COMPOSITIONS 2011-2013:
THE ROLE OF INTERPRETATION IN

HERRMANN, HONEST METHODS, AND MCCCPG

By

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This thesis concerns the development of three works (*Herrmann, Honest Methods and MCCCPG*), and their presentation.

The analysis begins by examining Robert Morris’s reading of Minimalist sculpture. Here, it is found that a phenomenological focus on parts can lead to consideration of not only the whole of an object, but also its environmental conditions. Building on work undertaken prior to Wesleyan, Pierre Schaeffer’s sound object is investigated as a potential analogue in music-related discourse. Schaeffer’s original theory, as critiqued by Brian Kane, exposes material and historical issues that have particular resonance for a temporal art-form reliant on mediation.

In Susan Sontag’s argument against interpretive practices in the visual arts, a similar concern with parts and whole is identified. Emerging from her emphasis on formalism over understandings of content, juxtaposition is viewed as a creative technique that has the potential to reveal interpenetrations between different musics, and how these performed.

The thesis ends by examining the function of juxtaposition as form of interpretation in the compositions. Ultimately, the works are seen to echo Morris in foregrounding a variety of environmental concerns through a focus on phenomenologically-heard sound. Jonathan Sterne’s understanding of sonically-defined public and private space demonstrates the relevance of such an approach given the continued influence of repeating and transmission technologies on how we compose, perform and listen.
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“Music. The breathing of statues. Perhaps: The quiet of images. You, language where languages end. You, time standing straight from the direction of transpiring hearts...”

- Rainer Maria Rilke, An die Musik (1956)

Implicitly recognised in Rilke’s aligning of music and sculpture is a shared aspiration to transcendence of material conditions (Horton, 2009). Robert Morris, writing in Notes on Sculpture (1966), identifies the operation of this as a key concern of Minimalist sculpture of the 1960s:

“However, certain forms do exist that...do not present clearly separated parts for these kinds of relations to be established in terms of shapes. Such are the simpler forms that create strong gestalt sensations. Their parts are bound together in such a way that they offer a maximum resistance to perceptual sensation. In terms of solids or forms applicable to sculpture, these gestalts are the simpler polyhedrons...One sees and immediately “believes” that the pattern within one’s mind corresponds to the existential fact of the object. Belief in this sense is both a kind of faith in spatial extension and a visualization of that extension. In other words, it is those aspects of apprehension that are not coexistent with the visual field but rather the result of the experience of the visual field”. (Morris, 1993: 6)

Rather than a one-to-one correspondence between the appearance of an object in space, and its appearance in the mind of the viewer, experience of sculpture is described as being dependent on a process of “seeing” and
“believing”. Objects are registered in consciousness through visual perception, but their existence as mental correlates is the result of a joining of percepts with “faith” in their operation in space. In other words, Minimalist sculpture tends towards transcendence of environment through a seemingly counterintuitive simplification of form to that which is immanent to the medium, or to that which foregrounds the “gestalt”.

Morris’s phenomenological reading has come to dominate subsequent critical discourse. The power of his essay can be located not only in his understanding of parts, or gestalt-casting “unitary forms” (ibid.: 7), but also in identifying that a phenomenological approach can frame consideration of the whole. In Part I, Morris further develops the distinction between “the visual field” and “the experience” of this, describing sculptural shapes that, by virtue of creating unstable gestalts, encourage the viewer to consider the concreteness of their experience. In Part II, the use of the term “structure” to describe such works is criticised on the basis that “structure applies either to anything or to how a thing is put together” (ibid.: 11) - the greater interest is located in identifying the features of objects whose experience emphasises viewer-context relations (ibid.: 15). Echoing Rilke, time is ultimately identified as essential to the transpiring of seeing and believing (ibid.: 17). Whilst then aspiring to transcendence, this work undeniably “stands straight” from, and
indeed draws attention to changes in environmental “variables” over time (ibid.: 17).

Attempting to understand music from a related phenomenological perspective has been a recurring theme in music theory since Husserl first employed musical terminology in emphasising the “horizontal” nature of such experience (Lewin, 1986: 327-328). Why then begin this thesis with a description of theory related to the plastic arts? In attempting to answer this question, and to familiarise the reader with the work preceding that undertaken at Wesleyan, reference is made here to The Means To Hear Them, an experiment completed at the Central School of Speech and Drama, London in 2011. Through comparison of the original analysis of this experiment with one that features Brian Kane’s understanding of Pierre Schaeffer’s sound object, it is possible to demonstrate why a turn to theory accommodating a wider field of experience is necessary in the description of the compositions.

The Sound Object in Reduced Listening

“Section One: Participants were led into the space in pairs...and were seated at two tables separated by a large screen...Initially, one participant ‘dictated’ - that is, performed one of four sets of instructions inspired by [Yoko] Ono’s Grapefruit...whilst the other was asked to ‘transcribe’, or to listen and write down all the sounds heard during this time...On completing the instructions, the roles were reversed.” (Parcell, 2011: 20)
In Schaeffer’s terminology, taken from the *Traité des objets musicaux* published contemporaneously with *Notes on Sculpture*, the separation of participants can be thought of as foregrounding the *acousmatic*. For Schaeffer, in order for a sound object to articulate itself as a mentally-subsisting phenomena, the means of production of sound must be hidden - as Kane describes, “…the acousmatic experience reduces sound to the field of hearing alone. [original emphasis]” (Kane, 2007: 17). In *The Means...*, an opaque screen is employed to deemphasise the action of those “dictating” according to simple instructions such as “make many sounds with your teeth and mouth.” (Parcell, 2011: 33). The process of forming and identifying mental images of sound is henceforth removed from visual context, with the aural becoming the primary mode of listeners’ experience.

The understanding of phenomenology underlying *The Means...* closely resembles Morris’s seeing and believing. In one listener’s transcription, rationalisation of sound production - “saliva”, “tongue” (Parcell, 2011: 35) - was gradually replaced by descriptions suggestive of prominent features - “squelch”, “sweep” (ibid.:35). The transcriptions thus reflect the refined abstraction of Husserlian consciousness, and the gestalt effects of Morris’s unitary forms. Even echoed, in fact, is the Schaefferian endorsement of an alternative “solfège” (Schaeffer in Kane 2007: 19) in the foregrounding of sonorous parameters as a final classification - “speech (non-verbal)” (Parcell,
A possible objection to *The Means...* as a wholly Schaefferian project can, however, be located in what Kane identifies as one of Schaeffer’s most important contributions - the association of the acousmatic with repetitive technologies, and a particular “theory of listening.” (Kane, 2007: 18).

As Kane describes, Schaeffer found in the use of magnetic tape the ideal conditions for reduced listening, or the process of removing sounds from their signification in the real world (ibid.: 18). Unlike human action retained in *The Means...*, recording and playback technologies enable sounds to be played an infinite number of times, and allow their reproduction at various speeds - by means of recording, it is possible to adjust the temporal frame of that which resulted in the description “squelch” in order to examine its identification as such in the mind. This understanding is predicated, Kane notes, on another Husserlian claim of mental, or “intentional” objects: “...that they are grasped as the same through a multiplicity of acts of consciousness...” (ibid.: 19). In Schaeffer’s conception, the potential manipulations of such technologies reflect the machinations of hearing and believing, enabling the listener to move beyond the acousmatic reduction as typified in *The Means...* in order to access the essence of a sound object (ibid.: 18).
Such theorising can be said to be in accordance with Rilke’s “language where languages end”; for Schaeffer, the procedures of working with magnetic tape are thought to enable the testing of a mode of communication beyond linguistic signification. Drawing on the work of Adorno in the 1920s, Kane is skeptical of such a claim given that: “...the compositional act is engaged, from the very beginning, in a dialectic with history, in the form of sonic material.” (ibid.: 21). Rilke’s description of musical time as being “from the direction of transpiring hearts” is, conversely, apt - whilst the acousmatic and reduced listening go some way to explaining how music in-itself is experienced moment-to-moment, both music and technology are historically-conditioned, and hence not reducible to the essential (ibid.: 21-22). To reiterate through Morris’s terms, the distorting effects of environmental variables ensure that appeals to the essential cannot hold through time. The desire to reconcile a structural understanding of the sound object with the experience of Experimental music leads to a similar criticism of the original reading of *The Means*.... Drawing on TS Eliot’s notion of the “auditory imagination” (Eliot in Parcell, 2011: 7), Jacques Attali’s Composition - an imagined future in which production and consumption is carried out by communities composing for themselves - was located in listening to works such as Cage’s Imaginary Landscapes on an “organic” basis, or in terms of a “carrier of a meaning” (Bürger, 1984: 70). In retrospect, what this view overlooks is the grounding of such sonic practice in the emergence of
recording in the early twentieth century. Whilst the immediate relationship of
the sound object to the imagination can be tested through technological
means, consideration of the impact of technology on the “structure” of this
practice is absent from both this discussion and Schaeffer’s theory - in Kane’s
terms, the significance of the “material-historical” (Kane, 2007: 21) is
conveniently bracketed out.

It is tempting to view the sound object as an analogue of Morris’s unitary
forms. However, Schaeffer’s understanding does not allow for a reflexive
encounter on anything other than an “eidetic” basis (ibid.: 15). Gleamed from
the original analysis of The Means..., this deference to a world of preexisting
meaning is similar to prevalent misunderstandings of the politics of
Experimental music, and particularly John Cage’s statement that the
composer should “…give up the desire to control sound, clear his mind of
music, and set about discovering means for sounds to be
themselves...” (Cage, 1961: 10). In her description of the composition of
4’33”, the art historian Liz Kotz draws on the work of James Pritchett in
describing Cage not as a philosopher musing Platonically in this statement,
but articulating as a composer issues resulting from sustained engagement
with the practice of making music. Through brief description of Kotz’s
argument, it is possible to investigate how Cage’s “means” differ from
Schaeffer’s essentialism, and to locate in his work a destabilisation of form
and content that demands consideration of the effects of technology on wider musical practice.

**Towards Interpretation**

In Kotz’s description of his work on *Williams Mix* from 1951 to 1953, Cage is shown to approach technology “nonorganically” - that is, his manipulation of tape results in a splintering of whole and constituent materials without a desire to reconcile the two:

“Cage’s work with audiotape altered his understanding of the nature of sound and time, and decisively transformed his use of notation. By its material structure, tape manifests time as a spatial continuum and renders it subject to intense manipulation. Yet frustrated by his failure to achieve control through tape splicing and synching, Cage...[moved] toward more process-based procedures...Cage’s intensive fragmentation of sound materials arose from his desire to integrate the new technical means of magnetic tape into the process of composition...” (Kotz, 2007: 43)

Cage concerned himself not with the Schaefferian sound object as unitary form, but rather the frame, or “structure” in which such forms are perceived. Similar to the oxymoronic effects of simplifying sculptural form to the gestalt, Cage’s work can be heard as the actions of a composer aware that in inscribing sound, a certain distancing from material conditions results. His solution to the alienating effects of technology, unlike Schaeffer, is not to appeal to primordial understanding, but rather to accept that new modes of
experience are possible. Kotz later describes, resulting from this, how Cage came to consider musical time not as “transpiring”, but instead, like the physical representation of sound on tape, as something of an empty container in which an encounter can occur (ibid.: 46). Nonetheless, the notation for 4’33” - a succinct demonstration of this understanding - is identified as affording composers a potentially overwhelming range of creative possibilities (ibid.: 7-9). Given the purpose of this thesis, it is necessary to return to Attali, and his “crisis of proliferation” (Attali, 1985: 130). Here a questioning of the relationship between musical material and its circulation - one that necessarily limits what can be said to constitute musical practice - can be located.

Attali’s prophesying is consistent with a nonorganic reading of Cage’s use of technology in that, through disassociation of music from its traditional use- and exchange-value, the life of meaning in production, in Bürger’s words, is “killed” (Bürger, 1984: 70):

“Essentially, proliferation is a manifestation of the difficulty of seeing to it that production is consumed, of giving meaning to commodities, therefore of producing demand apace with the repetitive supply...if policies - Keynesian or structural - to stimulate consumption fail, production will proliferate without being able to find an outlet...it will consequently die from an excess of life...” (Attali, 1985: 130).

Despite their radical nature, both Cage and Attali recognise that the consumption of music is, ontologically-speaking, resistant; in his call to produce “demand”, or to “compose” listening, Attali belies the view that new
forms of musical organisation resulting from increased engagement with technology retain significance only in their sounding and reception. But, what does it mean to listen to music that has been removed from its intended environment, or, as Attali describes it, its “code” (ibid.: 20)? Complicating matters is the presence in art music of mediators who make sounding and reception possible. As historically- and materially-conditioned beings, we carry palimpsests of musical training and cultural expectation that ensure essentialist playing, or novel listening, are rarely within our grasp. Given that interpretation of all kinds in music remains largely under-theorised from a musical perspective (Hellaby, 2009: 3), it is again prescient here to turn to visual arts discourse. In attempting to understand form, content and style in the interpretation of visual art, Susan Sontag describes a mode of receiving that is based on operation, rather than a search for meaning. A Sontagian listening can be contrasted with those of Cage and Schaeffer, and examined for insight in relation to an art form that, whilst for interpretation, has taken both its practice and practise largely for granted.

Against Interpretation

Sontag begins with the traditional view that content in visual art is synonymous with referential meaning - that is to say, one can look at figurative painting, and create a world of signification parasitic to the external
environment (Sontag, 1966: 5-6). If the capacity of an artwork for embodying such meaning is taken to be necessary for interpretation as a mode of understanding, both music and the abstract art prefiguring Morris are excluded from this particular discussion by virtue of their content being dead either a priori, or as the result of a non-organic killing (ibid.: 10). What was once assumed to be beyond question has recently, however, been put in doubt, with certain music theorists engaging Rilke’s “perhaps”, and acknowledging the possibility of musical content being synonymous with meaning as described above - Laurence Berman, for instance, has articulated the need for the “imagistic” or “archetypal” understanding of some musics (Berman, 1993: 3-5). Nonetheless, such insight has little significance for Sontag - the reading of content as a default mode of comprehension leads to unhelpful assumptions, or obfuscation of a work’s true parameters. Emphasis should instead be given to form:

“What is needed, first, is more attention to form in art. If excessive stress on content provokes the arrogance of interpretation, more extended and more thorough description of form would silence. What is needed is a vocabulary - a descriptive, rather than prescriptive, vocabulary - for forms.” (Sontag, 1966: 3 - 12).

In highlighting the “descriptive”, the understanding of form as the presentation of a work in-itself has resonance with Morris’s foregrounding of the gestalt. In both cases, form denotes a separation into parts - a “vocabulary” - that is not the basis of a code, or language, and therefore interpretable, but rather
observable in terms of operation and interpenetration. For Morris, the magnification of shape, and the formation of mental correlates is a pure expression of such a position, one that takes advantage of a certain objective rationality inherent in materialisation. Sontag, on the other hand, believes that being against interpretation can be retroactively applied to visual art discourse, with an “erotics” of art eventually being favoured over failed “hermeneutics” (ibid.: 14). Considering mediation as essential to the experience of music, does this mean we should assume a similar position in relation to musical interpretation?

For Interpretation

When practicing Bach’s Inventions at the keyboard, we frequently concern ourselves with divisions of form and content of this type. As music is experienced temporally, we consider this relationship on a moment-to-moment basis, with a procedural approach ensuring that meaningful content is not divisible from consideration of the presentation of the work, or its form. However, at the heart of the traditional understanding of interpretation in music is a paradox: in practising, Sontag’s attempts to dissolve content into form are often forgotten on the grounds that the operation of the work is assumed to point towards the subjectivity of its originator. Although the musical content - pitches and durations - of the first few notes of the D Minor
Invention, are not content in a meaningful or representational sense, resulting from consideration of musical form, or how musical events transpire, we nonetheless encounter in some editions the ascribing of shared human emotions to such phrases. When we decide how to articulate this Invention, we can be said to be at once for and against its interpretation - often, both an erotic and hermeneutic stance is assumed - with the surprising result that the boundaries of interpretive possibility are drawn in. In the isolation of the first note of the Invention as a sound object, however, where then do we direct our interpretative focus? Likewise, in adding a note at a time, when we do recognise not only an ascending minor scale, but practise this as though it were Bach’s motivic material? Sontag, as noted, is not against interpretation in music, but rather opposes referral to the fictional environment of an originary subjectivity in the manner that Kane opposes Schaeffer’s essentialism. In fragmenting Bach’s work we hear that its operation, its form, can be linked to a wide field of materially- and historically-conditioned sound, and that our interpretation necessarily involves more than attending to an unknowable inner landscape.

What is clear from Kotz’s analysis of Cage, and those visual artists influenced by his teaching at the New School, is that work of an Experimental nature can now be thought of as historically-situated. But, can it be said that in performing Cage’s Cartridge Music, where the outcome of an action is largely
unknown, it is possible to consider articulation with the gravity given to musics of other periods? In the writing of Morris, Schaeffer and Sontag, there is the suggestion that to focus on parts - in this case, the production of sounds in isolation - is not to ignore their operation in a wider structure. Rather, by reducing to descriptive formal vocabulary, we begin to understand what it takes to recognise repetition - the basis, in turn, for identifying style in mediation. It follows that a phenomenological approach with a descriptive vocabulary, rather than a prescriptive language, appears central to the interpretation of works based on fragmentations of existing musics.

**The Sound Object in Juxtaposition**

“Section Two: After a short interval, participants reentered the space, although this time as a group. Each instruction [for dictation] was located within a locked box, and was accompanied by a recording featuring...performances of that instruction, and...[accompanying] descriptions. Each box was placed in the centre of the table with titles...located around the exterior. As each set of recordings could be heard through its respective box, the group was asked to match each box to a title. When all were matched to a title, the boxes were opened. Participants then surveyed...the dictations (recordings) and transcriptions (descriptions)...” (Parcell, 2011: 20)

That the original analysis of *The Means*... largely overlooked the second section of the experiment is not surprising when it is considered that in the search for understanding *Composition*, its origins in a previous age of *Repeating* were not addressed. Indeed, participants were only able to reencounter the sounds they had previously performed because of the ability
to capture and replay sound. As with a certain Husserlian identification of features in the first part of the experiment, the experience of participants confirmed that although such technologies appear to enable capture and authentic reproduction of sound, the very process of inscribing means that the status of sonic content is destabilised, with one participant even remarking: “...it took me a while to realise that I was listening to sounds that I had heard earlier”. Unlike Husserlian phenomenology, however, this appears to suggest that although “one does not seek...the gestalt of a gestalt.” (Morris, 1993: 7-8), the formation of a sound object does not preclude differential identification. In the experiment, the use of titles reflects a related consequence of technology’s depersonalisation of music: human action, in the form of description, can ascribe new meaning to a work or practice through minor alteration to its environment. In other words, sound can exist as an unchanging object in the mind whilst still being subject to reinterpretation according to context. As the listeners’ earlier recordings appear alongside one another, each is inherently encountered as fragments reflecting certain aspects of a particular sound object. In their isolation, these fragments are meaningless, hinting only at preformed gestalts. The significance of each sound object is assumed only in relation to each other, and in relation to the environment in which they are heard.
Preliminary Conclusions

The works composed at Wesleyan draw on existing musics and identifiable styles, considering these as comprising independently existing sound objects, whilst recognising their inherent referentiality. This approach is the result of considering sound as the basis of music, and is an attempt to reconcile a Schaefferian, or Husserlian phenomenology with consideration of the wider aural field resulting from the dissolution of content into form. These works are not against interpretation. Rather, they build out from meaningful and meaningless fragmentations, examining how their interaction and interpenetration might be revealed through mediation. Consequently, the following three works begin from the blurring of the organic and nonorganic in the second section of The Means... experiment, separating and then recombining musical processes of composition, performance and listening to enable linkages between them to articulate for themselves.
The understanding outlined above was first encountered in a series of compositions for keyboard instruments that are grouped under the title *Honest Methods*. The title references Bach’s original description of the *Two-Part Inventions*:

“Honest method, by which the amateurs of the keyboard – especially, however, those desirous of learning – are shown a clear way not only (1) to learn to play cleanly in two parts, but also, after further progress, (2) to handle three obligate parts correctly and well; and along with this not only to obtain good inventions (ideas) but to develop the same well; above all, however, to achieve a cantible style in playing and at the same time acquire a strong foretaste of composition.”

As a parallel, the intention in composing *Honest Methods*, undertaken from late 2011 to early 2013, was to familiarise the listener with techniques centred on manipulation of the sound object, and to address how their performance might be approached.

**Honest Methods I**

Similar to Morris’s concern with qualities immanent to his medium, the first of the *Honest Methods* isolate pitch and duration to examine the formation of melodic gestalts. The following example shows, in the very first of these
studies, notes from the right hand part of Invention No. 9 (F Minor) being repeated to create an elongation of contour that results in a distinctly unfamiliar familiar experience:

Figure 2.1: *Invention No. 9, Addition of Notes*

Removing a part from its original two-part context can be thought of as an acousmatic reduction in that this entails a foregrounding of sonorous features. In Figure 2.1, a reduced listening takes place in the reregistering of phenomenal content through randomly-determined repetitions of individual notes. David R. Cerbone explains how reduction of this type has been employed in explaining the experience of music:

“As one note in the melody is experienced as currently sounding, the just-experienced and the still-to-be-experienced notes are part of the horizon of that moment of experience; the current moment of experience ‘points to’ those further notes as retained or expected. These moments of experience...‘add up’ to a melody” (Cerbone, 2006: 23-27)

In the above example, the “horizon” of experience is disrupted; as with Morris’s unstable gestalts, what the mind believes or “expects” is constantly placed in doubt. In listening to this example, it is clear that what is initially
heard is not the characteristic minor scale descending from the dominant, but rather that an impression of this is gained from the “adding up” of repeated notes over time. To borrow from Rilke once more, we transpire in hearing this melodic fragment, listening without concrete expectation. The use of repeated notes - later to include the insertion of silences, and modifications of tempo - can be considered, furthermore, techniques that reflect the influence of Experimental composers’ work with magnetic tape. Arguably, what is brought forth in this approach to melody is firstly investigation of its identification as such in the mind, and secondly, the point at which recognisability begins to impact on the formation of a mental correlate.

In their presentation, the modification of individual parts were first heard alongside those of others from different *Inventions*. This early approach to juxtaposition allowed for a consideration of shared characteristics, with stretched out and disrupted fragments gaining significance in mutual intervallic and durational relationships. Recognition of repetition hence became an important element - in the linear progression of two parts, occasional correspondences assumed greater substance when recognised as such at different points.
Honest Methods II

Multichannel sound was employed in *Honest Methods II* to enable the travelling of recorded fragments in space. The mixing of the project became the primary compositional concern, levels being adjusted so that a listener situated in the field of a speaker is enveloped by its sound, whilst all eight speakers can be heard when an equidistant position is assumed. The main experience of listening to *Honest Methods II* can be described as attempting to follow the movement of identifying units in their journey across space, or to identify the repetition of unitary forms in relation to the environment of the *Inventions*.

Initially, SuperCollider was employed in creating the fragmentations, and applying disruptions to each part. It soon became efficacious, however, to record these using a keyboard with velocity control. In this way, it became necessary to consider how the material was being played - identical fragments assumed different characters when performed with different expressive qualities in mind. The following of articulations through space involved a process of identifying interpretative parameters, in addition to the recognition of fragmented compositional features.
Honest Methods III

In *Honest Methods III*, an explicit attempt was made to understand the relationship between fragmented musical material and its interpretation in performance and listening. The work isolates small portions of the *Inventions*, and asks that a performer practise these for a prescribed amount of time. Videos of this process were subsequently combined in multiscreen to foreground the discipline that performers submit themselves to in the pursuit of music’s content, and to enable the emergence of linkages between approaches to performance.

The exercises focused on matters relating to technique, interpretation, and performance. In the example below, phrases from the text of *Notes on Sculpture* are randomly ascribed to a two-measure fragment from Invention No. 5 (E-flat Major):

Figure 2.2: *Invention No. 5, Addition of Expression Markings*
For Bach such markings were not mostly necessary given the musical culture in which he participated - an understanding of how to articulate a phrase was a result of the daily practice of music shared amongst many individuals, and many national styles (Stauffer in Butt: 1997: 203). *Honest Methods III* attempts to articulate the distance of such an approach from the contemporary understanding of notated music as resulting from the work of a composer (Goehr, 1992: 2). As Lydia Goehr recognises, this understanding has led to two modes, the Perfect Performance of Music, and the Perfect Musical Performance, dominating the practice of musical interpretation for the past two centuries (Goehr, 1998: 134). On the one hand, the expression markings in Figure 2.2 can be thought of as encouraging a Perfect Musical Performance in pointing towards content inherent in each note. Alternatively, the keyboardist might consider the interpretation of each note in relation to others, and thus engage in a formalist reading, or attempt a Perfect Performance of Music. In both cases, to attempt to access a world of external meaning is to look elsewhere than the composer’s subjectivity - the terms chosen have significance only in relation to the remainder of Morris’s text.

What *Honest Methods III* demonstrates, in this regard, is that in the isolation of practise from musical practice, interpretative goals that are not innate to the medium are placed above the world of possibility described in Sontag’s foregrounding of art in-itself. Indeed, although Bach acknowledges that a cantible style is something of an affect, he makes no prescription for its
acquisition in any other area than regular playing of music, or engagement with wider musical practice.

In the composition of *Honest Methods*, phenomenological reduction, or a foregrounding of the sound object, becomes a means of thinking about how musical practices, and specifically interpretation, are regulated. What emerges from the process of dividing the *Inventions* into identifying units - testing and performing these, and placing them in juxtaposition - is an understanding that articulation, in the form of touch at the keyboard, is replete with a vast quantity of information that the separation of musical processes can only aim to understand in part. The work of the composer, performer and listener is not best directed towards total comprehension of this information - we are, after all, limited to that which we can know about a work at the time of performance. Rather, forgotten possibilities already inherent in musical practice must be brought to the fore. In this way, the juxtaposition of fragmented existing musics can and should be considered a form of interpretation - one that is capable of articulating Kane’s material-historical.

By way of illustration, the decision to present *Honest Methods III* in video format points towards the increasing presence of instructional videos online - a trend that has the potential to reclaim practise from its service to perfect performances, and promote a practice in which many different interpretive modes can exist.
The understanding that juxtaposition functions as a form of interpretation that can reveal connections in-and-between creative works is one again influenced by visual arts discourse. The work of Douglas Gordon, in particular, is a contemporary example of how, in a phenomenological approach to preexisting materials, once overlooked relationships can be uncovered.

Towards Style

In Between Darkness and Light (After William Blake), Gordon appropriates two films with shared subject matter: 1973’s The Exorcist, and The Song of Bernadette from 1943. Philip Monk describes how their juxtaposition is achieved, and what is revealed:

“The two films are projected on reverse sides of a shared rear-projection screen where they are sustained in the darkness and light of their opposing images...In allowing the narratives to interact (the soundtracks intermingle as well), Gordon does not stage a confrontation of good and evil so much as let one act through the other...The operation between these films makes sure that any outcome - judgement or inspection - is indeterminate and undecidable.” (Monk, 2003: 120)

In avoiding a “confrontation”, Gordon cannot be said to be concerned with the content of the films as individual entities, but rather is interested in their formal
expression of similar but opposing experiences. In their presentation on opposite sides of a single screen, our belief in the forthcoming events of one film is altered by the simultaneous viewing and hearing of another. As Gordon makes no artistic intervention, what unfolds is a moment-by-moment breakdown of content into unitary forms - the heavenly voices accompanying Bernadette’s visions of the Holy Mother, and the animalistic noise of the demonically-possessed Reagan become identifying units that intermingle, and gain significance through synchronicity and repetition both sonically and in terms of their relationship to the procession of images. The changing vocabulary of cinematic style reveals itself as an important consideration in the experience of the work - although similarly ecstatic in many ways, the present, spectrally-dense sound of The Exorcist finally overwhelms the once dominant symphonic palette of the earlier film.

In Feature Film, Gordon develops his interest in the soundtrack, engaging directly the work of Bernard Herrmann on Hitchcock’s Vertigo. In both feature and installation formats, Feature Film foregrounds Herrmann’s soundtrack, although now as an accompaniment to an original video of James Conlon of the Paris National Opera conducting an orchestra that is never present. Conlon’s movements appear entirely in close-up, with a focus on expressive movements of hands and arms, and the registering of facial expression (ibid.: 163). As with Darkness and Light, the underlying approach is somewhat
phenomenological - the density and magnification of images ensures that Morris’s seeing and believing is present in making sense of the relationship between the original soundtrack and the new film. Where compositional mediation is foregrounded in the aligning of the angelic and demonic, by contrast, the once-removed musician becomes Gordon’s subject of investigation.

Critical analysis of Feature Film has tended, much like musical discourse, to take for granted the movements that are made by Conlon in his performance - the conductor is assumed to be, even in his faked manipulation of external agencies, the sheer embodiment of musical interpretation. Given that the recording of Vertigo’s soundtrack was not made at the same time as the video of Conlon conducting, however, the work questions the relationship of interpretative practice to musical content in a similar manner to that explored in Honest Methods. The sense of expression that possesses Conlon throughout the video can only ever be parasitic - film music exists in service not of the subjectivity composer, but of fictional characters. In this way, the movements that we perceive in relation to what is heard appear to contain no content other than that describing the changing role of the conductor in the twentieth century. Whilst a seemingly heroic figure, Conlon can be thought of, like James Stewart’s Scottie, as an impotent mediator - a character who has no control over the totalising effects of linear narrative.
Gordon’s work straddles a fine line between determination and unintended synchronicity. It is necessary to consider whether Sontag would oppose the richness that results from this, or not, on the grounds that interpretation is primed to intervene as a mode of understanding. Gordon’s focus on allowing content to express itself through the operation of a work suggests that not only would Sontag approve, “...living, autonomous models of consciousness...” (Sontag, 1966: 27) might even be located in his use of juxtaposition as a primary creative technique. Although rooted in the visual arts, furthermore, the field of experience this work addresses is shown to extend to sonic concerns, and the material-historical in music. *Between Darkness and Light* and *Feature Film* can, in addition to *Honest Methods*, be thought of as articulatory precedents for the investigation of interpretive style undertaken in *Herrmann*.

**Style in Composition**

*Herrmann* for string quartet and saxophone brings together performances of two film cues by the composer Bernard Herrmann. The work attempts to articulate linkages between two contrasting performance styles: one rooted in jazz, the other based in Romantic lyricism. Like *Honest Methods*, the work exists in variety of formats, the first of which was composed from November to December in 2012.
The first iteration of the work drew on insight gained from Honest Methods, and began with rumination on the role of articulation in music. In producing sound, the first necessary consideration is the construction of the sounding object - by way of illustration, a portamento on a saxophone results in an entirely different sound to one performed on a violin because of the physical characteristics of the instrument. Secondly, the positioning of the performer in relation to this object must be addressed. Schaeffer might argue that for true phenomenological consideration to occur, such information must be removed from consideration. Sontag, however, supported by Kane’s critique, appears to describe the impossibility of disassociating an articulation from its sounding in a physically- and environmentally-conditioned style:

“If art is the supreme game which the will plays with itself, “style” consists of the set of rules by which this game is played. And the rules are always, finally, an artificial and arbitrary limit, whether they are rules of form...or the presence of a certain ‘content’...An artist’s style is, from a technical point of view, nothing other than the particular idiom in which he deploys the forms of his art...Thus, form - in its specific idiom, style - is a plan of sensory imprinting, the vehicle for the transaction between immediate sensuous impression and memory (be it individual or cultural). This mnemonic function explains why style depends on, and can be analyzed in terms of, some principle of repetition or redundancy.” (Sontag, 1966: 33-34).

The materials chosen for use in Herrmann can be thought of in her terms as exemplifying their “idiom”. In each case, their origins in the work of a film composer ensure that they provide a clear link between “sensuous impression” and received knowledge of expressive syntax. As shown in the
video of Conlon, our recognition of technique, phrasing, and expression in distinct performance styles is based on arbitrary rules that, nonetheless, remain upstanding given their “individual and cultural” foundations - in other words, we recognise a jazz portamento as such even when it appears acousmatically in the soundtrack to Taxi Driver. Related to her advocation of operation over content in interpretation, Sontag further recognises that in attempts to access style, a phenomenology, or approach based on “repetition or redundancy”, is necessary. With this view in mind, Herrmann begins not with the Schaefferian sound object, but with the arbitrary mental correlates of the second part of The Means... experiment. The work isolates fragments of phrases and articulations in the original recordings of The Road, a Romantically-inclined string cue from Fahrenheit 451, and the jazz-heavy Taxi Driver Theme, placing these in juxtaposition over a harmonic backing derived from the first few phrases of both works. As with Gordon’s rearticulations of Hollywood films, the intention of adopting an approach grounded in phenomenology was to reveal linkages between disparate performance styles through simultaneous existence. As discussed, in music this naturally led to consideration of how the materials should be mediated.
Style in Performance

In the first rehearsal, the harmonic backing was assigned to Violin II, Viola and Cello, with Violin I and Soprano Saxophone placing the fragmented articulations over this accompaniment according to predetermined time-brackets. What at first emerged, despite preemptive performance instructions, was an attempt by both the violinist and saxophonist to associate the fragments with patterns heard within the harmonic background. In this sense, the limits of a chamber style of playing were brought to the fore - the musicians exposed interpretation conditioned by work-focused musical heritage in attempting to remain with the constrained rhythmic and dynamic range. Any intervention on the part of the composer to alter this performance style, and to enhance the perceptibility of the intended juxtaposition, was adopted for a certain period of time before being lost in the performers’ default mode of understanding.

Charlie Parker With Strings (1947-1952), can be thought of as an early recorded example in which a similar overlapping of performance styles reveals their grounding in individual and cultural memory. The albums that Parker recorded with a classical string section were mostly viewed negatively by critics at the time given the apparent attempt to restrain the dynamic nature of early bebop in favour of commercial success (Ratliff, 2002: 77). On
listening to the records today, following growing interest in forms such as the mashup and remix resulting from Attali’s emptying out of musical codes, it is difficult to be similarly offended. Moments of repetition between Parker’s playing and the string arrangements do lead, admittedly, to the bridging effects observed in the rehearsals of Herrmann. However, the recognition of a certain redundancy through over-familiarisation resulting from their usage in, for instance, Hollywood films, ensures that Parker’s radical vocabulary is still clearly perceivable above the string backings. Unlike the early iteration of Herrmann, Parker is successful in knowing when to foreground the “forms of his art”, and when to rein in “sensuous impression” to allow memory shared between musics to sound.

Parker’s approach to understanding the operation of different performance styles, like that of Bach, is not something shared with many musicians. As demonstrated in rehearsal of Herrmann, musical pedagogy tends towards approaches that subsume content, rendering this unto totalising interpretation in place of an enabling or articulation through considered mediation. An approach to enhancing musical maturity can be located in the Suzuki method, which employs recordings of well-known pieces to immerse students in the practice of music. As the recordings of each work tend to be singular interpretations (Starr, 2000: 7), however, this approach cannot replicate the
richness of Parker’s engagement with multiple musical styles and acceptance of influences from other forms of art.

In the penultimate version of *Herrmann*, an attempt was made to acknowledge the failings of traditional music pedagogy, and merely take advantage of the propensity of style to leak into proceedings. The linearity of through-composition, unfortunately, did not result in the longed-for reflexivity in performance, and hence the decision was made to isolate the solo performers from a chamber situation. Recording not only made such depersonalisation possible, but became a further means of disrupting the hierarchical effects of tonal harmony - the backing string chords were isolated, and subjected to the stretching and rearranging procedures of Cage and Schaeffer. In the final performance of the work, the two soloists were freed from considerations of harmonising with a predictable texture, and hence were able to perform according to what Sontag identifies as “will” (Sontag, 1966: 33). Reflecting Morris’s understanding that self-reflection can result from increasing fragmentation, such use of technology points towards its growing influence on how music is played as well as composed. Given that these technologies are regularly encountered in our day-to-day life in urban environments, it is possible to examine how the conditioning of performance reflects changing social space, and particularly notions of the public and the private so important to most understandings of the operation of music.
Naming

To experience the works of Bruce Nauman, such as *My Name As Though It Were Written On the Moon*, has been described as “...to experience basic phenomena that have been isolated, inverted, taken out of context, or progressively destroyed” (Tucker in Morgan, 2002: 21). In *My Name...*, the first few letters of the artist’s first name are, in a monumental neon sign, each repeated to produce an extended form. Comparable to the disruptions of Bach’s *Inventions* in *Honest Methods I*, experience of a name cannot be said to immediately result in viewing the work, but rather emerges from a horizontal moment-to-moment consideration of repetition and difference. Like Attali’s technologically-mediated music, Nauman locates in proper nouns an externally existing code that can be emptied and repurposed. The idea of coding and decoding, fragmentation and recombination, is shown in Nauman’s title to be related, in a similar manner to Morris’s variables, to the telegraphic transfer of information, and the related human desire for exploration and control of distant environments.
In *The Nonaggressive Music Deterrent*, Jonathan Sterne details the use of certain musics in the control of a space rather closer to home, the contemporary urban landscape:

“For the full run of their histories, programmed music services like Muzak have been part of second-order media economies. They use already-familiar music — music that has circulated through other sound media as a commodity — to engineer the acoustic dimensions of spaces and experiences for listeners. In order to work, programmed music requires an earlier, ‘first’ moment of circulation, prior to its own...This essay examines the use of programmed music to chase people away.” (Sterne, 2005)

Sterne recognises that the use of such music is predicated on recognition of arbitrary stylistic rules that, in their deep connections to individual and cultural memory, create different physiological responses in different groups of listeners. On arrival at the Middlesex Corporate Center Parking Garage (MCCPG) in Middletown, CT, we are confronted with such use of already “circulated” music - the sound of orchestral instruments leaps out from an environment that is dominated by sites of business and commerce.

Phenomenologically-speaking, these sounds appear acousmatically in that their source is not immediately identifiable. However, as with many other sounds in potentially treacherous environments, we are forced to locate their cause. Sterne describes this use of sound in terms of articulating private and
public space - in the deployment of stylistically-identifiable classical and Romantic musics, the MCCPG dictates that its space is not for general use by the public, but is intended for certain groups of people.

**Naming MCCCPG**

MCCCPG can be thought of as bringing together these investigations of humankind’s relationship to its surroundings. The work is based on environmental recordings of the MCCPG in which the music deterrent can be heard alongside road traffic and sounds from passersby. The musical content of this material is not considered, as in R. Murray’s original explanation of the term, as human intervention that must be bracketed from the urban soundscape (Kelman, 2010: 212). Rather, it is acknowledged that towns and cities, like sound itself, have no essential character, and exist in the changing use of public and private space. In compositional terms, the choice of instrumentation has particular resonance. The work was originally composed for clavichord and classical guitar - two instruments that, in the inability to generate volume that carries over a long distance, stand in contrast to the amplification employed by the MCCPG’s owners.

Since the sixteenth century, the clavichord has been considered an instrument primarily for practise, whilst its involvement in the practice of
performance only gathered pace with the building of larger instruments in response to the invention of the piano (ODM, ‘clavichord’). In MCCCPG, these generally quiet instruments are asked to perform elongated lines derived from the musical content of the recordings of the MCCPG. These lines, like Nauman’s name, are stretched out through the insertion of notes, and a general slowing of tempi. In the original performance of the work at Alsop House in May 2012, the modified melodies were heard against the original recordings, with the physical limitations of the instruments ensuring that juxtapositions occurred infrequently, but with particular significance. An inversion of our public response when recognising strains of musical style in the demarcation of private space can be said to have taken place - the process of identification became unique to each listener at a phenomenological level, creating a shared public space of listening from private experiences.
CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSION

Herrmann, Honest Methods and MCCPG are comprised of fragmentations of existing musics. A phenomenological approach to musical style is taken, one that separates features of composition and performance into constituent parts, or unitary forms. In their juxtaposition, these sound objects assume significance in the relation of their operation, and in respect of the environmental and cultural positioning of the listener.

Investigation of the relationship between public and private space in music was reiterated in the Thesis Recital (Appendix CD), where the three works were themselves fragmented and juxtaposed. The structure of the concert drew on phenomenological understanding, providing an experience that resembles the seeing and believing of Morris’s Minimalist sculpture, or the foregrounding of technological means in Allan MacCollum’s Individual Works - as with viewing these works, listening in the Recital can be described as the identification of repetition and difference in-and-between works according to a range of environmental variables, such as speaker placement and the interaction of live and computer-controlled instruments. Where this work departs from visual arts discourse, however, is in the presence of mediators, on whom the sounding and reception of music depend. In this way, something
closer to a performance of a work such as Morton Feldman’s *Triadic Memories* was attempted. Whilst interpenetrations of musical content revealed themselves in a manner similar to Feldman’s slowly evolving harmonic units, examination of musical practice and practise enabled a consideration of how a repetition might be identified in performance, and how, as in Aki Takahashi’s seminal performance of that work, it might be played.

From greater engagement with the day-to-day playing of music whilst at Wesleyan, earlier phenomenological concerns have been expanded to include reflection on the structures of musical practice in which we operate today. The interpretation of music presents an intriguing site for further exploration given the possibilities already inherent in its historical and material utterances. To this effect, what the various theories and practices encountered in this thesis advocate is not a complete break with tradition. Rather, a return to the materials of music - to sound - can be considered an attempt to articulate questions that, although preceded in the music of Bach, Parker and Feldman, have largely been lost in the separation of composition, performance and listening into distinct practices and practises. Juxtaposition emerges as a primary creative and interpretive technique in redressing this balance, one that is appropriate to an aural landscape in which the effects of repeating and telegraphic technologies continue to be felt.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


