four).

Though originally drawn to the DIY experimental music community for its musical practices, I also befriended many scene participants and came to feel like a member of the community myself. After having decided to formally study the scene, I sometimes struggled with feelings of inauthenticity in my motivations for my continued participation in the scene. Though my interest in the scene has been motivated by sincere curiosity and admiration, I worried that these artists whose work I admired, and people I thought of as friends might perceive my interactions with them as instrumental rather than genuine. As I became more invested in my work, I was reminded of Judith Stacey’s (1988) meditations on the ethical difficulties of ethnographic research that causes the researcher to develop personal relationships with their informants while also being methodologically critical of them: that ethnography can occasion
betrayal. Fortunately, during the time of my research I did not encounter any conflicts of interest and remain interested and invested in the scene’s activities outside the bounds of this project. Furthermore, due to the generally self-reflexive nature of my informants, I am confident that whatever modalities of criticisms this study may offer, they will be met by scene participants who might read them with considerable curiosity and understanding.

This study assumes spaces of artistic production to be sites that hold out the promise of the *as if* through the engagement of imagination and aesthetic experience while simultaneously inhering as sites situated in systems of power, conflict, and transformations of capital. As a researcher, any position I may hold is privileged in its critical position. As such, my best hope is to exist as a “supportive interlocutor,” rethinking knowledge production, questioning the theoretical and methodological foundations of academic disciplines, and working to cultivate awareness (Juris and Khasnabish, 2013, 368). My goal is to document this artistic community, to critically engage with its underground status, and to consider its relationship to ostensive claims of openness and plurality implicit in its values, production, and reception.

**Research Sites**

As illustrated in Chapter Five, the underground DIY music scene in Los Angeles—or conglomeration of mutually inflecting art worlds that comprise “the thing signified” when I deploy the signifier “scene”—is radically decentralized. Like the city itself, it lacks a center and operates rhizomatically. In *The History of Forgetting*, Norman Klein (2008) refers to this character of Los Angeles as “efficient, sensually liberating, strangely free of an urban center, like

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59 Reflecting on the tension placed on her feminist principles by her own research, Stacey remarks: “Precisely because ethnographic research depends on human relationship, engagement, and attachment, it places research subjects at a grave risk of manipulation and betrayal by the ethnographer…” (1988, 22-3).
a cognate of abstraction in art, a Rothko painting where the center floats in an existential absence” (50). Though much has been written about this character of Los Angeles’ urban space (Banham 1971; Davis 1990; Jencks 1993; and Soja 1996 to name just a few), it is still uncertain if this reality is a bug or a feature in Los Angeles’ uncontainable city structure. It is certain, however, that this rhizomic character with its “strange liberation from classical codes of urban experience” (Barthes 1982, 30) casts the production of a coherent ethnology as a challenging undertaking.

Following Mike Davis, I observed in Chapter Five that competing accretions of cultural institutions in Los Angeles and their accompanying capital have traditionally taken place in Downtown Los Angeles as well spaces on the west side of the city. The logic of gentrification, however, continues in the city and is presently pushing further into central and eastern neighborhoods. Art practices are, of course, implicit in the dynamics of neighborhood change in interleaving cultural and socioeconomic registers (Deutsche and Ryan 1984; Florida 2002; Grodach, Foster, & Murdoch III 2014)—a theme I will explore further below. As an urban cultural community working in barely-funded obscurity, Los Angeles’s DIY experimental music scene occupies a complex position. While most of the scene’s participants are white and male and, accordingly, enjoy the accidental and unearned social benefits of several registers of privilege in the contemporary United States (Lipsitz 1998), their aesthetic pursuits place them in an economically dominated position (as I explore in Chapter Seven). As such, the scene finds itself on both sides of the fence of gentrification; sometimes pushing out previous residents (as in the case of the embattled PSSST Gallery in Boyle Heights), sometimes being pushed out (as with the relocations and closing of the wulf. and Pehrspace in 2016).
Tear It Down | LA + OC and the “Tear Sheet”

In the weeks that followed my first visit to the wulf. in 2014, I sought out other spaces in Downtown Los Angeles, Chinatown, and East Hollywood. Over the course of the next few years, I was to learn of about thirty venues that regularly programmed musical experimentalism of some kind, and another ten that did so intermittently (see Figure 6.2 and 6.3 below). Keeping up with programming at all of these venues was very challenging as there was no aggregate online calendar akin to that longstanding (since 2001) and exhaustive one maintained by Berlin’s experimental music organization *Echtzeitmusik* (http://www.echtzeitmusik.de/), or Chicago’s “Now Is” music calendar (www.now-is.org) maintained by Umbrella Music collective’s webmaster, Tushar Samant. I decided to make one myself.

Before setting out to create an aggregate calendar in early 2016, I informally inquired around the community when attending underground experimental music shows: “Is the difficulty of finding experimental shows in Los Angeles a bug or a feature?” Most of those to whom I posed this question decided that, due to the city’s disintegrated character and the variance of communicatory habits of its participants (read eccentricity and a-sociality), such a calendar was impossible. Apparently, others had tried such an organizational tac in the past with little to no success. The scene was too fluid in terms of aesthetics, practices, and shifting venue locations to be contained by a calendar. Still, as none of my interlocutors thought it would be problematic but really quite beneficial (if it worked) I decided that for the term of my study I would create and update an aggregate calendar each Wednesday.

Los Angeles area saxophonist Jonathan Rowden felt the same void and offered to add a calendar to the website for his arts organization, Tear It Down | LA + OC. Now-defunct, the arts organization and self-proclaimed “anti-venue” had a vision to organize creative music
performances outside LA’s pay-to-play venues, transcending genre and community lines. Rowden added a calendar section to Tear It Down’s website management service hosted by Squarespace, and in March of 2016, the “Tear Sheet” was born. The venues included in the aggregate creative music calendar purposefully took a broad, inclusive view of “experimentalism” that was oriented toward an open non-commercial, DIY aesthetic. Similar to the motivations of COMA and the Monday Night Music series described in Chapter Five, by including jazz, noise, new music, and even punk music listings, Rowden and I hoped to offer one-stop-shopping for underground music listings that exposed open-minded listeners to different lanes of experimentalism.60

After having exhaustively searched the online presences of music venues, galleries, DIY spaces, bars, multi-use spaces, we identified a list that fluctuated, but was generally about forty venues. Of the offerings at these venues, I attended fifty performances during the 2016 calendar year. Due to the density of its programming and status as an influential organization in the scene, the wulf. became my primary research site. In order to complement data gleaned from the wulf., I visited as many other venues as possible, if sometimes only once during the official research period. However, I had already been attending performances in underground, DIY experimental music spaces since late 2014, throughout 2015, and for the first half of 2017. The anecdotal observations I have made at venues outside of the official study period, and from which I address issues of gender, race, access and exposure, and political engagement, correlate to the findings born out during my 2016 fieldwork. Figures 6.2 and 6.3 name and locate the venues and number of occasions of my visits.

60 As some had predicted, scene participants were more interested in an aggregate calendar in theory than in praxis, and due to a lack of interest, I stopped updating the “Tear Sheet” at the end of the 2016 calendar-year. Though a few people did report to me that they found it useful in learning about performances, few musicians contacted us to list performances. Perhaps the scene’s hard-to-find character is a feature rather than a bug after all.
Though it is possible to navigate Los Angeles by mass transit, the widespread distribution of the DIY experimental music scene as portrayed here almost requires a car. From my residence in West LA, and later in Koreatown, travel times to research sites in DTLA, Chinatown, and the near east side such as Echo Park and Silver Lake, spreading into the Elysian Valley and Highland Park could take thirty to sixty minutes (depending on traffic) to travel only six to twelve miles. As such, to take part in any musical community in Los Angeles, experimental or otherwise, requires a commitment not only to cultural production and aesthetic experience, but of a significant amount of travel time. Relevant to this, I found that most of my informants consciously chose to reside in neighborhoods comprising the near east side of Los Angeles. This helped them take advantage of cheaper rents than one might find in DTLA or the west side, but also affords easier access to the venues at which so many performances take place.

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<td>504 Chung King Court, Los Angeles CA 90012 (Chinatown)</td>
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<td><strong>Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook</strong> (1)</td>
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<td>6300 Hetzler Rd, Culver City, CA 90023 (Baldwin Hills)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Betalevel</strong> (5 total - 3 as “off-site” for the wulf.)</td>
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<td>963 N Hill St, Los Angeles, CA 90012 (Chinatown)</td>
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<td><strong>The Blue Whale</strong> (2)</td>
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<td>123 Astronaut E S Onizuka St #301, Los Angeles, CA 90012 (Little Tokyo)</td>
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<td><strong>The Echo</strong> (1)</td>
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<td>Klowden Mann Gallery</td>
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<td>Los Angeles River</td>
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<td>Mata Noise</td>
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<td>Michael Todd Sculpture Studio</td>
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<td>The Regent Theater</td>
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<td>Santa Monica Public Library</td>
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<td>the wulf</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>356 Mission</td>
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Figure 6.2: Venue Names (number of performances attended in 2016) and street addresses.

Interviews

As noted above, a total of twenty-six participants in the Los Angeles DIY experimental music scene were interviewed as part of this study. Most informants interviewed were chosen as they were well-established scene participants by the time I began participating in late 2014. Some were present for previous decades of underground music in Los Angeles, some were
foundational members of experimental music programming series such as WasteLAnd, Southland Ensemble, or Gnarwhallaby, and others were originating participants when spaces like the wulf., Betalevel, and Pehrspace were founded. Through my participation in the scene, I selectively recruited study participants I believed to be representative of the overlapping communities’ activities and values. Of the twenty-six interviews conducted, all interlocutors were active organizers, composers, performers, or listeners, most often acting in each of these modalities at different times.

Scene participants were contacted and asked for interviews either personally, face-to-face while attending a performance in the field, or sometimes via email or text message. Meetings for interviews were conducted in public locations (cafes, bars, restaurants), most often chosen by the informant, and lasted 90 minutes to two hours. Each informant gave consent to be recorded and their statements to entered as data in the present study. Conversations were recorded electronically via the iPhone Voice Memos application and later transcribed. Though informal, interviews were semi-structured by a questionnaire of twenty-five questions to spur conversation and ensure consistency of topic from interview to interview. In order to not skew an informant’s replies to questions by knowledge of my own agenda, I refrained from addressing my research goals until after all questions on the questionnaire had been addressed. As informants’ answers to questions often inadvertently answered or addressed later questions, conversations did not adhere to a strict structure, though all themes of the questionnaire were addressed in each interview. Observations about general performance attendance and further researcher impressions regarding performances were recorded in a field journal to be later transcribed and elaborated upon the following day on computer (Wolfinger 2002).
Of my twenty-six interlocutors, three (12%) were in their early-to-mid-twenties, seventeen (65%) were in their late twenties to mid-thirties, and five (19%) were forty-five years old or older. Twenty-one (81%) were white with only four (16%) self-identifying as minorities or people of color. Twenty-one (86%) were male and, again, only four (15%) were women. Twenty-four (92%) had bachelor’s degrees, and twenty-two (85%) had achieved a level of education of master’s degree or higher (nineteen (73%) were Calartians). The majority identified their family economic background as middle and upper-middle class, while few reported coming from “musical families.”

Direct Observation

In addition to interviews, during 2016, I conducted direct participant observation at fifty music events at the twenty-seven venues listed in Figure 6.2. These events were all oriented around “experimental” music, though the various experimentalisms manifest in overlapping musical communities differed.61 Though aesthetics and practices differ, my own observations and those gleaned from interlocutor responses in interview show the overall experimental scene to be overwhelmingly white and male. Still, of the performances at which I was able to get an accurate count, on average, only two-thirds of attending participants (66%) were male—less than myself and others had intuited. This observation will be further addressed below with regard to access and exposure to experimental music practices.

61 In Chapter Seven I develop the idea of three “areas” of cultural production in the Los Angeles DIY experimental music scene whose aesthetic values and practices correlate to their position in the economic field of power.
Figure 6.3: Central and Near East Los Angeles Research Sites. Note: Sites #1, #4, #14 #16 #25 lie too far east to be pictured, while #7, #19, and #22 are too far north. Due to proximity, the marker for site #5 obscures #3, as #11 does for #10, and #17 for #15.
Characterizing the (Trans-) Local Scene

In Chapter Two I characterized Los Angeles DIY experimental music activities as a scene, rather than an art world or subculture. Here I further characterize this scene by way of the deeper taxonomical question of its localization. Situated in local worlds of training and practice, contemporary musical scenes are also awash in globalized media transmission. Due to the ease of hearing and learning from musical communities around the world, sharp lines regarding a scene’s “local” practices can be hard to draw. Accordingly, several scholars have theorized the appropriation of techniques between regions in theories of the trans-regional (Slobin 1993) and trans-local (Kruse 1993; Harris 2000; Hodkinson 2002). These theorizations, though, have generally been made in reference to commercially distributed popular musics such as heavy metal, goth and their attendant values. In the case of the Riot Grrrl scene of the 1990s, transmission outside of the mainstream is demonstrated to occur through touring and the underground distribution of informally-produced and distributed fanzines (Schilt 2004).

Los Angeles’ DIY experimental music scene is not characterizable as a commercially distributed popular music (though recordings are commercially available). Certainly a product of its unique urban and cultural situation, it is eccentric and, I argue, not solely “local.” Though far from commercially viable and popular, Los Angeles’ experimental music scene can be thought of as trans-local due to its porous aesthetic boundaries informed by musical and cultural values from two other scenes in particular: New York City’s experimental, new music scene (broadly speaking), and the predominantly Central-European Wandelweiser Collective (aka Edition Wandelweiser). The aesthetic and theoretical foundation of experimental sound practices at CalArts is inspired by the experimentalisms and minimalisms that flourished in mid-century New York City (Cage, Browne, Feldman, Young, Reich, Riley) as much as later developments in
performance art from New York’s downtown Fluxus and The Kitchen scenes. Many founding artists and instructors at CalArts hailed from those east-coast contexts and, naturally, brought their ideas with them to California in the 1960s and 70s.\textsuperscript{62}

Although it maintains offices in Haan, Germany, Wandelweiser is itself a decentralized, virtual community with global members around Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Founder Antoine Beuger’s own idea of Wandelweiser as a loosely-integrated, open-ended artistic community is influenced by his experiences as a member of Aktionsanalytische Organisation (AAO, also known as the Friedrichshof Commune). In his account of Wandelweiser, G Douglas Barrett (2016) shows how Beuger’s time with AAO informed his interest in keeping the collective’s aesthetic and values open. The AAO had been undone, Beuger says, by its dogmatic rigidity of thought; its radical liberation ideology became paradoxically dictatorial (43). Rather than maintain any official position regarding aesthetics or ethics in Wandelweiser, Beuger instead sought to be maintain an “integrating” role as it coalesced. This open, plural influence has made its way to the Los Angeles scene through the peregrinations through Southern California (as performers, academics, or otherwise) of European Wandelweiser members Manfred Werder, Jurg Frey, Eva-Marie Houben, and others as much as the influence of American member Michael Pisaro at CalArts.

So, then, the influence of New York City’s cultural history can be felt in Los Angeles as the warm climes of California welcomed experimentally-minded artists west in the 1960s and 70s. Wandelweiser’s imprint on the community further marks it as trans-local. Whereas a local

\textsuperscript{62} While geographical moves between the east and west coasts of the United States can be construed as linear, the development of art practices in the period was not. CalArts’ founding in 1961 was related to Walt Disney’s production line for training animators. This association is a useful remembrance of the school’s implication of other cultural moves occurring in America during the stirrings of the postmodern moment: from high culture to entertainment culture; from representation of beauty to commodity culture; from depiction to criticism.
scene might more commonly assert its musical localization by way of reference to social contexts, locations, or even by lyrics sung in a local language or accent (Mitchell 1996), the grounding values of diversity and undecidability that inform experimentation itself problematizes distinct circumscription of the Los Angeles scene. Still, as cliché and tautological as it may at first seem, the most constant character of the scene is openness to alterity and change.

Before moving on to descriptions and analyses of particular works and subjects’ experiences, I will offer brief descriptions of several influential spaces that hosted many of the performance I attended during my research period in 2016 and beyond. As the wulf. has been my primary research site, my review of its history and programming strategies is significantly more thorough than those of other sites. Other shorter venue descriptions can be found throughout the “Composers and Musical Examples” section and later in Chapter Seven.

the wulf.

The first program at the wulf. occurred on August 22nd, 2008, and served as memoriam to Harris Wulfson, the polymath musician, composer, theorist, and programmer from whom the venue get its name.63 That program featured Wulfson’s solo violin work “3 Bagatelles,” his chamber string work “Durations,” and Fluxus artist Alison Knowles’ “Unfurl” - a work wherein audience members perform the piece by slowly unfurling ready-to-hand unfurl-able objects (cloths, blankets, clothing, etc.).64 Cofounded by friends and CalArts MFA graduates Michael Winter and Eric KM Clark, everything about the wulf.’s existence was oriented toward

63 Wulfson was an accomplished violinist and multi-instrumentalist committed to the investigation—practically, artistically, and theoretically—of the relationship of humans to technology. An MFA graduate of CalArts, he effectively worked to connect his performance and composition practices with his interest in programming. Tragically, Wulfson suffered from psychological issues and committed suicide in 2008.

64 This program would be mirrored after the closing of the wulf.’s original South Santa Fe Avenue location for its first off-site program at Betalevel on September 16th, 2016.
community and the rapid prototyping of new work. Similar in its motivation to the Independent Composers Association of the 1980s, the wulf. would offer a performance space in Los Angeles for a musical sensibility that, in 2008, had very few other outlets for expression. Christine Tavolacci remembers how years before the existence of the wulf., members of what would become the wulf.’s community—most of whom were student members of Michael Pisaro’s Experimental Music Workshop at CalArts—would meet for informal parties and performances at Harris Wulfson’s apartment near CalArts. To Tavolacci, “the wulf. is a unicorn in terms of LA spaces because it has stuck around for so long” (interview, 21 September 2016). It was, in effect, a continuation of a student community at CalArts that would hang out and party at Harris Wulfson’s condo. As an extension of that group’s social circle, “the wulf. started, in a way, to create that kind of space where you could say—like here at CalArts—‘I want to put on a concert next week, I want to try out this new piece that I’m working on,’ and I think it was incredibly valuable for a lot of us to try out different performing ideas and compositions; to be supportive of each other” (Ibid.). The communal, integrative influence of a Wandelweiser subjectivity was materially present even then. For example, Wandelweiser-affiliated composer and German professor of music Eva-Marie Houben brought members of her own Experimental Music Workshop at Dortmund University’s Institut für Musik und Musikwissenschaft to CalArts several times in the early 2000s to engage with students (including those who would found the wulf.) at CalArts.

From August 2008 until September 2016, the community comprising the wulf. gathered in their bright, roomy, well-lit concrete space. With walls painted white, the high ceiling was supported by two large concrete pillars that bisected the room as one faced a bank of east-facing, pressed glass windows. Just out the main entrance, a hallway along the south wall led to a fire
escape where people often smoked cigarettes and sometimes marijuana. However, regardless of what one might expect in connecting the pervasive normalization in Southern California of recreational marijuana and the seemingly “trippy” musical aesthetics at the wulf, the presence of legal or illicit drug use did not characterize my observations of the community, attitudes, or practices.

A small kitchen and a surprisingly roomy bathroom (that featured a cheap but luxurious add-on bidet in later years) allowed two people to live at the wulf. in ad-hoc bedrooms separated from the main room by pink and white checkered curtains on each side, effectively sharing rent with the 501(c)3 non-profit arts organization the venue housed. Completing the wulf.’s sparse furnishing were an elegant wood-toned piano, a small PA system, various indoor/outdoor rugs lining the concrete floors, and mismatched couches, chairs, and stools. In addition to the donation jar near the front door, the organization accepted donations via subscription. But the wulf. was envisioned as a consciously “free” art space and as such did not ask for money or even actively “pass a hat.” Rather, it subsisted through grants from the Los Angeles County Arts Commission, the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, the Amphion Foundation, the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, and The Metabolic Studio - a direct charitable activity of the Annenberg Foundation. Only toward the end of the wulf.’s tenure at 1026 South Santa Fe Avenue, when the building had been sold and Winter was searching for a new home for the organization, would brief, apologetic announcements about the possibility of subscription membership and donation be made.

65 Strengthening even material connections to CalArts, I would later learn that the first of these mismatched pieces of furniture was donated by CalArts music producer and widow of James Tenney, Lauren Pratt. Among many other CalArts ephemera that ended up at the wulf., much of celebrated composer, conductor, and CalArts professor Stephen “Lucky” Mosko’s record collection ended up there. Though Mosko’s official music collection is housed at the Eda Kuhn Loeb Music Library at Harvard University, audiences at the wulf. would sometimes be treated to esoteric vinyl records from his personal collection as “walk in” music before performances began.
Programming at the wulf.

When I first visited the wulf in 2014, I was impressed by a seemingly-wide variety of types of experimental music offered simultaneously. For example, on the evening of November 16, 2014, double bass and saxophone duo Caracol Carnívoro brought their free jazz-inspired “nightmare music” that was followed by a solo structured improvisation by percussionist Corey Fogel. This was complemented finally by electronic drone minimalism from Andrew Young. I was excited to hear these modes of musical experimentalism—and the attendant mutually inflecting histories they represented—set into conversation in one place on one evening. This was significant to me as the programming seemed to demonstrate a kind of mixing that respected influences and worked to address negatively-appropriative practices of music making. I learned, however, that this intermingling of experimental subjectivities—the Afrological and Eurological characterized in Chapter Two—was not de rigeuer at the wulf.

In the closing remarks of his Afterword to “Improvised Music after 1950,” The Changing Same, George Lewis (2004) describes what he recognizes as a deleterious erasure of history, provenance, and influence by Black music on American experimentalism. Communities of experimentalism, he says, are at a crossroads facing a stark choice: “(1) to grow up and assert its character as multicultural and multiethnic, with a variety of perspectives, histories, traditions, and methods, or (2) to remain an ethnically bound and ultimately limited tradition that appropriates freely, yet furtively, from its presumed Others” (170). The breadth of programming I first experienced at the wulf. seemed to be addressing Lewis’ challenge as the musical community in question seemed to be, through their programming, putting differing experimentalisms on equal footing. Furthermore, brief conversation with listeners or performers quickly bore out that they were well-informed, well-trained, and respectful of many lines of
musical experimentalism and not interested in furtively borrowing from presumed Others; as quick to cite Anthony Braxton, Muhal Richard Abrams, La Monte Young, or Tony Conrad with equal admiration. Liam Mooney described the seeming lack of Afrological experimentalism as an illusory accident of programming. Though most programming was ostensibly Eurologically-oriented, the influence of Black music is unavoidable, as: “[a]nyone that’s grown up in the US—or really all over now—the structure of African-based musics has permeated everything. People are putting, you know, African ideas into their music without being conscious of it. I mean, if you do almost anything that’s polyrhythmic…” (Mooney, interview, 8 August 2016).

Furthermore, with so many community participants being Calartians, they were likely to have actually studied Afrologically-informed structured improvisation with Wadada Leo Smith (or even his improvisational system, Ankrasmation), Ulrich Krieger, and Vinny Golia as well Eurologically-informed composition with James Tenney and Michael Pisaro.

Nevertheless, I was to find that this plurality of experimental sensibilities was not to be common in the wulf.’s programming. The appearance of structured improvisation was the exception rather than the rule with electronically-oriented works, graphic and text scores, drone, and Wandelweiser-influenced works being much more common. Originally, decisions regarding programming at the wulf. were made by Michael Winter. As parochial as the venue’s community was (and, arguably, still is) in its early seasons, Winter first focused on programming new works of musicians in his immediate circle of friends. This had the benefit of further motivating others in the community to make new work due to the availability of the then-new space for performance. In spite of intentions to keep the venue open to differing musical subjectivities, the insular group of musicians performing new works informed by similar training and influences worked to solidify a character of the wulf. as a primarily Eurologically-oriented experimental
venue in Los Angeles. Briefly filling in as programming director for Winter while he was traveling during the early stages of the wulf., composer/performer James Klopfleisch tried to further democratize the venue’s programming process and musical proclivities. Though not immediately successful, Klopfleisch’s attempt at democratization did destabilize the earlier hegemony of programming and lead to the instatement of an artistic programming board at the wulf. that trumps any single director’s taste and judgement. This lifted pressure off Winter as he was no longer personally responsible for the venue’s programming and allowed the influx of new musicians and musical styles.

As the venue’s visibility grew, the advent of an artistic advisory board also offered much-needed anonymity for the perceived gatekeepers to what was becoming an important Los Angeles experimental venue. Winter explains:

Now the wulf. gets proposals all the time from people who clearly are looking for a place to play but have no idea about the history or aesthetic of the wulf. In the past, they didn’t have the problem of accommodating touring musicians or anything, but now that it’s bigger and has a presence in the scene, the artistic advisory board is a good name to hide behind so as not to make personal enemies. The board has also helped to engender diversity while maintaining an idea of the wulf.’s character. (interview, Winter, 24 August 2016)

In spite of a move toward more diverse programming, a mostly Eurological experimentalism has been the most supported and programmed. It is worth noting that neither Winter nor Clark are so naïve as to suggest there is a hard line between the idea of improvisation versus realization and interpretation of a text or graphic score. Rather, Clark stated in interview that he understood improvisation and realization to be mutually inflecting, intertwined and, sometimes problematic concepts approaching the structure of real-time music making with different conceptual assumptions - going so far as to even refer to rehearsed performances of
canonical Western art music as maintaining an element of improvisation in the interpretive decisions made by performers (interview, Clark, 6 September 2016).

In spite of this, the two initiated a ban on “improvisation” at the wulf. in the first year of its programming. According to Winter and Clark, the ban was due more to the tenacity and volume of free-improvising musicians looking for a venue more than any prejudice against the musical strategy or its historical significance. As, in the beginning, the founders intended the wulf. to be a space for the presentation and rapid prototyping of their own CalArts community’s work, there just wasn’t enough time on the calendar for all of the improvisers that wanted to play there. Winter explains:

I’m really not that interested in the branding of these things...there wasn’t by certain groups of improvising musicians – there wasn’t a consideration of the space as we wanted. A lot of improvisers – and this is not a bad thing, not a criticism – play a lot, anywhere; and they’re very ambitious; and they’re really active. And that’s great. But, it clogs the pipes. Uh, you know – so I guess I’m saying that’s a very important, interesting world. But you can’t do everything. And, there was kind of a couple of performances where it was like, we don’t really want to be here for this. And, this is not, these people aren’t considering us. You know? And they weren’t bad people; and they weren’t bad musicians by any means. But we realized that even without that world, we were still overwhelmed to some extent, or, at capacity with the amount that we could handle and do. And since then that’s [the ban] kind of faded away and we do have improvisation. And that’s fine, but we were young and trying to figure out a way to do as much as we can do, without overwhelming ourselves. So somewhere you’ve got to draw a line. (interview, Winter, 24 August 2016)

Clark corroborates this story, saying that early on they were overwhelmed by improvising musicians looking for a performance outlet:

That’s because we got so many emails. It was difficult...like, so many. Otherwise it was going to become a five-nights-a-week improvisation venue right away. And that would mean we would have been having shows all the time and that’s just nuts. So, that was a tough one, but that seemed the fairest thing to do, just make it a blanket [ban] because how do you...? (interview, Clark, 6 September 2016)  

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66 Reflecting on a similar issue in New York’s Downtown scene, Kyle Gann remembers: “But when I first came to the Downtown scene, it was so dominated by free improvisation and lots of other musicians couldn’t get their music out. Improvisers didn’t need to rehearse. They could just run up there with their instruments and start playing. And
Of the nineteen shows at the wulf. that I attended in 2016, (representing half of the
season’s thirty-eight total shows), the vast majority could be considered realizations of
graphic or text scores. When construable as improvisations, performances were rarely
“free,” but rather structured in terms of pre-determined time constrictions or, when
utilizing electronics (algorithmic processing on laptops or more hands-on practical
mixing with no-input mixers), structural boundaries from computational feedback. Six of
those nineteen shows included both improvisation and realization.

Betalevel

The most literally “underground” performance space in the scene is the multi-use space
in Chinatown called Betalevel. With walls painted white and red, the bric-a-brac left over from
years of previous performances and installations is illuminated by clamp-on work lights, strings
of light refracted, occasionally, by a disco ball and lasers. I have not been able to locate an
official history, or even an official address for Betalevel. Rather, the directions available at
www.betalevel.com give the adventurous listener a series of directions based on landmarks: “1)
Find yourself in front of Full House Restaurant; 2) Locate the alley on the left-hand side of Full
House; 3) Walk about twenty feet down the alley; 4) Stop; 5) Notice dumpster on your right-
hand side,” etc. After finding this venue, one notices that most of the people there know one
another. In spite of its friendly openness and lack of entrance cost, this is not a casual spot any
average music fan might stumble upon. Rather, it is a subterranean clubhouse for the hermetic
and paradoxically distributed clique of experimental arts in Los Angeles; whether performance,

so it was squeezing out all the other different kinds of music. And I knew lots of musicians who were very unhappy
with that scene because it was so dominated that way” (Oteri 2010).
video projection, or aurally oriented (or more). Originally organized by friends in the early 2000s and called c-level, Betalevel is one of the longest-running contemporary spaces in Los Angeles for aesthetic social experimentation and hands-on-culture.

![Figure 6.4: William Hutson performing an electronic improvisation, 1 October 2016. Part of an evening organized by the wulf at Betalevel - one of the first satellite shows programmed after the closing of what had been their permanent space.](image)

After the loss of what was the wulf’s permanent location some miles further south in the warehouse district, Betalevel served as a satellite space for the wulf’s continued programming. In fact, the first program performed outside of the 1026 S. Santa Fe Ave. space was held there. Accordingly, one can find a large overlap of scene participants from that of the wulf, though
Betalevel’s mix of programming attracts people from other related scenes who perhaps are not Calartians or have more of an interest in noise or performance-oriented practices. Demonstrating how attractive the neighborhood’s relatively-inexpensive rent prices are to non-commercial artists, one can find another experimental music just up the stairs, through the alley, and back out in the streets of Chinatown.

**Automata Arts**

Less than a block away from the alley that leads to Betalevel, the 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization Automata Arts can be found in Chung King Court. Founded by Susan Simpson and Janie Geiser in 2004, Automata Arts has an interest in preserving newly invented folklores in Los Angeles (as evidenced in their previous work as the Manual Archives 2007-9) and providing a home for experimental puppet theater, film, music, and other experimental practices. The unadorned walls of the storefront space are painted a dark moss green that feature no wall hangings. It is empty but for a few light fixtures and an air conditioner that hangs from the ceiling, giving the space a black-box theater feel that serves to focus attention (See Ulrich Krieger performing at Automata Arts in Figure 6.10). As in the case at the Velaslavasay Panorama and ArtShare LA, Automata Arts enjoys a supportive symbiotic relationship with experimental art presenters seeking a venue. Not explicitly a place for experimental music, music presentation there is “more of a side thing they let happen” that can be mutually beneficial by frame an artist’s performance in a visible Los Angeles location while helping to the organization to cover the venue’s rising rent cost (interview, Barbier, 8 November 2016). Accordingly, Automata Arts has a ticket price that, often costing more than $10, can be discouraging to a potential listenership at best and exclusionary at worst. Nonetheless, an attitude of aesthetic
practice as research similar to that of the Los Angeles’ experimental music scene is expressed in Automata’s self-documentation and openness to plurality.

**Human Resources**

The third of a cluster of experimental music venues in Los Angeles’ Chinatown neighborhood is Human Resources. This large and unassuming (and unmarked as “Human Resources”) building on Cottage Home St. houses a surprisingly large space favored by dancers, performance- and installation-oriented artists, but it often opens its doors to a variety of musical experimenters. Like Betalevel and Automata Arts, this space has no in-house experimental music organization, but is organized by a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization that seeks to encourage community access to a variety of non-traditional art forms. Some funding for the space comes from grants (Los Angeles County Arts Commission, The City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts) while other funding comes from ticket sales (low cost) and donation. Though the building’s upkeep leaves much to be desired (with a worse bathroom than even the literally-underground Betalevel), the size of the space affords an aural parameter for performing musicians not always available in other DIY spaces such as that of the wulf. or Betalevel: natural reverb. Furthermore, the physical size of the venue allows for novel staging of works. These characteristics were well-exploited by Southland Ensemble’s July 15, 2016 presentation of extremely minimalist works from the pages of the journal *Soundings Press*; works by James Tenney, Johanna Magdalena Beyer, John Dinwiddie, James Fulkerson, and Stephen L. Mosko. Regardless of scant attendance (only fourteen people), the performance by the six-person ensemble was compelling, if the works were themselves somewhat mystifying. My fieldnotes read:
One set of music happens with the ensemble moving from one piece to the next with listeners not clapping between pieces. I’m not sure if we should be clapping or if it’s ok not to, but people seem a bit confused as to what to do. Many of these pieces read as similar in their use of silence and droning. The recurring Tenney “Swell” pieces pass changing droning tones around. There is a piece that includes two projection screens of people first manipulating a double bass and cello respectively from below, then later telling stories. I’m not sure what to make of this program. The sounds are confused, and the words obscure one another. Nobody seems sure how to react or when the pieces are finished.

This kind of aesthetic unmooring is likely a feature rather than a bug of this concert’s program, the open-endedness and locality of works performed (Soundings Press was published by Peter Garland from 1971-90 and often focused on California experimental composers) was no accident.

Figure 6.5: A view of Human Resources from Cottage Home St. in Chinatown. Michael Pisaro and Ulrich Krieger can be seen talking in front of the venue’s entrance.
The $18 ticket cost for the aforementioned performance of aesthetically-challenging and obscure works—not to mention its occurrence on a Friday night—may have contributed to the sparse attendance that evening. But this is where Human Resources shows its utility and value as a venue in Los Angeles’ commercial landscape. Despite the low attendance that night (which is certainly not always the case), Southland Ensemble was able to realize its mission of presenting otherwise unpresented experimental music “to a wide variety of audiences through the mediums of interactive concerts, lectures and workshops. The ensemble believes strongly in the power of creative programming to educate and enhance the audience’s understanding of an historical or artistic period.”

Human Resource’s own complimentary mission is, in a sense, holding open the door and making space for a community whose broad interests are perhaps too broad for commercial tastes.

ArtShare LA

Only a few miles south of Human Resources but in a culturally and socioeconomically different world, is ArtShare LA. Another 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization making space for artists and arts education this large (28,000 square foot), multi-use building lies among warehouses, bars, and restaurants just west of Downtown Los Angeles in the Arts District. Since 1997 the building has persisted as ArtShare, though the organization that controlled the facility has changed with regard to mission and execution as cultural and socioeconomic realities in the Arts District changed. In what was once a two-story textile recycling facility are now galleries, educational studios, performance halls, and live/work lofts for artists. As a performance venue, ArtShare is similar to Automata Arts and Human Resources described above in that it is not a

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67 https://www.southlandensemble.com/about
dedicated experimental arts venue, but rather a supportive, inexpensive option for arts presentation. Like Automata and Human Resources LA as well as others like 356 Mission (Boyle Heights), Monk Space (Koreatown), Machine Project (Silver Lake), The Velaslavasay Panorama exhibition hall (West Adams Historic District), and Mor York Gallery (Highland Park), ArtShare LA is independent rather than institutional. As such it functions as an almost neutral space for curationally-oriented performance organizations such as Southland Ensemble, WasteLAnd, and Andrew Choate’s Unwrinkled Ear Concert Series who, like the Independent Composers Association and the California Outside Music Association before them, have no permanent space of their own and are in between total independence and institutional support.

**Composers and Musical Examples**

As I continue to assert, the DIY experimental music scene in Los Angeles is characterized by a plurality of musical strategies and informed by a myriad of theoretical and aesthetic influences. Still, a great commonality is the training so many received at CalArts. Though the DIY experimental scene is, by the definition I have offered earlier operating outside of institutions, the influence of institutions of higher education is inescapable. As so many members of the scene studied music or fine art at CalArts, it makes sense that some of their attitudes and practices can be traced directly to the people with whom they studied and the wide variety of teachings to be found there. For example, theoretical and performance practices that blend ideas from minimalism, cyclical jazz forms, modal improvisation, use of open forms and electronics, wide and odd-meter cycles from Persian and Balkan musics, non-Western tonalities and notational systems, are all well represented in the scene. Particularly well represented,
though, is the minimalist aesthetic notable in the works and pedagogy of Michael Pisaro and the late James Tenney.

I have described Tenney’s aesthetic theory as described in *Meta+Hodos* at length in Chapter Four. Teaching at CalArts in the 1970s and again from 2000 until his death in 2006, he was a prolific composer, conceptualist, theorist, and computer music pioneer whose music and very attitude continue to be influential. Through his studies or work with luminaries such as Harry Partch, Edgar Varese, Carl Ruggles, and John Cage—not to mention his work as a member of the original Philip Glass and Steve Reich ensembles and deep association with the Fluxus movement—his curriculum vitae shows him to be an experimentalist’s experimentalist; almost superlatively admired by those in the scene.

The foremost influence brought by composer and performer Michael Pisaro is likely his investment in the aesthetic of the Wandelweiser Collective (described at length above), which he was invited to join in the mid 1990s. After having taught at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois from 1986 to 2000, Pisaro joined the faculty at CalArts where he teaches composition and experimental sound practices. As he lives and works in relatively close proximity to Downtown Los Angeles (CalArts is in Valencia), Pisaro himself has a presence in the DIY scene and performs solo and ensemble works from time to time at venues such as the wulf. His influence is particularly visible in the planning of the annual Dog Star Orchestra Festival, an experimental music festival that has taken place in DIY spaces and public, outdoor spaces in Los Angeles since 2004.

Tenney and Pisaro are far from being the only teachers at CalArts that have had lasting influence on their students. The influence of CalArts professor Ulrich Krieger’s compositions that incorporate saxophone and electronics in sweepingly unfolding aural explorations can be
detected, as can the open improvisational approach of former CalArts professor Wadada Leo Smith. What is missing, however, are markers of an Afrological improvisational sensibility, or similarly, what Travis A. Jackson (2012) refers to as the Blues Aesthetic. I asked Vinny Golia, a revered woodwind multi-instrumentalist that has taught composition, improvisation, and woodwinds at CalArts since 1999, about attitudes toward mixing musical sensibilities at CalArts. He extolled the virtues of studying widely that is often espoused at CalArts, saying:

Studying widely—including Persian and Balkan styles—gives you a hand at working with music with wide cycles, like Steve Coleman or even a [Anthony] Braxton…looking at giant washes of things. Or, looking at drone music and understanding Phil Niblock but still understanding how to improvise; using Indian systems which take you to [La Monte] Young, and also, Terry Riley and that kind of minimalistic thing. So, once you start to see pathways there, then it becomes totally open…And other schools, sometimes they negate certain things, like, if you go to a school where everything is set up like a smorgasbord in front of you when you’re picking and choosing, you might pick to your own strengths and weaknesses. So, you may eliminate bebop from your choices, but bebop gives you the best building blocks for anything you need to learn. Gives you rhythm, harmony, and melody all in one music. Once you go to a bebop thing, you’re pretty well established on your instrument and can go in a lot of directions. The problem is that most cats don’t go outside the bebop thing once they get into it. They keep on immersing themselves in further cyclic structures like that. So, it takes a good teacher to show you how to appreciate one thing and see how you can incorporate it into another thing. (interview, 22 June 2016)

I have definitely heard reflections of Golia’s sentiment in conversations with musicians and composers in the Los Angeles scene. But for the most part, what is actually heard leans much more toward conceptuality and game orientation than toward free improvisation.

Another teaching artist at CalArts, Ulrich Krieger is a German national who sought out what he describes as a different attitude regarding genres of practice in the Unites States versus his prior experiences in Europe. His recent discography shows great plurality featuring modernist concert saxophone repertoire, a noise/art rock trio with Lou Reed, minimalism, and noise. Still, he doesn’t consider this genre-hopping to be a postmodern trait; not a reflection of a decentered
subject but simply a reflection of his many interests. When he first came to the United States (New York City) in the 1990s, he found musicians to be more open to playing different styles than in Germany. Whereas a musician in the United States might successfully perform rock, noise, improvisation, minimalism, concert music, etc., in Europe he found music communities and practices to be more mutually exclusive. The more compartmentalized, delineated genre boundaries in Europe may be incentivized, he thinks, by the logic of how projects are funded in Europe wherein an artist must present their work as representative of a particular practice and build a case for their work’s validity as such.

I illustrate the plurality of the scene’s aesthetic practices in the following descriptions of performances of works by six contemporary Los Angeles composer/performers in 2016. Despite their differing mediums and compositional approaches, implicitly shared characteristics of their institutional and social milieus are discernable in their work.

**Casey Anderson**

If Los Angeles’ DIY experimental music scene had a mascot, I suggest it might be Casey Anderson. Or, if it held some kind of awards ceremony for the scene analogous to The Oscars, it is likely that Anderson would win the award for “most tirelessly plugged-in.” Growing up “upper middle class and white” and coming to California via Maryland, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, he currently self-identifies as in his early 30s, straight, white, male, and broke. In an informal conversation, Anderson once exemplified his erudition and self-reflexive understanding of the contemporary scene by citing George Lewis by name and his idea of Eurological-oriented experimentalism. Having studied extensively with Wadada Leo Smith and being a great admirer of the AACM, Anderson is explicitly interested in bringing elements of interactive, agential
music into his instructional and improvisational works. An MFA graduate of CalArts, he seems to be everywhere in the DIY experimental music scene working in various modalities; as a member of artistic direction boards, as a co-founder and co-editor (with John P. Hastings and Scott Cazan) of the *Experimental Music Yearbook*, owner and operator of A Wave Press, and as a core member of Southland Ensemble. Additionally, he teaches in the Media Design Practices department at ArtCenter College of Design and works as a saxophonist in various bands.

![Figure 6.6: A performance of Casey Anderson’s *SCRUM* (2016) at CalArts’ Wild Beast performance space, 5 June 2016.](image)

Programmed as part of an evening performance at CalArts’ Wild Beast performance space, Casey Anderson’s *SCRUM* (2016) got its performers up and moving around. Part of the Dog Star Orchestra 12 festival, the piece was programmed that night (5 June 2016) alongside
works by John Cage, Manfred Werder, Todd Lerew, and Pauline Oliveros. Like some works of
Cornelius Cardew, Christian Wolff, and Sara Roberts, SCRUM is a piece that exploits social,
moving bodies to experiment with crowd behavior. The score\textsuperscript{68} describes the work as “A
mechanism to restart play.” And so it is, with the rules of the game to be played building upon
one another. The first series of instructions reads:

Each performer quickly selects an action from the list to perform (more or less)
continuously. while performing the action, each pushes through / around the
clump of others, searching for partners (any performer who has selected the same
action) to build an incrementally expanding ensemble: solos become duos, duos
become trios, etc.. expansion of a group is denoted by physical contact between
two persons who have selected the same action. when a group gains a member
they retreat out from the clump (to the perimeter) and attempt to push through the
clump again (still looking for additional members), stronger, louder, more present
with each pass.

The work had almost thirty people performing observed by an audience of about twenty-one.
Performers walked around performing the directions of the scores; speaking, clapping, playing
radios, slowly meeting up with performers with similar directions and creating battling factions
along a line of tape in the center of the room. After some elapse of time, they’d break and start
again. The performers seemed to be improvising and playing with modes and rules of social
interactions; seeking others with similar imperatives while each growing faction worked to
overpower the other. Accidental music found by scanning radios (mostly hip hop, it seemed)
played against clusters of vocal intervals and clusters, reading aloud, and hocketing clapping
sounds. The experience was analogous to watching the locomotion of reproduction of amoebas
or to model the collective evolution and adaptation of combative social activities. SCRUM was
fun to watch, and the sounds were familiar but, through their juxtaposition and fluctuation of
significance, unexpected.

\textsuperscript{68} See complete score available in Appendix.
Scott Cazan

An all-around creative technologist, Scott Cazan has a knack for deploying technology to make the familiar strange. Composition studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara led to an MFA in Experimental Sound at CalArts where he met and worked with many of the people that comprise Los Angeles’ DIY experimental music scene—especially those at the wulf. Having later worked as faculty at ArtCenter College of Design and CalArts, he also uses his talents in the private sector as a creative coder and audio specialist. Cazan possesses not only a deep knowledge of contemporary electronic music production, but also the imagination and curiosity to investigate its aesthetic and cognitive possibilities.

Figure 6.7: The score to Scott Cazan’s Grammar (2016), drawn on the floor at the wulf., 30 April 2016. See complete score available in Appendix.
On the evening of April 30, 2016, about thirty listeners gathered for the night’s programming at the wulf. Entitled “Uncanny Valley,” it featured two works for electronics and ensemble from Scott Cazan: Grammar (2016) (to which I allude in the introduction of Chapter One) and Play a Song (2016). The role of the performer as related to the sonic “product” heard was obfuscated in both works. As the first piece of the night, Grammar, showcased computer alchemy. Apart from some apparent live programming that had something to do with code scrawled on the floor like magical sigils, any relationship between sound sources and processes was very unclear.

This occultation is intentional as Grammar, according to Cazan, is a “shadow” of a pre-composed work for electronics. The sounds that comprise grammar are not the pre-composed work to which they correlate, but rather, a re-enactment of the keystrokes used to originally create the pre-composed piece. The sounds heard are indeterminate in a sense as the function of what the keystrokes do—how or if they alter the sounds being produced by SuperCollider—is hidden from the performer. This reorientation of the idea of the “performer” as having any control over the parameters of whatever is being performed is well-established in experimentalism. However, its transposition into different modes continues to be productive and, in the best cases, exciting. In an interview, Cazan talked about the computer’s role in divorcing the composer’s agency from the performance and any jurisdiction over meaning-making - pushing the process into the realm of the (almost) mystical:

The way I think when I’m performing is, usually, I’m trying to eliminate my “performer” role and trying to situate myself as a listener. Primarily in the same level as the audience, right? It’s impossible because we’re in control, um, but you can sit and listen and sort of know when to move ahead. And I think that’s where computers are wonderful, because they can take a lot of the pressure off. To just simply explore listening and sound and not, not expression…with the violin you’re in full control and, I’m not going to pick up a violin (laughs). (interview, 20 June 2016)
That experience of a manifestation of the new in sonic terms is what excites Cazan. His use of creative coding in his electronic experimental music practice is an exercise in resituating organized sound production in mathematically-non-idiomatic worlds. The complex self-reflexivity of waiting and listening as discussed in Chapter Three monitors the horizon of possibility’s aperture of openness, and in doing so effectuates the augmentation of that aperture:

You’re just experiencing these things and there’s no way to really describe what’s happening. But there’s a sense of, like, looking for the unexpected. Or...endlessly searching for it, but, monitoring your own state as a person, as a listener. Understanding how you react to these things. Or when something comes out of nowhere and completely outside of your view of what could have happened. Like, that’s exciting, right? And I understand why it’s so outside of your field of what can happen. That to me is... magic. That’s the rub. (Ibid.)

In the case of Grammar, the performer might be somewhat familiar with the piece’s sonic realms of possibility, but the execution of each sound event is masked by the encoded key commands resulting in the performer never really knowing what the effects of the keystrokes they are executing might be—if there is any effect at all. The performer’s agency is minimized, not making choices with clear outcomes, left only in their actions the ability to effect a change or not effect a change—with the understanding that something is happening in which, to some degree, they are implicated.

The other work performed in the “Uncanny Valley” that night was Play a Song. Characteristically, this work serves to remake the familiar as weird. Featuring Casey Anderson on alto saxophone, Andrew Young on guitar, Corey Fogel on snare drum, Carmina Escobar dancing, and Scott Cazan controlling electronic audio signals, Play a Song had each performer wearing headphones and heuristically working toward what sounded like an approximation of Roy Orbison’s “You Got It.” The audience does not hear the original recording, but instead hears
shadows of the song’s familiar structural characteristics slowly emerging as performers figure out what might be their part on their instrument.

In an email, Cazan explained the logic of the piece:

_Play a Song_ is a piece for any amount of performers in which performers are hearing a song for the first time. The performers are simply asked to try to learn the song on their instrument. This piece is, in essence, a way for performers to isolate and discover short gestalts present in a song and draw those out unintentionally. This usually results in a cloud of the most identifiable aspects of a song according to the performers. (email, 4 March 2018)

Figure 6.8: A performance of Scott Cazan’s _Play a Song_ (2016) at the wulf., 30 April 2016.
I assume that the audio input the performers heard was time stretched, as what listeners heard seemed to be slower than Orbison’s original, further serving to make the familiar strange. Watching and listening to the heuristic process of the performers’ learning, listeners experience the relationships of structural elements of the song differently, perhaps turning them over in their minds as “short gestalts” removed from the synthetic whole. This visit to the uncanny valley was overall very enjoyable and the performance was rewarded with a loud and long applause.

**Carmina Escobar**

Many of the pieces performed in the DIY experimental music scene can be described as musically static, but also physically so. Performers most often sit or stand without movement more than is necessary to perform with whatever instrument or interface they’re manipulating. For the most part (other than Todd Lerew’s work I describe below), there is little fanfare, narrative, or drama. This is not the case with Carmina Escobar’s works.

An autodidact multi-modal musician, vocalist, creator, inventor, Escobar describes herself as an “octopus personality” who enjoys “creating worlds” through her work (interview, Escobar, 22 September 2016). Originally from Mexico City, Escobar had originally intended to study film before being thwarted by teacher strikes. Instead, she studied opera and earned an undergraduate degree in classical voice. However, she didn’t feel like a “natural” in that world: “It was a nightmare (laughs). I mean, I like the instrument [classical voice] a lot, but European 19th century traditional music was not my thing. But it was a way to discover different things. I was kind of a weirdo, I guess? And I hang a lot with instrumental players which is always a good thing” (Ibid.). Through experimenting by running vocal signals—reading poetry, improvising, etc.—through guitar pedals with friends in her late teens, Escobar started to get excited about the
possibilities of the voice in experimental contexts. After working more with avant-garde works and even performing Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire*, she felt she needed to find an even more experimental path and sought out opportunities for training and resources. It was CalArts that was to provide these. Stating, “I’m middle-class in Mexico City, but it’s obscene the amount of money [that it costs to attend CalArts]. But it’s knowledge, it’s resources, it’s a space, it’s time. It’s fucking amazing” (Ibid.).

Escobar applied to the school and, as she did not have the funds to attend on her own resources, the institute offered her a series of grants, eventually culminating in an MFA of Performance/Vocal Arts in 2010. While at CalArts, she studied with singers and vocalists such as Hebe Rosell, Jacqueline Bobak, Michiko Hirayama, Shelley Hirsh, Meredith Monk, Joan La Barbara, Juan Pablo Villa and Jaap Blonk, while studying experimental techniques with Michael Pisaro, Vinny Golia, and Leo Smith (Ankrasmation). Having dug into and invested in the Los Angeles scene composing, performing, and teaching, she has been hired by CalArts as a lecturer of VoiceArts and is the first Mexican hire in the music school.

On the evening of Sunday, September 11, 2016, Escobar performed a piece that included projections and dance, featuring Japanese butoh dancer, Oguri. The evening, called “OPEN SOURCE” was programmed by the wulf. (by Scott Cazan and Stephanie Smith, really), and featured interdisciplinary, intermedia works by Escobar, Liew Niyomkam, and Ulrich Krieger, and was the second performance associated the wulf. after it’s physical space had closed two weeks prior. It is noteworthy that this was also one of the very first performances at the ill-fated PSSST Gallery in Los Angeles’ Boyle Heights neighborhood.69

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69 A 501(c)3 art space whose building was purchased and renovated by an unknown benefactor, PSSST Gallery endeavored to offer a platform for artists who identify as queer, women, and/or people of color. However, the space was not welcomed by the embattled, mostly Latinx community in Boyle Heights and was an object of disdain for...
In our interview, Escobar noted the world-building character of her work that offers alternatives to reality and room for exploration: “It’s another possibility in a world that doesn’t give you so much possibilities [sic],” she said, “so, it’s against the status quo, I think…” (Ibid.). To build these worlds, for this piece—the name of which I couldn’t find, if there was indeed a name—Escobar created layers of spoken and sung sound that were by turns diaphanous and thundering.

Figure 6.9: Vocalist, Carmina Escobar (against the wall) and butoh dancer, Oguri (with fluorescent light) performing as part of the wulf.’s “OPEN SOURCE” night at PSSST Gallery, 11 September 2016 (photographer unknown, image: http://www.pssst.xyz/past/).

As she has several times now, she collaborated with Oguri who explored the space physically and interacted with lighting elements on the floor and hanging from the ceiling, as

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groups including the Boyle Heights Alliance Against Artwashing and Displacement (BHAAAD). Due to these tensions, PSSST Gallery closed in early 2017—an event lauded by the Boyle Heights community.
well as video projection of a man wading into the ocean, to improvise a narrative. The sonic elements of the performance were extremely loud at times, and the smell of ozone was apparent, as Escobar inadvertently over-drove a few of PSSST Gallery’s speakers, burning out several electronic elements.

Though the evening had been programmed by the wulf. and featured several artists affiliated with the wulf. community, the audience was much larger than one could have expected at the wulf.’s old space. The performance was relatively informal with the audience sitting on the floor and a few checking their phones from time to time. The crowd of approximately seventy-five audience members appeared to be much more mixed with regard to gender than was usually in attendance at the wulf., and read as queer. This perhaps reflected the official mission of PSSST Gallery of creating space for individuals that identify as queer, women, and/or people of color. Further differentiating it from a performance at the wulf., there was a $10 ticket cost.

Escobar’s performance was well-received, and it appeared she achieved her goal of “moving people.” This power of world-building through experimental sound practices is at the root of her impetus of making music: “Exploring ideas is important for the human race—and in a Baroque sense, moving the passions. And voice can do it like that [snaps fingers] And that’s how I found the relevance of my own practice” (Ibid.).

**Ulrich Krieger**

As the only European of those I have interviewed, saxophonist and composer Ulrich Krieger’s experience of Los Angeles’ experimental music scene interested me greatly. Hailing originally from Freiburum im Breisgau in Baden-Württemburg, Germany, he came to the United States in the early 1990s. Before moving to California in 2007 for an appointment as Associate
Professor at CalArts, he trained at the Manhattan School of Music in New York City and performed widely across stylistic boundaries. In our interview, he was able to speak to his understanding of experimental education, the question of postmodernity in Los Angeles’ contemporary experimentalism, the overlapping and borrowing between musical traditions, and gender, racial, and socioeconomic inequities from an appreciably-different positionality. Though much of his musical output is locatable in the experimental and noise traditions, he also performs regularly in rock and metal contexts (for example, in Lou Reed last band, Metal Machine Trio and his own “modular noise-metal” group, Blood Oath), in liminal “acoustic electronic” modes, as well as more traditionally composed, concert-oriented modes. Though he often approaches composition as research and performs new music still in development, he is comfortable calling some of his own work “noise.” Often creating graphic scores for his own later realization, Krieger’s performative attitude is kinetic and differs from the compositional and performance practices of Scott Cazan or Michael Winter, whose modes of performance—while also conceptually open—are more reserved. “Art, for me, is essential for defining social context and interaction,” Says Krieger. From his perspective, his music has three roles: political, social, and philosophical. But more than that, he added: “I want things to be sensual and not just intellectual” (interview, Krieger, 31 August 2016). He wants his audience to feel his music, perhaps even to evoke places and times.
This is the case for two of his works performed at Automata Arts on April 22, 2016 to an audience of ten (five men, five women - though, rather optimistically, there were chairs enough for 38 set up). Krieger began the evening with his ReSpace (Universe, parts 1 & 2), the low amplitude and glacial pace of which recalled to me the Wandelweiser aesthetic whose influence in the scene was becoming more apparent (Krieger has performed as part of Wandelweiser’s Komponisten Ensemble and recorded works for Burkhard Schlothauer published by Edition Wandelweiser). A paper program read, “In ReSpace, Krieger employs the saxophone’s keys as controllers, manipulating nuanced and quiet feedback to create lush ambient atmospheres.” Similar to Lucier’s “I Am Sitting In A Room,” the role of the room’s constructed materiality in
creating unique performative feedback was implicated as part of the piece. It was unclear how Krieger was making sound with the saxophone as he certainly wasn’t blowing in it or using the keys in any conventional manner. The sound was pure, approaching simple sine waves, and he was making clusters of tones that were sometimes very close, rubbing against one another. At times, due to the nature of the harmonic series, these pitches became tonal clusters. This was very quiet and patient music, and the noise from Chinatown outside overlapped with the work. For example, in Chung King Court just outside Automata Arts’ front door, a woman and child were talking loudly and were quite audible, as were passing cars. As such, the urban space interjected in to the imagined space created by Krieger, with the sonic trace of the immanent and the realization of the work interpenetrating one another.

Krieger’s second set that night was RAW I-V, a piece invoking the moods of five pseudo-ghost towns in Southern California: Desert Center, Trona, Needles, Shoshone, and California City. This piece used live sampling through contact mics on the saxophone, guitar pedals, rubber and metal saxophone mouthpieces (and sometimes no mouthpiece), and saw Krieger being much more animated than during the performance of ReSpace. Sometimes invoking the quiet of desert landscapes (wind, lonely tones), other sections were violent, featuring distorted R&B riffs on the horn, screaming, with Krieger affecting a rock aesthetic as he writhed, knelt, flung his hair, etc., for almost an hour. As always, Krieger was approachable after the performance and let me see his electronics setup and steal a glimpse at his scores. These particular works, sketched out as they are, are not intended for other performers and differ from his more traditionally composed and engraved chamber works. Rather, they function for him as reminders of felt spaces, textures, and notated sounds to aid in his realization of the works.
Figure 6.11: Ulrich Krieger’s score for RAW III, used by permission. See complete score available in Appendix.

Todd Lerew

Hailing originally from a small family farm in South Dakota, Los Angeles composer/performer Todd Lerew understands musical experimentalism as a reflection of an open, experimental lifestyle. His own works utilize invented acoustic instruments, found objects, and unique preparations of traditional instruments to play with the idea of failure expressed in material, processual, and durational terms. For example, Yielding Isometrics (2012) asks the performer to hold a small weight out at arm’s length while that same hand is controlling the pitch pole of a Theremin, attempting to match a target sine tone. The performance is over when the
performer, having become exhausted, can no longer hold the weight and fails to maintain a steady pitch. *Flagging Entrainment of Ultradian Rhythms and the Consequences Thereof* (2014), which won the 2014 American Composers Forum’s National Composition Contest, is a percussion piece that asks all performers to maintain perfect synchrony despite a lack of visual or aural cues and with a uniformly increasing (or decreasing) rest between struck notes. As the pause between attacks increases in length, it becomes more difficult for each player's internal count to remain in synchrony with that of the other performers. As the performers inevitably manifest a variance—which, of course, is different for every performance—the instructions of the work dictate changes in pitches to be played and additional actions specified.

Lerew is always, however, investigating the relationship between aesthetic beauty and knowledge. Regarding his compositional attitude, he says:

> I have to feel like I’m learning something, and I’m very interested in exploring perception and beautiful aesthetic experiences. Everybody’s looking for that, but it’s mysterious. Related to that, experimentalism is trying to be new, but it doesn’t operate outside of history. It’s organized around the question of “what hasn’t happened yet?” It only fails when it does not succeed at doing something new or somehow changing the way you understand a situation. (email, 11 August 2017)

Lerew earned a BA at Hampshire College, a private, liberal arts in Massachusetts before enrolling at CalArts for a MFA in composition. Part of the CalArts mafia, he has been a mainstay in the community at the wulf. as a listener, composer, and performer. I offer below descriptions of two performances of Lerew’s compositions I observed during my fieldwork.

As part of that same evening at CalArts described above as part of the Dog Star Orchestra 12 festival on June 5, 2016, Lerew’s *Small Objects in the Weather* (2016) was programmed along with works by John Cage, Manfred Werder, Casey Anderson (*SCRUM*), and Pauline Oliveros. Taking place in CalArts’ Wild Beast performance space, about thirty performers sat on the floor—some with pieces of cut metal rod, some with 1’x 4’ pieces of sheet-metal—waiting to
be directed by Lerew. The composer sat on a stool before a large gong and directed the
performers’ by using various-sized party poppers—cardboard tubes filled with confetti activated
by an explosive charge triggered by pulling a string. The performers hit their rods on the
concrete floor quickly making bell-like tones while others stood behind them to sometimes shake
their pieces of sheet-metal. Lerew’s party poppers ranged in size from very small to very large
and, as he deployed them, filled the vertical space in the room with colorful confetti. It was
unclear if the work had any pre-conceived structure outside of the materials of its performance.
But in spite of the rather novel and almost cute character of the piece, he remained stoic before
the performers, cueing their performances with conviction. Finally, he primed the large gong
he’d been sitting in front of while another performer took control and cued the silencing of
remaining performers by “shooting” at them with a series of smaller party poppers. It was
unclear how or if this work investigated failure or even whether its structure was preconceived or
improvised by Lerew with only the materials used by the performers prescribed. Whatever it
was, the work’s strength was its performative nature and its overlapping, textured sounds. It felt
whimsical and received a long applause—and it became clear that it had been programmed as
last of the evening for the extensive cleanup it required afterward.

About three months later on the evening of September 2, 2016, WasteLAnd presented
new works by Todd Lerew and Erik Ulman at Art Share LA. This was the first night of
WasteLAnd’s fourth season, and about seventy-five listeners (approximately fifty men and
twenty-five women) were in attendance. Whereas venues like the wulf. and Betalevel are free,
tickets for this performance cost $10 with proceeds going to renting space and materials as well
as maintaining the WasteLAnd website (interview, Matt Barbier, 11 August 2016). The
performance hall of Art Share LA was arranged with folding chairs and the attitude before the
performance began was informal, with people drinking beer and wine available from the venue’s hallway “bar” and enjoying snacks provided by WasteLAnd. But as the performances began, an order prevailed that was reminiscent of formal concert etiquette: the audience’s seats were uniform and neatly arranged in rows, I observed no talking, no cell phones or texting, and polite clapping was reserved for the end of pieces—none between movements. During the first half of the evening’s program, a reader’s choir performed Lerew’s *Reading the Dictionaries* (2015), followed by Ulman’s through-written, atonal and microtonal *String Quartet No. 3*. Lerew’s piece is exactly what it sounds like, with—in this case—five readers rhythmically reading, in order, the entries of the letters “Q” and “V” from five different dictionaries. The performance of both “movements” lasted about thirty minutes in total with Ulman’s work lasting another thirty or so afterward.

This program initiated for me an unexpected series of critical thoughts. I had been attending so many less formal and experimentally-oriented performances that I was shocked by the pseudo-formality of this scene. Lerew’s piece seemed to me to be reminiscent of something that might have been performed by the Scratch Orchestra or as part of a Fluxus-oriented “happening,” and it felt strange to me that its performance and reception had been made so formal and academic. This feeling was, perhaps, natural as—according to one of WasteLAnd’s founders, Scott Worthington—the organization is interested in presenting music that more commonly has a home in academia in other settings without academic affiliation (interview, Worthington, 23 June 2016).

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70 Score available in Appendix.
Figure 6.12: (Above) Todd Lerew conducting *Small Objects in the Weather* (2016) at CalArt’s Wild Beast, June 5, 2016. (Below) Confetti from the party poppers Lerew used as a cueing device falls down on performers.
In the history of their programming, WasteLAnd has rented concert spaces at Los Angeles Community College, the University of California, San Diego, and CalArts, but they’re home bases are Art Share LA, 356 Mission, or the Velaslavasay Panorama theater. The formal, ritualistic nature of performance etiquette more commonly reserved for canonic works (Small 1987) felt forced, especially as Lerew’s work for reader’s choir seemed reminiscent of musical practices that were Dadaist or otherwise counter-cultural. This reflects Bürger’s insight regarding the failure of the avant-garde (mentioned in Chapter Two) - how that which represents the neo-avant-garde (experimental) is captured and assimilated by the structures it perhaps intends to criticize or supersede. Though the work gestured at a character of resistance present in Dada or Fluxus, its pseudo-formalized presentation made it feel inauthentic.

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**Reading the Dictionaries**

*for readers’ choir*

A number of performers (no fewer than four) read aloud the words set forth in several dictionaries, alphabetically and in time with one another.

Any language is permitted, but all performers must be reading in the same language, and will all have different editions of roughly the same length. Only dictionaries containing a list of words of a single language are to be used, and all should be intended for the same purpose of use. That is, none should be specialized, themed, or inter-lingual translations.

Each performer must read directly from a print dictionary as opposed to a photocopy, a prepared/reduced list of words, or a digital version of any kind.

No fewer than four different editions by any number of lexicographical manufacturers should be represented. That is, all performers may have the OED but from different years, or there may be two different OED dictionaries and two more from Merriam-Webster, etc.

No performer’s dictionary should be of dramatically differing length from that of any other performer, so as to avoid any solos of excessive duration. In English, collegiate dictionaries are recommended as a good average size and for diversity of entries within a similar range of length. A performance using learner’s dictionaries or pocket dictionaries could be interesting for covering a

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**Figure 6.13: Extract from Todd Lerew’s *Reading the Dictionaries* (2015).**

*See complete score available in Appendix.*
Michael Winter

One of the founders of the wulf, Michael Winter is a remarkably intelligent, committed, and friendly person. While a student at CalArts from 2003-5 for his MFA in composition, he studied exclusively with James Tenney. He also took part in Michael Pisaro’s Experimental Music Workshop at CalArts and has been influenced by the rise of the Wandelweiser aesthetic in Southern California. In spite of the breadth of his studies, Winter counts Tenney as his greatest influence. Born and raised in Nashville, Tennessee, Winter began his undergraduate studies in guitar performance at Belmont University before transferring to study electronic music and composition with Jeffrey Stolet at the University of Oregon, where he was greatly affected by the music of Hungarian avant-garde composer György Ligeti. Winter’s compositions vary from open, simple text scores for interpretive realization to explicitly notated and mathematically-oriented works that consider sound from the perspective of information and its attendant computable physical properties. Bearing an observable influence from James Tenney, these compositions are exploratory and research oriented, intended to occasion for performers an experience in an open, but proscribed domain of possibility described by the composition’s parameters. During our interview, Michael made reference several times to the development of a minimal amount of resources and a minimal amount of information in his work to occasion novel sonic experiences. He characterized an attitude shared by himself and contemporaries in the DIY experimental music scene that is concerned with creating works to be understood as problems to be solved; whose performative outcomes are valid regardless of the performer’s level of technical proficiency. In these terms, a “novice” musician’s realization of a work—as long as it is following the directions proscribed in the score—are as valid as that of a virtuosic practitioner.
The concept of *Werktreue* and authorial voice is discarded in favor of process, experience, and the broadening of horizons:

I’ll tell you where the way that we do things has most defined my aesthetic—is this idea of minimal resources and minimal information. So again, these are not things that are exclusive. You can develop new harmonic constructs and challenge old ones without that traditional virtuosity that we talked about. And in fact, this new type of virtuosity is much better suited to these new pursuits. Because, not only are you discrediting the specialist, but you’re also saying that this type of questioning is accessible to everybody. Because everybody has the potential to be up for the challenge. Conformity is actually the last thing you need. (interview, Winter, 24 August 2016)

This is part of what Winter describes as his original impetus in imagining new works, perpetually reaching for the horizon of the *as if*: “There’s kind of an ontology about all of this that is being the perpetual learner and grower…a certain kind of openness to it. This new kind of virtuosity that I could identify with, it’s about new experiences” (Ibid.).

The three pieces I describe below are exceedingly original in their conception, but clearly integrate influences from experimental attitudes and techniques manifest in the works of James Tenney (*Having Never Written a Note for Percussion*), Pauline Oliveros (*Rock Piece*), Cornelius Cardew (*The Great Learning*, though Winter’s work has no political implication), and even Morton Feldman’s gestural minimalism.71

It has been noted that while he often takes part in the realization of other community members’ compositions, Winter doesn’t often perform his own (Munoz 2017, 216). For that reason, I was excited to hear him perform his *Preliminary Thoughts* (2016). The valediction of the “letter” portion of the score is inscribed January 23rd, 2016. As such, for this performance on January 26, the work was very fresh when it was performed that night. Part of a three-

71 Winter is a composer, but also a theorist who has written extensively about experimental music in a number of critical modes. Committed to the free distribution of information, all of Winter’s works are available for download at his website: www.unboundedpress.org.
performance evening at Betalevel called “American Hardcore 8: New Electronic Music,” Casey Anderson opened the night with a timed improvisation with a circuit-bent guitar pedal. Winter’s piece followed and die Reihe (Jack Callahan) closed the evening with an ironic and disinterested laptop playback of various digital indication sounds from dated message service from AOL, etc.: ding, ding, ding; you’ve got mail; “wooosh”—for what seemed like a very long time.

Preliminary Thoughts\textsuperscript{72} comprises the reading of a “musical letter” he had composed to friend and mathematician, Gregory Chaitin, who had invited Winter to create a work to be performed in Turin, Italy for the 300\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz’s death. Investigating musical threads running through Leibniz’s body of writing, the personal letter that comprises the text of Preliminary Thoughts is organized by the themes of combinatorics, harmony, aesthetics, structure, epistemological vs. practical limits, and free will. It is clear that the relationship of these computational themes to phenomenal experience and knowledge production are reflected in Winter’s work as well which consider scores as domains of possibility rather than circumscribed objects. The reproducible identity of the work is not important, and Winter is not concerned with anything being “communicated” to the listener. Rather, Winter suggests there is a veil between the composer’s concept and any listener’s experience thereof. He refers to this phenomenon as the “incalculability of concept to precept transparency,” and states that any listener is responsible for their own experience of his work, of which he makes no claim (interview, Winter, 24 August 2016).

\textsuperscript{72} See entire score available in Appendix.
Dear Greg,

As I mentioned in prior correspondence, in consideration of the upcoming celebration of Leibniz on the 300th anniversary of his death, I have immersed myself in his work; reading and rereading his texts as much as time allows. His oeuvre is so voluminous, that I fear even by the time we meet in November, I will have only scratched the surface.

I have been enjoying the fact that much of Leibniz’s writings are in the form of letters. They are less precious, less formal in that way. As I prepare to write the piece for the celebration in Turin, I thought it would be nice to set my correspondence with you to music. As musical letters or studies of sorts. Ideas not yet fully formalized but worth expressing; both the text and the accompanying music.

Structure:
The guitar part is played throughout starting and ending alone for at least 2.5 minutes. The reading of the letter and accompanying electronics part occurs directly in the middle of a performance and is bound by a noise swell before and after the reading (yet not sounding during). Both the crescendo and diminuendo portions should be at least 2.5 minutes resulting in the letter starting at least 5 minutes into the performance and stopping at least 5 minutes before the end of the performance. Thus, the structure as a whole is as follows:

- guitar --------------------------------------------------------------
- noise swell (crescendo) -- letter with electronics -- noise swell (diminuendo)

Guitar:
Except for the lowest string, the guitar is tuned to subharmonics of the high E-string (given below such that the 1st harmonic is the open string and the 2nd harmonic is at the 12th fret).

I = standard high E
II = tune the 3rd harmonic to the 2nd harmonic of I
III = tune the 4th harmonic to the 3rd harmonic of II
IV = tune the 5th harmonic to the 4th harmonic of III
V = tune the 6th harmonic to the 5th harmonic IV
VI = tune the 3rd harmonic to the 2nd harmonic of IV

// path to recording of letter – change accordingly
l = Buffer.read(s, "~/home/mwinter/preliminary_thoughts/letter.wav");

SynthDef("preliminary_thoughts", {  
  var env, env_gen, hierarchical_dust, low_sine, high_sine, brown_noise, white_noise, letter;  
  // structure: guitar played throughout  
  // 2.5 >> minutes solo guitar
  // 2.5 >> minutes noise cresc.
  // letter with electronics
  // 2.5 >> minutes noise dim.
  // 2.5 >> minutes solo guitar
  env = Env([0, 0, 1, 1, 0, 0], [60 * 2.5, 60 * 2.5, BufDur.kr(1), 60 * 2.5, 60 * 2.5], \sin);
  env_gen = EnvGen.kr(env, timeScale: 1);  
})

Figure 6.14: Four extracts from Michael Winter’s *Preliminary Thoughts* (2016).
See complete score available in Appendix.
The more traditionally musical accompaniment to the “reading” part of Preliminary Thoughts—the score of which rigorously describes a partially-notated, minimal, six-tone guitar part with electronically-produced sine-tones and noise written in the SuperCollider audio synthesis programming language—bears this out. During the performance at Betalevel that night, Winter sat calmly on stage (which is no stage at all, but rather a clear spot on the concrete floor between the audience and a wall) and played the guitar part while the sound recordings and SuperCollider script realized the remainder of the work’s sonic elements. About twenty people were in attendance that evening and after the piece had run its course, it received enthusiastic applause.

About five months later I took part in the realization of another of one of Winter’s works. The sun was just rising around 5:30am on the morning of Saturday, June 4, 2016. It was then that I and nine others gathered at the corner of Fletcher Drive and Ripple Street in Los Angeles’ Elysian Fields neighborhood (Frogtown) to realize the opening performance of the Dog Star Orchestra 12 festival. Totally different than his through-written, graphic, or algorithmic works, Just Above and/or Below the Waterline…(2010) is an open text score. Though only one valid method of realization, Winter had chosen to realize the work by spelling its title in stones along a river bank. The group mostly complete at 6am, we walked down from Rattlesnake Park to the bank of the Los Angeles River where we could collect stones and get to work.

Meanwhile, on the south bank of the river, Wilfrido Terrazas, Natalia Perez, and Carmina Escobar performed as the flute, cello, and voice trio “FILERA.” Unfortunately, their performance was not audible to us on the north bank and I cannot attest to its nature. As the sun rose and we worked to realize the text of the work’s title in stones on the concrete bank of the Los Angeles River, Casey Anderson was trying to remember the origins of the piece. He asked
Michael if it was from some time they had been traveling in Florida. Anderson remembered the two of them wading in open water with hands held just above the waves. As the waves undulated, they slapped the palms of their outstretched hands, to which Casey remembers Michael saying in reply: “That’s a piece.” Michael, however did not remember this and did not elaborate on the writing of, or even on any preferred realization of, the open work in question. It took about 2.5 hours for us to realize the score in stones along the bank. Though whatever sounds we produced could not, by most conventional accounts, be considered music, the activity occasioned by the text of the piece put us to work to navigate a social space for a common end while experiencing what R. Murray Schafer has called our soundscape.

Figure 6.15: Complete score for Just Above And/Or Below the Waterline… (2010) as presented for realization on June 4, 2016. Alternative score available in appendix.
Figure 6.16: Above - from left to right: Michael Winter, Micha, Casey Anderson, Todd Lerew, Stephanie Smith, Liam Mooney, Natalia Perez, Colin Wambsgans, and Carmina Escobar realizing Michael Winter’s *Just Above And/Or Below the Waterline*…(2010). Below - a view of the finished work from the south bank of the river.
I close this section with a description of the final musical performance that took place at the wulf.’s original physical location. Fittingly, this last performance was a spare, measured performance by Michael Winter of his piece *Minor Third Abstract* (2011) and simply featured himself at the piano as the sun slowly rose. There had been a program on Saturday evening and audience members were invited to sleep over for the final performance in the morning. As I was in Santa Barbara that evening for a performance of my own on Saturday night, I missed that second-to-last performance, but I arrived back at the wulf. at about 4:15am that Sunday morning, the 28th of September 2016.

It was dark when I arrived, but I could see about twenty people sleeping on the floor in blankets, sleeping bags, or just curled up on the sofas. Winter—characteristic of his indefatigable productivity—was still awake and working in his room while the others slept. No one responded to the buzzer on street level, but I was able to contact him by phone when upon he let me in, asked me to stay awake and man the entrance buzzer (more people were beginning to arrive), and went back to his room to continue whatever he was doing. I sat there near the entrance on a white couch attempting to stay awake. A few more people trickled in, mostly older folks that hadn’t slept over. Around 4:40 a.m. at astronomical twilight, Winter sat at the piano without speaking an introduction or intentionally waking anyone up and began quietly playing a pitch—just one pitch. He repeated this pitch quietly and with intermittent pauses of several minutes, only introducing the minor-third interval above after about thirty minutes. With a minute or more of silence between these pitches, played either simultaneously or intervalically, he carried on for about 90 minutes in a patient, meditative manner. There was no real dynamic shift or change of pitches, only mild variation of rhythm and periodicity of the interval. When it had concluded, Winter simply stopped, stood up, walked around a bit, and eventually came to sit near me and
William Hutson who had arrived about a third of the way through the performance. Many ostensive listeners, it seemed, slept through the performance. Though I did notice that Todd Lerew got up about half way through and found a chair, and Casey Anderson awoke, checked his phone, and remained on the floor in his sleeping bag. Having been awake all night, I was profoundly tired after the performance. Michael decided to go to sleep while the others remained asleep on the floor, and I stumbled down to my car and drove home through the morning light.

The whole of the performance was cinematic with the shifting play of the light, the sparse but rhythmic tones that asked nothing of the listener, had no perceptible structure, and disinterestedly lapped at the ear like passing waves.

In what follows I consider the influence of the California Institute for the Arts in the contemporary DIY experimental music scene in Los Angeles. This in itself is not as difficult to construe as the following topic, if and how the scene engages with political issues.
Figure 6.17: Michael Winter at the piano performing *Minor Third Abstract* (2011) as the final performance at the wulf.’s original location. This performance began at astronomical twilight and lasted approximately 90 minutes. One can just make out the multitude of people who slept on the floor to be present for the piece’s performance.
Figure 6.18: A view leaving the wulf. for the last time as a performance venue—notice the addition of further contact information for entrance on the wulf.’s familiar sign as listener-participants trickled in during the early hours of the morning before astronomical twilight.
Politics: Race, Gender, Socioeconomic Status, Exposure, Access

For all of the conversation that has been had surrounding experimental music’s political status or autonomy therefrom—practitioners have historically spoken out of both sides of their mouths about the issue—the fact remains that its production, reception, and circulation are political whether they want to be or not. Musical experimentalism exists in a field of production characterized by histories of unequal access and exposure to art as much as unequal access to basic human rights. No matter how this music’s focus on the possible and how its vaunted openness might possibly translate from the aesthetic sphere to the ethical, the truth is, for most people who even learn that this music exists, they likely already have a propensity for that openness from a position of racial, gendered, or socioeconomic privilege. This is not always the case, but it is a reality whose implications I found to be rarely discussed in the scene. However, in interview, nearly everyone I spoke with agreed that unequal representations of race and gender were a problem. Musical experimentalism is still working in the wake of the United States’ history of institutional racism and Western histories of the White, male genius composer. Though destabilization of these histories and the power structures they created have made progress in the twentieth-century, cultural production persists in their long shadows. Furthermore, problems of connectivity are built in to Los Angeles’ geography in material and more intangibly-cultural realities. And while nobody I spoke with had an answer, making moves toward education and access for people outside of historically white communities seemed common.

The overwhelming majority of those I spoke with for this project self-identify as straight white males. Many could be placed on the spectrum of being “woke” in the sense of their meta-

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73 I address this idea at length in Chapter Eight.
reflexivity of their own position in current political affairs in the United States and the structuring power structures of the art worlds they inhabit. Most, however, are ostensibly too busy trying to survive in Los Angeles and make their work in its unforgiving economic climate to actively commit to material means of resistance. The scene is adjacent to other more clearly politicized issues in Los Angeles that inflect its activities, such as more egalitarian access to education, exposure to non-commercial culture, and the issue of gentrification. In spite of its implicit positions of radical openness and plurality, by not explicitly engaging with these issues, the scene fails to show a way forward - though that finding of a way forward is ostensibly a goal shared by scene participants.

I asked several of my interlocutors who self-identify as people of color about their experiences in the DIY experimental music scene. When I asked Alan Nakagawa—an American of Japanese descent—if he had any experiences or thoughts about the scene informed by racial issues, he noted that his feelings were complicated and that due to the difficulty of the issue, that the beginning of any answer must itself be multi-faceted. However, with regard to access he noted educational and economic issues to be primary to aesthetics. He said: “The institutional structure for people of color to succeed is not there yet. Does that make all of the teachers in California racist? No. But the system is such that it’s not promoting the value of education as the number one goal of the family.” In a conversation he had with Los Angeles artist Todd Gray, who is African American, Nakagawa remembered how Gray told him, “It’s not just about racism, it’s about [the] economy.” He continued: “Those who have will have more, and those who don’t will have less. The idea being that every time you see racism raised as an issue, it’s a smoke screen. Because what’s really happening, is that the division is becoming greater. The system has to be changed or dismantled, as anarchists might say” (interview, Nakagawa, 12
September 2016). But regarding the DIY experimental music scene, he noted a self-conscious awareness of his status as a minority when attending experimental music shows:

“When I go to the wulf. as a person of color, I’m acutely aware that the grand majority of folks are white. You know? And, um, as a person of color who kind of is in the same genre of the people who play the wulf.—I have a different conversation when I’m in the room with people of color than I do when it’s people of color and white people. And a totally different conversation when it’s just white people and I’m the only person of color. It’s a completely different conversation. (Ibid.)

Much of what Nakagawa described reflects to Lewis’ (1996) differently racialized characterizations of freedom in experimental works and Priest’s (2013) notion of having the privilege to play with failure (26-7).

It’s similar to, but not exactly, if you’re hanging out with people you work with, and people you grew up with. It’s kind of like that. Why? Because most people who are white have probably not been pulled over solely because they’re white. When most white folks in Los Angeles get pulled over, one of the possibilities of the outcome of this situation is not death. Right? Or getting beat up. As a person of color, that’s the first thing you think about. Like, is this cop a good cop? Or is this cop a cop with a chip on his shoulder...For most white people, you don’t think about. You don’t live in that world. (Ibid.)

Nakagawa is describing, even in the spaces of aesthetic openness and plurality, the persistence of a combination of race relations and socio-economic realities that work to oppress people of color, restrict their access and exposure to kinds of art works and practices, and maintain divisions between classes and cultures.

Composer/performer Stephanie Smith74 noted similar experiences as an active member of the experimental music scene who is perceivably doubly in the minority as a person of color and as a woman. Smith grew up in Houston, Texas, studied music at the University of Chicago, and earned an MFA at CalArts studying with Mark Trayle and Sara Roberts. Her mother is from Taiwan/Mainland China and her father is from Illinois, of Swiss/German descent. She often

74 See the score for Smith’s Bell Controller (motor array) (2016) in Appendix.
forgets that, to strangers, she reads as Asian: “People sometimes think I don’t speak English,” she said. “I feel like I have this weird white privilege in my mind that I got used to, but I forget people read me as a person of color. That’s really weird and it reminds me of my privilege, too.

But in terms of music stuff, I tend to notice [the scene is made up of] white males and Asian women. You notice that?” (interview, 13 August 2016). Reflecting the lack of diversity in the scene, when she notices other people of color in the scene she is usually just curious of how they got there. “Like, if it’s a woman, sometimes I just think she must be dating someone, but that’s really unfair” (Ibid.). But moreover, Smith’s struggle for representation can feel like it is about being recognized as an artist with something valuable to contribute:

> What I’ve struggled the most is being female and not being taken seriously—the assumption that I don’t know what I’m talking about. Whereas with males, people tend to assume that they know what they’re talking about and they’re taken seriously. I feel that’s been the main point of struggle for me…it’s tied to the legacy of male dominated everything…Another thing is just being featured because I am a woman. I really hate that. I really, really hate that. It happens a lot. (Ibid.)

Responding to my questions about race and gender representation in separate interviews, Eric KM Clark and Matt Barbier both noted the complexity of addressing the lack of representation of women or people of color without appealing to the kind of tokenism Smith has experienced.

Regarding the how they approach season planning for WasteLand’s performance series, Barbier noted that unequitable programming across race and gender lines is:

> not a problem unique to Los Angeles, it’s a real problem everywhere. Whether it’s Europe, New York, Chicago, Boston, or San Francisco – it’s a real issue. It’s something WasteLand in particular is working hard on considering the makeup of each concert while still having a really strong flow and consideration of every single piece in how it relates to the program but also to the performers we’ve hired. The way we function is to pick a piece and the performers we think will perform that best, and we build the program around that. So, that’s a big consideration. We just did our first season with a featured composer, Michelle Lou, who we picked because her music’s awesome, but also to set a good tone for the program in general to start with a woman of color as our first featured
composer. Next year’s a white dude, so, sorry. We’ve got our eyes in the next five or six years on having 60% female composers. We’re trying to kind of program consciously and support that issue while also making sure that at every concert there aren’t token pieces. (interview, Barbier, 11 August 2016)

Though he said that he doesn’t consciously pay attention to gender splits in programming or performance, Eric KM Clark says that programming for Southland Ensemble tries to expand the repertoire. This sometimes means finding works by composers who are less represented with regard to gender and race.

…like, we’re going to include a concert with Ruth Crawford…she was a great composer from the early 1900s to mid 1900s. I call her Ruth Crawford because people might know her as Ruth Crawford Seeger which she sometimes went by. And we’ve done Pauline Oliveros. And we come up with all these composers well, we did some Fluxus music from those compilations…so many [female] composers who are recent and 35 or under. But we’re trying to find those historical ones, and it’s a bit hard to find the documentation. But we talk about it because we want to branch out. (interview, Clark, 6 September 2016)

But Clark notes, a scene’s representation cannot be solely located in the demographics of concert attendance: “I think you can’t say that the scene is only the concert.” He points to educational initiatives apart from those at exclusive institutions of higher learning like CalArts. For example, he notes how he and others in the experimental music scene have partnered with the Harmony Project to provide instruments and lessons—as well as expose underserved students who might not otherwise find it to musical experimentalism—all at no cost.

And that’s why I’m bringing up the Harmony Project and these groups. Because, people perform in those scenes and branch out throughout L.A. And, so, maybe the concert audience doesn’t show that, but there are all these groups and different demographics outside of that. So, that, still is worthwhile. And it should be noted that that does happen. (Ibid.)

Another instance of this is work he and others did in 2014 with the Society for the Activation of Social Space Through Art and Sound (SASSAS). Through workshops with children from
underserved local schools were exposed to John Cage (“Kids Play Cage”), Pauline Oliveros (“Kids Play Oliveros”), and Fluxus. Clark remembered:

For the Oliveros one, we had the rehearsals at the union [Musicians Union in Hollywood on Vine St.] and had some Harmony Project kids as well. So, in that, we got all these between 12- and 17-years-old interpreting Oliveros text scores. And that was great. That was really fun. And then we gave a performance at Center for the Arts in Eagle Rock. That would have been two years ago [with James Klopfeisch and Christine Tavolacci, 7 September 2014] …That was just fun getting these kids from different backgrounds - like, you don’t lead them. You just, in a way, give them permission. Say, “It’s okay.” Right? And then they interpret. It’s amazing. Like, it’s really cool to see them get into it because they’ve never seen a text score or, like, “You mean I can use these stones and that’s an instrument?” (Ibid.)

This kind program is responding in real effectual ways to the state of affairs noted by Michael Pisaro during our discussions of representation in the experimental music scene.

How many African-American students have I had in Experimental Music Workshop in my sixteen years teaching here? [Implying, “not many”] …So, you’d have to make a concerted effort on a regular basis to invite non-white-guy composers into that situation. To, kind of pave the way. And it may be that that’s what really has not been done. Because, I would have thought that ten years ago, I might have thought, well, just leave it open and people who are interested in that sort of thing will join that community. But it doesn’t work that way. In a way, there must be a lot of signals given off that somehow exclude [people] before they even have the opportunity to include themselves. I wish I knew better what those signals were. (interview, 21 October 2016)

The signals Pisaro mentions are numerous and supported by various histories and codings of what music is and who has access to it. Of course, many of these signals are leftovers of the logic of the cult of Bildung that, supported by the Romantic period’s understanding of music as a transcendental phenomenon imbued with metaphysical dignity, associated music with the higher classes (discussed in Chapter Four and Seven). And of course, in the west, those who inhabit sociocultural positions that have been the most powerful have traditionally been white and male. Echoes of this imperialist and patriarchal historical reality persist in spite of experimentalism’s interrogative spirit of structures of valuation, musical or otherwise. Pisaro continues:
But I have a much stronger experience just dealing with the “guy” end of this - why are there so few women? And, I’ve had a good number of women study with me who are experimental composers, and, again, that can’t really be essentialized. But it occurred to me that, of course, it’s already a challenge to be a female composer. You’re already a minority, and you - you want to get somewhere doing it and that’s already one thing stacked against you. And if you add being an experimental composer to that, that’s two things stacked against you. And, so, it takes a person of extraordinary courage to go in that direction…What really has to happen, or what people in the community can control, is that when there’s some element that comes into it that is more diverse than what’s been there before, is to see that it’s supported. To me, that’s virtually the only thing I’ve seen that genuinely works. So, with these female students, first and foremost it had to be about supporting their work. And finding a way to do that that was absolutely genuine and not tokenistic. But that still recognized that there was this extra sort of hurdle that they had made. And I feel like that has genuinely worked…The balance is far from ideal, but there have been a series of women involved with this community long-term and they really feel like they’re a part of it. But that sort of didn’t deal with having it so open at the beginning so it feels like anybody could join in, you know? So, I don’t really have an answer. (Ibid.)

While formal and informal interventions that work to support historically oppressed groups are important, on the ground it seems that work like that described above by Harmony Project and SASSAS is the most effective. This idea is admittedly utopic, and when faced with the real daily exigencies of just staying alive in a tough urban space, experimental music can seem unimportant. Furthermore, despite Los Angeles’ overwhelming liberal currents, present turns in United States politics toward uncritical nationalism, protectionism, and various brands of extremism make the task of more just systems of arts education more difficult. Still, perhaps “difficult” music, by merit of its difficulty that invites one to engage in intentional listening and thought, can have a supporting role in this task. Los Angeles composer and philosopher Douglas C. Wadle (2007) writes: “Political climates of extremism make thinking unfashionable.” Echoing the relationship of the cognitive work done when confronting difficult music to phronetic thinking (as discussed in Chapter Three), he suggests that “[t]he purpose of difficulty in the arts is to allow people to experience an alternative means of ordering their perceptions and thus
develop a new structural wing on the edifice of their thought” (25). Thus, as Cage and Kaprow and so many others have intuited, engaging in experimentalism as an activity may teach us to think and be better. By continuing to work toward equitable exposure and access regardless of institutional value or funding—perhaps often on a voluntary basis—real movement toward equitable diversity regarding who might be thinking better and making the experimental music of future generations could come to pass.

In my preceding chapters I have characterized a means of theoretical intervention via philosophical hermeneutics and offered a practical field by way of my ethnographic study in which to explore its implications. The final chapters of this dissertation explore several theoretical interventions using the Los Angeles DIY experimental music scene so described as a case study.
Chapter Seven: Recovering Aesthetic Experience in Bourdieu’s Sociology of Art

Is it possible to translate the (false) philosophical problem of “aesthetic value” into these ecological problems of “cultural capital”? I would like to propose an affirmative answer to this question, but with the qualification that the translation always has a remainder, which is nothing other than aesthetic experience.

– John Guillory (1993, 405)

[T]he human sciences are connected to modes of experience that lie outside science: with the experiences of philosophy, of art, and of history itself. These are all modes of experience in which a truth is communicated that cannot be verified by the methodological means proper to science.


Sociology and art do not make good bedfellows.


Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of art has contributed to the disenchantment of the world through a demystification of the relationship of aesthetic value to positions of dominance and oppression in social life. However, the empirical orientation of Bourdieu’s demystifying framework permits an uneasy state of methodological affairs as there seems to be a challenging, perhaps non-reducible element of aesthetic experience in the relationship of art to social reality. If we are to take statements about the importance of aesthetic experience made by musicians and listeners seriously, we must recognize it as an (or maybe *the most*) important motivation in the artistic field of production. In this chapter, I consider the Los Angeles DIY experimental music scene as artistic field of production through a Bourdieusian lens. I acknowledge the effectiveness of Bourdieu’s theories in describing the reproduction of structures that reproduce inequality in power relations, but also note their inability to address the import of aesthetic experience to listeners in the experimental music scene that report of their experience a kind of
“enchantment”—or at least an intuitive, non-rational transcendence of their empirically observable social realities.

Bourdieu’s ([1980] 1990) model of the artistic field of cultural production employs his ideas of habitus, the logic of which is played out in a field of objective delimitations. However, the limitations of his method to empirically characterize agency have been noted since its introduction and development in the mid 1970s (Giddens 1976, 1984; Ortner 1984; Zolberg 1990; Guillory [1984] 1993; Reckwitz 2002; Born 2010). Regardless, there is much about the social logic of value and meaning as related to aesthetic works that can be more clearly understood via Bourdieu’s theoretical framework. To that end, in what follows, I plot the Los Angeles’ experimental music community’s field of production in terms of his field of economic power, but then explore the possibility that the findings available therefrom are limited in their ability to account for the reality of agency and innovation in the field of artistic production. To do this, I consider Bourdieus’s empirical understanding of the role of aesthetic judgment in structuring social reality in comparison to its role as understood in the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer. It is not my aim to conflate Bourdieu’s epistemological approach to the relationship of the aesthetic and the social with Gadamer’s ontological one. But, as both inquiries are interested in investigating human conduct, judgment, and valuation, I aim to offer a supportive intervention into an ongoing debate over how society both reproduces and pushes at its social constraints. By reflecting upon implications of Gadamer’s philosophical idea of aesthetic judgment that connects practice (praxis) to understanding as related to Bourdieu’s empirical one, I hope to support Bourdieu’s logic of the field of practice while also providing a theoretical structure that supports ideas of “change” and agency so often asserted by musicians and listeners; an area that, as noted above, has been identified as a theoretical shortcoming of
Bourdieu’s. In the end, I show that aesthetic experiences occasioned by music may be thought of as more than weapons in the struggle for social position. Rather, they have the capacity to transcend the constraints of their fields of production and to expand social agents’ horizons of understanding.

**The Artistic Field of Cultural Production: The Economic World Reversed**

In Bourdieu’s (1983) classic analysis of the value(s) of literary production in terms of the production of material and symbolic values—those things he describes as responsible for the production of social belief in the value of a work (318)—he develops the idea of an artistic field’s position in a greater social field of production. The task, he suggests, “is that of constructing the space of positions and the space of position-takings (*prises de position*) in which they are expressed” (Ibid., 312) in order to better understand the field of forces and struggles which transform or conserve said fields. Relationships between positions of various fields of artistic production (and the social agents implicated therein) to the greater field of economic distributions of power is thus understandable by the network of relations which position them with regard to differing types of capital; economic, cultural, social, and symbolic. The meaning and value of a work is in constant flux, then, and changes automatically in turn with any change in the field within which it is situated. For Bourdieu, relationships of value in the artistic field of production operate by a kind of para-logic; what he refers to as the inversion of the economic world. The artistic field, he argues, assigns value not corresponding to the amassment of economic capital, but by a phenomenon’s (agent, organization, work, practice) autonomy therefrom. He describes this as a double hierarchy, the site of what he dubs the *heteronomous* principle of heirarchization. This is where the laws of the market (and the dominating power of
economic capital) are challenged by the relative autonomy of the artistic field of production and its internal criteria of valuation (see Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1: This example shows the double hierarchy: the heteronomous principle of heirarchization; the inversion of values extant in the relationship between the field of power versus the artistic field (Bourdieu 1983, 319).

Understood this way, we see that the artistic field of production operates by its own rules which work contrary to those of the market. Rather than concretizations of wealth and positions of social power being rewarded, autonomy reigns. In this inverted world of the artist, those people, organizations, works, and practices which demonstrate their disinterestedness in the economy dominate. Bourdieu refers to this as a reversal of logic wherein the “loser wins” (Ibid., 320). What matters in these social worlds is not money or position, but legitimization by the
recognition of others in the scene that, while perhaps occupying otherwise totally dominated positions in the field of power, draw the symbolic value that demonstrates their dominance in the artistic field by their autonomy from that field of power. This is the field of charismatic consecration over/against institutional consecration; intellectual audience over/against bourgeois audience; no audience over/against mass audience; no profit over/against riches; young over/against old. What is at stake, Bourdieu suggests, is the legitimization of who is an artist and what is a legitimate artistic practice. By this theoretical account legitimized artists and works live at the edge of the transformation of symbolic and cultural capital to economic capital as bourgeois agents attempt to coopt their works. Furthermore, the struggle for ideals of valuation, and ultimately for the dominant authority in the field of power is at stake. The bourgeois audience, themselves dominant in the surrounding field of power, threaten the dominated (though dominant in the artistic field) artists, their works, and their spaces of production in the domain of the market. But ironically, the inversion of hierarchy implicit in Bourdieu’s model also brings with it the reality that the dominating bourgeois agent, by ignoring a dominated (autonomous) artist, work, or practice, unwittingly consecrates and legitimates that artist, work, or practice within the field of artistic production. While this schematization is a helpful topographic modelling of structures of inequality and domination in fields of power, Bourdieu notes that it is just that – a model, not to be taken as a perfectly isomorphic representation of what is the case. Furthermore, the model is full of variables, not deterministically predictable, and there is an extreme diversity of “posts” any agent may occupy as it navigates the relationships between these complicated and dynamic fields.
Los Angeles’ Experimental Music Scene as Bourdieu’s Artistic Field of Production

The logic of the model I’ve described effectively portrays the Los Angeles’ experimental music scenes and makes sense of some of its dynamics. It is perhaps to be expected that avant-garde musical practices in Los Angeles—consisting of practices more closely aligned with old systems of patronage, aesthetic valuation, and institutional structures of support (Bürger 1984)—will occupy an area of the field more closely associated with institutional consecration, the bourgeois, and a rich(er), mass (commercial) audience. In contradistinction, what I refer to as experimental practices—those more apt to be subversive and critical—therefore occupy positions more associated with relative autonomy from the market, charismatic consecration, and small, bohemian audiences. Paul Lopes (2015, 234) argues that the positions of avant-garde and experimentalist practices in the field of production have historical precedents as far back as the 1940s and 50s. Already in this period the musical avant-garde in America, including composers such as Milton Babbitt—who joined the faculty at Princeton University in 1948—were producing and recording works that were being institutionally consecrated as culturally legitimate and worthy of institutional support.75 Meanwhile, experimentalists such as John Cage remained relatively marginal to the music field. Cage eventually did, however, join the ranks of the institutionally legitimized by joining the faculty at Wesleyan College in 1960. He would continue to compose, and later also to publish his influential book *Silence* in 1961. Still, despite his ostensive institutional consecration, further experimental works such as *Atlas Eclipticalis* (1961-2) and *O’OO”* (1962), were not well-received by culturally “authorized” musicians (the

75 But as evidenced by his famous article of 1958, “Who Cares If You Listen,” it is clear that Babbitt’s consecrated position did not make him feel totally secure. His claim that “serious music” was threatened by “populism” illustrates the precarious position in America of the musical avant-garde to those institutions upon which it relies for support – not to mention the practical irrelevance of his “serious” and “advanced” music to anyone but fellow music professionals. For a fantastic critique of this situation, see Susan McClary’s (1989) “Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition.”
New York Philharmonic, for instance) or their bourgeois, mass audiences (Piekut 2011, 20-64). It should not be surprising then, that half a century later, similar patterns of economic domination, artistic commodification, and dynamic transformation between types of capital are observable in the Los Angeles’ experimental music artistic field of production.

Figure 7.2: Los Angeles’ Experimental Music Scene as Artistic Field of Production

As an attempt to describe different but mutually inflecting social groups, practices, and physical spaces that represent the Los Angeles experimental music scene, I have plotted them as three distinct areas in a Bourdieusian diagram of the artistic field of practice (Figure 7.2). The positions of the various fields that I sketch here are delimited by their aesthetic practices...
(proximity to culturally legitimated musical aesthetics such as tonality, form, and sound production) as well as their relationship to legitimated institutions and physical venues. Lacking the vast amount of empirical data Bourdieu usually wielded in his sociological models, I aim only to sketch these positions to gain a glimpse into their relationships.

The first position I outline, denoted as maintaining an autonomous “art for art’s sake” attitude, exists in the bottom left corner, closest to the poles of “No Audience,” “Autonomy,” “Poor,” and “no economic profit.” This area describes the most independent, DIY performance venues in Los Angeles’ contemporary experimental music such as the wulf, The Handbag Factory, and Betalevel which have no official institutional affiliation and operate as “guerilla” spaces. These venues present the most challenging, most experimental musical practices in the artistic field. They include (but are not limited to) extremely conceptual works, durational works, traditionally non-musical practices, the “Wandelweiser aesthetic,” text pieces, algorithmic works, minimalism, drone, and noise works. Those who attend shows at these DIY experimental venues are often young intellectuals that could be described as bohemian, but who have benefitted from institutional training and exposure to non-traditional works and practices.

Furthermore, as there is no price charged for admission, the organizations that program and host such performances enjoy no economic profit but are therefore free from populist taste and aesthetic judgment that rule the market. As Bourdieu suggests, the most “legitimate” work—based on their position in the schema set out—often occurs in these spaces, where artists make and premier new works evaluated by their peers as the most contemporarily relevant, valuable, and meaningful; these are simultaneously the most challenging, subversive, sometimes charismatic, and therefore the most artistically legitimate. This is where the “recognition granted by the set of producers who produce for other producers, their competitors, i.e. by the
autonomous, self-sufficient world of ‘art for art’s sake’, consecrates the value of the work” (1983, 331).

It seems that Bourdieu’s attitude and analysis of this position in the artistic field of production as the most legitimate and authentic is shared by some of those who are the most invested in the maintenance of these DIY spaces and the practices they engender. For instance, Michael Winter, who co-founded the wulf. in 2008, expressed his belief that to be effective in making good work autonomous of the exigencies of the economy and mass taste, venues and practices must attempt to exist outside of the field of power and the accompanying structures of inequality and domination that inform extant dynamics and their reproduction. Regarding his attitudes that helped shape the wulf.’s fiscal and programming operations, he explained:

We had a fiscal sponsor at first just until we got our own 501(c)3 status. Yeah, you know, the wulf. accidentally—maybe not accidentally—but quite organically settled into the model it is today. The free model. We had ambitions early on that, oh, we’re gonna pay musicians all these things…but we never planned to charge at the door. That [the lack of a ticket price] was always an idea. Whether or not we could sustain that was yet to be seen at that point. But we also had this model where we paid rent to live there and, so, the cost of running the organization was relatively minimal. So, we could do that. And we had a space…it became, in that sense, an alternative economy and an alternative community. It’s kinda nice. These things, in my opinion, should exist on the fringe. You know? They should somewhat be a challenge to the system. You kind of sculpt locally a microcosm you feel is a bit more humane and a bit more under the rubric of something you feel is right. Or just, or whatever you want to call it. Unfortunately—that’s what I was saying about the umbilical cord to the granting system, or the government or whatever—that doesn’t necessarily promote that. And so I think you see a lot of organizations today basically conforming to the award model. And there’s nothing wrong with that. It’s just that they’re not functioning, I guess, as radically as the wulf. accidentally does. (interview, 24 August 2016)

By operating and making art on the fringes of the dominant system of the economic field of power and its aesthetic modes—a system that coopts art as a tool of oppression—Winter believes a more just world is possible. As such, he hopes the wulf. might operate as a model of something more egalitarian. This attitude is further reflected in Winter’s (2010) writing about a new
economics for a new art wherein he suggests that economics as they currently play out breed conformity and compromise in art that serves to threaten artistic freedoms and integrity. For Winter, the insidious reality of economic commodification threatens the spirits of free production and proliferation: “There is nothing more disturbing than seeing an artist who works solely for money. If you cannot do it for free, for the sheer love of new experiences, please quit now [emphasis added]” (n.p.).

This perceived authenticity that associates aesthetic innovation with autonomy can present as a hardship in the economically dominated field of DIY experimental music. But, it is also potentially attractive. Alan Nakagawa, a Los Angeles sound artist, experimental musician, painter, and film maker, suggests that this legitimizing autonomous authenticity of the experimental music scene is unavoidable in navigating the difficulty of these fields:

I think it would be harder for me to do that in any other form. And I think it’s because it’s not so readily loved; not so readily accessible; not so readily listened to that makes it a much more fertile ground for me as an artist. Because we study art, right? And we only study the folks who push the medium. So, of course, I want to be one of those. But what does that mean in a capitalist society? That means I’m not going to make any money [laughing] as an artist. That most of my gigs will be for free – or that I’ll even have to pay to do art, you know to perform some piece somewhere. And that’s crazy talk in a capitalist society. But, um… I live in a capitalist society, but my creative spirit does not live in a capitalist society. So that’s why I choose experimental music. (interview, Nakagawa, 12 September 2016)

Nakagawa locates a tension between his creativity and the logic of a capitalist society and, to Bourdieu’s point perhaps, chooses to consistently live and work from an artistically autonomous but economically dominated position; favoring that which pushes the medium of his work. In a way, the reality of economic domination in the DIY experimental music scene—both personally and for organizations—becomes a badge of honor that signifies commitment and authenticity.
Furthermore, it is uncommon to find the performance of older, more potentially-institutionally-consecrated works of any kind at performance venues such as the wulf. or Betalevel. Rather, new works, often performed by their composers, are the norm. This reflects what composer/performer Casey Anderson refers to as the wulf.’s character as a “rapid prototyping space, in a way” (interview, Anderson, 4 August 2016). He notes that the wulf., and venues like it, are special as they promote diversity in thinking. “Diversity of ideas leads to diversity of outcomes,” he says, noting that experimental works—some of Christian Wolff’s, for example—intentionally play with structures of social reality as heuristic fictions to model human interactions, and in doing so, reframe people’s conceptions. In his work as a teacher at Los Angeles’ ArtCenter College of Design, Anderson notes that the socially modeling, cognitively challenging, and problem-solving character sometimes inhering in these works is transferrable to other spheres of experience: “I use Christian Wolff to talk about technology with my students all the time” (Ibid.). As the words of Winter, Nakagawa, and Anderson seem to suggest, there is more than aesthetic pleasure or artistic legitimization to be gained from experimental practices. They allude to a capability of aesthetic experience/judgment (taste) to augment their understanding of the world. This idea will be further interrogated and developed below.

The second area, positioned in the middle area of the artistic field of production, occupies the social, artistic, and economic space of independent venues and presenting organizations. Less relatively autonomous to the field of economic power, these unconventional spaces and presenting organizations are more implicated in navigating the shifting logic of the Los Angeles real estate market. Whether they inhabit a semi-permanent space or rent performance space, these organizations have operation models that require them to charge admission fees to offset their costs of operation and maintain their existence in the scene. As evidenced by a series of
recent closures of long-running experimental music venues in Los Angeles, successfully navigating the para-logic of the inversion of values between the market and the artistic field of production is an arduous task. At the time of writing (spring 2018), Los Angeles experimental music patrons have lost several venues: Pehrspace after a ten-year run (2006-16), Mata Noise (2013-16), Machine Project (2003-18), and long-standing punk/noise/experimental space The Smell (which has lost its lease and, is seeking a new space), not to mention the wulf. Still extant spaces include, but are not limited to, Automata (Chinatown), Human Resources LA (Chinatown), 356 Mission (Boyle Heights), Monk Space (Koreatown), The Velaslavasay Panorama exhibition hall (West Adams Historic District), Mor York Gallery (Highland Park), and ArtShare LA (Arts District). As composer, trombonist, and co-founder of WasteLAnd Matt Barbier describes it, Los Angeles “is fraught with venue issues.” In reference to the “middle-area” spaces mentioned above, Barbier concludes: “All of those spaces are really supportive, but they’re not necessarily ‘homes’ for experimental music; more of a side thing they let happen” (interview, Barbier, 11 August 2016). As described in Chapter Six, these spaces generally carry on their own programming outside of whatever experimental music that is independently programmed there. Automata is first and foremost a venue for experimental puppet theater, Human Resources LA programs performative contemporary and conceptual art, the Panorama curates panoramic works and films, and Human Resources LA hosts installations and classes. They do, however, commonly rent out spaces for local organizations to host performances. Such organizations and ensembles that regularly rent performance space at the above-mentioned spaces and elsewhere include WasteLAnd, Southland Ensemble, Gnarwhallaby, The Society for the Activation of Social Space Through Art and Sound (SASSAS), and People Inside Electronics, among others.
By the logic of Bourdieu’s model, one would rightly expect these performing and programming organizations to be engaged in practices perhaps more polished, less explicitly “experimental,” slightly more in line with the tastes of a mass audience. And this is, generally, the case. WasteLAnd, Southland Ensemble, and Gnarwhallaby reflect a more polished presentation and draw on the body of works in the process of being canonized as institutionally legitimate. For example, this is observable in Southland’s programming of works by John Cage, David Tudor, and James Tenney. In contrast to this programming, though, these organizations—WasteLAnd, for example, whose website tellingly characterizes their programming of both “avant-garde and experimental music”—also commissions and programs new, challenging works from local Los Angeles composers while also programming works from relatively obscure contemporary composers from elsewhere. Scott Worthington (a composer/performer and co-founder of WasteLAnd) shared that, as a programming organization, WasteLAnd is interested in finding a middle ground; presenting music that perhaps more commonly has a home in academic settings, in settings without academic affiliation.

The third area, that one positioned furthest toward the top and right of the fields of power, is occupied by venues the most closely affiliated with educational or curating institutions. This area boasts organizations that are the most charged with institutional consecration, the most successful in the economic market, program the most “canonic” avant-garde musical works and practices, and often own the physical spaces they inhabit.\textsuperscript{76} Programming organizations in this

\textsuperscript{76} The distinction is not necessarily a value judgment between \textit{new} and \textit{old} works, but rather an explanation of the positions they inhabit. Bourdieu (1983) noted that experimental practices change in the unfolding of history to become their own orthodoxies while displacing previous orthodoxies. “…[T]he [experimental] avant-garde is separated by a generation from the consecrated [canonized] avant-garde which is itself separated by another generation from the avant-garde that was already consecrated when it made its own entry into the field” (340).
area include Monday Evening Concerts\textsuperscript{77} and the Green Umbrella Concert Series (part of the Los Angeles Philharmonic’s programming at Walt Disney Concert Hall). Per Bourdieu’s model, here one can expect to find works and practices more in line with “older,” more institutionally concretized and legitimized avant-garde musics such as the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century modernist avant-garde as well as the post-war Euro-American avant-garde of the 1950s and 60s. For example, the Los Angeles Philharmonic’s Green Umbrella series for 2016 (“the Los Angeles Philharmonic at its most daring,” it’s website exclaims) features well known works by Steve Reich as well as new works by Gerald Barry and young, local composer Andrew Moses. Also residing inside the Walt Disney Concert Hall is REDCAT (The Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater), a performance venue and programming series described on its website as an “interdisciplinary contemporary arts center for innovative visual, performing and media arts...Each season REDCAT presents a far-reaching roster of work by globally renowned artists, inside one of the most versatile and technologically advanced presentation spaces in the world” (https://www.redcat.org/about).

These spaces, as one might expect, boast high ticket prices and offer subscription memberships for their programming. Due to their associations with the bourgeois, legitimized centers of institutional concretization of LACMA, the Colburn School, the Goethe-Institut, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, CalArts, and the media powerhouse associated with the name Walt Disney, they suggest to their patrons that whatever music is being offered, it is the best and most “legitimate” aesthetic experience that money can buy (which further implies their patrons own legitimacy, social position, and status as dominant). It is worth reasserting that this

\textsuperscript{77} Monday Evening Concerts were formerly held at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art’s (LACMA) Bing Theater but are currently held at Herbert Zipper Concert Hall at the Colburn School in downtown Los Angeles while their morning concerts are held at Goethe-Institut Los Angeles’ Media Lounge.
characterization is not as a criticism or judgment (ethical or aesthetic) of the works or practices offered by any of these performance organizations. Works programmed at these venues are not necessarily better or worse than those at DIY experimental music venues—they are, in fact, generally of extremely high artistic merit and presented with great skill (and budget). Rather the important implication of Bourdieu’s model is that these works are, in the eyes of the affluent, bourgeois ticket holder more apt to frequent such venues, charged with a kind of value that is—by institutionally concretized standards of legitimization—markedly different from those of the new experimental works and practices one might experience in a DIY venue that resides in an unremarkable warehouse a few blocks away. The canonic status or value at works is, of course, always in transition, with works and venues in different socioeconomic spaces informing one another’s practices and programming. This point is well-illustrated in an anecdote shared by Michael Pisaro that detail a few performances in 2014 of visiting Dutch experimental pianist, Reinier van Houdt.

Having been booked at REDCAT for the evening of Friday, March 21, 2014, van Houdt played to a full house there with a general ticket cost of $20, only to perform the next evening at the wulf. at no cost. In addition to the lack of a ticket price, there was a notable change in the pianist’s program:

A couple years back, a fantastic Dutch experimental pianist, Reinier van Houdt, played at REDCAT - and that’s what was able to bring him to LA, is that they [REDCAT] could afford the piece and travel and all that. He did a program that made sense for REDCAT that included a piece by Luc Ferrari, one by Jerry Hunt who in the 80s was one of the most important composers in that tradition - was from Texas but very active in New York - and very, very strange music. Shamanistic, super-complex, but weird. He died of AIDS in the 80s and nobody plays his music. Reinier decided, because he’s a big Hunt fan, to play his piece on that concert. And then, he played a piece by Walter Marchetti for umbrella and left hand. Another fantastic piece. And then, because he was there [REDCAT] he could play at the wulf. And what he did at the wulf., is that he played pieces by people from that community including Mark So and Mike Winter and Casey
Anderson…and, I think a couple others. And then he also did another Marchetti piece, *Natura Morta*, I think, where you cut fruit and you put it on top of the piano and the piece goes on for an hour. And you can’t do that at REDCAT. And so there you had the same performer - and there’s the edge of the repertoire that’s more formal and requires…like, the Ferrari requires sophisticated electronics and hookups and you have this one commonality of the Marchetti. But the one Marchetti piece, the one he did at the wulf. wouldn’t make any sense at REDCAT. Because, you wouldn’t smell the fruit over the course of the hour, you know? Which is a big part of the piece. And so, I think these things are hinged. It’s not always that way, but I think that in LA - and you could add WasteLAnd to that - they look a bit more like traditional concert series, but a lot of the community bleeds from one to the other. And it’s the case that people interested in experimental music are probably interested in [Helmut] Lachenman and possibly [Brian] Ferneyhough - things that are more from the avant-garde; and vice-versa. That’s not unique to LA, but it’s really pronounced here. (interview, Pisaro, 21 October 2016)

When he played the wulf. the next night (March 22, 2014), van Houdt did indeed play works by young, local composers including Andrew Young, Casey Anderson, Mark So, and Michael Winter, as well as several explicitly Wandelweiser-associated works.

Bourdieu’s topological model that nests fields of artistic production and power while putting their competing logics of power and domination in contradistinction does indeed effectively model the sorts of relationships between positions and position-takings one might expect regarding Los Angeles’ experimental music scene. However, as evinced by the words of Michael Winter with regard to seeking a more just world, Casey Anderson’s assertion that music can reframe peoples’ social conceptions, and Alan Nakagawa’s thirst for the new that lives outside the exigencies of capitalist structures, this model may not account for the work they suggest that music does in their lived realities. Many of those artists and scene participants with whom I have spoken insist that music has the capacity to break open their every-day experience of the world, to change their perspective, and to model new or different ways of being-in-the-world. To that effect, in referring to his own motivations and the meaning and value he finds in experimental music practices, Michael Pisaro baldy states: “Well, it changes you.” In a
conversation with the composer and teacher in CalArts’ composition and experimental sound practices program he alluded to his understanding of the music’s value: “Speaking personally, I think – it basically changes my relationship to the world” (Ibid.).

In his empirically-oriented theorization of art’s capacity to change the world, Bourdieu also asserts that the logic of the field of artistic production is not mechanical or predictable. There are, he suggests, too many variables with regard to the spaces of social position, dispositions of value, and social trajectories (1983, 345-6). But does the “change,” reframing, or innovation that seemingly can transcend the logic of the field of artistic practice come from within the field? And if the functioning of the field is not mechanical and therefore indeterminate, how can we account for the provenance of novel ideas and practices? In order to take seriously the claims made by Pisaro and the others previously mentioned—that aesthetic experiences occasioned by music can change them—we must be able to account for the roles of imagination, innovation, and creative invention in the artistic field. How does Bourdieu explain innovation in the artistic field? He posits a relationship between what he calls the habitus—those ingrained habits and dispositions that help to determine an agent’s values, beliefs, and actions—to objective, oppositional events. The rearrangement caused by this opposition thus produces something novel in the field; the fruit of an Aufhebung which moves beyond previous limitations. While this theorization may offer an elegant dialectical explanation of novelty in the field that is not wholly mechanistic or deterministic, it still resides within a logic that reduces

78 In her own criticism of Bourdieu, the importance of being able to successfully offer an account of agency as creative invention in social theory is noted by Georgina Born (2010) who says: “Of course, the need to account for invention is not just a necessity when theorizing cultural production…it is a general task for social theory” (180).

79 Collective agency—and ostensibly personal agency—is, then, also definable by these materialist terms: “[T]he conjuncture capable of transforming practices…is constituted in the dialectical relationship between, on the one hand, a habitus…and an objective event which exerts its action of conditional stimulation calling for or demanding a determinate response” (Bourdieu [1972] 1977, 82-3).
the ontological status of the work of art and the relevance of aesthetic taste to that of instruments for social distinction.

**Limits to the Theorization of the Field of Artistic Production**

The great achievement of Bourdieu’s idea of the work as weapon on the field of social position and power is that it can indeed teach us about how the arts might relate to the economic field of power and various kinds of capital. But as I have shown, its epistemology that privileges the empirical—if taken as the end-all-be-all of artistic production—designates social agent’s descriptions of their subjective, phenomenal experiences to be delimited by the field of dispositions and position-takings. By the logic of this closed system, the reality of claims that art works affect agents’ lives—that they manifest a kind of vehemence that exists outside of the transformation of all phenomena to types of capital to be used in the struggle for social position—can only be understood to be second-order at best. While the trace of this logic is demonstrably true within the empirical bounds of Bourdieu’s analysis, is this the primary value works possess? If we take the statements of musicians and listeners seriously, this estimation of the value of works—especially those at the fringe of the economic and artistic fields of practice—is not sufficient to theorize the values, motivations, and experiences of those agents engaged with them.

A primary question driving my research of experimental music works and practices in Los Angeles has been one of motivation in terms of value and meaning in experimental music worlds. An empirical, sociological analysis of value in the experimental music scene shows us that some of the value and meaning of the practices is surely its “authentic” cultural capital and

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80 See footnote 5 on page 20 regarding my use of terms “first-order” and “second-order.”
“coolness” of cultural autonomy. One interlocutor who had been a common fixture at the wulf explained: “I’m a bit of a snob – what can I say?” There is, for her, an element of feeling “cool” that comes from associating with something outside of mainstream media. And remarks of a local composer whose works are often performed at the wulf are so close to Bourdieu’s characterization of the inversion of values and reality of symbolic capital in the artistic field of production as to read as caricature: “The fact that it is very uncool is cool to me. I feel cool for being involved and feel cool there. What is [mainstream] cool disgusts me and I need a space to find what’s cool for me.” This same composer, though, also attests that experimental music is a practice that occasions “a kind of thinking I don’t get any other way—a kind of thinking that foments asking fundamental questions in new ways.”

As Guillory suggests in the quote with which I’ve opened this chapter, there remains in an empirical theorization of the relevance of art the un-addressable reality of the non-reducible phenomenal properties of aesthetic experience. Throop and Murphy (2002) support this assessment in suggesting that Bourdieu’s concept of phenomenal experience is fundamentally flawed in that it conflates phenomenology and knowledge based thereupon with mere subjectivism. They suggest that a “conflation of automaticity, habituation and non-conscious processes provides…for a fundamentally flawed model of human mentation and action that is far removed from how these processes are directly apprehended by individuals in the context of their lived experience” (199). This implies the need for a theoretical pivot away from the strictly empirical toward one that considers art works not as objects but as phenomena that occasion experiences relevant to the construction of subjects’ self-understanding and contextual, historical consciousness. I aim to accomplish this here by focusing on the role of aesthetic experience as tied to intentionality as the condition for experience and meaning (Ricoeur 1981b, 101). This
idea moves beyond the empirically available through an epistemological shift that admits the relevance of non-conceptual experience to human understanding. This shift implicates perceiving subjects in a cycle of meaning making noted in Chapter Four, one that foregrounds Heidegger’s notion of “meaningfulness” (Bedeutsamkeit) as a primordial characteristic of humanity’s ontological ground.81 In review, though conceptuality and language are crucial in the act of meaning making, Richard E. Palmer (1969) reminds us that meaning is not generated only in our relationship to the conceptual and language. Rather, “meaningfulness is something deeper than the logical system of language; it is founded on something prior to language and embedded in the world—the relational whole” (135). I do not wish to conflate aesthetic experience with “knowledge,” but to relate aesthetic judgment to intentionality, which I will later relate to Gadamer’s notion of play. Aesthetic experience is, then, not itself knowledge, but shown to be implicated in the processes capable of refiguring an agent’s horizon of understanding - that which is the ontological condition for knowledge. This approach makes sense of those assertions made by musician/composers and listeners in the field: that their interaction with works, by their own estimation, do more than define their social position or offer a means by which to concretize or change said position. Furthermore, this confirms Georgina Born’s (2010) suspicion that “…Bourdieu’s nuanced structuralism” that “…subsume[s] the formative role of aesthetic traditions and particular art objects within an account of competitive, conflictual relations between actors,” is not the entire story (178-9).

Previous to Bourdieu’s analyses, it has been a well-established critical trope to suggest that cultural and aesthetic realms are ineluctably related to the political realm and the ideas of  

81 As Ricoeur (1981a) further notes, this theoretical move was initiated by Heidegger and Gadamer in their post-Dilthey attempts to “dig beneath the epistemological enterprise itself, in order to uncover its properly ontological conditions” (53).
enlightenment and freedom (Kant [1790] 1987; Schiller [1794] 2004; Adorno [1962] 1976; Bloch [1959] 1996). Many of those interlocutors in the Los Angeles experimental music scene that is the topic of this study seem to anecdotally agree. The few quotes offered above from Michael Winter, Casey Anderson, Alan Nakagawa, Michael Pisaro, and others suggest that making music, especially experimental, autonomous, non-commercial music that foregrounds intentional listening is, for them, somehow a practice that can “change” them; that continues to move them to act outside mainstream modes of aesthetics and production. Perhaps even to work to create different, more just and egalitarian social realities (with regard to dynamics of power and the social realities of domination and oppression) than those they currently inhabit—not just to fight for social position. While interlocutors’ statements and descriptions of personal experience are admittedly vague, they remain important as they imply there must be a greater significance to musical practices than that which is addressable via an empirical approach.

I now move away from the analysis of the artistic field of production to a consideration of that which is the motor of its logic: Bourdieu’s understanding of the relevance of valuations of aesthetic judgment, or, taste. To better address those assertions of experimental music’s affective efficacy that lie outside of the purview of an empirical sociological theoretical framework (innovation, imagination, agency), I will set Bourdieu’s understanding of aesthetic judgment against that of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Here is where we find that epistemological and ontological pivot to which I have alluded. This allows me to show that these exist not as complementary, horizontally juxtaposable schematizations, but rather in a vertical relationship with Gadamer’s schematization describing the ontological possibility for Bourdieu’s epistemological one.

Though there is a tension between the social sciences and the humanities with regard to how the attempt to understand human conduct, I bring ideas from continental philosophy into
conversation with empiricism not to conflate the two, but in order to support the ideas of the former through a mediation from the latter. For, in making that pivot, I find that Gadamer’s understanding of aesthetic judgment has the ability to support Bourdieu’s findings, but is further capable to address the relevance of aesthetic experience outside its role in the demarcation of social distinction and position. Furthermore, by Gadamer’s general criticism of the privilege of rationality with regard to self-knowledge, the comparison shines a light on the role of innovation as related to agency. Ultimately this approach recovers aesthetic experience as part of the ontological ground that permits the construction of subjects’ horizons of understanding and being-in-the-world.

**Bourdieu and Gadamer: Contrary Understandings of the Aesthetic Judgment of Taste**

If we take the anecdotal suggestions of composers, musicians, and listeners that aesthetic experience is somehow complicit in changing their horizon of understanding—their knowledge of the world—then it must be related, as I have suggested above, to their construction of meaning and understanding. It would seem that Bourdieu maybe assents to this as he understands taste as a learned constraint on the possibilities of an agent’s social reality. For Bourdieu, by its complicity in social structuring, the aesthetic judgment of taste is part of the world’s profound social structuration that features art—and in the case of this analysis, music—as a weapon to be used in the battle for social position (Bourdieu [1979] 1984, 1). While Gadamer’s understanding of aesthetic judgment may not rule out aesthetic distinctions that mark social class, is not totalizing as it is for Bourdieu. Rather, in a manner that supports the claims offered above made by interlocutors from the Los Angeles experimental music scenes, Gadamer understands
aesthetic judgment of taste in relationship to the capacity of aesthetic experience to expand human horizons of understanding.

**Art, Social Space, and the Aristocracy of Culture**

For Bourdieu, the signs and signifiers bound up in artistic production compose an objectively observable and ideologically saturated site of class struggle. In *Outline of a Theory of Practice* ([1972] 1977), he refers to these common signifiers as *doxa* and suggests they partially construct the objective, unspoken and presupposed social conditions of the world by which “the natural and social world appears as self-evident” (164). By this understanding, social agents’ judgments of aesthetic taste inextricably tie the symbolic meaning of art works to positioning in social spaces. Following this logic, the subject exercises the power of judgment in a way she believes is free but is in fact governed by the habitus that delimits the fields of dispositions and position-takings. Hence, the agent is not entirely free to find (or not find) beauty and significance in works, but rather is limited to that which is within the limits of social space occupied by said subject. These “dominated agents” can only appreciate works which they perceive as within the purview of their social class constructed by “the objective laws whereby their value is objectively constituted, [and] tend to attribute to themselves what the distribution attributes to them, refusing what they are refused (‘That’s not for the likes of us’)…” (Bourdieu [1979] 1984, 471).

The character of the beautiful which, previously in transcendental idealism had been tied to the morally good and humanity’s teleological movement toward universal enlightenment, is denied by Bourdieu who instead asserts taste to be totally socio-culturally constructed. Aesthetic
tastes developed by agents are, in this formulation, means by which they define their social position and potentially appropriate other social positions.

Bourdieu explains:

Scientific observation shows that cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education: surveys establish that all cultural practices (museum visits, concert-going, reading etc.), and preferences in literature, painting or music, are closely linked to educational level (measured by qualifications or length of schooling) and secondarily to social origin (Ibid., 1).

This is seemingly a closed system. And by this theoretical formulation, the aesthetic judgment of taste is in direct relationship to the hierarchy of arts and the social hierarchy of consumers. Furthermore, in being aesthetically educated, social agents learn to “correctly” understand and interpret art works by way of the construction of their artistic knowledge and cultural competence. For Bourdieu, “correct” interpretations of works exist, works do not “speak” with hermeneutical autonomy to subjects, and there is no available appreciation of a work for a social agent if they have not been socially acclimated to its socially-constructed value. Thus, upon encountering a challenging art work—the correct evaluative codes for which a subject has not been trained in—results not in a judgment of taste, but merely of a confusing, unproductive experience: “A beholder who lacks the specific code feels lost in a chaos of sounds and rhythms, colours and lines, without rhyme or reason” (Ibid., 3). Such a beholder can only perceive surface properties of works and cannot evaluate or place them; cannot move from the primary

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82 “Correct,” that is, as related to socially-constructed attributions of value. Gadamer (1994) asserts that taste is not perfectable and must be recognized as variable: “One does violence to the concept of taste if one does not accept its variability. Taste is, if anything, a testimony to the mutability of all human things and the relativity of all human values” (51). This is a criticism of Kant more than Bourdieu, which will be developed further below with regard to the sensus communis.
stratum of meaning we can grasp on the basis of our ordinary experience to the stratum of secondary meanings.

Thus, the encounter with a work of art is not ‘love at first sight’ as is generally supposed, and the act of empathy, ‘*Einfühlung*’, which is the art-lover’s pleasure, presupposes an act of cognition, a decoding operation, which implies the implementation of a cognitive acquirement, a cultural code (Ibid.).

This cultural code is an operative function of the logic that drives the inversion of values in the artistic field of production from those in the enveloping field of social and economic power. For social agents, competence with this cultural code ultimately becomes cultural capital that secures the profits of having developed taste, the distinction of aesthetic judgment.

Bourdieu’s understanding of the relevance of the aesthetic, then, supports the demystification of the modern world with the development of critical procedures that conceive of art works only in their complicity in ideology. Alluding to problems inherent in such totalizing modes of analysis (while not referring specifically to Bourdieu), George Levine (1994) suggests that while they are clearly instructive, they succeed in occluding another deeply important role of the aesthetic, its ability to breach or augment ideological realities. While not denying the complicity of the aesthetic with social structures and power dynamics, he identifies the need in criticism to recover and take seriously the reality of the productive, ideologically rupturing nature of aesthetic experience: “More positively, I am trying to imagine the aesthetic as a mode engaged richly and complexly with moral and political issues, but a mode that operates differently from others and contributes in distinctive ways to the possibilities of human fulfillment and connection” (3). A move to focus on the productive nature of aesthetic experience leads well here into a discussion of Hans-Georg Gadamer’s understanding of taste and
aesthetic judgment through the recovery of Immanuel Kant’s subjectivization of aesthetics.

**Kant’s Subjectivization of Aesthetics and Gadamer’s Recovery of the Aesthetic as Grounding for Understanding**

In Chapter Four I reviewed how Immanuel Kant ([1790] 1987) described the human judgment of taste as the association of the feeling of pleasure with the intuition of an object. These judgments, or, claims of taste are not simply subjective and personal. Rather, subjects assume that all other subjects ought to agree with the judgment of such a claim. Hence Kant’s classification of the judgment of taste as a subjective universal—the community of taste, or, *sensus communis*. Gadamer (1994) notes that “the price he pays for this legitimation of critique in the area of taste is that he denies taste any *significance as knowledge*” (38). The transcendental function Kant ascribes to aesthetic judgment is merely reflective and supports his idea that judgments of taste are divorced from conceptual knowledge or truth claims (determinative judgments) based thereon.

It is from this classification of aesthetic experience as non-conceptual that Bourdieu’s greater formulation of the social situation of aesthetic objects (the model of which is considered above) has its point of departure. But by adopting a framework that foregrounds agents’ being-as-understanding (Dasein) in his philosophical hermeneutics, Gadamer recovers the place of aesthetic experience as related to intentional play—the condition for experience and meaning; a means of ontological disclosure. Unlike Bourdieu, Gadamer asserts that our encounters with the aesthetic are not simply exercises in social positioning played out in closed social spaces. Rather, through encounters with art works and the aesthetic experiences they occasion, agents’ fore-structures of understanding are consistently stretched and revised into new, meaningful wholes.
(this is the performance of the hermeneutic circle). This task of interpretation—by encountering and fusing with other horizons of understanding—constantly puts the subject’s extant horizon of understanding at risk in the interest of potentially creating for them a changed understanding of the world.

**The Role of Appropriation and the Communicability of the Work**

Another issue to deal with here, then, is the idea of a “correct” interpretation of an aesthetic experience. As noted above, for Bourdieu, the function of taste lies in the ability to correctly appreciate a work and thereby appropriate it into one’s socially-constructed codes of distinction. This ability is cultivated through education and the acquisition of cultural codes of evaluation. There is no room in this formulation for works to speak, or for a judgment of beauty in the experience of a work to occasion pleasure—apart from that which has been already cultivated as appropriate to a subject’s cultural understanding and social position. Furthermore, movement within the space of social positions is dependent upon access to various types of cultural (aesthetic) capital and the will to acquire and leverage these different types of capital in the interest of movement. But must experimental music works, then, have “correct” interpretations by community and class standards that can then be used to move in social space? Artists who produce them would certainly suggest not, rather they’d likely suggest that each listener constructs their own meaning, if meaning is to be found at all.83 I mean to imply that,

83 GegenSichKollektiv (2012) suggests that experimental practices—especially noise—may occasion an alienating subjectivity outside any complicity in decoding or interpretation that can work to destroy one’s position as a “self.” By decentering the subject, it cultivates the “anti-self” which characterized by “being no one, being nowhere, being nobody, definitely not an artist, certainly not an audience, producing nothing that separates us from our objective conditions, having nothing to exchange because there is nothing to count that someone else can frame” (194).
more than simply markers of distinction, these subjective meanings again affirm our inherence in a world characterized by ontological openness rather than epistemic closure.

Still, for Bourdieu, the appropriation of tastes and requisite aesthetic objects is strictly a means for a social agent to instrumentally differentiate themselves in the space of social positions. Further social movement may be occasioned by various methods of constituting otherwise insignificant objects as works of art, or by giving aesthetic redefinition to objects already defined as art, but in another mode; by other classes or class fractions (e.g., kitsch). He suggests, “[t]he dominant fractions do not have a monopoly of the uses of the work of art that are objectively—and sometimes subjectively—oriented towards the exclusive appropriation which attests to the owner’s unique ‘personality’.” Social agents have the ability to move and uniquely situate themselves in their social position by way of their appropriation of aesthetic tastes. He goes on…

Liking the same things differently, liking different things, less obviously marked out for admiration—these are some of the strategies for outflanking overtaking and displacing which, by maintaining a permanent revolution in tastes, enable the dominated, less wealthy fractions, whose appropriations must, in the main, be exclusively symbolic, to secure exclusive possessions at every moment (Bourdieu [1979] 1984, 282).

For Bourdieu, the human faculty of taste and aesthetic judgment is complicit in modes of appropriation of art objects as well as the cultural codes by which to correctly interpret them. But from Gadamer’s perspective, while agents may appropriate things, what is really appropriated in our interactions with art works is new horizons of understanding through the process of play. These new horizons of understanding are, then, the ground for the logic of the cultural codes that allow the “correct interpretation” of art objects.

It is true that experimental music practices have no monopoly on aesthetic experience and, as understood in the framework of philosophical hermeneutics, the increase of being-as-
understanding it may occasion. Yet I suggest that in experimental music practices, intentional listening—some implications of which I have considered in Chapter Three—may be foregrounded or more pronounced than with other practices. When listeners of any kind of music intentionally engage as meaning makers, they risk their extant horizon of understanding in their play with another world of meaning. Gadamer went so far as to assert that this play is the clue to explain the mode of being of the work of art. Not in its empirically ontic characteristics—its score, the sounds themselves, or means of production—but in its temporal unfolding and the self-forgetfulness that might be experienced by an agent in an encounter. He says: “[T]he work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it” (Gadamer 1994, 103). Gadamer suggests that by intentionally focusing on and engaging in play with a work of art, we extend to the work the endless dialogue we usually maintain with ourselves. This dialogue is one that not only tells us who we are, it is who we are. And with regard to music, “[a]s a practice that requires listening, dialogue affords openness towards difference and provides a powerful way in which difference…can be integrated in to consciousness; as an encounter it puts ourselves at risk” (Hamlin 2015, 17).

In contradistinction to Bourdieu, then, it is the very fact that aesthetic experiences occasioned by art works change us that supports their being and potential cultural meanings at all. The role of appropriation in this sense is neither the acquisitions of things nor that role recognized by cultural critics as complicit with cultural domination and hegemony. What a subject appropriates, then, through the fusion of worlds of meaning is potentially an augmented horizon of understanding that might result in innovation.
Los Angeles composer/performer Scott Cazan seems to describe just this process when talking about intentionally enduring a four-hour performance of a Wandelweiser work during a Dog Star Orchestra Festival that featured long stretches of silence:

Let’s say you spent simply the first forty minutes being uncomfortable and, in the first thirty minutes you’re like “Alright, cool I’m gonna do this, this is good. But thirty minutes pass and you’re just like “Oh man, I’ve got three and a half hours to go.” And you start to get uncomfortable in your seat, you’re squirming, and then that hour passes and you go, “Ok…” You sort of give in. It’s like stages of grief or something. You sort of give in and go, “Alright, well now I have three hours left. This is daunting, but I’d better, like, settle in.” And then another half hour and then you’re just like “Alright, I’m here.” And you start to settle in. You settle in and sit there and your body relaxes and you’re there. And the next thing you know, four hours has gone by and you’re like, “Wow, it ended so soon.” And I think that process kind of speaks to what’s interesting with this music. Because…it really changes you. It has, like…it has an effect. In a way, like, the romantic [music] when you’re being yanked around, except that you’re having to sort of deal with it. It’s not telling you what to do, but, you have to deal with your own shit [emphasis added]. (interview, Cazan, 20 June 2016)

A Re-Characterization of the Relationship of Aesthetic Experience to Knowledge

Perhaps the immediate implication of the recovery of aesthetic experience offered by philosophical hermeneutics is the helpful reframing of the “work” concept of music (Ingarden 1986; Goehr 1992; Demers 2014; Kluth 2018) from art object to temporally unfolding experience, and the credibility given to consequent relationship between aesthetic experience and understanding. We are thus able to make sense of the claims made by informants in the scene that their experiences change them, reframe their experience, and perhaps encourage them in their work that inverts the values of—or pushes at the boundaries of—institutionally legitimated culture. This conception of the power of aesthetic experience also helps to accredit challenging, unorthodox experimental musical practices that subvert legitimated “high art” practices as worthy of the appellation “art.” Furthermore, Bourdieu’s achievement of describing important elements of the logic of the artistic field of production remains.
The situation of Gadamer’s ontological understanding of the role of aesthetic judgment as condition for the possibility for Bourdieu’s epistemological one allows us to take seriously interlocutors’ claims of music’s ability to not only to construct their worlds of understanding, but also to transcend and refigure them from within.84 Thus recovered from a fate that is only complicit in demarcating and maintaining the borders between social spaces, we are able to—apart from anecdote or tautological assertion—consider the reality and relevance of aesthetic experience to innovation and change within ideologically informed social structures that were previously theoretically closed. From the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics, we can see that those fore-structuring histories of taste and aesthetic judgment inherited by agents from their sociocultural life-worlds are situated in the process of human understanding, which is always in a process of augmentation and refiguration. As much as more conventional musical practices, experimental music practices are indispensable for this reason; that they are inexhaustible in their potential significances, have the capacity to rupture congealed ways of thinking and acting, and can suggest alternative ways of inhering in the world. Implications of this assertion lead to my next chapter’s interrogation of the idea of postmodernity in relationship to the Los Angeles DIY experimental music scene.

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84 This also supports the complementarity of the “inside” (artist’s) and “outside” (social scientist’s) views asserted by Vera L. Zolberg (1990) that balances a humanist assertion of art’s ineffable character with a reductive ascertainment of art’s social relevance (14-5).
Chapter Eight: Recovering the Utopian Impulse in the In-Between

But I believe that we live not very far from the topos of utopia, as far as the contents are concerned... That island does not even exist. But it is not something like nonsense or absolute fancy; rather it is not yet in the sense of a possibility; that it could be there if we could only do something for it. Not only if we travel there, but in that we travel there the island utopia arises out of the sea of the possible—utopia, but with new contents.

—Ernst Bloch ([1964] 1987, 3)

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.

—Oscar Wilde (1912, 43)

Both experimental music practices and the city of Los Angeles (its architecture, urban planning, variety, character, and relationship of inhabitants, etc.) have been widely theorized in terms of postmodernity. Accordingly, in my investigation of the contemporary DIY experimental music scene in Los Angeles, it would be irresponsible not to address the topic. To that end, in this chapter I consider the potential postmodernity of contemporary experimental musical practices, attitudes, and their reception in Los Angeles in light of previous understandings thereof. In finding that the scene transcends any sufficient characterization informed by tropes of postmodernity, I offer an intervention from the useful but difficult idea of the metamodern, whose own paradoxical characterizations of contemporary states of affairs I address through insights offered by the hermeneutical turn.

In the context of musicological discourse, the interpretive prism of postmodernity has provided a means by which to circumscribe an historical periodization through the connection of musico-structural traits to observations of socio-economic and cultural character. Whether seeking directly to understand or interpret the logic of postmodernity in music or by the implicit
deployment of its values, postmodern thought has animated contemporary musicological
discourses since the development of the New (postmodern) Musicology I first discussed in
Chapter Two. The diversity of ideas in collections of essays (Kirms ed. 1998; Lochhead and
Auner eds. 2002) and monographs (McClary 2000; Kramer 2016) have sometimes productively-
contradicted one another in ways that reflect the contrary character of postmodernity itself.
Regarding the study at hand, a critical lens influenced by postmodern inquiry remains a valuable
means by which to understand experimental music’s structural traits and their relationship to the
social dynamics in Los Angeles’ constructed urban space. However, outside of the formal
characteristics that ostensibly identify it as postmodern, attitudes that inform the production and
reception of experimental music in Los Angeles require a new approach.

Terry Eagleton (1996) observes: “If postmodernism covers everything from punk rock to
the death of metanarrative, fanzines to Foucault, then it is difficult to see how any single
explanatory scheme could do justice to such a bizarrely heterogeneous entity.” Its resistance to
definition, he says, may be its only common denominator: “If there is any unity to
postmodernism at all, then it can only be a matter of Wittgensteinian ‘family resemblances’; and
in this sense it seems to provide an instructive example of its own dogmatic anti-essentialism…”
(21-2). Still, “[i]n their own way,” different theorizations “all seek to transcend what they see as
the self-imposed limitations of modernism, which in its search for autonomy and purity or for
timeless, representational truth has subjected experience to unacceptable intellectualizations and
reductions” (Bertens 1995, 5). This literally “post” modern attitude manifests culturally in an
incredulity toward metanarratives (Lyotard 1984) that freed cultural signifiers from their
identification with the telos of history (Jameson 1991) and dissolved differentiations between
“high” and “low” culture. Accordingly, manifestations of postmodern music have ostensibly
broken with more conventional ideas of temporality, authorship, and unity. Made in the image of the greater cultural Zeitgeist, this music revels in the free play of texts divorced from their historical and cultural moorings.

The inception of musical experimentalism and its consequent development have made this journey, and in many ways have exemplified the cultural values implicit in the postmodern turn. Identificatory analytical markers for postmodern cultural products (Jencks 1986; Hassan 1987) have proven as applicable to literature and architecture as they are to music. However, as a referential starting place for many of the concepts to which I will refer in this chapter, I appeal to Jonathan D. Kramer’s (2002) list of characteristics for musical postmodernity (Figure 8:1). While far from exhaustive, Kramer’s list is well considered—and incidentally, as it stands as a list, all of its proverbial boxes are checked by experimental music practices. As initiated by Cage et al. in the 1950s, experimentalism embodied the denial of authorship, identity, agency, and temporality associated with Western traditions.

Cage began creating works that broke radically with modernism and their anticipation of stylistic and conceptual matters later associated with postmodernism: fragmentation of style and structure within the art object; the abandonment of narrative linearity; questioning the role of intentionality in the creation of art and challenging the hegemony of Western culture; redefining the role of the listener/observer in the perception, reception and use of the art object. (Hamm 1997, 279)

By embracing indeterminacy, traditionally non-musical sounds, and even silence, experimental composers forced listeners into new roles of activity and engagement. Composers of the New York School (Morton Feldman, Earle Brown, Christian Wolff, and John Cage) explored questions of authorship, the immutability of the art object, dynamics of presentation, and the roles of time and identity in the production and reception of works. No longer motivated to create art objects to fill the imaginary museum of musical works (Goehr 1992), postmodern
composers turned to challenge the foundations of the integrated subject, of institutionalized art, and the ideas that had framed the significance of temporality itself.

(1) is not simply a repudiation of modernism or its continuation, but has aspects of both a break and an extension;
(2) is, on some level and in some way, ironic;
(3) does not respect boundaries between sonorities and procedures of the past and of the present;
(4) challenges barriers between “high” and “low” styles;
(5) shows disdain for the often-unquestioned value of structural unity;
(6) questions the mutual exclusivity of elitist and populist values;
(7) avoids totalizing forms (e.g., does not want entire pieces to be tonal or serial or cast in a prescribed formal mold);
(8) considers music not as autonomous but as relevant to cultural, social, and political contexts;
(9) includes quotations of or references to music of many traditions and cultures;
(10) considers technology not only as a way to preserve and transmit but as a deeply implicated in the production and essence of music;
(11) embraces contradictions;
(12) distrusts binary oppositions;
(13) includes fragmentation and discontinuities;
(14) encompasses pluralism and eclecticism;
(15) presents multiple meanings and multiple temporalities;
(16) locates meaning and even structure in listeners, more than in scores, performances, or composers.

Figure 8.1: Jonathan D. Kramer’s “Characteristics of Postmodern Music” (Kramer 2002, 16-17).

This development points to one of the more consistent organizing themes connecting postmodern cultural criticism: the “End of History.” Transposed by Marx to the material sphere from of Hegel’s idealism, this idea originally referred to the culmination of humanity’s dialectical development, an arrival of sorts that shrugged off the arc of history’s telos. Having been further turned over in the hands of theorists in ever-more political and materialist terms, in 1989, political scientist and economist Francis Fukuyama declared an end to history in what seemed like the totalization of a globalized collusion of capital and culture. This signaled “the endpoint of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (3). Jameson (1991) further extended this
claim in his description of a dominant cultural logic, declaring comprehensively observable
“senses of the end of this or that (the end of ideology, art, or social class; the ‘crisis’ of Leninism,
social democracy, or the welfare state, etc.); taken together, all of these perhaps constitute what
is increasingly called postmodernism” (1). In its totalization (perhaps ironic for its demonstrable
character as a metanarrative itself), this postmodernism seemed to preclude the idea of utopia
from the then-contemporary social imaginary. The impulse to disintegrate, de-historicize, and
disavow metanarrative allowed no place for utopia either as undiscovered island or hoped-for
futurity, and the postmodern critique of high-modernism by extension eyed utopian desire as
dangerously monolithic and worthy of suspicious (Jameson 1994, 53).

But the rumors of history’s death seem to have been greatly exaggerated and the end of
history postponed. Van den Akker and Vermeulen (2017) note that since the turn of the
millennium, it has become increasingly commonplace to declare that history has not halted, not
come to a standstill (2). Rather, authors across disciplines have come to agree that history has
been rebooted, and that the reported “end” was only really another “bend” in the arc of its
developing (or destabilizing) economic, political, and socio-cultural realities observable in the
2000s (Arquilla 2011). An observable waning of the previously-observed waning was underway:

This goes for discussions of history as much as it goes for debates about the arts.
We can think, here, of the waning of a host of different postmodern impulses,
which nonetheless share some kind of family resemblance (Jameson’s ‘senses of
the end,’ if you will): pop art and deconstructive conceptual art (from Warhol to
Hirst, by way of Koons); punk, new wave and grunge’s cynicism in popular
music; disaffected minimalism in cinema; spectacular formalism in architecture;
metafictional irony in literature, as well as the whole emphasis on a dehumanizing
cyber-space in science fictions of all kinds. Moreover, since the turn of the
millennium, we have seen the emergence of various “new,” often overlapping
aesthetic phenomena such as the New Romanticism in the arts (Vermeulen and
van den Akker 2010), the New Mannerism in crafts (van Tuinen, this volume), the
New Aesthetic in design (Sterling 2012), the New Sincerity in literature
(Konstantinou 2009, 2016a), the New Weird to Nu-Folk in music (Poecke 2014).
Quirky Cinema and Quality Television (MacDowell 2012; Vermeulen and Rustad
2013), as well as the discovery of a new terrain for architecture (Allen and McQuade 2011), each of them characterized by an attempt to incorporate postmodern stylistic and formal conventions while moving beyond them. Meanwhile we witness the return of realist and modernist forms, techniques, and aspirations… (Van den Akker and Vermeulen 2017, 2-3)

By these terms, history, development, and—by extension—utopic imagination is back, though what follows casts doubt on the veracity of its purported demise having occurred in the first place.

**Characterizing the Postmodernity of Los Angeles**

Since its founding, Los Angeles’ meta-self-representation via the culture industry has constructed a conflicted character in the social imaginary. The double portrayal as space of conflict and possibility is illustrated by Davis’ (1990) now-canonical reading of Los Angeles that is both a paradisiacal endless (capitalist) summer and noir-tinted sunlit mortuary where you can “rot without feeling it” (Rechy 1963, 87). Earlier classics of urban theory were suspicious of Los Angeles’ closed urban homogeneity. Jane Jacobs (1961), for example, prophesied the difficulties of fomenting public life for the arts: “Los Angeles is embarked on a strange experiment: trying to run not just projects, not just gray areas, but a whole metropolis, by dint of ‘togetherness or nothing’” (72). And according to Kevin Lynch (1960), the city’s sprawl marked it problematically illegible in comparison to the grid of Manhattan’s streets, noting: “Complete chaos without hint of connection is never pleasurable” (5). Still later projects of Reyner Banham (1971), Ed Soja, (1996), and Normal Klein (1997) reflected on what they recognized as both challenges and opportunities of the city’s postmodern disintegration. Any totalizing postmodern characterization of the city, however, risks becoming a one-dimensional caricature.
The influence of place is, of course, fundamental in organizing the senses and informing the parameters of a subject’s identity. Developing this observation, Barbara Moroncini’s 2008 study of experimental music composers in Los Angeles investigated the relationship between place and cultural production. Informed by the assumption that “[w]ho you are and ‘what’ you are is a function of ‘where’ you are” (Benson 2001, xi), Moroncini interrogates the veracity of Jameson’s (1991) idea of “Cognitive Mapping” as a heuristic framing device to explore music’s complex relationships to physical space and systems of power aligned with capital. This idea assumes, like postmodern musicology, that cultural products are encoded with the values and power dynamics of their contexts of production. Hence, the topos of a subject’s cognitive mapping describes how, to them, art functions as an equivalent map of the physical world. Its deployment ostensibly enables “a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society’s structures as a whole” (51). However, the reality may not be as simple as that. Multitudes of dynamic systems inhabiting various modes of experience cannot be so easily and legibly collapsed into one another, not the least into (the semiotically-unfixed category of) aesthetic representation. Still, Jameson insists in the utility of this analytical framing, noting that in spite of its faults it may be of use: “even if we cannot imagine the productions of such an aesthetic, there may, nonetheless, as with the very idea of Utopia itself, be something positive in that attempt to keep alive the possibility of imagining such a thing” (Ibid.).

Moroncini pursues such an attempt in her investigation of how composers’ musical choices relate to how they understand themselves within the urban space of Los Angeles and its structural and aesthetic representations of the logic of late capitalism. Focusing on experimental music composers Bob Bellarue, Raven Chacon, and Kraig Grady, she notes that their
compositional output—some of which is explicitly utopic (Kraig Grady’s literal invention of an island, “Anaphoria,” from where his microtonal instruments and works supposedly hail)—describes a role for music that is implicated in the ideological limits of its cultural reality, and the promise of music to refigure those realities. However, all three composers in Moroncini’s (2008) study “argue that music ‘doesn't change society in the ways that it used to.’ They do not seek to ‘mobilize consciousness,’ and acknowledge that ‘newness’ is no longer a number one priority. Instead, the impression they give is that of artists who want to focus on the live experience of music, the present, the now, and the sensuousness of sound” (10). There is a conservatism implicit in this experimentalism, a recession from an attitude that would deploy the production of new, challenging music as a site for politicization and resistance to socially deleterious ideologies as it so often was in the 1960s and 70s (Piekut 2011). “Motivated by a sense of disillusionment, or perhaps even disempowerment,” argues Moroncini (2008), “they have abandoned the attitude of ‘resistance’ characteristic of experimental music in the past, in favor of returning to a state of enjoying music for music’s sake. These politics, I argue, are characteristic of the present, and especially of contemporary composition in Los Angeles” (11). This begs the question in terms of the ontology of openness and the worlding power of music I have described in previous chapters: do works in this context no longer world? Do they no longer have the power to refigure horizons of understanding? Is the world in which understanding being’s dwell and make meaning finally closed? The rebooting of history described suggests otherwise. Still, there seems to be something confounding music’s refiguring power to be deployed in the practical field of Los Angeles’ DIY experimental music scene. In what follows, I pursue this through the prism of political engagement and ethical convictions.
This lack of political engagement rings true in the contemporary experimental musical landscape in Los Angeles I describe in Chapter Six. Many of my interlocutors agreed that, at present, the music seems to exist in a bubble removed from political exigencies. One noted: “The more I think about it, read about it, and write about it, it feels strange to me. It seems this [music] should be a platform for criticism and I’m not seeing it play out. So, it makes me wonder what the hell people are making work for, then. Because, that [music]—seemingly—was a platform for social criticism” (interview, Clark, 6 September 2016). Another, when questioned about political engagement, replied: “I don’t do anything political with my work. I don’t even think about being political...and it’s not a thing I think about when I see other people’s work, either” (interview, Smith, 13 August 2016). If not explicitly so, Michael Winter noted that, at least sometimes, the scene is self-critical in ways that might be politically construed. As an example, he shared an anecdote of staged, implicit resistance to the institutional canonization of experimentalism:

Kluth: Why do we not see politicized experimentalism much in the contemporary scene? I don’t see anybody running around like Henry Flynt picketing Shostakovich or something.

Winter: You know, you do kind of. You just don’t hear about it. Like, for example, when we did this concert at REDCAT that Michael [Pisaro] led; it was called 4’33” and Beyond [March 21, 2008]. [Names redacted] decided to play Alison Knowles’ Nivea Cream Piece in the audience during it. So, you’ve got four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence with people rubbing Nivea cream on their hands in the audience. And this kind of created a big stir. (interview, 24 August 2016)

The unintentional puns of how you “don’t hear about it”—“it” being political dissent—in this statement refer to the near-silence of both pieces mentioned, but also to the more material implications about gender and representation. Still, if this is the kind of political engagement being undertaken, can this kind of silent “dissent” as alleged resistance foment material change
outside its insular scene? For Moroncini, this abandonment of the political and return to a pseudo-autonomous condition of music for music’s sake is an epiphenomenon of contemporary urban life’s indispensable but disempowering “system of systems” that works to align aesthetics with systems of power as is so exemplified in Los Angeles. It is important to note here that this recession from political engagement does not mean a recession from the sphere of the ethical, nor a disentanglement of the music’s association therewith, as I will discuss below.

This situation describes a familiar double-bind for music and the implicit association with aesthetic judgment that recognizes its further implication in the (re)production of socially inscribed systems of power aligned with capital, but also the implication that somehow playing music—music for music’s sake—can be a site of performative resistance. This is the still-present antinomy that I consider below.

**Characterizing the Post-Postmodernity of Los Angeles**

To be sure, the various strains of experimental music I have described in Los Angeles’ contemporary DIY experimental music scene can be described, in terms of formal structure, as postmodern. All of those characteristics noted in Kramer’s list (Figure 8.1) are still present. However, they are suspended in and informed by a different “structure of feeling.” This term is borrowed from Raymond Williams who cryptically defined it as our “social experience…in solution” ([1925] 2001, 33). As a distributed manifestation of period’s Zeitgeist, it resists discursive reduction but is realized best in a period’s art (Ibid., 40). For its ambiguous and multimodal character, the concept of “structure of feeling” has been deployed extensively by Jameson in his descriptions of postmodernity’s modes of manifestation that characterize contemporary Los Angeles.
The experimental music scene and its attendant practices described by Moroncini in 2008 and my own now a decade later seem to share a paradoxical attitude toward political engagement: they have receded from any claim of political efficacy due to an attitude of disillusionment and disempowerment informed by an ubiquitously postmodern subjectivity (Moroncini 2008, 11), yet they insist in their belief in the promise of experimental music’s *as if* to demonstrate exemplary ethical attitudes through musical composition and experience.\(^85\) This superposition of modernity’s enthusiastic hope for the future and postmodernity’s suspicious resignation to a lack thereof describes a structure of feeling in ascendancy that replaces the dominance of postmodernity: metamodernity.\(^86\)

An informed naïveté or pragmatic idealism (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2010, 5), a metamodern structure of feeling is not characterizable by traits of either modern or postmodern subjectivities. Rather, it is a para-logical both/neither that, as such, oscillates between ostensive antinomies: enthusiasm and irony, hope and melancholy, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity, etc. In spite of the End of History suggested by postmodernity’s rejection of telos and metanarratives in general, the metamodern recognizes the ascendancy of a cultural impulse to sincerely—as in, not in a form of self-delusion—create works that function *as if* an historical horizon still exists. Thus, as it is inspired by a modern naïveté yet informed by postmodern skepticism, metamodernism is a heuristic label as much as a periodizing term:

\(^{85}\) This position does not collapse the political into the aesthetic, rather it suggests that the aesthetic can be an emblematic, a demonstrative model for alternative future possibilities. I develop this idea below.

\(^{86}\) Concepts referred to as “metamodernism” have been previously deployed in different discourses for different purposes. Vermeulen and van den Akker’s (2017) unique development of “metamodernism” differs from these and stands as a heuristic label for aesthetic and cultural predilections and a notion by which to periodize described preferences (4-6).
It is a structure of feeling that emerges from, and reacts to, the postmodern as much as it is a cultural logic that corresponds to today’s stage of global capitalism. As such, it is shot through with productive contradictions, simmering tensions, ideological formations and - to be frank - frightening developments… (Van den Akker and Vermeulen 2017, 5-6)

These contradictions are occasioned by metamodernism’s inherence in a state of *metaxis*. Originating conceptually in Plato’s *Symposium*, Diotima taught Socrates that Eros has its being in a state of metaxis—literally, the “in-between”—that exists as a conduit connecting the divine and mortal worlds and is thus both while being neither. Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) describe this in-between culturally as a double-bind locatable in utopic desire that is aware of its own futility:

Metamodernism moves for the sake of moving, attempts in spite of its inevitable failure; it seeks forever for a truth that it never expects to find. If you will forgive us for the banality of the metaphor for a moment, the metamodern thus willfully adopts a kind of donkey-and-carrot double-bind. Like a donkey it chases a carrot that it never manages to eat because the carrot is always just beyond its reach. But precisely because it never manages to eat the carrot, it never ends its chase, setting foot in moral realms the modern[ist] donkey (having eaten its carrot elsewhere) will never encounter, entering political domains the postmodern donkey (having abandoned the chase) will never come across. (Vermeulen and van den Acker 2010, 5)

That metamodernism “moves for the sake of moving” resonates with the dominant structure of feeling in the Los Angeles’ DIY experimental music scene. This scene's double-bind shows it to have seemingly resigned itself to a state of irrelevance in greater aesthetic and political worlds, while at the same time it refuses to quit. The scene’s persistence in difficult socio-cultural contexts consequently testifies that, for scene participants, something productive is happening: musical works still world, they persist in redescribing subjects’ horizons of understanding

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87 It is important to note that the analytical framework offered by the idea of the metamodern attempts to characterize a structure of feeling not only in ascendancy, but also in flux. Furthermore, though it engages at length with the idea of utopia, in their formulation of the metamodern, Vermeulen and van den Akker do not spell out (to my knowledge) to precisely whose theorization of utopia they appeal.
despite the disempowering system of systems. As my interlocutors shared with me over and over, moving for the sake of moving remains somehow efficacious in a way that, for them, connects the aesthetic to the social and ethical, but can offer glimpses of alternatives outside present realities. In a Blochian sense, their musical practices remain a path to the utopian as a means by which they might cast themselves “into the external world and overcome existing objectifications that are inadequate to it” (Hudson 1982, 26)—transcending the oppressive systems they inhabit from within, potentially augmenting interlocutors’ understandings thereof in the process. I take this to demonstrate that, in spite of being apparently obstructed in their pursuance of utopias by oppressive systems, those obstructions are not impermeable. As such, subjects are not bound in a Bourdieusian system characterized by closure, but rather their practices can be characterized by an ontology of openness - if an openness struggling under the logic of late capitalism. Regardless, for them, music still holds out the promise of the as if. No matter how removed, autonomous, or oppressed composers of experimental music in Los Angeles might be, their works and actions suggest that their musical practice orders their lives, can exemplify more plural and democratic social structures, and are implicit in their construction of meaningful worlds.

**The Utopia of the In-Between**

This in-between character that is both and neither the resignation to political irrelevance and a powerfully affecting practice has been differently but consistently described by my interlocutors in Los Angeles’ contemporary DIY experimental music scene. Here I offer excerpts from interviews that demonstrate a metamodern subjectivity informing artists’ understandings of their own artistic and social motivations.
Multimedia artist Alan Nakagawa described this with a metaphor of a bow and arrow; that the shooting of the arrow toward a reachable aesthetic goal or “correct” outcome is, for him, not the organizing motivation of his musical practice. Rather, is in the gesture of the aim; the process, the listening, the sitting-with that occasions its efficacy:

But the gesture of the aim—that’s life—if that’s the most important thing, it’s really about the quality of life and not the target. Isn’t that why we do art? Because every time we’re creating we’re in the process of taking the bow out, stretching it, you know, all this [gestures at unfinished works]…I think performing and exhibiting are important. The event is great, but it’s making the art [that is primary]…That’s the end point. Every try is a hit or miss toward this target that’s beyond the haze; which you can’t even see. (interview, Nakagawa, 12 September 2016)

Nakagawa’s characterization can be understood as an idea of utopia obscured in the distance as a target that, by orienting the utopic impulse from a distance, realizes itself. In this way, the open, research-oriented aesthetic experiences occasioned by experimental works might show themselves as examples for rules not yet in existence. They offer an invitation to follow to alternative, perhaps better ways of being. It is almost a paraphrase of Bloch’s logic of hope with which I open this chapter (“Not only if we travel there, but in that we travel there the island utopia arises out of the sea of the possible—utopia, but with new contents.”). It is also redolent of Jameson’s idea referred to above: that though one may not arrive at utopia, there is something mysteriously productive in the work of imagining and moving toward such an expected arrival.88

Musician/writer/concert organizer Andrew Choate (The Unwrinkled Ear) described the efficaciousness of experimental music as that, regardless of its formal structure or idiomatic

88 It is important to note that, for Bloch, it is not only that we travel, but that we arrive at a utopia that is significant - the possible is only important in that it can become the real-possible. Bloch’s ([1959] 1996) process philosophy holds open the indeterminacy of the future but seeks material change reflecting a good utopia: “…possible is everything that is only partially conditioned, that has not yet been fully or conclusively determined. Here we must of course distinguish between the merely cognitively or objectively Possible and the Real-Possible, the only one that matters in the given context” (196). While for Jameson it is possibility itself that is instructive, for Bloch, it is not only the “promise” of the possibility of our travel to the island of utopia, but THE REAL POSSIBILITY of our arrival that really matters.
character, leads his thought process in new ways and sometimes makes disparate connections. For him, this experience can be framed by any variance of silence or sound - the particulars of sound sources and structure are unimportant. Rather, it is the labor of listening that is fruitful. Unsurprisingly, he does not privilege logos in his experience with experimental music, nor conventionally denotive cognitive outcomes:

For me, it’s when you shut off the part of your brain that’s thinking about making something happen or doing something, and you just listen, your brain will unconsciously work out some other problems and you’ll think about some other things. Especially during extremely abstract music. And so, for me, when I’m really listening, my mind will be flooded with imagery and senses of new kinds of interactions...So when it’s not working [the music is not effective], my brain is not generating images. The music is not leading my thought process. (interview, Choate, 4 August 2016)

Composer and instrument inventor Liam Mooney echoes Choate, noting that it is the activity of open and active listening that allows other possibilities to arise:

As far as my own stuff, it’s always that exploration – that I need to know what this will sound like. Not just thinking about it, but I have to hear it. That’s with my own stuff. But as far as participating in other people’s stuff, going as a spectator or listener, audience member, that is kind of purely experiential. The thrill of “who knows what can happen here.” It might not always be something interesting, but just knowing that this could go anywhere—there’s really no confinement to what might happen at one of these things. (interview, Mooney, 8 August 2016)

Adding that Eric KM Clark echoed the value of active play in listening and in performance - that the openness of realizing a score whose illocutions are vague that is the most fun, but potentially also the most meaningful in its promise of the possible:

I love thinking through it like a puzzle and all of the different possibilities. Like, if you sat in on a rehearsal and we’re deciphering a text score, and it’s so specific—but it’s not like there’s one option. You’re putting all of these possibilities out there. It’s a game and its really, to me, extremely fun...because it’s this whole play of possibility and interpretation. (interview, Clark, 6 September 2016)
Others have testified to experimentalism’s efficacy in more social and material ways that support Blacking’s idea of “soundly organized humanity” (1973), or even Attali’s ([1977] 1985) more structurally-oriented description of music’s ability to organize communities.\textsuperscript{89} But rather than the resting in a capability to structure power to which Attali might attest, scene participants explicitly give a picture of experimental music that builds community whose ethics are described by its pluralist, open horizons (explored in Chapter Six).

For example, among its possible significances, for Gnarwhallaby’s pianist Richard Valitutto, the role of music in the experimental scene is socially-oriented as an organizer of a growing community’s shared ethical values and convictions:

> I mean, I think that’s one of the coolest things about any experimental scene. Because it hasn’t been codified and figured out, the main thing it does is bring people together. It brings a community together. A lot of times you might not have control over what that community is, but the only way it can work is if people put aside their own bullshit for a while and just be a body in a space for someone else…Sometimes the biggest value I’ve gotten from going to something, is the belief that I am supporting a friend or community. (interview, Valitutto, 29 July 2016)

And in what would be an almost unimaginable shift to the present relationship of the aesthetic to systems of power, Michael Pisaro goes so far as to believe that this power of listening might interrupt the present relationship of music to systems of capital and structures of power. He suggests that the alignment of music with capital cannot last forever; that music’s role in organizing and re-organizing human affairs will eventually win out apart from its present explicit implication in the neoliberal structuring of power in favor of its role in the implicit informing of pluralist beliefs and practices:

\textsuperscript{89} “All music, any organization of sounds is then a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community, of a totality. It is what links a power center to its subjects, and thus, more generally, it is an attribute of power in all of its forms. Therefore, any theory of power today must include a theory of the localization of noise and its endowment with form… Equivalent to the articulation of a space, it indicates the limits of a territory and the way to make oneself heard within it…” (Attali [1977] 1985, 6).
Early in Wandelweiser in the 90s, it was clear to me that this group of people was very aware. It started with silence, really—silence was really the window to this. And it seems kind of contradictory because you might think of silence as a true kind of abstraction or removal, but in practice and the practice of making pieces that have long silences in them, it was an immersion again and again in the environment in which the music was occurring. And, so, that sustained immersion, I think, is really the initial entryway for this change [of the relationship between the aesthetic and capital]. And everybody goes a different direction and has somewhat different experience of that, but sooner or later, it changes what you think material is for music. And, so, I feel like we’re in that age where musical material itself is in a real state of flux. And it’s really only mainstream culture that holds on to music as something made by instruments with singing and loudspeakers, you know? I really don’t think that that’s gonna be around forever as the concept of music. Because the climate is changing, and everyone knows they have to change their relation to the world as a result of that—some change has to occur on some level. (interview, Pisaro, 21 October 2016)

Recovering the Platitudes

I admit that on their own, these statements about the “possible” in experimental music and its relationship to “sound” social structuring (Blacking 1973) are, at their best, observed social phenomena while, at their worst, toothless and tired platitudes. However, past this prima fascia character, they point toward and align with claims made by experimentalists since the early twentieth century: that the openness of experimental works can inform their ethical beliefs regarding how to best inhere in a plural world. As is evidenced by the lack of political engagement in the contemporary Los Angeles scene, these ethical recommendations can be stymied before provoking material political actions. Still, what I am referring to as their utopic impulse persists in the scene’s social imagination.

In Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions, Fredric Jameson (2005) opines that our “imaginations are hostages to our own mode of production (and perhaps to whatever remnants of past ones it has preserved). It suggests that at
best Utopia can serve the negative purpose of making us more aware of our mental and ideological imprisonment; and that therefore the best Utopias are those that fail the most comprehensively” (xiii). By this approach, we might think that it is not the arriving at Utopia that makes it real, but its reflection of our present situation’s lack. A related logic exists in the paradoxical double-bind of metamodernism’s schematization that gives a name to experimentalism’s both/neither: its outward denial of meaning and simultaneous assertion of efficaciousness.

Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) situate the metamodern discourse along postmodernity’s rebooted teleological line of history, asserting “history’s purpose will never be fulfilled because it does not exist. Critically, however, it nevertheless takes toward it as if it does exist. Inspired by a modern naïveté yet informed by postmodern skepticism, the metamodern discourse consciously commits itself to an impossible possibility” (5). I want to explore the implications of this assertion in terms of philosophical hermeneutics, as this situation seems to demonstrate the logic of hope and the promise of possibility it maintains. Accordingly, philosophical hermeneutics comes into play as an explanatory scaffolding for metamodernity’s “impossible-possibility.” By extension, it mediates the antinomy of postmodern musicology’s own methodological metaxis which assumes that music is both and neither ideologically inscribed and capable of refiguring subjects’ horizons of understanding. Understood as such, the double-bind described by a metamodern structure of feeling is a function of that field described by Kosselleck in Chapter Four that connects the space of experience to the horizon of expectation, helping to maintain a tension between the two. In what follows, I explore how the
meaning-making hermeneutic circle animated by the act of listening connects imagination and aesthetic judgment to ethical recommendation.  

The Rule of Metaphor and the Logic of Hope

The problem I wish to address stems from anecdotal, uncritical assertions that aesthetic judgment can engage a subject’s phronetic reason—their judgment as related to the field of practice and how to act therein—relating aesthetic experiences to analogous planes of ethical judgments and political actions. Moreover, this highlights the complex issue that works are communicable and are understood to “speak,” to have meaningful expressions that inform subjects’ ongoing processes of worldmaking. Framing this phenomenon in the terms of philosophical hermeneutics described in Chapter Four, we are able to recover music’s potential meanings from a fate of reduction via the formal epistemological nature of musicology before the postmodern turn, but also from a totalizing recession into ideological implication thereafter.

As alluded to in Chapter Seven, the communicability of the work and the promise of its affective vehemence can be related to aesthetic judgment and its reliance on synthetic imagination by which subjects engage with the poetic nature of social reality. To pursue this connection further, I now turn to consider some of Paul Ricoeur’s reflections on metaphor and other operations that allow for shades and changes of meaning that inform subjects’ practical understanding of the world.

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90 I questioned above whether the utopic imagination had ever really “left” during the postmodern period. Of course, it had not, and could only be understood as “gone” within a totalizing caricature of postmodern cultural logic. To be sure, utopic imagination, seeming to have been captured by structures of power informed by capital (the “system of systems”), came under timely criticism as a site of deleterious social control. The metamodern discourse recognizes this, but again recovers utopic imagination as means of intervention in that logic of oppression.
In Chapter Four, I quickly described Ricoeur’s idea of productive mimesis. Relating it to Gadamer’s account of play—characterized as an epoché, a recession from the real—I identified it as a process capable of refiguring an agent’s horizon of understanding. The many related implications regarding language, truth, and being that are part of this conversation’s necessary context in poetics theory are too great to be included here. However, I offer a concise, albeit incomplete, description derived from Ricoeur’s ([1975] 1978) account of metaphor as an operation that offers a redressive comparison between things that by some observable means both “are” and “are not” the same.

Addressing how the work of imagination can interrupt and refigure present understandings of reality, he explains that metaphor can make or change meanings through “the apprehension of an identity within the difference between two terms” (26). This insight demonstrates the possibility for the redescription of the relationship between unlike things in a subject’s understanding. Roger Savage (2018) addresses the relevance of this insight in terms of our encounters with works of art:

The consequences of identifying the irruption of new meanings with the power of thought and imagination at work in these meanings’ figuration are far reaching. First, to the degree that the world projected by a work shatters existing outlooks and habits of thought, the work’s proposal of the meaning expressed by the work is the spring of the claim that the work makes. The force of this claim is borne out when, through distancing itself from the practical order, a work refashions reality from within. (201)

Implicit in this process is the communicability of works, as it is the synthetic operation of imagination drawing consecutively sounding elements together as experienced synthetic wholes that occasions their experience and situates them in understanding.
Furthermore, this illustrates the temporally-transitive nature of understanding that allows for changes in meaning, the simultaneity of multiple meanings (polysemy), and claims to new or changing truths held in the flux of contextual frames.

Operating by the same logic, metaphor can also join perceptual domains synaesthetically, harmonizing names and concepts by their family resemblance to differing modalities of sense:

The ‘sensorial transpositions,’ joining two different perceptual domains (a warm colour, a clear voice), fit without difficulty into the great family of metaphors. The synaesthetic constitutes a case of spontaneous perception of resemblances which is nevertheless a function of the mental dispositions of speakers. Sensorial correspondences harmonize neatly with substitutions of names since both are cases of resemblance between ‘senses.’ … [T]he synaesthetic transpositions become recognizable thanks to the mediation of language. (Ricoeur [1975] 1978, 120)

This demonstrates that understandings and truths gained through metaphorical redescription are not based in a final verisimilitude or veridical correspondence, but rather testify to a new manifestation of a world that is itself the basis for second-order talk about ideas of correspondence. The refiguring function of this process demonstrates that Bedeutsamkeit which characterizes humanity’s ontological ground; how being-as-understanding is always already caught up in the hermeneutic circle in which works are operative in augmenting the practical field of our experiences. It is this capacity for meaningfulness and its availability to refiguration that is at the core of a culture’s construction of meaning. As such, the productive character of music, like other pursuits such as literature, poetry, painting, sculpture, etc., has its primary efficacy in its engagement with imagination and aesthetic judgment primary to practical or political concerns.
**Connecting—Not Collapsing—the Aesthetic (in)to the Ethical**

Interlocutors testify that experimental music in Los Angeles, like any music anywhere, can “mood” them differently, thereby augmenting the listener’s understanding. This should come as no surprise as, evinced by daily life and anecdotally assumed in musicological method, music attunes us to the world differently. Such an observation further attests to the ability of our engagement with music to pre-conceptually re-dispose us to the world, continually opening it to us anew. Roger Savage (2010) addresses this transcultural reality, writing:

> Ultimately, music’s power to refigure our relation to the world in the realm of feeling attests to the fact that our attunement to the world is also the condition for, and the effect of, our meaningful engagement with it. This refiguration of the real, in the order of feeling, is the hermeneutical response to the enigma of music’s nonrepresentational character. (102)

The relevance of this realization hearkens back to my discussion of Kant’s divorce of aesthetic (reflective) judgment from concepts (determinative) and, hence, the production of knowledge. Chapter Seven described Gadamer’s recovery of aesthetic experience as a grounding for understanding, the possibility of which lies in the primordial character of field of being as a relational whole. This character permits meaningfulness and characterizes the ontological grounding of humanity’s understanding and acting (Palmer 1969, 135; Ricoeur 1981b, 101). This flyover summary of connections between non-conceptual experience of music, mood, and meaningfulness points again to the transitive nature of truth claims, but also to an understanding of how experimental music (like any music) might inform a socially-situated subject’s ethical convictions and actions.

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91 For a thorough consideration and explication of this complex topic, see the section, “Music and Metaphor” in Roger Savage’s (2010) *Hermeneutics and Music* Criticism (91-102).
It is important to stress that our experiences of encounters with art works may prompt our synthetic imagination to refigure our horizons of understanding and encourage the pursuit of different practical outcomes. Still, we should not fall prey to the impulse to portray works in and of themselves as ethical or political. But how to explain art’s perceived liberatory potential? In his suspicion of any assertions of collusion between art and politics, Adorno (1997) reminds us that art’s distance from reality is its first social characteristic. Politically committed art must therefore be false as it effectively closes the distance that allows its critical function. Hence, art can only be true by its negation of the existing order (8). However, this implicates art in the performative contradiction of Adorno’s negative dialectic that immediately paints any truth claim as ideologically inscribed and thereby false. To mediate this paradox, Roger Savage (2018) reminds us to look to art’s capacity to refashion the real in accordance with the worlds it projects and to account for that capacity by the role of imagination in exploring alternatives that set out different models for inhering in the world (198).

Differing from what Kant called determinate judgments that retrospectively place an individual case under a universal rule, aesthetic judgments of taste are instead reflective and act prospectively, the singular case summoning its “rule” by exemplifying it (Ibid., 204). This is an important insight and a clue to the connection between the judgment of taste with regard to aesthetic experience and the horizon of expectation, and furthermore, to how they might inform ethical convictions. Aesthetic judgments of taste prospectively test works’ exemplarity, or, situational “rightness.” Whereas determinative judgments are only effective in the retrospective mode, aesthetic judgment function prospectively, effectively wagering that “rightness” in unknown future contexts - risking intervention in unfolding situations with unknown consequences. Rather than a claiming a universal truth, the act by which a case is placed under a
rule is reversed from such a denotive, top-down judgment. Instead, aesthetic judgment operates from below to above.

Consequently, the ‘rule’ exemplified by the work is one the work itself evinces. This ‘rule’ is akin to the universal that Aristotle tells us poetry teaches: we cannot know whether the ‘rule’ existed before it was invented. Moreover, the meaning proffered by a work, and hence the truth to which it lays claim awaits the reader, spectator, or listener’s apprehension of this ‘rule.’ The truth that a literary text, poem, play, painting, sculpture, or musical work expresses is one to which it alone gives a figure. (Savage 2015b, 147-8)

Furthermore, one can assert an analogous relationship between rules called by works in the aesthetic field and those called by exemplary actions in the practical field: “Like the work, the ‘rule’ to which the act attests is also one that the act evinces. Hence, like the truth to which a work lays claim, the example set by the act seeks its normativity based on the wager made by the agent in taking the initiative to respond to the demands and exigencies of a situation” (Ibid.). This implies that new meanings initiated by aesthetic experience may serve to challenge accepted mores and conventional standards of wisdom, but that they do so with unknown outcomes that take a chance on the as-yet unknown as if. They constitute an adventure and a risk (Ibid., 140) as the example of the work’s summoned rule becomes emblematic of alternative paths of action, and, as such, establishes a model we might imitate in the sense of following after it. Ricoeur (1998) suggests this effect of being drawn to follow (Nachfolge) is comparable to an art work’s communicability (182). Hence, like the work’s claim to truth, the injunction issuing from an individual act or work recommends itself to us by reason of its exemplarity (Savage 2018, 206).

By this analysis I have endeavored to demonstrate a means of understanding how encounters with art might alter subjects’ horizons of understanding and call to a stand new means by which to heuristically engage with the world, while showing how aesthetic judgments of taste
connect prospectively to ethical convictions. Apart from purely aesthetic concerns, this, then, is the primary importance of our encounters with art and the aesthetic experiences they occasion: that every aesthetically-initiated reconsideration of the present state of affairs sets out a claim for differently-appropriate ways of thinking, acting, feeling, and relating to others. As such, though Los Angeles’ DIY experimental scene may not be explicitly politically engaged, by its aesthetic experiments it is remains nonetheless engaged in research in the great ethical laboratory of the imaginary (Ricoeur 1992, 59).

Still Looking to an Open Horizon

This compressed analysis has described the Los Angeles DIY experimental music scene’s paradoxical recession from political engagement that nonetheless believes in the power of music. Characterized as a metamodern double-bind between disillusionment of postmodern life and promise of the utopic impulse, metamodernity’s impossible-possibility reflects this new cultural logic’s reboot of history. In spite of its acknowledged end in the postmodern period, this discourse reflexively takes toward a new telos of history as if it exists; moving for the sake of moving, animated by an impulse to seek a truth it perhaps never expects to find. In spite of the presence of the logic of late capitalism and other structures that characterize post-postmodernity, the world is not closed, and aesthetic experiences occasioned by works still have the power to refigure subjects’ horizons of understanding - still hold out the promise of the as if.

Furthermore, I have sought to show that this ostensive logical antinomy makes sense if framed in the terms of philosophical hermeneutics. Despite its lack of practical political action, this accounts for how musical works engage the imagination in aesthetic judgment; refiguring agents’ horizons of understanding and becoming heuristically implicated in the ethical sphere.
Notwithstanding music’s implication in ideology or structures of power aligned with capital, our experiences with the aesthetic bear out the power of art to redescribe our realities. But in doing so, to prospectively react to shifting fields of symbolic and material relations in pluralist social spaces, regardless of seemingly totalizing systems of power. Bloch was right: Utopia may not exist, but in that we continue to travel there by the applications of aesthetic judgment, “the island utopia arises out of the sea of the possible—utopia, but with new contents.”
Chapter Nine: Conclusion

I noted in the introductory chapter of this dissertation that it would not run a straight course from beginning to end, but rather that it was engaged in a hunt. As such, I have explored a lot of territory in pursuit of a better understanding of how experimental music in the Los Angeles DIY experimental scene might engage and affect its listeners, occasioning experiences that alter their understanding of the world. These territories have included: a consideration of different histories and theories of experimentalisms, the investigation of a series of clues about ontological openness and musical meaning suggested by the act of listening, an explanatory methodological intervention offered by philosophical hermeneutics, an ethnography and analysis of the aforementioned scene, a consideration of its implications in light of sociological theories of the judgment of taste, and a metamodern characterization of its structure of feeling.

In the sixteen months since the end of my formal fieldwork in the Los Angeles DIY experimental music scene it has continued to persevere and transform. Since the loss in September of 2016 of what had been its permanent space, the wulf. continues its programming, though not with the same frequency it once enjoyed. Some performances take place at Automata Arts, Betalevel, and other venues I have described above. However, since early 2017 the bulk of them have been taking place at Coaxial Arts Foundation’s space at 1815 S Main St. Just south and west of Downtown Los Angeles, this bare-bones exhibition space is an open, narrow room on the ground floor of a building situated between the Fashion District and University Park. The neighborhood’s urban, industrial feel and the location’s barely-marked entrance exemplify the hard-to-find character of many of the DIY spaces I have described. A 501(c)3 non-profit, the unadorned brick walls and concrete floor of Coaxial Arts Foundation’s space offer an
appropriately uninscribed environment for the variety of media, sound, and performance art exhibitions hosted there. Much of the wulf.’s programming style and audience remains the same though there has been an influx of outsiders (non-Calartians) and touring artists since the venue change. Furthermore, since the loss of the wulf.’s original space, Michael Winter left Los Angeles for extended peregrinations in Mexico and Europe, leaving much of the programming and organizational duties to be assumed by Andrew Young and the advisory board.92 Programming series WasteLAnd, Southland Ensemble, and Gnarwhallaby persist and continue to grow, presenting works that seem to be ever more representative of diverse composers. For example, Southland Ensemble’s presentation of the works of Ruth Crawford Seeger mentioned above by Eric KM Clark came to pass in April of 2018, and WasteLAnd’s “Autoduplicity” program in December of 2017 consisted only of works by women composers.

Despite of the continued commitment of participants, the scene remains small, insular, and still lacks in diversity. Its presence and aesthetic continue to go largely unnoticed by the population at large. As addressed in previous chapters, this is due to its challenging aesthetic (which I called profoundly “weird” in Chapter One) and often socioeconomically privileged position of this music in present modes of presentation. But I have also noted that this is due to a lack of access and exposure for diverse, often historically oppressed groups with less access to arts education. Apart from individual scene participants’ laudable engagement with community music teaching programs like the Harmony Project and SASSAS discussed above, I am unaware of any educational initiatives regarding experimental music outside of more elite educational or cultural institutions. But what could a course or workshop to engage students in the kind of

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92 Incidentally, Young was the first person that was ever paid to work at the wulf. While a student at CalArts, he was hired as an intern at the wulf. which had secured a grant from the LA County Arts Commission for that purpose. During the course of his internship he and Michael Winter worked to get the wulf.’s recorded archive hosted on its website (interview, Young, 12 June 2017).
aesthetic values demonstrated in the spirit of Southern Californian musical experimentalism look like?

Reflecting on this question, it is instructive to remember that the musical experimentalism engaged in in Los Angeles is not only informed by its aesthetic, but also by a spirit of seeking and research. This is exemplified by James Tenney’s influential conception of his experimental music practice as parametric perceptual research described above. In line with this, an educational initiative to expose students to musical experimentalism might succeed not only by teaching the history and practice of the music, but also by finding ways to demonstrate—practically and aesthetically—an attitude and values that eschew epistemic closure in favor of ontological openness. That there is not a “right” way to do musical experimentalism can be an advantage as much as a liability.

Music has its being in its temporal unfolding, and many believe experimental works suffer in their recorded presentation; Cage calling them simply postcards from the event (Grubbs 2014). It follows that effective educational presentation of musical experimentalism should include hands-on interaction with works that connects performance and reception to demonstrate that experimental music is not only about music, but how engagement with that music might show the world differently or refigure an understanding of the practical field. Such a practical model can be found in recent research by Los Angeles composer and technologist Casey Anderson and anthropologist Elizabeth Chin.

In the summer of 2016 the two engaged in the design and execution of educational workshops at Lekòl Kominote Matènwa, a rural community school in Haiti, that used open-ended art projects to teach technology concepts. The curriculums they developed engaged students in learning through “participant making”: “An approach to fieldwork, ethnography, and
design that takes the ethnographic commitment to participant observation and all that this implies and melds it with a designerly investment in ‘making’—that is, the iterative process of manifesting ideas as things” (Chin 2017, 543). Several of the workshops designed by Anderson led students through open ended art projects to creatively teach concepts of electricity and general computational concepts. These workshops were practically-oriented (teaching soldering by building paperclip bracelets, for instance) but were incentivized with creative, aesthetic goals. For example, creativity and exposure to alternative sounds was taught through the construction of contact (piezo) microphones, encouraging students to seek out “hidden sounds” in their surroundings - effectively creating DIY percussion instruments. In another workshop, “the teachers and some of the older students were challenged to prototype a light-controlled, multiple-voice synthesizer with a CMOS microchip, light-dependent resistors, and an amplifier. Participants “tuned” their feedback loops to each other to create beautiful, bell-like tones or guttural, rhythmic loops” (Anderson 2018). Anderson notes that this workshop “results in sustained attention to the creative affordances of ‘bending,’ or repurposing a design structure…to an end not necessarily predicted by its manufacturer” (Ibid.). In a very practical manner, this method succeeds in teaching a practical skill and demonstrating the open-ended-ness of design, but also in the power of imagination to “bend” the real as it is presented.

I am not suggesting that experimental music education must teach technology, but that the inclusion of a practical, workshop curriculum oriented toward “participant making” might effectively combine glimpses of histories and practices of experimentalism with an attitude toward research that highlights the capability of aesthetic experience to augment a subject’s world. Such a method of sharing, anchored in practicality and collective doing, could be an accessible starting point for exposure to the promise of the possible inherent in experimental
music to people outside of privileged institutions and socioeconomic positions. It could function as a model—in our contemporary society that struggles sometimes to validate “art for art’s sake”—that points from the practical to the aesthetic, acting as what Kaprow ([1987]1993) called “an introduction to right living; and after that introduction art can be bypassed for the main course” (224-5).

After having covered so much ground, it is not too much to ask for a final takeaway - my position about regarding the scene. As I have outlined in previous chapters, any potential utopic idealism to which scene participants might aspire by gesturing with their works toward new ways of being in the world is necessarily situated in the problematic realities of contemporary Los Angeles. With that in mind, I admire that the scene’s openness I have championed above persists in spite of the city’s present challenges, history of racist policing, class warfare, and the often-oppressive logic of late capitalism. A facile takeaway characterization of the Los Angeles DIY experimental music scene might set participants up as dreamers working heroically in obscurity to engage with and maintain their ostensibly alterity-promoting musical practices. Likewise, another more suspicious or ironic characterization would show them to be deluded idealists with their proverbial heads in the sand, contributing nothing to the complex reality of their situation. These are both caricatures, but caricature is often rough truth. As I see it, whatever the truth is, like the musical practice itself and the city in which it takes place, it must be complex.

The opening manifesto and prologue of Michael Winter’s prose piece, “Notes on a New Economics for a New Art” reads:
I. Manifesto

To the extent possible…

1) proliferate art freely.

---

Prologue

Allow us to abandon our propriety.
To address problems without giving full solutions.
To be marginal half-revolutionaries.

…
To fight for a more humane world
by disregarding the traditional, formal protocols of institutionally sanctioned protest.

…
To rant and rave.
…

In hopes, that perhaps, truly fresh ideas may come to the surface. (Winter 2010, n.p.)

In coming to a conclusion regarding the complex nature of whatever real contributions and character of this scene, the lines, “To the extent possible…” and, “To be marginal half-revolutionaries” are elucidatory. I have suggested that, in its persistence, this musical community is making small steps toward the further realization of both its aesthetic and social values. To that end, in the piece referenced, Winter goes on to offer recommendations for a more just social reality and art’s place therein, but also couches them alongside personal notes about his own positionality. He is aware of his privilege as well as the many constraints that characterize his practice saying: “Currently, the extent possible, for me, is far from what I would like. The above statements are what I can manage given the shackles of the modern system. Am I angry? Yes. I want more: more time to create art, more time to develop the artistic community in which I make art, simply more.” He continues:

I do not take my privileged life for complete granted. My socio-economic status has afforded me a fine education and a good life. But now more than ever, I feel
the need to strive for real freedom. Not the freedom sold to us by propaganda machines. People often state that we have it better now than any other time in history. Apart from the fact that such a statement is completely worthless and void of any meaning, one thing is evidently clear: our lives, mine included, are far from what they could be. Simply put: this system is not working! I am angry with myself: for being complacent, for being complicit. Still, I do what I can ‘to the extent possible’. And right now, these ideas are exactly that. Hopefully, in the near future, they may be realized or, at least, attempted. As Morton Feldman points out, “Art is a crucial, dangerous operation we perform on ourselves.”

Now is the time to put ourselves at risk; not only in art, but in how we live. Every day of our lives should be like making art: dangerous and with risk. (Ibid.)

I admire this reflexivity and I find Winter’s attitude laudable. He cannot speak for the whole scene. However, though other interlocutors whose insights have informed this project may have used other terms, I believe most would agree with his words. Perhaps more important to my personal takeaway from this study - I agree with his words, and I believe this community is doing much more good in Los Angeles than harm. It is true that musical experimentalism is not the most effective activity in which one might engage if the end goal was social change. Still, in some of the ways I have addressed, I believe it models and prepares participants for further risks—holding the door open for change, working in that spirit of idealism— “to the extent possible.”

Summarizing the methodological intervention of this dissertation, my deployment of philosophical hermeneutics works to offer an explanatory description that gives a name to—while theoretically situating aesthetic experience in—the poetic process by which humans not only make meaning, but also navigate the practical and social fields of our shared world. Reflecting on what seem at first to be profoundly weird values and practices from the perspective offered therefrom, I have demonstrated that experimentalism, too, participates in that musicality of man that encourages its sound organization (Blacking 1973). Despite difficulties still to be overcome, this allows a view of a Los Angeles DIY experimental music scene that persists.

93 From Feldman’s (2000) Give My Regards to Eighth Street.
despite its post-postmodern milieu informed by power structures characterized by epistemic closure. The scene’s diverse musics offer aesthetic experiences that gesture to the open ontological ground that is the condition for the possibility of those closed and potentially oppressive epistemic structures. By this continued effort, it demonstrates its commitment to the promise of the as if to model different ways to be in the world. Furthermore, insights gleaned from this study that theorize the first-order significance of art’s elicitation of experiences that occasion worldbuilding rather than art as object do not belong solely to my reflections on experimental music. Rather, they are transferrable to any musical sensibility, studies of communities organized by musical practices, and may be extended to other art practices as well.

As Gadamer (1994) reminds us, “the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it” (103). The promise of the possible held out by art is, then, that capacity to look past the exigencies of the present and the fetters of historical failings, engaging the imagination to conceive of that which is not-yet, and to model potential paths by which to reach it. In an environment such as Los Angeles, making aesthetically-challenging and economically dominated music that asks so much of the listener, and for such open-endedly-articulated goals, may seem an activity for a community of holy fools. Conversely, I understand the scene’s chosen musical expressions as a challenge that respects the capacity of each individual to engage intentionally and thoughtfully with the world every day. At its best, the music of the Los Angeles DIY experimental music scene functions as a kind of dare, inviting listeners to engage with the other, risk their present understanding of the world, wagering it for a glimpse at not-yet-known possible worlds lying just beyond their present horizons.
Appendix: Representative Musical Scores Circa 2016

I have portrayed the musics comprising the DIY Los Angeles experimental music community as heterogeneous in concept and execution. They are bound, however, by a research orientation toward musical experience and an interest in deploying listening’s capacity to refigure horizons of understanding, projecting different ways of being-in-the-world. Several of the composers interviewed for this project have been generous to allow me to include further information about them, their musical attitudes, and copies of scores. Rather than interpretively characterize each artist whose work presented here, I have opted to let them speak for themselves by including biographical copy from their own websites. All texts, scores, and images are used with the express permission of their authors and composers.

The scores included in this appendix are far from exhaustive in their description of experimental approaches or sensibilities in the Los Angeles DIY experimental music scene. Furthermore, they do not represent “favorites.” However, they do represent a fair cross-section of works I was fortunate to audition during my fieldwork in 2016 with regard to plurality of technique, attitude, and aesthetic. Finally, it should be no surprise that all of the works presented here come from composers affiliated with the California Institute for the Arts as graduates, or teachers, or both.
Casey Anderson:  *SCRUM* (2016)

Biographical information from http://www.caseythomasanderson.com/about/:

Casey Anderson is an artist working with sound in a number of media, including composition, improvisation, electronic music, saxophone, text, and installations. Performances, exhibitions, and residencies include MOCA - Los Angeles (CA), ISSUE Project Room (NY), STEIM (NL), Atlantic Center for the Arts (FL), MASS MOCA (MA), The Walker Art Center (MN), and The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA (CA). He co-founded, and co-edits (with John P. Hastings and Scott Cazan), the Experimental Music Yearbook, owns and operates A Wave Press, and is a core member of Southland Ensemble. He currently lives in Los Angeles, California and teaches in the Media Design Practices department at ArtCenter College of Design.
A mechanism to restart play

Beginning at a centralized location in the space, performers standing closely together in a large, irregular clump (silent / motionless until cued)

~

Each performer quickly selects an action from the list to perform (more or less) continuously. While performing the action, each pushes through / around the clump of others, searching for partners (any performer who has selected the same action) to build an incrementally expanding ensemble: solos become duos, duos become trios, etc... expansion of a group is denoted by physical contact between two persons who have selected the same action. When a group gains a member they retreat out from the clump (to the perimeter) and attempt to push through the clump again (still looking for additional members), stronger, louder, more present with each pass.

~

The first two groups to reach 8 members dictate the two possible actions for the next section, with remaining performers quickly joining one or the other. Groups return to a loose circle at the point from which the piece started and attempt to balance / tune the two actions, standing closely together in a large clump split in half (one half for each action).

When the two groups reach an equilibrium, one (and only one) performer “breaks” the balance by “tagging out,” one by one, all performers while pushing through / around the group (the goal is dispersal). Performers stop their action as soon as they are tagged out. When all have dispersed / separated, performers restart the entire process by picking a new action from the list and resuming the search for partners.

~ repeat freely ~

 Actions

READING
CLAPPING
HUMMING / SINGING (TONES)
RADIOS

Figure Appendix 1: Anderson’s SCRUM (2016). Reproduced with permission.
Scott Cazan: *Grammar* (2016)

Biographical information from http://www.scottcazan.com/about:

Scott Cazan is a Los Angeles based composer, performer, creative coder, and sound artist working in fields such as experimental electronic music, sound installation, chamber music, and software art where he explores cybernetics, aesthetic computing, and emergent forms resulting from human interactions with technology. His work often involves the use of feedback networks where misunderstanding and chaotic elements act as a catalyst for emergent forms in art and music.

Scott has performed and received numerous commissions with international organizations such as The LA County Museum of Art, MOCA (Los Angeles), Issue Project Room (NY), Feldstarke International (with CENTQUATRE, PACT Zollverein, and CalArts), Ausland (Berlin), Art Cologne, Ensemble Zwischentöne, The University of Art in Berlin, Toomai String Quintet, Southern Exposure (San Francisco), Guapamacátaros (MX), Umbral (MX), the Media Mix Festival (Monterrey), the BEAM Festival (UK), REDCAT (Los Angeles), Machine Project and many others. He has collaborated and performed alongside a variety of artists such as Ulrich Krieger, Mark Trayle, Michael Pisaro, Carmina Escobar, Carole Kim, Jana Papenbroock, and many others.

As an active educator he has taught at institutions such as the University of California, Santa Barbara, Art Center College of Design, and is currently a special faculty member of the California Institute of the Arts where he teaches topics on the intersections between art and electronics. His music can be heard on Khalia Records, CareOf Editions and Edition Wandelweiser.

In an email correspondence, Scott described Grammar this way:

Grammar is a shadow of a pre-composed work for electronics. The piece was created using SuperCollider and the vim editor over the course of a week while in residence with Audition Records in Mexico City. While the pre-composed work is never really heard, the performance of the piece is a re-enactment of the keystrokes used to originally create the pre-composed piece. It is typically performed with a lone keyboard (usually without a laptop present) and an ordered set of possible key commands to be executed. The performer, in this case, might be somewhat familiar with the sounds of the piece but the execution of each sound event is masked by the encoded key commands resulting in the performer never really knowing what the effects of the keystrokes they are executing might be. The performer is only left with the ability to effect a change or not effect a change. (Cazan, email, 15 March 2018)
Figure Appendix 2: Grammar’s score (seen here) is hand-written on a visible surface at every performance from some reference - or from the last performance if needed. Image provided by Scott Cazan. Reproduced with permission.
Figure Appendix 3: A screenshot from SuperCollider realizing a performance of *Grammar*. Image provided by Scott Cazan. Reproduced with permission.
Ulrich Krieger: Quantum 1 and RAWI-V

Krieger is a prolific composer and influential performer and teacher at the California Institute for the arts. He works beyond and between categories and, though his works often with renowned musicians, he also often includes students in his performance ensembles. Biographical information from http://www.ulrich-krieger.com/bio.htm reads:

[Ulrich Krieger] is well known as a saxophone player in contemporary composed and free improvised music as well as a composer of chamber music and electronic music.

His recent focus lies in the experimental fields and fringes of contemporary Pop culture: somewhere in the limbo between Noise and Heavy Metal, Ambient and Silence.

His original compositions go back and forth between Just Intonation, Silent Music, Noise, Instrumental Electronic, often asking for elaborate amplification, and works in the limbo of Rock culture – not accepting stylistic boundaries.

Krieger developed his own, often amplified style of saxophone playing, he calls 'acoustic electronics'. He uses refined acoustic, quasi-electronic sounds, which then get processed, the saxophone often becoming more an 'analogue sampler' rather than a traditional finger-virtuoso instrument. By amplifying his instrument in various ways, he gets down to the 'grains of the sounds', changing their identity and structure from within.

Ulrich Krieger was commissioned to write works for: Soldier String Quartet, ohton ensemble, Ensemble United Berlin, KontraTrio, zeitkratzer, Ensemble Experimente, Seth Josel, intersax, Text of Light, and others. His compositions are widely performed by ensembles in Europe and the USA.

He has managed to transcribe and arrange Lou Reed’s infamous 'Metal Machine Music', everybody thought impossible to do, for classical instruments, performed by zeitkratzer and other groups.

He also arranged works by Merzbow, Throbbing Gristle, Deicide, Terry Riley, Henry Cowell and others for chamber ensemble.

He collaborates with: Lou Reed, LaMonte Young, Phill Niblock, Text of Light, Lee Ranaldo, Phill Niblock, John Duncan, Zbigniew Karkowski, Merzbow, Thomas Köner, DJ Olive, Christian Marclay, Kasper T Toeplitz, Antoine Beuger, Radu Malfatti, Mario Bertoncini, Michiko Hirayama, Miriam Marbe, Hans-
Joachim Hespos, Ensemble Modern, Berliner Philharmoniker, Soldier String Quartet, zeitkratzer, just to name a few.

Krieger has received prizes, grants and residencies from: Kunststiftung Baden-Württemberg, Villa Aurora Los Angeles, Deutsches Studienzentrum Venedig e.V., Akademie der Künste Berlin, 'Meet-the-Composer' Forum New York, DAAD, Darmstädter Ferienkurse für Neue Musik, and many others.

He lived in Berlin and New York, and was 'Composer-in-Residence' in Los Angeles, Rom, Venice, Bologna, and Townsville (Australia).

He studied saxophone, composition and electronic music at the UdK Berlin (University of the Arts) and the Manhattan School of Music New York and performed with orchestras like: Berliner Philharmoniker, Deutsches Symphonie Orchester, Rundfunk-Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Ensemble Modern, Musikfabrik, and many more.

Since 2007 he lives in Southern California, where he is associate professor for the composition faculty at the California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles.


In an email correspondence, Krieger noted that the visual scores for Quantum 1 and RAW differ from his other compositions in that they are composer-performer pieces. As such, they are (very detailed) memory helpers:

they look visually very different from my chamber music scores, which are all neat, clean and polished, computer set and printed.
but i believe strongly, and even teach to my students, that the way a score looks influences the way the piece is performed.
therefore for me the visual presentation of a score (how it looks) is a part of the composition of a piece (e.g. is it totally written out, is it partially open, is it etc.).
RAW and Quantum are not contemporary chamber music, they are noise. the context is a different one, the score, if any, has to be fitting the context and intend (Krieger, email, 18 September 2017).
Figure Appendix 4: Score for Krieger’s *Quantum 1*. Reproduced with Permission.
Figure Appendix 5: Score for Ulrich Krieger’s RAW I. Reproduced with permission.

Figure Appendix 6: Score for Ulrich Krieger’s RAW II. Reproduced with permission.
Figure Appendix 7: Score for Ulrich Krieger’s RAW III. Reproduced with permission.

Figure Appendix 8: Score for Ulrich Krieger’s RAW IV. Reproduced with permission.
Figure Appendix 9: Score for Ulrich Krieger’s RAW V. Reproduced with permission.
Todd Lerew: *Concerted Pitching* (2014) and *Reading the Dictionaries* (2015)

Rather than reproduce information from Lerew’s official website (he does not have one that I can find, though his works and biographical information about him are available from a number of sources online), I am reproducing here (with permission) the extensive artist statement with which Todd provided me. Lerew’s interest in composition as physical, perceptual, and affective research is evident from Lerew’s self-characterization. His statement: “The most powerful experiences I have had with works of art are with those that seem to ask a lot of me or that require me to meet them on their terms but which justify this demand by suggesting that the place of this meeting differs from any to which I have prior exposure,” speaks to his attraction to and value of aesthetic experience’s capacity to refigure listeners’ understanding.

This was written in April 2014:

As a composer, I identify with the experimental tradition in that nearly all of my pieces are the result or actual process of focused experiments with materials and instruments used (or misused), facets of the perception of sound, and relationships among performers or between performer and audience. Inspired by the rigor and elegance of various reductive projects of conceptual and minimalist movements across all artistic media of the last half-century, I am interested in the often subtle and unexpected ways in which complexity can emerge when a single strong idea is presented well.

If my work can be considered conceptual insofar as clear and transparent ideas drive many of the pieces and I often feel it is important that the listener knows what is ‘going on’, it is not rigorously so in that the transmission of the idea does not stand in place of the work itself and I do not carry on with a project if I do not believe there can be an interesting sonic experience of the conceptual inquiry. Rather, it may be more accurately stated that I seek extra-musical inspiration as a very direct and practical approach to conceiving and executing new works.

Perhaps the most prevalent theme in my work is the exploration of the sonic potential of non-traditional musical instruments and materials. In some cases, there is little intervention on my part, as with *Test Weekly*, in which multiple smoke detectors are set off with a fog machine, or the self-explanatory *Corrugated Straws on a Car Through a Wind Farm On a Fault Line in the Desert*. Other works utilize unique preparations of more traditional instruments, such as *30 Notes for Drum*, in which wax is poured onto a drumhead as it is...
played to dramatically alter its spectral characteristics, or *Alternate Rules of Play*..., a game piece in which players must remove ping pong balls from the interior of a grand piano simply by striking the key corresponding to the string on which the targeted ball lies.

In some cases, I have even built new instruments to assist in the realization of an idea for which standard configurations are not sufficient. Among these are *Concerted Pitching*, which uses a long clear tube with flute mouthpieces on either end and a ball inside which is free to roll laterally and alter both pitches simultaneously, as well as *The Variable Speed Machine-Wound Monochord Chorus*, which requires four custom-built monochords with tuning pegs on either side and gives the direction to tune each string both up and down at the same rate with the intention of maintaining a steady pitch by perfectly synchronizing movements.

Both the monochords and the interdependent slide flute serve as evidence of an interest in the social element of a performance situation. The focus is not only on the fact that non-traditional instruments are employed, but also that there are people using them. I am fascinated by the unique imperfection of the human performer, and sonify this indeterminable failure both with the impossible task of the monochords, and in *Yielding Isometrics*, in which a performer holds a weight above the frequency antenna of a theremin and attempts to match a steady target pitch until they can no longer keep their arm suspended. In both cases, a perfect machine-like accuracy would result in no acoustic activity at all, and it is only in the degree of deviation from the stated goal that musical material is generated.

Due to the nature of the materials used or the situation constructed, the work often has a strong visual component. It can also be somewhat humorous, which is reflected in titles such as *Performed in Accordance with the California Balloon Law, SB 1990* or *Polyrhythms Induced by Drumming at Speeds in Excess of 180,000 Beats Per Minute*. Some of the pieces suffer when experienced as an audio document removed from the performance setting, as with the theremin piece or with *Lexical Semantics*, in which one of two identical tuning forks is heated with a small blowtorch and they are then played at regular intervals for up to 20 minutes or longer as the heated fork returns to room temperature and the beating slows down as the pitches converge. But the extent to which any of these works can be said to be theatrical is a direct result of the devotion to the peculiarities of experiential listening and engagement with a time-based medium.

Present in several of the works mentioned is a deep curiosity regarding the perception of sound and the shifting modes of active listening. In *30 Notes for Drum*, many people observe that the spectrum of the drum’s sound in the middle section of the piece separates into a pulsating low hum that is not dependent on the timing of the sticks striking the head as are the higher frequencies. *Test Weekly*, given sufficient volume, elicits otoacoustic emissions (interference tones or buzzing created by the inner ear) not unlike an off-kilter walking bass line. In
another piece, *Radial Quiet in Weightless Noise*, sustaining instruments struggle to be heard from within a high intensity field of white noise, and there are strong aural illusions regarding the location of a sound or whether one hears anything at all despite being able to see that several performers are active. It is never my intention to suggest a single definitive mode of interaction with a piece, but it has become clear to me that the research of psychoacoustics and other experimental sciences can be directly exported to expand the scope of aesthetic experience.

Through continually asking myself what sound is, where it can be found, and what the implications are for us as listeners, the answers have become increasingly unclear to me. If this work can be considered political, the intention is to engage an act of opening, as I am not interested in a directly confrontational mode of communication that assumes an antagonistic relationship between composer and performer or audience. The most powerful experiences I have had with works of art are with those that seem to ask a lot of me or that require me to meet them on their terms but which justify this demand by suggesting that the place of this meeting differs from any to which I have prior exposure. To the extent that my work is difficult for some, I hope that any tension it may create is profitable. (Lerew, email, 8 November 2017)
Concerted Pitching
(for two flute players and custom double flute with rolling ball bearing, ~10 minutes)

Begin with the ball very near to the center of the tube.

Performers stand for the duration of the piece. Since the tube must often be in a level position, a notable height discrepancy between performers may call for the shorter of the two to stand on something (stable) to afford a more comfortable balance between the two sides. The tilting of the tube back and forth may best be achieved by bending one’s knees as opposed to rolling the neck or back, as this can negatively affect the embouchure and interfere with eye contact between performers. The instrument should be held at the joint between the mouthpiece and the long tube to better support the weight and prevent undesirable leaning or turning of the headjoint.

All measures are repeated ad libitum within an agreed upon time frame. Each measure presents a pattern in which, upon repeating, the individual performers’ instructions switch back and forth. Each measure may therefore be thought of as a pair of measures with alternating directions. Performer 1 cues all measure and section changes. Rhythms indicate instructions and pattern only, and measures are not to be counted straight through at any steady tempo. Often, the length of a breath or the movement of the ball will determine the duration of a given event, whereas rests are free (typically 2-10 seconds). Short pauses are allowed even where rests are absent if the instructions, or a transition between them, logistically necessitates this.

Should the ball get stuck in the tube at any point throughout the piece, the performer to whom the ball is closest blows into the tube to dislodge it before resuming. A quick puff is preferred to a full forceful breath with follow-through, as this will minimize the velocity at which it shoots to the opposite end of the tube. The performer may also tongue the air hole closed immediately after it is dislodged to create air resistance and slow the ball’s course.

Notation:

- A regular notehead indicates a steady, clear pitch with no vibrato.
- An x in place of a notehead indicates a tongue stop/rall.
- A notehead with a backslash through it indicates a wind tone, or unvoiced sound (Assian/air noise).
- A cluster symbol indicates covering the air hole with one’s finger to allow the ball to roll slowly from one end of the tube to the other. Brief “venting” (quickly removing one’s finger from the hole and immediately replacing it) is allowed to increase seamlessness or to speed past known spots at which the ball tends to get stuck.
- A “pedal up” star in place of a notehead references sealing one’s mouth over the air hole and blowing directly into the tube. The objective is to hold the ball in the center of the tube despite its downward slant. The performer is blowing primarily to counter gravity in this instance.
- A diamond-shaped notehead indicates overblowing to any available higher register.

Todd Lerew 2014
Figure Appendix 11: Page 2 (of 2) of Todd Lerew’s *Concerted Pitching* (2014). Reproduced with permission.
Reading the Dictionaries
for readers’ choir

A number of performers (no fewer than four) read aloud the words set forth in several dictionaries, alphabetically and in time with one another.

Any language is permitted, but all performers must be reading in the same language, and will all have different editions of roughly the same length. Only dictionaries containing a list of words of a single language are to be used, and all should be intended for the same purpose of use. That is, none should be specialized, themed, or inter-lingual translations.

Each performer must read directly from a print dictionary as opposed to a photocopy, a prepared/reduced list of words, or a digital version of any kind.

No fewer than four different editions by any number of lexicographical manufacturers should be represented. That is, all performers may have the OED but from different years, or there may be two different OED dictionaries and two more from Merriam-Webster, etc.

No performer’s dictionary should be of dramatically differing length from that of any other performer, so as to avoid any solos of excessive duration. In English, collegiate dictionaries are recommended as a good average size and for diversity of entries within a similar range of length. A performance using learner’s dictionaries or pocket dictionaries could be interesting for covering a wider alphabetical range, but it may be difficult to find these in the requisite number of distinct editions while still being similar enough in length.

The words are recited in tempo, one entry on each beat, with an unhurried pace that allows for the pronunciation of the longest entries. The reading should be clear yet flat, and absent of theatrical inflection, nor are there any dynamic changes throughout.

For clarity amongst the group, the first syllable of each entry falls on the beat regardless of the natural placement of accents.

Only the bolded words appearing as individual entries are spoken. All other content – pronunciation keys, definitions, parts of speech, examples of usage, etc. – are ignored. Proper names and multiple-word entries are spoken, but abbreviations or initials as well as incomplete words (e.g. prefixes/suffixes) are omitted. A good rule of thumb is that any entry meant to be read aloud as it appears (e.g. YMCA) is incorporated, whereas any entry that appears only as a function of written language (e.g. Pd) may be skipped. Multiple entries for words that are identical in spelling and pronunciation need not be repeated, but different forms of the same word may be spoken if they have been given separate entries and at the discretion of the reader.

To start each performance, a conductor sets the tempo and, in time, the group speaks in unison the name of the letter they are reading from. Following this cue and without pause, readers individually proceed to their first entry of the agreed-upon passage.

It may not be possible to perform the entire piece (the entire dictionary) without interruption, as this could take many hours or several days. Instead, a single letter may be performed and credited as e.g. Movement D, or (albeit less desirably) only a section of a letter may be performed and credited as e.g. Excerpt Ba – Bo.

In most cases, one reader will be left with a solo due to the fact that their dictionary contains the most entries for the selected alphabetical excerpt. As other readers drop out and only one or several remain, the tempo may suddenly feel much slower, but remaining readers should resist any urge to rush and should maintain this steady tempo.

If a given performance encompasses more than one letter, all readers must finish all of the entries of the first letter before any reader may proceed to the next, and the new letter is begun by all readers again in unison and on cue.

On the first several passes, it can be very difficult to read every entry straight through. Once the alphabetical range of a given performance has been set, some amount of rehearsal or preparation would be useful in reducing surprises or mistakes in the course of the reading and to identify allowable versus omitted entries.

Should a reader stumble on a word or get behind, skipping a beat and then re-joining on the following is preferable to speeding through to catch up. Ideally, however, this can be eliminated with preparation, as it degrades the effect of cataloguing differences in inclusion between editions.

The perception of authority of the dictionary and the importance of its contents breaks down, even to the extent that inclusion can feel arbitrary. It is an exercise in the pliancy of language, and suggests the complications in professing to know one.

Todd Lerew 2015

Figure Appendix 12: Score of Todd Lerew’s Reading the Dictionaries (2015). Reproduced with permission.
Luke Martin: so softly that it came, a wild dim chatter, meaningless (2016)

This biographical information from http://www.lukecmartin.com/about.html shows Martin’s strong interests in process, silence, listening, and meaning, and “exploring limits of perception and methods of re-evaluating (and altering) process of everyday life, i.e., ways of being in the world,” through their deployment. His engagement with theorists as much as music composition is evident as well as the influence of Michael Pisaro and Wandelweiser.

Luke Martin is an experimental composer, performer, and poet currently living in Boston, MA. His work focuses on the concepts of silence, blandness, and social sculpture and is primarily interested in exploring limits of perception and methods of re-evaluating (and altering) processes of everyday life, i.e., ways of being in the world.

Some (current) artistic concerns include: composition as engagement in process(es); composition as perception / attention; being in the world; consideration of performance / composition from a point of silence or doing nothing; critiquing the self-desire to do something (more); listening; field recording; composition as fundamentally social; sound as always happening; sound as incidental / by-product of (other) processes; how we engage in pre-determined or taken-for-granted processes constantly; also, constant creation of (new) processes or compositions by everyone/thing everywhere; layering of communal activity located on the edges or outside of perception; meeting / communicating / seeing / listening / being in a fog; silence as fog; silence as being in the world; position of relationality between subject and object; being bored or engaging with boredom as being in the world / being creative; potential.

Luke has been influenced by the work of Samuel Beckett, John Cage, Joseph Beuys, Morton Feldman, Peter Ablinger, Deleuze and Guattari, the Wandelweiser Group, Gertrude Stein, and others. Luke performs (and has performed) with various groups on no-input mixer, guitar, objects, and other various odds-and-ends including sinecure (Andy Young, Ben Levinson, Isaac Aronson), Variant State (Michael Rosenstein, Howard Martin, Jesse Collins, Chris Johnson), DogStar Orchestra (large ensemble of experimental musicians / festival of experimental music in LA), Ordinary Affects (experimental music ensemble; Morgan Evans-Weiler, Laura Cetilia, James Falzone), The Readers Chorus LA (a reading group led by Sara Roberts and Jordan Biren), and others. He has an M.F.A. in music composition from California Institute of the Arts, where he studied with Michael Pisaro, and a B.A. in English and Music from Colby College (magna cum laude, honors in music composition/theory).
Having relocated from Los Angeles to Boston in the summer of 2016, Luke spends his time composing, performing, writing, reading, and working as an adjunct professor of music at Massasoit Community College and the grant writer for Monday Evening Concerts (Los Angeles, CA) and Fullerton Friends of Music (Fullerton, CA). Additionally, he works with Boston-based experimental music organization Non-Event (Boston, MA) and as an associate producer at the Ojai Music Festival (Ojai, CA).

Luke co-directs, with Aaron Foster Breilyn, an experimental music festival in Boston (in collaboration with Non-Event and Washington Street Art Center): the co-incidence festival. He produces Vespers, a series of experimental music in Greater Boston and runs, with Morgan Evans-Weiler and Sam Leviazar, a small label called Fold.

*so softly that it came, a wild dim chatter, meaningless* was written in 2016. A recording of the work is distributed by Edition Wandelweiser Records (EWR 1613). The title is taken from Samuel Beckett’s novel, *Watt* (1953), whose resistance to interpretation is well known. The information page at Edition Wandelweiser Records offers an explanatory note from Martin:

"so softly that it came, a wild dim chatter, meaningless was recorded at mentryville park in southern california. the performance began just before sunrise, at a clearing halfway up the mountain trail.

the piece originated from a field recording in the middle of mentryville park; alone, in the same location, and as the sun was rising. amy golden, ben levinson, davy sumner, and ryan gaston received this field recording and we proceeded to transcribe the same portion of it using my developing notation for silence. all slightly different, these five transcriptions were then combined into a score, in which performers could wander while reading at their own pace(s) left to right.

"Mr. Knott talked often to himself too, with great variety and vehemence of intonation and gesticulation, but this so softly that it came, a wild dim chatter, meaningless to Watt's ailing ears. This was a noise of which Watt grew exceedingly fond. Not that he was sorry when it ceased, not that he was glad when it came again, no. But while it sounded, he was gladdened, as by the rain on bamboos, or even rushes, as by the land against the waves, doomed to cease, doomed to come again."

Samuel Beckett, *Watt*

(http://www.wandelweiser.de/_e-w-records/_ewr-catalogue/ewr1613.html)
This score comprises a series of instructions that guide performers through the construction of their own graphic scores which are then combined. The graphic score offered below is that which culminated in the recording available via Wandelweiser.
this piece is for three or more performers. it may be of any duration.

**preparation:**
each performer will be provided with the same field recording (of any duration) and instructions regarding ‘silence notation.’ the task is to transcribe the field recording using that notation. **rules:**

1) paper: 4.25in x 11in (8.5in x 11in cut in half, length-wise), landscape. pencil should be used. the total width of this transcription is a single page of the dimensions given above. the transcription begins on the far left and ends on the far right.
2) all listening should be done with headphones, at a normal (not overly loud or soft) volume.
3) before transcribing, listen to the full field recording to familiarize yourself with it.
4) a spectrogram, or similar aid, should not be used.
5) frequency: top of the paper (highest relative pitch) to bottom of the paper (lowest relative pitch).
6) the transcription must occur in real time: listen straight through without stopping.
7) the transcription must be represented in felt time, i.e., with no timecode: transcribe the material as best as possible, left to right, with proportional spacing of sound objects.
8) listen through, while transcribing, three times (not including the initial listen).
9) how dynamics are represented is up to you, though the decision should be given careful consideration. two possible methods (or a combination of these) that occur to me are: 1) notate traditionally with p, mp, mf, f, etc. symbols based on how loud the sounds in the field recording are, or 2) instruct the performer to play all the sound objects at approximately the same dynamic level of the ambient sounds during performance. other methods are welcome.

**final score:**

once the transcriptions are finished, they should be scanned and sent to the composer B&W (PDF or tiff). the composer will compile them into a final score for each performer (the composer will also make a transcription following the above rules). the vertical organization of the score will be randomized for each performer. one possible example below, if 5 performers:

| [transcription '1'] |
| [transcription '2'] |
| [transcription '3'] |
| [transcription '4'] |

**performance:**

performers interpret the notation on their instruments/sound-making devices. with each new sound object symbol, a decision must be made: 1) [external] sound/play the notated sound, 2) [internal] sound the notated sound in your head, or 3) [withheld] be silent, i.e., do not articulate that sound either internally or externally.

performers should read the score(s) left to right, at their own paces. there are no timers in this piece. performers may wander vertically, to either adjacent or non-adjacent transcriptions. the pitch ranges are separate for each transcription, but are malleable – that is, the performer can determine what the pitch range(s) are and change them at will, even during performance. when finished, remain silent. the piece is complete when all performers have finished.

*the title is from Samuel Beckett’s novel, “Watt”*

Figure Appendix 13: Instructional score to Luke Martin’s so softly that it came, a wild dim chatter, meaningless (2016). Reproduced with Permission.
Figure Appendix 14: Graphic score for *so softly that it came, a wild dim chatter, meaningless* (2016) generated by realization of the instructional score. Reproduced with permission.
Stephanie Smith: *Bell Controller (motor array) (2016)*

Stephanie’s works are compelling in their concept as much as their execution. In the pursuit of making new work and reframing material possibilities she sometimes incorporates the familiarity of the violin, but also invents new machines, modes of notation, direction, and execution.

Biographical information from http://music.stephiescastle.com/

Stephanie Cheng Smith is a composer, performer and programmer who creates interactive pieces, installations, improvisations and through-composed works. She often uses electronics, violin and light, and her latest explorations with motor arrays have been featured in the 2016 issue of Experimental Music Yearbook. Smith’s performances and residencies include Studio for Electro-Instrumental Music (STEIM, Amsterdam), PACT Zollverein (Essen), liebig12 (Berlin), Re-New Digital Arts Festival (Copenhagen), EcoSono (Caribbean), Centre for the Living Arts (Mobile), Megapolis Arts Festival (Baltimore), and—in Los Angeles—Machine Project, LA Film Forum, REDCAT, and the Society for the Activation of Social Space through Art and Sound (SASSAS). She has also made appearances on webcasts such as EarMeal, Experimental Half-Hour and dublab. Smith frequently performs electronic music under the name Stephie’s Castle, is a member of networked music ensemble bitpanic, and has composed for and performed as a member of the Dog Star Orchestra. Serving on the wulf.’s Artistic Advisory Board, she also curates and produces experimental music concerts in the Los Angeles area.

She has studied composition at the University of Chicago with Kotoka Suzuki and earned an MFA in Experimental Sound Practices and Integrated Media from California Institute of the Arts, studying with Mark Trayle, Sara Roberts, and Ulrich Krieger.

She is currently focusing on: motors, programming, interface design, and human-computer interactions.
Figure Appendix 15: Stephanie Smith performing *Bell Controller (motor array)* (2016), June 2, 2016 on at Mor York (Los Angeles) for a Solarc Brewing event: “experimental pilot brews paired with experimental music.” Photograph by Eron Rauch. Reproduced with permission.
Figure Appendix 16: Score for Stephanie Smith’s *Bell Controller (motor array)* (2016) for June 2, 2016 performance at Mor York (Los Angeles).
Michael Winter: *Just Above and/or Below the Waterline* (2010)

and *Preliminary Thoughts* (2016)

Winter’s work is often about the thoughtful use of minimal resources to reframe minimal information in surprising ways. “Similarly, my work subverts discriminatory conventions and hierarchies by exploring alternative forms of presentation and interaction.” I offer here two works discussed in Chapter Six that show the variance in Winter’s compositional approaches. Both are, per his request, reproduced in their entirety; one very minimal, indeed, the other more exhaustively descriptive. Biographical information from http://www.unboundedpress.org/:

My work often explores simple processes where dynamic systems, situations, and settings are defined through minimal graphic- and text-based scores that can be realized in a variety of ways. To me, everything we experience is computable. Given this digital philosophy, I acknowledge even my most open works as algorithmic; and, while not always apparent on the surface of any given piece, the considerations of computability and epistemology are integral to my practice. I often reconcile epistemological limits with artistic practicality by considering and addressing the limits of computation from a musical and experiential vantage point and by collaborating with other artists, mathematicians, and scientists in order to integrate objects, ideas, and texts from various domains as structural elements in my pieces.

I have performed across the Americas and Europe at venues ranging in size from small basements to large museums to outdoor public spaces (some examples of more well-known festivals and venues include REDCAT, Los Angeles; the Ostrava Festival of New Music; Tsonami Arte Sonoro Festival, Valparaiso; the Huddersfield New Music Festival; and Umbral Sesiones at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Oaxaca). In 2008, I co-founded the wulf., a Los Angeles-based organization dedicated to experimental performance and art. As a laboratory and hub for exploring new ideas, the wulf. has become an experiment in alternative communities and economies. Similarly, my work subverts discriminatory conventions and hierarchies by exploring alternative forms of presentation and interaction.
just above and/or below the waterline...

- michael winter
  (la; 6/2010)

Figure Appendix 17: Score for Michael Winter’s *Just Above and/or Below the Waterline*… (2010). Reproduced with permission.
preliminary thoughts

The following text is a ‘musical letter’. Performance instructions for the guitar and optional trombone parts are provided following the text of the letter. Also included is a Spanish translation of the text by Nicolás Carrasco Díaz. Note that while the letter includes a name in the valediction and was originally recorded with the name spoken, the name should be omitted if spoken or recorded by someone else. That is, omit the name and proceed directly to the date. Different languages of the text may also be read in performance simultaneously.

Dear Greg,

As I mentioned in prior correspondence, in consideration of the upcoming celebration of Leibniz on the 300th anniversary of his death, I have immersed myself in his work; reading and rereading his texts as much as time allows. His oeuvre is so voluminous, that I fear even by the time we meet in November, I will have only scratched the surface.

I have been enjoying the fact that much of Leibniz’s writings are in the form of letters. They are less precious, less formal in that way. As I prepare to write the piece for the celebration in Turin, I thought it would be nice to set my correspondence with you to music. As musical letters or studies of sorts. Ideas not yet fully formalized but worth expressing; both the text and the accompanying music.

I write this letter as an exposition of my preliminary reactions in hopes that the very articulation and expression of these thoughts will aid in their future formulation albeit as naive as they may be in their current state.

In Leibniz’s writings, I have found several cogent threads that intrinsically (if not explicitly) relate to art and music. I will group them as follows even though they are all interrelated: combinatorics, harmony, aesthetics, structure, epistemological vs. practical limits, and free will.

1) Combinatorics

I found Leibniz’s dissertation entitled ‘On the Art of Combinations’ of particular interest. Perhaps because it is an early work; laden with mistakes yet sound in its conception. But more likely because of explicit references to the application of combinatorics to music. Although it was written for his studies in jurisprudence, it is humbling that it can apply to so many other domains.

My composer friend Tom Johnson first showed me the 6th of 12 problems from the dissertation last summer though I was unaware of the source at the time. In the problem, Leibniz tries to count the number of 6 note melodies that can be sung with 7 possible pitches. He classifies them by the number of repeated elements. That is, he was trying to give a solution for the number of tuples and permutations with prescribed repetitions.

Earlier in the dissertation, he also discusses the application of combinations from problems I and II to organ registry and counts the number of possible timbres that an organ with a certain number of stops can sound (i.e., all subsets of the stops). In this sense, Leibniz predicted over 300 years ago musical ideas that are only now being explored by composers more thoroughly. Though there are important precedents. Bell-ringing traditions come to mind and also the music of Bach, of course. I like to think that there was a sort of intellectual resonance between Leibniz and Bach based on the fact that they lived near each other at the same time. I am also curious if Bach might have been alluding to the title of Leibniz’s dissertation in the Art of the Fugue.

Figure Appendix 18: Page 1 (of 31) of Michael Winter’s Preliminary Thoughts (2016).
Reproduced with Permission.
2) Harmony

While I have yet to find a full version of Leibniz's letter to Christian Goldbach, I have found the following translated excerpts:

"All our usual intervals are ratios based on two of the prime numbers, 1, 2, 3 and 5. If we were endowed with a little more subtlety, we might arrive at the prime number 7. And actually I believe the following ones are also given. Thus the ancients did not openly avoid the number 7. But hardly anybody proceeded as far as the following prime numbers, 11 and 13."

Then later in the letter he writes:

"I do not believe that irrational ratios are pleasing to the soul in themselves, except when they are very close to the rational ones which give pleasure."

Clearly Leibniz had a keen understanding of musical harmony. These are deep insights rooted in the Greeks yet only revived recently by composers such as Harry Partch and James Tenney. And indeed, as Leibniz predicted, composers are starting to more thoroughly explore harmonies based on higher prime numbers; what Tenney calls extended harmonic spaces with higher dimensions.

The second quotation might refer to the interleaving of dissonances with consonances as is common in chordal progressions within the rubric of functional tonal harmony. However I prefer another interpretation; that Leibniz is suggesting what Tenney calls "tuning tolerance"—the idea that the brain resolves irrational harmonies to the nearest simplest set of frequency ratios.

Admittedly, I have yet to follow this thread in Leibniz's writings to further extent but hope that I can find more texts that refer to harmony and harmonic constructs.

3) Aesthetics

It is hard to fully understand Leibniz's thoughts on the perception of beauty. He often alludes to the concepts of good and bad with respect to music and art, which I disagree with. In my mind, absolute beauty does not exist. People who believe in it are actually referring to status quo bias where the status quo is the current popular opinion. That is, if someone deems something as universally bad, it actually means that it is against the status quo with which they are in agreement. Whether or not, and how, someone appreciates beauty must be subjective even though biases will arise, especially within cultures. I have theorized in the past what can bring about a person's opinions with respect to if and how they appreciate something they perceive and why this can differ from person to person. I can even demonstrate it in terms of Algorithmic Information Theory, but I will leave that for a later time and remain focused for now on where Leibniz and I align.

In both his "Discourse on Metaphysics" as well as "Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas", Leibniz discusses the concepts of "clear" and "confused" knowledge. The latter is of particular interest to me. To paraphrase Leibniz with my understanding of the concept: confused knowledge is the ability to perceive something as distinguished from other things yet unable to express the properties which give rise to its distinction. I sometimes tell people that music often interests me when I know that there is some underlying process even though I cannot identify or properly articulate exactly what that process is. I refer to this as the "incalculability of concept-to-percept-transparency", which is the inability in art to know to which extent someone can deduce the concept of a work from the perception/experience of it.
4) Structure

Leibniz’s discussion on the relation of parts to other parts and to the whole (an example of which I will give later with respect to epistemological vs. practical limits) is almost found verbatim in the composer John Cage’s definition of structure. However, Leibniz had even more radical thoughts pertaining to structure. As you have pointed out in your writing, Leibniz basically predicts Algorithmic Information Theory with the following quotation from his “Discourse on Metaphysics”:

“If someone traced a continuous line which is sometimes straight, sometimes circular, and sometimes of another nature, it is possible to find a notion, or rule, or equation common to all the points of this line... When a rule is extremely complex, what is in conformity with it passes for irregular... But God has chosen the most perfect world, that is, the one which is at the same time the simplest in hypothesis and the richest in phenomenon.”

This statement is essentially synonymous with the fundamental tenet of Algorithmic Information Theory: that you have structure if the computer program that generates a given object is smaller in bits than the object itself. It is this idea perhaps more than the others that I would like to follow as thoroughly as possible in Leibniz’s work to better understand its genesis.

5) Epistemological vs. Practical Limits

In the dissertation, Leibniz writes:

“The concept of parts is this: given a plurality of beings all of which are understood to have something in common; then, since it is inconvenient or impossible to enumerate all of them every time, one name is thought of which takes the place of all the parts in our reasoning, to make the expression shorter. This is called the whole. But in any number of given things whatever, even infinite, we can understand what is true of all, since we can enumerate them all individually, at least in an infinite time. It is therefore permissible to use one name in our reasoning in place of all, and this will itself be a whole.”

Similar to how Leibniz was interested in an alphabet of human thought and the lexicon of a universal language, making art is often about defining elements and how they are (or can be in the case of a more open work) arranged. And just as it is inconvenient to enumerate through all subject-predicate pairs for a universal language, so too is it often difficult, if not altogether impossible, to enumerate all possible musics made from a given set of musical elements. I often find that the musical concepts that I envision in the compositional process quickly spiral out of control in the same way that their more abstract mathematical analogs in combinatorics explode exponentially. But where does the inspiration come that guides the artist to limit the material and order it in a particular way? Here Leibniz’s faith in God guides him. Much of his work references the perfection of God’s creation and the dissertation itself starts with a proof of God’s existence. But this is all in search of truth and clearly he is seeking the idea of a universal proof checker. That is yet another thing that amazes me about his thought process. Almost as aside, he invents new fields of mathematics or prophesizes concepts that are only proved or disproved much later.

This rift between the limits of knowledge and the limits of practicality also occurs in Algorithmic Information Theory. Beyond the paradox of not being able to find a minimal program with certainty, just finding a program that outputs a given result at all is exhaustive beyond our computing means today. I dream of a world in which all my ideas would be computable.
6) Free will

The rift I discuss above also gives me a great deal of faith in intuition and inspiration. And that my intuitive decisions are the very computations I am interested in making with machines. But what is choice? Leibniz believes that all true predicates are contained within a given subject. This is yet another idea where Leibniz and I have independently aligned if I interpret his thoughts correctly. I believe he suggests that because you are unaware of the future, despite its containment in the subjects of the world, that whether or not there is free will does not matter. I have referred to this as the "illusion of choice" in my own writing. And suggest the very same thing I interpret in Leibniz: that in any world, determinate or not, there is no difference between choice and the illusion of choice.

Then finally, there is love, which I believe must be intrinsically linked to art and creativity. I now know how real love is and how inspired I am by my love for others. Just as art is a "confused" knowledge, so too is love. My body and my senses inform me of its presence and of its loss from another, but my mind cannot explain the reasons for these visceral distinctions. I imagine Leibniz has somewhere discussed what I now understand... that all I do is for love... and that every ounce of my creative energy is for that love to be reciprocated.

With Best Regards,
Michael Winter (Los Angeles; January 23rd, 2016)
preliminary thoughts
speaker, guitar, electronics, and optional trombone / sustaining tones

Structure:
The guitar part is played throughout starting and ending alone for at least 2.5 minutes. The reading of the letter and accompanying electronics part occurs directly in the middle of a performance and is bound by a noise swell before and after the reading (yet not sounding during). Both the crescendo and diminuendo portions should be at least 2.5 minutes resulting in the letter starting at least 5 minutes into the performance and stopping at least 5 minutes before the end of the performance. Thus, the structure as a whole is as follows:

Guitar:  
noise swell (crescendo) -- letter with electronics -- noise swell (diminuendo)

Except for the lowest string, the guitar is tuned to subharmonics of the high E-string (given below such that the 1st harmonic is the open string and the 2nd harmonic is at the 12th fret).

I - standard high E
II - tune the 3rd harmonic to the 2nd harmonic of I
III - tune the 4th harmonic to the 3rd harmonic of II
IV - tune the 5th harmonic to the 4th harmonic of III
V - tune the 6th harmonic to the 5th harmonic IV
VI - tune the 3rd harmonic to the 2nd harmonic of IV

Throughout, the guitar repeatedly plays the strings successively in descending order always sounding the 2nd harmonic. While allowing the strings to ring as long as possible, the durations between tones should always be 1, 2, 3 or 4 times a unit duration of between 1/6 to 1/3 of a second. That is a 6-tuple of the set {1, 2, 3, 4} where the numbers are multiples of the unit duration. The iteration of 6-tuples should avoid repetitions to the extent possible such that as many different sets of durations is heard. Included below is a score realized in a quasi-tablature notation. The numbers indicate the multiplier of the unit duration as opposed to the fret number assuming that the 2nd harmonic is always played on each string. A subtle addition of resonance can be applied with electronics.

Optional Trombone / Sustaining Tones:
During the noise swell and the reading of the letter, long swelled sustain tones can be sounded occasionally such that a harmonic of the sustained tone slightly beats with a harmonic of one of the strings of the guitar (that is the pitch should be an octave equivalent of a harmonic or subharmonic of one of the guitar strings).

Electronics:
Apart from the noise swell described above, the electronics part that occurs over the reading of the letter consists of a flickering of combinations (triggered in a particular way) of a low sine-tone, a high sine-tone, brown noise, and white noise. The electronics should sometimes obscure but not ever completely overwhelm / make unintelligible the reading of the text. Included are two versions written in SuperCollider: one where the letter is recorded and the other where the letter is read live. Both are commented in order to explain the functionality.

Michael Winter (Los Angeles; January, 2016)
( // main routine — version with recorded letter
  // path to recording of letter — change accordingly
  l = Buffer.read(s, "~/home/minter/preliminary_thoughts/letter.wav");

  SynthDef('preliminary_thoughts', {
    var env, env_gen, hierarchical_dust, low_sine, high_sine, brown_noise, white_noise, letter;
    // structure: guitar played throughout
    // 2.5 >> minutes solo guitar
    // 2.5 >> minutes noise cresc.
    // letter with electronics
    // 2.5 >> minutes noise dim.
    // 2.5 >> minutes solo guitar
    env = Env([0, 0.5, 1, 1, 0, 0], [60 * 2.5, 60 * 2.5, BufDur.kr(1), 60 * 2.5, 60 * 2.5, \sin]);
    env_gen = EnvGen.kr(env, timescale: 1);

    // this triggers the combinations of sources
    // it is similar to the Supercollider UGen called dust but with a hierarchical structure
    hierarchical_dust = {
      TIRand.kr(0, 1, Impulse.kr(100)) *
      TIRand.kr(0, 1, Impulse.kr(10)) *
      TIRand.kr(0, 1, Impulse.kr(1)) *
      TIRand.kr(0, 1, Impulse.kr(0.1))
    };

    // adjust the multiplier at the end of each line for adjusting levels
    // note with each trigger, each source has a 1 in 3 chance of sounding
    low_sine = SinOsc.ar(76.midioclps / 16) * (TIRand.kr(0, 2, hierarchical_dust) < 1) * 0.5;
    high_sine = SinOsc.ar(76.midioclps * 8) * (TIRand.kr(0, 2, hierarchical_dust) < 1) * 0.03;
    brown_noise = BrownNoise.ar() * (TIRand.kr(0, 2, hierarchical_dust) < 1) * 0.03;
    white_noise = WhiteNoise.ar() * (TIRand.kr(0, 2, hierarchical_dust) < 1) * 0.01;
    letter = PlayBuf.ar(1, 1.bufnum, env_gen >= 1, env_gen >= 1) * 1.4;
    Out.ar([0, 1],
      (letter + low_sine + high_sine + brown_noise + white_noise) * (env_gen >= 1) +
      (WhiteNoise.ar(env_gen * 0.01) * (env_gen < 1)) // noise swell before/after text
    ).play;
  })

  // optional: use this to add subtle resonance to the guitar
  // this can also be used with the version for letter read live below
  // note that this does not mix the original signal

  // string tunings for resonators
  var str = Array.newClear(6); str[5] = 76.midioclps; // E
  SynthDef('guitar_resonance', {
    var resonators = Mix.new(Combi.ar(
      SoundIn.ar() * 0.25, (str[0] / 16).reciprocal, (str / 4).reciprocal, 10)) * 0.02;
    Out.ar([0, 1], resonators);
  }).play;
// main routine – version with letter read live

SynthDef("preliminary_thoughts", {  
    arg gate = 0;
    var env, env_gen, hierarchical_dust, low_sine, high_sine, brown_noise, white_noise, letter;
    // structure: guitar played throughout
    // 2.5 => minutes solo guitar
    // 2.5 => minutes noise cresc.
    // letter with electronics
    // 2.5 => minutes noise dim.
    // 2.5 => minutes solo guitar
    env = Env.asr(60 * 2.5, 1, 60 * 2.5, \sin);
    env_gen = EnvGen.kr(env, gate, timeScale: 1);

    // this triggers the combinations of sources
    // it is similar to the SuperCollider UGen called dust but with a hierarchical structure
    hierarchical_dust = {
        TIRand.kr(0, 1, Impulse.kr(100)) *
        TIRand.kr(0, 1, Impulse.kr(10)) *
        TIRand.kr(0, 1, Impulse.kr(1)) *
        TIRand.kr(0, 1, Impulse.kr(0.1))
    };

    // adjust the multiplier at the end of each line for adjusting levels
    // note with each trigger, each source has a 1 in 3 chance of sounding
    low_sine = SinOsc.ar(75.0,midicps / 16) * (TIRand.kr(0, 2, hierarchical_dust) < 1) * 0.2;
    high_sine = SinOsc.ar(75.0,midicps * 8) * (TIRand.kr(0, 2, hierarchical_dust) < 1) * 0.05;
    brown_noise = BrownNoise.ar() * (TIRand.kr(0, 2, hierarchical_dust) < 1) * 0.05;
    white_noise = WhiteNoise.ar() * (TIRand.kr(0, 2, hierarchical_dust) < 1) * 0.05;
    Out.ar((0,1),
        (low_sine + high_sine + brown_noise + white_noise) * (env_gen >= 1)) +
        (WhiteNoise.ar(env_gen * 0.05) * (env_gen < 1)) // noise swell before/after text
    );
    SendTrig.kr(env_gen >= 1);
}).send();
}

// gui for triggering sections of the piece
w = Window.new("preliminary_thoughts", Rect(200, 200, 380, 80));

-synth = Synth("preliminary_thoughts");

b = Button(w, Rect(20, 20, 140, 30)).states({
    "press this to start piece", Color.black, Color.yellow],
    "start letter when this turns green", Color.black, Color.red],
    "press when finished reading", Color.black, Color.green],
    "we", Color.black, Color.red).action_(
    arg butt;
    if(butt.value == 1, { AppClock.sched(60 * 2.5, { -synth.set(!gate, 1); nil}) });
    if(butt.value == 3, { -synth.set(!gate, 0)); });

    o = OSCFunc{AppClock.sched(0.0, { b.value = 2; nil});
    },'/tr', b.addr);

w.front;
pensamientos preliminares
traducción Nicolás Carrasco Díaz.

Querido Greg,

Como te mencioné en cartas anteriores, al considerar la próxima celebración de Leibniz a los trescientos años de su muerte, me he sumergido en su obra, leyendo y releyendo sus textos según me permite el tiempo. Su obra es tan voluminosa que temo que para el momento en que nos encontremos en noviembre, apenas habré rasguñado la superficie.

He estado disfrutando del hecho de que un cuño de los escritos de Leibniz están en forma de cartas. De esa manera son menos preciadas, menos formales. Mientras me preparo para componer la obra para la celebración en Turín, pensé que sería agradable musicalizar mi correspondencia contigo. Como cartas musicales o suertes de estudios. Ideas aún no formalizadas pero dignas de ser expresadas, tanto del texto como de la música acompañante.

Escribo esta carta como una exposición de mis reacciones preliminares a la espera de que la sola articulación y expresión de estos pensamientos ayudará a su formulación futura sin importar cuán ingenuo sea su estado actual.

En los escritos de Leibniz he encontrado varios hilos convincentes que intrínsecamente (cuando no explícitamente) se relacionan con el arte y la música. Los agruparé a continuación si bien todas están interrelacionadas: combinatoria, armonía, estética, estructura, los límites epistemológicos versus los prácticos, y el libre albedrío.

1) Combinatoria

La disertación de Leibniz titulada "Sobre el arte combinatoria" me pareció de particular interés. Tal vez porque es una obra temprana, cargada de errores aunque acertada en su concepción. Pero me interesó más probablemente por sus referencias explícitas a la aplicación de la combinatoria en música. Si bien fue escrita para sus estudios en jurisprudencia, es aleccionador que pueda ser aplicada a muchísimos otros dominios.

Mi amigo compositor Tom Johnson fue el primero en mostrarme el sexto de los doce problemas de la disertación durante el último verano aunque desconocía su referencia en aquel tiempo. En el problema, Leibniz intenta contar el número de melodías de 6 notas que pueden ser cantadas con 7 alturas posibles. Las clasifica por el número de elementos repetidos. Esto significa que él estaba entregando una solución para el número de tuplas y permutaciones con repeticiones prescritas.

Antes en la disertación, también discute la aplicación de combinaciones de los problemas I y II a los registros del órgano y cuenta el número de timbres posibles con el que un órgano con un cierto número de registros podría sonar (por ejemplo, todos los subconjuntos de registros). En este sentido, Leibniz predijo hace más de 300 años las exploraciones musicales que solo ahora están siendo indagadas más exhaustivamente por los compositores. Sin embargo, hay importantes precedentes. Piensas en las tradiciones campaneras y también en la música de Bach, por supuesto. Me gusta pensar que hubo una suerte de resonancia intelectual entre Leibniz y Bach basada en el hecho de que vivieron cerca uno del otro en la misma época. Tengo curiosidad por si Bach habría querido aludir al título de la disertación de Leibniz con El arte de la fuga.
2) Armonía

Si bien aún no he encontrado una versión completa de la carta de Leibniz a Christian Goldbach, sí he encontrado los siguientes extractos traducidos:

"Todos nuestros intervalos usuales son proporciones basadas en dos de los números primos 1, 2, 3 y 5. Si fuéramos dotados con un poco de mayor sutileza, podríamos arribar al número 7. Y en realidad pienso que los siguientes también están dados. De este modo los antiguos no evitaron abiertamente el número 7. Sin embargo, apenas alguien procedió más allá a los siguientes números primos, 11 y 13".

Luego, más adelante escribe:

"No creo que las proporciones irracionales sean en sí mismas agradables para el alma, excepto cuando están muy cerca de aquellas racionales que sí brindan placer."

Claramente Leibniz tenía una comprensión perpicaz de la armonía musical. Aquellos son pensamientos profundos enraizados en los griegos pero solo recientemente revividos por compositores como Harry Partch y James Tenney. Y de hecho, tal como predijo Leibniz, los compositores están empezando a explorar más minuciosamente las armonías basadas en números primos más altos, lo que Tenney llamó espacios armónicos extendidos con dimensiones superiores.

La segunda cita podría referirse a la intercalación de disonancias con consonancias como es común en las progresiones de acordes bajo la rúbrica de armonía tonal funcional. De cualquier modo prefiero otra interpretación; que Leibniz está sugiriendo aquello que Tenney llama "tolerancia de afinación" –la idea de que el cerebro aproxima las armonías irracionales al conjunto más simple de proporciones entre frecuencias.

Cierto es que aún debo seguir este hilo en los escritos de Leibniz en mayor medida pero espero encontrar más textos en los que se refiera a la armonía y los constructos armónicos.

3) Estética

Es difícil entender completamente los pensamientos de Leibniz sobre la percepción de la belleza. Con frecuencia alude a los conceptos del bien y el mal con respecto a la música y el arte, con lo cual estoy en desacuerdo. En mí mente la belleza absoluta no existe. La gente que cree en ella está realmente refiriéndose a una opinión sesgada que se ha vuelto estupido. Esto es, si alguien considera que algo es universalmente malo, en realidad significa que aquello que es considerado malo es diferente de la opinión sesgada con la cual aquel alguien adhiere. Si alguien aprecia o no la belleza, y cómo, debe ser subjetivo aún cuando las parcialidades emerjan, especialmente dentro de las culturas. Anteriormente he teorizado sobre qué conlleva la opinión de una persona con respecto a si aprecia algo que percibe y cómo, y por qué, esto puede diferir de persona a persona. Incluso puedo demostrarlo en términos de la Teoría Algorítmica de la Información, pero lo dejaré para otro momento y me quedará enfocado por ahora en donde nos alineamos Leibniz y yo.

Tanto en su "Discurso sobre la Metafísica" como en sus "Meditaciones sobre el Conocimiento, la Verdad y las Ideas", Leibniz discute los conceptos de conocimiento "claro" y "confuso". El segundo me resulta particularmente interesante. Parafraseando a Leibniz, según mi comprensión del concepto; el conocimiento confuso es la habilidad para percibir algo en tanto distinto de otras cosas aún cuando sea incapaz de expresar aquellas propiedades que hacen posible la distinción. A veces le digo a la gente que con frecuencia me interesa la música cuando sé que hay algún proceso subyacente, si bien no puedo identificarlo o articular apropiadamente con exactitud cuál es el proceso. Me refiero a esto como la "inicialidad de la transparencia-de-concepto-a-percepto", que consiste en la ineptitud en el arte para saber hasta qué punto alguien puede deducir el concepto de una obra a partir de su percepción o experiencia de la misma.
4) Estructura

Se puede hallar el tratamiento de Leibniz sobre la relación entre partes y la relación de estas con el todo (un ejemplo de esto lo daré más adelante con respecto a los límites epistemológicos versus los prácticos) citado casi literalmente en la definición de estructura del compositor John Cage. Sin embargo, Leibniz tenía pensamientos todavía más radicales respecto a la estructura. Como has señalado en tu escrito, Leibniz básicamente predijo la Teoría Algorítmica de la Información en el siguiente pasaje de su "Discurso sobre Metafísica":

"Si alguien trazara una línea continua que a veces es recta a veces circular, y en otras ocasiones de otra naturaleza, es posible encontrar una noción, o regla, o ecuación común a todos los puntos de esta línea... Cuando una regla es extremadamente compleja, lo que está en conformidad con ella pasa por irregular... Pero Dios ha elegido el mundo más perfecto, esto es, aquel que es al mismo tiempo el más simple en hipótesis y el más rico en fenómeno."

Esta declaración es esencialmente sinónima con respecto al principio fundamental de la Teoría Algorítmica de la Información: hay estructura si el programa de la computadora que genera el objeto dado es inferior en bits que el objeto mismo. Tal vez esta idea más que las otras, es la que me gustaría seguir tanto como sea posible en la obra de Leibniz para comprender mejor su génesis.

5) Los límites Epistemológicos versus los Prácticos

En la disertación, Leibniz escribe:

"El concepto de partes es este: dada una pluralidad de entes todos los cuales se entiende que tienen algo en común; entonces, ya que es inconveniente o imposible enumerarlos a todos cada vez, se piensa un nombre que toma el lugar en nuestro razonamiento por todas las partes, para hacer más breve la expresión. A esto se le llama todo. Pero en cualquier número de cosas dadas cuales sea, incluso infinitas, podemos entender lo que es verdad de todas, ya que podemos enumerarlas todas individualmente, al menos en un tiempo infinito. Por ende es permisible usar un nombre en nuestro razonamiento en lugar de todas, y este será por sí mismo un todo."

De manera similar a como Leibniz estaba interesado en un alfabeto del pensamiento humano y en el lexico de un lenguaje universal, con frecuencia hacer arte se trata de la definición de elementos y de cómo son dispuestos (o en el caso de un obra abierta, de cómo podrían ser dispuestos). Y tal como es inconveniente enumerar uno por uno todos los pares de sujeto-predicado para un lenguaje universal, también es con frecuencia difícil, si no completamente imposible, enumerar todas las músicas posibles hechas a partir de un conjunto dado de elementos musicales. A menudo considero que los conceptos musicales que concibo en el proceso composicional aumentan vertiginosamente sin control de la misma manera que en combinatoria sus análogos matemáticos más abstractos explotan exponencialmente. ¿Pero de dónde viene la inspiración que guía al artista para limitar el material y ordenarlo en una manera particular? Aquí la fe en Dios de Leibniz lo guía. Gran parte de su obra hace referencia a la perfección de la creación divina y la misma disertación parte con una prueba de la existencia de Dios. Pero todo esto está a la búsqueda de la verdad y claramente está sembrando la idea de un verificador de pruebas universal. Esta es otra cosa más que me asombra de su proceso de pensamiento. Casi como digresiones, inventa nuevos campos de la matemática o profetiza conceptos que solo serán probados o descartados mucho más tarde.

Esta brecha entre los límites del conocimiento y los límites de lo práctico también ocurre en la Teoría Algorítmica de la Información. Independentemente de la paradoja de no ser capaz de encontrar con certidumbre un programa mínimo, simplemente encontrar un programa que en absoluto produzca un resultado dado es exhaustivo más allá de nuestros medios actuales de computación. Sueño con un mundo en el cual todas mis ideas serían computables.
6) Libre albedrío
La brecha de la que hablo arriba también me da una buena porción de fe en la intuición y la inspiración. Y en que mis decisiones intuitivas son exactamente las computaciones que me interesa realizar con máquinas. ¿Pero qué es la elección? Leibniz cree que todos los predicados verdaderos están contenidos dentro de un sujeto dado. Esta es otra idea más en la que Leibniz y yo nos hemos alineado independientemente de si interpreto de manera correcta sus pensamientos. Creo que él sugiere que, debido a que no conoces el futuro, a pesar de que este está contenido en los sujetos del mundo, no importa si es que hay o no libre albedrío. Me he referido a esto como la "ilusión de la elección" en mi propia escritura. Y sugiero la misma cosa que interpreto en Leibniz: que en cualquier mundo, determinado o no, no hay diferencia entre la elección y la ilusión de la elección.

Finalmente, entonces, está el amor, el cual creo que debe estar intrínsecamente enlazado con el arte y la creatividad. Ahora sé cómo es el amor real y cuán inspirado estoy por el amor a otros. Tal como el arte es un conocimiento "confuso", del mismo modo es el amor. Mi cuerpo y mis sentidos me informan de su presencia y de su pérdida por otro, pero mi mente no es capaz de explicar las razones de tales distinciones viscerales. Imagino que Leibniz ha analizado en otros pasajes lo que ahora entiendo... que todo lo que hago es por amor... y que cada gramo de mi energía creativa existe para que ese amor sea reciproco.

Con mis mejores deseos,
Michael Winter (Los Angeles; 23 de enero, 2016)
preliminary thoughts

guitar

michael winter (la, 2016)
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