A Summation, An Exploration

by

Albert Hill
Class of 2007

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors in Music

Middletown, Connecticut        April, 2007
Acknowledgements

I would first like to express my gratitude to everyone in the Music Department for all the learning and fun they provided. I must specifically thank Alvin Lucier, Ron Kuivila, and Yonatan Malin, who have been amazing guides on my journey here at Wesleyan. I would also like to acknowledge the Math Department, especially David Pollack and Wai Kui Chan, who have given me so much along the way.

I must now single out Jacob, Steve, Evan, and Micah, who have been and will continue to be a family to me. I shake my fist at our neighbors, West Berlin, who may be bitter rivals, but know that a friendly cup of tea never hurt anyone. I have also been lucky enough to have a string of good-natured transients grace me with their presence, and for that I thank them heartily.

I am forever in debt to Boogie Club for all the giant squids, and to Prometheus for bringing fire into my life. I would like to extend that debt to everyone who makes music, dances, or otherwise participates in the arts, not to mention everyone who does math, science, natural and social, and more, so pretty much everyone. Also nature, etc...big thanks to the universe for, you know, being there, and making life interesting, and letting me walk on, in, and through you.

Turning homeward, I am forever grateful to Baltimore, the greatest city in America\(^1\) and its denizens for providing a great home, specifically my friends. Double thank to Sami who helped me get through this difficult semester more than he knows, and an extra bit o’ gratitude to Will, what more can I say.

Lastly, I’d like to try and fail to express adequate gratitude to my family. It just can’t be done, you have done so much.

---

\(^1\) It’s true, go ahead, Google it.
“You need chaos in your soul
   to give birth to a dancing star.”
-Friedrich Nietzsche
A SUMMATION, AN EXPLORATION
by Albert Hill

CAP’N! I CAN’T SHAKE EM!

SIT TIGHT MATE, AND KEEP UP THOSE EVASIVE MANEUVERS. I’M GETTING A READOUT...

LOOKS LIKE AN AUDIENCE’CLASS CRUISER.

MMM, AGILE

I’LL FIRE UP SOME COUNTER-MEASURES.

THAT EXPLAINS WHY WE HAVEN’T LOST THEM.

PUSH

SPARKLERS AWAY.

NO LUCK CAP’N, THEY’RE STILL ON OUR TAIL...

I THINK THIS CALLS FOR...

THE RED BUTTON

RED
Why do we make music? This is a very hard question; let us digress for a moment to consider an easier question that will lend us some clues.

Why do we listen to music? The answer that comes to mind is because we enjoy it. What exactly does this mean? Somehow the music produces a positive response in our brains. Perhaps the song is catchy; for some reason the melody, harmony, or rhythm\(^2\) hooks us. Maybe we like the song on a more ‘natural’ level, connecting emotionally. It could be the song matches our thoughts or feelings on a subject through lyrics, or on a more aural level through the creation of a mood. On a cognitive level, the song could fit what expectations our minds form as we listen to the song about the future of the song. Or the song plays with what we expect, baiting us; perhaps we await a cadence but through a deceptive motion it is delayed, building anticipation for the resolution. This suspense makes the release all the more fulfilling.\(^3\)

On the other hand, maybe we are pleased on a more intellectual level. More extreme manipulations of the mind’s expectations for the music give us food for thought. Less ‘natural’ music provides less emotional enjoyment, but often includes more interesting content to think about. In fact, music can even be displeasing to the ear, but if it motivates the brain, we will still listen to it.\(^4\)

\(^2\) The false triumvirate of music.
\(^3\) Toni Craige, Personal interview, 7 April 2007.
\(^4\) Other scenarios present themselves in which one would listen to music that one does not enjoy on the natural level: to judge whether one does or does not enjoy the music; at the request of a friend; because other options, such as leaving the venue with no re-entry and thus missing the music one does enjoy a lot, are worse than just having to endure some music.
Now, why do we make music? I would say it is to produce this enjoyment in ourselves, and also to share it with others. The degree to which we focus on our selves and our peers varies. Some may make music only for others; some may only care about themselves; however I believe we are inherently social creatures, and also very self-focused, so most music makers will fall somewhere in between the two extremes.

So I have put forward two realms of musical effects. One is the emotional, more base, gut-level, instinctual side of experience, the other is the seemingly higher, intellectual engagement. I’d like to pull in another view of the functions of art. Scott McCloud provides three: “exercise for minds and bodies not receiving outside stimulus,” “art as self-expression,” and "art as discovery, as the pursuit of truth.” While I do not agree with his arguments for this division, it is still interesting to consider these three in light of my division into two.

I would argue that all art provides stimulus, whether it be self-expression or sooth-seeking, (or neither, if that is even possible,) and thus the stimulus is more part of the definition of art than an effect. Or, if it is an effect, it is common to all art, so it does not divide art as both my and McCloud’s other two. And as for these

---

5 “The cause of the production of real art is the artist’s inner need to express a feeling that has accumulated, just as for a mother the cause of sexual conception is love. The cause of counterfeit art, as of prostitution, is gain.” -Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?*, trans. by Aylmer Maude (Cambridge: Hackett, 1996), pg 173.
7 Ibid.
9 My disagreement stems from his definition of art, which we may or may not get into later.
10 Not that I think these divisions in two are true splits; rather I would say that most art leans towards one side, but spreads into both. As usual the dichotomy is actually a spectrum. Keep that in mind as I continue to talk about them as though they were mutually exclusive.
divisions, I see them pairing up quite well, with self-expression playing to the emotional side and the search for truth being the quest of the intellectual.\textsuperscript{11}

Now as we narrow our consideration to experimental music, I think we can agree that this falls on the more intellectual side. This can be traced directly to Cage, who sought to remove the ego from the art process.\textsuperscript{12} So self-expression is right out, leaving only the pursuit of truth.\textsuperscript{13}

So the listeners are mostly thinking, thinking about the music, thinking about the ideas behind the music.

Let us accept the proposition that in experimental music, the explanation or idea behind the music is often as important as the sound itself. We have effective ways of conveying the sound to an audience, usually through a concert, installation, or recording, by creating sound waves in the air to reach the listeners’ ears. But how do we convey an idea that goes with the music?

Program and liner notes are the primary methods for the artist to communicate with the audience outside of the music, with talks or question and answer sessions helping to flesh out the artist’s views. Said notes are often too short to fully explain, and so either end up being oversimplified or totally incomprehensible, either way unhelpful.

\textsuperscript{11} On a similar note, I think the search for truth and the attempt at self-expression are inexorably linked, like two sides of the same coin, like physics and philosophy, working towards the same ultimate goal with totally different approaches.


\textsuperscript{13} Not the best term, because what is truth?
Talking to the artist is a huge step up, getting much more across, and potentially using questions to tailor the explanation to the audience. However there is limited access to such events. More subtly, because so much is revealed by the artist, there is a strong temptation to believe that what has been said is the full extent of the idea. Surely the artist attempted to get as much across as possible, but ideas always go deeper, and there are always connections left unexplored, just as the listener forms new connections in his brain from hearing the artist talk.

Since these methods are so problematic, we should explore other ways to convey such information. Let us start with the minimalists, specifically Steve Reich. His concept of “music as a gradual process” led him and others to create pieces such as *Come Out* (Reich) and *I Am Sitting In A Room* (Alvin Lucier). These pieces change very slowly through many repetitions. Thus they reveal, with no additional explanation, their own construction. Since the construction is central to each piece, it points strongly to at least one train of the composer’s thoughts. Thus such minimalists have figured out how to convey information through the music itself. And with information coming from the music, there is no definite end to the explanation, so a listener can continue contemplating the piece and the composer.

Coming from another facet of experimental music, George Brecht and his fellow Fluxus composers present short and sweet works in textual form. These

---

14 Unless ze was pulling some sort of partial- or misinformation ploy.
15 This may be an arbitrary classification, and perhaps an unsatisfactory one – Jonathan W. Bernard, “The Minimalist Aesthetic in the Plastic Arts and in Music,” *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Winter, 1993), 86. - but bear with me: most if not all genre distinction are.
compositions confront the fact that the composer’s intentions are never made clear, that there must be interpretation of the work. In order to perform one of these works, such an interpretation must be made, and then realized. Here the key interpretation occurs looking at the score, not hearing the music, so the process is not quite as efficient as the minimalists, but it again avoids the problem of ending the audience’s engagement with the piece.

The gradual process piece and the text piece are both basic ways of getting the audience to focus what the composer wants them to focus on, with some degree of accuracy, and to force some interpretive work on their part. The focus specifies the subject matter and the interpretation keeps the audience engaged. Presenting material in such an engaging manner is key to all education.

---

Laying facts out on a page like a textbook leaves them dead and tired, and will invariably invoke a similar response from the reader.\textsuperscript{18} Information needs to have some life to it, to require a bit of thinking in the head, to trigger a mini-Eureka moment, keeping the user engaged and active (and maybe even excited).\textsuperscript{19} This is the way to truly teach well. The user must want to play with the material, to juggle the ideas around in hir head and see how they interact. Users can provide some motivation on their own, but even their most interested can be turned off by dry language and lack of stimulation.

And while the information must be kept alive by forcing some interpretive work, one can stray too far in this direction as well. Making the text too dense will lead to a frustrated reader, which is potentially worse than a bored one. The previously affected will at least get through the work, and pick up some of the content. Frustration will prevent full exposure of the user to the art, and cast a negative light in the partial experience (though up until the insurmountable frustration the user will be actively engaged). So, as with many things in this world, the composer, or writer, or, let us say, artist, must strike a balance between too clear and too opaque.

\textsuperscript{18} In this case the audience of a textbook is a reader, but as I continue this exploration, I will be referring to art in general. As such, I will refer to a person experiencing the art as a “user.” From time to time I may slip into using words such as viewer, reader, listener, and their associated verbs. In these cases, I will often be referring to the user experiencing the art, and my specific word choice will reveal what specific example I have crafted in my head. The word variation will also keep the text from becoming too stale.

This middle ground is hard to come by, and varies for each work. By considering one’s audience, one can get some idea of how much effort they will be willing to put into engaging the work. This is very related to whether things are covered in depth, or whether the information provides more of a broad overview. If one’s audience consists of specialists in the field, they will be willing and able to do more interpretive work with less effort. Background information would only slow the access to the more specialized knowledge. Essentially one can work at a much higher level, one which would quickly frustrate a lay-person, when specifically presenting to a more expert audience.

When presenting to the common man, on the other hand, no specific knowledge can be assumed, so information must be laid out clearly and broadly, either providing the necessary background, or using phrasing that does not require any additional knowledge. Specialists will then find this boring, blunt, and slow. Such a presentation is not useful to experts; instead it helps educate others about the topic so perhaps next time the audience can move up in the specialized knowledge hierarchy of information.

Whether the information is presented in a written form, such as a book, paper, or article, or some other form such as a musical composition, the balancing act between transparency and impenetrability must be dealt with. And again one must walk the line between too specific and too broad. The ideas have to be understandable, but not boring. One must not lose the audience by writing beyond comprehension, nor by moving too slowly, dwelling unnecessarily on simple matters. The material must inhabit the middle ground between too obvious and too opaque,

20 A classic middle/high school writing rule.
straddling the disinterest of the audience. Balance is key to engage the audience, but the material must be at the right level to garner interpretive work without being overly frustrating. One must walk the line between transparency and impenetrableness. The ideas must not be too specific, nor too broad. One must be understandable to the audience, but not boring. The material must inhabit the middle ground of comprehensibility, making its home between too complicated and too simple. A balance must be struck between the obvious.
"I think we lost them."
HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED
HOW HUMANS COMMUNICATE?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN? TALKING OR WRITING? LANGUAGE IN GENERAL?
YES, LANGUAGE. WHAT IS LANGUAGE? WHAT ARE WORDS?
WE USE WORDS TO CONVEY IDEAS OF THINGS, ACTIONS, POSITIONS...EVERYTHING!

WEEL RIGHT, THAT'S WHY THIS IS SUCH AN IMPORTANT QUESTION. A WORD IS JUST A COMBINATION OF SOUNDS THAT WE HAVE ARBITRARILY ASSIGNED A MEANING.

AND THEN WE HAVE AN ALPHABET OF ARBITRARY SHAPES TO TRANSLATE THE SOUNDS INTO WRITING.

WHERE ARE YOU GOING WITH THIS?
I'm saying that we communicate within a completely arbitrary system.

Is that a problem? Think about the classic anarchy-leads-to-system example.

It benefits everyone to standardize traffic laws so that everyone avoids traffic accidents. But it is arbitrary whether everyone drives on the left or the right.

But in a general case, you have to find the best solution available, and new solutions can arise, with technology and other advances.

Becoming too dependent on a system can trap you. This doesn't seem to apply to traffic laws or language, but perhaps we are already trapped.

But there are different languages; it's not just one system.

That's true, but all languages follow certain rules; they all have the same structure.

For example, the word-idea relations are static.

But they're not! Word meanings evolve over time. Some words drop out of use, some new words are created, and others take on new meanings.
Consider breaking words into individual syllables or sounds.

So this requires an even bigger reconfiguration.

Right. We lose definitions as well as relations between words. If we started from our current system, we would already associate syllables with objects thanks to our pre-existing words. However if we started from scratch, we would freely associate syllables with anything we wanted.

Wait.

And then grammar would come around as we standardize the relations between words?

Wouldn't they just build up to words?

That's quite conceivable.

It's also conceivable that if we abandoned our phonetics and started just using body sounds, that certain sounds would be associated with certain things, and then those would become new phonetics. Perhaps we'd pick up some clicks from Xhosa, or maybe not limit ourselves to mouth sounds, or even sounds as per sign language - and would continue to build up as you stated.
So you're saying the structure is bad?

No no, I'm not making a judgement call, I'm just raising the question.

But if the structure is good, why question it?

How else would we know if it is good?

I think that we take it for granted.

And that we should be aware of this structure at some point...

...so that we are aware of the fact that we can be aware of it...

And can choose not to actively focus on it, but we can choose to engage that focus if we want - we have that choice.

Well that was just a little confusing.
I CAN'T BELIEVE WE'RE HAVING THIS CONVERSATION.

I KNOW, IT'S LIKE WE'RE IN SOME OVERLY INTELLECTUAL MOVIE FOR KIDS.

YEAAA, OR COLLEGE.

ANYWAY...

THE OTHER PLACE I WAS GOING TO GO WAS WRITTEN WORD.

Alright. Again, it's a structure. There are different systems; some write right to left, others ot you know, S U D O P O M W E A N N D.

But it's all very set, there's very little freedom on the page.

So let's go.

Well, we write how we speak, so the same sort of system applies.

First of all, it's very interesting to look at the differences in how we write and speak. But I'd rather look at how we can break down the text system. We can parallel the speech methods, eventually abandoning even letters for any little symbols.

I think this is just a symptom of your jack-of-all-trades mentality. You don't want to choose a system because you want to keep your options open.

I think you have a problem with commitment.

Let's not talk about that. The point is, there's another layer of freedom: typography.

Words can be placed on a page, in different fonts, sizes, colors, et cetera. Position, angle, it's all morphable, just like when you break down words to letters to symbols (and remember letters are just symbols for sounds).

The "dare" I say it - deconstruction of standard layout moves text towards visual art.

...so why are we talking about this?
language is our primary method of communication.

noise

disruption
destruction

What do you think about that?
Visual culture is strong.
You are reading this.
You are not hearing this.

Read this to yourself
your breath
I don't turn in audio reports,
Always papers - page after page
of written text on the page.
Try blindfolding yourself for an hour.

Try blindfolding yourself for a full twenty-four hours.

Try blindfolding yourself for an hour a day.
art
holes

in the light

reflecting from the page
first five syllables
and seven more follow those
five more at the end.
boxed into the page

you can color outside the lines

but how can you think outside the box

draw on the table

which is just a bigger box

real hard to think outside the

be an astronaut

then you're confined to a very

small space
The mind thinks a lot of things, including itself. Consistently coming up with new ideas, discarding them, perhaps saving them for later. Often working on things it doesn't consciously know it is considering. Normally, the conscious level that bubbles up later.

Considering what might solve the problem.
form

content
DADA

DADA

DADA

DADA
We may not think of music as existing in space, but we hear music in space.

More obviously, we also hear music in time.

\[ f_n = \frac{n \cdot c}{2 \cdot L} \]
One of my goals in life is to challenge expectations. I think this is an excellent way to shake people out of their complacency, to make them step back and actually look around them. Often this reexamination is of an activity they do everyday without really thinking. I want people to be aware that they do things automatically all the time, and that they could pay closer attention to their actions, even if they choose not to.

These actions go all the way down to the basics, to the sensory information we receive constantly and ignore. You see, humans adapt very quickly to their environment. Consider right now. Unless there is an unusual smell on the airways (be it pleasant or not) you were totally ignoring your sense of smell while reading the previous sentence. Taste is usually ignored unless eating. Hearing and touch are more engaged in the world, but can still be similarly tuned out.\(^2^1\) Vision can be as well,\(^2^2\) though we are usually most attuned to our sight.

Consider how the world slows down when we are in danger – this is our brain accepting all our sensory input because all of a sudden it doesn’t know what is important. It lets all the information in so that the scrap that could save our lives isn’t accidentally discarded. Now think about how much information we throw away without even realizing it. By only accepting the information of what is changing, our

\(^{2^1}\) Consider focusing on something you are reading while music plays in the background. At the same time, you are probably sitting or lying down, but ignoring the sensation of back-on-surface.

\(^{2^2}\) Consider driving while talking on a cell phone.

- Consider staring at a single point for a long time. Your field of vision will fade towards grey, and movement in your peripheral vision then appears bright and vivid.

- Consider the infamous “basketball” video. Check out the University of Illinois’ Visual Cognition Lab’s website at http://viscog.beckman.uiuc.edu/media/ig.html to watch the video and link to more information.
brains automatically save themselves a lot of trouble\textsuperscript{23} and make themselves more
dynamic.\textsuperscript{24} It is when we are so used to ignoring these sensory inputs that we can no
longer consciously experience them that I am worried about.

That is why I am partial to guerilla art, be it music or not. Guerilla art is
sprung on the audience with no warning, engaging the senses with the unexpected.
Just as a song conflicting with the mind’s expectations can stimulate thought, actions
or objects in everyday life that don’t match one’s expectations for normalcy provoke
a reaction. Since the brain is not accustomed to these exceptions, it does not filter
them out.

There are many considerations to go with
guerilla art, but for now I will put them aside to look at
this clash of expectation and reality. Humans always
have expectations for life. They can be broad; when walking down the street, there is
not a specific scene we expect to observe, instead there are a range of actions, none of
which will seem very out of place. But we don’t expect a gorilla to wander out of a
side street.

\textsuperscript{23} Of course this is very useful because it allows us to focus on other things – i.e. we can think about a
math problem and not be distracted by the fact that we are wearing a shirt. This statement seems kind
of absurd. That’s because we are almost never distracted by wearing a shirt – it’s something we do so
often and are so used to that we have no idea what it feels like anymore.

\textsuperscript{24}Because we interpret our senses in relative, not absolute terms, we have a sort of sliding scale that
allows much more flexibility. A more technical example follows.

Consider hearing a tone, say an A at 110 hertz (Hz). We would hear the A an octave up at 220 Hz. In
absolute terms, this is an addition of 110 Hz. If this was the scale we operated on, then the next octave
would be at 330 Hz, then 440 Hz, etc, and an octave down from our original tone would be 0 Hz, or
silence.
Conveniently this is not how we hear; instead we hear 220 Hz as double the original frequency. This
relative relation gives us an octave up at 440 Hz, and an octave down at 55 Hz. In the upward
direction, this spreads our octaves out over a much larger range of frequencies. In this downward
direction, this prevents our not-a-tone example, fitting a potentially infinite number of octaves between
55 Hz and silence, though they will quickly drop below our hearing range (which is approximately 20-
20,000 Hz).
In more specific circumstances, expectations can narrow. Were we attending an experimental music concert, we would expect to see and hear an interesting and unconventional take on music. What if we found ourselves listening to a DJ set of club music?\textsuperscript{25} This would clash with our expectations, and force a reaction. We could leave, or maybe get up and dance, or we could just sit and listen. Regardless of the action or inaction taken, a decision was made because something different happened, something surprising. The decision could even result in exactly the same actions as if no decision had been made, but the key is that the decision was made. In the same way, we can ignore our senses as long as we are on some level consciously choosing to. If they are ignored without our acknowledgement, then we have missed the boat.

Turning back to this clash of expectations with reality at the concert, we can see how misinformation can be used to force our hands. We are suddenly put on the spot by the performer, faced with a decision of how to react. This can be totally unnerving, and thus we may react negatively, perhaps leaving, or even rioting like in the good old days.\textsuperscript{26} We may also try to dodge the pressure either by leaving or reacting passively. In either case a reaction has been provoked, which was a goal, but evidently putting people on edge can have negative effects.

One way to negate these effects is to put humour to use. Those who don’t take themselves too too seriously will be able to laugh at the club-set-at-experimental-concert scenario, quickly displacing their initial discomfort. These may also be the

\textsuperscript{25} I seriously considered doing this for my thesis recital.

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Le Sacred u printemps} anyone?
people who have broader sets of expectations, and thus can more easily adapt to the confrontation. Wait just a second, humour, you ask? The funnies can be used to make serious points, as we can see from the work of stand up comics. Not only that, under the cover of humour one can often push further than when making straight claims. And even if the joke doesn’t end up getting you thinking, it did make you laugh, which is pretty good on its own.

Humour in art also sets up a conflict. High art is a serious matter, not something to be laughed at. Or is it? Let us turn to Allan Revich’s writings on humour in Fluxus art:

Fluxus humor takes two primary directions. The first, is as mentioned above, that by being deliberately funny, while also being “serious” art, Fluxus draws attention to the absurdities present in the conventional art market. Pointed humor forces us to ask uncomfortable questions about what we assume to be the unquestionable truth. …

The small scale and intimate (yet disposable) nature of Fluxus art is the other direction that Fluxus humor takes. Art that … demands to be taken seriously while simultaneously refusing to take itself seriously. Here again, humor is used as a tool to

---

27 The phrase “It’s funny ‘cause it’s true,” comes to mind.
point to the absurdities of the generally accepted "reality"
acceptance of truth by our cultures.28

When using humour, we should be aware, and perhaps wary, of gimmicks. If
the concert opened with just one club track and then moved on to experimental music
as advertised, that would hint at the point, but it would never drive it home, walk it to
the door and try for a goodnight kiss. But if the performer dropped some hot beats for
two or three hours, then the concert itself is art, art that is fully committed to.

“Part of being a performer is really committing
yourself fully to what you are doing.”29

DJing from a conventional experimental/computer music setup, such as a lit
concert hall, seated behind a table with a Mac laptop on it, would present the form of
an experimental music concert, drawing the audience in, allowing them to form
expectations about their upcoming experience, before ambushing them with the
unexpected content of a dance club. On the other hand, turning off the lights,
standing behind two turntables and a microphone, maybe even adding some lasers or
semi-psychedelic video; this all leans towards the real club scene, such that neither
content nor form expectations are met. The former conflict is self-contained in the
event, while the later depends on some false advertising and pre-formed ideas. Either

28 Allan Revich, “Fluxus, Art, and Humor,” The Fluxus Blog – A Journal About Fluxus: Then and
m03.php#e99 (accessed April 11, 2007).
29 Ron Kuivila, lecture, Music 300: Seminar for Music Majors, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT,
December 11, 2006.
way people are thrown off and thus forced to think on their feet. This experience is akin to the dire situation in which one receives all sensory inputs. This situation is not as dire, but the adrenaline starts pumping a bit and for a moment time slows. One might say fight or flight.

If the audience chooses flight, then we have lost them with only a parting blow to give them something to reflect on. We want them to choose fight, to engage the art.

If you want to fight, turn to page 57.

If you would rather engage, turn to page 56.
As previously discussed, this engagement is key. If the audience is interested enough to initiate the connection, we must make sure we are providing material that will keep them thinking. Humour can help draw the audience in, but might lull them into a complacent place, where they are only superficially interacting with our material and are not really ready to contribute effort into the experience. This points towards another balancing act of engagement, between leaving the audience at ease and making them too uncomfortable. Some discomfort keeps them active and aware, but push too far and they are no longer receptive, turning against anything coming in, like the frustrated user from page 10. Just as with the clear vs. impenetrable balance of presenting information, an interested audience will tolerate discomfort and stay focused while at ease. So once engaged, it becomes easier to induce thought in the audience.

The End
This fight is key. The conflict keeps the mind alive and active. This applies everywhere, not just in the minds of an audience at an experimental music concert. Humans try so hard to resolve conflict, even simple things. Most of us are very bad at Keats’ negative capability;\textsuperscript{30} we shelve things away in resolved little packages unless they burst out and demand to be dealt with. Trying to answer questions raised requires energy, and we are lazy. We default to the commonly accepted answer instead of thinking for ourselves.

Sometimes I break the rules. To just break them. But also to test the rule, to see if it should be in place, and to let other people test it, vicariously, in their minds. Just because things are done this way does not mean that they should continue to be done as such. And just because something is tradition does not make it wrong. I just want to explore. I may find dead ends, that things are right as they are and my ideas for change go nowhere, but I ask the question. I attempt to do this exploration harmlessly, but since conflict is necessary, some friction arises. My instincts have been to avoid offending people, to tiptoe around them, observing at a distance. Now I often argue just to keep people thinking, and to keep me thinking.

Of course it’s another balancing act – conflict on the war level, or even most physical violence, is not good, and while it may help us grow, I would rather grow

\textsuperscript{30} The ability to accept conflict, to have both sides exist and to not have to resolve them. A sort of acceptance of mysteries or questions without needing explanations or answers. Keats being John Keats, English Romantic poet.
through less destructive, more self-motivated and perhaps artistic challenges. We could push with and against art, moving through the vast universe of thought.\textsuperscript{31}

Now consider literally pushing against art. Absurd? Perhaps. We often see art as existing in this pure space that is separate from the real world.

---

\textit{If you want to gaze in and examine this space, turn to page 59.}

\textit{If you want to try to push into the vacuum world, turn to page 60.}

\textsuperscript{31} Of course this point is only semi-valid, since war is art (thanks Sun Tzu) and has the ultimate motivation (survival) built in. That’s a tough one to think about.
We can gaze in and examine this space, but it is separate from everything else. This is an interesting way to look at art – outside of any context. However museums generally have a plaque with at least the title, artist, and year of the piece, information which will also be included in a program for a performance, or on the title page of a book. These tidbits move towards viewing the art in its true context.

There are many avenues to explore in building this bigger picture. We can consider other period pieces. We can examine a broader range of artistic tradition, across time, location, and style. We can learn the story of the artist’s own life. But where does this search end? We can get deeper and deeper into the examination of a single piece of art, without ever fully understanding it.

The End
We can look in and see this vacuum world, but no touching, no deeper interaction. Art is placed on pristine walls in well lit rooms behind ropes with guards, or performed in silent, hallowed halls. But art exists in the world, so it necessarily interacts with the world. We’ve just seen how art must engage the audience to be effective. In our museum setup, the art requires the audience to provide the initial interest. Once engaged, art interacts on a perceptual level, but in the case of visual/plastic art it is a physical entity, so the art can interact physically with the world.\(^{32}\) Perhaps this is the shadowy world behind museum walls, where art is packed and moved, repaired and examined, handled and actually touched. Why is this some sort of hidden taboo?

We want to preserve great art, so we can look at it, and save it for posterity. We want to see it as (we think) the artist intended. But the artist cannot predict how we will view the art, in (the) light of the world around us and our past sum of experience. We all perceive the art differently, and our perceptions will change each time we encounter it. Thus we are not preserving anything.\(^{33}\)

We have a hard time coming to terms with change, especially destructive change. But all things come to pass. Art is created, art must be destroyed. We need to learn to deal with this. It may or may not have been Rauschenberg who painted

---

\(^{32}\) Sound too is physical, both its wave and its source. Literature, dance, theatre, etc. are also physical.

\(^{33}\) This is an outlandish claim, as we are clearly preserving the physical form of the art, and thus all users are responding to approximately the same stimulus. Outlandish claims are still useful to consider, giving new perspectives and partial truths, and thus they must be made from time to time. This is probably the only one you’ll find footnoted though.
over one of his own paintings. It doesn’t matter who it was; merely consider the action.

After consideration, if you want to idealize your view of the world, turn to page 62.

If you would rather think about distortions in the world, turn to page 64.
Good. Art can be changed, and it will be. This inability to deal with change points towards a larger trend I have noticed in the way humans think of the world.

We have this idealized view of how things work. This is helpful in many cases, but when we operate on its assumptions without realizing what we are doing (i.e. that we are making assumptions and simplifications), it can come back to bite us.

On the other side of not expecting change, we often view a long time as a static infinite. We can only see short term change, which we may be obsessed with. Think about the business quarter. Possibly a useful tool for keeping track of how a company is doing, the quarters are now the focus of our financial world; it’s all about the short term gain.34 We are obsessed with what is about to happen, often trivial in the grand scheme of things. But we don’t have a long term view anymore, which is what will ultimately befall us.

Just as we only have short- or infinite-term views, we split most things into two extreme categories and leave no middle ground which is inevitably inhabited by things forced into one category or the other. It turns out most things are spectrums, not dichotomies.35 It is easier and faster to just sort things into two baskets rather than placing them individually in the right spot on a line, but if we ignore the fact that we are making an approximation, that they each actually belong to a point on the line and instead associate them only with the closest endpoint, then we end up with a hugely distorted view of the world.


35 The classic Wesleyan criticism.
Basically what we are doing is reducing the world, an extremely complex system, to a simple system that our brains can understand. Some of the most interesting models we create are of other people. We have to acknowledge our inner thoughts and complexity, but rarely do we imagine such intricacy in other people; we ignore the parts of people’s lives that we don’t observe.

The End

---

36 We may not be able to fully comprehend the universe, but the quantum gravity computer can (in theory). Michael Brooks, “Outside of time: The quantum gravity computer,” *New Scientist*, March 31, 2007.

37 This is a tricky point, because how can you be aware of something you are not aware of. Well, clearly you can’t be. The problem is more that we don’t incorporate wiggle room into our model to allow for these outside activities; we assume we have the full picture.
Good. Art can be changed, and it will be. This inability to deal with change points towards a larger trend I have noticed in the way humans think of the universe.

“Distortion is a risk that must be taken for understanding to be shared.”

We don’t like to think about distortions to our world. We have our clean little world views in which we ignore many important things. Some of these things are problems we could be working to solve, like poverty and hunger. Other things are shunned by people for social reasons, like sex and noise.

“Although existing in all music, the noise-element has been to music as sex to humanity, essential to its existence, but impolite to mention, something to be cloaked in ignorance and silence.”

Since Cowell wrote that, both noise and sex have emerged much further into the public eye. However they are still maligned in many cases, and still cause discomfort. So here it is – the discomfort is caused because sex and noise don’t fit into people’s world views, which are what they use to generate expectations about the world. Thus it is possible to use sex and noise to challenge the expectations, which

---

39 It is hugely important that we stop ignoring the big problems that I have just mentioned; however, I’m going to be a pretentious academic (as you can see from my use of a semicolon and misspelling of pretentious) and talk about the later.
Further: the humanity-sex relation is obvious or you’re not old enough to be reading this. The noise-music side is a bit more technical, but basically any instrument making a tone is not producing perfectly identical waveforms, as can be shown with an oscilloscope, and thus contains some element of noise. Then think of drums, clearly part of music, which are all noise. Or are they? No, drums, like rooms, have a resonance and thus have an element of tone. (Think of all the toned drums used in hip-hop/rap today. I first noticed their ingenious and subtle use by the Neptunes in Snoop Dogg’s “Drop It Like It's Hot,” but I’m sure they appeared before that, potentially even earlier than 808s, and now they are all over the place.) Cowell, in this article, divides music into rhythm and sound, and sound into tone and noise. Point being, tone and noise are hopelessly intertwined. But no! The situation is only hopeless if you want to separate them. Just as if you tried to separate sex and humanity.
we know is a key activity. Of course these days it is harder and harder to get to people, to challenge them, or just interact. Our worlds are becoming more self-controlled, more self-insulated.

“For many of us, the explosion in technology has perversely limited, not expanded, our exposure to new experiences. Increasingly, we get our news from sources that think as we already do. And with iPods, we hear what we already know; we program our own playlists.”

This quote from *The Washington Post* gets straight to a part of that self-insulation I am particularly interested in – what I have termed “headphone culture.” People walk around with their earbuds, hearing what they want, removing themselves from the world. Like windows, headphones disconnect our sound and visual environments, giving us control over one completely, and thus cutting off the stimulus of the outside world. This outside world provides noise, which is disruptive to our pleasure listening. I of course take the view that the noise should be accepted as part of the listening experience (and in fact makes the experience more interesting).

With this prevalence of headphones, we are anti-training ourselves to listen. This makes the task of conveying ideas through music all the harder for musicians;

---

42 Unlike windows, headphones take acoustics out of the picture. Cell phones are also culprits.
43 À la Christian Wolff via John Cage and David Tudor, *Indeterminacy*, Smithsonian/Folkways, 1959, in the fourth minute. Everything is music if we listen as if it is.
44 To comment on this, I will walk around with a boombox, playing music I want to hear into the world where it combines with ambient sounds before reaching my ears. At the same time, it adds ambient sounds to other people’s listening experience. I also of course enjoy just listening as I walk.
45 To really listen, as one would listen to art.
Appendix A

Installation No. 1

Zelnick Pavilion, March 29th, 2007

Basic Setup:

1. Two condenser microphones in center of room, one facing each end of the pavilion. Two sets of speakers, one at each end. The mics each input one channel of sound to the computer, which processes it through a pure data program (mostly delay, with a little compression, see DIAGRAM BELOW). The output from each mic is sent to the speakers on the side of the room the mic is not facing.

2. Contact mics were installed in various places in the room. These outputted to one of two small speakers, one next to each condenser mic. The contact mics were installed: three on a door, two on a metal grate in the floor, one on the mixer that controlled the levels for the contact mics, and one on a cookie tin, with cookies in it, on a table in the middle of the room.

This setup was explained to anyone who asked.
The pure data program starts with a delay of three seconds. A timer counts off ever 300 milliseconds, and when the timer reaches 60, the delay time is increased by 100 milliseconds. So about every third of a minute, the delay is incremented by a
tenth of a second. (You can see in the program that the timer has all sorts of unnecessary features like resetting and printing information that were used when testing the program.)

The program also contains a rudimentary compressor which looks ahead at the envelope of the sound in the delay buffer and tries to squash it when the envelope gets too large. Included in this compressor is the infamous “‘oh shit’ response,” which activates when the envelope hits a peak indicating the sound has gotten too loud for the compressor to be effective. This triggers two periods of high compression, with length scaled by the delay time, before a return to standard levels.

Some quotes:

“It is like a dream, because everything repeats back kind of weird.”
- David Abravanel, Personal communication, April 8, 2007, 1:06 am.

“For me, the most interesting aspect of your thesis was the way you were able to make the space and presentation as experimental as your actual sound installation. Everyone in the room became a part of the whole dynamic -- sound and social. It was amazing to observe the ‘audience’ interacting as a sort of performance in itself. At times, it was impossible to decipher between the arranged sounds and the natural, ambient noise that the crowd superimposed over all the voices--the sounds I am often unaware of in public spaces. In stepping back, I think I heard a lot of what I hear every day consciously for the first time.

Bitchin, it was.”
- Caitlin Keitel, e-mail message to author, April 10, 2007.
Appendix B

JABBERWOCKY.

‘Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wade;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

“Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!”

He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought –
So he rested by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

“And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!”
He chortled in his joy.

‘Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogroves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

Appendix C

CHROMACHORD
    ROBOTS
        N
    RED ROOM
        F=MA
            D

MUSIC
    CHANCE
    CHANGE
    SILENCE

    REPETITION
    TAPE
        MINIMAL
        CLAP
    SPEECH
Appendix D

Some useful definitions:46

Irony – 1a. The use of words to express something different from or often opposed to their literal meaning. b. An expression or utterance marked by irony. c. A literary style employing irony for humorous or rhetorical effect. 2a. Incongruity between what might be expected and what actually occurs. b. An occurrence, result, or circumstance notable for such incongruity. See Usage Note at ironic. 3. Dramatic irony. 4. Socratic irony.

Happy – 1. Characterized by good luck; fortunate. 2. Enjoying, showing, or marked by pleasure, satisfaction, or joy. See Syns at glad. 3. Well-adapted; felicitous. 4. Cheerful; willing. 5a. Characterized by spontaneous or obsessive inclination to use something. Often used in combination: trigger-happy. b. Inordinately enthusiastic about or involved with. Often used in combination: clothes-happy.

Danger – 1. Exposure or vulnerability to harm or risk. 2. A source or an instance of risk or peril. 3. Obsolete Power, esp. power to harm.

Zeugma – different meanings of the verb are put to work. Example: “…whether the nymph shall stain her honour or her new brocade…” (A. Pope)

Thesis – 1. A proposition maintained by argument. 2. A dissertation advancing an original point of view based on research, esp. as required for an academic degree. 3. A hypothetical proposition, esp. one not proved. 4. The first stage of the Hegelian dialectic process. 5a. The long or accented part of a metrical foot, esp. in quantitative verse. b. The unaccented or short part of a metrical foot, esp. in accentual verse. 6. Music The accented section of a measure.

Appendix E

\[ e^{j\pi} = -1 \]

\[ e = 2.71828183 \]
\[ i = \sqrt{-1} \]
\[ \pi = 3.14159265 \]
Appendix F

Some ideas:

(from Conrad’s brother, via Conrad) Error-invariant music – errors do not affect the music – there is no “right” – takes pressure off the performer – improvisation versus composition – even so it’s a certain type of improvisation – often in improv, like jazz, you still want to get it right.

a concert hall without squeaky seats

overtones of light

We talk about how we can look back on ourselves and say “I can’t believe I thought I knew so much them,” because in reality we knew so little and know so much more now, and how this reflection happens a lot, and will probably continue.
But when did it first happen?
And what was the amount of knowledge needed to be “experienced?”

I used to think the spoon was the perfect utensil. Now I know better. I have seen the light that is the spife.
You May Object "what about the spork?"
To This I Say: The spork's fork features are two shallow to be of great use, and what use they are the spife can mirror with its stabbing ability. Plus the spork takes away from its spoon abilities with the indents to form its stubby tines, while the spife loses almost no ground by semi-serrating its edge.
You May Object: "you will hurt your mouth!"
To This I Say: If you hurt your mouth with a spife, then I wouldn’t go near it with a fork, and I would look for especially blunt spoons, and eat slowly, only soft foods and liquids, and I would see a doctor.
You May Object: "that’s a grapefruit spoon!"
To This I Say: Pure Semantics.
Appendix G

Some games:

Running Charades (Learned from Anna Moench):
Choose a cluemaster.
Divide the remaining players into two teams.
While the cluemaster creates the clues, the teams may find it useful to standardize
signs or actions for common charades categories such as movie, book, famous person,
place, as well as sounds like, number of words, number of syllables, etc.
The teams should stand on either side of the cluemaster, a short distance away.
On the cluemaster’s signal, one member of each team runs to the cluemaster, gets the
first clue, and runs back to their team where they start acting out the clue as per
normal charades. Once someone guesses the clue correctly, another member of the
team runs to the cluemaster to get the next clue. This continues until one team
guesses all the clues, thus winning.

Blind Circle Tag (from David Chandler, who taught me Tai Chi):
It is best to play this game in a large, level area with around sixteen people.
One person starts as ‘it’. The rest of the players join hands in a circle around the
person who is ‘it’. The person in the middle closes hir eyes and attempts to tag
someone. The circle of people must move together to avoid being tagged. They must
remain linked, but may raise their arms to allow ‘it’ to pass outside the circle. When
this happens, the circle must yell “outside” at which point ‘it’ opens hir eyes and
moves back to the middle of the circle,resetting the game. When ‘it’ does tag
someone, the tagger joins the circle and the tagged becomes the new ‘it’.

Link Tag (from Tai Chi):
To play this game you must have an even number of people. First determine one
person to be ‘it’. This works like tag – the person who is ‘it’ tries to tag another
player to make them the new ‘it’. People on base are safe.
In this game, base is two people linking arms. A third person can join one side,
which kicks the person on the other end off (chains can only be two people long; the
person kicked off is vulnerable even if they still have arms linked).
If two pairs of people link arms, all four are vulnerable (punishment for not paying
attention).
(The attitude of players should be cooperative, providing bases to those in danger
while not sacrificing other players.)
A player who just tagged someone cannot be tagged back until they have been on
base, but they can’t remain off base to maintain invulnerability/stalemate the game.
(They can try to make sure their joining a base won’t get someone tagged.)

Name Tag (from Tai Chi):
This is like a game of normal tag, but when you think you are in danger of being
tagged, you can yell out someone’s name. That person immediately becomes ‘it’.

76
Blob Tag (from Tai Chi):
One person starts as ‘it’. When they succeed in tagging someone, the two stick together as tagged (contact is sticky) and are collectively it. They continue to tag people, sticking as tagged, building a blob (or chain, more likely). The game lasts until everyone is tagged. (This is best played in a restricted space).

Meditation exercise (from Liz Levitt):
1 infinite line
2 infinite lines intersecting at one point
3 infinite lines each intersecting each other at one point – making a triangle.


Each line should have no mass.
Bibliography

Abravanel, David. Personal communication. April 8, 2007, 1:06 am.


Craige, Toni. Personal interview. 7 April 2007.


Keitel, Caitlin. e-mail message to author. April 10, 2007.


//

information x obscenity = ?

“We live in a violent culture. What does it mean to be loving in a violent culture?”
- Joy James, “FREEDOM: A Public Dialogue.” (Under Kennedy above.)

“If we wait until tomorrow, will tomorrow ever come?”

79