DiY DYNAMIC:
EXPERIMENTAL ELECTRONIC MUSIC AND THE
UNDERGROUND IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA

By

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INTRODUCTION: "Into the Machine"

If anything, what this music represents is a change, a rapid development towards something else. Admittedly more alien, more faceless, electronic music represents the evolution of music. This is perhaps not the death of rock n' roll but its reconstruction. (Todd Roberts, quoted in Sicko 1999:185)

Just as the technology shapes the activities of its users, their activities shape the technology. (Katz 2010: 220)

Electronic music possesses a rich and varied musical and social history in terms of experimentation, where technologies, musical ideas, and social attitudes are recycled, reinterpreted, and reconstituted to create new worlds of sound, creativity, and culture. The aesthetic of experimentation is deeply imbued in the art and culture of electronic music.

Technological experimentation in electronic musical practice can be traced to the beginning of the 20th century. Ferruccio Busoni's *Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music* (1907) is one of the first documents to laud the use of early electronic instruments. While in the process of investigating microtonality to expand the tonal vocabulary, Busoni had become fascinated by Thaddeus Cahill's Teleharmonium, or Dynamophone (originally finished in 1901) (Chadabe 1997:4), one of the first instruments to produce sound using electrical signals (see Weidenaar 1995). Busoni recognized the Teleharmonium's ability to infinitely divide the octave, providing new possibilities for producing and notating new tonalities: "Only a long and careful series of experiments, and a careful training of the ear, can render this unfamiliar material approachable and plastic for the coming generation, and for Art" (Busoni 1911:95).
The aesthetic of technological experimentation is further addressed in the philosophies of the Futurists, specifically Balilla Pratella and Luigi Russolo. Pratella's outspoken manifestoes challenge conventional artistic ideas of sound itself, calling for a bold celebration of the sounds of machines, modern industry, and war (Rodgers 2010:6). In his *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Music* (1911), Pratella pontificates that the soul of the masses is embedded in the sonic characteristics of industrial machinery, and that "the domain of the machine and the victorious reign of electricity" (Pratella in Rainey, Poggi, and Whitman 2009:84) is one of the central themes to Futurist musical expression.

Perhaps more bluntly, Luigi Russolo's *Art of Noises* (1913) candidly states, "We must break out of this restricted circle of pure sounds and conquer the infinite variety of noise-sounds" (Russolo in Rainey, Poggi, and Whitman 2009:134). Russolo's subsequent creations of his *Intonarumori* music boxes were elemental in realizing the noise-sounds Russolo envisioned (Chadabe 1997:3).

Following Russolo's lead, an infinite variety of noise-sounds have been explored, developed, and championed by generations of composers and musicians operating outside the boundaries of mainstream culture. Leon Theremin's 1920s debut of his aetherphone—or theremin—realized his vision of an instrument capable of creating sound without using any mechanical energy, like the conductor of an orchestra" (ibid 8). John Cage's *Imaginary Landscapes No. 1-5* (1939-1952) utilize phonographs, radios, and magnetic tape as new 'instruments' for live performance and composition. The works of Karlheinz Stockhausen, such as *Gesang der Junglinge* (1955-56), *Telemusik* (1966), *Kontakte* (1958-60), *Hymnen* (1966-67), *Mixtur* (1964), and *Mikrophonie I* (1964) pioneered early techniques in electroacoustic music composition and performance such as...
spatialization and live electronics. The San Francisco Tape Music Center (founded in 1961) fostered a community-sponsored composer's guild that provided fertile ground for experimentation with tape-splicing, primitive synthesizers, tape-looping, and abstract videography. Hip-hop's signature elements of record scratching and mixing revolutionized the use of the phonograph concerning live performance and sampling, while fostering the culture of the DJ. Juan Atkins, Kevin Saunderson, and Derrick May's contributions to the creation and subsequent promulgation of Detroit techno has spawned a worldwide development of dance music genres, clandestine social cultures, and electronic music communities. While the aforementioned examples represent only a small fraction of electronic music movements and composers, each case contains a similar musical aesthetic: lines that demarcate traditional concepts of melody, harmony, and rhythm become significantly blurred, resulting in a music that is identified by the character of its sounds rather than its compositional structure (Lee 1998), as well as a music that redefines the roles of composers, performers, and audience members.

In some cases, the radical and unconventional natures of electronic music in the US are directly reflected in the attitudes and behaviors of their patrons and practitioners, often resulting in a "locally focused collective movement" (Harrison 2009:29) that can also be characterized as "underground." From the early history of Detroit techno to the origins of hip-hop in the Bronx, these musical movements were founded outside of mainstream American culture, providing a "security zone" whereby marginalized musical and cultural groups could openly celebrate their creativity and diversity (Fikentscher 2000:12). Hence, the term "underground" itself is often difficult to define, and possesses a wide variety of political, cultural, social, and musical definitions and implications. As
electronic music of all kinds has gradually found its way into mainstream society the underground has had to further reinvent itself in terms of its scope, participants, technology, and relevant musical terminologies. What was once an almost invisible safe-haven for marginalized cultures has now become a global phenomenon; a perpetually shifting ideology that habitually generates new communities, genres, ideas, and establishments at any given moment.

*Story and Setting - A Personal Perspective*

My own interests in electronic music began in high school in the early 90s, when digital culture reached a particularly vital and open-ended phase (Davis in Miller 2008:67) and was becoming more and more integrated into American musical and social life. I became fascinated with a kind of sound that seemed to rebel against every other kind of music I was familiar with. Musical groups such as Orbital, Underworld, the Orb, Skinny Puppy, 808 State, and the Future Sound of London featured a synthetic soundscape of driving rhythms, soaring ambient textures, creatively altered samples, and random noise fragments. In addition, the method by which these groups presented their music was strikingly futuristic. Instead of a four or five member rock band featuring conventional instrumentation (drums, bass, guitar), there were now two to three members onstage attending to sophisticated racks of technology including synthesizers, computers, drum machines, mixers, and samplers.

The spaces these groups occupied were as eclectic as the music they produced. Disorienting flashing lights, diverse racial mixtures, drug usage, endless dancing, and a euphoric sense of a nonstop party atmosphere were commonplace. It no longer felt like
the routine concert setting I had attended so many times before. Rather, the entire concert grounds were transformed into a futuristic fantasy world, place where one could escape into an unconventional reality in terms of its music, people, and tastes. Sometimes these spaces existed in officially sanctioned concert halls containing large numbers of people. Sometimes they existed illegally in warehouses and abandoned buildings for any number of people, accentuating the idea of an alternate reality with the knowledge that you were participating in something secretive, invisible to the general public, and independent from a domestic environment (Thornton 1996:18).

One of the most noticeable anomalies in my experience of electronic music was the appearance of a lone figure onstage capable of altering the mood and energy of the room to their will: the DJ. The DJ has been a pivotal figure in the development of underground musical movements for the last four decades, utilizing vinyl records, CDs, and digital sound files as "building blocks," stringing them together in an improvised narrative to create a 'set'" (Brewster, Broughton 2000:8). Fundamentally, the DJ is the creator of a musical atmosphere rather than a performance, and has the "tremendous power to affect people's states of mind" (ibid 5). This places the DJ in a category all their own, and suggests that the DJ's activities are separate from individuals who compose and perform original electronic music. Yet despite their traditional musical role, the modern DJ has come to be viewed more and more as an electronic musician due to the styles of music they play, the venues at which they perform, the artists with whom they associate with, and their use of modern musical technology. In the present day, DJs are able to "perform" their sets with new hardware and software programs designed specifically for DJ activities such as digital mixing, sampling song segments on the fly, virtual record
scratching, and effects manipulation. Conversely, experimental electronic musicians who don't identify themselves as DJs are able to use new DJ technology for their own purposes, further blurring the lines between presenter, performer, and composer.

My endeavors in experimenting with and creating electronic music did not occur until my arrival at New York University. In addition to playing in avant rock groups, free jazz ensembles, and heavy metal bands in the greater New York area I started to experiment with samplers, drum machines, and digital audio editing at home. I began to develop a completely new musical vocabulary, and utilized electronics in virtually all of my academic oriented compositions, taking care to include my ancillary interests of improvisation and small ensemble orchestration. One of my works, "Ruptial Disture," premiered at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. in 2004, involved recording and editing thirteen separate written passages for an ensemble of flute and tuba on the popular software sequencing program ProTools. These recorded passages, now in the form of digital samples, were then uploaded to a dynamic software synthesizer called Spongefork, which allows a user to manipulate sine waves or sampled audio through a unique XY based modulation controller using the computer keyboard, mouse, or an external MIDI input device (Spongefork). During a live performance of Ruptial Disture, the flute and tuba players first play the original written passages while the composer improvises with the pre-recorded material. After finishing their written passages, the players may choose to improvise with the composer's manipulated sounds, or they may play the written passages again. This results in a kind of musical deja-vu, as one begins to hear subtle echoes and variations on material that has already been introduced. As the
piece progresses, the interplay between the instrumentalists and the computer generated sounds becomes more and more enigmatic, and the listening audience may wonder if the sonic textures are created by the instrumentalists or the computer program.

The success of Ruptial Disture in addition to the composition and performance possibilities involved therein led to increased private "amateur" or bedroom practice (Katz 2010:127) with electronics outside of New York University. I began to delve deeper into the vast electronic music medium, experimenting with effects-laden samplers, production synthesizers, vocal effects processors, software tracking programs, and virtual online instruments. These cutting-edge devices provided me with more ideas and increased my compositional vocabulary, allowing me to interact with new information and create a unique musical culture all my own (Keller in Miller 2008:144). Soon, I had composed enough material to engage in performances as a solo artist, with the first occurring at the Acme Underground in New York City in 2001.

From its humble bedroom beginnings, "BlipVert"—the moniker I use for my solo electronic music endeavors—has become an internationally recognized electronic music project. BlipVert is currently represented on six record labels that maintain headquarters in Canada, the Netherlands, Belgium, and New York. BlipVert has been presented at venues all over the United States and Europe, appearing at festivals that included artists such as Fennesz, Ceephax Acid Crew, Alec Empire, and the Sun Ra Arkestra. The music of BlipVert has been reviewed in numerous online magazines and been the subject of several interviews regarding my compositional procedures and musical background. Recently, I was invited to bring my BlipVert project to STEIM—a research center in Amsterdam focusing on live performance with electronic instruments (STEIM)—for a
weeklong residency. Working with STEIM's staff, I was exposed to revolutionary possibilities for performing my material live through the use of iPhones, Nintendo Wii controllers, and interactive sampling software.

Upon reflection, my experiences in making electronic music raise an interesting question: where do I fit in? The combination of academic experimentalism and underground dance music aesthetics seems to place me in limbo; an artist who picks and chooses aspects from each camp and integrates them for his own purposes. This idea of integration will be one of the primary focuses of this thesis. Electronic musicians today can choose from a multitude of equipment, performance techniques, and musical influences to create their own unique identity. Furthermore, the seemingly random nature of their integration widens the scope of sonic possibilities, so that conventional terms like "dance," "noise," and "ambient" take on completely different meanings.

What is Experimental? Defining a Musical Paradigm

One of the more difficult concepts to define in this thesis is the notion of "experimentalism" in music. This particular word can take on many definitions, and with today's persistent creation of musical genres and labels, words such as "experimental" can be misleading and ambiguous. While it is true that one of electronic music's fundamental principles is the aesthetic of experimentation, not all electronic music—dance or otherwise—that is created is considered experimental, or at the very least imbued with an experimental creative nature.

For purposes of this thesis, I propose the following flexible conditions:
1. Experimental electronic music involves creative exploitation (Schloss 2004:39) of existing technology, sometimes irrespective of the technology's intended usage. Composers and performers who utilize their chosen technologies to the greatest possible benefit—often transcending the intended use of the technology—is a common theme in the history of electronic music. In order to capture the idea of "experimenting" with an object that in turn gives rise to new ideas and techniques, an aspect of creative exploitation is a necessary requirement—however large or small—for execution. This concept can be construed in a vast number of ways and applied to both hardware components and software programs. Circuit bending, the "creative customization of the circuits within electronic devices" ("Circuit Bending") is an excellent example of creative exploitation of hardware. Hip-hop record scratching is the practice of manipulating mediated music, using "recordings, turntables, mixers, and sound reinforcement technology originally designed for recording and playback purposes only in creative ways" (Fikentscher 2000:34). Venetian Snares (aka Aaron Funk), a popular electronic musician who creates highly eclectic odd-meter drum n' bass and jungle using sample tracking software, first used "Med Sound Studio, a Windows port of the old Octamed sample tracker for the Commodore Amiga" (Sellars) to program rhythm tracks, an example of software exploitation.

Technologies can also be creatively exploited during live performances, engaging the performer in activities "above and beyond those at which [they] are active" (Nyman 1999:14). A DJ who provides rhythm tracks for a singer or a group of instrumentalists is one example; the DJ is then partly responsible for the quality of the performance rather
than the overall mood of the room. Using a digital delay unit to loop vocals or samples in a minimalist fashion is another example of live technological exploitation.

2. Labels concerning performance, presentation, and composition become clouded.

As the uses of technology become broader, so do the terms that have defined the practitioners. An individual who utilizes the program "Virtual DJ" would find that, in addition to working with "traditional" DJ techniques such as mixing and song selection, a user can integrate effects, capture loops on the fly, and engage in virtual record scratching ("Virtual DJ"). Thus, the DJ exits the realm of being a "musical presenter" (Brewster, Broughton 2000:8) and enters the realm of performance. The possibility for creating and mixing loops on the fly also allows a DJ to spontaneously compose with mediated material.

Ableton Live, a popular music sequencer, attempts to combine virtually all aspects of electronic music production into one package:

Live is designed to be an instrument for live performances as well as a tool for composing and arranging. It is also used for mixing of tracks by DJs, as it offers a suite of controls for beat matching, crossfading, and other effects used by turntablists, and was one of the first music applications to automatically beat match songs ("Ableton Live").

Ableton appears to shatter the notions of "DJ," "performer," and "composer" in one stroke. With Ableton, a composer is able to "DJ" their own music, while DJs are able to compose and arrange original (or mediated) material in conjunction with elements of traditional turntablism.
3. Experimental electronic music is rooted in a "DIY" (do-it-yourself) aesthetic.

Experimentalism in electronic music involves a proactive attitude and desire to exploit and explore technology on one's own terms. The traditional dedication and rudimentary practice that goes into learning an instrument is drastically redrawn when working with electronic equipment, as the user has a complete freedom to explore all the dimensions of the equipment at their disposal. In essence, users "teach themselves" how to use music making "tools" (Calix in Rodgers 2010:131) which can generate a variety of sonic qualities, some being unintended aberrations. Thus, combinations of equipment, techniques, and methodologies take on an infinite number of permutations. Some artists believe the DIY concept is essential for experimental electronic musicians, and that the fundamental enjoyment is in "doing what you want, how you want to do it" (Fields, Personal Communication). The DIY concept can also be applied to conditions outside of music, such as event organization, promotion, and record production, activities that will be discussed later in this thesis.

4. Experimentalism in electronic music retains a perpetual ingenuity by combining concepts. Experimental electronic music production in 2012 functions chiefly by combining concepts to create new musical material, ideas, and technology. Revolutionary methods of presenting, performing, and composing have established an inalterable foundation upon which resulting ideas can be combined. Therefore, artists who produce new experimental electronic music utilize a wide palette of techniques such as sampling, record scratching, tape looping and splicing, live mixing, utilizing electronics in live performance, usage of analog and digital effects, and videography in
combination with each other arrive at new concepts of creation (Lee 1998). The CDJ player combines the option of using CD and mp3 media with onboard effects, record scratching simulation, and speed/pitch control similar to a vinyl record player. Instead of bringing crates of vinyl records, the DJ is now able to bring CDs and flash drives containing hundreds of hours of music in significantly smaller formats, thus making media portability more convenient and increasing options for selection and performance. Tape looping can now be done digitally by editing sound files in a sequencer such as ProTools, Logic, or Cubase. Synthesizers can exist not only as hardware but also as software programs controllable by a MIDI instrument. While the sonic possibilities of experimental music are infinite, the act of experimentalism relies on referencing past methods and building on their ingenuity.

5. Experimental electronic music, while blurring roles, can inadvertently encompass innumerable styles, genres, and identities regardless of their historical implications. Since its inception, electronic music has "divided into an infinite number of substrata" (Sicko 1996:189). However, the idea of experimentalism can provide an adequate umbrella for many styles of electronic music due primarily to the combination of creatively exploitative practices involved (see point four). An electronic musician who employs spontaneous sampling and record scratching while performing "dance" oriented music\(^1\) could be considered experimental based on the principles of point one. This individual, while in part associated with electronic dance music, is not strictly a DJ (which as Kai Fikentscher explains, is the "traditional cultural broker" of dance music),

\(^1\) The descriptor of "dance" embraces several categories of music that have evolved from 1970s disco such as house, techno, trance, hi-NRG (i.e. "high energy") (Fikentscher 2000:12).
nor do they conveniently fall into an easy definition of those genres associated with dance music (ibid). In addition, their live exploitation of technology to create a style of music typically associated with the DJ (ibid) further blurs the preciseness of their musical identity. The elements of experimentalism as previously outlined provide a descriptive foundation for electronic musicians who proactively utilize technology to create new and original works of composition and performance. In the end, "the slightest new musical direction" that "seems to generate a new, artificially-created sub-genre" (Sicko 1996:190) can instead find a home under the term experimentalism.

Again, these conditions are flexible, and are based on my own observations, experiences, and recent research concerning this thesis. The point is to move towards a sensible idea of what "experimental" insinuates in order to better understand its attachments to those individuals and communities who personify it.

Towards a Definition: The Underground

The value and efficacy of underground musical movements are often not fully understandable or appreciated until long after their absence or their co-opting by a mainstream entity. Ergo, the process of subcultural principles originating and proliferating within a hegemonic supercultural structure—i.e. a "domineering mainstream" (Slobin 1993:27)—and then reappearing as part of a superculture all its own is a persistent historical theme in electronic music. For example, virtually all of the technological innovations pioneered in underground dance music are now commonplace. Some electronics companies have seized upon these innovations and made them readily
available for broad public consumption. The skills involved in turntablism, a subset of DJ-ing that involves complex mixing, record scratching, and on-the-fly sampling techniques—often relying on the DJs ability to capture song fragments down to the microsecond—are now available as onboard effects on upscale CD players from companies such as Pioneer, Gemini, and Numark (Katz 2010:130). Mark Katz further illustrates how these kinds of CD players have simplified turntablism:

With these players it is a much simpler matter to find, repeat, and manipulate particular recorded passages. What's more, with inexpensive CD burners, DJs can easily compile their own individualized records from other CDs from digital files pulled from the Internet (ibid).

Technological advancements in drum machines, sampling computers, digital recording technology, and synthesizers have drastically increased the ease by which individuals can access activities of composition and performance. Drum machines are now able to replicate thousands of synthesizer and percussion sounds, including the popular acid house sounds of the TR-909 and TB-303 (respectively, a drum computer and bass synthesizer developed by Roland in the early 1980s) (Collin 1997:21), as well as the precise snare drum timbres of the "amen break" characteristic of drum n' bass music of the late 90s. Digital recording technology allows for mixing, editing, and manipulation of recorded soundfiles down to the smallest details (Katz 2010:148). Synthesizers, once bulky and rare in their availability, are now portable and capable of accurately reproducing the sounds of acoustic instruments and primitive synthesizers. Synthesizers can also act as controllers; MIDI keyboards can interface with computer software to trigger samples and sound files during live performances.
The main idea with technological advancement concerning electronic music is that "anybody can do it" (Calix in Rodgers 2010:188), a concept that has both positive and negative connotations among seasoned professionals and especially those who have established reputations prior to technological advancements in their field (ibid, Katz 2010:130). The most identifiable positive aspects include a larger democratic atmosphere of technology, experimentation, and opportunity where both budding artists and the simply curious can explore, create, and produce their own work with seemingly unlimited resources and inhibitions (Calix in Rodgers 2010:188). The negative aspects include the stigmas of "flash in the pan" social recognition and a disconnection from sacred artistic practice, not to mention a hapless ignorance of historical relevancies (ibid). Regardless of the true social effect of musical technology, their advancements have dramatically increased the number of creative participants worldwide.

Along with advancements in musical technology has been a complete reformation of what is considered underground from a geographical, social, musical, and political perspective. The rapid and ultra-compartmentalized nature of changes in the modern underground is often highly ambiguous.

Near invisible "transformed architectural environments" (Thornton 1996:5) are no longer exclusive to any sort of electronic musical underground, nor do they specifically attract marginalized cultures. Throughout the United States, those who appreciate and practice electronic music can be seen at major concert halls and festivals, university campuses, local clubs, bars, warehouses, retail outlets, restaurants, open-air markets, and
randomly created spaces such as parks or fields. Hence, electronic music is no longer solely infused with a secretive or isolated sensibility.

Access to mass marketed technology has allowed a multitude of social groups to create their own musical identity in a relatively foreign culture. For example, anyone can adopt a DJ "personality" and specialize in composing and performing a certain type of music, often producing strikingly original permutations on past themes. Drum n' bass (aka jungle), a music that originated from the Jamaican dub practitioners of the 1970s, can be heard as a major influence in the music of Aphex Twin, Venetian Snares, and Squarepusher ("Drum And Bass Bands/Artists").

As more people become capable of utilizing new technology in their music, new variations on original styles, and inevitably new labels to identify those new variations, consistently appear. If the layperson were to do a Google search for "electronic music genres," the first link that appears is from Wikipedia, the popular online encyclopedia "that anyone can edit" (Wikipedia website). Wikipedia lists approximately 202 individual electronic music genres ("List of Electronic Music Genres"); genres that came to prominence during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s now employ several different subgenres apiece. Techno, a style of music that originated in Detroit and has "spread to more countries and cultures than perhaps any music in recent history" (Sicko 1999:16), now lists fourteen distinct subgenres such as acid techno, bleep techno, ghettotech, minimal techno, Rotterdam techno, and techstep. Drum N' Bass, an offspring of Jamaican dub and now a category itself, lists nine of its own subgenres such as darkstep, drumfunk, liquid funk, and techstep. House music lists a staggering twenty-two subgenres; with two
of those—diva house and electro swing—listing their own distinct subgenres, hardbag and swing house respectively (ibid).

It is difficult to say whether or not new musical genres and sub-genres in electronic music carry any legitimacy (a topic to be explored in detail later), as "the slightest new musical direction seems to generate a new, artificially-created sub-genre" (Sicko 1996:190). Thus, are these slight directions really capable of creating a wholly new, innovative sonic experience? Oftentimes, electronic music artists believe that new labels are "a load of crap" (McFarlane qtd. in Sicko 1996:190) and that genres gain popularity because they create a "scene, and it's cool to be into it," but "not because of the music, and not because it even interests them at all" (Taylor, Personal Communication). Bay Area musician Patrice Scanlon concisely illustrates the appeal of persistent genre creation in electronic music, emphasizing the concept of "scene" inclusion:

I think it's totally ridiculous. It's just for people to feel like maybe they were the first at something, because we don't have that really anymore. To say you're an electronic musician in the year 2012 is not as impressive as back in 1958 if you're Max Matthews at Bell Labs. So I think that's people's way of going 'look, I created a new genre so I'm the pioneer.' So it's kind of an ego thing, and also it's a way socially for people to create a group that they feel like they can belong to that's different than everyone else (Personal Communication).

The ethnographic questions of how and where these musics are appreciated and by who become strikingly complex. The underground ideology that once defined the character of electronic dance music has gradually dwindled to incorporate a larger worldwide community of new cultures and musical styles. Yet, when one attends current events that are oriented towards electronic music, the environmental qualities that have
defined past underground movements are ever present regardless of the location. The musical nature of these events seems to become fused with their environmental dynamics, echoing electronic music's deep connections with qualities of mystery, illegality, and subcultural identity. Electronic music still embraces the true nature of experimentalism on musical, environmental, and cultural grounds; mixed crowds come together to express their uniqueness in an atmosphere of bonding and uninhibited engagement (Collin 1997:17). What has profoundly changed is the ideology surrounding the underground: practitioners, audience members, spaces, tastes, styles, and attitudes operate on the musical and cultural principles of conscious integration rather than necessary isolation.

The aforementioned changes, developments, and complexities in the unique field of experimental electronic music present an ideal opportunity for its ethnographic examination in a defined geographical area, in the case of this thesis the San Francisco Bay Area. By confining this thesis research to a specific metropolitan area, one can begin to identify patterns of behavior, participation, and development that could be assigned to a larger overall pattern, but never a steadfast model. The San Francisco Bay Area (not to mention the West Coast) has its own exclusive musical and cultural history that can help to better explain the state of its present condition, and also contribute to an understanding of the manifestation of ancillary musical cultures at large. What is important to remember is that 21st century experimental electronic music genres, cultures, and environments can never be researched sui generis. Successful research on

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2 Some of these environmental qualities include psychedelic and strobe lighting, shiny futuristic surfaces and glitter balls of late-sixties and seventies' discotheques; black and grey walls or postmodern tribal styles of eighties 'clubs'; created spaces in industrial districts and remote rural areas of late eighties and early nineties' raves (Thornton 1996:55).
the perpetually changing nature of this music calls for the identification of patterned behaviors among genres, tastes, ideas, social interaction, and geographical locations, some of which may seem completely unrelated yet contain minute strands of similarities between them.

Relevant Scholarship: Contributing to the Dialogue

Most research on electronic music takes one of four roads: the research and analysis of the work of composers, historical accounts, compendiums of interviews or essays, or analysis of a—typically underground—specific social-musical movement.


Books that focus on electronic music movements from a social perspective creatively integrate musical and historical foundations. Sara Thornton examines social and cultural forces within club music, or dance club music cultures. Thornton's Club
Cultures (1996), while slightly dated, focuses on the attitudes, tastes, and subcultural capital of individuals in a non-mainstream (subcultural) environment. Thornton examines club cultures' environmental considerations, historical authenticities, relation with the mainstream, and underground media to present a coherent picture of the social nature of a club environment, even examining the "club" outside of its traditional boundaries (rave).

Kai Fikentscher's book 'You Better Work!' Underground Dance Music in New York City (2000) focuses on a specific geographical area of dance music history and, based on his research, attempts to assign a broader social significance to underground musical movements. Fikentscher not only coherently defines what the underground is but he acutely identifies marginalized cultures that have adopted an underground identity to appreciate music on their own terms. Fikentscher's research also encompasses the "cult and culture of the DJ" (Fikentscher 2000:33), demonstrating that the art of DJ-ing—i.e. creating a musical atmosphere and affecting people's states of mind (Brewster, Broughton 2000:8)—is intimately connected to an underground social environment.

Non-academic books on electronic music attempt to tackle the larger issues of the development of certain movements while sometimes maintaining an innocent nescience about their true meaning, origins, and purpose. This technique simultaneously posits the author as an authority and an innocent, yet enthusiastic, bystander. Ostensibly, the author paints a complete picture, yet the surreptitious reality is that they might not have all of the puzzle pieces or be as "in the know" as devoted fans with intransigent viewpoints.

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Thornton defines subcultural capital as "the embodied or objectified stock an individual possesses while participating in a club culture" (1996:11).

Fikentscher's definition outlines a "protected, possibly secret arena that facilitates opposition, subversion, or delimitation to a larger, dominant, normative, possibly oppressive environment (2000:9)."
good example of this concept is Dan Sicko's book "Techno Rebels: The Renegades of Electronic Funk" (1999). Sicko focuses specifically on Detroit as the locus of techno music, recognizing its founders, contributing environmental factors, and global appeal. Sicko's book claims to "begin the discussion and definition of the genre" (Sicko 1999:11) of techno, and mentions that writing about techno is a "dangerous endeavor" (ibid 10) due to techno's rapidly evolving nature. Sicko also demonstrates how a book on techno could be substantially larger than his 240 pages:

With a form of music that's at least a decade old, and with influences that reach back to the history electronic compositions, repetition, and rhythm-centered African music, a book on techno could easily swell to five times this size, if not be a mere single volume in some sort of "Encyclopedia Electronica" (ibid).

By making this claim from the outset, Sicko asserts that his book is not an authoritative source, but attempts to initiate a discourse. Sicko's endeavor to tackle an entire history of a complex and inconspicuous musical movement is highly credible, yet requires some support from texts that pinpoint and explain specific nuances within the movements, thus rounding out the discourse.

On a more bold front, Matthew Collin's book "Altered State: The Story of Ecstasy Culture and Acid House" (1997) parallels the story of acid house with the emergence of the ecstasy drug from 1970s disco through acid house and illegal rave parties of the 80s and 90s. Collin's vast geographical coverage includes music scenes in Britain, Detroit, Chicago, Ibiza, New York, and California, weaving together a complex narrative of two worlds, music and drugs, that are seemingly inseparable. Collin attempts to legitimize acid house as a major genre by aligning it with worldwide club and drug cultures. On the back flap of the book, one reviewer (Irvine Welsh) praises Collin as having written the
"real history of the last ten years" (qtd. in Collin back cover), insinuating that Collin's coverage of the more lawless activities involved in underground dance music paints a more legitimate picture of its history. Another reviewer (Jon Savage) praises Collin's "first full history of the dance boom" (qtd. in Collin back cover). Hence, Collin highlights acid house's importance as a movement within the greater context of electronic music, possibly creating more connections among midwestern electronic music circles.

While this book may not be a definitive history of dance music itself, it opens up a vast possibility of scholarship concerning other subgenres and their related subcultural qualities.

While the aforementioned texts include a small portion of the research materials to be used throughout this thesis, literature on underground musical movements remains sporadic. This is partly due to the underground's relatively recent disposition in society and its susceptibility to change. Since the 1950s, underground became a "label common to environments where the ideas of social change could be further cultivated" (Fikentscher 2000:10). In the US, "many examples of this change came in the form of artistic expression, which has long been a vehicle for ideas of social progress" including the "music of worship among slaves during the formation of early black churches," jazz, and the socio-cultural avant-garde of "beat poets, performance artists, painters, and musicians" (ibid). Therefore, trying to follow a perpetually kinetic environment that is committed to a progressive social and musical ideology can be extremely challenging. As one of electronic music's primary homes has been within underground environments, it has since taken on a multitude of meanings and definitions.
Research Methods and the Field

This thesis is based on ethnographic fieldwork that took place in the San Francisco Bay Area during the summer months of 2012, specifically June, July, and August. Fieldwork primarily consisted of conducting interviews and attending concerts. Artifacts concerning experimental electronic music in the San Francisco Bay Area such as flyers, posters, photos, and recordings were acquired as well. All observation and interaction based research—interviews and concert attendance—took place in San Francisco and Oakland.

For purposes of this thesis, the San Francisco Bay Area includes the cities of San Francisco and Oakland. While the larger city of San Francisco is the obvious choice as the focal point of this ethnographic fieldwork, I found that Oakland was necessary to include due to its related history with major experimental music developments in San Francisco and the fact that the figures interviewed herein live and function in either one of these two locations. Oakland also possesses a rich social and political history that closely relates to characteristics of San Francisco counterculture and its historically progressive ideologies, as well as combined musical and sociocultural histories that have had a worldwide impact. It is my hope that my fieldwork and reading materials will begin to paint a clearer picture of musical developments in these locations.

A good portion of this research was conducted on the Internet, a "micro-media" (Thornton 1996:157) that has provided instantaneous access to artist pages, equipment information, community websites, audio and visual media, and comment boards. In addition, the individual as the primary personae as opposed to a band in electronic music practice increased the likelihood of a large number of personalized websites for
promotion and presentation, factors that would not have been found—or would have been substantially harder to find—in books or journal articles.

This research began during my first semester at Wesleyan in Dr Su Zheng's class "Practicing Ethnomusicology." My final project was an ethnography on electronic music artists at Wesleyan University, entitled "Wesleyan Electric: An Ethnography of Electronic Music Artists at Wesleyan University." Originally, this project was assigned to assess our knowledge of ethnographic fieldwork skills acquired over the course of the semester. I found that Wesleyan contains a multitude of young artists engaging in electronic music, each identifying themselves in a different way and by different standards. During the course of the project, I participated in many of the same fieldwork activities I employed for this thesis research. That project planted a seed for this thesis by allowing me to practice on a small familiar musical community before examining a larger similar one.

Chapter Descriptions

The chapters in this thesis aim to uncover the fluctuating characteristics of experimental electronic music artists and communities in San Francisco Bay Area by addressing three areas: relevant historical occurrences, an exploration of the current landscape of experimental electronic music from a multitude of perspectives, and my own personal experience.

Chapter One will be a broad historical overview of distinct musical and social movements in San Francisco and Oakland. This chapter will highlight the origination of musical communities, electronic music studios, and artistic attitudes that have helped
shape experimental electronic music practice in the San Francisco Bay Area and contributed to its present-day condition. San Francisco's acute characteristics as the epicenter of 1960s counterculture, its geographical isolation, and its acclimation towards community involvement (Smith 1995:4) have contributed to a centralized, progressive artistic milieu with core values of interaction and free exchanging of ideas. The San Francisco Tape Music Center's commitment to community access and its activities which, to a certain extent, paralleled and foreshadowed the political and social upheaval of the 1960s (Bernstein 2008:37) marks it as a dynamic entity functioning among the sociopolitical and sociocultural activities in the Bay Area.

Chapter One will also include a significant overview of Oakland as an epicenter for west coast hip-hop, one of the more profound examples of DiY (do-it-yourself) musical practice in the Bay Area. While west coast hip-hop has "many parallels to the phenomenal cultural movement that took place in the South Bronx" (Arnold 2006:72), it also has its own unique history of practitioners and organizations that have had a significant local and worldwide impact.

I devote Chapter Two to an in-depth examination of the landscape of experimental electronic music in the San Francisco Bay Area, focusing on artist communities, musical practices, associated genres, artistic philosophies and attitudes, and environmental preferences. The two most evident "camps" involved with experimental electronic music are that of independent composers or composer/performers, and underground artists who primarily associate themselves with alternative spaces, sometimes facilitated by communal organization. While these two camps may appear

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5 "Soundsystems," and organizations that host events oriented primarily towards "dance" music will be explored in-depth in Chapter Two.
separate on the surface, they maintain deep similarities "by the continuing evolution of computer music technology" (Neill 2002:3). In the Bay Area, these camps' social inclinations have adopted a more kaleidoscopic approach to inclusion by focusing on education and "hyphenating" their definitive properties. By focusing on the nature of experimental music practice—and by utilizing my flexible outlines mentioned above—profound comparisons can be made between these two camps in terms of independent practice and organization (DiY), use and purpose of technology, and relation to the larger social sphere.

One social group that continues to be sparsely represented in experimental electronic music is that of women. While there are decidedly more women making electronic music in academic, mainstream, and underground communities in 2012, the domineering gender in all of these environments from composition and performance angles continues to be male. Resulting female perspectives are informative and demonstrate their awareness of this condition in profound ways. Composer Annea Lockwood describes a "great hole, a black hole of no info" of information about women composers (Lockwood in Rodgers 2010:2). A portion of Chapter Two will be an examination of experimental electronic music practice from female perspectives, utilizing poignant texts and information gathered from field interviews. Tara Rodgers book "Pink Noises" (2010) is an excellent account of attitudes, opinions, and insights regarding the activities of major female electronic composers and sound artists. Many of the women Rodgers interviews maintain successful careers as sought-after composers, performers, and instrument builders. Rodgers presents a (somewhat) disparate community of artists that are alive and well, creating and pushing the boundaries of electronic music despite
their relative invisibility. One of the more pleasing sections of Rodgers' book is her complete recontextualization of the origins of electronic music's inherent experimentalism. Instead of relying on Luigi Russolo's brutish militaristic attitude as the locus for exploration, Rodgers introduces a concentrated account of Clara Rockmore's work with the theremin.

Chapter Three will be devoted to my own experiences as an experimental electronic musician in the San Francisco Bay Area, which will compare and contrast with observations in the previous chapters. My BlipVert project (discussed in the "Story" section of the Introduction) has been responsible for producing some of the best music I've ever composed, due in major part to the freedom that I discovered working—i.e. experimenting—with electronic instruments. However, BlipVert has always been a vehicle for developing a personal compositional and performance aesthetic. As my research for this thesis progressed, I began to think more and more about my activities as a composer and performer in a larger historical context. For example, no matter how much I think I may be being truly innovative, there is always some connection that can be made to past musical movements and artists that have "broken the mold." My usage of a Pioneer CDJ could never have been possible were it not for the reinvention of the phonograph as an instrument by 1970s hip-hop DJs. My intricate techniques of collage editing and looping in ProTools find their roots in analog tape splicing. Recently, and perhaps most strikingly, two comments on one of my live videos on YouTube—by users Pedro Oliviera and Phillip Johnston—both exclaim that my performances relate a lot to the energy and sound of 1960s free jazz ("BlipVert Live @ Gaslab: Eat Concrete 'Bassfudge Powerscones' Tour 2009").
It seems that no matter where I turn, some aspect of my ostensible compositional ingenuity pays homage to the innovators of past musical movements. This concept, needless to say, is an incredible revelation for someone who assumed his work was primarily of Eurocentric inspiration, not to mention the result of Eurocentric practice and education. By inserting my own experience into the discourse, I aim to present myself as a case study that is continually changing; an artist whose conclusions about his own aesthetic can be redrawn to reinforce the present-day cultural impact of the underground and the people, music, and environments associated with it.
CHAPTER ONE: THE BAY AREA'S HISTORICAL UNIQUENESS AND INFLUENCES

Geographical Singularities, The Counterculture, and Community in San Francisco in the 1960s

In an 1897 article in the San Francisco Wave, American novelist Frank Norris paints a vivid picture of San Francisco as an isolated entity capable of fostering ingenuity and social development from within its own boundaries:

Perhaps no great city of the world is as isolated as we are. Did you ever think of that? There is no great city to the north of us, to the south none nearer than Mexico, to the west is the waste of the Pacific, to the east the waste of the deserts. Here we are set down as a pin point in a vast circle of solitude. Isolation produces individuality, originality. The place has grown up independently. Other cities grow by accretion from without. San Francisco must grow by expansion from within; and so we have time and opportunity to develop certain unhampered types and characters and habits unbiased by outside influence, types that are admirably adapted to fictitious treatment. (qtd. in Davidson 1989:8)

Norris' eloquent description of San Francisco encapsulates its independence, originality, and seemingly warranted exemption from US mainstream society. San Francisco's solitary nature is second only to its physical beauty, which together create a romantic, mythic, otherworldly marginalized landscape. Jack Kerouac colorfully characterizes this landscape in his poem "October in the Railroad Earth," accentuating Norris' idea of isolation along with the sleepy kineticism of the city itself:

But it was that beautiful cut of clouds I could always see above the little S.P. alley, puffs floating by from Oakland or the Gate of Marin to the north or San Jose South, the clarity of Cal to break your heart. It was the fantastic drowse and drum hum of lum mum afternoon nathin' to do ole Frisco with end of land sadness - the people - the alley full of trucks and cars of businesses nearabouts and nobody knew or far from cared who I was all my life three thousand five hundred miles from birth-O opened up and at last belonged to me in Great America (Kerouac 1959).
Kerouac's touching and edgy depiction of San Francisco and its inhabitants elaborate upon Norris' description to further illustrate the captivating effect of this isolated metropolis. San Francisco's geographical location and its inhabitants⁶ present a carefree, disparate environment steeped in physical beauty and a mysterious social dynamic. Kerouac paints San Francisco as a city possessed with a "pulsating American energy that enlivens and alienates at the same time" (Davidson 1989:14).

San Francisco's singularity as a picturesque, solitary metropolis on the edge of the western continent has long provided a bedrock for ideological alternative communities; a place for "rascally and anarchistic types" from a variety of social, political, and artistic circles to associate and establish their own identities (Bernstein 2008:8). During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the defining characteristics of San Francisco's thriving bohemian community—rugged individualism, experimentation, and interest in non-Western cultures (Hicks 2003:3)—provided an environment free of competition; a liberal and unconstricted social milieu for an individual to assert a new beginning (Smith 1995:29). Hence, a major theme in San Francisco's history is that of a mecca of "otherness," a city where radical new ideas have been discovered and explored together with the reassessment of traditional cultural values. San Francisco does not boast of uniqueness within itself, i.e. an alternative or "underground" culture. Rather, as Kenneth Rexroth has stated: "It [the underground]⁷ is dominant, almost all there is" (in Davidson 1989:11).

This all-encompassing underground ethos is most profoundly seen in 1960s counterculture, which finds its roots in the migration of the Beat Generation from New

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⁶ Kerouac refers to these inhabitants as the "fellaheen" people (Kerouac 1959).
⁷ Parenthetical inclusion by Davidson.
York to San Francisco in the 1950s. Poets and writers such as Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Phillip Lamantia, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Neal Cassady, and Gary Snyder "formed an intellectual community that protested against the oppressiveness and homogeneity of post[WWII] American society" (Bernstein 2008:8). The Beats' aesthetic transcended artistic expression to find meaning and purpose in political, social, and cultural arenas. The dissolution of the boundaries between bohemianism—i.e. artistic radicalism—and popular culture (ibid 9; Smith 1995:xx) and their subsequent re-amalgamation was, fundamentally, an intellectual ideology that had an immense influence on the rising postwar college-educated generation. That many of the beats were participants in some of the more well-known countercultural events—such as the Trips Festival and Human Be-In, both in 1967 (Bernstein 2008:9)—demonstrates their long lasting dedication to their beliefs and their concurrent influence throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Often referred to as the "new class," the 1960s post-war generation gradually adopted a new, radicalized social dynamic, resulting in a greater frankness of public discussion of the varieties of individual behavior (Smith 1995:xx). Hence, everything was called into question:

...family, work, education, success, child-rearing, male-female relations, sexuality, urbanism, science, technology, progress. The meaning of wealth, the meaning of love, the meaning of life—all became issues in need of examination. What is "culture"? Who decides what "excellence" is? Or "knowledge" or "reason"? And where the established institutions did not move quickly enough to join the debate, new institutions were extemporized: free universities, free clinics, food conspiracies, the underground press, collectives, communes, tribal families, alternate vocations. Even the technology that was the dominant culture's pride came in for rethinking and remaking (Roszak 1996:xxvi).
Highlighted by "Berkeley's student-led anti-Vietnam war protests, the radical politics of Oakland's Black Panther Party, and the hippie movement of San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district" (Harrison 2003:35), the Bay Area (San Francisco in particular) provided a fertile breeding ground for a longstanding countercultural philosophy that can still be felt today. The west coast's distance from other centers of power and industry infuses the region with a sense of regeneration and revival, which is coupled with the added benefit of experiencing that revival in an area rife with natural physical beauty.

At the core of this ambitious reassessment of culture, ideas, and social institutions was the affluence of the attendant "new class" of facilitators and participants—thanks in major part to the intrusion of the military industrial complex on American politics—which made possible a striking transformation of the role of the middle class and its visibility in popular culture (Roszak 1996:xv). It is often easy to misconstrue the social nature of 1960s counterculture as a random collection of (mostly) destitute, unorthodox, and marginalized people: fringe artists, troublemakers, and political agitators. However, the affluence of the "new class" afforded the individuals involved an opportunity to drop out of society (and back in again) with relative ease, cushioned by economic benefits such as social programs and parental bank accounts. Instead of using their social position to support and augment their environment, the "new class" challenged the system and attempted to "shake it to its foundations," an endeavor that eventually took root on a much larger scale (ibid xiv-xvi). The educated and affluent social nature of the counterculture—initially brought to action by the aforementioned radical integration of intellectual-artistic avant-gardism with mainstream culture—is chiefly responsible for the movements' proliferation. The traditional ideals of the
American middle class were transplanted with disaffiliation and questioning of the established social order, ultimately sustained and ushered along by economic prosperity. The counterculture's legacy—particularly concerning the redefinition of class distinctions—has had a "profound impact on local knowledge and sensibilities, both of which inform the way today's young Bay Area residents see themselves" (Harrison 2009:35).

Principal among the sensibilities that define the Bay Area in conjunction with its countercultural legacy is a strong sense of community, particularly within artistic scenes. The vast possibilities for a new social order in the 1960s could not be realized without a "sustaining fact of community—the circles, salons, and bars in which artists could invent out of the earthly city a heavenly city of fulfilled potential" (Davidson 1998:16). In addition, the absence of "major label" institutions or artistic "marketplaces" in the Bay Area parallels an absence of an overriding "political system" or "competitive spirit" that governs artistic expression (Harrison 2009:38; Smith 1995:4).

The Beats' worldwide impact and momentum was exerted primarily through their creation of "alternative forms of community" (Davidson 1998:28). Michael Davidson describes the inner dynamics of such a community as well as its social impact:

…the creation of a literary avant-garde depends on complicated forms of bonding and self-definition that establish authority within the group. To the outside, such bonding may seem exclusive and narrow, but to the initiates it is essential for survival. Literary infighting and warfare, rather than undermining the sense of community, are important components in strengthening resolve and developing a strong platform. If this creates insularity, it also forges important types of opposition since by controlling who is "in," the community may also legislate who is "out." This was certainly the case with the Beats, who developed a private argot, dress code, and pattern of behavior designed to affirm group solidarity and, at the same time, keep out the "squares." These communities were based on shared literary interests, to be sure, but they also
reflected sexual and social preferences as well, some years before the sexual and gay liberations. And because sexual preferences often led to (or derived from) alternative theories of family and group, they prefigured the communalist "lifestyle" movements of the late 1960s (ibid).

In analyzing Davidson's passage, one begins to see the inherent power of alternative communal organization. The Beats established their own insular system of activities and social characteristics within American mass society, synthesizing "matters of art, politics, and social theory into lifestyle, which can then be inherited and extended to the larger culture" (ibid 29). While many of the Beats' communal regulations were singular to their own ethos, their fundamental principle of an alternative environment for artistic-social engagement and its successive filtering to larger society remains as one of their most profound contributions to the character of Bay Area artists and artistic organizations, facilitating a strong "DiY" (do-it-yourself) attitude among artistic groups and the idea that even the most disparate individuals can find a sense of belonging outside of mainstream culture. The further metamorphoses of the Beat movement into 1960s counterculture via individuals such as Ken Kesey and the increased presence of psychedelic drug usage (Pinch and Trocco 2002:89) expanded the notion of community to a wide-reaching global perspective. The concept of global community was further amplified by the Vietnam War demonstrations and Civil Rights marches. Overall, communal social behavior was responsible for bringing generations of young people together in demonstrations of communal social activism, revolution, and liberation (ibid).

With many of the Bay Area musicians I interviewed during the course of my research, community seems to be an all-encompassing concept. Community can take on an insular, cliquish concept (much like the Beats), but is more often seen from the
standpoint of broad inclusivity. According to long time San Francisco resident and
musician Pamela Z the Bay Area provides a "nurturing community" where "people are
very interested in each other's work" (Personal Communication). Some Bay Area artists
see community as "appreciating each other's differences" (Wang, Personal
Communication) implying an open, communicative temperament between artists
regardless of their discipline or specialties. Comparisons made to other major
metropolitan areas such as New York City reveal the Bay Area as "more accepting," "laid
back," and "less stressful and strained" regarding musical tastes and artistic attitudes
(Taylor, Personal Communication). As Kenneth Rexroth has observed, San Francisco's
main advantage is that it is not New York (qtd. in Davidson 1998:11). Bay Area artists
who have relocated from the more intensified environment of New York appreciate the
fact that they can present material that is "unpolished" due to Bay Area audiences being
"accepting" and "forgiving," as well as the "cross-pollination" of local musical
communities as opposed to a "claustrophobic" individualism in New York (Moldover,
Personal Communication). Concerning the DiY aesthetic, the Bay Area seems willing to
let a person "do whatever," providing "more opportunities" to musicians who are
"hoofing it, hitting the pavement, doing it themselves" (Diede, Personal Communication).

Regardless of the types of community attitudes that exist among artists in the Bay
Area, the region's overriding sense of interactivity and support in addition to its
independence and DiY proactivity have been longstanding ideologies that are woven
deep into the fabric of its history. For some artists, the sense of community they
experience in the Bay Area combined with the region's physical beauty and progressive
social nature make it an ideal place to establish a base of operations or perhaps a "new
beginning" for themselves (Smith 1995:29), much like the authors, poets, and painters that migrated to California in the early twentieth century.

But, what of the music?

In addition to its rich social history, the synthesis of internal ingenuity with influences of worldwide musical movements has shaped the Bay Area's present-day musical character. To expand on Frank Norris' concept, the region's expansion "from within" has been the direct result of its singularities—e.g. countercultural ethos, physical beauty, isolation, sense of community—and their appeal over time to a growing number of people.

As Theodore Roszak exclaims: "Music inspired and carried the best insights of the counterculture—from folk protest ballads and songs of social significance at the outset to the acid rock that became the only way to reflect the surrealistic turn that America was to take at the climax of the Vietnam War" (1996:xxxiv). However, there was another vital epicenter of music that "added to the protest songs of the folk movement," establishing a reputation for "staging wild art events and happenings" and attracting "the hippest of the hip groups" in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco (Pinch and Trocco 2002:89-90). It is to this center, its history, personae, and purpose that we now turn.

*The San Francisco Tape Music Center: Its Origins and Purpose*

Long before the establishment of any electronic music complex, San Francisco had already become a hub of activity for composers experimenting with new sonic
possibilities through instrument building, cross-cultural composition, and early electronic instruments. Lou Harrison's interest and work with Javanese gamelan led to the construction of an "American gamelan" with Bill Colvig.\(^8\) Henry Cowell's interest in harmonic rhythm led to a 1930 commission of Leon Theremin to build the rhythmicon, essentially the world's first drum machine (Glinsky 2000:135-136).\(^9\) Harry Partch broke new ground in the world of instrument construction, creating such instruments as the Chromelodeon, the Cloud Chamber Bowls, and the Diamond Marimba (see Partch 1974).

After 1960, electronic music studios began to appear throughout the world, some private, and some sponsored by government media centers and universities. Josef Tal, with the assistance of composer Hugh Le Caine, established the Center for Electronic Music in Israel at the Hebrew University in 1961 (Gluck 2005:164-165). The Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center was an important hub of activity, primarily notable for Milton Babbitt's early electronic works (*Composition for Synthesizer*, 1961). However, for an emerging new generation of composers in the 1960s, particularly in the United States, the purpose was to "step out of history" (Chadabe 1997:85) and address the dilemmas that were characteristic of composers who were devoted to working with electronic music, yet lacked the resources to do so (Holmes 1985:72). The exciting artistic and social climate in San Francisco in the 1960s was an ideal locale for the establishment of a new kind of electronic music studio, one that focused on public access, community involvement, and providing an alternative environment for electronic music composition and experimentation free from institutional oversight (e.g. academies,

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\(^8\) Harrison and Colvig's "American gamelan" refers to their construction of an original set of gamelan instruments made primarily from aluminum and iron.

\(^9\) Cowell's interest in Chinese music also led to his exploration and expansion of sliding tone articulation.
government institutions). This new electronic music studio also provided ample resources for electronic music composition as well as opportunities for performance and collaboration with major figures in San Francisco's eclectic artist communities.

The origins of the San Francisco Tape Music Center began at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Pauline Oliveros and Ramon Sender, both young and adventurous composers, created an improvised electronic music studio in the attic of the conservatory, pooling equipment together from, as Oliveros states, from "hither and yon" (qtd. in Chadabe 1997:85). The modest facilities spurned the creative ingenuity of the founders, encouraging them to experiment with the available components, sometimes in unorthodox ways, to create tape pieces featuring revolutionary sonic effects. Some of these components included a two-channel Ampex tape recorder—providing opportunities to experiment with "sound on sound" recording, i.e. overdubbing (Bernstein 2008:9)—and a SilverTone tape recorder which, with its feature of the operator being able to hand wind the tape while recording, could serve as "variable speed machine" (Chadabe 1997:86).

The sparse facilities in the studio also led the composers involved, including Terry Riley and Philip Windsor, to "invent new sounds from everyday objects, often enhancing their acoustical properties with contact microphones and a piano soundboard for reverberation" (Bernstein 2008:10). Pauline Oliveros describes her early sound making processes concerning reverberation, filtering, and her aforementioned "variable speed machine":

I would record acoustic sounds using cardboard tubes as filters. I'd put a microphone at the end of a cardboard tube and a sound source at the other. I used different sized tubes to get different filter characteristics. Sometimes I'd
clamp a sound source to the wall so the wall would act as a resonator and then record it at 3-1/2 or 7-1/2 inches per second and use the hand winding to vary the speed. I used a bathtub as a reverberation chamber (in Chadabe 1997:86).

The establishment of this amateur studio led to the inception of the "Sonics" concert series. The Sonics concerts not only featured original works by the founding members, but also group improvisations with outside artists, which emphasized the founders' "predilection for spontaneous music making" in addition to a wider interest in free improvisation in the 1960s new music scene (Bernstein 2008:11). Terry Riley mentions that improvisation reflected, "the kind of compositions we were doing in those days," a kind of "musical abstract expressionism rather than jazz" (Riley, along with Oliveros and Loren Rush, had established a group that recorded improvisations for KPFA, a Bay Area listener-sponsored radio station) (ibid). The Sonics I concert (December 18, 1961) was advertised as a "bring your own speaker" event, in which different speakers were positioned around the auditorium and wired to a specially configured keyboard, allowing composers to "play" their own works spatially throughout the room and adjoining corridors (ibid 12; Pinch and Trocco 2002:36).

During the course of the Sonics concerts, the concepts of spontaneity, improvisation, and experimentation in all aspects of performance became characteristic of the SFTMC's concert aesthetic, continuing throughout the center's existence. While its primary focus was tape music, the SFTMC's collaboration with a larger avant-garde artistic scene that included the San Francisco Actor's Workshop, the San Francisco Mime Troupe, the Committee Theater, the Dancers' Workshop, and the Opera Theater (Bernstein 2008:2)—not to mention San Francisco's many independent writers, visual
artists, and musicians—imbued the center with deep sense of community and interactive participation across artistic disciplines, hence pushing the boundaries of multimedia performance art. Profound collaborations between composers, dancers, visual artists, writers, and poets "challenged traditional distinctions between performer and audience," formulating a trend in 1960s performance art that critic Michael Kirby referred to as the "new theatre" (Kirby qtd. in Bernstein 2008:23).

Ramon Sender, electronic music composer and co-founder of the San Francisco Tape Music Center, sums up his ultimate hope for the center's mission, artistic mandate, and position in the local community in a 1964 report:

I would like to see the center become a community-sponsored composer's guild, which would offer the young composer a place to work, to perform, to come into contact with others in his field, all away from an institutional environment. Each composer would, through his contact with the center, be encouraged to fulfill his own musical needs and develop his own personal language. He would have the advantage and support of all the facilities of the center, for rehearsals and performances of his music, for contact with other musicians and composers, [and] for work in the electronic music studios. He would be encouraged to involve himself in the musical life of the community-at-large. The community in turn would be offered the services of the center as a music producing agency for films, for plays, for churches, and [for] schools. Such a program, carried through in detail, could produce a revolution (qtd. in Bernstein 2008:18-19).

At the time of Sender's writing, the SFTMC had moved yet again to the eastern side of Haight-Ashbury on 321 Divisadero Street, enjoying only one season in Russian Hill due to a fire that destroyed the building on Jones Street (ibid 17). Sender's revolutionary vision of an electronic music studio capable of community engagement, providing resources for a new generation of progressive composers, and redefining the cultural and
civic life of San Francisco became an ultimate reality. During the next three seasons at the Divisadero building, the SFTMC gained a local and national reputation for staging some of the most exciting and innovative experimental art and multimedia events (ibid 18; Pinch and Trocco 2008:37). Some of the developments at the SFTMC directly contributed to new directions in pop culture artistry and instrument design. One of the most profound innovations at the center concerned the development of the early synthesizer.

Despite the SFTMC's pioneering and renegade approaches to producing and recording sound, Morton Subotnick and Ramon Sender continued to search for alternative methods of making electronic music by moving "away from cutting and splicing [tape] to get something that was more like an analog computer" (qtd. in Pinch and Trocco 2008:37). Subotnick describes the idea:

Our idea was to build the black box that would be a palette for composers in their homes. It would be their studio. The idea was to design it so that it was like an analog computer. It was not a musical instrument but it was modular...It was a collection of modules of voltage-controlled envelope generators and it had sequencers in it right off the bat...It was a collection of modules that you would put together......Our goal was that it should be under $400 for the entire instrument and we came very close (in Dunn 1992:39).

In essence, what Subotnick and Sender envisioned was a "black box" for composers; an "intentional" electronic music device that was not only specifically designed for making electronic music (rather than relying on equipment designed for other purposes), but allowed for an electronic musical device with greater portability and affordability, truly meeting the demands of the electronic music composer (Pinch and Trocco 2008:38-39; Holmes 1985:82).
After meeting Ramon Sender in 1964, Bill Maginnis, the SFTMC's technical director from 1964 to 1966, began working with engineer (and Berkeley dropout) Don Buchla. Buchla had already been in the process of developing his own version of a voltage-controlled synthesizer similar to Robert Moog's design.\textsuperscript{10} Moog was an east coast based physicist and one of the first developers of solid state technology in electronic instruments, eventually developing the Moog synthesizer as well as the eponymous company, Moog Music (Holmes 1985:78-82). However, Buchla's singular developments were in many ways reactions to the fundamental creative philosophies at the SFTMC. For one, Buchla's synthesizer—the first prototype, the "Buchla Box," was brought to the SFTMC in 1965—employed the use of electronic sequencing, a device that could produce pre-determined control voltages in an endless cycle, a development that mimicked (and was aimed at eliminating) the time-consuming activity of tape-splicing (Pinch and Trocco 2008:39-40). Secondly, Buchla's synthesizer employed touch sensitive plates rather than a keyboard, which stressed Buchla's appreciation of randomness—an aesthetic similar to the regular improvisatory activities at the SFTMC concerts—and his aversion to referring to his idea as a "synthesizer" (Holmes 1985:83; Dunn 1992:39). The Buchla allowed for greater freedom of playability; moving away from the "dictatorial" nature of keyboard based design and more towards the idea of "controllerism." Controllerism is the idea of using an electronic device to "control" or manipulate sound via unconventional interfaces rather than "play" sound using a set

\textsuperscript{10} Don Buchla developed his synthesizer and its inherent components with no knowledge of Moog's activities on the east coast. Moog's first prototype was in the summer of 1964, while Buchla's appeared in 1965. The two inventions were similar in their uses of voltage control, amplifiers, filters, and patch wires, but each were markedly different in their playability (Pinch and Trocco 2008:41-42)
design,\textsuperscript{11} (Pinch and Trocco 2008:44) a concept that Buchla himself identifies as "separating sound from structure" (Dunn 1992:39). Buchla's design freed electronic music from the constraints of the studio allowing composers greater flexibility in where and how they work, a concept which had, and continues to have, an immense impact on contemporary culture (Bernstein 2008:31).

The SFTMC's 1964-66 seasons were filled with some of its, as well as 1960s San Francisco's, most notable events, placing the center at the forefront of new musical developments in the United States. In March and April 1964, Pauline Oliveros organized a six-day festival celebrating the work of David Tudor (TudorFest), featuring compositions by Alvin Lucier (Action Music for Piano - 1962), Toshi Ichiyanagi (Music for Piano #4 - 1960), and John Cage (Atlas Eclipticalis - 1961-62) (Chadabe 1997:89). In November 1964, Terry Riley's (now legendary) minimalist work In C was premiered, which was originally commissioned by the SFTMC. Another commissioned work, Steve Reich's It's Gonna Rain, was premiered in February 1965 (ibid). Ultimately, the Trips Festival in 1966, the center's final season, was the watershed event for the SFTMC in addition to the history of underground arts in San Francisco (Bernstein 2008:5). The three day festival featured a massive integration of Bay Area avant-gardism and psychedelic arts: the Grateful Dead, Big Brother and the Holding Company, Don Buchla using his modular synthesizer to manipulate live music, a "Worship" service with dancer Chloe Scott and composer Lou Harrison, Pauline Oliveros' A Theatre Piece (1965), Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters performing Psychedelic Symphony (after distributing

\textsuperscript{11} This concept will be discussed in-depth in Chapter Two.
LSD throughout the crowd), and a host of experimental dance, theatre, and light shows (ibid; Chadabe 1997:90).

Ironically, the success of the SFTMC eventually brought an end to its activities as an independent institution. The Rockefeller Foundation offered the SFTMC a grant of $200,000 over a four year period, provided that it align itself with an academic institution. In the summer of 1966, the SFTMC moved to Mills College, eventually becoming the Mills Tape Music Center. After the move, many of the original founders of the SFTMC left to pursue other endeavors, with only Pauline Oliveros remaining as musical director of the center until 1967 and Bill Maginnis staying on as technical director until 1968.

From its beginnings until its alignment with Mills College, the San Francisco Tape Music Center functioned as an autonomous collective of musicians committed to independence, resourcefulness, and civic interaction. The SFTMC's removal of barriers between artistic disciplinary boundaries and its "radical aesthetic applied to electronic music" (Bernstein 2008:34-37) not only illustrates the methodology behind the progressive social re-contextualization of the counterculture, it also prominently demonstrates one of the first "DiY" models applied to experimental electronic music in the Bay Area. Ultimately, the founders saw themselves as "pursuing an alternative path away from academic high modernism" (ibid) by creating a community based organization that supported progressive creativity over rigid traditionalism and institutionalization, a concept analogous to the Beats' idea of alternative communities, which also encompassed the "small presses, underground newspapers, and filmmaker's collectives that increasingly emerged during the 1950s and 1960s as alternatives to corporate control and
commercialization of the arts" (ibid). The SFTMC was both emblematic and a product of its time period, establishing itself (for a time) as a national organization, eventually finding a home—despite the despair of Oliveros and Subotnick (Chadabe 1997:90-91)—as an integral part of an equally progressive institution. Regardless of the SFTMC's conclusion, its principles, sociopolitical inclinations, and singular events mark it as an integral part of music history in the Bay Area.

Bay Area Hip-Hop: Oakland and the DiY Underground

As we have seen, the Bay Area, San Francisco in particular, provided an ideal location—geographically, culturally, politically, and socially—for the origination and development of a unique kind of musical community. The San Francisco Tape Music Center not only pioneered the notion of experimentalism in electronic music (through improvisation and the unconventional use of electronic components), it focused its energy outward, collaborating with the Bay Area's rich panoply of artistic organizations and making its resources available for broad public access, thus "expanding itself from within" and functioning as a working model for the sociocultural and sociopolitical milieu in which it existed.

However, the Bay Area's surrounding urban environment is home to another kind of musical experimentalism that is the result of independence and a profound DiY ethos rooted in a diverse and complex socioethnic background, that of hip-hop and hip-hop DJ-ing. The "Bay Area hustle," i.e. the idea of a "savvy, independent minded business approach to life that willfully embraces nonconventional means of pursuing artistic and career ambitions" (Harrison 2009:35) is elemental in understanding the rise and
proliferation of hip-hop music in the Bay Area. While the same kind of mentality (a "hustle") could be applied to the Bronx, the birthplace of hip-hop, the Bay Area's "distance from other centers of power" (Davidson 1989:8) in conjunction with many of its regions (in our case Oakland) paralleling the Bronx as severely neglected and economically depressed areas distinguish its contributions to hip-hop from technical, musical, and social perspectives. For one, Bay Area hip-hop's stylistic influences of funk and usage of live instrumentation in both hip-hop and rap—along with its localized independent labels—has subjected it to "fewer pressures as to how it should sound, which resulted in widespread creativity and innovation" (ibid 76; Arnold 2006:77).

Since the 1920s, Oakland has undergone three periods of popular insurgency: the occupation by the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, a wave of massive post-WWII labor strikes, and the rise of black activism and black power politics in the 1960s. Each of these movements "arises from a different social location or base, adopts a different form, and articulates a different collective identity, centered on ethnicity, class, and race, respectively," all of which "occurred as part of nationwide social and political mobilizations that swept across twentieth-century urban America" (Rhomberg 2004: 1-4). Thus, Oakland from 1920 to the late 1970s embodies a continually changing plane of mass mobilization—accompanied by vastly different political regimes—from socioeconomic, political, and racial perspectives, resulting in a climate of shifting urban development considerations. This dynamic of constant social and political change has ultimately left Oakland without a fundamental central political community or sociopolitical structure. The absence of such political and social structure is starkly noted
in reports from the Oakland Project, a major study of Oakland politics in the 1960s and 70s by UC Berkeley political scientists. The Oakland Project study identified Oakland's "'non-group, non-political'" social environment, and that [Oakland] "as a city does not exist; it is a collection of neighborhoods without community" (qtd. in Rhomberg 2004:175). Oakland Project member Arnold Meltsner further illustrates this concept within the local political arena:

The usual grand drama of political scientists, the electoral battles for office, the conflict of interests and groups, and the disparities between men who seek power and men who have it is muted in a mélange of separate public arenas and private concerns (qtd. in Rhomberg 2004:173).

As a city subjected to periods of massive social change and disparate, competing political entities the sociopolitical terrain becomes "deeply fragmented and uneven…divided by race, class, and other forms of structural inequality" (ibid 199).

As is usually the case, the working class, low-income, and low-resource populations—in Oakland's case this has been, and continues to be, blacks—usually bear the brunt of this kind of political unevenness and fragmentation. City governments become “dependent on property taxes,” and are thus “constrained to seek economic development and avoid expensive commitments to high-needs, low-resource populations” (ibid). Between 1980 and 1988, Oakland lost a combined twelve thousand jobs in many of its vital industries such as traditional manufacturing, transportation, communications, and utilities, devastating the job market for Oakland's working-class black community. Nearly 23 percent of black families lived below the poverty line in 1989. A 1992 report designated every census tract in East Oakland as "medically underserved, based on the
prevalence of poverty, infant mortality rates, and the shortage of primary care physicians" (ibid 186).

If these problems aren't enough, there is the ever-present epidemic of crime and drugs. East Oakland—home to "Deep East Oakland," an area once referred to as the "killing fields" by Oakland rap group Black Dynasty—suffers from violent conflict over drug turfs, police corruption, and murders that are reduced to "meaningless statistics" in the greater public sphere (Arnold 2006:72). Eric Arnold's description of a murder involving an individual simply named "homicide #29" (based on an eponymous article in an October 1999 edition of the East Bay Express) illustrates the hollow, desolate anonymity that often follows such seemingly unending crime:

Police were not sure what the dispute was about. All we know of this individual is his age (21) and the fact that he lived on 55th Street in North Oakland—ironically, the same neighborhood once occupied by Merritt Junior College, where the Black Panther Party had been founded, 26 years earlier (2006:71).

The violent and economically depressed urban area of Oakland, specifically East Oakland, has birthed one of the most profound examples of DiY artistic culture in the Bay Area, that of underground hip-hop. The progenitor of underground hip-hop in the Bay Area and the unquestionable archetype of the aforementioned "hustler" mentality that permeates local hip-hop culture is Todd Shaw, aka Too $hort. Shaw began rapping in the early 1980's, making and selling custom made rap cassette tapes (aka "tape slanging") recorded in his bedroom on "mismatched stereo equipment and a Radio Shack mixer" (Jam qtd. in Harrison 2009:36). Rather than avoid his surroundings, Shaw embraced them by marketing his talents to a highly localized fan base, which at the time was mostly
made up of drug dealers and whoever frequented the local drug territories. In an interview with *Source* magazine in 2001, Shaw himself describes his entrepreneurial spirit of producing customized rap tapes with his partner Freddie B, seemingly infiltrating the violent and unstable environment of drugs and crime with a unique and bold independent creativity:

We went down to one of the little drug turfs where they sell the dope and started selling (tapes)... We'd do a customized thing for you, where we'd put your name in it and talk about your neighborhood, your car, your kid, or your girl, whatever you wanted in it, and we'd put it in there for you (Shaw qtd. in Arnold 2006:73).

Shaw's talent of creative interaction with some of the more (perhaps) dangerous individuals of Oakland is best illustrated in a story involving a local drug dealer named "Hot Lips:"

One day we were just rapping and Hot Lips was like, 'I'm really not interested in what you're doing. I don't want to hear that shit. If you had my name in that shit, though, I'd play it.' And the next day we had a tape with his name in it and twenty bucks in our pocket (Jam qtd. in Harrison 2009:36).

From these fiercely independent beginnings, Shaw eventually landed a record deal with Jive Zomba records, and has since established a highly successful solo career. The image of Todd Shaw making music in his bedroom, manufacturing ready to sell cassette tapes, and subsequently targeting and attracting a localized fan base through customization dominates the folklore of Bay Area hip-hop (Harrison 2009:36). The Oakland hip-hop and rap scene and its inherent qualities of independent marketing and distribution—primarily spearheaded by Todd Shaw—inspired artists "within a 50 mile radius of Oakland to follow their example and make their own self-produced, self-
distributed variations on hip-hop" (Arnold 2006:73). Todd Shaw's visionary entrepreneurial spirit and success has since spawned a region wide indie-friendly entrepreneurial atmosphere, as well as a litany of similar success stories from different Bay Area locations. In 1990, artists such as Vallejo's E-40, Hayward's Spice One, Richmond's Calvin T and Magic Mike, Oakland's Digital Underground and MC Hammer, and San Francisco's I.M.P. and Paris were among the many Bay Area artists producing their own material—e.g. tapes, LP's, albums—on independent labels (ibid 73-74).

Highlighting Shaw's example, the underground nature of Bay Area hip-hop is most prominently seen in its capacity to "blur the distinction between musicians and fans" as a result of the absence of an overriding political system (i.e. a major label record company). Thus, the potential for inclusion in the overall musical scene is not only more broad, but any boundaries of exclusivity are essentially non-existent, allowing for a freer environment where "every emcee's a fan, and every fan's an emcee" (Harrison 2004).

Bay Area DJ Rasta Cue-Tip further explains this dynamic:

We've never had the major labels here so we've never had the influx of that political system. We've never had somebody telling us 'this is the shit, this is not the shit.' We've never had nobody tell us, ' you can't put this out, we're putting this out instead. We've never had nobody telling us that so it lets us have our freedom of expression (qtd. in Harrison 2009:38)

The sense one gets from Cue-Tip's concise quote within the context of Todd Shaw's informal structure of community interaction (or perhaps integration), independent distribution, and entrepreneurship is that of a free-flowing and unsanctioned environment of musical expression that rewards the truly innovative, resourceful, and self-motivated artist who can ultimately find a home amongst like-minded individuals.
The mentality of this kind of environment is further reflected in local merchants and in Bay Area artists' continued ambition to seek out new methods of independent "hustling." Local Bay Area vendors and the Internet have increased the capacity for community interaction and a DiY entrepreneurial spirit among underground hip-hop artists, providing structure-based retail establishments for sale of materials and unique platforms for promotion, networking, and distribution. Companies such as Berkeley's Amoeba Music and Leopold's and Oakland's T's Wauzi all maintain a commitment to supporting local artists and carrying local music (ibid 39; see Orr 1995). Anthony Harrison mentions "at the start of 2001, the head hip-hop buyer at Amoeba Music is San Francisco reported that an estimated 70 to 75 percent of all local music brought into the store by artists themselves (for retail sales) fell under the category of hip-hop." (2009:39). In the late nineties through the early turn of the century, Bay Area hip-hop artists were quick to embrace the possibilities of the Internet (e.g. hustling tapes on discussion boards, setting up websites), as they "paralleled the DiY distribution practices most local artists had been raised on" (ibid). After being released from their record labels, Bay Area hip-hop group Hieroglyphics "resurfaced" as underground heroes with a personal website (www.heiroglyphics.com) and independent record label (Hieroglyphics Imperium) (ibid; Ducker 2004).

While there are other groups that Bay Area hip-hop artists credit for providing a model for independent success (e.g. the Living Legends, the Mystic Journeymen), Todd Shaw's proactivity and work ethic is the quintessential example, and blueprint, of the Bay Area DiY music model from creative, economic, and community (or "scene") standpoints. Shaw's model has not only been validated by his subsequent successful solo
career, it has created a viable aesthetic for underground artists throughout the Bay Area regardless of their stature; an aesthetic they can take pride in, cultivate, network with, and independently expand. Underground hip-hop in the Bay Area requires no external influence for its own proliferation. As Frank Norris might suggest, its growth occurs "from within."

*Bay Area Radio, Turntablism, and the ITF*

Across the Bay from Oakland exists another locale, Daly City (i.e. South San Francisco) that is responsible for the rise of another kind of hip-hop that defines the notion of electronic music experimentalism, that of turntablism. As a musical practice that found its way to the Bay from the Bronx, turntablism maintains special roots and significance in the Bay Area due to the establishment of the ITF (International Turntablism Federation). The Bay Area encouraged the rise and expanse of turntablism; DJs who "manipulate recordings in live performance, transforming preexisting recorded sounds into wholly new music" (Katz 2010:125). Turntablism has in turn given rise to what Mark Katz refers to as the "performative DJ" (2012:5), i.e. the idea of taking the DJ out their role as a musical "presenter" (Brewster, Broughton 2000:8) and reassigning them as performers through manipulation of electronics and source musical material. Like many of the activities at the San Francisco Tape Music Center, the idea of the performative DJ perfectly illustrates the idea of experimentalism in relation to music technology. Moreover, the strong ties turntablism has to the Bay Area further exemplifies the significance of the region in the larger course of hip-hop history as well as its impact on modern musical culture.
The popularity of hip-hop music in the Bay Area is due to the integration of college and community radio with larger, more commercial urban radio. San Francisco's KMEL-FM—one of the country's leading urban radio stations in the early 1990s, also known as "the people's station"—"became one of the first crossover pop stations in the nation to target young multiracial audiences with hip-hop, house, and dancehall music" (Chang 2005:440). This crossover was achieved by KMEL's integration with "one of the strongest campus and community radio networks in the country" (ibid). Beginning in the 1980s—the "golden era' of hip-hop (Schloss 2004:39)—radio jocks from local stations such as KPOO, KZSU, KUSF, and KALX—at the time all advocating local and east coast hip-hop—were recruited by KMEL to "attract the rest of the pop music audience" (KK Baby in Chang 2005:441). By adopting the talents of local radio, KMEL was able to add unique dimensions of new urban music and community-oriented programming to its larger commercialized format, eventually taking root on a national scale:

KMEL's music shows, community-affairs talk-show programming, and its pioneering Summer Jam concerts were soon imitated throughout the country. The station helped launch the rap careers of Tupac Shakur, [MC] Hammer, Digital Underground, Too Short [Todd Shaw], and E-40...Although much smaller than Chicago and Los Angeles, the Bay Area became the number two hip-hop market in the country (Chang 2005:441).

There can be little doubt that Bay Area radio was responsible for DJ Qbert's first exposure to Herbie Hancock's 1983 hit single "Rockit," which features record scratches by Grandmaster D.ST. As one of the founding members of the Invisibl Skratch Picklz, DJ Qbert (Richard Quitevis) has established himself as one of the world's premiere turntablists. Quitevis' original fascination with turntablism came about from a distinctive aural effect heard in Hancock's track:
Outer space music...I didn't know it was a record or anything—I just knew it was going *wheesht wheesht whusht*. I didn't know it was vinyl, I didn't know what the hell it was. I just thought it was...weird (Quitevis in Katz 2012:93).

Quitevis' early experiments with record scratching in the 1980s—along with Michael Schwartz aka Mix Master Mike, the additional founding member of the Invisibl Skratch Picklz—marks an important historical moment in hip-hop from both technological and cultural perspectives. Quitevis, along with Schwartz, DJ Apollo, DJ 8-Ball, DJ Shortcut, and DJs Celskiii and Deeandroid represent the rise and proliferation of the Bay Area Filipino American DJ community which "more than any other, spurred the rise and spread of turntablism" (Katz 2012:137). These individuals' "reconception and redesign of a tool [phonograph] central to the work of the modern DJ" (ibid 136) is a crucial Bay Area musical development in terms of a DiY, experimental approach to hip-hop, eventually gaining appeal on a national scale with the rise of record-scratching crews in Los Angeles, New York, and the Philippines itself.

Turntablism, according to Mark Katz, is a style of hip-hop performance, involving the manipulation of recordings, or as Kai Fikentscher suggests, "mediated music" (2000:15) in live performance. While turntablists utilize a setup similar to traditional DJs—two record players (turntables), DJ mixer—the equipment is recontextualized to adopt a variety of highly specific and sophisticated techniques for manipulating sound, such as record-scratching (involving a multitude of different styles), beat juggling, looping, and on-the fly sampling. Mark Katz describes the techniques of scratching and beat juggling, two of the most common turntablist techniques:

The most basic scratch, typically known as the baby...requires one hand to move the disc back and forth while the stylus is on the record...A broader
The vocabulary of scratches is available with two hands, one on the record and the other operating the mixer to shape the sound. The crab is one of the most impressive scratches to see... while the record hand does a baby scratch, the other hand bounces the crossfader between the thumb and each of the other fingers in quick succession to create a rapid burst of sound.

Beat juggling... requires two turntables and involves isolating and repeating discrete passages, alternating ("juggling") them between the turntables in counterpoint. When done well it looks easy, but, as with juggling chainsaws, the smallest error can have disastrous results (2010:135).

Turntablism places emphasis on the "immediacy of the physical contact between the hand and the disc (record) that turntables allow" (ibid 130), and further incorporates a manipulative as well as performative component to the sound reproduction process. Turntablism effectively allows for an unlimited range of sonic options: "If you're eloquent at your style on two turntables with all these effects in it too, the sky's the limit. You can do dub reggae tricks, you could rap tricks, you could do all types of different things" (Craig in Lee 1998).

The subsequent development of turntablist culture in the Bay Area as a result of Quitevis (and others') influence involved the development of scratch "crews"— groups of turntablists with similar aesthetics that function like a traditional band—and eventually to competition between crews and individuals in the form of DJ battles. From its informal, urban origins in the 1970s in the Bronx, "the DJ battle has blossomed into an international phenomenon with governing bodies and corporate sponsorship" (Katz 2010:131). Concerning Bay Area Filipino DJs, the development of DJ crews as a result

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12 Some of the better known organizations responsible for hosting early formal DJ battles include NMS (New Music Seminar; its DJ battle is now discontinued), and DMC (Dance Music Community).
of a "deeply socially inter-networked" cultural community that supports "a preponderance of social events and festivities in which music plays an important role" (Wang in Katz 2010:146) inserted a singular collectivized perspective into a largely individual competitive arena. In 1992 and 1993 Quitevis and Schwartz, performing as the Dream Team, won the DMC World DJ Championships, marking the only years that a crew won the competition. After forming the Invisibl Skratch Picklz in 1995, Quitevis and Schwartz (along with DJ Apollo) "were the best-known and perhaps the best group altogether, performing across the world and doing as much to bring attention to the art of the turntable as anyone since D.ST scratched on 'Rockit' more than a decade earlier" (Katz 2012:140).

Thanks to the foundation laid by Quitevis, Schwartz, and others, the successive galvanization of turntablism in the Bay Area in the mid-1990s is due to the creation of the International Turntablist Federation in 1996 by Alex Aquino. Functioning in an administrative capacity in the Bay Area turntablist scene (Aquino was not a DJ but managed the Invisibl Skratch Picklz and other Bay Area turntable artists through the 1990s), Aquino's twofold purpose in creating the ITF was to expand the structure of the DJ battle while allowing the overall focus to remain on authentic turntable technique. The ITF's mission contributed to more variations of the DJ battle, hence incorporating more expressive potential into turntablism's technical craft. The sponsoring of team battles allowed more possibilities for collaborative performances by DJ crews, elaborating on the Skratch Picklz's pioneering victory at the DMC championships in 1992 and '93. The ITF also introduced "Category Battles"…specialized competitions that

which to this day host the World DJ Championships ("DMC World DJ Championships - The Home of the World's Biggest DJ Competition").
focused on either beat juggling or scratching," and "'Advancement' battles, which were open to all types of 'beat/noise manipulation'" (Katz 2012:143). By focusing on rudimentary elements, the ITF perpetuated the popularity of turntablism by recognizing it as a legitimate art form and performative musical practice, helping to "advance the art of turntablism worldwide" (ibid).

The ITF's focus on technique also managed to "isolate turntablism from mainstream DJ-ing and hip-hop in general" (ibid). Whether or not this is a positive aspect of turntablism's proliferation is open to question. The most salient concept regarding Bay Area turntablism is its worldwide validation as a sophisticated and comprehensive performative art. Thanks to the efforts of the Invisibl Skratch Picklz, Alex Aquino, and the Bay Area Filipino American DJ community turntablism maintains a distinct place among experimental electronic music artistry.

The South San Francisco turntablist community and the creation of the ITF demonstrate a profound sense of cultural ownership of a highly original style of experimental electronic music. That this ownership has occurred in the Bay Area further validates the efficacy of the region's aforementioned qualities of musical and social-musical reassessment (as seen with the SFTMC and Oakland hip-hop). Turntablism neatly encompasses the fundamental musical outline of this thesis: DiY creative exploitation (Schloss 2004:39) of technological equipment to create a revolutionary aesthetic from, to borrow a term, scratch.
CHAPTER TWO: THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE OF EXPERIMENTAL ELECTRONIC MUSIC IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA

"Do it Yourself": Renegade Performers, Composers, and Administrators

The following quotes from Bay Area electronic musicians exemplify the do-it-yourself attitude concerning artistic practice in the region:

I think to push anything new out there in the world DiY is the only means to make it happen. Because in the beginning of anything there is hardly ever any support from other means (Wang, Personal Communication).

[Regarding a DiY aesthetic]: There's simply no other way to do it for most experimental electronic artists in the Bay Area. No one is going to come along and hand them a golden ticket—plus, the fun is doing what you want, how you want to do it (Fields, Personal Communication).

The "do-it-yourself"-ness is very fresh and special to the Bay Area. People build their own instruments and create their own systems for making electronic music and performance. That's always been something that's really prevalent here (Z, Personal Communication).

One almost interprets a sense of pride when reading these statements, as if DiY is a driving force behind experimental electronic music (or any kind of music) practice in the San Francisco Bay Area; a concept unique to those artists who can successfully harness its nuances. As we have seen from the previous chapter, the region has in fact had a long history of grassroots DiY activity concerning music, specifically electronic music. The region's "distance from other centers of power" (Davidson 1989:8) further provided a place where the individual could establish their own methodology for experimentation, effectively building their own models for marketing, promotion, event organization, community outreach, creative ingenuity, and formulation of artistic
opinions. In the following chapter, I will attempt to expose and examine these methodologies in the context of two arenas: electronic musicians (e.g. those who identify themselves as composers, composer/performers, instrumentalists); and underground organizations, or the traditional union of environmental specifics (club and rave atmospheres) with "dance" music. Through examination and analysis of ethnographic data (interviews, event ethnographies), this chapter will ultimately attempt to illuminate the identities, attitudes, creative methods, community relations, and proactive energies existing within these two arenas.

Establishing Identity - DJs, Electronic Musicians and Interrelated Experimental Aesthetics

As composer Ben Neill points out, "popular and high-art computer music…are two worlds that rarely intersect, but that seem inevitably drawn together at this juncture in history" (2002:3). The separation of these two worlds, as Neill suggests, concerns rhythm. The aesthetics of complexity, dissonance, and obscurity as taught by academic institutions to aspiring composers stand in direct contrast to elements of pulse and rhythm employed by the dance club DJ or techno artist. The presence or absence of rhythmic content "draws the dividing line between serious and vernacular, visceral and intellectual" (ibid).

However, the research for thesis has uncovered a multitude of interrelationships between electronic artists who either embrace or disregard rhythmic content. As will be shown, rhythmic content is only one of many mitigating factors concerning these interrelationships. The most salient factors concern identity through experimental use of technology, space, genre adherence, and community relations.

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aesthetic approaches" that in turn have reformulated how electronic musicians identify themselves (ibid). As newer and more sophisticated music technology finds its way into creative endeavors, so too do their users find their way into newer performance environments, technological environments, musical definitions, and social scenarios. Music that is "appreciated more in physical than intellectual terms" (Chadabe qtd. in Neill: 4) continues to adopt high-art techniques: "experimental live performance techniques," and the "extensive use of experimental software and hardware" (Neill 2002:4). Conversely, techniques and tools that are specifically geared towards producing music for broad based public appeal can be used as new technological approaches for musicians whose music is "aimed at an elite group of listeners" (ibid). DJs and turntablists may find themselves equally at home in the dance club and the concert hall, while a composer trained in creating high-art computer music (independently and academically) can appeal to a larger section of the public.

DJ-ing introduces additional considerations into the discourse. The DJ introduces concepts of "presentation," emotional crowd "communication," music "collection," and "mixing" (Brewster and Broughton 2008:10-11) into the arena of live electronic music performance and, in some cases, composition. Traditionally, the DJ's arena to demonstrate these skills has been the dance club, bringing with them an "incredible amount of power" to provide people with a "memorable event" (Morabito in Rodgers 2010:167). However, new technology—CDJ players, mp3 players, effects modules, virtual DJ environments—provides more options for the DJ to integrate concepts of sound manipulation and "improvisational decisionmaking" in their performances (see Katz 2012; Dobrian 2001). No longer is the DJ confined to vinyl records or record
players; the DJs multi-dimensional role is expanded to include musician, improviser, on-the-fly composer, and even instrumentalist. While Mark Katz cleverly terms this kind of musician as a "performative DJ" (2012:8), I wish to emphasize the importance of experimentalism (particularly relating to technology) as one of the defining characteristics of such an individual. In turn, as experimentalism defines practice so too does it make ambiguous the DJ's musical and social role.\(^\text{14}\)

In ascertaining the interrelated nature of these diverse musicians whose "rigid outlines shift in the shimmering air" (Slobin 1993:x), I will be occasionally referencing the flexible conditions for experimentalism I proposed in the Introduction (pages 9-14). These conditions include creative exploitation of technology (#1), label ambiguity (#2), the DiY aesthetic (#3), concept combination (#4), and adherence to a multitude of styles and genres (#5). Each of the individual descriptions in this section will include a "What is Experimental?" section, which will attempt to highlight the indicated elements of experimentalism as essential to the identity of the individual (or individuals) in question. As I reveal the unique characteristics of Bay Area electronic musicians, I hope to illuminate their individual qualities while demonstrating their connections to each through musical, technological, and social properties.

Brandon Taylor, an electronic musician in his 30s and longstanding member of the 5lowershop "soundsystem,"\(^\text{15}\) sees the worlds of the electronic musician and DJ melding together more due to technological developments:

If you make your own music, everyone would prefer to see you play live. It's all about you coming to the table with something enjoyable and cool…I'm DJ-

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\(^{14}\) See point two under "What is Experimental" in the Introduction.

\(^{15}\) Soundsystems will be examined in detail later on in the chapter.
ing at this party coming up actually...being a DJ now, you can just do it off your laptop and you're still DJ-ing, whereas a few years ago people would say 'what is he doing, he's not using vinyl, he's not DJ-ing.' Conversely, people could say 'he's not making his own music because he's DJ-ing.'

It's the technology. Classically, the person who was just spinning records is now using software and they're cutting things up live and remixing right there. Maybe they're using other people's material as source material, maybe they're using their own. If you didn't go behind and look at the laptop screen, you might not know what the hell they're doing (Taylor, Personal Communication).

According to Kai Fikentscher (2000:35), "the general notion of a DJ is that of a person who operates a turntable." However, based on Taylor's above statements, this image has taken a backseat to creative ingenuity through technological means. Taylor's own proclivities for musical expression primarily deal with Ableton Live.

Ableton Live attempts to combine virtually all aspects of electronic music production into one package, such as a live performance controller, effects processing, sampling, and mixing ("What is Live?"). From the software perspective, Ableton allows a user to work in "real-time," without interrupting a user's "creative flow" (ibid). This is to say that a user has complete independence when composing their music; mixing, editing, arranging, and programming can be enacted within a malleable software environment that allows the user to "add, reorder or remove devices" and "play with Live's flexible tracking routine" (ibid) at a moment's notice. As indicated by the Ableton Live company itself, the software program functions as a "unique sketchpad for improvising, playing, and performing with musical ideas" (ibid). Ableton's inclusion of instrument sound kits, effects, and MIDI enhance the variability of the software environment.
The other half of Ableton's versatility can be demonstrated in its compatibility with "instruments and controllers of all kinds" such as MIDI keyboards, iPads, and iPhones, Ableton's own "Push" controller (ibid), and the AKAI company's Ableton Performance Controller specifically designed for interacting with the Ableton software environment ("AKAI APC40 Ableton Performance Controller at AMS"). One of Ableton's poignant marketing points is "software you can play" ("What is Live?"), which encourages users to take their material out of the studio environment and experiment with live performance. The compatibility with popular communication devices such as iPhones and iPads makes the idea of performance even more accessible, suggesting that a user doesn't have to learn or invest in expensive hardware devices; everyday objects can now become tools for performance.

Ableton's versatility allows someone like Brandon Taylor to add a completely unique and challenging dimension to live performance that effectively melds the world of the DJ with the world of the musician. Taylor explains his process:

I use the Ableton controller like an instrument. I don't just play tracks when I play live. Live, all my stuff is in three second loops that I'm cutting up, mixing, and working with. I don't want to touch the mouse, if I can help it…My iPhone is actually a big part of things now, this functions as a wireless controller for Ableton Live…(Personal Communication).

What is Experimental?

Taylor's identity can be flexibly outlined in all of the points listed. For one, his exploitation of technology includes his unique use of the iPhone as a live controller for the Ableton software. He also uses "weird plug-ins," "modular stuff," and "circuit bent toy keyboards" (ibid) to widen his palette of sonic possibilities (see Photo 1). Secondly, Taylor's opinion on DJ-ing as well as his own practice with Ableton shifts Fikentscher's
"general notion" of the DJ into a completely new realm. Instead of being confined to presenting vinyl based mediated music, Taylor is able to perform his own original creations with a program that provides options for performing as a DJ or in a strict concert setting. While Taylor's DiY use of technology and aesthetic development is self evident, he uses other software programs (Fruity Loops), field recordings, and his additional abilities as a "guitar player" (Taylor, Personal Communication) to build upon his already eclectic skill set. His use of Ableton controller as an "instrument" (ibid) can be identified as a combined extension of his aptitude with electronics and guitar. The fifth point—experimental electronic music, while blurring roles, can inadvertently encompass innumerable styles, genres, and identities—demonstrates the multi-dimensional nature of Taylor's image as an electronic musician, and quite possibly his music.

Pamela Z, a well-known Bay Area based composer, performer, vocalist, educator, and member of the steering committee for the San Francisco Electronic Music Festival sees the infusion of DJ culture into electronic music as creating a grey area of identity. She describes her opinion of the DJ in a curatorial role, and their place in the SFEMF:

…when we first started doing the [SFEMF] we were immediately deluged with proposals from DJs who just wanted to come and do dance music. We're really more interested in presenting work that has a really high level of excellence. We don't mind mixing it up. I don't think the worlds are separate; I think there's a really blurry line that separates them. Rather than a line in fact I think it's just a big swath of area.

In terms of DJ culture, I feel like part of the role of the DJ is curator. There's a guy named Wobbly aka John Leidecker, and his knowledge of music is so broad and deep. If you mention any composer to him like John Cage or Aphex Twin, he'll immediately be able to expound on them in great depth…I also like him as a composer, where he's playing fragments of things and crazy collages
you don't recognize. I think he's the quintessential example of how the worlds I mentioned aren't separate (Personal Communication).

The big swath of area that Z refers to translates directly to her own personal aesthetic identity, which she describes:

I want to own a whole bunch of labels because I feel that one doesn't tell the whole story. I jokingly refer to myself as a very hyphenated musician….If somebody says I'm a vocalist and someone who knows nothing about me reads that, I feel like the picture you get from that word is either no information because its so broad, or it's the wrong information.

The term I always use is composer-performer. I don't want to use just composer either. People may think that a composer is just someone who makes little black marks on a piece of paper. I know that a composer is broader than that, but I think that without any qualifiers it doesn't describe it (ibid).

Z's desire to own a whole bunch of labels in her own work allows her to interpret multi-dimensional levels of significance in artists she appreciates. Referring to Z's mentioning of John Leidecker, curatorial or "collection" abilities becomes an essential part of breaking down singular definable properties of a particular artist and reassigning them multiple definable properties. Leidecker's broad and deep musical knowledge can most likely be attributed to "digging in the crates," the "process of acquiring rare, usually out-of-print vinyl records for sampling purposes" (Schloss 2004:79). As a staunch DiY activity, record collecting "carries with it a sense of valor" and an image of a "devoted collector" (ibid). For Z, John Leidecker's devotion to collecting is not only another dimension of his artistic identity, it relates with her own sensibilities as a musician with a wide range of talents and abilities.

16 In addition to touring and performing as a solo artist, John Leidecker has recent joined with experimental music and sound collage band Negativland, creating a collaborative project entitled "Negativ(wobbly)land."
**What is Experimental?**

In this particular case, the most salient reference points concern label ambiguity. The attachment of a wide variety of labels to both Pamela Z (and John Leidecker) ultimately paint them as multi-faceted artists capable of displaying a wide range of abilities which in turn assigns them *no specificity*. By identifying herself as a "hyphenated musician." Pamela Z creates a flexible basis of characterization; an artist who can fit into many situations and function in different capacities. Additionally, her desire to retain a broad significance to her artistic structure filters into her outside activities as event organizer, educator (to be described in detail later), and general connoisseur. The artistic properties of the artists that she appreciates maintain similar identity flexibility, which connect with her on an aesthetic level. According to Z, John Leidecker is not simply a DJ; he is a composer, curator, collector, DJ, and performer. Furthermore, identity concerning style or genre almost becomes lost within Z's multi-hyphenated personae, as well as the artists she identifies with. Experimental aesthetics result in innumerable musical categorizations, similar to her (and Leidecker's) personal characterizations.

Patrice Scanlon is a dancer, composer, and former clarinetist and "club kid" (Scanlon, Personal Communication) who now works at Mills College as the technical director of the intermedia program. Scanlon's early affinity for dance music led her to "accept electronic music," and eventually to adopt a more experimental approach to composition:
I started going to dance clubs in the mid-nineties. I had an epiphany on the dance floor one night that 'hey, I'm a dancer and I make music, so why don't I make dance music?'

I was at a club every weekend. I remember specifically asking a professor 'I really like dance music, and I want to know how they make that.' So I started off spinning records of course, and found it kind of boring. I eventually said 'I want to do my own thing, and not just mix other people's stuff together.' That was the catalyst I guess.

Coming up as a clarinetist who loves Beethoven and Romantic music and taking ballet class and hearing Brahms, and then going in a completely different direction that was so pulse oriented and minimalist...that was a big diversion for me when I got to college (ibid).

Scanlon's time at Mills has also contributed to her desire to "be considered a legitimate composer," as "at Mills College dance music is commercial music" (ibid). While Mills may be limited in its acceptance of certain types of music, Scanlon's current affinity for improvisation, new instruments, and electronics stems directly from her experience as a DJ and her exposure to the rhythmic aspects of electronic music (see Neill 2002). Her current projects include a group with Fred Frith and making her own Foley recordings, which consists of using:

anything from a bottle of aspirin being shaken to make a shaker sound, dropping pennies on metal candlesticks, putting hard candy in a plastic alcohol container and manipulating it and shaping the sounds you can get out of that...Basically whatever I find in my house I take it with me and keep playing around with it until hopefully something good comes of it...In terms of performing live, I basically break all that stuff down into samples and map it out through Max/MSP (Scanlon, Personal Communication).

From Scanlon's days as a person unfamiliar with the inner workings of Max/MSP, her current proficiency with electronics and music technology is striking; she even considers building her own synthesizers in the future. She describes her current equipment:
I've also got an M-audio keyboard, and a nine-fader thirty-two knob controller that links the different parameters of different effects to manipulate the sound in real time. I've also been doing motion tracking for a long time. I was using Eric Singer's version of Cyclops. Now, I'm using a connect sensor from the Xbox game...You can map your right elbow, right shoulder...

**What is Experimental?**

Scanlon's abilities represent an interesting variation of technological exploitation (point one) and DiY practice (point three), in addition to label ambiguity (point two) and building on concepts (point four). Her Foley recordings represent an exploitative use of found objects as sound sources, whose nuances are then further broken down into sampled "musical quotations" (Katz 2010:147) and manipulated live using Max/MSP. Scanlon's use of the Xbox sensor for mapping body (dance) movements represents a creative use of video game technology for her motion tracking projects, perhaps assisting her with her current goal of "writing music for dancers" and dance festivals (Scanlon, Personal Communication).

Scanlon's entire appreciation and proficiency with electronics has arisen out of a staunch DiY attitude that can be seen as a logical combination of her previous interests of dance, dance music, DJ-ing, and clarinet playing. Consequently, her time at Mills has allowed her to further synthesize these interests and explore more ways to realize her creative visions. Yet, her movement into more expansive methods of composition has not involved negation of her past. She has continued to progressively build on her prior experience by incorporating her DiY integration into electronics with increased proficiency with Max/MSP and additional electronics. Though she places her current focus on writing music for dancers, one cannot help but also reference her musical perspectives of DJ and dance music connoisseur as contributing factors. Yet, none of
these elements specifically define who she is; it is technological, social, and musical experimentation that has guided her forward.

Matt Moldover's work with "controllerism," or the practice of using music software controllers (MIDI devices, joysticks, etc) to perform electronic music in a live setting, stands in a class by itself. Since co-creating the Warper Party\(^{17}\) in New York City, Matt has established himself as an event organizer, composer, performer, and educator through a truly DiY concept that he helped originate.\(^{18}\) What is perhaps most remarkable about Moldover is his ability to create his own software controllers from scratch, resulting in truly unique performance devices that serve a wide variety of purposes from mixing to effects manipulation to on-the-fly editing (see Photo 2). With his own custom built controllers in combination with sampling software, Moldover is able to take the concept of DJ turntablism to new dynamic heights ("Moldover's Approach to Controllerism (1 of 2)." Moldover sees turntablism as controllerism's main inspiration, and the idea of finding a live performance tool (or instrument) for his own sample-based performances:

I think controllerism's inspiration was turntablism, because it was something that wasn't all that conventional of a musical instrument; people have taken turntablism to and beyond the level of conventional instrumentation. DJ mixers have evolved into these really amazing performance instruments, and I saw that as being the greatest recent parallel for what I was trying to do with controllers and music software. And I also realized that DJs are this big group of people right now…So, here's a whole group of people I could reach out to

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\(^{17}\) To be discussed later in this chapter.

\(^{18}\) Matt is candid about the idea that he didn't quite "invent" controllerism. Matt points to Ean Golden, "one of the first guys to popularize it" (Moldover, Personal Communication), and the fact that Moldover "came up with the word" (ibid) with the co-creator of the Warper Party, Julie Covello. Covello recommended that Moldover publish the idea, after which he contacted Ean Golden, who at the time was writing articles for Remix magazine. Golden's subsequent article on controllerism helped to popularize the term and attach significance to Moldover as the, or one of the, inventors of the concept.
and turn on to this…performing with these tools (Moldover, Personal Communication).

In Moldover's case, the connection between technological exploitation and role redefinition is palpable. The creation of new performance tools allows the DJ to step out of their general role of reproduction and into new dimensions of live performance (Katz 2012:61-62). While this concept could be considered similar to Brandon Taylor's technological inclinations, Moldover's focus lies squarely on the DJ and the desire to expand the DJ's world through technological experimentation. Moreover, Moldover's inclusion of instrumentation and instrument building as integral conditions for controllerism build on the idea of turntablism (see Katz 2010:125; 2012:62; Jorda 2001); any object can adopt instrumental properties and henceforth be used to manipulate or create sound. With controllerism, the DJ is able to develop new and innovative sound-gesture relationships (Dobrian 2001) by reinventing objects in musical terms, appealing to both popular and elitist audiences by placing the focus more on the musical (and perhaps engineering) process rather than the music itself. Moldover further explains the expansion of the DJ's role through controllerism:

Controllerism has been a major contribution, cause I think what that's done is sort of taken that paradigm of DJ dance music…its drawing out more from that. Its saying maybe the DJ can do more than just play back the sound as it was mixed. I think controllerism has a much broader meaning than just 'hey DJs you should do more than whatever.' But that's how a lot of people have taken it (Moldover, Personal Communication).

**What is Experimental?**

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19 Mark Katz (2012:62) proposes five points for qualifying an object's instrumental nature: it involves real-time sound manipulation, contains a body of techniques developed specifically for the object, a distinctive sound, the object is specifically designed or modified for making music, and the sound generated is considered to be music by a community of listeners.
Moldover represents a poignant example of technological exploitation, as well as addressing all of the remaining points. In fact, if any one of the points is not addressed, Moldover's entire concept could not be possible; his conception of controllerism exists purely within an experimental methodology. Do-it-yourself exploitation of technology is essential to building and creating new controllers, which builds on the idea of turntablism as a pioneering method of "instrumentalizing" a conventional object. As for identity, Moldover (as well as any controllerist) could easily follow Pamela Z's logic of being considered a "hyphenated musician" (Z, Personal Communication). However, Moldover introduces even more terms into the mix, such as engineer and instrument builder. In the end, descriptions concerning musical genre or style almost become irrelevant, as the musical process takes center stage over sonic results. Moldover himself attests to this fact by mentioning, "if you read my YouTube video comments they're like 'yeah, his music isn't changing the world…but his concepts are" (Moldover, Personal Communication).

While the aforementioned individuals represent a small portion of Bay Area electronic musicians, they do represent a segment of those musicians who are embracing electronic music on their own terms from a variety of perspectives. As this thesis has proposed, it is the concept of experimentalism that attaches significance to these artists in terms of their identity and endeavors. My flexible outlines of experimentalism have served to illuminate not only their artistic ingenuity, but also their aspirations for establishing their own creative principles free from definition. Their identity and endeavors gain even more significance when considered in the context of the Bay Area's
social, cultural, and musical history (as evidenced in Chapter One). The singular properties of the Bay Area as a music-making locale shine through these artists' personalities. They retain progressive and continuously morphing artistic identities by subsisting in an open-minded, congenial community of progressive practitioners.

_Space Considerations - Shifting the Focus and Rejuvenating Tradition_

Sara Thornton's statement, "One of the main ways in which youth carve out virtual, and claim actual, space is by filling it with their music" (1996:19) finds more dimensions when the notion of experimentalism is introduced into the musical structure. For one, artists who specialize in experimental electronic music are also able to claim _purpose_ along with their space, creating platforms for education, political awareness, community building, plastic art expression, and simply a congenial gathering place for meeting new people. Furthermore, the notion of youth culture, as hinted in Thornton's above statement, can be expanded to encompass a wider range of ages and experience, bringing to the table new and unique options for musical presentation. This is to say that experimentalism does not function within a singular age range. Artists whose work could be considered experimental, regardless of their level of experience or popularity, share similarities in terms of how they utilize and lend purpose to their spatial properties. With the nature of the music goes the underlying purpose of the musical events themselves.

In the Bay Area, experimental electronic musicians become defined by the events they themselves create to facilitate conscious integration; people who don't fit into a pre-

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20 Italics in original.
21 See the flexible conditions proposed in the Introduction under "What is Experimental? Defining the Musical Paradigm."
existing scene...have created their own events and parties" (Fields, Personal Communication). Club venues in the Bay Area are ideal for experimental electronic musicians in their design conceptions, simultaneously embracing elements from late sixties' discotheques, seventies 'discos,' and eighties clubs; while this design conglomeration is not unique to the Bay Area, it does set up an effective backdrop for musical-social qualities unique to the region.22 These kinds of environments provide the sort of traditional "otherworldly," "imaginary," escapist conceptions that are commonly associated with the underground dance club (Thornton 1996:21). Yet, it is not the club environment itself that attracts participants or patrons (see Collin 1997). Rather, the nature of the event retains significance as a mobile, autonomous entity that is capable of "forming a community or collective identity" (Fikentscher 2000:26).

Kevin Diede (aka Wyatt Gurp aka Steve Squiebe)'s monthly event "Circuitry," held at the Underground SF (a club in the lower Haight Ashbury district) from 2006 to 2008, operated on an "open-ended, do whatever you want to do" principle (Diede, Personal Communication) for all kinds of electronic musicians (e.g. DJs, circuit benders, laptop musicians). As an electronic musician, DJ, and event organizer, Diede's original intention of initiating Circuitry was to "have someplace for everybody to just do their thing and go out and have fun for the night" (ibid). All event promotion, booking, and advertising was conducted entirely by Diede; flyers were primarily distributed online via email and posted to social networking sites such as myspace. Reflecting upon the event's existence, Diede mentioned his fondness in seeing "so many people willing to come out

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22 Sara Thornton gives an excellent account of the "rejuvenation" of the discotheque since the 1960s. Late sixties' discotheques embraced psychedelic strobe lighting, slide projectors, and hanging beads; seventies 'discos' contained shiny, futuristic surfaces, chrome party palaces of mirrors and glitter balls; eighties 'clubs' favored black or grey walls and postmodern 'tribal' styles (1996:55). These elements are also discussed in the Introduction on page 18 concerning the underground.
and share their talent for very little money" (ibid). As for complications versus benefits, Diede is succinct in his assessment:

Complications I would say would be trying to get fair shake from these venues, that kind of seem like….they kind of know that you'll do it no matter what, because you love it. So they're not willing to put up the proper money, or maybe they'll say that they'll give you a percentage of the bar or something after a couple of months, but then you call them about it and they'll just kind of ignore you, and you'll never be able to talk to the owner or the person in charge…

As far as benefits go, I guess the main benefit you'll get if you keep doing it is just personal satisfaction for you and having a good time for you and your friends (ibid).

Diede's attitude reflects perhaps a typical frustration with the economic aspect of music, the universal "mainstream" consideration of being monetarily compensated for one's time and effort. However, his appreciation of having a place open to fun, friendly relations, and open artistic expression—not to mention the Underground SF's persistent allowance of the event—places a different kind of importance to the event as a whole. The absence of economic and managerial oversight frees a person like Diede to create an event that is centered specifically on his own social group, bringing with it a welcoming musical-social environment free of inhibitions. Yet even without this oversight, Diede was still able to have a legitimate space to conduct his event. The musical nature of his event becomes deeply woven into the fabric of his original intent; an environment where everyone can "do their thing" (ibid) gives way to liberal aesthetic preferences from both

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23 Dain Fitzgerald, a former DJ and event organizer who was interviewed for this project, also mentions his frustration in promoting and organizing events by mentioning that "Money is one primary consideration," as is "making sure people show up" (Personal Communication). Dain was one of the main organizers of "Synthetic," a Sacramento based electronic music event held at the Press Club in Sacramento. Dain was also affiliated (primarily on a social basis) with Kevin Diede and members of the Circuitry event, allowing for successful social and musical collaboration between the two events and locations over a two to three year period.
audience and performer perspectives. Having attended and performed at many of these events myself, the wide variety of musical acts that passed through Circuitry kept the event fresh and unpredictable, which in turn brought a different type of clientele to the SF Underground every month. For example, a night that featured mostly noise or unorthodox musical acts featured Circuitry regulars, electronic musicians mostly from Diede's (and my own) social circle. On nights that featured musicians with a large local following, the demographic would expand to include (mostly white) people from all over the greater Bay Area, some of who were also affiliated with other electronic music events (e.g. local hip-hop, drum n' bass, techno themes). I never got the sense that Diede's frustrations ever outweighed his enjoyment of producing Circuitry. For Diede, the resulting dynamics of his DiY event seem to be exactly what he originally intended.

Matt Moldover, a Bay Area transplant from New York City, has been on the forefront of creating community based music events for experimental electronic musicians on both the east and west coasts. Moldover was the founder of a monthly electronic music event in New York City called the Warper Party. The Warper Party, which still functions to this day, is a performance showcase for electronic musicians aimed towards demonstrating different methodologies for live performance. After a move to San Francisco in 2006, he set to work on creating the west coast version of his Warper Party event, LoveTech (the LoveTech term could be interpreted as "love for technology").

On the whole, LoveTech's agenda is centered on building community through affinities for technological experimentation, particularly controllerism (as discussed

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24 These were mostly white 20 to 30 year old males and females, some of whom were romantically involved. Almost all of the regulars were involved in electronic music or DJ-ing in some capacity.
earlier). Moldover sees LoveTech as having "the same theme as the Warper Party…which is basically live electronic music or controllerism if you will" (Personal Communication). LoveTech hosts monthly to bi-monthly events at different venues around San Francisco and the greater west coast. Presently, Moldover co-hosts the event with another electronic musician named Rich DDT. In addition to concerts, LoveTech hosts events such as electronic music workshops, a "digital jam lounge" where patrons can experiment with different kinds of music technology installations,\(^\text{25}\) and "controller battles," where controllerists compete against each other in live performance ("LoveTech SF - Event Archive"). All promotion, concert and event organization, and installation equipment design are created solely by Moldover and Rich, further featured on Moldover's personal websites (lovetech.org; moldover.com). Moldover is also featured in a massive amount of his own YouTube videos that provide exposure to and instruction on the finer points of controllerism, such as instrument modification and live performance usage. While somewhat similar to Kevin Diede's Circuitry event in that it hosts electronic musicians who "are simply just doing their own thing" (Moldover, Personal Communication), LoveTech sharpens its focus on the artist whose aesthetic is defined through alternative technological means:

> You know, it's not about trying to make a whole bunch of money, it's really about creating a quality event and connect people who are all interested in this culture of electronic music to each other. So making that the ethos, and teaming up with others, I hope it continues with the ideal of showcasing live electronic musicianship - as we say - and creating a platform for artists who

\(^{25}\) One particularly inventive installation is Matt Moldover's "Octamasher," an interactive controller installation that consists of eight keyboards and speaker systems arranged in a circular fashion. Each keyboard is a specifically designed "controller" by Matt Moldover which each has its own distinct characteristics, allowing the user to play looped passages or songs instead of notes. All of the keyboards are synchronized together, making it possible for eight people to create music together with virtually no musical experience at all. This installation is not only a great introduction to controllerism, it breaks down barriers between performer and audience, providing more possibilities for community building and interaction amongst patrons and musicians alike.
are not bands or DJs, but are somewhere in this area in between…Trying to create a space for that ideal to flourish is the goal (ibid).

In dissecting Moldover's aforementioned statement, some key points come to the foreground. For one, the focus on experimental musicianship as the mitigating factor for LoveTech events seems to place genre or performance style as secondary to technological concerns. Instead of a musical "free-for-all" (Diede, Personal Communication) as a means for community interaction, LoveTech emphasizes DiY technological and performative rudiments as key components for creating a communal atmosphere. Moldover's affinity for controllerism and his desire to exploit its nuances in a communal setting strengthens LoveTech's fundamental ethos, providing a strong base of leadership and direction (i.e. "platform") for artists whose aesthetic identities are ambiguous. Secondly, Moldover's mentioning of "space" completely redefines the notion of the necessity for a static environment for the enjoyment of electronic music. LoveTech has appeared throughout San Francisco at warehouse spaces, small and large clubs, technology centers such as the California Academy of Sciences and the SF Tech Summit, and at San Francisco's Fillmore concert hall ("LoveTech SF - Event Archive"). That LoveTech does not have a permanent home signifies the idea of the event as maintaining an inherent, though ethereal, spatial quality. This is to say that wherever LoveTech goes, regardless of the location, the ethos goes with it; LoveTech's mission itself defines the space it occupies.

I had the opportunity to attend one of Matt Moldover's LoveTech events at the Boom Boom Room in San Francisco's Fillmore District on June 26th, 2011. This event was co-hosted by "F&ck Yeah!," a party oriented around a live band ("NVO") that
performs original electronic dance music (see Photo 3). This particular LoveTech event seemed to be geared towards live performance without the additive components of installations or workshops. The event had an interesting triple nature to it: a traditional concert layout (elevated stage, instrumental components), a club setting for underground dance music (DJs, disco lighting, dance floor), and a bar running almost the entire length of the establishment. It was difficult to precisely ascertain the social demographics, but in all a mostly white, thirty-something crowd made up the majority of the patrons, DJs, and performers.

Moldover's performance was centered around the use of his own custom built controllers, some of which were modifications of traditional instruments; a modified electric guitar, his own personally designed controller which manipulated software programs from his laptop, and a Nintendo joystick (attached to a microphone stand) for manipulating vocal sounds (see Photos 4 and 5). The resulting music resembled "rock n' roll" and structured "songs," stemming from what Moldover and his family "listened to early in life" (Moldover, Personal Communication). While I was surprised by the music itself, Moldover later reminded me that the main idea behind his new artistic direction was "trying to use technology and do interesting things with technology, and merge it with traditional musicianship" (ibid). This statement reformulated my preconceived ideas behind appreciating Moldover's music, i.e. the concept of appreciating the music versus the process involved in its creation. By making judgments solely concerned with taste, I turned a blind eye to how Moldover was creating his music in a live setting. That structured songs and rock n' roll could now have a completely recontextualized performance structure presents exciting new performance possibilities for musicians of
all kinds. Moreover, Moldover's devotion to integrating new technological ideas into
traditional frameworks further reinforces his belief in LoveTech's *modus operandi*, not to
mention controllerism as a legitimate means of creative expression.

*Space in Terms of Education (and Performance): Cross-Pollination*

Looking further into the realm of possibilities concerning DiY use of space—and
expanding on LoveTech's concept of interactivity between patrons and performers—one
finds instances of educational outreach. Pamela Z's long running commitment to
electronic music education promotes a free-spirited, uninhibited atmosphere that caters to
musicians and non-musicians alike, contributing to a concept that is "not a musician's
workshop" (*Z*, Personal Communication). *Z* conducts music workshops that focus on
using electronics (e.g. ProTools, delay units, sound design concepts, software programs)
to "teach art" (ibid) as opposed to artistic specifics. Through a California Arts Council
grant, *Z* had organized her workshops collaboratively with San Francisco's Lab, an
"interdisciplinary arts organization supporting the development and presentation of new
visual, performing, media, sonic and literary art" ("The Lab - About").\(^26\) Now conducted
solely from her own studio, all aspects of the workshop design are overseen by *Z*, which
directly aligns with the DiY approach to electronics she assumes and promotes
throughout the course of the workshops. She describes the organizational history and the
psychology behind this concept and its relationship to producing a successful
environment for creating artistic works rooted in experimentalism:

\(^26\) The Lab also prides itself on showcasing work by "emerging and underrepresented experimental artists" ("The Lab - About")
When I started doing workshops through my own studio, I started charging for them, which was almost the opposite from how it worked with the Lab. Sometimes I've had to turn people away, and sometimes I've had to cancel workshops because there haven't been enough people who register...I design the workshops, and come up with the concepts and what we're going to cover over the course of the workshop.

People come in and say 'I don't know how to play an instrument,' and I say 'that's okay.' Or they say 'I don't know how to read music,' and I say 'well, you'll never have to in this class.' The people who typically like to take my workshops are artists who want to become more inter-media in their approach, such as choreographers who want to design their own sounds for their dance pieces, or visual artists who want to add sound to their work. I get musicians who are like, a classically trained flutist who wishes she understood how to use electronics. I really like the wide range of people that I get. I love giving people new information. I guess the philosophy or bent of my workshops is providing people with tools and ideas to make experimental sound and performance works, and to appreciate them (Z, Personal Communication).

Not only does Z's approach deviate from any sort of traditional instruction, it promotes musical experimentation (via technology) as a plausible segue for the layperson into meaningful creative expression and, for artists, further aesthetic definition. In fact, experimentation supersedes the technological in her workshops. The prevalent DiY character of the Bay Area which contributes to individuals who "create their own systems for making electronic music and performance" (ibid) spurs Z to avoid teaching specifics even concerning music technology. Accompanying the technical information is ultimately "how to use these tools to create experimental compositions" (ibid). This in turn addresses important aesthetic considerations: "How can we use found objects and found text to create work? How can we use our physical body? What is it about voice and timbre that's unique?" (ibid). The workshop participant, guided by Pamela Z, is able to freely and immediately access creative ingenuity by assuming control over
sophisticated technical tools by experimenting with their nuances rather than assuming a learning curve.

Concerning space, by changing her base of operations from the Lab to her own studio Pamela Z has managed to shift the focus from institutionalization to education disseminated directly by the artist. As an established (and reputable) composer, performer, and vocalist, Z is able to communicate her knowledge and experience to students completely by her own standards and without any outside support. By maintaining control over her workshop's administrative functions, she creates a milieu "where sound and the interrelationship with the individual or groups is participatory and spiritual rather than exclusive and artistic" (Oliveros 1984:105). In the case of her workshops, artistry is dependent solely upon the participants' willingness to engage with a congenial and communal atmosphere of free experimentation. While her workshops remain primarily a place for instruction, their democratic structure presents further possibilities for public performance and collaborative work with outside artists.

For her own performance concerns (and furthering the possibilities of space utilization), Pamela Z turns her entire building into a seasonal concert venue she titles the "Room Series" ("Z Programs : Room"). Based on her own schedule, Z hosts "evenings featuring a variety of virtuosic, solo artists and chamber groups playing experimental music" (ibid). She describes the series in more detail:

I make a little season…It winds up being something like four or five concerts a year. It's all new music, and I try to mix it up. One thing I do is create instrument themed evenings, like for example one evening was a percussion themed evening that I called 'Battery.' If you remember from the 80s, David Sanborn had a program called 'Night Music.' What I loved about that show was that there was such a great mix of artists on each show…And at the end of every concert they'd all play together. It's somewhat similar in my series,
where I give each artist their own set, and then at the end we all play together (Z, Personal Communication).

Effectively, Pamela Z turns her entire living space into an all-purpose headquarters for experimental musical expression. As each aspect of the event is under her control, Z has the freedom to construct her educational and performance programs however she chooses. While unlike Matt Moldover she keeps her educational and performance endeavors separate, both activities feature experimental music making within a DiY use of space.

Interestingly, one begins to see cross-pollination possibilities amongst the previously described events and the individuals associated with them. Pamela Z and Matt Moldover could easily find common ground in terms of educational outreach, while the fixed nature of Kevin Diede's event could provide a free or low cost location for a collaborative effort between all three participants. Conversely, Kevin Diede's event could have benefited from educational outreach, which would have possibly lead to increased event attendance and more substantial connections with the surrounding community. An event involving the efforts of all three individuals could effectively feature all of their primary purposes: social interaction, performance, technological awareness, and community building. The inherent attitudes towards experimentalism within the aforementioned purposes would further break down assumed roles between musicians, students, audience members, performers, and composers.  

Pauline Oliveros presents a coherent argument on the need for "Alternative Spaces" (1984:194) for contemporary arts:

27 It would be helpful to again refer to the flexible definitions stated in the "What is Experimental" section in the Introduction, particularly point two.
Generally the Alternative Space develops and maintains for musicians and artists resources and facilities too extensive for an individual to support. It is an institution without academic or conventional box office goals. It provides space, facilities, and assistance for artistic research, and for performances for small, interested audiences. It is a meeting place for the exchange and development of experimental ideas.\(^{28}\) It often begins as a collective, usually interdisciplinary in nature, supported by several persons who are intensely interested, committed to such work, and who need an outlet or place to do their own work among peers (ibid).

Oliveros' statement simultaneously captures the founding spirit of the SFTMC\(^{29}\) while outlining the current space considerations facilitated by Bay Area electronic musicians. As we have seen, Bay Area electronic musicians enact a strong principle of DiY concerning the space they occupy by "superimposing" fundamental principles of original electronic music events over specific architectural or visual spatial concerns. By openly establishing "the exchange and development of experimental ideas" (ibid) in a given area, space becomes "effectively rejuvenated" (Thornton 1996:55) to appeal to a wider social demographic. Subsequently, eliminating "academic and conventional box office goals" (Oliveros 1984:194) alleviates mainstream expectations—competition, capital gain, hierarchies—and increases community values of interaction, public awareness, and communication.

*Bay Area "Soundsystems" - The Mobile Underground*

Brandon Taylor enjoys the complete freedom of setting up concerts at virtually any space in the Bay Area. His following statement perfectly illustrates the underlying

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\(^{28}\) Italics by author.

\(^{29}\) Detailed history given in chapter 1.
attitude that personifies an underground organization, i.e. a "renegade culture[s] opposed to, and continually in flight from, the colonizing co-opting media" (Thornton 1996:6):

A lot of the things we do aren't even at venues. A lot of times we'll go out and throw parties at parks and stuff, and you just can't tell anyone that that's happening. That's the 'getting away with it' aspect of it. That's actually my favorite stuff to do. That's the best. There's nothing better than going to a totally neglected space or park and, which is also beautiful space too, and it's public land so screw you, we're going to do it. It's like, if you're going to trash it, we're going to do something with it (Taylor, Personal Communication).

Taylor lives in South San Francisco in a converted warehouse space occupied by 5lowershop and a "family" (ibid) of other soundsystems, each with a different name: Katabatik, S.P.A.Z. (semi-permanent-autonomous-zone), and Havoc Sound (see Photos 6 and 7). While it could be reasoned that each of these groups represent competing organizations, Taylor asserts that:

These groups work with each other all the time, and when one takes a break, people from one sound system filter into the other. 5lowershop is a different fee than the other soundsystems, and people from S.P.A.Z. and Katabatik work with us if they want to (ibid).

The congenial work ethic amongst these groups speaks of a liberal, localized, and collectivized establishment of event organizers who use the scenic layout of San Francisco as their own backdrop for producing unique musical experiences. The notion of a soundsystem, i.e. "mobile outfit" that can be randomly "set up in a yard or other type of public clearing for dances" (Veal 2001:47) provides a type of experimental model (that will be returned to periodically) for concert production. This model can be linked to early 1990s "raves": the movement of the club environment "out of traditional dance venues into new sites like disused warehouses, aircraft hangars, municipal pools and tents in farmers' fields" in pursuit of "forbidden and unpredictable senses of place" (Thornton
With raves, experimentation filters into all aspects of the event as all of its structural principles (e.g. musical styles, patron demographics, space, promotion) retain loosely definitive properties. While it could seem like such a model could result in chaos due to too much flexibility, lax definition allows people like Taylor and the additional soundsystem members to maintain ultimate (and admirable) control over all aspects of the proceedings. Hence, those who choose to participate in soundsystem events—soundsystem members, volunteers, regular patrons, performers—establish a sense of ownership by working within an environment that retains multi-dimensional levels of significance unique for each person. Yet, such ownership is *earned* through participation in an inherently difficult set of processes which function largely out of the public eye. Taylor explains:

> Underground is inherently difficult, that's the whole point. The music is difficult, the culture is difficult, the people involved are not always the nicest people on earth and have very particular ways that they like things to be. But, the other thing is that the underground is accepting and open....The underground is like, 'all are welcome.' On our flyers we say 'no one turned away for lack of funds' (Taylor, Personal Communication).

The all are welcome, no one turned away for lack of funds principles that Taylor speaks of maintain a level of difficulty in their achievement. Promotion of events, which is "pretty much strictly word-of-mouth" (ibid), will often times only consist of a flyer (see Photo 8) or Facebook event page providing no information other than the schedule of performers. The location of the event is not announced "until like an hour beforehand" (ibid), and can only be discovered by calling a given telephone number printed on the
The secretive nature of such promotion aims to replace a "pre-sorted and pre-selected" (Thornton 1996:22) crowd—and those who desire only the experience of a soundsystem event—with those who have a vested interest in establishing their identity within a like-minded anti-commercial culture. The result is a traveling entity that includes "different genres of music," "people discussing political issues and animal rights," and ultimately a place where "everyone can do their own thing (Taylor, Personal Communication). The soundsystems' free-flowing nature of organization and experimentation within its own confines propagates "ad hoc communities with fluid boundaries which may come together and dissolve" (Thornton 1996:3) at a moment's notice.

Interestingly, 5lowershop itself retains its own individuality within this kind of progressive, mobile concert experience. Taylor indicates that 5lowershop is supposed to be all-inclusive, not only in our guests, but in the people playing and the people involved. It changes all the time, with who's involved and what their tastes are. Originally, it was much more techno oriented, but it was always diverse. Being a collective, there tends to be a lot of argument in what direction we want to take. But, it's like, we - all of us hosting the party - all take the directions we're interested in (Personal Communication).

Taylor's comments precisely illustrate the Bay Area's milieu of internal expansion combined with conscious integration of new principles. 5lowershop mirrors the "alternative forms of community" (Davidson 1998:28) established by the Beat Generation in the 1950s. Yet, it simultaneously foregoes and retains the concept of insularity and exclusivity by opening its doors—via social and musical channels—within an already underground environment. In 5lowershop's case, alternative communal organization

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30 This procedure was used in the promotion of the "Monsters of Love" event that I was asked to perform at in February 2013. This event and my experience at it are discussed in detail in Chapter Three.
champions differentiated musical interests, which are henceforth filtered to the surrounding underground community. As an outsider or "anti mass-culture" (Thornton 1996:5) organization, Slowershop makes itself further accessible to outsiders themselves, effectively functioning as a subculture within a subculture; a "flexible and mobile musical monument" (Slobin 1993:x).

*The Genre Debate - Making Sense of an Eternal Dictionary*

As music journalist Dan Sicko points out "The fragmented landscape of today's electronic music takes great patience to understand" (1996:189). As we have seen, the multi-faceted natures of Bay Area electronic musicians seem to negate the idea of genre or style as relevant to identity. The persistent creation of electronic music genres can seem "totally ridiculous" (Scanlon, Personal Communication) and run the risk of becoming "overground and watered down" (Taylor, Personal Communication). What is more important are the experimental processes—e.g. technological, artistic, social—that contribute to aesthetic development and related community interaction. Mostly, Bay Area artists' eschew the idea of labels in favor of broadening their musical perspectives. However, coupled with this negation is a nonchalant attitude that allows some artists to use labels for their own purposes. This is to say that labels can be used creatively and in collusion with each other. Again, the idea of conscious integration comes into play; Bay Area electronic musicians experiment with labeling processes as they do with music and social events.
David Wang aka Mochipet has established a reputation for himself as an electronic musician who has adopted a hybridized approach to musical style. Wang's varied approach to stylistic traits has brought him an equally varied touring opportunities. The freedom of Wang's approach can be further attributed to his identity as an underground artist:

I tend to always branch out to as many things as possible. I have made music that has been categorized under: IDM [intelligent dance music], Breakcore, Techno, Dubstep, House, Hip-Hop, Glitch-Hop, Electro, Breaks, Jazz, Rock, Ska, Funk, Death Metal, and even Noise. But this can be tricky when making music professionally as a living; people tend to want you to make the same thing over and over again, which is rather challenging to me. I am trying to balance this with my endless musical appetite (Wang, Personal Communication).

I have performed all over Europe, Asia, America, and Canada in Festivals, Huge Venues, and Tiny little hole in the walls. 2011 I probably spent more than 1/2 of the year on tour but this year I am taking some time off…

I would consider myself an underground artist because I am solely independent and I hardly ever work with The Mainstream Music Industry in my day today. The advantages of that is that you are completely free to do whatever you like on a case by case basis...

Wang's vision finds roots in his philosophy towards musicological and compositional stylistic trends:

As a composer I think it is important for you first to learn from other composers that came before you. Listen to Bach, Tchaikovsky, Pink Floyd, Queen, Miles Davis, Frank Zappa, the list goes on and on, and learn from them. What were they trying to express? What were the historical and social ramifications? What was the method they use to make music? Who did they learn from? Right now Dubstep is in the limelight but in music history it will just be a minor blip, so you should look at it proportionally in terms of your intake. It's important to live in the now but it is equally important to know where you came from and where you might be going in the future. Musical trends come and go but the underlying emotions are the same. In terms of finding your own voice, I think you need to pull from things that sets you apart from other people. There is no one in the word like you. So what makes
you special? It's definitely not the current trend. Highlight and amplify those qualities. Show the world what you're worth.

Wang's above statement captures Pamela Z's notion of a "hyphenated artist" from a different perspective—Wang "mines" stylistic traits to adopt the notion of a *hyphenated composer*. The aesthetic and social qualities of Wang's wide ranging influences covering rock, jazz, romantic, and baroque music filter into his personal creativity. Underlying musicological issues of compositional methods, intent, and surrounding social environment govern Wang's involvement in a multitude of styles. This is to say that Wang discovers stylistic properties that appeal to him on deeper emotional grounds rather than mainstream social appeal, perpetually introducing fresh new ideas into his compositional framework. Musical process becomes conjoined with other qualities that he believes are aesthetically lasting and relevant to his own output. Furthermore, Wang's identity as an underground artist *allows* for the process of *stylistic experimentation* in this manner, ultimately contributing to the artistic singularity that he highlights above.

Dain Fitzgerald, a former DJ and event planner, believes in a close relationship between genres due to interrelated sonic qualities. As a result, genre labels help rather than hinder an artist's image:

I think it's helpful for definition. It's tough to know why people seem to inevitably attach themselves to labels but it helps to elicit in someone's mind the sound they prefer for whatever reason. I suppose labeling can become parsed so much that even people who cling to labels are willing to let some of these others slide in, because they're similar. Like grime and dubstep, similar crowds go to those shows that feature those kinds of music I guess. Those genres overlap enough. The reason there's two different names to begin with in that there's some minor distinguishing factor that either journalists or the people making the music determined as worth identifying on its own...Certain people seem to be cynical about other people's motivations, but then they themselves don't think they're insincere about what they like. I liked saying
the word 'glitch' back in the day. In truth, I liked the music first and then I liked saying it right after (Fitzgerald, Personal Communication).

Fitzgerald's somewhat ambivalent attitude about genres nevertheless highlights the idea that, similar to David Wang, underlying musical properties are often the governing factors concerning appeal. Though this may seem like a far stretch, Fitzgerald mentions his affinity for 'glitch' music—a style of electronic music that features "malfunctioning" or error-based sonic qualities such as sound file skipping, hiss or scratches associated with vinyl records, distortion (Cox, Warner 2004:393)—first came from his enjoyment of the music. Fitzgerald's mentioning of "distinguishing factors" suggests the idea that genre creation is based in musical appreciation and not in peripheral concerns (i.e. the idea of identifying with the music rather than a "scene").

The key point in Fitzgerald's reasoning is the notion of initial appreciation. Any music in question maintains some initial appealing quality (or combination of qualities) that an audience member or artist can identify with regardless of its origins. Ultimately, the terminological importance takes on a life of its own.

David Wang and Dain Fitzgerald's opinions became strikingly evident at an event I attended on August 22nd, 2012 at the Underground SF (see Photo 9). The establishment signifies itself as "one of the last real DJ bars" in the city that hosts "a variety of electronic music" every month (Underground SF website) (the Underground is also the location of Kevin Diede's now discontinued Circuitry event as discussed above). However, Underground SF also hosts a weekly live music showcase called the "Local Artist Live-In" hosted by "LoveHaight Records" (LoveHaight Records website):
The event features local singer/songwriters from around San Francisco and the Bay Area, and you’re apt to encounter some really talented musicians at the Live-In. The night usually includes two or three different acts, and closes with a DJ spinning funky dance tunes.

As the dance floor is used as a stage, audience members fill the bar area to watch and listen. It’s really a perfect venue for this kind of event. Small and intimate, with red hazy lighting, it gives the artists a great setting for their music, while being low-key and comfortable for the crowd as well (Depa 2012).

Having been a regular at the Underground SF as a performer and audience member, I expected the evening to be themed towards electronic music and DJ performances. However, the dance floor area of the Underground had, as the above advertisement suggests, been transformed into a stage. All of the Underground SF’s surroundings—a conglomeration of virtually all of what Sara Thornton describes as endemic designs of sixties' discos and clubs in the seventies and eighties: psychedelic and strobe lighting, shiny futuristic surfaces and glitter balls; black and grey walls or postmodern tribal styles (1996:55)—remained unaltered. The only major addition was abstract video projection that shone on the back wall of the club opposite the DJ booth (see Photo 10). The live acts of the evening featured vastly different stylistic properties. The first act was a solo singer-songwriter guitarist who went by the name "4M1R," which I later discovered was a somewhat esoteric spelling of the name Amir. The second act, "Sorrow Church," utilized pre-programmed beats and synthesizer textures—played from the DJ booth—along with a vocalist and electric guitarist (Sorrow Church also set up additional lighting effects for their performance; see Photo 11).

Overlooking the bar area, a DJ was present yet functioned as a "background" accompaniment to the proceedings rather than someone responsible for "responding to the feelings of a roomful of people" (Brewster, Broughton 2008:11; see Photo 12). The
DJ's music featured a wide variety of music (hip-hop, funk, acid jazz), which acted as interludes between each featured live act.

The event's sparse mix of patrons seemed to feature mostly friends of the acts and people who were closely affiliated with LoveHaight records members. The mostly white, 20 to 30 something crowd primarily congregated by the bar/lounge area, sometimes venturing up to the stage to chat with friends or to visit the smoking area on the back patio. That the entire dance floor area was now converted into a stage made it difficult for patrons to find extra space to socialize other than the bar/lounge area. Occasionally, groups of patrons would leave the venue altogether to stand outside and socialize.

Upon reflection, the main purpose of the event seemed to precisely align with LoveHaight's stated goal of "uniting the Bay Area to create a close knit community based on art, ideas, and love" (LoveHaight records website). The presentation of different musical acts throughout the evening combined multiple genres—singer-songwriter/rock, punk, gothic, electronic, industrial, DJ culture—that emphasized appreciation of musical properties rather than a conglomeration of music with peripheral enhancements. LoveHaight's ambition of creating a "close knit community" (ibid) through artistic expression indicates the necessity of accepting as many views as possible, not simply focusing on one idea. While this ideology may not have had an immense appeal to the local population, it further supports LoveHaight's ambition to help artists

31 4M1R and Sorrow Church are not LoveHaight records artists. One can only assume that the artists LoveHaight records invites to perform at its events is a separate endeavor from those whose music they choose to feature as recording artists.

32 Whether LoveHaight records chose Underground SF—a longstanding and reputable club designed specifically for hosting DJs and electronic dance music—as a means to bring an eclectically designed underground environment to accompany their events is unknown. That the club is located in the Lower Haight district may speak of a desire to keep a geographical continuity with the name of the record label.
"stand out in the ever changing artistic climate in today's popular music" (ibid).

LoveHaight creates a scenario to showcase the uniqueness of the artists it hosts from strictly musical standpoints, presenting a smorgasbord of artistic expression from which patrons can sample.

In this manner, musical appreciation becomes experimental. LoveHaight's event demonstrates a reverse DiY use of space to facilitate wider music appreciation among the local population. A club well known for hosting electronic music is transformed to host folk artists, bands, and rock-electronic hybrids while still retaining the DJs appeal. As a result (and similar to the ideologies of David Wang and Pamela Z), patrons can attach multiple labels to their palette of sonic appreciation by attending a LoveHaight event, thereby hyphenating their tastes. Furthermore, Underground SF takes on a new significance as a club that consciously integrates multiple stylistic conceptions as opposed to simply being a "DJ bar" that features a "variety of electronic music" (Underground SF website).

Exploring the Female Perspective

Tara Rodgers highlights significant historical incidents displaying the prominence of "male technical competence" and "'hard' mastery in electronic music production" (Rodgers 2010:6). The "prominent origin" (ibid) of the avant-garde noise of the Futurists—specifically Luigi Russolo's Art of Noises manifesto (1913)—celebrated the "sounds of machines, modern industry, and war" (ibid). In the United States, "links between audio and military technologies were well established by the 1920s," specifically the application of amplification and recording technologies for military usage, i.e.
"controlling sound" (ibid). During the Cold War, the association of "space age and atomic" research with electronic sounds has resulted in a persistent terminological association of electronic music with high-tech combat:

DJs "battle"; a producer "triggers" a sample with a "controller," "executes" a programming "command," types "bang" to send a signal, and tries to prevent a "crash" (McCartney 1995 and Peebles 1996:12 qtd. in Rodgers 2010:7; see Katz 2010:124-145).

While some of the above terms have been encountered already throughout this thesis, their militaristic innuendos and "aesthetic priorities of rationalistic precision and control" (Rodgers 2010:7) as associated with the male gender have yet to be addressed.

Mark Katz's account of the phonograph's popularity among men in the early 20th century provides support to Rodgers' assertions, specifically emphasizing the notion of "technical competence" (ibid 6):

Much of the [phonograph]'s advertising specifically targeted women, and many of the writings on the domestic role of the phonograph were by and for women. For good reason: music in the home has traditionally been the province of women...But the phonograph had a significant impact on the male of the species as well. It offered something new to the average American man: a way to enjoy music without risk of being unmanly...The phonograph also mitigated the supposed "feminizing" influence of music...because as a machine it opened opportunities for tinkering and shop talk, traditional men's activities (Katz 2010:66).

The separation of feminine-domestic and male-independent (technical) realms is an important point in Katz's above passage. Pauline Oliveros' statements, "Women have been taught to despise activity outside the domestic realm as unfeminine, just as men have taught to despise domestic duties. For men, independence, mobility, and creative action are imperative" (1984:47) further outline this dichotomy. In the context of Katz's phonograph history and Rodgers' exposure of militaristic associations with electronic
music, Oliveros' assertions suggest a subtle power structure among gender roles in relation to creative expression. Women became "confined" to the home through association with domestication (specifically child-rearing), while men retain a disconnected independence that spurs creative action within amongst the greater public. Hence, while the notion of aesthetic appreciation and creativity carries with it a significant emotional—perhaps "unmanly"—component, subsequent filtering to the public cannot be possible without the intrusion of "hard technical mastery" (Rodgers 2010:7).

The above conclusions do not signify anomalies; in my experience with electronic music the majority of my interactions, collaborations, and experiences have been with males. Throughout the course of my research for this thesis, the majority of my interviews and interactions were with males. From 2006 until 2011, the majority of my experiences as an artist involved concerts, clinics, festivals, and international tours with other male artists. My personal nineteen record discography—also as a guitarist, producer, percussionist, and transcriber—consists of work with virtually all male artists.

Throughout this section, I wish to briefly explore the female perspective on experimental electronic music (and related experiences) in the Bay Area. The women that I interviewed during my research—whose achievements and opinions have been highlighted in the above sections—have provided necessary and contrasting perspectives on electronic music in the Bay Area. While this topic deserves more than just a brief explanation, I am hoping it will inspire more research into the accomplishments of women involved in electronic music, especially those who fearlessly engage in "tinkering and shop talk" (Katz 2010:66) as a necessary aspect of their aesthetic.
Patrice Scanlon's fascination with electronics began at an early age. Yet, Scanlon remembers experiencing a social predisposition against the encouragement of women in fields relating to math and science:

Back then math and science weren't considered strong subjects for women...it was just kind of the general feeling you got. Women were supposed to be better at English or music or something....I remember seeing the movie 'The Net' in high school and saying 'I want to be a computer systems analyst.' I was about sixteen or seventeen, and went home and told my mom. She said 'Patrice, you're not good at math; you won't be good at computers' (ibid).

One gets the impression that, for someone like Scanlon, the cards are already stacked against her even before the initial practice has started. This principle eventually makes itself evident in practice, as is evidenced by Scanlon's later experience in a Max/MSP class:

The teacher showed us how to make a major scale and play it back. Then he said 'okay, now you do it.' I looked around the class and everybody knew what they were doing and I didn't. It dawned on me that 'oh, I'm a girl, I'm not getting this,' and I felt like I was behind everyone else. That however really motivated me to push myself further. That's how it all started (ibid).

Scanlon's proactivity to learn and creatively work with electronic music has been drastically accelerated by her move to the Bay Area, specifically through the help of Pauline Oliveros. After Oliveros posted a "letter of desperation" on the SEAMUS website calling for "any woman who is into electronic music" (ibid) to come to Mills College, Scanlon jumped at the opportunity:

I was very lucky to get a full assistantship and get everything paid for. If Pauline hadn't called out like that I don't know if I would have would up at Mills. I went there from 2001 to 2003, and I was one of five women out of twenty-five students. Since I've been working at Mills for the last seven years I have seen a huge difference, I've seen the female grad student enrollment number go up a bit (ibid).
From her journey from the "east coast macho-ism" to the "heaven" of Mills college (ibid), Scanlon's time at Mills has allowed her to establish a reputation—in the Bay Area and beyond—as a composer, dancer, electronic music performer, and teacher.

Scanlon's experience and perseverance is reminiscent of a pioneering young Pauline Oliveros, whose "uphill battle" and "hard time" (Sender in Bernstein 2008:79) in the San Francisco music scene in the 1960s could not have found like minds in an online forum. Oliveros' pioneering work in creating the San Francisco Tape Music Center, her support of women composers, and her continued "interest in new media, electronic music, theater pieces, and improvisation" (Oliveros in Bernstein 2008:84) has laid the groundwork for someone like Scanlon to explore and realize her interests. Furthermore, Oliveros' work carries with it the underlying historical aspects of countercultural social redefinition and the importance of alternative communities (as shown in Chapter One) unique to the Bay Area. Thus, Scanlon has been able develop her abilities in an area where the notion of women composers who work in electronic music not only has significant historical connections, but is allowed to propagate.

Scanlon's presence at Mills also assists in deconstructing a deeper notion of electronic competence as being associated primarily with men. Now the technical director of the intermedia program, she is eager to impart her knowledge to other aspiring young women:

I work directly with the undergrads at Mills. I'm dealing with young women all the time. I absolutely love it, I love encouraging them. I love seeing when they first walk in with hardly any computer skills except Facebook and tweeting and maybe Microsoft Word, and by the time they leave two years later they're producing thirty minute documentaries. Once they get those skills they just fly with it. For men, they would never admit that they were struggling and having a problem (Scanlon, Personal Communication).
Scanlon's educational work can be seen as part of a larger underlying support network for women composers in the Bay Area. Her belief that the region is "unique" in that it provides substantial opportunities for women who work with electronic music is due to "Pauline [Oliveros], Pamela Z, and Maggie Payne at Mills" (ibid). Scanlon's mentioning that these women "are looking out for us," and that they "want to help propagate the women in the scene" (ibid) suggests Oliveros' early work has established a long lasting standard for artistic women in the Bay Area. Oliveros' work has also assisted in formulating a region-wide bedrock of support for women composers, especially those who experiment and create with electronics.

Pamela Z's educational, compositional, and performance work carries with it an awareness and sensitivity to a "gender imbalance" that she believes is "owned by the entire culture" (Z, Personal Communication). Like Scanlon, Z believes that women are inhibited from exploring technical practice in general, and not just in the musical realm. Thus, the question of a gender imbalance has more to do with examining anthropological phenomena:

I do think the condition we have in the world where there's some gender imbalance in a lot of different things is a problem, or a condition that's engendered by the cultural whole, not just one gender in the culture...For whatever reasons in our world, women have been kept down in terms of the technical world. When women were talented in that way they didn't get the same kind of recognition for it as men did. It's the same in the art world. There were women in the many art movements that have existed, but you'd never know it because they always wrote about the men and never the women...It's not a question so much for the musician or artist; I think it's a question for someone who's studied social phenomena and culture and gender psychology (ibid).
Z's statements immediately call to mind Tara Rodgers above examinations of militaristic terminology and conjoined "male technical competence" (2010:7) associated with electronics and electronic music. Z's kaleidoscopic view in holding the "cultural whole" responsible for social gender imbalance—in addition to the poor and limited documentation of electronics and electronic music practice (Rylan in Rodgers 2010:141)—calls into question the validity of traditionally accepted histories of electronic music.

Tara Rodgers provides a profound alternate view of electronic music history by reorienting the historical focal point, hence recontextualizing traditional associations of electronic music with male dominated notions of aggression and militarism. Rodgers notes Clara Rockmore's performances on the theremin in the early 20th century as a viable origin story contrary to that of the Futurists. Rockmore's theremin performances "helped to establish electronic and experimental music as a viable art form in the public imagination" (Rodgers 2010:9; Chadabe 1997:8-11). Aesthetically, Rodgers indicates that Rockmore's performances demonstrated an alternative mastery—fluidity, "tonal agility," ("Novelty Feature" 1947 qtd. in Rodgers 2010:9), "nuance and care" (Rodgers 2010:9)—to that of the brutish, noise-centered ideas of the Futurists. Furthermore, Rockmore's encroachment on a "phallic domain of virtuosity and technical mastery" (ibid) signifies a dramatic redrawing of social roles. The female expressive potential, if given license, can recontextualize hard, "male technical competence" (ibid 7) as inspiring "wonder and a sense of possibility instead of rhetorics of combat and domination" (ibid 9).
While Rodgers' historical recontextualization does provide an alternative historical focal point for electronic music, it raises further questions as to the "separation of what is considered men's work and women's work" (Z, Personal Communication). Patrice Scanlon reasons, "in our society women are more in touch with their feelings and emotions and men are supposed to be macho, and a champion and be the best" (Personal Communication). Pauline Oliveros states "Because women are expected to seek the adoration and approval of men, they must not win in competition with men" (1984:135). Oliveros also indicates, "if a woman succeeds in a purposive activity…she consciously or unconsciously expects the loss of her femininity. She has violated the cultural paradigm" (ibid). Oliveros' notion of competition sheds some light on the problem. Emotional dynamics—i.e. the "feminine"—focus on "inner" reflective properties, while self-determining, "purposive" (ibid) dynamics—i.e. the "masculine"—focus on "outer" expressive, independent properties. Thus, "inner" emotional natures are incompatible among "outer" independent assertion. In addition to being incompatible, the two sets of properties seem to compete with each other. The loss of femininity, or masculinity, occurs when men or women step outside of their cultural functions.

Perhaps the most profound answer I received during the course of my interviews that best addresses the above cultural phenomenon was from Pamela Z. In asking her why she believed the male gender was more prevalent than the female concerning electronic music, Z exclaimed: "I wonder if anyone would ever, in an interview with a male, in a field that's male dominated, think to ask them 'why is your field male dominated? Because it's always the women who have to figure out why that's the case"
(Personal Communication). Z's further opinions stress a necessary, and possibly reluctant, ownership of racial and gender roles as a result of imbalance:

now it's not only your job to do whatever it is you do, but you're also the spokesperson for that group. White men are never asked to be a spokesperson for white maleness. Women I think have thought about these things a lot, and our weapon against them I guess is to not give too much thought about them, and just do what we do (ibid).

Through Z's statements, I began to gain a deeper perspective into my own aesthetic and its place in a larger social context. In all of my experiences as an electronic musician, I have never once been asked to give any sort of commentary on my gender or race. In addition, I have never once asked any other males, musicians or otherwise, their perspectives on gender or racial imbalances in any industry. Here, Z's notion of the "cultural whole" (ibid) becomes strikingly evident. The polarization of cultural traditions has created an environment where the most dominant culture can establish an almost silent footing within the greater social spectrum. Cultures that step outside of their pre-determined cultural functions are considered anomalies, and are expected to answer for their unorthodox behavior. If these divisions weren't enough, cultural polarization has also contributed to a lack of communication between different groups. However, it is precisely Pamela Z's "unorthodox" behavior—as well as Patrice Scanlon, Pauline Oliveros, Tara Rodgers, and many other women—that has contributed to creating congenial, nurturing environments for women who are interested in electronic music.

Until the cultural whole begins to cross-pollinate, freely communicate, and assert their destinies within a variety of contexts, strong and determined figures like Pauline Oliveros, Pamela Z, and Patrice Scanlon will continue to be a necessity for underrepresented cultural groups.
CHAPTER THREE: THE BLIPVERT METHOD - EXPLORING A PERSONAL AESTHETIC

*BlipVert and Its Relation to the Bay Area*

For the last ten years, a great deal of my artistic work has been concerned with electronic music and electronic music performance, specifically the successful development of a composition and performance aesthetic. While the majority of my time is usually spent on activities that have nothing to do with music (e.g. marketing and promotion, dealing with monetary concerns, organizing lodging and travel), the writing of this thesis has allowed for a great deal of personal reflection, illuminating the development of my performance aesthetic and its essential constructs.

"BlipVert," a moniker under which I have been producing and performing electronic music since 2001, I believe strikes an intelligent balance between pre-composition and improvisation in its employment of prepared source material together with a live performance methodology that has, at its core, spontaneous instrumental interaction. In fact, spontaneity (improvisation) lies at the core of my entire BlipVert concept, which ultimately represents the purpose of my instrumental choices and their relationship to my compositional procedures. Bruno Nettl determines degrees of musical decision making in improvisation as dependent on the "size of the building blocks" available to the musician, and "the larger the blocks, the greater the internal variability" (1974:15). Nettl further states, "improvised music shows itself to be different in degree, but not in essence, from the traditions on which 'composed' music is based" (ibid). Nettl's mentioning of greater internal variability due to larger building blocks, as well as the idea
that improvisation and composition share similar aesthetic traditions, insinuates that a
performer's repertoire always consists of elements from both sides.

My BlipVert project began, as I often like to claim, "above an animal hospital in
the winter of 2001" ("What is BlipVert?") in Midwood, Brooklyn. While the inception of
this project has occurred on the east coast, its proliferation finds roots in the Bay Area.
The Bay Area has provided a communal musical environment free of competition and
commercialization. Often times, I have been able to find multiple communities that
support my compositional aesthetic. Throughout this chapter, I wish to explore my
BlipVert project's compositional and performance elements as unique phenomena, as
well as their inclusion in and appreciation by the Bay Area's progressive and flexible
musical climate.

*BlipVert Compositional Analysis*

At its core, BlipVert relies on a solid foundation of meticulously composed digital
audio tracks that contain a great deal of tangible input, i.e. interaction with hardware
components as opposed to software. To this end, my home studio environment is
primarily oriented towards devices that allow maximum "hands-on" involvement. This is
to say that I prefer to use studio components that I can treat like instruments; "playing"
the studio devices with my hands as opposed to manipulating a virtual environment. I
work with hardware components such as drum machines, samplers, and mixing devices
that are independent from the internal software of the computer. The more I physically
interact with my studio components, the more of myself I am able to put into the
compositions, hence the more dynamic my work can be. The electronic music studio
itself effectively becomes an instrument (Dudas 2010:29). Hence, the idea of a "studio improviser" (ibid 30) is an ever-present element in my work; I am able to intimately create, edit, and reconfigure ideas at a moment's notice. The incorporation of randomness as a controlling factor in my compositions is a direct result of the "hands on" nature of my studio environment.

One of the sole software programs I do use is ProTools, a reliable recording and digital editing workstation that acts as the "central nervous system" for recording and editing music. For my purposes, ProTools presents a user-friendly, versatile environment for digital manipulation and editing of sound files "in a variety of ways down to the smallest details" (Katz 2010:148). The ability to manipulate sound in this manner provides the bedrock of the controlled chaos that marks any BlipVert performance.

The BlipVert compositional repertory may be described as a system of individual hyper-developed musical ideas, or "building blocks of many different orders" (Nettl 1974:15). Musical ideas in BlipVert compositions consist of one of two concepts:

- A fully realized musical passage, occupying any length of time, which is used as the focal point for further development. Some examples of these musical ideas can include multi-layered polyphonic vocal melodies, heavily edited percussion patterns, extended melodic motifs, and genre specific musical sections utilizing specific instrumentation.
- A mood or overall sonic temperament that is desired to be expressed through a process of "collage" composition. That is, the combination of multiple sonic textures to create moods of intensity, manic happiness, disorientation, anger, and terror.

Essentially, each musical idea is treated separately as its own composition, which results in a "condensed blur of electronics that borrows from everything: jazz, glitch, metal, IDM, funk, and probably at least a few genres that haven't even been named yet"
(Johnson 2009). Musical ideas in a BlipVert composition may contain some (mostly aesthetic) underlying connection, such as a continuation of a motif or rhythmic elaboration. However, the most salient characteristic of any BlipVert composition, and subsequent performance, is its "unpredictable and frenetic" (ibid) nature; the presence of rapid, randomly shifting musical ideas that seem to provide a "real-time window" (ibid) into my compositional thought process. Nicolas Slonimsky provides an apt description of compositional development that is perfectly representative of BlipVert compositions and, despite the unpredictability, their underlying coherency:

When a musical seed grows, each cell divides into several cells, forming new musical organisms. A good composer manages to maintain unity among all these microscopic—or shall we say musicoscopic—particles…(1966:63)

The resulting unity of such musicoscopic particles contributes to a highly flexible compositional process where: "Songs become liquid. They become vehicles for improvisation, or source materials, field recordings almost, that could be reconfigured or remixed to suit the future" (Toop qtd. in Keller in Miller 2008:141).

The BlipVert composition "New Choomish" (released 2010, Eat Concrete Records; "BlipVert - New Choomish - FULL TRACK - EAT017 SP") provides a good example of separately distinguishable musical ideas that maintain both underlying connections and random shifts of mood and texture. New Choomish consists of five separate musical ideas, or sections, each of which displays different building blocks as well as different dimensions of my musical abilities (see Fig. 1). The composition opens with a multi-layered vocal sequence (musical idea #1) that establishes the initial tempo, later joined by a compliment of percussion, electric piano, and synthesizer that further
outlines the tempo. The vocal sequence and instrumentation combine with each other and dramatically interact until 1:23, where a sudden shift to aggressive, edited percussion occurs. The second musical idea comes into play here, which consists of a frantic sonic temperament characterized by a collage of synthesizer textures, percussion fragments, undecipherable vocals, samples, white noise, and effected elements from the previous section to create an almost disorienting effect. The second musical idea culminates with an explosive climax at 2:46, featuring an accelerated sequence of percussion and synthesizer that gradually slows to stop at a descending glissando vocal line at 2:58. From here, the third musical idea takes shape, with a whispered vocal chorus accompanied by a subdued frenetic drum pattern. Occasional, brief interruptions of sung, choral, and yelled vocal textures add depth and playfulness to the whisper chorus and drums. After another dramatic climax ending at 3:26, the fourth musical idea occurs with faster aggressive edited percussion, similar to the second idea. The fourth section continues to 4:37, where a sustained synthesizer line seems to put the composition in a holding pattern before moving forward. The fifth and final musical idea enters with a surprising ensemble of South Indian percussion, handclaps, synthesizer, two independent choral melodies, and a whispered spoken vocal line, ushering the listener into a completely new sonic realm as compared with the previous sections.

At first listen, the musical ideas in New Choomish seem haphazardly thrown together. Yet, by observing the composition closely, some sensible connections can be made between each musical idea. The first idea prominently introduces complex, creative vocal layering as one of the main components of the entire composition. This kind of vocal layering is prominently heard in the third and fifth musical idea, as are
"whispered" vocal textures. The first idea also introduces a primary "pulse" to the composition through the vocal layering and added compliment of electric piano and percussion, a concept to be reiterated later on.

The use of heavily edited, disjointed, aggressive percussion formulates another primary component of the composition; instead of "keeping a beat," percussion is used to make "more interesting broken beats and rhythms" (Mori in Rodgers 2010:75). Ideas two and four take on the concept of aggressive percussion as the focal point, with occasional bursts of synthesizer samples and ancillary textures. The aggressive percussion in idea two also gives way to an explosive climax at the end of the idea, which eventually subsides to accentuate the subdued feel in idea three (also emphasized in ideas one and five). Idea three retains an element of aggressive percussion and multi-layered vocals, maintaining connections with the previous two musical ideas introduced thus far. Another explosive climax occurs at the end of idea three, which not only repeats a significant element of idea two, but also leads the listener to a revisiting of idea three within a completely new preparatory context. This is to say that both moments of climax are given different treatments as to their resolve, one leading to a subdued feel and the other leading to an aggressive feel.

While idea five may seem random, the relationship to ideas one and three—whispered vocals, multi-layered vocals, subdued feel—emphasizes the desire to use vocals as the transmogrifying foundation of the musical idea. Furthermore, idea five's return to a steady pulse-based percussive texture is reminiscent of idea one. Based on this rationale, idea one and provide coherent structures of rhythm centered musical ideas that effectively bookend the frenetic nature of the additional ideas.
Perhaps the most sensible way to interpret any BlipVert composition is that of a "rich collage" of sounds, afforded by the "manipulability of recording technology" (Katz 2010:163). As indicated earlier, the flexible and versatile nature of ProTools helps to achieve the kind of hyper-development within ideas that ultimately contributes to the chaotic nature of BlipVert compositions.

The milieu of editing, idea shifting, aesthetic combinations, and collage oriented sound construction in BlipVert compositions indicates, "it is not the quality of the final product that is most important, but the quality of the manipulation" (Wordsayer in Schloss 2004:165). Viewed in this way, BlipVert compositions maintain an intimate connection with their application to live performance. BlipVert performances are as "unpredictable and frenetic" (Johnson 2009) as the music itself; compositions are further manipulated with a variety of live performance hardware that focuses on sound manipulation rather than the successful execution of a composition from beginning to end. Thus, the "hands-on" nature of sound manipulation in my home studio translates directly to the performance venue; compositions that have already had a significant amount of tangible input are essentially given a newer, yet familiar, field in which to roam.

**BlipVert Live Performance Analysis**

In live performance, I strive to incorporate the hands-on philosophy of my compositional method with the idea of a small, mobile, intelligent traveling unit that is capable of a maximum amount of freedom and power. My live setup involves the manipulation of four pieces of equipment: a Pioneer CDJ-400, an Alesis Air FX unit, a
Digitech Vocalist/Vocal effects processor, and an additional four channel Eurorack mixer, each of which serve a different performative purpose (see Fig. 2). These components serve as my "instrumental" arsenal; each component has distinct sets of sound manipulation abilities that I exploit to a different degree. Ultimately, I use my composed material as vehicles for improvisation, feeding them through the aforementioned pieces of live performance hardware. The resulting sonic experience is full of energy and erratic. When this experience is combined with ancillary improvised vocal accompaniment, microphone feedback delay loops, and an occasional woodwind solo, the live show becomes a mixture of intensity, drama, kineticism, and placidness.

In keeping with the above compositional analysis, I wish to examine a section of New Choomish in a performative context. The essence of sound manipulation, as evidenced in the compositional framework, takes on a more central role due to the dynamic nature of my live performance components. In addition to sound manipulation, ancillary body movements are incorporated to heighten the visual aspect of the performance.

The Pioneer CDJ-400 and the Alesis Air FX module have revolutionized my live performance capabilities. As dynamic "instruments," they completely satisfy (for me) the gesture-sound relationship. Not only are the units small and compact, they also contain numerous effects for sound manipulation. Via its unique "jog wheel" the CDJ offers stutter, acceleration and deceleration of speed, sample capture and looping, wah wah, record scratching simulation, filtering, and reverse playback. By waving one's hand over the top of the Alesis Air FX, effects such as ring modulator, pitch-shifting, distortion, sample and hold, and virtual percussion and synthesizers can be summoned. With both
of these components, I maintain full control of my live sets and have a seemingly unlimited amount of creative tools at my disposal. For example, during performance I am able to improvise and creatively work with one specific sample or motif over a period of fifteen minutes, drawing out as many sounds and ideas as I possibly can. My ability to "exploit…the qualities of variability, instability, and unpredictability" in performance (Nyman 1999:91) allows for pre-arranged compositional ideas to be lengthened or shortened, repeated indefinitely, sonically recreated, altered in terms of pitch or speed, played backwards, and distorted with a wide variety of digital effects.

The visual result of my live performances is that of rapid arm, hand, and body movements. Often times, determination as to how sound is manipulated and produced can become clouded, as some of my movements involve small gestures that do not indicate a specific effect or alteration. However, due to the relatively streamlined nature of my live performance setup, gestural movements are concentrated enough as to be sensible without being indecipherable. An audience member, with some inspection, can eventually determine the purposes of my gestures and the subsequent connection to the types of sounds that are produced.

Many of my body movements can sometimes represent a bizarre, non-sensical kind of "Brownian motion," which has been defined by some audience members as "dancing" (Reviews - A Nice Place for Noise). I equate this kind of motion to "body tricks" used in DJ battles (Katz 2010:135). These kinds of moves, such as spinning in place, jumping up and down, random twitching, and aimless meandering about "do not affect…the sound of the routine," but rather add to the visual appeal of the performance (ibid). Thus, gesture is not only a vital aspect of performing BlipVert in a live setting, it
acts as visual accompaniment to the overall chaotic sonic experience, allowing me to step away from pure "instrumental" focus and incorporate drama, humor, anger, and silliness. It could be reasoned that my ancillary body movements at their core maintain strong improvisatory character as well, i.e. "interpretive" movement. By observing that "spontaneity of execution is the essence of music vitally connected to the human body" (Partch 1974:44), the improvisatory inclination of my BlipVert project can be witnessed visually from both instrumental gestures and interpretive movement.

A performance of New Choomish in Eindhoven, Holland during a 2009 European tour is an ideal opportunity to witness the concomitant elements of sound manipulation and ancillary body movement working together ("BlipVert Live @ Gaslab: Eat Concrete 'Bassfudge Powerscones' Tour 2009"). Due to the multitude of activities occurring within this one excerpt, the first eleven seconds of the live performance (LP) will be compared and contrasted along with the original composition (OC) (see Fig. 3). The beginning of the live performance starts at the beginning of musical idea four (OC 3:29). From 0:00 to 0:01 (LP) the original material is "stuttered" by use of the CDJ jog wheel, creating a brief, dramatic foreshadowing (or sustaining) of what is to come. Over the next two and a half seconds a multitude of actions occur (LP 0:01-0:03.5). A right hand move to the Air FX pitch shift is followed by a brief touch of the CDJ jog wheel (still on a stutter effect), with a return back to the Air FX pitch shift culminating in a pausing hands to chest motion at 0:03. The altering of the original composition's percussion and samples (OC 3:30-3:33)—in addition to the rapid arm movements required to alter the sounds—add an elevated dramatic effect to the already chaotic material. The original

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This performance can be witnessed in its entirety on YouTube at the web address http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4j-bWLN2XU from 2:03 to 2:36. The studio recording can be heard at "https://soundcloud.com/eatconcrete/3-blipvert-new-choomish-full-track-eat017-sp."
composition next introduces a rapidly falling and ascending "white noise glissandi" (OC 3:33-3:34). The live performance choice made in this case is to visually interpret the glissandi by use of fluid hand motions (LP 0:04-0:05), which seem to logically extend from the pausing motion at LP 0:03. The original composition then introduces a disjointed two-second collection of percussion and samples (OC 3:34-3:35). The sonic recreation ability of the CDJ comes into play during this part of the performance, as multiple right and left hand touches on the jog wheel turn this of the original composition into a pitch shifted drum break (LP 0:05-0:06). The drum break culminates with a quick right hand wave over the Air FX (LP 0:06), providing a small "squeak" before moving forward.

At this point, body movements take over the rest of the performance. The original composition's "bouncing ball" synthesizer riff (OC 3:36-3:37) is visually interpreted with an extended right hand draw across the body (LP 0:07). A sped up snare drum "rush" (OC 3:38) is interpreted with a kind of "conjuring" motion with both hands (LP 0:07-0:09). Finally, four prominent synthesizer hits, each at different pitches (OC 3:38-3:39[40]) are emphatically stated with four defined visual cues with both hands (LP 0:10-0:12). The visual cues are also delivered in different directions to highlight the changes in pitch.

The strength and purpose of any BlipVert performance relies on an overriding sense of experimentation and spontaneous interaction with sonic material. The overall aim of the above analysis is to provide an example of the types of improvisatory choices that are made, as well as the frequency of improvisatory decision-making. As we have seen, a BlipVert performance contains a multitude of actions occurring within an
extremely short period of time, resulting in an entirely new composition from both aural
and visual standpoints. A colorful analogy that could characterize my performances
would be that I become an "action painter" (Veal 2001:100) of sound and visual motion.
Each BlipVert performance is an "episodic coloration in which 'explosive sonic events' take place" (ibid) coupled with equally explosive visual events.

Sometimes, these actions involve accidental occurrences of sonic manipulation
(e.g. imperfect capture of a sample, choosing an effect that is aesthetically displeasing,
missing a visual cue). However, no matter how spontaneous (or accidental) the actions appear to be, there is always a sharply tuned awareness of the underlying compositional material. This is to say that I am always aware of "where I am" in the composition while improvising with it so as not to lose focus or control of the overall performance (the body movements in LP 0:07-0:12 are in exact synchronisation with the sonic occurrences).
Hence, the "task of assimilating and maintaining accidental variations," in conjunction with an acute awareness of pre-composed and improvisatory elements in performance "requires superhuman powers of concentration and technique" (Nyman 1999:17). These "powers" of concentration and technique ultimately determine how successfully I am able to communicate my aesthetic during live performance.

By observing BlipVert as a whole, it becomes clear that improvisation is prominently represented in both the studio and live performance process (see Fig. 4). The source (i.e. pre-composed) material accounts for half of the entire BlipVert conception, which largely indicates that the core of my aesthetic relies on a heavy degree of pre-composition. Yet, the dynamic nature of the pre-composed material employs a
significant element of improvisation, as original ideas are experimented with and elaborated upon within the "hands-on" studio environment—one might say that the hands-on nature of my studio environment encourages improvisation. Thus, not only is my studio an improvising instrument in itself, but the resulting material is further altered in live performance using components with a wide variety of options for sonic manipulation.

"Monsters of Love"

My BlipVert project, while having originated conceptually (and in practice) on the east coast, has been afforded the opportunity to proliferate in the ripe musical climate of the Bay Area. The Bay Area's "different feel" due to its "laid back" and "less stressful and strained" environment allows for a "diverse" artistic culture where a person can "get away with doing all sorts of different stuff" (Taylor, Personal Communication). As mentioned in Chapter Two, the Bay's location at the "edge of the earth" creates an "inspiring place with a lot of people who are excited about being here" (Fields, Personal Communication). My unique compositional and performance procedures, while not rooted specifically in any sort of genre, have been able to garner significant appreciation from the "supportive and accepting" (Moldover, Personal Communication) nature of Bay Area musicians, concert organizers, and concertgoers. I have always been able to find like-minded fans, festivals, collectives, and events that support and appreciate my artistic endeavors, regardless of their unorthodox nature.34 Furthermore, the underground

34 The west coast in general has been responsible for providing my BlipVert project with its first "residency," as part of a bi-weekly event entitled "Synthetic" occurring at the Press Club in Sacramento, CA. For about five months during the spring/summer season of 2007, BlipVert was featured at the first Synthetic event each month. This allowed for extensive experimentation with performance techniques,
characteristics that permeate many electronic music scenes seem to abate slightly in favor of musical diversity and inclusivity in terms of space considerations and the plastic arts. While I would hardly consider myself a "rascally or anarchistic type" (Bernstein 2008:8) who can only find opportunities for artistic expression within the Bay Area, the majority of my output, touring, and electronic music collaborations have occurred in this unique corner of America.

"Monsters of Love" is an annual Bay Area electronic music event occurring on (or around) Valentine's Day hosted by soundsystems 5lowsershop, S.P.A.Z., Havoc Sound, and Army of Love. I was recently asked to perform at the 2013 Monsters of Love event on behalf of 5lowsershop, which occurred at the Bordello\(^{35}\) in Oakland, California. Every aspect of the event maintained a staunch DiY character, from promotion to space construction to ticket sales. Within several of the Bordello's 15-20 rooms there existed differently themed activities infused by colorfully dressed patrons, campy furniture, colorful decorations, and a plethora of multicolored, flashing, and neon lights. Some of the activities were created by the soundsystems and some by outside affiliates (e.g. visual artists, the venue itself). The largest and most heavily frequented room, hosted by the soundsystem S.P.A.Z., featured a scheduled cast of DJs and electronic musicians who produced and performed dance oriented electronic music (see Photo 13). Several VJ artists who were responsible for projecting video images on multiple walls further

\(^{35}\) One of the more "off-the-grid" establishments in the Bay Area, this unique two story, multi-room mansion and bar was frequented by the writer Jack London in the late 19th/early 20th century. A bordello was maintained at the residence for some time, which most likely led to its current unofficial name, the Bordello. In the 1990's the mansion was home to some of the Bay Area's biggest underground raves and eclectic parties.
emphasized the "centralized" character of this room. The Army of Love room featured a more tightly contained dance area and electronic musicians who produced more aggressive dance music. The "bar" area was transformed into a video viewing lounge, where patrons could view 3-D films (projected on the wall) using any of the 3-D eyeglasses suspended from a rope across the room. Several upstairs rooms, accessed by crawlerspaces, featured giant spreads of soft cushions for relaxing and socializing.

The social atmosphere at Monsters of Love was as mixed as the music. With events that feature multiple soundsystems (such as Monsters of Love), audience age range consists of 18 to about 40, with a relatively equal ratio of men to women. Fundamentally, soundsystem events—in addition to providing a "forbidden and unpredictable sense of place" (Thornton 1996:22) that "explores new territory" (Paskin in Thornton 1996:22)—provide an equally congenial, anti-commercial, and unpredictable social space that discourages particularity among crowd selection and inclusion. In conjunction, they perpetuate the traditional purpose of the underground dance venue, as a place to exacerbate the connection between the pleasures of sound and inhibited bodily movement:

…dancing is the fundamental connection between the pleasures of sound and their social realization in the libidinal movements of bodies, styles, and sensual forms. It represents a social encounter…where bodies are permitted to respond to physical rhythms that elsewhere would not be tolerated; [it represents] the moment where…a transitory step out of the everyday can be enjoyed (Chambers in Fikentscher 2000:61).

As we have seen the idea of conscious integration working its way into Bay Area electronic music events, social inclusivity across a range of dynamics (race, age, tastes) is palpable—similar to the late 1990's rave culture "organized by young entrepreneurs in
reaction to the expansion of the leisure industry and perceived 'commercialization' of night-life in the 1980s (Thornton 1996:47). In addition, the ultra-flexible nature of the soundsystems' administrative structure allow for the organization of such events at virtually any time and at any geographical location.

As indicated in Chapter Two (Bay Area Soundsystems), the events hosted by 5lowershop support an "all-inclusive" (ibid) philosophy from a conjoined social and musical perspective. 5lowershop uniquely utilizes the social milieu of the underground dance venue as a place to facilitate the presentation of a multitude of musical styles. Some of these styles may or may not involve music that contributes to a sense of movement. 5lowershop's all-inclusive attitude contributes to a person hearing "all kinds of different shit" on any given night (Taylor, Personal Communication). For example, in one 5lowershop concert one may hear "hardcore, total noise, straight techno, experimental noise, speedcore, breakcore, and an across the board DJ" (ibid). Thus, 5lowershop's audience makeup is primarily determined by the nature of its music. Mostly, this includes (mostly male) fellow DJs and electronic musicians; the nature of 5lowershop's inclusivity focuses more on conscious stylistic integration. Socially, this draws equal parts practitioners and connoisseurs, i.e. those whose musical tastes are outside any sort of commercial or institutional sphere. Personally, some of my most rewarding and interesting performance experiences in the Bay Area have been with the 5lowershop soundsystem. The chaotic and randomized sonic nature of my music fits in perfectly with 5lowershop's concertizing aesthetic; the inclusion of many different forms ultimately leads to the acceptance of a music with many forms.
Interestingly, the "sensory blurring" (Fikentscher 2000:23) of the event further expanded the "traditional" concept of the pre 1970s French discotheque while still retaining some of its original character. The "circumscribed location" (in this case a converted mansion), established for the purpose of "social dancing," did not "prioritize the aural dimension at the expense of the visual" (ibid). "Relative darkness" still permeated the venue, and "the constant presence of music at a high volume and wide frequency spectrum" was one of the most recognizable factors throughout the course of the evening (ibid). However, the emphasis on visual (and sensory, as evidenced by the "cushion" rooms) activity seemed to equal that of the aural activity, further heightening the overall experience. Furthermore, the presence of music not specifically oriented towards dancing provided patrons with alternate aural stimuli. The "redesign of aural and visual perception" (ibid) was itself effectively redesigned; a new version of an alternate world that focuses on conscious integration. In all, the Bordello was transformed into an otherworldly mecca of sight, sound, and social interaction, a free-flowing concert/party atmosphere whose festivities began around ten o'clock at night and lasted until six o'clock in the morning.

The 5lowershop room was responsible for hosting the "experimental" room, or DJs and electronic music performers who specialized in more abstract forms of electronic music (e.g. noise, highly aggressive techno, ambient, music made with circuit bent instruments). The intimate, dimly lit room contained two performance areas: a regular DJ booth and another performance area enclosed by a steel grate and infused with a dim red light (see Photo 14). The steel cage booth was especially intriguing. The use of a steel enclosure seemed to "intensify the presence of its personalities" (Thornton 1996:80),
providing them with an effective visual component to compliment the experimental nature of their music. Above the steel cage booth was fixated a large multicolored mask design, which seemed to keep an authoritative watch over the proceedings (see Picture 15). At the rear of the room stood two tall speakers that comprised the main soundsystem.

Surprisingly, 5lowsershop was one of the first rooms that patrons encountered when they entered the establishment, effectively providing a "preview" of the experiences that lay further inside the venue. Patron reactions ranged from becoming immediately captivated—and hence remaining in the room—to a desire to press ahead to socialize and discover more of what the venue had to offer (perhaps also to discover an area with more "danceable" music). Brandon Taylor, one of 5lowsershop's main organizers and the individual who invited me to perform, stresses 5lowsershop's desire to be "all-inclusive, not only in our guests, but in the people playing and the people involved" (Personal Communication). Taylor's wide-ranging musical tastes can be seen in the eclectic range of artists he invites to 5lowerhop events, where he "doesn't want hear the same thing all night long" (ibid). 5lowsershop's devotion to inclusivity from artist and patron standpoint—as well as the intimacy of the room itself—seemed to provide a kind of initial welcoming environment, despite the "difficult" nature of its music (ibid). Patrons could essentially "get a feel" for what the rest of the event was going to be like while trying out some of the event's more unorthodox music first, eventually moving on if they desired something different. Conversely, the sparse decorative layout of the 5lowsershop room as well as its focus on more eclectic electronic music helped to maintain its own character, thus establishing a kind of independence from the other rooms.
My performance at Monsters of Love occurred at circa two fifteen in the morning in the 5lowershop room. Beforehand, I had arrived to the venue very early (circa midnight), and thus had a great deal of time for socializing and observing the other rooms. At this time, the room contained an average amount of patrons, most of which had by now learned the general structure of the venue and were moving freely between rooms. After some frantic communication with Brandon, I was led through what seemed to be a utility closet to the inside of the steel grate booth. I then had about five to seven minutes to set up my equipment before launching into my performance.

Throughout my thirty to thirty-five minute set, I found that my main concern was ascertaining the "precise effects" (Brewster, Broughton 2008:10) of my music on an audience that was not only rapidly changing, but was encountering me as their first experience of the event. Overall, the Monsters of Love event seemed to offer an "other-worldly environment in which to escape" (Thornton 1996:21); an "interior [haven] with such presence that the dancers forget local time and place and sometimes even participate in an imaginary global village of dance sounds" (ibid). This ideology was staunchly evidenced by the rooms hosted by S.P.A.Z. and Army of Love, where the focus was on dancing rather than presenting music with an experimental aesthetic. These rooms featured DJs and performers who were "responding to the feelings of a roomful of people, and then using music to accentuate or heighten them" (Brewster, Broughton 2008:11). The experimental concept in the 5lowershop room instead placed the focus on the music rather than patrons' emotive conditions. Thus, I automatically felt as if my performance needed to focus on more recognizable "dance" music rather than my usual

Brandon Taylor's statement concerning 5lowershop's musical ideology of "For me, its especially about the music" (Personal Communication) is particularly relevant here.
chaotic performances. Furthermore, the element of "performing" or improvising with my electronic equipment did not seem to matter as much as "controlling the relationship between some music and hundreds of people" (ibid).

Overall, my performance maintained an adequate amount of crowd communication while allowing the focus to remain on musical experimentation. In fact, due to the rapidly mobile nature of the crowd and presence of the steel grate, I felt that couldn't effectively communicate with the crowd even if I desired to (whether or not this was predetermined by 5lowershop in allowing the focus to remain on music in their room is open to question). Some patrons chose to visually interpret the music themselves on the dance floor area—via a healthy amount of random gyrating and ancillary body movement—while others stayed in close proximity to me in order to dance or closely witness my interaction with my electronic components or the music itself ("Brownian motion" dancing). As my performance area was outwardly recognizable enough to focus patrons' attention, those wishing to simply watch my performance remained in close proximity to the steel cage. Crowd reactions were mostly positive; many people came up to the steel cage to offer accolades such as "great set," "holy shit, man, totally awesome," and "nice job." Brandon Taylor also congratulated me and was "totally glad I could come out." This allowed for further conversations in the backstage (utility closet) area with Brandon, other members of the 5lowershop soundsystem, DJs, and patrons.

After my set, one patron told me "I wish I heard more stuff like that at these events." This particular comment held the most meaning for me, as I felt that regardless of my appearance or the unorthodox nature of my music, I was able to provide a positive, alternative experience to a patron who perhaps thought he was going to "hear the same
thing all night long" (Taylor, Personal Communication). It is these kinds of reactions and experiences I live for. Knowing that there are members of the public who, despite their surroundings, are still able to assimilate and appreciate alternative (and challenging) aural experiences inspires me to continue the development of my artistic aesthetic.

Moving Ahead

The development of a compositional and performance methodology rooted in experimentation involves a composer's "intelligence, his initiative, his opinions and prejudices, his experience, his taste and his sensibility in a way that no other form of music does…" (Nyman 1999:14). In other words, the creation of experimental music involves a major commitment from the artist on multiple fronts; creative ingenuity and perpetuity necessitate involvement from emotional, intellectual, and personal facilities. It has taken nearly ten years, countless concerts and festivals, thousands of dollars, numerous equipment configurations, lost baggage, being stranded in foreign countries, early morning hospital visits, equipment fires, small riots, customs detention, absent soundmen, dishonest venue owners, stolen equipment, and constant doubt and self-evaluation to bring my BlipVert project to where it is today.

The Bay Area has provided me with access to a completely unique kind of musical community; my ideas can find appreciation amongst like-minded individuals who are able to establish new aesthetic perceptions in "traditional" social and musical structures. The redefinition of the underground concept from a near-invisible environment that is "kept away, to a large degree, from mainstream society" (Fikentscher 2000:5) to an environment of conscious, creative integration allows for the flourishing of
a myriad of artistic perspectives in a liberal and democratic community. I like to think that I am continuing the Bay Area's tradition of artistic participation and proliferation within alternative communal structures. In addition, I hope my actions can help to establish new social and artistic paradigms for the next generation of Bay Area electronic musicians to develop and expand upon.
CONCLUSION

To revisit one of the fundamental concepts of this thesis, the presence of experimentalism in musical forms advertently affects related activities of the practitioners. Experimentalism, as I have attempted to demonstrate, is ultimately rooted in a DiY aesthetic. The desire to create new musical technology, concert experiences, and methods of expression necessitates a willingness to strike out on one's own and deviate from prescribed (mainstream) formulas. While this could be seen as universal, the focal point of the San Francisco Bay Area has provided unique insight into experimentalism's manifestation in geographical, social, educational, environmental, individual, and communal arenas. Examining a music as varied, malleable, and accessible as electronic music within these contexts expands the scope of the ethnomusicological data. Practitioners, to borrow a term from Pamela Z, hyphenate their identities by liberally adopting a variety of genre descriptors and activities (or, perhaps, adopting none at all). Moreover, their contact with the greater social spectrum expands to include community outreach and a broader public inclusion and participation (i.e. conscious integration).

There are of course examples of DiY musical development throughout the Bay Area's history that have not been mentioned in this thesis. San Francisco and Berkeley's punk rock scene throughout the 1980s and 90s—including groups such as Operation Ivy, Rancid, Swingin' Utters, and The Forgotten—became centered around independent and collectively owned music clubs, such as 924 Gilman Street, Mabuhay Gardens, and The Farm. Berkeley's 924 Gilman Street (one of the longest running independent music venues in the United States that functions to this day) still maintains a staunch DiY ethos
in its overall operations; members pay yearly dues and work together to run the venue collectively. San Francisco's 1970s funk legacy, one of the major contributing factors to the evolution of Bay Area hip-hop, featured the use of live instrumentation in Bay Area hip-hop (see Arnold 2006:71-84). The Bay Area's abundance of independent labels allowed for such "widespread creativity and innovation" in hip-hop, with live instrumentation continuing "to be a staple of Bay Area hip-hop to this day" (ibid:76). In addition to live instrumentation, the Bay Area is also recognized as a center for socially conscious hip-hop due to the region's strong spoken word scene, featuring artists such as Azeem and Zion-I (see Arnold 2006:71-84). Research on these scenes and their relation to DiY aesthetics and underground identity are topics for another thesis.

It becomes clear that the Bay Area is capable of playing host to a variety of musical movements regardless of style or image, which is further reflected in the attitudes of musicians, event organizers, collective members, and educators alike. Many of the individuals I spoke to during the course of my research spoke of San Francisco as a uniquely sympathetic environment for creativity; "accepting" (Moldover, Personal Communication), "nurturing" (Z, Personal Communication), and "laid-back" (Taylor, Personal Communication). While these comments paint the Bay Area in a convincingly utopian light, the underground portion of this thesis effectively balances this conception. Brandon Taylor's comment of the underground being "inherently difficult" (ibid) concerning the music, culture, and people involved grounds the aspiring underground participant in a cogent reality. Though the DiY activities with 5lowershop are completely left up to the control of Taylor and his compatriots, there is no specific guarantee in regard to conventional outcomes such as economic results, participant reliability, patron
behavior, and overall event success especially within illegal spaces. The same logic applies to similar situations discussed in this thesis: economic results and management interaction at Kevin Diede's former Circuitry party, the number of people who register for Pamela Z's electronic music classes, the success of Matt Moldover's new live performance aesthetic, and the abandonment of labels and genres which, while appealing to the artist, could contribute to an ambiguous connection between artist and audience member.\textsuperscript{37}

Though some of the artists discussed in this thesis do not specifically characterize themselves as "underground,"\textsuperscript{38} the notion of inherent difficulty seems to encapsulate many of the activities pursued by experimental electronic musicians in the Bay Area regardless of their identity. While the Bay Area does provide a congenial environment for experimental music making, the trade-off is the willingness to accept conventional unknowns and allow fundamental (or perhaps authentic) aspects of artistic process, new technological developments, and aesthetic principles to take center stage (i.e. an alternative focus). That an essential DiY character accompanies this trade-off is clearly seen by independent creativity in terms of identity, choice of space, event design and administration, and interaction with the larger public. David Wang (aka Mochipet) emphasizes this point:

\begin{quote}
The advantages of that is that you are completely free to do whatever you like on a case by case basis because you are not tied by a contract to anything. The negative side is that because you are not working with the Mainstream Music Industry you tend to make way less money and have way less exposure. It's a trade off (Wang, Personal Communication).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{37} This ambiguity could also result from utilizing too many labels or genres.
\textsuperscript{38} Patrice Scanlon humorously refers to herself as an underground artist because "no one knows who I am" (Scanlon, Personal Communication).
As shown in Chapter One, many of the singular musical developments in the Bay Area have resulted precisely from this alternative focus. Kenneth Rexroth's characterization of the Bay Area's artistic milieu seems particularly apropos in aggregating DiY musicians (particularly those discussed in this thesis) who, beneath their surfaces, maintain profound similarities: "It [the underground] is dominant, almost all there is" (Davidson 1989:11).

Thus, the Bay Area's singularity as a music-making region comes not from recognizing anomalies that occur within a "domineering mainstream" (Slobin 1993:27), but from anomalies formulating the greater musical and social-musical architecture of the region. Though social and economic landscapes have changed drastically since the mid-20th century, the Bay Area's still retains its historical implications as a locale for "rascally and anarchistic types" (Bernstein 2008:8), augmented by its geographical location and physical beauty.

Like most metropolitan music scenes, the Bay Area can run the risk of becoming "splintered" (Wang, Personal Communication). Musical scenes can partition themselves off into separate groups with little or no interaction due to "different ideas of what they think the scene should be" (ibid). However, the fundamental point concerning the Bay Area's dominant underground atmosphere is that it provides a multi-dimensional alternative—geographical, social, historical, and communal—for those who wish to shape their musical destiny in whatever way they choose. Though corporate and mainstream establishments have indeed found their way to the Bay Area, the region's countercultural legacy has imbued it with the spirit and character of reevaluation and regeneration.
Observing DiY innovation occurring within non-mainstream events in a singular geographical location is truly inspiring; practitioners are able to create city-wide events and profound personal identities by solely relying on their wits and ambitions. What is perhaps most inspiring for me is the continued opportunity to be a part of this unique conglomeration of concepts (as demonstrated in the "Monsters of Love" section in Chapter Three), and furthermore the freedom to establish my own identity as I see fit. I like to think that I am participating in (and perhaps carrying the tradition of) a bold experiment initiated by the Beat Generation long ago. The Beats saw their marriage of bohemianism and popular culture as a pathway to a new society, or at the very least a new consciousness that could produce a multitude of different results. One can still feel the essence of this new consciousness when frequenting spaces such as Golden Gate Park, Fisherman's Wharf, North Beach, Market Street, and the Mission as well as downtown Oakland. One might say that the spaces themselves inspire metaphysical and mental rejuvenation, which further validates the power and efficacy of the region's physical characteristics.

In my attempts to illuminate DiY aesthetics, the underground, and experimental electronic music in the Bay Area, it becomes clear that their functioning properties when combined form a malleable whole. Experimentalism in music gives way to independent creativity, which in turn assigns the practitioner a distinctive non-mainstream identity, all of which occurs in an area with a substantial history of alternative creative ingenuity. No matter where one begins, they will eventually encounter a conjoining property. As has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, the depth and originality of Bay Area artists
who adhere to this design is strikingly evident in their activities, attitudes, and interaction with the greater community.

As for how present-day Bay Area artists appreciate these concepts working together, I can think of no better way than to conclude with a candid quote from Brandon Taylor:

This is what I enjoy doing, and what I have the capacity to do, 'cause I can do this without a lot of money or a Master's degree. A bunch of my other interests require me to be good at things that I am not good at...I know a lot about it, and people sometimes say 'how come you're not doing that for a living,' and I say 'cause I suck at x part of it.' With this music, I'm allowed to suck at part of it, because there's somebody else that might be good at that part of it, and I might be good at something that they're not good at. My overall goal is to not be completely miserable, and hopefully have that rub off on others. If I just wanted to be by myself, I wouldn't live here in the Bay Area because...I'm here because I like people, which is strange because most people would think that I don't like people. It's important to have interaction. It's nice to do parties and have people who have never been to anything like that, or people who've been coming to our events for years say 'holy shit.' I like to make people have a good time, and to realize that you can do that without spending three hundred dollars supporting some corporate bullshit, or pretending that you're enjoying yourself when you're not (Personal Communication).


**Interviews:**


**Discography:**


**Videography:**


APPENDIX I

Figures
If there is no fundamental design (indicated, idea components are a result of previous fundamental and auxiliary.

Color indicates connecting elements from idea to idea.

Fundamental design of central idea. Subsequent (auxiliary) development occurs as a result of fundamental design.

MUSICAL IDEA(S) #5
Subdued Reed
Pulse-based Rhythm
Whispered Vocals

MUSICAL IDEA(S) #4
"Bursts"
"Symphonic Fragments"
"Fractured Rhythms"
Ambient Ideas

MUSICAL IDEA(S) #3
"Explosive Climax"
"Synthetic Symphonic"
"Fractured Rhythms"
"Ambient Ideas"

MUSICAL IDEA(S) #2
"Explosive Classic"
"Synthetic Symphonic"
"Fractured Rhythms"

MUSICAL IDEA #1
Subdued Reed
Whispered Vocals
Pulse-based Rhythm
Ambient Ideas

BLIPPERT COMPOSITIONAL SCHMATIC
BLIPVERT LIVE COMPONENTS AND PURPOSES

1. **Pioneer CDJ 400** - Primary "controller." Used to playback and manipulate source material in a variety of ways.

2. **Alesis Air FX** - Secondary "controller." Used to manipulate source material only.

3. **4 Channel Mixer** - "Regulatory" unit for volume and frequency equalization.

4. **Vocal Processor** - Ancillary effects unit for vocal improvisation, accompaniment, and looping. Acts as an alternate focal point of new source material that can be improvised with and manipulated.

5. **Various acoustic or acoustic/electric instrumentation** - Act as "traditional" contrasts to "new" instrument/controller usages. Examples: electric kalimba, zurna, shehnai, rhaita, hand drums.

Fig. 2
THE BLIPVERT METHOD

Fig. 4
APPENDIX II

Photos
**Photo 1** Brandon Taylor's home studio. Notice the Ableton controller (lower left), iPhone (on computer), various controllers (right of computer), and laptop running a variety of plug-ins.
Photo 2 One of Matt Moldover's custom built controllers. The buttons, knobs, and ribbons on this controller each serve some purpose in affecting the overall sound running from Matt's laptop, such as remixing, filter effects, soundfile "slicing" and editing, and dynamic controls to name a few.
Photo 3 The stage for LoveTech/NVO F&ck Yeah!'s event at the Boom Boom Room, June 26, 2011. Notice both promotional details - LoveTech's banner on the bottom and F&ck Yeah!'s promotion on the video screen.
**Photo 4** Matt Moldover performing with a modified guitar, along with his laptop and custom controller.

**Photo 5** A Nintendo controller attached to Matt Moldover's microphone stand to manipulate vocal sounds.
Photo 6 Side view of Brandon Taylor's South San Francisco residence and sound system headquarters.

Photo 7 Front view of Brandon Taylor's residence.
Photo 8 Flyer for Slowershop event. Note the "Info Line" indication and subsequent phone number.
Local Artist Live-
UNDERGROUND SF | LOWER HA

LOVE HAIGHT
RECORDS

JULY/AUGUST LINE-UP!

LUCIA COMNES – 7/25
4M1R – 8/22
SORROW CHURCH – 8/22

Photo 9 Poster for LoveHaight Records event, August 22nd, 2012 at Underground SF. The featured performing act, or acts, are listed weekly.

Photo 12 DJ booth overlooking the bar at Underground SF - LoveHaight Records event, August 22, 2012.

Photo 14 View of part of the dance floor area for the 5lowershop room at Monsters of Love event, February 16, 2013. Note the secondary DJ/performance booth behind the curving black structure occupied by a female performer (with keyboard and headphones). The soundsystem is located to the left underneath the blue wall structures. The steel grate DJ booth is located to the bottom right, unseen in this picture.
Photo 15 Mask design overlooking the flower shop room. The steel grate DJ booth (yellow) can be seen in the center of the picture. The corridor to the other rooms and other parts of the Bordello is to the left of the steel grate.
APPENDIX III

Interview Transcriptions
MATT MOLDOVER - AKA - MOLDOVER INTERVIEW
Conducted in San Francisco, CA in person July 10, 2012, 9 to 9:45 PM

Will Northlich: How did you first start making music? Electronic music?

Matt Moldover: Music was in my home as long as I can remember. My mom was an amateur cellist and has actually gotten pretty serious about it recently. So I started getting serious about music when I was twelve or thirteen, and I started playing guitar and with rock bands. I didn't really encounter electronic music until I got to college, and that was more...that was the same time as I was encountering jazz and funk and fusion and all this other crazy stuff at the same time. Because I had a strong aptitude for computers - playing a lot of video games but also writing a lot of video games and learning how to code - it seemed like, 'oh, here's something I am good at that a lot of these guys who can wail on their horns and shred the guitar can't do. I can shred some C-Sound or bust out some complex drum programming.

WN: So it was a mentality of 'seeing something that you wanted to get involved in' as a way to get away from the traditional guitar route. That is to say, it's something I can do, it's something I can access and I can be a part of.

MM: Yeah, you said it well. It's a recurring theme in my life, its like there's the cool kids, and at first I want to do what the cool kids do, and in junior high or high school that was probably play sports and be accepted by the popular kids [Laughs]. Definitely didn't go that direction, and then I would see that the music's cool and its like 'oh the cool kids are the ones that play their instruments really well,' primarily because at my school it was all about jazz. In the same way, its like, its not really cool, but this electronic thing is really hip and I'm gonna go do that.

WN: How would you describe your style of music?

MM: I'd say the main influence comes from rock n' roll music and songs, and that comes from the culture in my family and what I listened to early in life. I'm getting back to those roots now, which is kind of what my new music is about. If you listen to all of the stuff I've done in the last ten years it goes all over the map. I can say what it all has in common is that it's all trying to use technology and do interesting things with technology, and merge it with traditional musicianship. Like, here's something new, here's something possible with sample manipulation, but let's keep it musical, let's write pieces of music that people want to listen to. In other words, what mom wants to listen to [Laughs].

WN: [Laughs] Yeah, it'll keep her off my back.....moving on, your performances and aesthetic have changed considerably over the years, from mash-up DJ sets to building and performing with controllers to, what seems to be now, a unique kind of futuristic electronic singer/songwriter utilizing all of your talents. What do you believe has
influenced these changes, and how do you identify yourself now within the greater context of electronic music performance?

MM: Each project is kind of a reaction to the last. The mash-ups were all based on strictly samples, such as movies and other music, which was a reaction to playing in bands and doing everything super-organically - sort of 'super-sample' - and then flipping that into the composition of the album - kind of doing the Squarepusher* thing making it all about the recording and not so much about the performance - and now the singer-songwriter thing, which is all about simple melodies, lyrics; composition takes a back seat to songwriting. So, kind of like reaction reaction reaction and learning new things; keep it interesting and flowing.

I see myself as a contemporary of artists like Beardyman, Tim Exile, and Imogen Heap^ who I've been listening to. [Imogen] has done some pretty amazing controllerism performances and she does the singer-songwriter thing as well. Yeah, I'm looking for more artists in my generation, whereas before I felt like I was looking at the towering greats of [John] Coltranes and [Jimi] Hendrix's and all that kind of stuff. Now I'm looking for people around me that inspire me and do more similar stuff, and maybe I can even work with them one day.

WN: Where/how often do you perform? At what venues do you perform? In your view, does the Bay Area provide adequate and enjoyable performance opportunities?

MM: In the Bay, I perform about once a month, and I try not to perform more or less than that. I try to keep myself on my toes but not strain myself out. I was playing a lot at the LoveTech events because they were happening monthly, and I would play those if I was in town. Now it's more at other events that are not too dissimilar to LoveTech. Its kind of sporadic, because I don't do a kind of cut and dried act, so I wind up in some pretty interesting venues, which I like. Yeah, the Bay Area's been really good. I've found it much easier to find places to play here than in New York, I'd say. It seems like there's more, I don't know, there's a great arts scene and a great tech scene so I can fit into both of those. There isn't as much professional music, but that doesn't necessarily make for a good audience. [Laughs] Too many musicians, not enough music fans.

WN: Your YouTube videos on controllerism - building and performing - are very popular. Do you see controllerism as a major force in electronic music (and popular music in general) now (practitioners, networks, online communities, etc.)?

MM: Yeah, I think controllerism is really important. In my last email blast about Jam Boxes and multi-player instruments I said this is the most important contribution I've made to music culture since controllerism! Because I do think it was really important. Its really cool in these interviews to tell the story really briefly, because basically I was doing this live performance all based on samples, and trying to translate it for broader audiences; trying to give it a name and a vocabulary with which I could explain it. I think controllerism's inspiration was turntablism, because it was something that wasn't all
that conventional of a musical instrument; people have taken turntablism to and beyond the level of conventional musical instrumentation. DJ mixers have evolved into these really amazing performance instruments, and I saw that as being the greatest recent parallel for what I was trying to do with controllers and music software. And I also realized that DJs are this big group of people right now, I mean DJ-ing is more popular than playing traditional instruments like guitar I'm pretty sure. So, here's a whole group of people I could reach out to and turn on to this, to all these crazy cool things that are possible, performing with these tools. So, controllerism, and calling myself a controllerist, were really good ideas.

A lot of people say 'Did you invent controllerism?' or they go 'Hey, there's the guy that invented controllerism' or they point to Ian Golden who was one of the first guys to sort of popularize it. Neither of us invented anything [Laughs]. I came up with that word, me and Julie (Covello) and she was adamant that it was a great word and I needed to publish it, and that's when I went to Ian and showed it to him and suggested we publish an article, Ian at the time was writing for Remix magazine. Ian then wrote this great article about controllerism. Yeah, I'm stoked that controllerism's gained popularity and it's a way for people coming up now to say, 'yeah, I'm a controllerist.' It's real. I'm not mucking around with something that's not a musical instrument, this is legit.

WN: Your LoveTech event is popular for electronic musicians to showcase their talents. In your view, what are the most important qualities of this event (community building, exposure, etc.)? Why is this event unique and what do you hope to achieve in the long run?

MM: LoveTech is the same theme as the Warper Party that I started in New York, which is basically live electronic music or controllerism if you will. I think the most important qualities are that we try to create community, and it's not about getting as many people into the event as possible. You know, it's not about trying to make a whole bunch of money, it's really about creating a quality event and connect people who are all interested in this culture of electronic music to each other. So making that the ethos, and teaming up with others, I hope it continues with the ideal of showcasing live electronic musicianship - as we say - and creating a platform for artists who are not bands or DJs, but are somewhere in this area in between, or simply just doing their own thing. Trying to create a space for that ideal to flourish is the goal. I hope it morphs into bigger and cooler things because the small community events are great, and I hope they continue to go on. But as the culture grows I can see the possibility for much bigger things like the controller battle; we're doing more stuff with festivals and other arts groups.

WN: Do you believe there is a strong and like-minded 'community' of electronic musicians in the Bay Area? Are there different communities based on styles, instrumentation, etc?
MM: Community is kind of a fuzzy term. I believe there is a good electronic music community in the Bay Area. I think its kind of still segmented, but there's a lot of groups similar to LoveTech, such as the Renegade Lights Group which does Monome oriented stuff, and the NVO F*ck Yeah show that you came to, they're organizing electronic shows. So there are little pockets of stuff. It's hard to say if it's all one entity, but there's a lot of cross-pollination. For example, there are guys who are very active in the Monome community that are active in the hip-hop community as well.

WN: You were elemental in setting up one of the seminal electronic music events in NYC (the Warper party) with Julie Covello (aka DJ Shakey). Why the move to the Bay Area? Why not stay and continue the tradition?

MM: I think for this question I may skip the story I told you the other day about Jojo (Mayer) [Laughs]

WN: [laughs] I do remember that one. I do like his prophetic statement relating to the fact that a "flame has been lit," carry the torch...

MM: Yeah, don't pray to the ashes, that was cool. Yeah, I love artists that carry forward and don't rely of their past successes or try to re-create them. That was partly why I moved out here, I also fell in love with a woman, just to be straight [Laughs]. But, I felt like Warper was successful, and I learned a hell of a lot doing it, stuff that I would not have learned any other way in terms of organizing events. So, it was really helpful for me and it was a great way for me to collaborate with Julie (Covello). The fact that its still going I'm very grateful for, that I can go back there and perform is an amazing and wonderful honor I can think of. But basically, aside from the woman, I left to grow and to change, and I felt claustrophobic in New York and I wanted something different. Anybody who comes to San Francisco cannot be unaware of how amazing it is in so many ways, its naturally beautiful, its super diverse, and there's a ton of creative things. The tech industry here has made it somewhat expensive to live [Laughs], but there's a lot of interesting ways that I think that culture connects to the electronic music scene, and kind of fuels that.

WN: Dovetailing off that, in your view what are the main differences between the east and west coast electronic music scenes? What makes the Bay Area appealing as an area to produce and perform electronic music?

MM: The Bay Area is appealing to produce and to perform electronic music because there's good audiences for it. For example, the stuff I'm doing now is totally new music and the performance is totally unpolished [Laughs]. I almost feel embarrassed sometimes playing shows. But I'm doing that intentionally because the local community here is really supportive and accepting and forgiving. I don't feel the clash of 'expert' awesome people that I felt in New York. It makes it easier for me to take an unpolished thing onstage, which can help me come up with ideas and solve problems more efficiently. That's the vibe I get. People here are a little bit more easy going and a little bit more accepting of direction, and it's a bit easier to find venues to play on Friday or Saturday.
In contrast to the East Coast, people are just awesome in whatever they do; they just do it 100 percent. Even when I go back there now I'm just blown away by the level of awesomeness that people portray there.

WN: You mean the East Coast?

MM: The East Coast, yeah. Particularly in New York. I was helping my friend (Zach Danziger) the other day, who's a fusion drummer; f#@kin' nasty! Now he's got drum triggers hooked up to Max/MSP patches that are arpeggiating changes, and he's just got crazy stuff going on. He's an expert. There are hundreds of guys doing amazing stuff over there. I see that and say wow, holy crap, humans can do that.

WN: There's a more accepting, welcoming community here?

MM: Yeah, that makes sense.

WN: Do you see the things that you've done in your musical life as having expanded and/or developed this idea of dance music or experimental dance music as a whole? Do you believe the idea of dancing, or a club experience.....have the events that you've done expanded the dance experience?

MM: I've kind of been on the edge of dance music you could say, as its something that came to me later in life like in my twenties. It's actually becoming much more important now, and its awesome, but music to me has always been more emotional, sometimes intellectual, kind of experience, but not physical which is what dance is. There's many different ways you can enjoy music and to me dance is the physical one.

WN: With your mash-up sets I remember they were very dance oriented, and it was almost a DJ kind of experience to me.

MM: Yeah. I'd say controllerism is really the thing that fits into all that. My music, and if you read my Youtube video comments they're like 'yeah, his music isn't changing the world,' and by that they mean the recordings I've produced, but they also say 'but his videos and his concepts are.' So I think in that realm, controllerism has been a major contribution, cause I think what that's done is sort of taken that paradigm of DJ dance music....its drawing out more from that. Its saying maybe the DJ can do more than just play back the song as it was mixed. I think controllerism has a much broader meaning than just 'hey DJs you should do more than whatever.' But that's how a lot of people have taken it, that's the most common descriptor of it. I think that's a cool thing. The biggest school of controllerism for me was playing at these parties called Amateur Female Gel Wrestling.....

WN: [Laughs] Wow! Okay....

MM: It was a monthly thing in New York for a while. I DJ'd it for two or three years before I started the Warper Party. That was my house gig. I got good at it without
having to impress anybody. DJs are supposed to watch an audience and react by picking their song and following the changing energy level. I could do that from moment to moment cause I had this amazingly flexible rig, but I had all the same material, songs and stuff. That's the most significant I've made so far to the sample based mash-up DJ stuff.

**WN: What is your overall artistic goal? What do mostly hope to achieve with your music?**

**MM:** That would lead into an explanation of my new, recent meditation practice and the major loss in my life, and how that's kind of set up my artistic goal of being more about helping other people, for what that's worth. It's hard to interpret that in terms of 'what's my favorite thing to do' or 'what do I enjoy most about music' and that's performing. That's something that draws out a lot of issues with ego for a lot of people, myself included. But breaking it down, it's inspiring to educate other people, and that's what I aim to do with my performances. Looking at the other work I do with my Jamboxes and developing multi-player instruments I design, they are very clearly a way to educate and inspire people on a much more hands-one kind of way, which is exciting for me because I would love for my performances to carry the traditional values of performance, the idea of I'm on stage, let me just play the music I've made for you and hopefully it's an exchange of ideas. In the world of those multi-player instruments hopefully that whole culture grows. My dream is for those things to be in every shop and bar ad whatever, like jukebox machines in the fifties and pinball machines in the seventies, video games in the nineties. What's there now? Could it be interactive music jam stations? That would be awesome.

* A popular artist affiliated with the UK's Warp Records.
^ Beardyman is a well-known UK beatboxing artist who is adept at live-looping techniques; Tim Exile is an electronic musician affiliated with Warp Records; Imogen Heap is a popular vocalist and multi-instrumentalist.
^^ Also known as DJ Shakey, Julie Covello is a New York based artist who started the Warper Party with Matt.
** Matt Moldover previously told me a story about why Jojo Mayer - a popular drummer and percussionist - left the live drum n' bass scene (and New York in general) that he started with his band Nerve (I was also part of this scene with my own band - Samsara - for an extended period of time). Matt exclaimed it was because Jojo needed to move on, and didn't want to continue to fall back on something that was already successful.
Will Northlich: You and I have known each other for quite awhile. You've been a composer, producer, event producer and planner, and DJ. You've been around this scene of underground experimental dance music - or breakcore - for a long time. How did you first start making music, and electronic music in particular?

Kevin Deide: I had a friend who was into cutting up music in Sound Edit 16 and recomposing it, so I started using his computer and starting experimenting in the program and just really liked working with the raw waveforms, rearranging them into new things. I had come from a background making four-track indie-rock stuff, and it just seemed that this type of music, you know, cutting and pasting and making into whatever you wanted…..electronic music seems to be a bottomless pit of creativity, and you really don't know where it's going to take you.

WN: That's a great quote. In my reading of the SF Tape Music Center there was a sense of anything goes, and that seems to translate directly into the scenes that you and I were involved in and are still involved in to a certain extent. Now, you're a DJ and composer. How would you describe the styles of music that you compose and DJ?

KD: As far as DJ-ing I just do whatever is good for the party. Like, if its something more laid back or chilled out, I'll do that for the party. I guess with DJ-ing it's a little less specific for me, its kind of last minute 'what do I feel like paying that day,' or 'what I think will go over well.' As far as music I compose, I guess I try to keep it a little bit stricter in terms of genres. But, I'm really a 'fly by the seat of my pants' guy when it comes to composing or DJ-ing. I don't get a ton of stuff done because I change my mind on what I want to do from day to day.

WN: Would you say that has a lot to do with the fact that electronic music is that bottomless pit you described earlier?

KD: Oh yeah, and especially as a DJ there's just so many records to play and so many different ways to link between them and go from one genre to another. That's really what I like about DJ-ing is the 'throw it all in one pot and see what comes out the speakers' kind of deal.

WN: That leads me perfectly into the next question. You've gone back and forth between DJ-ing and performing original electronic music at your concerts. Which do you prefer? Does one activity have more appealing characteristics than the other?
KD: They're both fun for different reasons. I would say DJ-ing takes a lot less time prepare. That's probably the main thing. If I'm sitting around having to make new tracks it's going to take me maybe, like, twelve hours for one track to finish it. But if I'm DJ-ing I can go through my records in a few hours and throw them out there and see what happens. It all depends what I'm in the mood for. They both have good things about them.

WN: They're both equal? Or is DJ-ing more accessible due to the time it takes to prepare?

KD: Yeah, I think it depends on how much time I have too. Like, which one I'm willing and able to do. I like them both equally. You get a similar sense of satisfaction out of both of them. They're both fun, and it's hard to pick one.

WN: You've been at the forefront of setting up DJ and electronic music events in San Francisco, such as the Koko Club and Circuitry, where we first met. What was your main focus in setting up these events?

KD: Aaron Harbour* was more involved in setting up the Koko stuff. The main reason I got into setting up events was just to hang out with people, and I was blown away by the music they could make. It just seemed like it would be fun to have someplace for everybody to just do their thing and go out and have fun for the night. It kind of just happened by accident. I was just reading through a local paper once and happened to see an ad that the Underground SF at the time was booking shows. The Circuitry party ended up playing there on a monthly basis for a while, and I met an incredible number of talented people through having a venue for people to play at. It's really nice that there are so many people willing to come out and share their talent for very little money, cause as far as I've seen there's not much money at live shows.

WN: What were the major benefits and complications in running these events?

KD: Complications I would say would be trying to get a fair shake from these venues, that kind of seem like.....they kind of know that you'll do it no matter what, because you love it. So they're not willing to put up the proper money, or maybe they'll say that they'll give you a percentage of the bar or something after a couple of months, but then you call them about it and they'll just kind of ignore you, and you'll never be able to talk to the owner or person in charge. That's definitely one complication. Probably another is trying to find time to keep doing it.

As far as benefits go, I guess the main benefit you'll get if you keep doing it is just personal satisfaction for you and having a good time for you and your friends. Also, getting some free drinks, which isn't the healthiest thing [Laughs]. I mean, you won't get paid, so.....
WN: Would you say another benefit is providing an outlet for different people to do different creative things?

KD: Yeah, definitely. That's one thing that we tried to do at the parties was keep it open-ended and say, 'do whatever you want to do.' If you want to throw down a noise set, just do it. If the bar doesn't like it, then the bar can just deal with it [Laughs].

WN: Were there differences between running DJ events and live electronic music events?

KD: Definitely at the Koko Club, we would book a lot more safe music. There wouldn't be as many noise acts because the venue wasn’t really into that and we had to be a little bit quieter. Underground SF was pretty much a free-for-all, do what you want kind of thing.

WN: It seems to me there's always a new electronic music genre coming out that maintains a degree of popularity for a while, and then loses popularity; dubstep would be a current example. Lots of guys are making and DJ-ing dupstep music, and maybe when another genre comes along, they'll go with that. As a promoter of events and DJ and composer, do you believe it's important to adhere to trends in electronic music, or is it more important to establish an independent voice?

KD: Definitely a little bit of both. A lot of music, take dubstep for example, it kind of diversifies really fast. It seems like the dubstep that's coming out now is really in your face and over-the-top party music. But when it started out, it was really more dub influenced. Try to find a track now that really put the 'dub' in dubstep it wouldn't be as easy. But when it first started out, it seemed like that was really where it came from, that's how it got its name. It just evolves on its own.

WN: So there can be a variety of genres within the genre itself?

KD: Yeah. Take dubstep again. I don't like the bass-heavy party stuff as much but I still like the dubstep records that I bought when it first came out eight to ten years ago, I think there's more heart in them. It's still fun to listen to for me. It's like with any genre of music, you're maybe going to like ten percent of it and the other ninety percent might be crap. I feel that's kind of universal across music.

WN: I remember when chiptune music was big, and I see almost nobody performing chiptune music now. I remember when circuit bending was big, and the only time I've seen a circuit bending performance in recent memory was at a concert I did in Europe last summer. You've done virtually everything. I can see what you're saying about diversification. It seems to be all over the map. Would you agree with that?

KD: Yeah, definitely.
WN: Where/how often do you perform? At what venues do you perform?

KD: Well, this year I haven't been performing at all, I've just been sidetracked with stuff in my personal life and I haven't felt like it. I'm still making music and stockpiling it. It takes a lot to get material for a show together. I've probably played maybe once or twice in the last year, whereas the year before I was playing twice a month. It comes and goes.

WN: In your view, does the SF Bay Area provide adequate and enjoyable performance opportunities for electronic musicians and DJs, or is one more prevalent than the other?

KD: I would say there are opportunities for both. In a lot of the shows, there's a lot of opportunity to do either. That's what I like at shows, a few DJs and a few live acts. I think that's usually a pretty good mix. The DJs can cover while the live acts set up. I think they're both pretty equal. I think that the Bay Area, as opposed to other places, there's definitely more opportunities, you just have to seek them out. You have to get yourself on the bill and let people know you're willing to play. That's basically how I met you, you emailed me and told me you wanted to play. I don't think one is more prevalent than the other though.

WN: What I'm noticing more and more in this kind of electronic music that you and I have been involved in that there can be a unique combination of DJ aesthetics and live electronic music. So it's almost a combination of those two worlds, which can be unique. While my opinion still is that there are a lot more opportunities for DJs, such as at bars, clubs, social events and so on, it seems like these worlds might be melding together. Would you agree?

KD: Yeah. When I do live performances of my own music I kind of end up putting something over the end of one song and then mixing the two together, so it's very similar to DJ-ing. Some people do it like that and some don't

WN: That's more or less how I did my BlipVert shows, although I would affect the sound from track to track.

KD: Yeah, my live sets involve similar things, which I guess could be the DJ thing filtered through the live set aesthetic.

WN: In your view, who are the artists that are making significant contributions to experimental electronic dance music in the bay area at the present time?

KD: I don't know, really. I don't go out that much recently, so I kind of feel weird answering that [Laughs]. I've just been a homebody for the last year or so.

WN: I guess….what are names that keep ringing out for you?
KD: As far as parties go, Alex ElectroAss books these juke parties, and it seems like they're on the cutting edge or on the cusp of electronic music, which is what we would try to do with Circuitry. He books really fresh bands and a lot of juke people which is kind of the most recent genres to blow up.

WN: How would you characterize juke?

KD: Good question [Laughs]. It's kind of like ghettotech, like the old east coast booty-bass evolved, but filtered through newer beats like two-step and with more cut-up vocals, and more focus on the high-end stuff, like hi-hat rolls and stuff. Not too bassy I guess. Hard to describe I guess.

WN: When these new genres are created, and it's really hard to describe the genre, do you think that labeling, such as ghettotech, dubstep, juke, in fact someone told me about something coming out of LA called purple.....I mean, I've always believed it's kind of silly. If you give something a cool name, it'll make something that doesn't sound very good sound better because it has a cool name. By genre-izing things down to a microcosmic extent, is that beneficial to this music, or does it take something away from it - is it a waste of time and sort of counterproductive?

KD: I do think it's sort of silly, but it's kind of helpful if you want to go out and buy a specific kind of music. It kind of helps if the juke records are all in one space, like if you want to be a juke DJ you know what to buy and where to go.

WN: You've lived in SF and Oakland for many years. What is it about the SF Bay Area specifically that appeals to you as a home for composing, performing, and organizing events for electronic music?

KD: Well, I moved here from Salem, Oregon, and there was really no place to play or watch music. Sometimes a place would pop up for a few months and some indie bands would come through but then it would get shut down somehow. In the Bay Area, a lot of the bars have turntables, and they think DJ-ing is cool so they'll let people DJ during their happy hours. There are more places with big soundsystems so they're more willing to let you do whatever. It's a big area, there's a ton of bars and nightlife compared to smaller cities. I'm sure LA, New York, and Chicago are great too, but this is just kind of where I wound up. It wasn't a conscious choice, I ended up liking it.

WN: Do you believe that these kinds of scenes - electronic music scenes - can really crop up anywhere? I mean, Venetian Snares is up in Winnipeg, there's a big scene in LA, DTrash Records is up in Kitchener (Canada). It seems to me that, at least with the counterculture in the 1960s in San Francisco it was a hotbed of, you know, screw the system. I'm wondering did that influence have any basis in your decision to move here, the history of San Francisco counterculture specifically?
KD: No, not really. It's probably helpful that there's hippies that want to party and will pay a few dollars at the door [Laughs].

WN: Do you believe there is a strong and like-minded 'community' or network of electronic musicians and/or DJs in the Bay Area?

KD: Yeah, I think there is. Maybe it's not the same people all the time, but it's kind of a 'do-it-yourself' kind of thing. It's all what you put into it and what you get back from it. If you make an effort to do this stuff, then that's really the deciding factor of whether or not an event will get off the ground, or will happen at all.

WN: One working title I had for this thesis was the 'DiY Underground.' Back in the day, we essentially were underground and not mainstream. Would you say that's accurate?

KD: Yeah. Its a few people helping each other put on parties. When I was doing Circuitry Aaron (Harbour) stepped up and was willing to go find new bands and new people. It is definitely a 'do-it-yourself' environment. I guess there are people who have managers who do everything for them, but that's such a small percentage compared to the people that are hoofing it, hitting the pavement, doing it themselves, Photoshopping the flyers themselves, finding people to play at the party to keep it going. There's definitely a 'DiY' aesthetic.

WN: What is your overall artistic goal? What do mostly hope to achieve with your music?

KD: That's kind of a question I ask myself a lot, and never really find the answer to [Laughs]. For mostly, it's trying to get self-satisfaction. There's a certain feeling I can get by finishing a song, I get a tingle in my heart that says 'you did something good.' Awhile back, I stopped expecting good things to come out of music and learned to just accept what it gives you. One of the main things I've gotten out of it is friends, new friends, and meeting nice like-minded people that you're happy to see while you're doing your thing.
Will Northlich: In your experience attending and DJ-ing shows in the Bay Area, what are the factors that constitute a successful event?

Dain Fitzgerald: Well, I think there are a lot of factors to consider. Money is one primary consideration. From my own perspective, I would say that making sure a lot of people show up is important, and making sure everything goes off without a hitch. Most of the parties I threw were in Sacramento, so I'm not sure if there's a huge difference in the dynamic. I was attending shows off and on in the Bay Area for close to a decade, and then I started planning more things where I was based out of, which was Sacramento. Successful shows are primarily based on attendance in my view, so that one can see it's actually a successful event rather than relying on hype.

WN: How would one do that, in your view? I mean, get a lot of people to attend?

DF: Well, doing something different than I did I guess. The shows I did not consistently get a lot of people out. Sometimes I got lucky.

WN: What were the things you were doing, in your view that contributed to low turnout at your events?

DF: Primarily it was the whole social schmoozing aspect of it. You basically have to be a scenester and go to everyone else's shows to expect them to go to yours. I wasn't really doing that. One the other hand, others' shows weren't really the types of things I wanted to go to. My tastes in music weren't really aligned with what they were doing. It was mostly finding things online that I liked.

WN: Would you say the shows that you organized, specifically with Synthetic out in Sacramento, were very eclectic in their showcasing of different styles of music, and therefore it wasn't a typical or specific genre format that people could relate? I remember a show I did there once with an 8-bit artist from Seattle and a DJ who specified in glitch and IDM. Did this maybe have some bearing on the turnouts?

DF: Yeah, absolutely. There must have been some people I failed to connect with. I may have had my hand in too many pots. Sometimes I would want a techno guy, which from my perspective seemed experimental and popular but out here in California no one had really heard of them. Then a week later I would do some plunderphonics kind of thing. You could make you theme experimental, but typically that's a certain kind of experimental. Due to spending more time on the internet and not making any face-to-face kinds of connections with artists or people, I was unable to develop any sort of
movement or get any scene going. I think I set some things into motion where other people came along and did it better.

WN: Do you believe it's important to be diverse in setting up electronic music shows?

DF: As a promoter I do, but I don't particularly care if any other promoter does that, as long as I'm in an area where there's a multiplicity of promoters all doing their one thing.

WN: Do you have a DJ style? Is there a certain type of music you prefer to DJ?

DF: In the last couple years, I hardly have been DJ-ing, primarily because I've been working so much. My sets are usually very brief but have tended to be more on the techno and house side. I was a raver back in the late nineties. I DJ things with kind of a minimalist feel to them, like minimalist techno and house.

WN: Do you believe DJ-ing garners more attention than live acts? Do you believe one is more popular than the other in the Bay Area?

DF: It's really hard to say. If you put aside places concert halls like the Warfield or the Greek Theatre in Berkeley there's probably more money made overall. There's a lot of underground bands. Oakland seems to have a lot of house parties. San Francisco, except for the big professional shows, has a lot of professionalized clubs where a lot of big name DJs come and play. It's very professionalized. Oakland is more grimy and underground.

WN: This idea of the underground keeps coming up. Events that are off the beaten path or off the map so to speak because of their eclectic nature. Would you consider yourself, or have you ever considered yourself, part of the underground? How would you define the underground?

DF: I definitely consider myself more into underground music, but the actual musical style is not necessarily unapproachable or inaccessible.

WN: A previous person I interviewed exclaimed that the underground was difficult. For you, the underground, or styles of music associated with the underground, are easy to access?

DF: Yeah. I think the underground by its very nature is not well known. I mean, all difficult music is underground, but maybe not all underground music is difficult. There's underground music that's plenty danceable, that might have a shot at being pretty well known. It kind of depends on what angle you look at it.

WN: Continuing with the idea of the underground, in your view, and in your experience in planning events, how prevalent is the 'do-it-yourself' aesthetic?
DF: The DIY thing kind of has to be prominent when dealing with underground events or experimental music. If you're trying to convince a club or bar or café to do an event they might say 'well, okay, I guess you're going to promote because I wouldn't know how to promote it, so you're on your own.'

WN: What are the most effective types of promotion, since the venue might be more or less clueless?

DF: That's a good question. Flyering seems to be one of the least effective methods of promotion.

WN: Really? The least effective?

DF: Unless you are going to lots of parties and passing flyers out to people in person I guess it's effective. Just hoping that the design is really cool and leaving it on a table somewhere seems pretty bad. You basically have to convince people who know a lot of other people to come.

WN: So word-of-mouth then?

DF: Yeah, and the Internet today is really effective. If you get into a venue that routinely gets people out on a Friday and Saturday night then you're off to a great start right there. One event I did at the Press Club in Sacramento was extremely popular, but that's because the artist was really well known. I didn't try any harder to promote that specific show, but a lot of people came out simply because they knew about it.

WN: Moving into the idea of genres, do you believe that the creation of multiple genres for electronic music, such as the many that are currently in existence, is superfluous or helpful in defining new methods of expression? For instance, two people have told me about a style of music called juke.

DF: [Laughs] Juke? I've never really heard of that. I think it's helpful for definition. It's tough to know why people seem to inevitably attach themselves to labels but it helps to elicit in someone's mind the sound that they prefer for whatever reason. I suppose labeling can become parsed so much that even people who cling to labels are willing to let some of these others slide in, because they're similar. Like, grime and dubstep, similar crowds go to shows that feature those kinds of music I guess. Those genres overlap enough. The reason there's two different names to begin with in that there's some minor distinguishing factor that either journalists or the people making the music determined as worth identifying on it's own. I guess there's also a novelty in being all about the newest label. Certain people seem to be cynical about other people's motivations, but then they themselves don't think they're insincere about what they like. I liked saying the word 'glitch' back in the day. In truth, I liked the music first and then I liked saying it right after.
WN: A lot of people are making light of the fact that dubstep is now a worldwide phenomenon.

DF: That one, yeah, it's like the music du jour now for all kinds of movie trailers and action scenes and things like that. It has a real rock vibe, a real kickass vibe. The waveform and the bass are more rubbery and responsive due to technology or something.

WN: Do you believe there's a like-minded 'community' or network of electronic musicians and/or DJs in the Bay Area?

DF: There's definite scenes like there have always been. Lately, there's this overlap between a kind of art punk, mildly gothy weirdo bands and a kind of techno purist house revival left-field stuff. Those groups tend to overlap. If you're at one of these shows, before midnight the bands will be featured, and the afterparty will feature old school techno.

WN: So these are types of parties?

DF: Yeah, and I see a lot of the same people. That's just one particular scene that I'm witnessing. Back in 2009, I was going to more dubsteppy kinds of shows. There was a very theatrical 'Burning Man' kind of crowd that would go to those things, a sort of cyber-goth kind of scene. They seem to be really big shows. It's not the kind of dive bar, art school, hipster raver thing.

WN: What is it about the SF Bay Area specifically that appeals to you as a home for electronic music, as well as a home for yourself in general?

DF: Part of it is just that I grew up in Northern California. I'm not much of a globetrotter, and I haven't live in a bunch of different places. I feel like the world has sort of agreed that the Bay is one of the better places for electronic music. Obviously Europe just trumps that, and New York.

WN: Is there something unique or special about this area in your view?

DF: There seems to be a critical mass of people on the cutting edge of electronic music. For a city it's size, it seems to have a high concentration of people who are tech savvy, educated, and artistic. Obviously that helps. There's probably more of that than New York. New York has more people overall for instance, there are more things to do. San Francisco in my view is really good about cutting edge, cool, electronic music.

WN: Would you say maybe that technology has a lot to do with it? The Silicon Valley aspect of it?

DF: Yeah. That tends to make the whole experience of going to shows really good; the visual aspect is well done. The warehouse I used to live in, the first party I went to there was a guy who was playing chat roulette. You spin a proverbial wheel, and you chat with
some person on the web. I thought that was pretty cool. That's the kind of cool thing that I never saw anywhere else. There's a concentration of laptops and projectors and people who build things on hand and manage to put cool shows together. And they play the music I like which isn't available where I was.

WN: In your view, who are the artists that are making significant contributions to DJ-ing and experimental electronic dance music in the bay area at the present time?

DF: I heard a really good guy named Cullen Miller recently. He did an excellent experimental techno set at my old place. I couldn't really explain the technical aspects of it, but it was really good. There aren't really any names that jump out at me. In 2009 I saw a guy named Greco Guggenheim, and he was excellent, but then he took off to Sweden.

WN: Let me ask you this, who are artists who have made an indelible impression on you?

DF: Guys like Atom TM, who you know. Other artists I like them purely for the role they fill socially.

WN: Any Bay Area artists leave an indelible impression on you?

DF: Well, as I said Cullen Miller was one. Kid 606 left an impression but now he's in Berlin I think. Gold Chains was one. People didn't take him that seriously because he was doing a tongue in cheek white rapper thing. I thought the production was ahead of its time. Kit Clayton is awesome. You'll usually see him at a grimy warehouse hosted by a crew called Spaz.

WN: Yeah, a guy I interviewed before, Brandon Taylor, lives with the Spaz sound system. It's great how all this ties together.

DF: Yeah, I know about them, and Katabatik and 5lowershop. They did a bunch of left field parties that were a lot of fun.

WN: Do you have an overall musical goal? Is being involved in musical activities a priority for you, or do you have other interests?

DF: Music really isn't much of a priority any more. Over the last ten years I was doing a lot of online writing and have built up somewhat of a writing history now.

WN: So was DJ-ing just kind of a fun activity for you to do? Was it a hobby?

DF: Yeah. It was almost more of a by-product of me wanting to promote shows. It was like since I was promoting it, I might as well play.
WN: What were some of the most valuable lessons you learned as a DJ?

DF: I always sort of DJ in a kind of electro style, I never really beat matched. It depends on what you're trying to accomplish. I would just play a few songs I liked between the shows I promoted. Some people would come up and say 'oh yeah, I've heard this before.'

WN: So it was a social activity as well?

DF: Yeah.

WN: Would it be safe to say that anyone could DJ?

DF: Well, I used to have a show on KDVS, which is the UC Davis radio station. In that experience you just play songs after another and hope you don't have dead air. That was really my DJ style I guess. I was doing that in the infancy of when I was promoting shows. So promoting shows was having an outgrowth of the radio show.
Will Northlich: How did you first start making music, and electronic music in particular?

Brandon Taylor: I first started playing drums when I was fifteen, maybe, and then quickly switched to guitar and bass because I'm not the best drummer. I was playing in bands in high school, and first started experimenting with tapes and cheap Casio keyboards at the same time in high school after hearing bands like Ween and the Residents, who are my favorite band of all time, as is represented by my tattoo here [shows Residents tattoo on right arm]

WN: That is awesome! Hah! They're one of my favorites too! Did you see them at BAM in Berkeley the last time they were here?

BT: I did, were you at that show?

WN: I was.

BT: Me too. It was awesome. It was very weird [Laughs]. So the Residents were a big influence on the electronic thing, and industrial music obviously. I never really got into pure electronics for a long time because after high school I moved from DC back to Florida. There was zero good electronic music where I was in Florida. I never heard any good electronic music, so to me it was, like, screw that stuff. All I heard was bad Florida breaks and house. I played in some industrial projects and did a lot of experimenting on my own. I didn't become familiar with pure electronics until I was about twenty-two when I started hearing fast breakbeat stuff. I also got sick of playing in bands. I thought I can write music all by myself, and started a small online label thing with some friends, and then moved to New York, where I did more solo stuff and work with the label.

WN: What was the name of the label?

BT: Slum dot org, Slum Communications. The guys I was with we worked together in a previous industrial band, and when people moved away everyone just started doing solo stuff and stuff with the netlabel. That was in the mp three dot com days, it was about 'I've never heard anything like this before, I'm going to dig through mp three dot come and drink tequila' [Laughs]. That's where I met a lot of people who were first doing this stuff like Edgy and Hrvatski*, then I moved to New York and did a party with Edgy for years Ö.

WN: Did you ever do anything with Keith Whitman (Hrvatski)?
BT: No, I've met him a couple times.

WN: He's a really cool guy.

BT: I bet he is. I've been really into his modular stuff lately. But yeah, I moved to New York in 1998, and started getting really into the drum n' bass scene there, from about 1998 to 2000. That was the tail end of the really hard and dark drum n' bass stuff. There was a party every night of the week. I was out every night of the week.

WN: Did you ever do anything at Rothko in the east village? They had a pretty good scene. It's closed now, but...

BT: No, I never did. I did do the Pyramid Club a lot though. I was DJ-ing an industrial night there. That was where I met a lot of the DIY people, such as the Virus Renegade party, which was like 'throw a party in a cemetery' kind of people. We started doing a three level place near Pyramid closer to Soho, and that was where another ambient party called Opiate started. Through the late nineties and the turn of the century it was like, every week it was meeting new people and doing events. It was like, 'you got a sound system? Let's go!' I moved to the Bay in 2003, and up until then we were throwing a Renegade party like every two weeks, plus I had a weekly industrial and ambient thing. I was doing promotional work for a living as well. Moving from Tallahassee, where I kind of hated life, to New York, and things just blew up. Within six months I had a job and an apartment. But, half the reason I moved out of New York is that it was just getting too difficult to do anything. Renegade parties were being busted, and clubs were not having us play anything weird or hardcore. We even had parties at the Knitting Factory.

WN: Wow. That's surprising.

BT: Yeah, it just got really difficult. So then, I went on tour with the guys from the Virus party to Toronto and Montreal.

WN: A label that we're both affiliated with is up there, D-Trash. Did you hook up with any of the guys from D-Trash up there?

BT: Yeah, I hooked up with several guys up there such as Jay (Schizoid), Mike Nocore, Zymodic**. Mike Nocore and I Greyhounded across Canada to Winnipeg also to do some other shows. Then we went to Vancouver and I came down here, and I was invited to stay here. This place, where we are now, and the sound system that was here at that time were just going off. When I was first here there were about twenty people here, and every single one of them was a sound system person or a musician.

WN: Let me move on here, cause I have a lot of questions for you.

BT: Cool man, 'cause I'll ramble [Laughs].
WN: [Laughs] How would you describe the style of music that you compose? What makes Heartworm's sound unique?

BT: I've always made difficult music. I have a real hard time writing for the dance floor, and when I do it's not so dance floor-y. My initial stuff was cut and paste, a lot of vocal samples. Nowadays I write almost exclusively abstract synth-y stuff. All my breakbeat stuff nowadays is totally crazy. I just don't do dance floor sets anymore. At shows, I ask people to put me on either early or late, because I'll do something brutal and abstract. Generally, it's pretty brutal. But I do everything from straight breakcore to pure, shimmering, major key ambient music. It's always really dark and really weird.

WN: This leads perfectly into a question I have down that I want to ask now, especially since you seem to like to explore many different kids of electronic music. In your view, do believe the many genres that are attributed to electronic music are helpful in creating new methods of expression, or are they superfluous, such as dubstep, ghettotech, crunk, and so on?

BT: It's one thing to make a particular style of music and have it seem that there are people that are exciting and innovative in that scene. It's another thing to have that scene become overground and watered down, because people are going because of the scene and not because of the music. Dubstep and this whole 'bass music' thing, such as 'trap'.

WN: Trap?!?! [Laughs]

BT: Yeah, you don't know what trap is [Laughs]? Trap is like, and this is only what I've heard, trap is like shitty mainstream rap stuff without the vocals. Like instrumental Lil' Wayne songs.

WN: Wow [Laughs]. For me, ghettotech was about as far as I focused on genres…

BT: Yeah. Trap is a genre now. People go out and are like 'Owwwwww!!' Trap! And there are weird permutations of ghettotech, too, like this whole juke thing.

WN: Yeah! Another guy I interviewed was telling me about juke.

BT: Everyone's super into this juke thing now. To each their own, but I think that shit is hell of boring. One of my old roommates is doing a bunch of juke stuff now. I get a lot of shit about this stuff, because people say 'you just talk shit about anything that people like.' And I'm like 'no, there's some juke stuff that I like, and there's some dubstep that I like.' At the end of the day though, if you listen to it for an hour, it sounds like you're listening to the same song. So if you go out to a party, and it's dubstep for six hours, are you kidding me? That was always a problem with me and drum n' bass too, because after hearing drum n' bass at a party for five hours I have to go home. More to the point for me is its relationship to the underground. There was a crew here in town throwing parties
for example, and the lineup would be all dubstep guys. I always thought, 'what are you guys doing?'. This is not underground music. If I want to hear dubstep, I can go to any number of places on a Tuesday night in this city and sit and have beer and hang out with hipsters and hear dubstep. When I go to a warehouse party, I don't want to hear overground music. People started doing that I think because it would get people in the door.

**WN**: You mentioned the word 'overground.' What do you mean by that?

**BT**: Just mainstream, and/or people that think it's not mainstream, but it actually is. The whole hipster phenomenon, which is, like, people that are into it because it's a scene, and it's cool to be into it, not because of the music, and not because it even interests them at all. Dubstep is the biggest electronic style in the world, and not long ago everyone was like, 'what's this?' It was a lot different awhile ago too. It was about space and restraint. Now it's about jocks and stuff.

**WN**: I wanted to ask, are you still affiliated with 5lowershop?

**BT**: Yeah, and I'm so affiliated that we've got a show coming up, and here's a flyer.

**WN**: Cool man, thanks, I'll be out of town though on the date of the party though. Are there any other parties happening?

**BT**: No, not really, primarily because everyone will be at Mutant Fest.

**WN**: Describe that for me. What's Mutant Fest?

**BT**: Mutant Fest is an annual, free, autonomous gathering of like-minded weirdoes here on the west coast that is based on the European technoval parties, where a bunch of people would take sound systems and set up somewhere and play hard music. Mutant Fest is a little different because it's not only about the sound systems; there's all sorts of different weirdoes that come out and do camps of circus performance and all sorts of DIY culture.

**WN**: Where does this happen?

**BT**: In Cascadia usually. This year it's in Oregon somewhere.

**WN**: Would you say the DIY underground electronic music scene in the Bay Area and elsewhere is also a part of that (Mutant Fest)?

**BT**: Totally. It traditionally was very sound system oriented.
WN: Why do people go to Mutant Fest in your opinion as opposed to a 5lowershop event here in town?

BT: Well, Mutant Fest goes on for a week. With 5lowershop you go to a party, you listen to the music, and you have a good time. At Mutant Fest, it's like an experience. It's a week of idea sharing; all of the alternative fuel, veggie oil conversion stuff. It's not just about the music. All sorts of weird DIY technology, all of these DIY performances.

WN: It seems like it's what Burning Man wishes it could be. You don't have to pay to go there.

BT: Yeah. I'm not going this year; I don't have the money to get up there. 5lowershop was going to go up there, but we've been on hiatus for a while. We decided it would be a better use of resources of our time to do an event here in San Francisco. There's a family of sound systems here in addition to 5lowershop, such as Spaz, Katabatik, Havoc Sound. These groups work with each other all the time, and when one takes a break, people from one sound system filter into the other. 5lowershop is a different feel than the other sound systems, and people from Spaz and Katabatik work with us if they want to.

WN: Would you consider 5lowershop and the kind of music it hosts as 'underground'? What does underground mean to you? Is there such thing as 'underground' anymore? It seems to me that 'underground' is kind of the mainstream thing now for a lot of people?

BT: Well, it's like I was saying earlier. For those types of individuals, it's not about the music; it's about the experience. Saying underground, like 'oh, I was into that before it was popular,' it's like well, so what? It's popular now and it's not underground anymore, no matter how much you want it to be. Techno was underground for a long time, and now it's huge. There is definitely an underground. The difference is that any of those people that you're talking about, you take them and you put them in the middle of a hardcore party, or any of the stuff that you or I do much less any of our contemporaries, like D-Trash, and they'll be like 'what is this crap?' Underground is inherently difficult, that's the whole point. The music is difficult, the culture is difficult, the people involved are not always the nicest people on earth and have very particular ways that they like things to be. But, the other thing is that the underground is accepting and open. I've never really thought about this before, but it's true. The underground is like, 'all are welcome.' On our flyers we say 'no one turned away for lack of funds.'

WN: The events you produce with 5lowershop are very popular for underground electronic music. Does 5lowershop have a specific musical ideology concerning the artists it hosts, and/or a specific ideology in general?

BT: It's supposed to be all-inclusive, not only in our guests, but in the people playing and the people involved. It changes all the time, with who's involved and what their tastes are. Originally, it was much more techno oriented, but it was always diverse. A party
would have a whole bunch of different genres of music. There'd be tables of people discussing political issues and animal rights. As for the music, check out this flyer. I mean, this party we have hardcore, total noise, straight techno, experimental noise, speedcore, me, breakcore, and an across the board DJ. We like it to be as all-inclusive as possible. I don't want to hear the same thing all night long. Being a collective, there tends to be a lot of argument in what direction we want to take. But, it's like, we - all of us hosting the party - all take the directions we're interested in. In the hipster or dubstep scene, if you play something experimental, people are like 'what the hell?' Those people are in it to be cool; they're in it because it's a scene. For me especially it's about the music, for others it's about politics or something else, and everyone can do their own thing.

WN: How are 5lowershop events promoted? What determines the success of a 5lowershop event in terms of attendance and exposure?

BT: Promotion is pretty much strictly word-of-mouth.

WN: Would you say that's pretty consistent with all underground events?

BT: Yeah. For example, there's a Facebook event page for this upcoming party, but it's private, and there's no information on it other than the lineup. The location won't be announced until like an hour beforehand.

WN: Sort of like the way raves used to operate, right? Like, having a secret location or something...

BT: Yeah, it's because what we're doing, technically you need permits to run a speaker system like the size of the one we have. A lot of the things we do aren't even at venues. A lot of times we'll go out and throw parties at parks and stuff, and you can't just tell anyone that that's happening. That's the 'getting away with it' aspect of it. That's actually my favorite stuff to do. That's the best. There's nothing better than going to a totally neglected space or park, which is also a beautiful space too, and it's public land so screw you, we're going to do it. It's like, if you're going to trash it, we're going to do something with it. As far as attendance, it's like some things are more successful than others, but I think we do pretty well. In fact, this is the first 5lowershop party to have a Facebook page [Laughs].

WN: Hah! No kidding! Moving on from there, how important is a 'do-it-yourself' aesthetic in the proliferation of Bay Area electronic music events? Is it the same now as it was several years ago when, say, breakcore - and artists like Cardopusher and Kid 606 - were more popular?

BT: I think DIY culture is really a United States thing.
WN: You think so?

BT: Oh, entirely. When people go to Europe, they get flown out and paid and all that. In Europe, when they throw a breakcore party, there are thousands of people there. Venetian Snares for example, gets paid like, three thousand dollars for a gig. I'm not kidding. He's one example. Around the time you played with us, Slowershop was having a breakcore party every week. But when they played for us, they'll get like, maybe one hundred bucks, maybe more. That's because, that's what it's like in the U.S., and this is in San Francisco, that's not even addressing little cities. We're one of the more established crews to host underground artists, and with us it's like, you know the money you're going to get. At first people were skeptical, but after coming through and seeing how much fun we have, how it's not about money with us, other than making a bit to maintain our sound system, I don't make any money off of it. If I made money on this stuff I'd have more than what I have in my pocket right now. I think it's very important that the underground remains strong here in the U.S. It would be nice to be paying people more, but I think when it goes above ground, it starts not being about the music anymore.

WN: I completely agree. In your view, does the SF Bay Area provide adequate and enjoyable performance opportunities for electronic musicians and DJs, or is one more prevalent than the other? Do you believe there's a like-minded "community" or network of electronic musicians and/or DJs in the Bay Area?

BT: Yeah, totally. In the underground art scene, there's not really much of a difference. If you make your own music, everyone would prefer to see you play live. It's all about you coming to the table with something enjoyable and cool. If you're DJ-ing then whatever, fine. I'm DJ-ing at this party that's coming up actually. Within our scene it's kind of either way. That's also changed quite a bit with the technology, where being a DJ now, you can just do it off your laptop and you're still DJ-ing, whereas a few years ago people would say 'what is he doing, he's not using vinyl, he's not DJ-ing.' Conversely, people could say 'he's not making his own music 'cause he's DJ-ing.' I've always been just 'whatever' about that whole thing, of course they're two different things. But I don't find one thing inherently better than the other. If you're good at it, you're good at it. I think DJ-ing is hard.

WN: It seems to me that the live and DJ camps are melding together more.

BT: It's the technology. Classically, the person who was just spinning records is now using software and they're cutting things up live and remixing right there. Maybe they're using other people's material as source material, maybe they're using their own. If you didn't go behind and look at the laptop screen, you might not know what the hell they're doing. If it sounds good and it's a good time, no one really cares. As musicians, we might say, 'he's totally faking it, screw that.' But, whatever [Laughs]. I might not book you again.

WN: [Laughs]. What makes the SF Bay Area unique as a city for underground, and perhaps mainstream, electronic musicians compared to New York? Is there a
specific reason you came here? Is there a specific reason that these events work really well here? I mean, in LA you have the Darkmatter events, in Portland you have Reactionary, in Canada you have D-Trash, and so on.

BT: There's a really healthy noise scene here. It's a little cliquish, but it's really inclusive of all sorts of experimental weirdo noise stuff. That's one of the big focal shining points for me. There is that in New York, but it's super cliquish. I think New York in general is much more about attitude and less about music, not that I want to talk shit about my friends in New York. But, I find there to be less attitude here, and people are more accepting of things here. If you play a bad set, or if things don't happen the way they're supposed to, it's a little more laid back here. I don't know if it's because it's California and that's just the way people are. I think it's also a little more diverse out here too. You can get away with doing all sorts of different stuff. In New York, if you go to a hardcore party, you're going to hear hardcore. Here, if you come to a Slowershop party you're going to hear all kinds of different shit. It's just a different feel really. It's less stressful and strained. The hip-hop scene here is way laid back compared to New York, which is not. Of course, this is all coming from when I used to live there.

WN: Where/how often do you perform? At what venues do you perform?

BT: I generally work with sound system crews, but sometimes those sound systems might be doing things in more acceptable places like galleries and things like that. The good thing about having your own system is that you can take it wherever the hell you want to. Sometimes I'll be like 'shit, I have four shows this month,' and three of them are in one weekend, and they're for totally different things that I need to write three completely different sets for. That's entirely due to what's going on. If I feel like playing, and there's something going on and I have new stuff, I'll ask. You don't always just wait to be asked to play. I usually play twenty minute sets. I do so many completely different things that I play all over the place at many different venues. It would be nice if I was getting paid for all of this, but it's great to make what most people consider inaccessible music and be invited and be allowed to play it. You can't do that everywhere. Having your own sound system is helpful, because it's not like you're trying to pull one over on a bar.

WN: I totally feel that, and by having a sort of independence in going where you want to go and playing what you want to play, I've always thought that gives an underground scene an immense freedom. For example, when you were talking about Mutant Fest, that event, compared to a similar event like Burning Man, seems truly underground to me. I have friends who swear that Burning Man is the end-all, be-all, and new counterculture.

BT: Yeah, and you should never have to pay a ton of money to get let into a fence or something, or to be allowed on public land to hear a bunch of bad trance and dubstep. Paying entrance fees at that thing, and bringing all your own food and stuff, that's a lot of money to just be let in the gate. Everyone says the art is amazing there, and that's cool, I understand that. But, again, for me it's about the music.
WN: Just a few more questions here. Equipment wise, what do you prefer, what do you enjoy, and how does that contribute to the music that you produce?

BT: I'm a software person, because I can't afford expensive gear and I can get software for free. I spent six hundred bucks for my computer four years ago. I was a Fruity Loops person, it's a really powerful program. Ableton Live I like because the way I learned it was I'm a musician, a guitar player, and I use the Ableton controller like an instrument. I don't just play tracks when I play live. Live, all my stuff is in three second loops that I'm cutting up, mixing, and working with. I don't want to touch the mouse, if I can help it. I've been doing a bunch of stuff with guitar lately also. Lately, I like a lot of weird plug-ins and modular stuff. I have tons of circuit bent toy keyboards and stuff. I've been doing a lot of field recording lately. My iPhone is actually a big part of things now, this actually functions as a wireless controller for Ableton Live, so I don't even have to touch the computer, I just control it from here. This phone doesn't have service, so I just use it as a tiny computer. There are a lot of really amazing synth apps and drum machines for one of these [demonstrates a patch]. I get bored and I like stuff to be as abstract and hands-on as possible.

WN: In your view, who are the artists that are making significant contributions to experimental electronic dance music in the bay area at the present time?

BT: If you look at the flyer I gave you, those are my top people right now, pretty much. Naked Slice from New York is pretty good. As far as locals like Tigerbeat 6 and Daly City Records, whatever comes out on those labels will always be the tastes of the guys who run them, that's my take on it. It's one guy who has some money, and therefore he's going to dictate things. That's fine. Daly City Records now is just one artist, the guy who runs it, and that's fine, but you can't have a record label with just one person. I never really considered these guys underground.

WN: What is your overall artistic goal? What do mostly hope to achieve with your music?

BT: I'm trying to not be completely miserable, which is kind of my goal in life period. I mean, this is what I do. This is what I enjoy doing, and what I have the capacity to do, 'cause I can do this without a lot of money or a Master's degree. A bunch of my other interests require me to be good at things that I am not good at. Marine biology for example, is a strong interest for me. I know a lot about it, and people sometimes say 'how come you're not doing that for a living,' and I say 'cause I suck at x part of it.' With this music, I'm allowed to suck at part of it, because there's somebody else that might be good at that part of it, and I might be good at something that they're not good at. My overall goal is to not be completely miserable, and hopefully have that rub off on others. If I just wanted to be by myself, I wouldn't live here in the Bay Area because it's expensive. I'm here because I like people, which is strange because most people would think that I don't like people. It's important to have interaction. It's nice to do parties and have people who have never been to anything like that, or people who've been coming to
our events for years say 'holy shit.' I like to make people have a good time, and to realize that you can do that without spending three hundred dollars supporting some corporate bullshit, or pretending that you're enjoying yourself when you're not.
Will Northlich: How did you first start making music, and electronic music in particular?

Patrice Scanlon: I started off as a dancer when I was six and a clarinetist when I was eight, and did the whole classical training on both sides of those. I always saw myself as a musician and a dancer and never saw how those two worlds could be incorporated. It wasn't until I got to college that I encountered a digital arts program my sophomore year. A lot of my artist friends were into it. I also started going to dance clubs in the mid nineties. I had an epiphany on the dance floor one night that 'hey, I'm a dancer and I make music, so why don't I make dance music.

WN: Were you involved in the rave scene or rave culture?

PS: I didn't go to raves, but I was a club kid. I was at a club every weekend. I remember specifically asking a professor 'I really like dance music, and I want to know how they make that.' So I started off spinning records of course, and found it kind of boring. I eventually said 'I want to do my own thing, and not just mix other people's stuff together. That was the catalyst I guess. And of course, I was the only female out of ten people in my class. I'll never forget my first class in Max/MSP. The teacher showed us how to make a major scale and play it back. Then he said 'okay, now you do it.' I looked around the class and everybody knew what they were doing and I didn't. It dawned on me that 'oh, I'm a girl, I'm not getting this,' and I felt like I was behind everybody else. That however really motivated me to push myself further. That's how it all started. Coming up as a clarinetist who loves Beethoven and romantic music and taking ballet class and hearing Brahms, and then going in a completely different direction that was so pulse oriented and minimalist…..that was a big diversion for me when I got to college.

WN: A lot of what you said leads perfectly into my later questions, so it seems I did a good job on this [Laughs]. How would you describe the style of music that you compose?

PS: I hate this question [Laughs]. To kind of dodge the question I would say experimental. To be more literal, I think dance music is dance music, it's the music you want to dance to, and then when you've decided to break it up into all these little sub genres like techno, house, drum n' bass, and jungle…I mean I still don't know what the difference between drum n' bass and jungle is. I'm teaching an electronic music production summer camp for high school students now and we were talking about this today. When you start splicing up the genres it becomes about the tempos, the types of instruments you're using, the way the song is structured, is there a breakdown, are there vocals, sampling from different sources…..each one of these bits and details will separate
what you're hearing into a different genre. I've always approached music as very linear when I write it.

WN: Let me ask you this, this is a question I've asked several other people I've interviewed. All of these genres, such as dubstep, techno, there's something a few people have told me about called juke which was described to me as old school instrumental rap tracks. Do you believe all this genre-izing is superfluous or that it fosters new kinds of creative ingenuity?

PS: No, I think it's totally ridiculous. It's just for people to feel like maybe they were the first at something, because we don't have that really anymore. To say you're an electronic musician in the year 2012 is not as impressive as back in 1958 if you're Max Matthews at Bell Labs. So I think that's people's way of going 'look, I created a new genre so I'm the pioneer.' So it's kind of an ego thing, and also it's a way socially for people to create a group that they feel like they can belong to that's different than everyone else.

WN: You were involved in the underground dance music scene for a period of time. I remember visiting your myspace page once and there was a breakcore kind of track posted there. Do you still compose this kind of underground dance music, or music associated with genres such as breakcore, dubstep, etc?

PS: Very very rarely.

WN: Why is that?

PS: Well, I've been at Mills College as the tech director for the intermedia program for the last seven years, and I do feel a sense of pressure to do something, cause in their eyes at Mills College dance music is commercial music, and it has no value or place. So to be considered a legitimate composer I've kind of moved myself away from that. The influence is still there, I still like pulse and melodies and harmonies and a structure you can follow. But, I'm not breaking out the 808 or the 909 drum kits or things like that. And also just being a teacher for the last eleven years, it's hard to find the time and the energy to want to do it for yourself when you're helping so many other people meet their creative demands. By the time I get home at night I just want to walk my dog and drink a bottle of wine and pass out and do it all again the next day. So its come down to the point where I've actively had to seek out collaborations with people to get myself to write music or else I won't do it.

WN: Do you now, or have you ever, considered yourself an underground artist? How would you define the underground?

PS: I would definitely consider myself an underground artist because no one knows who I am [Laughs]. People who do know who I am really appreciate what I do, and I like that. I like being more local and homegrown. I definitely am not looking for the stardom of somebody like Squarepusher or Amon Tobin. I really respect what those guys do but that's never been the motivating factor for me. It's just a form of expression for me, it's
therapeutic, it's calming. Music is a very emotional thing for me, and usually when there's something really emotional going on in my life that's when I write the most music. That considers it to be underground, because it's not something popular that everyone wants to listen to, it's not something you're going to find on a commercial or on MTV.

WN: It seems to me that there is a large predominance of the male gender in many electronic music events in the Bay Area and elsewhere. For example, you were only woman on the judge panel for the 2009 SF laptop battle, and in fact the only woman in the entire company of judges and performers. I've heard and read about many reasons given for this gender imbalance. For example, Pauline Oliveros mentions that women have been taught to despise activity outside of domestic requirements; there's a 'boys with toys' attitude that permeates the general atmosphere of electronics, and so on. I've noticed it's getting better in Bay, and there are more women composers working with electronic, such as Laetitia Sonami, Pamela Z, and so forth. Why do believe the male gender is more prevalent than female concerning electronic music?

PS: Well, I was born in 1978, to give you an idea of where I'm coming from historically. Back then math and science weren't considered strong subjects for women. Whether that was said out loud or not I'm not sure, it was just kind of the general feeling you got. Women were supposed to be better at English or music or something, but math and science weren't supposed to be your stronghold. I remember seeing the movie 'The Net' in high school and saying 'I want to be a computer systems analyst.' I was about sixteen or seventeen, and I went home and told my mom. She said 'Patrice, you're not good at math; you won't be good at computers.' She flat out told me that. Maybe it was that comment that pushed me to want to prove her wrong. Hmm, I'm not sure what else to say.

WN: Here's another question that may help you better answer the previous one. As a woman, what is it about the SF Bay Area specifically that appeals to you as a home for composing, performing, electronic music, dance, and audio engineering?

PS: Well, definitely since I've moved out here from the east coast from Long Island, New York and Orlando, Florida….there's definitely an east coast macho-ism where if you are a woman doing these things your guy friends who are supposed to be supportive are so competitive. In my experience I was put down more so because they needed to boost themselves up. Ever since I've been out here I've been going to graduate school at Mills, and I think that was like landing on heaven because they want women in their grad programs badly.

WN: It's interesting that you say that because Pauline Oliveros was the first director of the Tape Music Center when it was moved there. Do you think that Pauline establishing herself at Mills had anything to do with the Mills climate as you describe it?
PS: Oh definitely. It was actually Pauline who wrote this letter of desperation on the saemus group list.

WN: What is that?

PS: It's a composer music society. Pauline was pleading to everyone on this list 'if you know any woman who is into electronic music whatsoever send her our way.' The undergrad program at Mills is all women, and the graduate program is co-ed. Even when I went there after this pleading letter that my professor read at my undergrad and said 'you need to go to school here,' I was very lucky to get a full assistantship and get everything paid for. If Pauline hadn't called out like that I don't know if I would have wound up at Mills. I went there from 2001 to 2003, and I was one of five women out of twenty-five students. Since I've been working at Mills for the last seven years I have seen a huge difference, I've seen the female grad student enrollment number go up a bit.

WN: What has contributed to decline and/or increase? Are women less marginalized?

PS: If you want to say the new music, tape music, drone music area of electronic music I feel the number of women is growing and climbing steadily. But, that's just a Bay Area phenomenon with Mills being so close. When it comes to dance music I don't know why there is that impression. It's only men. I know very few women who like electronic dance music. I can't really think of anybody that I can name off the top of my head.

WN: I just finished Tara Rodgers' book, and names that come to mind for me are Mira Calix, Beth Coleman, and Maria Chavez.

PS: Yeah, but I wouldn't consider them four on the floor dance party, you know? Especially Maria Chavez, she's more experimental.

WN: What is it about the social position of women in this world of electronic music that allows them to express themselves in a totally unique way?

PS: I think it's because you feel special because you're one of the few. That's a big part of it. It's also proven that women can multi-task better than men. We're taught in our society especially that women are more in touch with their feelings and emotions and men are supposed to be macho, and a champion and be the best. Just like fifty years ago, 'who's going to be your husband?' was the biggest question on women's minds. Now I think we're all at a point where we realize we don't need any of that. I think it's a really amazing and fascinating time to be alive and to watch all these things happen, and I think its only just beginning.

From the DJ angle of things, I think the women were viewed more as a prop, what they were wearing and being behind turntables, and that was sexy. It was kind of like a novelty, I don't think those people were really taken seriously. I remember spinning at a club one time and these guys came up to the booth and they were like 'you're a chick,
spinning this music?' and I was in jeans and a sweatshirt. I think that's part of the dance music scene too. Women are there to be dressed up and suck on lollypops [Laughs].

WN: [Laughs] Succinctly put. Do you believe the Bay Area provides ample opportunities for women artists interested in the electronic arts in the way of performance, workshops, employment, etc.?

PS: Definitely. I think the Bay Area is really unique in that sense. I don't think I would have been given the same opportunities that I got here on the east coast. I think it is because Pauline and Pamela Z and Maggie Payne at Mills….

WN: Would you say they set the standard?

PS: Yeah, and they're looking out for us too. They want to help propagate the women in the scene. I remember Maggie said to me one time 'I'm so sick of being the only female at AES. We need more women; I'm sick of seeing a sea of dudes at AES.' I worked also part time at Expressions College in Emeryville, and it's the same thing there. If there's woman in a recording class, they call them unicorns there.


PS: It's because they're so magical and unique. For a woman to be going to school there is amazing. Again, that number is slowly increasing.

WN: Just out of curiosity, is it awkward for you to talk about this kind of stuff? Is it awkward for any woman to talk about do you think?

PS: I don't think it's awkward for any woman, but it's something I think a lot about, especially since I work directly with the undergrads at Mills. I'm dealing with young women in technology all the time. I absolutely love it, I love encouraging them. I love seeing when they first walk in with hardly any computer skills except Facebook and tweeting and maybe Microsoft Word, and by the time they leave two years later they're producing thirty minute documentaries. Once they get those skills down they just fly with it. For men, they would never admit that they were struggling and having a problem.

WN: In your view, how important is the 'do it yourself' aesthetic in the proliferation of Bay Area experimental electronic music events, and events of an underground nature, such as events at 21 Grand, events posted on the Bay Improviser calendar, and so on?

PS: The 'DiY' thing is hugely important. Working with a sequencer, like Logic or Reason, there's a certain predictability there. I really love hearing people try new things that have more of a programming aspect to it, or the way they built a certain circuit, or the way they're interacting with the music. It's not always awesome music to listen to, but it becomes more about the process about how the sound was created, and I find that
very fascinating. In terms of it being popular music, it's never going to get there. I've been to tons of shows at 21 Grand and the Lab; I've heard countless concerts at Mills. It's interesting how all of these people have different processes, but there's something so similar to each one of those pieces. It's like this random chaos that you start to find the pattern in after you listen to it long enough. That's something that's become really interesting to me, especially in improvised music. There's something interesting about doing something off the cuff or off the top of your head….how can that sound the same every time even with different groups of people. So maybe we've actually made our own genre that we're trying to follow there too.

WN: It seems to me that perhaps DIY leads to its own community or method of expression, which may have its own kind of sound as say maybe when you'd go to a rock concert or something and it would have its own dynamic. DIY events may think that they don't have that kind of feel, because by its nature is sporadic, it actually does.

PS: Yeah. I'm an improviser myself, so I'm not excluding myself from this.

WN: What's your primary instrument now?

PS: Now I just do straight up electronics. I have a group with Fred Frith on guitar, Jason Hoopes on bass, and me on either synths or processing the group sound. I love it, it's magical. We've never recorded it though. It's exciting, that element of surprise. I think that whole process can go in a negative way as well. You just go up there and do whatever you feel like doing, and that element of surprise makes you feel like you've done something good, and when you listen back to it you wouldn't feel as strongly about it [Laughs].

PS: I'm very fortunate to work at Expressions, where I have access to all kinds of great equipment. I just bought a concert zither, and I love the kalimba. I spend a lot of my time in the studio doing foley recordings.

WN: What are those?

PS: Anything from a bottle of aspirin being shaken to make a shaker sound, dropping pennies on metal candlesticks, putting hard candy in a plastic alcohol container and manipulating it and shaping the sounds you can get out of that. Another one of my favorite instruments is a bracelet I bought that has metal circles and then shells. Basically whatever I find in my house I take it with me and keep playing around with it until hopefully something good comes of it. If not, it's not like we're wasting tape these days. If I'm not working in that medium, I'm working in Logic a lot and using the sculpture synth, which is a great modeling synth. I can't get tired of that thing; it's limitless for me. I'm a digital synthesizer girl, I do know the analog synths but I guess I can't afford it. I did just take a class for audio engineering, so maybe making my own synths is something for the future.
In terms of performing live, I basically break all that stuff down into samples and map it out through Max/MSP.

WN: Would you consider yourself adept at Max/MSP?

PS: Yeah. I would say so. I've got a pretty good handle on it. I've also got an M-Audio keyboard, and a nine fader thirty-two knob controller that links the different parameters of different effects to manipulate the sound in real time. I've also been doing motion tracking for a long time. I was using Eric Singer's version of Cyclops. Now, I'm using a connect sensor from the Xbox game, it is so cool. You can actually map your right hand, your right elbow, right shoulder, and it's way too much fun.

WN: In your view, who are the artists that are making significant contributions to experimental electronic music in the bay area at the present time? And specifically, who are the female composers that stand out for you?

PS: I'm going to be really biased because the only people I know right now go to Mills. I would say there's a young lady by the name of Ashley Bellouin. She built a beautiful glass harmonica, and does a lot of droney stuff. Sara Davachi is another person who just graduated and she's also in the drone and analog synth realm of things. There's Mariel Jacobsen who does a lot of things with violin and electronics. Les Stuck does some interesting things with dancers and the things he writes for Max/MSP. I think John Bischoff is one of the best. The emotionality he can get out of electronic music is mind-blowing to me. You can't really say Fred Frith is a computer musician but he's definitely electronic. If it wasn't for him I probably wouldn't have had all the confidence in myself that I needed. He really pushed me and encouraged me a lot. I think the Bay Area would not be the same without him. It's more of the collective whole of the Bay Area that keeps it going. I've kind of fallen out with a lot of the scenes here. I'm not really a fan of going over the bridge to the city, so I stay more local here. I feel like sometimes it's not growing or going anywhere. I think it's a great collective and a supportive collective, but at the same time there's a stagnation.

WN: What is your overall artistic goal? What do mostly hope to achieve with your art? Along with that, how important is dance in your artistic aesthetic?

PS: What I'm hoping to achieve at this point in my life is to write music for dancers. There's this whole new genre in dance festivals called 'dance on camera' or 'dance for camera.' That's become a really big thing and a good way to enter into these festivals. I really want to keep continuing with the motion tracking stuff too. I think those are the things that are my source of passion right now. I need motivation and deadlines and pressure to get myself to do it. I think it's also a matter of getting older. When I was in my twenties, you could not get me away from the computer. Now, I want a garden, I want a barbeque. It's different the older you get. If I woke up tomorrow and the only thing I'd have to do is write music for dance companies, I'd be in heaven. Both dance and music are my loves, forever. Without them in my life I could see myself flipping to depressive states really easily, especially if I'm not dancing. There's something about the
physicality of dancing. It's one of the few times my overly active mind shuts off and I can just be in the moment.

WN: Would you say that your interest in dance stems from your experience in clubs, in those kinds of environments?

PS: No, I think it definitely came from my dance training and not the club scene. The club scene was the catalyst to get me to accept electronic music, because before that I thought electronic music was the most awful thing in the world because I was a clarinetist and I was so into romantic and post romantic music. Any form of music that was synthesized was the devil to me, and it was like ‘why would you want to do that when there's all this beautiful music that's been written.’ So I got to the dance scene and I was like 'oh, this is fun, how do you make this?'
Will Northlich: One of the reasons I wanted to interview you is due to your residence in the Bay Area for a significant period of time coupled with your perspectives as a woman in the unique environment of electronic music. How did you first start making music, and electronic music in particular?

Pamela Z: I first started making music when I was a very small child. My first memories of making music are singing and playing with machines such as tape recorders. I played viola when I was in elementary school. I loved doing things like trying to string rubber bands across dressers to try to make a guitar, you know? I was working with found sounds. When I was five years old my sister and I sang in a talent show and we used pods from the trees in our neighborhood. There were seeds inside the pods and we used them as maracas [Laughs]. So I was using found objects and homemade instruments since I was pretty small. Then I learned to play guitar in elementary school and was a singer-songwriter for many years in addition to being in concert choir in high school, learning to sing Italian arias, being a vocal major in college, and singing classical vocal music. The whole thing about playing with machines, the cassette tape recorder was invented when I was young. My father first sent my sisters and me one as a gift, which I commandeered. Soon after that, he sent a second one. Once I got ahold of both of them I started figuring out how to do multi-tracking, getting really dirty recordings with many layers. I also did my own radio shows, where I did all the music and voice-overs. From pretty early on I was playing with machines, not really knowing anything about the electronic music world or experimental music. I was basically already doing sound art and radio art as a little kid.

I didn't really get into doing what one might term as electronic music until I discovered processors, and digital delay at first. I got more sophisticated with my recording once I got out of school. I was doing some experimentation with layers and making more ambient stuff, which was a departure from opera arias and folk rock and punk rock, the stuff I was doing in clubs. When I got a digital delay, I feel that that was one of the points where it was a life-changing moment. I started making work with a lot more repetition, layers, and minimalism.

WN: What was it about the digital delay that for you really hit home?

PZ: Well, I always was sort of a loner, and I made my living playing music in clubs and busking on the street. When I first got out of school I had a double major in music and education, and I was already playing professionally in clubs. But, everyone said 'oh, you've got to be safe and teach.' I actually substitute taught for a year, and then for another I got a post teaching elementary school and junior high school teaching music. I literally made more money busking on the street than being a teacher. I stopped teaching after a year and a half. I basically lived in Boulder, Colorado for ten years, and made my
living as a musician. Then I started traveling to San Francisco and playing on the wharf, and at that time you could do pretty well busking in the Bay Area.

Getting back to your original question, the digital delay allowed me to continue to be a solo artist and it allowed me to expand the layers of sound that I could create with one voice. Within a few years of using the digital delay I stopped playing the guitar because it didn't really suit the kind of music I was trying to do. My work kept getting more experimental from the stuff I was playing in clubs at the time. What happened was, I saw Jaco Pastorius in concert once do a solo using a stompbox, making loops. I said 'I could do that with my voice.' So I went to a music store the next day and described what I saw, and the guy said 'oh, that's a digital delay.' He sold me a much higher end rackmountable delay. I started playing with it at home and I never went to bed that night. All of a sudden, I could create layers of sound with just my voice. Really overnight, the way I started thinking about sound and composing changed radically because of the possibilities. I just became really fascinated with it. I also think that a lot of minimalist composers such as Phillip Glass and Steve Reich made it okay for me to make music that about a short motif. I've always loved layers, and digital delay gives you a lot of ability to create layers and do it in real time.

**WN:** How would you describe the style of music that you compose and perform? Would you consider yourself a minimalist?

**PZ:** It's funny, because the people who everyone calls minimalists never wanted to be called that. I actually love the term because I think of it in a broader fine art kind of way; it's an aesthetic that I find pleasing. If you think of it as an aesthetic that isn't just applied to working with repetition….I like the idea in a bigger sense. Some people eschew labels because they don't want to get pigeonholed into one thing. I have the opposite problem. I want to own a whole bunch of labels because I feel that one doesn't tell the whole story. I jokingly refer to myself as a very hyphenated musician. I rather dislike when I get listed somewhere as 'vocalist.' I consider my instrument to be the combination of my voice and the electronics I use. If somebody says I'm a vocalist and someone who knows nothing about me reads that, I feel like picture you get from that word is either no information because its so broad, or it's the wrong information.

**WN:** If you had to be billed as something, what would you prefer?

**PZ:** Well, that's where this hyphenated thing comes in. The term I always use is composer-performer. I don't want to use just composer either. People may think that a composer is just someone who makes little black marks on a piece of paper. I know that a composer is broader than that, but I think that without any qualifiers with it doesn't describe it. The term composer-performer already gives you a big piece of information, because there is a tradition of composer- performers. It makes people realize there's some information they don't have. It's like 'okay, she's a performer, but what instrument does she perform on?'
WN: I heard Robert Dick say something awhile ago, which was 'Nowadays, if you're a composer, learn how to perform on something.'

PZ: I know Robert, and he has very strong opinions, which is fine. I don't like to dictate what people do; I think that they should just do what they do. If the sounds that people are amazing, then I'm happy to hear the sound they're making. I don't think people should be performers if they're not performers. One person's art may be to make incredible soundscapes that are amazing to the ear, and they're not comfortable in front of an audience, so they throw some video behind them and it's not better than the videos that come from Itunes, and it doesn't match the level of sonic sophistication they're presenting. A lot of composers are performers, and a lot of composers are not performers. I would never want to push someone into doing something that isn't his or her forte.

WN: Here's a question that deals with that idea. Have you ever connected with the DJ/experimental electronic dance communities? Do you see yourself as separate from these communities? With this composer-performer dynamic, would you say that that could assist people in discovering whether or not they prefer composing over performing or vice versa?

PZ: I have to say that I was one of those people that was very resistant to electronica and techno. I liked Kraftwerk and other groups. What I didn't like was the moment that I realized that they sort of usurped our name and now the general public was thinking electronic music was this more popular dance music form. I'm on the steering committee of the San Francisco Electronic Music Festival, and we first started doing the festival we were immediately deluged with proposals from DJs who just wanted to come and do dance music. We're really more interested in presenting work that has a really high level of excellence. We don't mind mixing it up. I don't think that the worlds are separate; I think there's a really blurry line that separates them. Rather than a line in fact I think it's just a big swath of area. I think in all genres, there are people who elevate that to an art form.

In terms of DJ culture, I feel like part of the role of the DJ is as a curator. There's a guy named Wobbly aka John Lydecker, and his knowledge of music is so broad and so deep. If you mention any composer to him like John Cage or Aphex Twin, he'll immediately be able to expound on them in great depth. If I were to have a DJ at a party, he'd be the one I want. He does not play typical mainstream party music, his mixes are totally eclectic. I also like him as a composer, where he's playing fragments of things and crazy collages onstage that you don't recognize. I think he is the quintessential example of how the worlds I mentioned aren't separate.

WN: I want to go into a completely different area now, which I'm anxious to get your views on. You've been a major musical presence in SF for many years, organizing events and classes at the Lab, numerous performances, on the board of SFEMF and so on. It seems obvious that there is a large predominance of the male gender in many electronic music events in the Bay Area and elsewhere. Why do
believe the male gender is more prevalent than female concerning electronic music? What have you seen in the classes you teach that brings attention to this? What would be a reason that jumps to your mind?

PZ: I think to answer that you have to step back and look at the larger world and not just at music. I hear all the time on NPR, they're talking to women in Silicon Valley and asking 'why are all the programmers male?' There was a term that I heard that's apparently bandied about all the time called 'bprogrammers' or maybe it was something else, but it was something like that. It's always women that have to answer this question too. I wonder if anyone would ever, in an interview with a male, in a field that's male-dominated, think to ask them 'why is your field male-dominated?' Because it's always the women who have to figure out why that's the case. I do think the condition we have in the world where there's some gender imbalance in a lot of different things is a problem, or a condition that's engendered by the cultural whole, not just one gender in the culture. It's a hard thing to explain. For whatever reasons in our world, women have been kept down in terms of the technical world. When women were talented in that way they didn't get the same kind of recognition for it as men did. It's the same in the art world. There were women in the many art movements that have existed, but you'd never know it because they always wrote about the men and never the women. The world has a long history of this separation of what is considered men's work and women's work. We live in time now where theoretically that separation is gone. But we live in a time that backed by a foundation of cons of history where that wasn't the case. I think if some people who lived in the sixties saw that there are many women who are doing electronic music they would be amazed. Maybe there will always be some tendencies towards certain practices concerning men and women that won't ever change. We have a culture that wants to put women in front of the microphone at the head of the group, and all the instrumentalists are men and the woman who's the pretty one in front. By the same token when women invent things or do really highly technical things they either don't get credit for it or they get segregated into the group of 'this is the special group of women who do the odd thing that women don't usually do.' It's not a question so much for a musician or artist; I think it's a question for someone who's studied social phenomena and culture and gender psychology.

WN: One thing that you said that hit home for me was 'why not ask a guy about it?' In my own defense, in the other interviews I've done I guess the reason I never did was I felt I wouldn't get an interesting or legitimate answer.

PZ: I'd be very curious to know what a guy would say about that, because you get to hear it. Maybe they feel they're overstepping their bounds or something. I'd like to know the opinions of men about why this is. I think all of these problems regardless are owned by the entire culture. The other thing that's sort of sad about it is that it's now not only your job to do whatever it is you do, but you're also the spokesperson for that group. White men are never asked to be spokesperson for white maleness. Women I think have thought about these things a lot, and our weapon against them I guess is to not give too much thought about them, and just do what we do. I do know however that there's been a lot of change. Since I started doing electronic music, if I was ever asked to be on a
compilation I was always the only woman on it. That's no longer the case. There is change, but at the same time I think there is something in this nature of men and women which helps to perpetuate these things. I don't know if it's innate or cultural, but a lot of our nature is cultural, so if we were all raised in a culture where geeks are guys, then that sets a predisposition. I was always the geeky one in my family, so not everyone falls prey to the conditions that we have. But I'm sure even I in some cases fall prey to them.

I think a lot of guys consciously believe that they believe in equality, and they would like to champion the cause of women getting as much credit as they do, or women having equal respect. But those same people also grew up in a culture where that isn't the case. When I first started teaching classes at the Lab, I was encouraged to do them for girls, and I didn't want to do that. I said 'I don't want to discriminate against the boys, I want anyone who's interested to come and take the class.' The first time I did it I got all boys and two girls, and when I asked the girls why they took the course they said 'well, because my boyfriend has a recording studio and I always feel really stupid, you know?" And that was during the nineties, and I began to understand why I should do one just for girls. So I started doing them for women, and I got all these women who came and said 'I tried to take electronic music classes at my school, and the guys would not let me get my hands on the gear.'

WN: Do you believe the Bay Area provides ample opportunities now for women artists interested in the electronic arts in the way of performance, workshops, employment, etc.?

PZ: I think so. When I first started doing workshops that was about twenty years ago. I think a lot of the leaders in this field are female. I know a lot of people who specialize in electronic music who take side gigs to make money, and they'll be programmers or composers for game companies and it seems like more of them are women than men. I know a lot of women who have gone down that path or they're teaching at Expression's College. I think the Bay Area is a really vibrant place for that kind of gender equality in electronic music.

WN: Jumping immediately off that, what is it about the SF Bay Area specifically that appeals to you as a home for composing, performing, and living in general?

PZ: Well, I have to be honest. I love New York, and I didn't really get to know it until I was an adult. I started going to New York regularly in the nineties. There was a period of time when I decided I wanted to be bi-coastal and people said 'you're a starving artist, and you want to live in the two most expensive cities in the world.' [Laughs]. Eventually, through a series of different things, I ended up finding places in New York and here. I kind of feel more alive in when I'm in New York. For the past seventeen years I've had a live/work studio in this building, and I love it. I need this space to make work; a lot of people have little shoebox apartments in New York that they pay a lot of money for, and then they pay another rent on a studio. I can't have the place that I work be a place where you go out and get a cab or get on the subway and travel someplace. I roll out of bed and I'm here in a second. I feel like the Bay Area has been incredibly supportive to me as an
artist in many ways. There's a real nurturing community here, people are very interested in each other's work and there's all these series' here, and we all go to each other's events. There's a support system and a way to go and see all kinds of people's work and get inspiration and ideas and support for your own work. The funding for public foundations is getting really bad recently. I've had regular California Arts Council grants for many years to do arts residencies at the Lab. In all the years I've applied for grants from the San Francisco Arts Commission I didn't get it probably twice. There are some private foundations that have been very supportive, as well as arts administrators and other institutions. I've also been able to teach workshops on a regular basis, and I've received lots of commissions from a variety of dance companies. The Bay Area has been very supportive and nurturing to me as an artist, but I do feel like there's a certain level that being in New York boosts you up to, not because New York is necessarily better but because the world views New York as better. You can do the exact same thing in San Francisco as you can in New York but it matters more in New York. All I had to do was play at Roulette in New York and I would get reviews in big papers, such as the Times and Time Out. I got an illustration in the New Yorker. Times reviews and Village Voice reviews mean something to people. My stature here in San Francisco is on a completely different level in New York.

WN: Would you say that Pauline Oliveros and the SF Tape Music Center, as well as the counterculture in general, had something to do with this sense of community here?

PZ: Maybe. Maybe it's like the beginnings or early part of it. I definitely feel like that continued. However, with new music and experimental music I feel like there's more of a global community. There's a joke that there are usually only thirty people that attend a new music concert, but it’s the same thirty people no matter where you are in the world [Laughs].

WN: [Laughs]. I totally hear that. Just a few more questions here. Do your workshops have a specific musical ideology concerning their makeup, participants, or nature? Is there a 'DIY' component to organizing these events?

PZ: Well, I teach workshops out of my own studio now. When I first started doing it, it was through a California Arts Council artist in residence grant with the Lab in San Francisco, and it was totally collaborative with the Lab. There were very helpful. Getting participants was done through an application process. The physical plant and some of the equipment was also provided by the Lab. When I started doing workshops through my own studio, I started charging for them, which was almost the opposite from how it worked at the Lab. Sometimes I've had to turn people away, and sometimes I've had to cancel workshops because there haven't been enough people who register. I tend to take whoever wants to take the workshops. I design the workshops, and I come up with concepts and what we're going to cover over the course of the workshop.

The 'do-it-yourself'-ness is very fresh and special to the Bay Area. People build their own instruments and create their own systems for making electronic music and
performance. That's always been something that's really prevalent here. For my own workshops, I really have no interest in just teaching a ProTools class. I want to teach art. So, included with all of the technical information is how to use these tools to create experimental compositions. For example, how can we use found objects and found text to create work? How can we use our physical body? What is it about voice and timbre that's unique?

WN: It seems like your classes touch on multiple areas, even perhaps music theory.

PZ: Yeah, a little bit. But, it's totally not a musician's workshop. People come in and say 'I don't know how to play an instrument,' and I say 'that's okay.' Or they say 'I don't know how to read music,' and I say 'well, you'll never have to in this class.' The people who typically like to take my workshops are artists who want to become more inter-media in their approach, such as choreographers who want to design their own sounds for their dance pieces, or visual artists who want to add sound to their work. I get musicians who are like, a classically trained flutist who wishes she understood how to improvise and how to use electronics. I really like the wide range of people that I get. I love giving people new information. I guess the philosophy or bent of my workshops is providing people with tools and ideas to make experimental sound and performance works, and to appreciate them.

WN: I'll have to sign up for a workshop. What kinds of equipment do you use? How do your equipment choices contribute to the music you produce?

PZ: Well, if I'm in the studio making work I use ProTools, and I have good microphones and digital audio interfaces. ProTools is the main thing I use for constructing pieces. I use a lot of video in my work these days also and I use Final Cut for making video. For performing and presenting the work I use Max/MSP, and for video I use Isadora, which is sort of a Jitter-esque software that I found more user-friendly.

WN: Cool! Moving right along, in your view, who are the artists that are making significant contributions to experimental electronic music in the bay area at the present time both male and female?

PZ: There are lots and lots of great artists. If you look at the SFEMF website, every year we have a lot of local people as well as people from out of town. Mariel Jacobsen does stuff with violin and electronics. There's a woman who I just had at a series that I produce regularly in this building called Thea Farhadian who does beautiful work with violin and electronics. Les Stuck does beautiful work as well. I will always love Carl Stone's work, he's one of my favorites and he lives in Japan now. I relate just as much to visual artists as I do to sound artists. Some of my favorite artists are more installation artists than they are musicians. Paul DeMarinas is a remarkable artist and his work is really mainly now exhibition and gallery type stuff. There's a chamber ensemble called SF Sound Group, and they're local. The people who run that are the same people who do the new Tape Music Center. They do wonderful concerts that are other composers' works plus they all compose themselves. Matt Ingles is in that group. There's a whole
community around that. The list goes on of course. The names on SFEMF are a pretty amazing list of current artists. On my website I have a series called the Room Series, which I curate in this building. I bring in mostly local people.

WN: How often do you do this?

PZ: I make a little season. I'd like to do it a lot more than I do now. It winds up being something like four or five concerts a year. It's all new music, and I try to mix it up. One thing I do is create instrument themed evenings, like for example one evening was a percussion themed evening that I called 'Battery.' If you remember from the 80s, David Sanborn had a program called 'Night Music.' What I loved about that show was that there was such a great mix of artists on each show. One show that I remember was Phillip Glass, Debbie Harry, Sun Ra, and Christian Marclay. And at the end of every concert they'd all play together. It's somewhat similar in my series, where I give each artist their own set, and then at the end we all play together.

WN: Incredible, I had no idea that there was a series here. We've covered a lot of ground, and I want to move to the last question. In your view, what must be done to keep electronic music events and communities in the SF bay area vibrant, lively, and diverse?

PZ: I think people just need to keep doing what they're doing, and I think it's being done. There's the SFEMF every year, the Edgetone Festival happens every year, there's also the Thingamagig Festival where people use found instruments and circuit bent instruments. There's a lot going on, and there's a lot of new things going on. It makes me nervous when I do to new music events and I see a sea of grey hair. I really want young people to stay engaged in it. But there are a lot of young people who are starting their own thing. There's a whole group of young composers doing chamber music type stuff, but they've taken it out of classical venues and they're doing it in cafes and these kinds of places. There was a big Lou Harrison thing at the Berkeley Symphony, and I looked around and discovered that I was the youngest person there, and that was upsetting [Laughs].

WN: Would you say that a lot of these festival directors have to listen to the younger generation?

PZ: Yeah, they have to listen and be open. These institutionalized things like the Berkeley Symphony and the Maverick series at the SF Symphony, those are great things, but maybe the chief audiences at those are older people and people who can afford the events. There are plenty of other things on grassroots levels that are being driven by a younger contingent, and it's very serious and intelligent music. What I hope people don't do is water things down to have broader appeal.
Will Northlich: How did you first start making music, and electronic music in particular?

Jay Fields: I started out as a child with a Yamaha DD5 drum machine and PSS 170 keyboard, recorded through the built-in mic of a boombox – I remember singing and playing with those machines for hours, thankfully none of those tapes are still around. I eventually started making collages of sounds with a dual tape deck boombox and figured out a way to reverse and slow down/speed up the tape while recording (holding fast forward or rewind half-way while enabling the record button). Later on, I played saxophone in grade school and picked up drums and guitar in my early teens. In my late teens, I heard Squarepusher and Aphex Twin for the first time and was almost immediately focused on learning how to create music or sound that humans weren’t physically capable of playing or reproducing with acoustic instruments. Some friends of mine turned me onto Impulse Tracker and Cool Edit Pro and I spent many summer vacations off school messing with those programs. This is the same era of recordings that Zod Records eventually released years later.

WN: How would you describe the style of music that you compose? What makes Exillon's sound unique?

JF: The style has changed a lot since I started making music I was proud of around 1998. I just try to capture a mood or a feeling – I’m not sure that makes my sound unique. Is anyone’s music unique? I’m sure there are recurring themes, scales, time signatures or other music theory elements that could be used to dissect my sound but I’ve always just made stuff that sounds good to my ear and my gut. I appreciate theory and use it as a tool when needed (sometimes) but I prefer to avoid it.

WN: Where/how often do you perform? At what venues do you perform, and how are your events promoted? Do you enjoy DJ-ing or performing live, or do you prefer both?

JF: I’ve performed in warehouses, clubs, coffee shops, book stores, abandoned houses, clothing stores, basements, living rooms and really nice proper large venues. I perform on average 5-10 times per year, more if I’m on tour. Recently, I’ve played at Public Works (SF), Boiler Room (LA), 222 Hyde (SF), Bang Face (London), somewhere in the woods of Avery and so on. Events are usually promoted by word of mouth, of course with boost of online (Facebook, myspace, songkick, email and website assistance) – but I think the best shows came about due to strong word of mouth, supported by likeminded individuals. I very rarely DJ in public, I much rather perform or play my own material since I know that stuff better and have more control.
WN: You're affiliated with several record labels, including the popular Ad Noiseam in Germany. In your view, how important is it to be represented by a label today, considering such websites like soundcloud and bandcamp where everyone can post and distribute their music?

JF: Soundcloud and Bandcamp are great but it can be very difficult for someone who has just recorded their first song to get people to listen to it. However, assuming they’re making music that others enjoy – an established record label can quickly introduce this new artist to a lot of people who will most likely enjoy their music. If an artist already has a strong following, there may not be any need for a record label to support them – we are seeing more and more of this.

WN: In your view, does the SF Bay Area provide adequate and enjoyable performance opportunities for electronic musicians and DJs, or is one more prevalent than the other?

JF: I think there are a good variety of opportunities available – there are a lot of open-minded organizers and promoters here who support non-mainstream electronic music. And there are a lot of people who don’t fit into a pre-existing scene here that have created their own events and parties.

WN: Do you believe there's a like-minded 'community' or network of electronic musicians and/or DJs in the Bay Area?

JF: Yes.

WN: In your view, how important is the 'do-it-yourself' aesthetic in the proliferation of Bay Area experimental electronic music events?

JF: There’s simply no other way to do it for most experimental electronic artists in the Bay Area. No one is going to come along and hand them a golden ticket – plus, the fun is doing what you want, how you want to do it.

WN: Would you consider yourself an "underground" artist? What does underground mean to you? How would you define the underground?

JF: Who knows what underground means anymore. I suppose anyone who isn’t being played on the radio could be considered underground. However, they might have a youtube video with more plays than a radio single, so are they still underground? Are you still underground if you have 5k or more “likes” on facebook? Underground wasn’t supposed to appeal to the masses but over the years, that’s become the case.

WN: What is it about the SF Bay Area specifically that appeals to you as a home for composing and performing electronic music, as well as a home for yourself in general?
JF: I chose to live in San Francisco because of the weather, food, people and overall vibe of the place. I’ll always make music regardless of where I’m located – I didn’t chose to live here because of the music scene. It’s an inspiring place with a lot of people who are excited about being here and we’re sort of on the edge of the Earth. I like to think of it that way at least.

WN: What sort of equipment do you use, and how does that contribute to the music you make? Do you believe advances in music technology have made it easier for people to get into making this kind of music?

JF: I use computers, software, cheap circuit bent toys, new state of the art hardware and vintage hardware. I’ll use whatever I can get my hands on, I love learning new machines and trying to make them do things they’re not intended to do. Of course, advances in music technology make it easier for people to create music – whether or not anyone will want to listen to it is another matter. It’s interesting because there have been so many advances but the most successful artists always make the simplest music so does it really matter what tools people use? For me it’s about the process, I enjoy the process of learning new tools and expressing something using those tools. Whether or not anyone listens to it and enjoys it is like dessert - it’s not a requirement but it’s nice when it happens.

WN: In your view, who are the artists that are making significant contributions to experimental electronic dance music in the bay area at the present time?

JF: The entire Katabatik crew in Oakland (http://katabatik.org/) and everyone on Record Label Records out of Oakland (http://www.recordlabelrecords.org/)

WN: What is your overall artistic goal? What do you mostly hope to achieve with your music?

JF: To create and release music I’ll still be proud of 50 years from now. I hope to make people feel something when they listen to it.
DAVID WANG - AKA MOCHIPET - INTERVIEW
Conducted via email. Answers received August 14, 2012

Will Northlich: How did you first start making music, and electronic music in particular?

David Wang: After seeing Guns and Roses on TV I bugged my mom for months to buy me a guitar. She finally did, and then some guitar lessons at the local music shop. I had a lucky chance of getting an extraordinary guitar teacher; without him it's possible I would have never had the passion for music I do today. He was very dedicated and honest about music and he passed that on to me. I learned guitar fairly quickly and moved on to bass guitar and drums. I quickly became interested in Jazz and started to borrow Miles Davis and Thelonious Monk CD from the library. I saved up for a year and a half to buy my first 4-track tape recorder (this was when computers were still fairly expensive and my parents were not very rich so they wouldn't buy me one). That's how I learned how to record songs, on just a single cassette tape with only 4-tracks. I eventually convinced my father to get me a cheap PC for school and that's when I started making electronic music. It was all on one Soundblaster soundcard cause it had a RAM chip in it with a 1/2 a Megabyte of memory you could store samples on to. I would make whole songs using just a 1/2 a Megabyte of memory. It's not like today, you cherished ever bit of memory you had. From there I moved on to FM and Granular Synthesis. That's how it all began.

WN: How would you describe the style of music that you compose? Do you stick to one specific genre, or do you like to branch out as much as possible?

DW: Coming from such a diverse background I tend to always branch out to as many things as possible. I have made music that have been categorized under: IDM, Breakcore, Techno, Dubstep, House, Hip-Hop, Glitch-Hop, Electro, Breaks, Jazz, Rock, Ska, Funk, Death Metal, and even Noise. But this can be tricky when making music professionally as a living; people tend to want you to make the same thing over and over again, which is rather challenging to me. I am trying to balance this with my endless musical appetite. I hope I can keep on exploring new sounds and maintain a living as a musician.

WN: Where/how often do you perform? At what venues do you perform?

DW: I have preformed all over Europe, Asia, America, and Canada in Festivals, Huge Venues, and Tiny little hole in the walls. My time on the road varies. 2011 I probably spent more then 1/2 the year on tour but this year I am taking some time off to get my creative roots going in the studio as well as conjuring up a new live show for 2013. I am lucky enough to be able to work at my own schedule and I hope it stays that way.

WN: You've been at the forefront of promoting and performing at underground electronic music events in the SF Bay Area for many years. What is your main focus in setting up these events (such as the SF Laptop Battle), and what are some of
the major complications and benefits in working as an 'underground' artist? Or, would you consider yourself and what you do as "underground"?

DW: I would consider myself an underground artist because I am solely independent and I hardly ever work with The Mainstream Music Industry in my day today. The advantages of that is that you are completely free to do whatever you like on a case by case basis because you are not tied by a contract to anything. The negative side is that because you are not working with the Mainstream Music Industry you tend to make way less money and have way less exposure. It's a trade off.

I always tried to bring creativity and unity to the Bay Area music scene. I feel like it is way too splintered for such a small geography. I really hope there could be more of a family vibe between all artists here. But it is also difficult because most of the people in San Francisco come from other parts of the US, or the world. They all have different ideas on what they think the scene should be.

WN: You also run a popular Bay Area record label. Does your label have a specific philosophy regarding the music you promote and release (compared to other Bay Area labels such as Tigerbeat 6 and n5md)? What makes Daly City Records unique?

DW: Daly City is mainly just an avenue for me to bring out new music to the world. We are not looking for the latest and greatest trend. We are looking for new creative music that people might not have heard before. In my opinion that is the purpose of a record label. Some of the people we have worked with have gone on to bigger and better things such as: edIT (Glitch Mob), Daedelus (Ninja Tune), Ben Samples, ill-eha. But we are ok with that because we are looking for the new people that no one has heard of yet.

WN: It seems there's always a new electronic music genre coming out that maintains a degree of popularity for a while, and then loses popularity; dubstep would be a current example. As a composer, do you believe it's important to adhere to trends in electronic music, or is it more important to establish an independent voice? How does one establish an independent voice?

DW: As a composer I think it is important for you first to learn from other composers that came before you. Listen to Bach, Tchaikovsky, Pink Floyd, Queen, Miles Davis, Frank Zappa, the list goes on and on, and learn from them. What were they trying to express? What were the historical and social ramifications? What was the method they use make music? Who did they learn from? Right now Dubstep is in the limelight but in music history it will just be a minor blip, so you should look at it proportionally in terms of your intake. It's important to live in the now but it is equally important to know where you came from and where you might be going in the future. Musical trends come and go but the underlying emotions are the same. In terms of finding your own voice, I think you need to pull from things that sets your apart from other people. There is no one in the world like you. So what makes you special? It's definitely not the current trend. Highlight and amplify those qualities. Show the world what you're worth.
WN: In your view, does the SF Bay Area provide adequate and enjoyable performance opportunities for electronic musicians and DJs, or is one more prevalent than the other? Do you believe there's a like-minded "community" or network of electronic musicians and/or DJs in the Bay Area?

DW: There are a lot of musicians and DJs in the Bay Area with many different opinions and skills. I think it's more important to cherish our differences than similarities. How boring would it be if everyone made the same music and thought the same thing? Community should be about appreciating others differences.

WN: I've always believed there's a strong 'do-it-yourself' kind of attitude within these kinds of "underground" electronic music events. Would you agree? In your view, how important is the 'DIY' aesthetic in the proliferation of Bay Area electronic music events?

DW: I think to push anything new out there in the world DIY is the only means to make it happen. Because in the beginning of anything there is hardly ever any support from other means. So it's very important. For me the DIY aesthetic is really important in terms of creativity as well, I hope it stays alive.

WN: What is it about the SF Bay Area specifically that appeals to you as a home for composing, performing, and organizing events for electronic music?

DW: The Bay Area is my home. My parents live here and I grew up here so there is a familiarity with it. However, in terms of composing, performing, and organizing events I find it rather difficult in all honesty. Rents have gone up so much now it's hard for a musician find an adequate studio space for a reasonable price. More often then not you're bothering neighbors with your music making. Performing and organizing events is difficult too because you have to compete with so many established events and touring acts every weekend.

WN: In your view, who are the artists that are making significant contributions to experimental electronic dance music in the bay area at the present time?

DW: In terms of Experimental Electronic Music Matmos, Carson Day, and Edison come to mind.

WN: What is your overall artistic goal? What do mostly hope to achieve with your music?

DW: To get better at conveying the feelings and emotions that are inside of me through the artistry of sounds.
APPENDIX IV

Abbreviated List of Bay Area Experimental

Electronic Musicians and Artists
Abbreviated List of Bay Area Experimental Electronic Musicians and Artists

All information taken from the website listed after the artist description. Where there is no description and only a website listing, this is intended to provide useful information for others to conduct independent research (information may also not have been immediately available after conducting Internet research). It is possible that some Bay Area artists have been omitted in this listing. Again, this is an abbreviated list, yet created with the intent on being comprehensive with the information available.

Affiliated with Daly City Records

**Mochipet**
Born in Taiwan to a rocket scientist father and kindergarten teacher mother, David Y Wang aka Mochipet’s music has traveled the globe from Europe to Asia and everything in between. With many overseas and US tours his music has been featured in Videos Games with the Beastie Boys as well as performed by a 20-piece orchestra at New York’s Carnegie Hall.
dalycityrecords.com

**Cuti Sadda**
last.fm/music/Cuti+Sadda

**Bloody Snowman**
www.last.fm/music/Bloodysnowman

**Lokae**
Originally from China, raised in Southern California, and now currently residing in San Francisco, Luo has developed a far-reaching appreciation for diverse musical backgrounds and styles. He has played classical piano, got his chops down with jazz ensembles, nodded his head for years to the boom bap, and honed techniques of collage while DJing throughout the Bay Area. Such a broad musical background helps inform the pliancy in Lokae’s production strategy, where he brings visceral instrumentation to bear on laptop robotics.
Lokaemusi.com

**Mophono**
From DJ’ing at the now infamous Future Primitive parties to running his own Change the Beat weekly in San Francisco for nearly 5 years, Mophono (also aka DJ Centipede) has been an unsung mainstay of the Bay Area, CA electronic/hip hop DJ scenes for some time.
cbrecords.com
Pu22L3 (Puzzle)
Bay area resident alex abalos aKa pu22L3 began his musical career spinning hip hop and soul before moving on to hardstep drum and bass as well as playing bass guitar in various bay area death metal bands (sharing bills with the likes of cannibal corpse and playing in venues like the legendary warfield theatre.) Drawing inspiration from flamenco polyrythms and frequently incorporating live bass guitar alongside his trusty circuit bent akai MPC and laptop, pu22L3’s current work deftly swings between electro death jazz, hyped up splatter break madness, and intricate, melodic guitar driven glitch.
slowleak.org/pu22l3/

Spaceheater
Spaceheater combines the prolific melodies of musician Evan Francis with the noisy machine funk of producer Bill Mitsakos.
www.last.fm/music/Space+Heater

The Flying Skulls
A hard-hitting, West Coast production crew that rocks dub-step, breaks, and stage-raging electro. The Flying Skulls can captivate a room with melodic, explosive beats, or whip up a dance floor with hard hitting booty breaks. It's live West Coast Bass at it's theflyingskulls.com

Vladimir Computin
vladimircomputin.com

Affiliated with Tigerbeat6

Blectum From Blechdom
Blectum From Blechdom is Kevin Blechdom and Blevin Blectum from Oakland, CA.
schplarg.com

C.L.A.W.S.
C.L.A.W.S. is the solo project of Brian D. Hock. After growing up in the San Francisco punk and grindcore scene, Brian moved to Berlin in 2005 with his darkwave band “Vanishing.” During this period he became involved in the afterhour dance scene with longtime friend Beaner, and they started DJing and producing together as “War Vs. Sleep” (bar 25). Upon returning to San Francisco, Brian started producing as C.L.A.W.S., throwing after hour warehouse parties and drumming in the band “Bronze”.
tigerbeat6.com/c-l-a-w-s/

Clipd Beaks
Clipd Beaks was formed in early 2003 in Minneapolis, Minnesota by Aric Blodgett, Nic Barbeln, Greg Pritchard, Ray Benjamin and Scott Ecklein. These longtime friends decided to start making music together after many years of playing in two separate bands.
The name “Clipd Beaks” was lifted from the title of a song from one of these previous bands. In the summer of 2003, Clipd Beaks recorded and self-released the EP Gang Caves. Later that year, the band recorded and self-released another EP titled Winterfucking. After a short tour in early 2004, the band began recording an EP for the Deleted Art label out of Sweden. The EP was completed and named Preyers in late 2004, shortly before Greg Pritchard moved west to San Francisco, California. The band continued to play shows and record in Minneapolis throughout the winter of 2004 and spring of 2005. Meanwhile, the release of Preyers was being delayed by Deleted Art. Clipd Beaks eventually relocated to Oakland, California and reunited with Greg Pritchard in mid 2005.

http://soundcloud.com/clipd-beaks

Eats Tapes
Eats Tapes, Marijke Jorristma and Gregory Zifcak, animate antiquated and accelerated synth attacks with their salvaged, fixed, fetishized and formerly fashionable machines. They have become a household name in the Bay Area, introducing the sincerest of rave art jams to the out-rocked, out-postured denizens of SF’s mission district and Oakland’s free techno warehouse scene. Their music is a driving, chaotic organism riding a constant crescendo to an early grave. In performance, Eats Tapes wrangles howling hardware and discarded altered beasts, mutating the character and context of underground techno by grafting it with influences from the bay area’s fertile noise scene.

eatstapes.com

Gold Chains
Hip-hop hooligan for the indie rock crowd, Gold Chains has recorded for Orthlorng Musork and Tigerbeat6, hardly the equals of Def Jam or Rawkus. Still, he’s a talented rapper and producer, closer to seriously humorous rappers like Gonzales than the hip-hop satire of MC Paul Barman. He was born Topher Lafata and grew up in Reading, PA, parlaying an early interest in skateboarding and hardcore punk into a band influenced by post-punk and industrial. He kept on performing while at college in Connecticut, and broadened his interests to include playing with a live hip-hop act. Lafata also bought a four-track, along with sampler and drum machine, and began recording his own tracks. One of his first productions was a tape called Gold Chains: Music for a Higher Society, which contributed his performing name by the time he started doing shows in San Francisco. Support gigs for Kit Clayton and Kid 606 paid major dividends; his first wide release, Gold Chains EP, appeared on Clayton’s Orthlorng Musork label in late 2001, and his second, Straight From Your Radio (another EP), was issued by Kid 606’s Tigerbeat6.
gold-chains-worldwide.com

Lesser
Lesser settled in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1994, where he participated in the Drum & Bass scene. There he toured with A Minor Forest, and later collaborated with Kid606, publishing a number of records on his Tigerbeat6 Records label. In addition, Lesser has played with members of Crash Worship. In 1997 he helped form a group Disc with Kid606 and M.C. Schmidt and Drew Daniel (of Matmos). Lesser became an honorary
member of Matmos when they toured with Björk as an opening act in addition to playing as supporting musicians in her band on her Vespertine tour in 2001. Later in 2004, Lesser remixed “Who Is It” from Björk’s Medúlla album.

**Numbers**
From the first experiments with no-wave art-punk at the turn of the millennium, San Francisco’s Numbers continues their sonic evolution of minimalism, noise, and pop. The songs are minimal and epic at the same time; powerful, blunt guitar riffs, insistent drumming, and tense slabs of analog synthesizers.

**Wobbly**
Wobbly is the moniker of Jon Leidecker a San Francisco based musician/composer of experimental electronic music. He has released works on Tigerbeat6, Illegal Art, Alku, Phthal, and others. He has been producing music since 1987 and ongoing studio and live projects involve collaborations with People Like Us, Thomas Dimuzio, Kevin Blechdom, Jay Lesser, Tim Perkis, Matmos and The Weatherman of Negativland. He is also a member of the Chopping Channel and Sagan.

**Zeigenbock Kopf**
Zeigenbock Kopf was a faux German techno/noise/industrial band from San Francisco, California. The band was formed as a humorous side project of John Dwyer (under the pseudonym “Hans”) of Thee Oh Sees, Coachwhips, Pink and Brown, Landed, Yikes, Burmese and The Hospitals. Two other members included “Uli Bunschlapser” and “Meister Detlef”. The band released four CD’s before calling it quits after the release of their 2006 album Fuck You To Dust and all resumed their former identities.

**Affiliated with Record Label Records**

**Kush Arora**
Active in SF, Kush is a member of Surya Dub which was awarded Best Club Night by SF Weekly for two consecutive years (2007-08) and has been at the center of the West Coast Dread Bass, Dubstep, and Electronica movement. Kush would find himself on the road frequently as ambassador for the Surya Dub Crew, opening for the likes of Flying Lotus, The Bug , SubSwara, Bassnectar, and Thievery Corp.

His tracks have been remixed by the likes of Rogue State, Eskmo, and England’s Steakhouse Crew. His work has caught attention of Pitchfork Mag, who referred to him as a “laptop musician extraordinaire”, BBC 1’s Mary Anne Hobbs dubbed his Brooklyn To SF release “a beautiful piece of work”.

kusharora.com
Kossak
Kossak's style can be described as a hyper-surgical, sound-design-infused beat music with hip-hop, jazz, dub and Eastern folk music influences. Each original sample is treated like a sacred object and is layered, processed, and mixed as if it were a final song. Entire drumkits are made from found-sounds, including everything from the pops and crackles of ice cubes to construction site sounds. Lucas has produced ambient and avant-garde music in the groups Involution, Clairaudience and 5000fingers since 1998. These efforts culminated in several international album releases and a number of live shows across the San Francisco Bay Area.
soundcloud.com/kossak

Fluorescent Grey
soundcloud.com/fluorescentgrey

Electronic/Experimental Electronic Underground Artists

Heartworm
https://soundcloud.com/heartworm

Exillon
http://nollixe.com/

Spukkin Faceship/Pongoid
http://www.last.fm/music/Spukkin+Faceship

Kit Clayton
Joshua Kit Clayton, better know by his stage name Kit Clayton, is a San Francisco-based electronic and digital musician and computer programmer. In addition to his musical work, Joshua is a programmer for Cycling '74, where he is responsible for further development of the Max/MSP MIDI/audio programming environment. He is a significant contributor to Jitter as well, a multi-dimensional data set processing and visualizing architecture with applications in audio, video, and 3d graphics, which is part of the multimedia package Max. Clayton uses Max, MSP, and Jitter extensively in his own abstract musical compositions, which have been described as including aspects of ambient computer music and glitch.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kit_Clayton
Personal website: http://www.musork.com/o_jkc.html

Letter D
http://www.last.fm/music/Opti/The+Letter+D

Amandroid
http://www.myspace.com/amandroid23
DJ Aneurysm
http://www.myspace.com/ysm

Vankmen
http://vankmen.com/

Split Horizon
http://www.last.fm/music/Split+Horizon

Tang Li Wheebs
https://soundcloud.com/tang-li-wheebs

Leohawk
https://soundcloud.com/leohawk

Fractal Cowboys
https://soundcloud.com/quasar-fractal-cowboys

Miss FAILed (formerly Miss Gawker)
http://www.myspace.com/missgawker

Electribe Called Quest
https://www.facebook.com/AnElectribeCalledQuest

Filthmilk
https://soundcloud.com/filthmilk

Onslaught Ocelot
https://soundcloud.com/onslaught-ocelot

Lowtech
http://www.myspace.com/lowtech

Experimental Electronic Composers/Electroacoustic and Electronic Performers/Computer Musicians

John Bischoff
John Bischoff (born 1949 in San Francisco) has been creating electronic music both for solo performer and in computer network bands since 1973. He received a BFA from California Institute of the Arts and an MFA in Electronic Music from Mills College. His teachers in composition and electronic music have included Robert Moran, James Tenney, and Robert Ashley. He has performed extensively in the San Francisco Bay Area, throughout the US including NEW MUSIC AMERICA festivals in 1981 and 1989, and in Europe including the Festival d'Automne in Paris, Fylkingen in Stockholm, Het Apollohuis in Holland, and the Academie der Künste in Berlin. He was a founding
member of The League of Automatic Music Composers, the first computer network band, and co-authored an article on the League's music that appears in "Foundations of Computer Music", MIT Press (1985). Since 1985 he has performed and recorded with the network band the Hub.


**C.J. "Reaven" Borosque**

C. J. “Reaven” Borosque is currently a sound artist, turntablist and noisician, living in the San Francisco Bay Area. She has preformed at the NorCal Noise fest, The Big Sur Experimental Music Festival (2003/04), and The Oakland Noise festival. She is the leader of the free-noise trio "Hideous Dream" She also plays in Rent Romus's free-jazz quartet “The Lords of Outland”. She has played with Kaylee Koombs in the out-ambient duo “Swoon Doll”.

She has also preformed with many folks including John Berndt, Ellen Weller, and Ignaz Schick, and currently plays noise pedals, turntables, and detuned electric guitar.


**Bob Boster/Mr. Meridies**

Bob has an MFA in Electronic Music from Mills College and studied with the usual assortment of stalwarts there. Working in live electronics, aleatorical and graphical composition, performance art, improvisational traditions, desk-top audio, and traditional processing-art, Bob has recorded and/or performed in a wide variety of circumstances for a diverse range of audiences.

Bob's work (generally presented as Mr. Meridies) has been released by Friction Media, Illegal Art/Seeland, and Cultural Labyrinth labels, as well as appearing in dance, theatre, and film scores. Highlights of 'their' extensive performance experience include Opus 415 in SF, the Knitting Factory in NY, Al's Bar in LA, the Canterbury House in Ann Arbor, and the Hanbury Ballroom in Brighton.


**Chris Brown**

Chris Brown's music has explored the intersection between many traditions and styles. Beginning as a classical pianist, he was influenced by American experimental and improvisational musics as well as by studies of Indonesian, Indian, and Cuban musics. Since the late 1970's he has been building a personal electronic instrumentation. At first these were amplified acoustic devices; then he went on to build analog circuits that modified their sounds, and custom-made computer systems that interactively transformed them. More recently, the sounds of these instruments have been sampled and mixed freely with an expanding collection of concrete and synthetic sounds. Collaboration and improvisation have been primary in the development of his music for various traditional instruments and interactive electronics. He has had commissions for such pieces from the Rova Saxophone Quartet, the Abel-Steinberg-Winant Trio and the Berkeley Symphony Orchestra, among others. As pianist with the Glenn Spearman Double Trio he performed and recorded music in the free-jazz tradition at venues including the San Francisco and Monterey Jazz Festivals, the DuMaurier and Victoriaville Festivals in Canada, and
extensively in Europe. He has performed and recorded with such prominent and varied improvisors as Butch Morris, Anthony Braxton, Wadada Leo Smith, Marilyn Crispell, Barry Guy, Ikue Mori, Dave Douglas, and John Zorn. He has also been active as a pianist in performing the music of composers such as James Tenney, Henry Cowell, Christian Wolff, William Brooks, David Rosenboom, Luc Ferrari, and Terry Riley.

Chris Brown's most recent works involve extending the experiences of Network Music into new performance venues. An installation involving networked rhythm-machines in large or outdoor sites, "Talking Drum" has been produced in Montreal, San Francisco, and Holland. A new series of concert pieces called "Inventions" have sprouted from the polyrhythm generating software for that piece. He is associate professor of music at Mills College where he teaches theory, computer music and Ethnomusicology.  


**Kyle Bruckman**

With a history of conservatory training gone awry, oboist and electronic musician Kyle Bruckmann combines the rigorous discipline of a classical foundation with raucous sensibilities more indebted to punk's aftermath in a dizzying variety of artistic endeavors. He has performed throughout the U.S. and Europe as a composer, an interpreter, and an improviser and has appeared on more than 30 albums of various genres.

Long-term affiliations include EKG, an electroacoustic duo with Ernst Karel, and the experimental "rock" monstrosity Lozenge. Bruckmann's quintet Wrack performs original compositions drawing equally from the traditions of contemporary jazz and classical modernism, cultivating an "ability to combine turned-up flame with clear-headed attention to texture and space" (Jason Bivins, Dusted Magazine). As a member of the Bay Area new music collective sfSound and of Gene Coleman's Chicago-based Ensemble Noamnesia, he has performed works by composers including Berio, Braxton, Cage, Cardew, Crumb, Goldstein, Ives, Penderecki, Sciarrino, Stockhausen, Webern, Xenakis, and Yoshihide.


**Amar Chaudary**

Amar Chaudhary is a longtime composer and performer specializing in contemporary and electronic music, as well as a developer of advanced software for sound synthesis and music composition. Amar studied composition first with Ruth Schonthal at the Westchester Conservatory of Music in New York from 1983 to 1991, and then at Yale University from 1991 to 1995. Amar had his music performed internationally and has received several honors for his musical work, including a 1992 premier of his clarinet quartet Conversational Impromptu at Weill Recital Hall in New York and the 1990 NGCSA Young Composers Award for Earth Songs.

Amar received his PhD in Computer Science from the University of California, Berkeley in 2001. While at Berkeley, Amar was a researcher at the Center for New Music and Audio Technologies (CNMAT) and developed advanced software for music composition and performance, including Open Sound Edit, an advanced 3D graphical editor for sound
representations and Open Sound World, a programming environment for real-time music and audio applications. He has published several research papers related to these and other projects.

Amar remains actively involved in local electronic and experimental music in the San Francisco Bay Area, and performs regularly. His recent music involves experimentation with new sounds and sound-synthesis/processing techniques and new modes of musically expressive performance. He is also interested in the use of folk instruments and toy instruments in electro-acoustic music.


**Matt Davignon**

Originally born in Agawam, Massachusetts, Matt Davignon has been developing his own unique form of improvisation since 1993. After moving to California as a teenager, he spent his musically formative years tinkering with tools such as lo-fi samplers, cassette tapes, contact microphones, household objects, 4-track compositions, extensive chains of guitar effects, prepared instruments, turntables and field recordings. These explorations fuel and inform his current work, which most frequently involves processing the sounds of a drum machine in real-time with various electronic devices. Characteristics of his music include a focus on textures, arrhythmic patterns and musical imperfections, with a focus on evoking biological systems.


**Cenk Ergun**


**Christopher Fleeger**

In the school of the acousmatics, Fleeger works with sound disembodied from its origin through field recording and makes use of the computer as a tool for cataloging timbre and establishing a musical network. Much of his performance material uses gestural sensors and touch panels to control the interaction between recorded soundscapes and live input from another player or from sonic activity in the performance space.


**Lance Grabmiller**

http://www.praemedia.com/

**Scot Gresham-Lancaster**
Scot Gresham-Lancaster is a composer, performer, and instrument designer, has been active in electronic and acoustic music for over twenty years.

He is currently a lecturer in Computer Music, Electronic Technician and Recording Engineer at the Music Department at California State University, Hayward. He is on hiatus from his lecturing position at Ex'pressions Center for New Media.

http://www.bayimproviser.com/artistdetail.asp?artist_id=120
Scott R. Looney
Scott R. Looney has always been interested in the creation and performance of compelling sounds across a broad spectrum of contemporary, improvised, and experimental music. He has studied composition and improvisation with Roscoe Mitchell, Wadada Leo Smith, Morton Subotnick, David Rosenboom, and Frederic Rzewski, obtaining his MFA in Composition from California Institute of the Arts.

After moving to New York, and finally to the San Francisco Bay area, he became more interested in expanding the timbral possibilities of the piano, and using pianists such as Denman Maroney as a starting point, has forged a signature style using the inside and outside of the piano, plucking strings, using metal implements and other quick preparations, in combination to playing the piano normally. He has also developed a flexible, expressive voice with electronics using Max/MSP which is as effective as his many piano textures are.

http://www.bayimproviser.com/artistdetail.asp?artist_id=71

Silvia Matheus
Ms. Matheus is an internationally accomplished electronic music composer who has been composing with computers and electronics since the early 1980. She is Brazilian national with a B A. in Music. She studied composition under the direction of Hans Koellreutter in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Silvia Matheus moved to U.S.A. to continue her studies at Mills College, Oakland, California where she graduated with a MFA in Electronic Music and Recording Media [in 1986]. She continued her education by taking many interactive music courses at the Center for New Music and Audio Technologies (CNMAT), UC Berkeley, California. She has also attended many seminars and lectures in the field of computer music in Europe, Asia and North and South America.

In the early eightieths Silvia Matheus built music scores/controllers made of glass etched with conductive painting that interfaced with electronic instruments with the score acting as a controller.

Silvia Matheus' main focus is on interactive improvisation with computers, electronics, and instrumental ensemble. She has composed music for multi-media projects, video, film, audio installations and radio plays. Her compositions have been selected to be recorded on ICMA label, and Ms. Matheus were many times selected for presentation at the prestigious International Computer Music Conference (ICMC): Hong Kong, China (1997); Banff, Canada; Tokyo, Japan; Havana, Cuba (2001); Copenhagen, Denmark (2007) and New York, USA (2010), and at Inter Society of electronic Arts (ISEA) at the Chicago Art Institute, USA.


Kristin Miltner
http://www.paxrecordings.com/Artists/miba.html
Amy Neuberg
Amy X Neuburg is best known for her wildly entertaining "avant-cabaret" performances for voice and live electronics, in which she uses an electronic drumset, a real-time looping machine, and an array of sounds and samples to construct complex, finely crafted, emotionally intense songs and stories. In live performance she uses the looper to build up thick vocal harmonies and rhythms one layer at a time, and controls all loops and samples by hitting drum pads, stomping on foot pedals, and grabbing faders; there are no canned or pre-recorded tracks. (See Technology below for more info.) Amy's songs are diversely influenced and sung in various styles -- from rock to bel canto to avant-garde -- over a nearly four-octave vocal range.

Maggi Payne
Maggi Payne is Co-Director (since 1992) of the Center for Contemporary Music at Mills College, Oakland, CA, where she teaches recording engineering, composition, and electronic music. She also freelances as a recording engineer and editor and a historical remastering engineer.

Her electroacoustic works often include visual elements which she creates, including video, dance, transparencies, and film. She enjoys collaborating with other artists and has worked with video artist Ed Tannenbaum for over twenty years. She is also a flutist, and has written several works for flute as well as other acoustic instruments.
http://www.maggipayne.com/

Philip Perkins
http://www.philper.com/

Tim Perkis
Tim Perkis has been working in the medium of live electronic and computer sound for many years, performing, exhibiting and recording extensively throughout North America and Europe. His work has largely been concerned with exploring the emergence of life-like properties in complex systems of interaction. A founder of the computer music band The Hub, he is also a well known performer in the San Francisco Bay Area's active improvised music scene, and a designer of multimedia systems for corporate clients. Recordings of his music are available on the Artifact, Lucky Garage, Meniscus and Limited Sedition labels.

Patrice Scanlon
Patrice Scanlon is an electronic musician, dancer, and audio engineer working in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Currently the Technical Director of the Intermedia Arts Program at Mills College (Oakland, CA) and an Audio Instructor at Expression College for Digital Arts (Emeryville, CA), Patrice also performs at local Bay Area Venues, and develops interactive systems with Max/MSP and the Kinect sensor.
David Slusser
David Slusser was born in Akron, Ohio in 1952. He began playing tenor saxophone at age 10, around the same time he started experimenting with reel to reel tape recorders. Getting his first film sound job in 1975, he continued his career with a move to the San Francisco Bay area in 1977, where he joined Lucasfilm in 1984, and received an Emmy award for sound editing in 1993. He has worked often as a music editor for directors Francis Coppola, George Lucas and David Lynch, with whom he has co-composed music for his films. On his own he has composed for documentaries and public radio, as well as his jazz group Rubber City. His sound design is in the collections of both the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, though far more people have heard it in some of the more imaginative commercials on television. He began an association with John Zorn in the mid eighties.

Laetitia Sonami
Laetitia Sonami is a sound artist and performer. Her sound performances, live-film collaborations and sound installations explore ideas of presence and participation.

Her signature instrument, the lady’s glove, allows her to control sounds, mechanical devices, and lights in real-time.

Pamela Z
Pamela Z is a San Francisco-based composer/performer and media artist who works primarily with voice, live electronic processing, sampling technology, and video. One of the pioneers of live digital looping techniques, she processes her voice in real time to create dense, complex sonic layers in her solo works that combine experimental extended vocal techniques, operatic bel canto, found objects, text, and sampled concrète sounds. In her current performance work, she uses MAX MSP and Isadora software on a MacBook Pro along with custom MIDI controllers that allow her to manipulate sound and image with physical gestures. Her performances range in scale from small concerts in galleries to large-scale multi-media works in flexible black-box venues and proscenium halls. In addition to her performance work, she has a growing body of inter-media gallery works including multi-channel sound and video installations.