Multiplicity and Belonging among New York City Improviser-Composers, 2000-2011

By

Amanda L. Scherbenske

Faculty Advisor: Professor Mark Slobin

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ABSTRACT

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Amanda L. Scherbenske

This dissertation engages musical multiplicity and belonging among New York City-based improviser-composers active since the early 2000s. It uses concepts from network theory and extends scholarship on multiplicity to discuss the complex entanglement of sounds, settings, identities, and discourses. It argues that while improviser-composers participate in myriad genres, their shared sensibilities are outgrowths of the creative and political labors of elder generations of African American experimental artists. Improviser-composers forge unique relationships to an African American musical history that has embraced artistic inclusion and rejected essentialist narratives. It contends that improviser-composers perform multiplicity and form their own assemblage of belonging by developing and maintaining a personal network. Improviser-composers collaborate with colleagues, employ many musical styles, and traverse scenes and art worlds to ends that are more than musical: they do so to negotiate belonging and contest essentialism. Ultimately, this dissertation challenges such reified binaries as black/white, jazz/classical, and improviser/composer in American musics.
# Table of Contents

List of Figures iii  
List of Musical Examples iv  
Audio Recordings v  
Preface vi  
Acknowledgements viii  

## Introduction 1  
   *Theoretical Orientations*  
   Musical Multiplicity within American Musics 3  
   Individualism 3  
   Collectivity: Solidarity, Choice, Affinity, and Belonging 14  
   *Methodological Orientations*  
   Networks 16  
   Personal Profiles 22  
   *Ethnographic Orientations*  
   Ethnomusicology in Urban America 24  
   Fieldwork and Print Sources 25  
   *Chapter Overview* 30  

## Part I: Locating Improviser-Composers 32  
   *Chapter 1: Multiplicity and Other Values:* 32  
   Claiming an African American Lineage 32  
   Traditions of Boundary Erosion 33  
   Mentoring Individualism and Collaboration 38  
   Conclusion 52  
   *Chapter 2: Shared Place(s):* 55  
   New York City and the Struggle for Space 55  
   Local Formations of Place 59  
   Conclusion 80  

## Part II: Tracing Multiplicity and Belonging 85  
   *Chapter 3: Improviser-Composers: Individual Histories and Personal Networks* 85  
   Judith Ya’akova Berkson 87  
   Jacob Garchik 103  
   Okkyung Lee 119  
   Mary Halvorson 136  
   Stephen Hart Lehman 150  
   Conclusion 166  
   *Chapter 4: Sounding Multiplicity and Belonging* 173  
   Listening to Judith Berkson 174  
   Listening to Steve Lehman 183  

## Conclusion 191  

Appendix A, List of Dissertation Interviews 203  
Appendix B, Improviser-Composer Networks 205  
Appendix C, Improviser-Composer Discographies 217
Judith Berksen Discography 217
Jacob Garchik Discography 219
Mary Halvorson Discography 223
Okkyung Lee Discography 228
Steve Lehman Discography 232

Bibliography 235

Discography 250
List of Figures

Figure 1. “Steve Lehman Website.” 2011. Screenshot by author. 45
Figure 2. The Stone exterior. 63
Figure 3. The Stone interior. 63
Figure 4. Jacob Sacks, Jacob Garchik, and Dan Weiss (left to right) at IBeam. 67
Figure 5. Jacob Garchik, Mary Halvorson, Thomas Morgan, Ches Smith at Barbès. 72
Figure 6. Tonic exterior (defunct). 77
Figure 7 Judith Berkson at Littlefield. 87
Figure 8. Jacob Garchik at Ibeam. 103
Figure 9. Eivind Opsvik, Jacob Sacks, Jacob Garchik, Ben Gerstein. 113
Figure 10. Okkyung Lee at Roulette. 119
Figure 11. Mary Halvorson at Douglas Street Music Collective. 136
Figure 12. Anthony Braxton, Mary Halvorson, Taylor Ho Bynum at Roulette. 143
Figure 13. Steve Lehman Octet at the Bimhuis. 150
Figure 14. Harmonic Comparison of “Ahavas Olam” 179
Figure 15. Comparison of “Ahavas Oylam” and “Inside Good Times.” 182
Figure 16. Judith Berkson, Formative Network. 205
Figure 17. Judith Berkson, Strategic Network. 206
Figure 18. Jacob Garchik, Formative Network. 207
Figure 19. Jacob Garchik, Strategic Network. 208
Figure 20. Okkyung Lee, Strategic Network. 209
Figure 21. Mary Halvorson, Formative Network. 210
Figure 22. Mary Halvorson, Albums with Braxton. 211
Figure 23. Mary Halvorson, Albums with Braxton and Wesleyan Affiliations. 212
Figure 24. Mary Halvorson, Strategic Network. 213
Figure 25. Steve Lehman, Formative Network. 214
Figure 26. Steve Lehman, Recording Affiliations, 1999-2002. 215
Figure 27. Steve Lehman, Strategic Network. 216
List of Musical Examples

Example 1. Excerpt from Judith Berkson’s score for “Ahavas Oylam.” .............................. 178
Example 2. Excerpt from Judith Berkson’s score for “Inside Good Times.” ............................. 181
Example 3. Introduction from Steve Lehman’s score for “Living in the World Today.” ............... 189
Example 4. Excerpt from Steve Lehman’s score for “Living in the World Today.” ...................... 189
Example 5. Excerpt from Steve Lehman’s score for “Living in the World Today.” ...................... 190
Audio Recordings

Recordings by Judith Berkson, ECM (used by permission)

Audio Track 1. “Ahavas Oylam” (excerpt) from Oylam (1:08)

Audio Track 2. “Inside Good Times” (excerpt) from Oylam (:42)

Recordings by Steve Lehman, Pi Recordings (used by permission)

Audio Track 3. “Living in the World Today” (introduction) from Travail Transformation and Flow (:20)

Audio Track 4. “Living in the World Today” (motive for tpt, as, ts, tbn) from Travail Transformation and Flow (:21)

Audio Track 5. “Living in the World Today” (altered motive for tpt, as, ts, tbn) from Travail Transformation (:24)
Preface

The intellectual provocation for this dissertation arose when writing my Master of Arts thesis on klezmer transmission. In my research I noticed that klezmer musicians perform not only countless internal variations, e.g. Yiddish hip-hop sampling cantorial recordings, but also across a variety of music scenes. These demonstrations of multiplicity led me to investigate the practices of Boston and New York City-based musicians engaged in klezmer and other musical styles—a project called, “Klezmer: Musical Place and Multiplicity in America.” I sought to fill a gap in contemporary scholarship, which had largely focused on klezmer as a distinct music scene, community, or subculture. While minimal scholarly attention had been paid to klezmer’s internal hybridity, there had been even less paid to the practices of musicians for whom klezmer constitutes just one performance area, or, one area of belonging within cosmopolitan cultural economies.

Upon researching eclecticism among klezmer musicians, I chose to alter my focus for several reasons. First, my interviewees all expressed an interest and long-standing engagement in improvised musics. Second, while there were only so many individuals to talk to about the klezmer topic, there appeared to be unlimited musicians to talk to about improvised musics. By refocusing my critical lens on improviser-composers, the number of events to attend and people to converse with seemed endless; and multiplicity appeared ubiquitous in light of this adjustment. Third, I joined Anthony Braxton’s Wesleyan ensembles and became completely fascinated with his Falling River Music graphic scores. Finally, my relationship with improviser-composer Tyshawn Sorey set the stage for my introduction to a vast array of experimental and improvised musical sites and sounds. Multiplicity and Belonging, then, engages a set of problems regarding musical multiplicity that arose when investigating first the Master of Arts thesis, then the proposed dissertation topic, and finally, the reframed dissertation subject. Ultimately, I have pursued similar theoretical
questions, trying to understand with the complex practices of musicians who perform in a variety of overlapping settings and genres.
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My family has supported my life in music. They first encouraged my pursuit of violin performance, and later, my forays into music scholarship. Foremost, my parents, Judy and Gerry, instilled in me an enthusiasm for learning and a love of music. Eric Scherbenske and Supritha Rajan have supported my work and intellectual growth long before I had considered graduate study in ethnomusicology. They have helped my development as a critical thinker and writer. My siblings, Judith, Sarah, Angela, and John have all encouraged me along the way. Auntie Rita and Uncle Nick provided assistance at a crucial moment in my fieldwork. My family’s tradition of letter writing has not been hindered by the advent of email: I thank them for the hundreds of letters they have written during my days as a graduate student, always cheering me on and encouraging me.
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Introduction

This dissertation investigates multiplicity and belonging among New York City-based expert improviser-composers active in a variety of overlapping settings and genres since the early 2000s. While scholarship is available about elder generations of improviser-composers (Iyer 1996; Dessen 2003; Looker 2004; Lewis 2008; Currie 2009; Heller 2012), there has been comparatively less consideration of this younger cohort. Much scholarship has examined the work of improviser-composers as part of a single scene, subculture, or ethnic group (Barzel 2004; Wong 2004a; Janeczko 2009). My research, alternatively, does not research a single scene or genre; rather, it relies upon an ethnography of practice\(^1\) that examines musicians and cultural actors developing, performing, and being in the world. I offer insights about musicians at work and play, moving in and out of times, places, and musics. I use concepts from network theory and extend Mark Slobin’s work on musical multiplicity (2007) to account for the scenes and art worlds that improviser-composers traverse, as well as the myriad musics and identities that improviser-composers perform. The profundity of subjectivities and affiliations is sui generis among this generation of improviser-composers.

Musical multiplicity and collaborations, while having sonic and aesthetic dimensions, are developed, maintained, and transformed through social networks. Multiplicity serves as a point of departure to theorize the complex entanglement of sounds, settings, identities, and discourses. Although improviser-composers participate in myriad genres, they share values that highlight their musics’ African American underpinnings. Improviser-composers express group belonging through

\(^1\) My writing draws on Bourdieu’s \textit{habitus}. Habitus is based upon experience and practice, yet allows for cleavages; it “generates” innumerable possibilities for behaviors and outcomes limited to the scope of its history (Bourdieu 1980:52-56). The profane is interrogated so that it connects to history and exposes underlying power structures. Consideration of \textit{habitus} helps in determining the historical underpinnings that have helped to create the present cultural and social constructions, in understanding these constructions as history.
these values; but the ways in which they articulate them—through sound and word—are personal. Improviser-composers collaborate with colleagues, employ multiple musical styles, and traverse scenes and art worlds to ends that are more than musical: they do so to negotiate belonging and contest one-dimensional identities and essentialism. Ultimately, *Multiplicity and Belonging* challenges reified binaries in American musics, such as black/white, jazz/classical, and improviser/composer.

Given the vast number of improviser-composers living in the New York area, I focus on a group of improviser-composers born in the late 1970s through early 1980s (they make up the posterior of the “Generation-Xers” or the anterior of the “Millennials”). They have lived and worked as musicians in New York City\(^2\) (hereafter NYC) for at least eight to ten years, and have established themselves among peers, audiences, and critics. They financially sustain themselves primarily through performing, teaching, and institutional support. The dissertation is informed by many improviser-composers of this generation; Chapters 3 – 4, however, draw on the stories and narratives of the following individuals at length: Okkyung Lee (b. Daejeon, South Korea, 1975), Jacob Garchik (b. San Francisco, 1976), Judith Berkson (b. Boston, 1977), Steven Lehman (b. New York City, 1978), and Mary Halvorson (b. Boston, 1980).

New York City itself plays a role in this study. Improviser-composers call the City and its environs home because of its cultural capital, performance spaces, and social and musical possibilities.\(^3\) Myriad musical, business, and social networks incubate creativity. Ultimately, NYC stages the initiation, maintenance, and development of multiple network formations. The City’s sheer size engenders its many scenes and art worlds, as well as recognizes and rewards multiplicity.

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\(^2\) New York City is often referred to by area residents simply as “New York,” or “the City”; I employ all three referents interchangeably throughout the dissertation.

\(^3\) As Gupta and Ferguson contest “the very notion of ‘home’ as a durably fixed place” (Gupta and Ferguson 2002:69), I do not contend that improviser-composers conceptions and relationships to New York as *home* are fixed. Rather, I mean that they reside in New York and its environs at least on a semi-permanent basis.
The places that harbor improviser-composers in the City shift over time; individual relationships to the City also change over time. For some, New York becomes a permanent residence. For others, it serves as a career launching pad, and still others move there and never attain the music career outcomes they seek. Movement, migration, and travel are ongoing and processual among improviser-composers’ networks. Aspiring artists from all parts of the U.S. and the globe move in and out of New York to connect with individuals who share sensibilities, take part in specific scenes and art worlds, and position themselves in an area where local success may translate into visibility—and even stardom—among particular global audiences and marketplaces. New York retains its magnetic allure for aspiring musicians and artists, largely because of its extensive creative and business networks.

**Theoretical Orientations**

**Musical Multiplicity within American Musics**

American Studies scholars find it difficult to agree upon what comprises American identity; but they frequently concur that its harmony is based on—at least partially—its cacophony. Historian John Higham (2001) proposes a common American culture characterized by competing visions of unity and diversity. He suggests that America’s three forms of unity (primordial, ideological, and technological) have coexisted with ever-present diversity. During the nation’s infancy unity was based on the primordial (see Geertz 1963), a “natural” and “corporate feeling of oneness that infuses a particular, concrete, unquestioned set of inherited relationships” (Higham 2001:5). Next, unity was rooted in the ideological, with Puritan values emphasizing, “mutuality and discipline...[and i]n doing so they originated an especially American combination: institutional

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4 Although I focus on musical multiplicity in America, I do not suggest that its processes exist apart from transnational and global networks (see Guilbault’s [1993] (2006) theorization of the “glocal” and Appadurai’s (1999) writings on the “global cultural economy”).
decentralization and ideological uniformity” (Higham 2001:8). Later, Protestant replaced Puritan ideology, “instead of enshrining a single creed, [it] exalted a sacred place” (Higham 2001:11). Finally, technological displaced ideological in unifying American life after the Civil War. Americans readily accepted it because “[a]s ideologists…[they] were attuned to universal principles and to their implementation in the programs of action” (Higham 2001:15). Technologies of “efficiency, specialization, and organization” (Higham 2001:xvi) have led to widespread diversity in American life.

Adelaida Reyes uses Higham’s proposed themes, “as a point of entry into an exploration of America’s musical life” (2005:4). She asks readers to imagine these themes as a pointillist painting: viewed up close the dots appear disparate, but viewed from farther away they appear as a unified picture. To bolster her claim that that American identity, and by extension American music, may be understood as pluralistic, Reyes upholds Liah Greenfeld’s conclusions, “[t]he unchallenged primacy of the individual [in the United States] guaranteed plurality of tastes…and self-definitions within the national framework. Pluralism was built into the system” (Greenfeld 1992:482). The national motto, e pluribus unum, seals her argument, “diversity is announced as a principle on which the nation was built” (Reyes 2005:4).

There has been perhaps no greater architect of American musical diversity than the invention of recording technology, and the ensuing advent of the recording industry. The recording industry, nonetheless, holds a paradoxical position in American musics: on one hand it has contributed to diversity through the dissemination and proliferation of recordings; on the other it has separated genres racially, as black or white. Tracey Laird (2005) discusses how these stringent distinctions arose out of the early American recording industry’s espousal of the “race” and “hillbilly” categories. Just as these categories emerged and took root, however, local practices belied their veracity. Laird argues that the Shreveport radio show Louisiana Hayride—unlike its
Nashville counterpart (Opry)—featured performers who seamlessly moved in and out of racialized stylistic bifurcations. While the Opry initially rejected Hank Williams and Elvis Presley because their music was too “controversial,” Hayride harbored their fledgling careers (Laird 2005). Thus, I consider American musics immeasurably diverse, yet at times still enshrining categories that engender difference and racial separation.

Fast-forward more than a half century: despite efforts to blur and deconstruct racialized boundaries, publications that review improviser-composers maintain binaries, at least partially, through their demarcation of classical/non-classical, jazz/non-jazz, and pop/non-pop. Most articles and listings about improviser-composers stand outside of classical music and opera classifications; rather, they fall almost exclusively under the rubric of jazz, or, less frequently, music. These most obvious divisions remain in residual structures, and potentially undermine political moves toward inclusion and equality. Historical and political ambitions, as well as art world structures, then, influence how I theorize musical multiplicity.

Today, musical performances and recordings described as “fusion” or “hybrid” abound. Ethnomusicology has strayed far from its early diffusionist politics: now more than ever, it seems, musics teem with the amalgamated. This is in no small part due to the effects of globalization, glocalization (see Guilbault 1993), and transnationalism, as well as the celerity with which mediascapes and technoscapes (from Appadurai, as used by Slobin 1993) evolve and impact cultural currents. Yet the ways that music scholars research, theorize, and write about multiplicity remain open for discussion. Some recent theoretical models offer a starting point for its consideration.

I write “at least partially” because critical reception writers take contradictory positions. On one hand they demonstrate conversance with the histories of American experimental musics and favor a politics of inclusion; on the other their ascription of particular lineages belies this position, assuming that today’s sounds are easily traceable to certain voices more than others. Finally, trenchant structures, more suggestive of locale, networks, and categories than of sonic parameters, frequently contradict a politics of inclusion and cosmopolitanism.

See Mackey (1995) for a study of the othering of jazz.
Stephen Cottrell uses Mantle Hood’s bimusicality to grapple with London-based freelance musicians’ performance of multiple genres. He qualifies it as “local bimusicality” to convey conversance in such musics as early music, pub jazz, modern jazz, touring shows, Western classical, contemporary art music, and pop and film session music (Cottrell 2007:94). Cottrell contends that local bimusicality “covers a broader range of issues than the ‘training of ears, eyes, hand and voice’” (2007:90), encompassing stylistic competency, musical and extra-musical “codes,” and musical identity. He argues that sustainability as an urban freelance musician necessitates social and aesthetic adaptive strategies, such as being bimusically competent enough to be rehired. Through “cognitive flexibility,” musicians learn to be “sonic chameleons” (Cottrell 2007:96) that perform multiple styles.

Cottrell (2007) largely extends his earlier assertions concerning “deputizing,” or, substitution of one musician for another for a given engagement (2004). Deputizing, Cottrell argues, “is endowed with both musical and social significance” (2004:70) and gives rise to the fluid classification of freelance musicians:

Economic expediency dictates that musicians must be competent in a number of different performance styles, leading to some overlap between musical genres, which frequently prevents the rigid categorization of a particular musician as being of one type or another. (2004:57)

Cottrell’s work, however, is predicated on an assumption of difference: the performance of multiple “musical styles...is necessarily grounded upon a cognitive understanding of the musical differences between them” (2007:101; emphasis added).

Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi (2004), too, base their arguments on positions of difference. The genres Shirei Eretz Yisrael (Songs of the Land of Israel), Israeli Rock, and Musiqa Mizrahit, they contend, all vie for dominance within an invented Israeli national culture, in which “subnational” groups fight for “recognition, legitimacy, acceptance, and integration within the
existing national culture” (2004:4). They contend that, while no music is inherently Israeli, these genres have all come to signify Israeliness (2004:7). In spite of these genres’ “hybridity,” they are, “legitimated and recognized” as national musics and are frequently “expressions of movements for separation and independence” (Regev and Seroussi 2004:8-9). The global flows of musical materials “increase the efforts of local popular-music communities to redefine and insist on the existence of their own national music styles” (Regev and Seroussi 2004:10).

They base their espousal of difference largely on the assertion of collective identities and the politics of belonging within Israel:

The transformation, transmutation, and permutation of art and cultural forms are expressive tools used for the maintenance and invigoration of contemporary cultural uniqueness. Yet, at the same time, the works, genres, and styles of these forms, as well as their producers and audiences, remain interconnected and interrelated as components of social information networks and as actors in social spaces of power, hierarchy, and prestige. (Regev and Seroussi 2004:246)

Regev and Seroussi do not use postcolonial theory, but their conclusions invoke its imbalanced power relations. They emphasize difference over connection in Israel’s manifold national and subnational musics, and argue that cultural materials’ multidirectionality is a result of globalization.

While Regev and Seroussi tackle the study of a national system, Vertovec and Cohen propose that cosmopolitanism, “advocate[s] a non-communitarian, post-identity politics of overlapping interests and heterogeneous or hybrid publics in order to challenge conventional notions of belonging, identity and citizenship” (2003:1).7 They seek to revoke the presumption that it is “only available to an elite” and argue that in the contemporary world, “cultural and linguistic diversity is omnipresent, and the capacity to communicate with others and to understand their

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7 I am concerned with some of the same questions that Vertovec and Cohen (2003) pose at the outset of their study: “Can we ever live peacefully with one another? What do we share, collectively, as human beings?” (Vertovec and Cohen 2003:1). Similar universal questions are not novel to ethnomusicologists (see, for example, Nettl 2005[1983]).
cultures is available, at least potentially, to many” (2003:5). Vertovec and Cohen propose that cosmopolitanism may be:

[V]iewed or invoked as: a) a socio-cultural condition; b) a kind of philosophy or world-view; c) a political project toward building transnational institutions; d) a political project of recognizing multiple identities e) an attitudinal or dispositional orientation; and/or f) a mode of practice or competence. (2003:9)

They argue that it has the capacity to express, “variously complex repertoires of allegiance, identity and interest” (2003:4).

Mark Slobin, too, aims to deal with similar complexities, synthesizing ideas presented at the 2006 International Council for Traditional Music colloquium in his article “Musical Multiplicity: Emerging Thoughts.” He relays its participants’ growing distrust of diversity, multiculturalism, hybridity, emergent, identity, and diaspora as frameworks. Instead, Slobin offers the term musical multiplicity to cope with the, “overwhelming interest in…multiple-source, multiple-leveled music-making” (2007:108), citing examples from his family history and research on Jewish musics.

Dave Tarras, a klezmer clarinetist whose career spanned much of the twentieth century in America, worked with multiple sources and musicians of various stripes. Slobin observes, however, that the current state of multiplicity has shifted markedly from the heyday of Tarras and other important twentieth century Jewish music figures’ careers:

[Cantor Gershon] Sirota and his compatriots, such as Tarras and [singer David] Medoff, were never subject to the whims of today’s promoters and networks, from WOMEX and WOMAD down to local impresarios. There were no government grants, no call to represent the group ‘multiculturally,’ and no WIPO to worry about who own liturgical prayer-modes, or UNESCO to categorize them as intangible cultural heritage. (2007:113)

He argues that although today’s situation resembles that of the past, “the action is more ramified, multidimensional, and volatile than ever” (ibid.).

Slobin suggests a break from overused “metaphoric terminology,” proposing, instead, eclecticism as “instrumental rather than metaphorical” (2007:114):
Eclecticism might be thought of as inherent, implicit, imposed, and strategic. It is inherent as a natural effect of the native soundscape of people's childhood and youth. They simply hear many musics from local and distant sources, live and mediated. Eclecticism is a lifelong process. (ibid.)

Its Greek etymology, he contends, implies choice and selectivity, and suit it well for the task at hand: musical eclecticism coalesces into strategic individual and collective agency. Eclecticism goes “beyond genre-bending” (Slobin 2007:115) in his father’s song repertoire:

American children’s, vaudeville, and popular songs, Christian songs he learned at a YMCA camp (his mother didn’t know it was non-Jewish), songs in Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian, Ukrainian and German, mixed-language songs, and songs in translation: English to Yiddish, Russian to Yiddish, even English to Latin” (Slobin 2007:114).

While eclectic has taken on near-ubiquity in musical descriptions, Slobin emphasizes its inherent intentionality.

The musical choices that people make also guide Tina Ramnarine’s research of Caribbean musics in diaspora, such as calypso, reggae, salsa, and steel band. She explores myriad musics in several research sites: she carries out the lion’s share of her study in Britain, but also works with communities in New York, Miami, Toronto, Trinidad and Tobago, and Barbados. Ramnarine asserts that diaspora is a place where home is established, rather than a place away from home (2007:10); one may experience an alternative to diaspora (as away from home) through multi-local belonging through musics (2007:22).

Ramnarine seeks to dismantle borders and differences, “[m]usic and diasporas spill over the boundaries that people too often insist on making” (2007:29); rather, she supports musical, political, and interpersonal connections. She does not study a “society with a music” or “a music culture” (2007:29-33), but investigates musical praxis: she understands hybridity not as “ambivalence and mimicry” (ibid.), but as a critical tool. Informed by Bhabha (1994), she argues
that the cultural differences implied by musical hybridities reinscribe power relations and hinder “an intervention in the ‘exercise of authority’” (Ramnarine 2007:32).

Multiculturalism (see Lundberg, Malm, and Ronström (2003)), too, underscores cultural differences, “to the extent that differences between groups are overemphasized” (Ramnarine 2007:87). Fusion, likewise, is embroiled in its own politics; it connotes the processes of musicians, “experiment[ing] with sonic possibilities and as a way of working with each other” (Ramnarine 2007:100). Just as she earlier critiqued hybridity, so she dismisses multiculturalism and fusion.

Ramnarine asks ethnomusicologists instead to position music as dynamic and look to everyday processes that: “bring into play dynamics of power and economy leading to different analytical avenues in exploring questions about social relations” (2007:105). Ramnarine contends that steel band practices, for one, resist “tropes” of cultural boundaries. She argues that ethnic politics may be prevailed against through the theoretical prism of diaspora, as predicated on a “politics of belonging” (2007:178-181) rather than difference and exclusion. She closes by urging scholars to denounce polarities that uphold the differences between the powerful and the powerless.

My own ideas about musical multiplicity are informed by these writings, and, by the many conversations I have had with musicians, colleagues, and mentors. My formulation of multiplicity borrows liberally from Cottrell (2007), Regev and Seroussi (2004), Vertovec and Cohen (2003), Ramnarine (2007), and Slobin (2007). Cottrell’s assertions (2004; 2007) align with the ways that some improviser-composers conceive of their performance across scenes and art worlds: firstly musicians, they perform various “styles” for diverse engagements. Improviser-composers rely on competencies, such as in improvisation, music literacy, and arrangement to navigate manifold

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8 In particular, my consideration of these issues is indebted to the conversations I have had about this topic with Professors Mark Slobin and Anthony Braxton.
musics. His attention to economic expediency, however, only goes so far in discussing multiplicity among improviser-composers. While it certainly may be a motivation for performance of different styles, improviser-composers are just as, if not more likely, to be guided by their personal aesthetics and affinity-driven networks.

Vertovec and Cohen’s cosmopolitanism can account for improviser-composers’ “multiple allegiances” and belongings. Cosmopolitanism, in this way, conceives of the manifold personal, political, historical, cultural, and social world-views and materials. As improviser-composers, too, “are no longer inspired by a single culture that is coherent, integrated and organic” (Vertovec and Cohen 2003:4). They look to close collaborators and personal experiences for inspiration and musical resources. Their espousal of musical multiplicity as we will see in Chapter 1, however, is rooted in African American traditions of boundary erosion.

My formulation of multiplicity, while borrowing from Slobin, aligns more closely with Ramnarine in its political commitment to dismantling boundaries and differences. Slobin does not directly invest in the political as Ramnarine does, but their approaches to multiple musical styles and communities dovetail. Their writings, ultimately, are both rooted in musical praxis. While Ramnarine outright rejects the assertion of difference, Slobin engages in a less overt political position. His predilection for comparison (1993), however, leads me to assert that he too is inclined toward an approach predicated on connection rather than difference.

Musical multiplicity encompasses composite musical experiences, including production and consumption. As Slobin (2007) observes, it accommodates the styles, genres, and repertoires that one has collected throughout one’s musical life. It is largely individualistic and personal. The

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9 Hollinger’s work on solidarity, which I explore below, submits that cosmopolitanism is one of “a family of responses to the problem of solidarity” (2006:xvii) that contemporary scholars frequently precede with an adjective (e.g. rooted cosmopolitanism, situated cosmopolitanism) to distance it from its pejorative associations.

10 Critiques of culture also abound within music scholarship, see, for example, Clayton, Herbert, and Middleton (2003), Stokes (2003), and Titon (2003).
musical multiplicity of two siblings from the same household, for example, would likely overlap considerably; yet it may also uniquely diverge. Despite group or familial overlaps, it is eclectic, personal, and mutable throughout one’s life. Multiplicity assumes a broader scope than Slobin’s (ibid.) articulation of eclecticism, however.

Musical multiplicity encompasses amalgamated or “fused” styles, as well as the performance of multiple genres, much like Cottrell’s (2007) local bimusicality. Slobin’s thoughts on “choice” in (2007) eclecticism encompass actively performed repertories, but seem to disregard non-strategic forms of multiplicity that frequently prevail in consumption. Musical multiplicity accounts for the collective, diachronic musical experiences and practices of an individual in addition to the synchronic, performed expressions. As practice, it assumes performance and creation, as well as consumption. I listened to Green Day and other “grunge” bands as a teenager; although they no longer comprise a part of my regular musical consumption, I still can call these styles to my mind and draw on them to negotiate everyday musical encounters. As a child and young adult I played Western classical violin; nowadays I perform klezmer and improvised musics. Although I no longer regularly play Western classical music, I am still able to, and my performance of klezmer and free improvisation never strays completely from my earlier training.

Multiplicity, ultimately, provides a means to conceive of the vast musical diversity of the world in which we live. My formulation of it borrows from cosmopolitanism’s (Vertovec and Cohen 2003) account for multiple allegiances and belongings. Multiplicity, in this way is divested at times of the musical, to assume multiplicity not only of music and the musical, but also of places, identities, and belongings. This move, admittedly, returns to the metaphorical.
Individualism

The social philosopher Charles Taylor identifies individualism as one of the three malaises of modernity in the West. A focus on individualism arose as people became disenchanted with a greater divine “order” (Taylor 1992:3), eventually replacing this spiritual and moral imperative. Central to Taylor’s argument is its critique of Allan Bloom’s (1987) affront of today’s youth as accepting “a rather facile relativism” that renders it “impossible to argue” about personal values within a “culture of self-fulfillment” (ibid.). Taylor pointedly takes issue with Bloom’s implication that there exists a moral deficit in the system:

There is a powerful moral ideal at work here...The moral ideal behind self-fulfillment is that of being true to oneself, in a specifically modern understanding of that term...and following him [Bloom] I am going to use the term ‘authenticity’ for the contemporary ideal. (Taylor 1992:15)

Taylor’s authenticity11 aligns with that articulated by klezmer violinist, Alicia Svigals. Svigals (2002) grounds her version of authenticity in being authentically true to the self in a discussion of her personal journey within the klezmer revival; like Taylor, she advances its underlying moral imperative.

Although Taylor’s authenticity provides one framework for theorizing individualism, he situates his work largely in Euro-American contexts, rather than in contexts inclusive of greater diversities. His arguments, therefore, do not adequately speak to the identities and materials that prove foundational for this generation of improviser-composers. While the individualism located in discourses of originality or uniqueness may be equated with myriad musics, African American

11 Taylor’s authenticity differs from its appearance in scholarly debates of the early music revival (e.g. Kenyon 1988; Taruskin 1988; Shelemay 2001), in which it occupied perspectives ranging from fidelity to the historical recreation and the imagination thereof, to postmodern, “endeavors [to] construct and transform the past in the present” (Shelemay 2001:6).
musical traditions take up more space than others in the present story, expressed frequently as creativity and finding one’s own sound or voice (Berliner 1994; Monson 1996). Lewis maintains (1996:118) that “personal narrative” and “telling one's own story” are integral to practices of Afrological improvisation. Still, individualism is frequently practiced as “individuality within the aggregate,” a phrase first articulated by Samuel A. Floyd (1995:228), and later engaged by Lewis in his history of the AACM (2008:xii).

Collectivity: Solidarity, Choice, Affinity, and Belonging

The practice of individualism rarely takes place solo; rather, it frequently happens through collaboration. That the primary location of my research takes place in New York City is significant for its particular local politics and position as an American global city. Urban studies theorists commonly account for individual navigation of “the city” through participation in particular “communities” (see Paddison 2001). David A. Hollinger eschews community for its implied absence of volition in favor of solidarity:

Solidarity is a state of social existence achieved only when parties to an affiliation are understood to exercise at least some measure of agency, if only in consciously affirming an affiliation into which they were born. (2006:xi)

Solidarity differs primarily from community through its explication of agency on the part of the individual. Improviser-composers choose to pursue particular musical pathways and strategic ties of their own volition.

Hollinger distinguishes solidarity from universalism and pluralism:

[It] urges each individual and collective unit to absorb as much varied experience as it can while retaining its capacity to achieve self-definition and advance its own aims effectively...it is [more] oriented to the individual and supposes that individuals will be affiliated with a number of groups. (2006:xviii-xix)

Hollinger’s descriptions are reminiscent of the sociological ascribed versus achieved statuses (Foladare 1969). Conceptually, however, this brings me to an area well trodden by ethnomusicologists: the issues and politics of identity. In the past thirty years scholars have fervently confronted ethnicity, race, gender, and sexual orientation, all to grapple with issues of identity.  

Hollinger’s solidarity (2006) seems germane in discussing improviser-composers’ willed affiliation to a flexible and interlocking system of aesthetics and values. He maintains that it assumes, “a state of social existence achieved only when parties to an affiliation are understood to exercise at least some measure of agency” (2006:xi). Because each person’s “political economy of solidarity” (2006:xvi) is limited, it is not merely a condition, but a dilemma of belonging. He argues that “willed affiliations” are “among the great problems of the twenty-first century” (2006:xv); further, the United States’s “identity debates” “of recent decades have been largely driven by a concern to distribute the energies that make solidarities” (Hollinger 2006:xvii).

My treatment of solidarity is indebted to and attempts to build upon Slobin’s earlier writings on musical affinity groups and intercultures (1993). Slobin suggests choice, affinity, and belonging as “three overlapping spheres of cultural activity” (1993:68). Even though choices may appear limitless within expressive culture, he argues, they are largely based upon aesthetic and ideological affinities (1993:55). Affinity groups consist of, “charmed circles of like-minded music-makers drawn magnetically to a certain genre that creates strong expressive bonding” (Slobin 1993:98). Finally, belonging, Slobin defines as a “complex act” dependent upon the level of commitment to a particular expressive cultural affiliation, and “a choice to follow up an affinity” (1993:56).

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13 See, for example, Hebdige (1987); Stokes (1993); Bennett (2004); Samuels 2004.
While Hollinger and Slobin entertain similar ideas, they diverge in manner and extent. Solidarity seems to connote a greater level of commitment than affinity appears to. Although it intimates a greater degree of willed intentionality, Slobin’s interdependent and overlapping spheres (choice, affinity, and belonging) make them equally tantalizing theoretical options for their pursuit of complexity. I interface solidarity with Slobin’s overlapping spheres to suggest a commitment to not only myriad styles or genres, but to a system of values. I take these spheres into account with respect of their underlying structures and traditions.\footnote{Subcultural Sounds (1993) develops the terms subculture, interculture, and superculture as structural aspects of expressive cultural spheres.}

**Methodological Orientations**

**Networks**

Upon my entry into the field, I became aware of the convoluted webs of musicians, composers, bandleaders, booking agents, label representatives, and publicists. I found the “x degrees of separation”\footnote{It is a common variable in network analysis.} variable between network actors easily traceable in certain instances, while completely absent in others. The range and density of one’s personal network do not always serve to predict one’s ties.\footnote{Personal networks are also referred to as egocentric networks in network theory.} The same individuals who maintain intimate collaborations with certain actors, for example, may neither know nor perform with other actors whose musical style, affinity, performance venue, school of training or record label one would expect to overlap. Such curiosities led me to directly investigate these webs and connections.

Improviser-composers mentally consider particular scenes and sub-scenes with sophistication. Mary Halvorson, for example, perceptively theorizes the topography of NYC scenes:
You’ll see scenes happening around...there’ll be a bunch of musicians that—I think of them mainly in terms of venues that people play at, or labels. Chris Speed, for instance, has the Skirl Label. A lot of the people on the label are his friends and collaborate together regularly. You’ll see crossover between people. For instance, I play in Tom Rainey’s Trio with Ingrid Laubrock; and then Ingrid has a group, which is me and Tom and John Hébert and Kris Davis. Then I saw that Kris Davis was playing a gig with Tom Rainey and John Hébert...There just tend to be...clusters of people or they’re on similar labels; or they work with similar groups with varying configurations of people...it’s not dissimilar to...essential social groups in a school. (interview 10 March 2010)

Improviser-composers both vaguely perceive and thoughtfully consider social-structural issues: they exist as much in people’s thoughts as they do in live interactions. Theory, therefore, is not divorced from practice. Improviser-composers consider and engage with it throughout the development of their musical and professional identities. Yet no matter how sophisticated the cognitive mapping of scenes, networks, and art worlds is, its existence in the mind’s eye alone renders it ephemeral. I engage principles of network theory to sketch the particulars part and parcel to professional musical life in New York. Doing so tangibly presents genre, subcultural, and scene connections, interactions, and collaborations, as well as their absence.


[Networks] are sometimes mentioned in passing in writing about popular music, for instance, yet little attention has been paid to their structure and dynamics or how they intersect, change over time, and affect musical knowledge, values, and production. (ibid.)

He argues that the great value of network theory for music scholarship exists in its pursuit of “comprehensiveness in understanding the layout and dynamics of a complex social and cultural nexus” (ibid.). Musical multiplicity takes on near ubiquity among improviser-composers; I rely upon network analysis to detail the topographies of a complex musical system that is not dealt with adequately through scene, subculture or other theoretical templates alone.
Brinner presents and compares the networks of bands, individual musicians,\footnote{He details the networks of the Iraqi-Jewish musician, Yair Dalal, and the bands Bustan Abraham and Alei Hazayit.} and the greater “ethnic music scene” in Israel through a series of case studies. To do so, he outlines many of network theory’s guiding principles in *Playing Across a Divide*, regarding the work of Granovetter (1973), Knoke and Burt (1983), and Degenne and Forsé (1999) as foundational to the theorization of musical networks. Nodes and links\footnote{The terms links and ties are used interchangeably in network theory.} comprise network theory’s fundamental units. Nodes refer to the actors, or agents, in a given network. Links refer to the types of relationships that connect them (e.g. friendship, kinship, financial exchange, musical exchange, dislike, and courtship).

Variables central to network analysis include: the number of links per node and network; the distance between nodes; the strength and directionality of links; and the hierarchy of nodes with respect to others in a given network. Brinner asserts that:

> These variables concern the degree to which each person, group, or institution is connected to other nodes in the network, the overall connectivity of the network, and the number of the links and intermediaries through which any two members of the network must communicate. Applied to musical networks they can visually represent the ability of people to work together, the probability that they will share musical knowledge and interests, and the relative importance of particular members of the network as intermediaries. (2009:167)

Directionality implies that a relationship (link) operates unidirectionally. With respect to music business practices, Brinner notes that the directionality of “ideas, music, publicity, and money along the link between a band and a record company is also asymmetrical because each entity has something different to offer the other” (2009:171).

Finally, network theory allows for hierarchical assessments of relationships, demonstrated through multiplexity, centrality, prominence, and prestige. Mustafa Emirbayer and Jeff Goodwin define multiplexity as “a network with two or more types of relationships” (1994:1448);\footnote{A multiplexed network may take into account, for example, friendship and business ties.} they characterize centrality as the number of an actor’s links compared relationally with the number of
links of other actors in the network. Centrality accounts for an actor’s position with respect to other nodes in the network. In a network “with high centrality,” the nodes that maintain “far more connections than the rest” (Brinner 2009:173) are referred to as hubs. Brinner defines prestige as a “node that is the object of numerous asymmetrical relations, of attention from others that is not necessarily reciprocated” (Brinner 2009:173; Knoke and Burt 1983), which may be further delimited as closeness or betweenness centrality. Alain Degenne and Michel Forsé (1999) explain closeness and betweenness centrality:

[when] refer[ing] to a node with an above average number of links, \textit{closeness centrality} refers to the nodes that are closest to all other nodes in the network, i.e., whose access is least mediated; and \textit{betweenness centrality} refers to a node being located on an unusually high number of paths connecting other nodes in a network. (Brinner 2009:174)

In a seminal network studies article, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” Mark Granovetter contends, “the stronger the ties between two people the more likely their circles of close fields will overlap” (Brinner 2009:170; Granovetter 1973). He surmises that weak ties significantly augment, “one’s information-gathering network by connecting to people beyond one’s immediate friendship network” (ibid.). As I later observe, improviser-composers tendency to accept most performance opportunities while building their musical and career network is a viable strategy, in part, because it allows for the expansion of one’s network through weak ties.

Brinner triangulates the “related perspectives” (2009:164) scenes and art worlds in tandem with network theory in his study of Israel’s ethnic music scene. He maintains that while scene and art world encompass the greater conceptualization of “people, organizations, and places involved in the production and consumption of music,” network theory extends this analysis by, “offer[ing] more detailed ways of thinking about relationships and roles” (2009:164). Brinner contrasts the “small networks” (2009:131) of the bands Bustan Abraham and Alei Hazayit (both comprised of
Israeli and Palestinian musicians): he argues that they represent “different positions within a single field of cultural production and consumption” (2009:132). Although they apply similar musical resources (e.g. Middle Eastern music), they maintain unique structural networks of “musical and social interaction” (ibid.).

Brinner (2009) draws extensively on his theorization of musical competence and interaction throughout Playing Across a Divide, as well: “musical interaction is deeply dependent upon and entwined with musical competence…it is through interaction, in turn, that competence may be increased” (2009:131-32). He assesses musical competences according to main instrument, musical training, aesthetics, and social knowledge. For improviser-composers, musical combined with networking competence affects one’s ability to successfully navigate NYC’s scenes and art worlds. Further, competence in multiple musical styles and traversal of scenes engenders work.

Brinner’s triangulation of network theory, scenes, and art worlds, in tandem with a discussion of musical competence illuminates the eclectic and cosmopolitan cultural economies at the center of Israel’s ethnic music scene. The Jewish and Arab musicians that Brinner writes about are stylistically and identity-wise, “far from homogenous. They constitute a subset of the larger network or the field of ‘ethnic music’ in Israel and also have links to several other networks” (Brinner 2009:168).

Will Straw concretized the term scene within academic discourse by comparing it to community:

A musical scene…is that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization…Within a musical scene, that same sense of purpose is articulated within those forms of communication through which the building of musical alliances and the drawing of musical boundaries take place. The manner in which musical practices within a scene tie themselves to processes of historical change occurring within a larger international musical culture will also be a significant
basis of the way in which such forms are positioned within that scene at the local level. (1991:373)

Andrew Bennett and Richard A. Peterson later observe that music scenes, while stemming largely from journalistic and everyday parlance, have been adopted by scholars to reference, “the contexts in which clusters of producers, musicians, and fans collectively share their common musical tastes and collectively distinguish themselves from others” (2004:1).

Howard Becker’s Art Worlds (1982) questions a central axiom of aesthetics: that a genius produces art, and the artwork manifests genius. He argues, rather, that within art worlds, “the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works the art world is noted for” (1982:x).

I use network theory and analysis more methodologically than theoretically. My purposes in employing it are threefold: it details the interactions that many improviser-composers intuitively understand about the complexity of the scenes and art world(s) in which they live and play; it charts the practices of multiplicity, individual expression, and collaboration; it sheds light on the seemingly endless list of musical and extramusical descriptors (of not only genres and subgenres, but also newly-coined terms) applied to improviser-composers. I use the terms scene and art world largely because they allow for both focused and wide angle snapshots of music-scenes. I find art worlds useful in enveloping a “network of people” (ibid.) engaged in interrelated activities. I largely apply the term art world, for example, when I refer to the greater social/structural and institutional networks that musicians navigate, in particular, classical or new music art worlds and jazz art worlds. Scenes, then, I largely use to refer to smaller clusters of musicians and related actors who share considerable aesthetic overlaps and engage in joint activities.

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20 Becker’s work has been critiqued for its theorization of changes in art styles and inability to deal with art as exceptional beyond a given art world: “Sociology of art requires a sensitive balance between the social conditions of the production of art works and the power of the works themselves” (Kimmel 1983:734-35).
Personal Profiles

The study of ethnomusicology is largely possible because of interaction and communication with individuals. James Clifford (1988) and Lila Abu-Lughod (1991) eschew notions of culture because of its tendency to overemphasize coherence, and reify otherness. Abu-Lughod provides one model for understanding identity and belongings through “ethnographies of the particular”:

And the particulars suggest that others live as we perceive ourselves living, not as robots programmed with ‘cultural’ rules, but as people going through life agonizing over decisions, making mistakes, trying to make themselves look good, enduring tragedies and personal losses, enjoying others, and finding moments of happiness. (1991:149)

“Ethnographies of the particular” contribute to dismantling the power structures inherent in ethnography in general. Advocating a politics of familiarity across cultures, she argues, has the capacity to engender ethnographies that “counteract the distancing discourses of anthropology” (ibid.). Further, a politics of familiarity helps to create a sense of empathy. Taking a similar model of culture, Michelle Kisliuk (1997) and Deborah Wong (2004b) argue for layers of knowing through reflexivity.

Recent works that focus on a central figure engage discourses on nationalism, ethnic and racial identities, international politics, diaspora, feminism, and spiritual frameworks. Virginia Danielson (1997) traces the life of Egyptian international star, Umm Kulthum, who honed her craft to create a newly Arab-Egyptian cultural form. Thomas Turino (2000) situates Thomas Mapfumo within Zimbabwean nationalism and the transnational “worldbeat” market. Franya Berkman’s compensatory scholarship on Alice Coltrane portrays a musician whose, “hybrid, experimental, and continually expanding musical conception has largely fallen outside definitions of jazz or any
singly identifiable style” (2010:5). She contextualizes Coltrane’s work within her spiritual aesthetics, African American spiritual narratives, and the spiritual as political.\footnote{See also Broyles-González 2001 and Veal 2000 for writings that focus on a central figure.}

Jesse D. Ruskin and Timothy Rice survey ethnomusicological monographs published between 1976 and 2002 that focus on the individual;\footnote{Ruskin and Rice state that, “we use the word ‘individual’ in as neutral a sense as possible—that is, as a single human being as opposed to a group of human beings” (Ruskin and Rice 2012:302).} they observe, “individual-centered studies have increased over the past two decades” (2012:303). They characterize individuals present in the literature as one of four types:

(1) Innovators in the tradition; (2) key figures who occupy important roles in the musical culture; (3) ordinary or typical individuals; and (4) normally anonymous audience members and other who play a role in music production, dissemination, and reception...[T]he vast majority of musical ethnographies in our survey focus on innovators and other key figures who play some important role in their musical culture. (Ruskin and Rice 2012:303)

They argue, “ethnomusicologists tend to view innovators as agents who move the history of a style down the temporal road,” whereas key figures, “play an important role in the narrative as a particular example of a general point the author wishes to make” (2012:304-05). On one hand the improviser-composers I detail all land somewhere between Ruskin and Rice’s innovators and key figures, but their typology does not exactly match improviser-composers’ roles. Such dogmatic distinctions are unnecessary for improviser-composers. Because I deal in the recent past, I cannot possibly predict which improviser-composers will, “move the history down the temporal road.”

My own ideas about culture are shaped by the trend in the social sciences that, as Ruskin and Rice summarize, “is defined as much by contestation between and among people operating from different social positions such as age, class, occupation, education, and urban-versus-rural residence as it is by shared understandings and practices” (2012:308-09). I fasten “ethnographies of the particular,” to a politics of belonging to tussle with a great expanse of personal backgrounds:
from growing up in an elite conservatory system in South Korea to growing up in the projects of a
depressed American city. I hope that this approach will allow me to better understand the lives and
work of my collaborators on their own terms; and, to represent their identities and assemblages of
belonging.

*Ethnographic Orientations*

*Ethnomusicology in Urban America*

My dissertation follows American ethnomusicology’s not-so-recent tendency to research
topics at home, and in the context of a city. In the late 1970s Reyes Schramm (1990 [1979])
expressed a concern for the study of ethnomusicology within urban areas. Her article, “Ethnic
Music, the Urban Area, and Ethnomusicology,” formally acknowledges the urban space as not only
an acceptable location for fieldwork, but also a necessary one. She implores ethnomusicologists to
fully appreciate studies that do not take as their locale far away, rural settings. Reyes Schramm
considers methodologies that assume a fixed and closed system “dysfunctional for complex
societies” ([1979] 1990:10). Her aversion to treating urban neighborhoods as static enclaves led her
to argue that closed-system approaches camouflage the ongoing movement of people and
communities. Further, her understanding of the movement of NYC’s peoples and musics
demonstrates prescience of the multi-sited, diasporic, transnational, and global studies now
omnipresent within ethnomusicology.

Despite the more than 30 years that have passed since Reyes-Schramm’s ([1979] 1990)
foreboding “manifesto” on urban ethnomusicology, it is still misunderstood within the discipline on
occasion. Vincenzo Cambria observes that the discipline’s roots are partly at fault:

Cities have surely not been a common research setting during a good part of the
history of our field. They represented, we could say, the binary opposite of the
subject matter that ethnomusicology, in its early stages, was delineating for itself as
an academic discipline. The basic dichotomies primitive vs. civilized, traditional vs.
modern, oral vs. literate, and folk vs. popular, important at the beginning to define the scope and interests of our discipline, were logical companions to that opposing rural and urban contexts. Urban areas and their culture were not suitable subjects in an ethnomusicologist’s agenda since they well represented (and synthesized) the second terms of the mentioned opposites. (2012:24-25)

Fieldwork and Print Sources

My active period of field research took place from June 2009 through December 2011. For approximately half of the time I was based in Connecticut, and half of the time in Brooklyn. Since this “active period” I have continued to attend concerts and events pertinent to my research. I travelled outside of New York for research, too: I occasionally attended events and conducted interviews in other Northeastern cities (e.g. Boston, New Haven and Philadelphia); I went on a mini-tour with Steve Lehman’s Octet and Paradoxical Frog for concerts at the Bimhuis (Amsterdam), Banlieues Bleues (Paris), Moers Festival (North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany), and Manufaktur (Schorndorf, Germany) in May 2010. The nature of the tour allowed no time for rest, providing insight into how rigorous and exhausting the lifestyle of a touring musician can be.

I approached my interviews with improviser-composers—and other cultural actors—through a process that I refer to as free ranging. They were not completely without structure, but were dealt with flexibly. I began each interview with a preset list of questions designed to elicit telling the story of one’s life in music, focusing on family life, musical education and learning, aesthetic interests and affinities, and collaborations. Whenever possible, I asked open-ended questions to elicit improviser-composers’ particular ways of talking about the subject. For as much as I am concerned with music, I am equally interested in genre and stylistic discourses. I asked follow-up questions after improviser-composers detailed their (hi)stories in a roughly chronological order. Through the interviews I intended to elicit responses to the central dissertation questions
concerning multiplicity, eclecticism, improvisation-composition, and belonging, and how these themes did or did not relate to personal narrative.

Borrowing from Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), I view the interview as a dialogic process shaped by words and interactions, and informed by written and vernacular discourse. I loosely adopt this literary concept for ethnography to consider how my interviews were shaped and re-shaped by verbal and non-verbal exchanges and by the experience and knowledge of interviewees and myself. The interchange between two or three individuals during an interview ultimately transforms its outcomes. Perhaps more significant, however, is dialogism’s salience for the research, analysis, and writing processes that follow the interview. These activities are in conversation with far more than the dialogue that occurs within the time-space of the interview itself. My transcriptions of entire interviews allowed me to revisit and reconsider the interactions and discussions that took place, and to reflect upon my relationships to my collaborators. The words and interactions of each interview sound and re-sound throughout my analysis and writing.

I recorded about 30 concerts/musical events in the field. I relied upon commercial recordings extensively in my writing and analysis, too. David Borgo notes practitioners’ and scholars’ problematization of a recording’s inability to relay contextual and real-time information of “contemporary improvised music”:

An audio recording, no matter its fidelity, necessarily reproduces only a limited spectrum of the performance experience and…the act of listening to improvised music away from its initial performance context and…forever alters its meaning and impact. (2002:178)

Still, Borgo maintains that recordings are used as networking tools and serve as career benchmarks. I have found the last statement particularly accurate in my research. Ethnomusicologists generally agree that recordings only convey partial musical and cultural information; they remain an invaluable tool for analysis, nonetheless.
In an effort to try to be as non-invasive as possible when photographing, nearly every photograph I snapped occurred at a moment of musical *forte or fortissimo*. New York is a city where critical reception and musical tourism are central to its scenes, both super- and subcultural; improviser-composers, consequently, are fairly accustomed to being recorded, photographed, and filmed. In spite of several training sessions and practice, my photography skills are impoverished: Peter Gannushkin, an excellent photographer who maintains an extensive archive of photographs of NYC’s “Downtown” musicians, generously granted me permission to use many of the photographs that appear throughout the text.

The Internet proved indispensable for my research of an inherently complex topic. I frequently relied on the Internet as a first search for gaining general background information about improviser-composers and cultural actors roaming New York’s highways and byways. This generation of improviser-composers grew up in various parts of the United States, Europe, and Asia, come from an array of religious, cultural, racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and have studied in a variety of educational and musical institutions. The Internet also served as the primary way that I learned about performances, colloquia, and events pertaining to improviser-composers. Finally, it provides access to many of the types and qualities of visibilities pertaining to improviser-composers and vernacular discourses.

Both personal and social accounts inform my writing and research. I surveyed print sources from 1999 forward to cover the period that my collaborators began to assert themselves as musicians in New York. In particular, I examined critical reception in the following publications: The New York Times (*The Times*), Time Out New York (TONY), The Village Voice (*Voice*), Downbeat, and All about Jazz (AAJ) (accessed largely via the Web (except for Downbeat), and less frequently, their material counterparts). I do not attempt an all-encompassing media survey of a
scene; instead, I meticulously gathered all articles and announcements that referenced eight of my main collaborators over a ten-year period, including their performances as sidepersons.

I selected these publications largely because of the visibility they provide to my collaborators. Their readerships include musicians with like-minded sensibilities as well as aficionados. According to drummer-composer Tyshawn Sorey (personal communication 4 February 2010), AAJ serves as a resource that many improviser-composers consult to learn about performances; one ostensible reason for this may be that many of venues where I did my fieldwork offered free copies of AAJ. While the *Voice* no longer serves as a significant resource exclusively for alternative cultural announcements, it remains a staple covering NYC happenings. The Times maintains its position at the vanguard of importance for reviews, both in and beyond the City.

In a study of NYC improvisers of late 1960s through early 1980s, Dessen considers *The Times* for its, “crucial role in establishing the careers of New York-based artists and presenting them to a broader national and international pool of readers and critics,” and the *Voice* for its, “instrumental [position] in covering and constructing the Downtown scene” (2002:35). While the *Voice’s* position now appears somewhat diminished compared with its pre-Internet period eminence, Dessen’s general assessment of the role that prominent publications play still largely holds true. Media institutions, such as the *Times*, continue to significantly shape the careers of musicians in and beyond the City. As Raymond Williams ([1983] 1991) shows, writing—and particularly published writing—is a political act capable of serving one or more agendas.

The current state of critical reception and information dissemination, particularly as relevant for improviser-composers, is materially (e.g. the current forms of media) and politically a

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23 Ten years represents the mean number of years that my collaborators have been living and working as expert musicians in New York.

24 Media forms do not exist in a vacuum unto themselves. Although I deal with vetted media sources for organizational purposes, this does not mean that other persons and institutions have not been in conversation with them in the course of production. I look to Appadurai’s proposed *ethnoscape, mediascape, technoscape, finanscape*, and *ideoscape* to explain global cultural flows (Appadurai 1999:221-22).
liminal one. Technologies such as the Internet, personal websites, blogs, Facebook, and Twitter have given rise to greater access to agency through self-promotion and visibility, and generally altered the face of information dissemination. Indeed, improviser-composers constantly navigate a palette of written, visual, aural, and performative visibilities of themselves and their work; and they varyiously engage with their creation and volatility. Further, journalists and musicians—at least theoretically—have access to even more modes of interaction than in the past. In part, these factors have brought about the considerable erosion of print media within the past twenty years. Despite its abatement, certain publications have weathered the changes, many now existing as hybrid media: institution-based, professional journalism presented through technologically updated formats.
Chapter Overview

In the first half of the dissertation I situate improviser-composers via history and place. Chapter 1, “Multiplicity and Other Values: Claiming an African American Lineage,” argues that improviser-composers’ practice of musical multiplicity is rooted in African American musical practices of self-empowerment and resistance to unilateral genre ascription. The term improviser-composer itself is a locution that has arisen in view of the rejection of racial essentialism in musical practices; it asserts the role of composition and the composer, in addition to that of performance and improvisation. Improviser-composers’ other shared values, such as individualism expressed as finding one’s own voice and collaboration, are also traceable to African American musics and values. Improviser-composers’ teachers and mentors frequently emphasize these sensibilities through formal and informal instruction and guidance.

Chapter 2, “Shared Places: New York City and the Struggle for Space,” situates the lives and practices of improviser-composers within New York City and its venues with low barriers to entry. Venues that harbor improviser-composers’ creative endeavors frequently resist market challenges to support personal aesthetics. Improviser-composers make sense of NYC’s vast scenes and art worlds by performing in the locales that accommodate them and their musics. They transform these spaces by performing belonging through shared affinities and social interaction. The spaces that harbor improviser-composers and their musics uphold a range of organizational strategies and aesthetic investments.

In the second half of the dissertation I trace multiplicity and belonging through case studies and musical discussion. Chapter 3, “Improviser-Composers: Individual Histories and Personal Networks,” contends that improviser-composers perform multiplicity and belonging through personal networks. Multiplicity is accrued and applied variously over the course of one’s life in
music. Improviser-composers’ consumption habits and performance practices are eclectic in nature from an early age. They retain this ethos in their studies, and later, in their careers. It is important to note, however, that the vibrancy and legacy of elder African American experimental musicians have shaped the embrace of musical multiplicity within many New York City scenes. Improviser-composers first rely on formative ties to jump-start their professional careers in New York; later, they customize ties to form strategic networks.

In chapter 4, “Sounding Multiplicity and Belonging,” I detail multiplicity in works by Judith Berkson and Steve Lehman. Berkson’s sense of disbelonging among jazz collaborators, in part, motivated her to develop a solo project that culminated in her album, *Oylam*. She articulates multiplicity and individualism through a range of musical styles and resources that she weaves together through a personal sensibility. Lehman, on the other hand, expresses his investment in individualism through a personal sense of rhythm and collaborative rapport; he demonstrates these sensibilities primarily through his work with drummer-composer Tyshawn Sorey, alteration of hip-hop artist GZA’s composition, and creation of rhythmic modulations. He gives voice to multiplicity by employing resources from jazz, classical, and hip-hop materials. The musical sounds, however, disconnect from their full range of sources, appearing on stages mostly within jazz art worlds.
Part I: Locating Improviser-Composers

Chapter 1: Multiplicity and Other Values:

Claiming an African American Lineage

Improviser-composers represent diverse social, economic, racial, national, gender, religious, and musical backgrounds; in spite of this, the veneration of three themes - multiplicity, individualism, and collaboration - underpins a host of shared expectations, values, and sensibilities. I isolate these parameters for analysis, but in actuality they exist symbiotically entangled. They are realized partially, significantly, or ideally from project to project and artist to artist, and are not always commensurate in a given performance or work. Improviser-composers’ musical pathways do not wander aimlessly, but run in pursuit of individual authenticity. In the process, their colleagues provide much-needed support and inspiration, and share similar aesthetics. Improviser-composers’ mutual sensibilities, and the intimate musical ties that they engender, ultimately illuminate shared belonging.

Cumulative experiences in music shape improviser-composers’ sensibilities. Family, peers, and teachers—and later, mentors and collaborators—influence tastes in child- and early adulthood. Improviser-composers are taught not only to articulate and develop an original sound or voice, but also to create a unique compositional praxis that demonstrates their individualism. The combined emphasis on improvisation and performance alongside composition has resulted in the “improviser-composer” locution. Still, these sensibilities are not simply taught to improviser-composers; rather,

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25 I borrow this term from Ruth Finnegan’s (1989) sociological study of music in Milton Keynes. She argues that music making plays a significant and vibrant role in the lives of its amateur musicians, despite assumed passivity in contemporary urban dwelling. She suggests that the urban-living of Milton Keynes is neither a “community in which people are bound by numerous ties” nor “a large and heterogeneous area inimical to personal control or warmth” (1989:299). Finnegans demonstrates that although the daily pathways of individuals may never cross, residents are connected through their choices via musical pathways. The multiple musical worlds within Milton Keynes at times intersect and overlap, while at other times remain unexposed and “hidden” from one another.
they hold fast to them as a matter of personal choice and affinity. By doing so, they passionately position themselves alongside like-minded peers.

**Traditions of Boundary Erosion**

The critical reception of improviser-composers overflows with convoluted, hybridized depictions. Current press accounts describe improviser-composers’ manifold musical engagements largely as variants of avant-garde, new music, jazz, experimental, rock, and “world music.” Conversely, the terminologies that improviser-composers apply to themselves and their musics frequently eschew genre descriptors altogether. Jim Samson observes that classification via genre primarily exists to, “make knowledge both manageable and persuasive” (2010) and inform one’s understanding of a given subject. His definition conveys a benign disregard for political aim or subject positioning within a tome of general knowledge borne of an era in which the world and its contents were assumed knowable. While genre may illuminate a subject, the ascription of genre(s) to NYC improviser-composers does more than make “knowledge…manageable” (ibid.) for its own sake. Rather, descriptions and their locations reveal social, cultural, and political subjectivities at work.

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27 David Borgo notes that of the many terms used to describe a *community* of contemporary improvisers:

> The preferred terms tend to highlight the creative or progressive stance of the performers and the cutting-edge or inclusive nature of the music itself...Stylistic references (jazz, classical, rock, world, or electronic) are variously included or excluded, as are cultural or national identity markers. (2002:167)

28 Critical reception genre depictions include: new-music; avant-garde; avant-garde chamber music; experimental; improvisation; impromptu; improv; improvising chamber group; improv-noise; now-prov; progressive electro-acoustic; independent-minded; far beyond the bounds of jazz; foley artists; unclassifiable brand of micro-composition; progressive-jazz; jazz avant-garde; jazz with an abstract bent; contemporary species of chamber jazz; free-jazz; experimental jazz; inside-outside jazz; avant-jazz; abstract lyricism informed by myriad traditions; music [that] resists characterization; avant-garde jazz and experimental rock intertwined; cross-fertilization; amalgam of experimental folk, rock and chamber music; an eclectic outfit; noise-rock meets post-bop; as rooted in experimental rock, folk and chamber music as in any subspecies of jazz; springy funk and chugging metal, along with chamber pop, Latin jazz and a few different takes on free improvisation; avant-folkish; between experimental jazz and underground rock; an atmosphere; prefer the road less travelled.
The seemingly paradoxical depictions held by the press and the musicians themselves indirectly expose contemporary improviser-composers’ musical and historical antecedents. Improviser-composers practice musical multiplicity (see Chapters 3 – 4) in part because they have taken up ranks in a tradition of boundary erosion (sometimes expressed as genre negation) espoused by African American musical collectives and practices of the past 40 plus years. Georgina Born observes that the black musical influences of experimental musics frequently go uncredited:

The fact that these influences often remain unacknowledged and subterranean, even within experimental music, signals their status as deriving from an ‘other’ culture and the reluctance of the postmodern sphere of legitimate music to admit its indebtedness to the ‘other.’ (1995:351)

Improviser-composers are not only indebted to elder generations of African American experimental musicians’ sonic aspirations, but also to their political ambitions and actions that sought to distance them and their musics from racial stereotypes and simplistic identities.

Elder generations of African American improviser-composers held these political aspirations particularly close through writing, organizing, and music making. They sought to move beyond genre circumscription and espouse values that celebrate hybridity. Such ideologies are especially evident in the collective histories of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), Union of God’s Musicians and Artists Ascension (UGMAA), Black Artists Group (BAG), and Creative Music Studio (CMS), as well as in the individual frameworks of Wadada Leo Smith and Anthony Braxton. Later on, the M-Base Collective, Knitting Factory scene musicians, and the Radical Jewish Culture participants took on these ideals, as well as voiced their own cultural critiques.  

This list exemplifies the onset neither of American improviser-composers’ engagement with hybrid or synergistic musical forms nor of African American political moves toward hybridity; emancipation from genre barriers; and uneasiness with categorizations. Rather, it accounts for the individuals and collectives who have most directly influenced—through mentorship and collaborative work—the generation of improviser-composers about whom I write. For a discussion of African American musicians as activists and intellectuals, see Porter (2002).
The present generation of improviser-composers has been greatly influenced by members (and former members) of the AACM, particularly in their espousal of what George Lewis deems, "multiple subjectivities rather than a unified subject" (Lewis quoted in Chinen 2008). Lewis demonstrates that many AACM musicians who migrated to New York in the 1970s transgressed genre and stylistic boundaries:

AACM musicians in New York articulated a definitional shift away from rigidly defined and racialized notions of lineage and tradition toward a more fluid, dialogic relationship with a variety of musical practices that problematized the putative jazz label as it was applied to them…musicians articulated participation across-genres, as well as exchanges of musical methods. (2004:67)

AACM artists considered jazz just one part of their artistic toolkit. They engaged in multiple career networks, scenes, and art worlds, including those of "high-culture" or "art music," and desired to transcend racialized depictions of them and their work:

The AACM’s work challenged the white-coded American experimental music movement to move beyond ethnic particularism toward the recognition of a multicultural, multi-ethnic base, with a variety of perspectives, histories, traditions, and methods. (Lewis 2004:52)

AACM members individually challenged extant binaries through theoretical writings as well. Wadada Leo Smith optimistically portended a musical future unified by cosmopolitan principles in his article, "(M1) American Music": “We will soon come into a world music, a different and wholly new music derived from the musics of the many different peoples of earth” (1974). Ten years later Anthony Braxton theorized transcultural integration in his Tri-Axiom Writings:

[C]reativity is directly related to its potential for building vibrational bridges across cultural and ethnic groups to establish a unified aesthetic and spiritual base…All of the activity that we have come to label cross-sectional (or fusion) can be looked at as one route leading to transformation…cross-sectional activity permeates the total spectrum of all earth creativity, involving every kind of music or dance, etc., and the effects of this activity are transforming not just western culture – but rather every culture. (1985a:169)
Sun Ra’s parameter-less approach influenced Braxton as a young man:

[Sun Ra] would help me to understand that I could dream and think about whatever I want to think about. That...there were no parameters on what I could do...His work was trans-idiomatic long before people started thinking in terms of fusion. (ibid.)

Braxton later described a similar concept as transidiomaticism, which pertains to: “not an ethnic-centric or idiomatic-centric experience, but something that relate[s] to composite reality” (2008).

In addition to the AACM, the arrival of members of Midwestern and Western collectives significantly impacted experimental and improvised-composed musics in NYC in the 1970s. Members of UGMAA and BAG integrated African American and pan-European traditions, as well as artistic forms (e.g. theater and dance) in their work (Lewis 2004). Cornetist Lawrence “Butch” Morris, among the UGMAA musicians who came to New York, became particularly important to many of the improviser-composers detailed here.

The Creative Music Studio (CMS) also engendered an ethos that parallels the political aspirations of the African American musical collectives and individuals traced above. Ingrid Sertso, Karl Berger, and Ornette Coleman established an institute committed to inclusion and universality in Woodstock, NY in 1971. Its practitioners transgressed boundaries through transmission and performance grounded in an ethnos of “universalism” (Sweet 1987). Coleman illustrates CMS’s approach:

Any person in today’s music scene knows that rock, classical, folk, and jazz are all yesterday’s titles. I feel that the music world is getting closer to being a singular expression, one with endless musical stories of mankind. (Coleman quoted in Sweet 1987:23)

From 1971 to 1984 CMS hosted a revolving cast of faculty luminaries: Derek Bailey, David Behrman, Carla Bley, Anthony Braxton, Peter Brötzmann, John Cage, Don Cherry, Marilyn Crispell, Jack DeJohnette, and Zakir Hussain, among others (Sweet 1987:16-18). Michael Dessen argues that its, “faculty and students from a wide range of countries...move[ed] away from a

The 1980s and 90s saw the extension of these projects. In 1984 M-Base emerged as a loose collective of improviser-composers, including Graham Haynes, Cassandra Wilson, Geri Allen, Robin Eubanks, Greg Osby, and Steve Coleman. Pianist-composer Vijay Iyer asserts that M-Base’s African American members augmented the work of the AACM and Sun Ra’s Arkestra to, “resist…appropriation, explanation, or pejorative pigeonholing by the dominant culture” (1996). M-Base did this, in part, by employing diverse materials. Coleman, for example, complicates a groove sensibility by positioning it atop a 33-beat cycle in “Rhythm People” (Rhythm People Novus, 3092-2-N); he also collaborated with the Cuban folkloric group, AfroCuba de Matanzas, for his album The Sign and the Seal: Transmissions of the Metaphysics of a Culture (RCA Victor, 74321-40727-2).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s many of the predominantly white Knitting Factory scene musicians (Currie 2009:209-10; also known as the “Downtown” scene, or Downtown II (Dessen 2003)) also became preoccupied with myriad materials and forms. John Zorn, one of the scene’s most visible actors, declared that, “we should take advantage of all the great music and musicians in the world without fear of musical barriers” ([1986] 1987) in the liner notes to his album Spillane. Guitarist Joe Morris discusses his generation’s engagement in multiple traditions and defiance of categorical conventions:  

30 In a seminal article on improvisation Bruno Nettl posited that improvisation and composition might be thought of as “opposite ends of a continuum” (1974:6).  
31 David Borgo (2002) argues that: “Freedom, in the sense of transcending previous social and structural constraints, has been an important part of jazz music since its inception” (165); he goes on to delineate it as a value and practice within improvised musics.
I don’t call it creative music or free jazz or free improvisation. I prefer to call it free music because tomorrow I might play in a death metal band. My generation does that kind of stuff—people like me and William Parker and John Zorn and George Lewis…that whole group of people does all different things, and we never saw that any one of those traditions was superior to the other one. We just liked certain things. (interview 14 April 2010)

Lewis (2004) asserts, however, that while Zorn and many of his white colleagues were credited with these ideas, they were in fact presaged by the initiatives of African American music collectives.

Many of the Knitting Factory scene participants also engaged in the Radical Jewish Culture movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Tamar Barzel traces Jewish improviser-composers’ identity exploration: “the prevailing racial regimes of the 1960s positing a stark black-white binary…left secular Jews little room for ethnic or cultural identification” (2004:77). She contends that the Radical Jewish Culture idea sought a space for “white otherness” (2004:81), which the racialized binary present in New York’s Downtown music scene previously had not allowed.

The tradition of boundary erosion espoused by elder generations—and exemplified through performances, theoretical writings, and recordings—informs improviser-composers’ practice of musical multiplicity. Improviser-composers are tied to elder generations through numerous network links. They have studied and collaborated with AACM members Anthony Braxton, George Lewis, Wadada Leo Smith, Muhal Richard Abrams, as well as taken up ranks in its current chapters. They have been regular members of Steve Coleman’s Five Elements and Butch Morris’s Conduction ensembles. They have collaborated with the progenitors of the Radical Jewish Culture idea and the “Downtown” scene.

**Mentoring Individualism and Collaboration**

African American musical traditions figure significantly in the raison d’être of not only musical multiplicity, but of other shared values. Berliner (1994), Monson (1996), and Lewis (2004)
establish the importance of creativity, individualism (i.e. finding one’s own voice), and the collaborative nature of individual expression. The Afrological, as formulated by Lewis, encompasses spontaneity, freedom “through discipline, defined as technical knowledge of music theory and of one’s instrument as well as thorough attention to the background, history, and culture of one’s music” (1996:114), personal narrative, telling one’s story, and the development of one’s own “sound.” Lewis also emphasizes that a sharp dichotomy between improvisation and composition does not apply to the Afrological (ibid.).

Improviser-composers cherish individualism and collaboration, in part because their mentors affirm these principles. Transmission of these ideals takes place both inside and outside of formal institutions: at conservatories, such as NEC, and on the bandstand, such as the Vision Festival. Berliner (1994) has emphasized the significance placed on mentorship in jazz. My collaborators, in their pursuit of multiple musics, relayed similar stories of mentors emphasizing the importance of these values for their personal musical practices.

Guitarist-composer Mary Halvorson’s studies with Anthony Braxton and Joe Morris figure significantly in her espousal of individualism as a guiding principle. As a Wesleyan University undergraduate music major, she regularly took classes with Braxton. She also studied privately with Morris during this period. Her mentors influenced the development of her sensibilities:

[Morris’]’s whole thing with the lesson—and…a big part of how I teach now—is based on how he taught me because it was so important to me, was really trying to sound like myself. He was so extreme about it that he…wouldn’t play guitar in the lesson because he didn’t want me to be imitating what he was playing…He felt really strongly about musicians having their own identity and their own unique thing. I was already getting a lot of those ideas from Braxton, and maybe from myself…I wanted to have my own sound and identity. It’s really hard to say…if those were my

33 Lewis intends for the terms Afrological and Eurological to as historicizing terms that pertain to: two systems that have evolved in such divergent cultural environments…[They] refer to social and cultural location and [are] theorized here as historically emergent rather than ethnically essential, thereby accounting for the reality of transcultural and transracial communication among improvisers. (Lewis 1996:93)
own ideas or anything. I was around such creative people all the time who were doing that. So I don’t know if somebody told me, or if I just thought, ‘well, you know, Braxton’s really inspiring me and he has a totally unique thing, so I want to have a unique thing too.’ (Halvorson interview 10 March 2010; emphasis added)

Halvorson’s recollection of her formative lessons bespeaks of an individualism akin to finding one’s own voice (Monson 1996). Braxton and Morris’ teachings so pervasively impressed this ideal upon her that she conflates their origin. That she now replicates it in her teaching suggests more than facile acceptance. Taylor’s formulation of authenticity (1992) and Lewis’s notion of the Afrological (1996) appear germane here: improviser-composers venerate individualism not only through musical performance, but also through transmission.

Similarly, Braxton influenced violist-composer Jessica Pavone to take initiative and pursue her identity through music. When she visited Middletown in 2002 Braxton invited her to play in his large ensemble concert, and later, his band:

[Braxton] became a mentor after I had been playing in his band, just through working with him and listening to him speak and listening to his philosophies on life and on music…I never went to Wesleyan or took his classes…I feel he’s in some ways, musically, has raised me, you know? Even though the music I do and the music I create is very different from what he does, it’s just his outlook and his approach and his dedication to his music…I just feel the message that I’ve gotten from him is to...figure out what your thing is and do your thing…I think a lot of what I learned from that whole scene and from him [was] a lot of self-production, self-producing concerts, just not waiting for somebody to—you want to do it? You...write it and you do it. Make it happen. Make it happen. Make it happen…Do what you need to do to get your music out there—that’s what’s important—get it out there, get it out there…maybe it’s his dedication to what he does…I feel like [as a teacher] he’s encouraging people to find their thing and do their thing. I don’t feel like he’s the kind of teacher who’s trying breed people that do what he does. (Pavone interview 17 April 2010; emphasis added)

Pavone melds individualism, expressed as “doing one’s own thing,” with self-production techniques (she repeats the statement, “make it happen”). Braxton personally models self-production, for example, through his membership in the AACM and publication of the Tri-Axium writings. Finally,
he perfectly validates Pavone’s pursuit of her “own thing” by encouraging work that differs significantly from his own compositions.

After vocalist-keyboardist-composer Judith Berkson completed the classical voice degree requirements at the New England Conservatory of Music (NEC), she enrolled in Joe Maneri’s “Performance Techniques.” Maneri’s extensive knowledge of music history and theory, as well as his idealism impressed her:

[Maneri’s class] was mostly a forum for him to talk about his ideas, which were very good. And real stuff, you know…[he] was just trying to get people to think—to think and also [to]…get in touch with themselves and music—instead of it just being the institutional thing. (Berkson interview 7 November 2009; emphasis added)

Berkson contrasts Maneri’s teachings with the conservatory curricula’s conformity. Maneri encouraged self-exploration through music, a pursuit that Berkson felt the institution sometimes lacked:

You don’t hear teachers saying, ‘fuck school, hang out with your friends and make up your own shit.’ You don’t hear them say that because they can’t…that’s too dangerous to them. Only really enlightened people would say, ‘learn what we’re saying, learn your basics, but then go and do your own thing. Don’t copy.’ They don’t really say that—they should. Ditch school, play with your friends and write your own music and learn that way. (Berkson interview 31 January 2011; emphasis added)

She decries some conservatory teacher’s failure to impart to students the importance of learning through self-creation and discovery.

**The Improviser-Composer Locution**

Berkson suggests that creation and discovery are realizable through collaborative performance, i.e. “play with your friends,” and composition, i.e. “write your own music” (ibid.). In recent years it has become commonplace for NYC musicians engaged in a spectrum of musics rooted in practices of jazz, experimental, Western classical, rock, pop, and various “world musics” to refer to themselves as improviser-composers, or related variants. The self-characterization, I
submit, demonstrates the transmission of values from a generation of improviser-composers, frequently men of African American heritage, to younger generations of men and women of various heritages and backgrounds. Elder generations encourage improviser-composers to assert their individualism through not only an original performative sound, but also a body of works. The locution grants predominance to individualism realized through performance-improvisation and composition because it assumes that improviser-composers will uniquely produce original sounds and works.

Elder generations of African American improviser-composers accorded composition importance in part because of their own struggle to break away from racial essentialism. They frequently challenged stereotypes and sought recognition for their artistic endeavors beyond performance and improvisation. Racial stereotypes positioned the black body in the moment of performance, assuming improvisation to be of the body. Composition, in this formulation, is assumed to be of the mind. Generally, these stereotypes exalt the position of the mind over the body. The mind-body politic is an issue undertaken by Brother Andrew Cyprian Love. Love (2003) contextualizes the significant decline in improvisation within the Western art music tradition in the late eighteenth century. He argues that Rene Descartes’ cogito ergo sum linguistically privileges the mind over the body and undergirds common cultural and popular views that conceive of a mind-body split. The separation Love describes results in a dichotomy between composition and performance (or in other writings, between composition and improvisation). For our purposes,

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34 Locating the genesis of the improviser-composer locution lay beyond the scope of the current work; I hope to undertake such an inquiry, however, for the publication of this manuscript as a book. The practice of composition, performance, and improvisation is not in any way novel. It has a long history in African American musical traditions (including jazz and experimentalism). Twentieth-century models, to start, include Duke Ellington, Horace Silver, John Cage, Morton Feldman, Cecil Taylor, as well as in groups such as the Association for Advancement of Creative Musicians, Union of God’s Musicians Artists Ascension, Black Artists Group, Asian American Creative Music Movement. Lewis’ A Power Stronger than Itself (2008), for example, demonstrates the connectivity of improvisation and composition in the practices of AACM artists. The intervention here, however, is in the application of improviser-composer as a self description.
Love demonstrates two important points: a constructed dichotomy exists between improvisation and composition, and, that it has been expressed through Cartesian philosophy as a mind-body politic.

The historically subversive acts against racial stereotypes espoused by elder generations have carried over into younger generations’ quotidian narratives, with varying degrees of cognizance and recognition of their original meaning and purpose. Improviser-composers readily present the locution on their personal websites, publically defining and presenting themselves for fans, aficionados, fellow musicians, and commercial entities. Personal websites mirror Nicholas Cook’s observations of recording containers:

Record sleeves transcend their origins…and become part of the product, or at any rate part of the discursive framework within which the music inside them is consumed. Seen in this way, they function as agents in the cultural process, sites where meaning is negotiated through the act of consumption. (1998:106)

Improviser-composers’ personal websites do similar work: they serve to present their identities within an integrative field of graphics and text. Music and its discursive frameworks become conflated through processes of reception and consumption.

A brief survey of improviser-composers’ personal websites reveals that they actively assert themselves as improvisers-performers and composers, with grammatical and syntactical variances: (1) Trombonist and composer Jacob Garchik; (2) Judith Berkson is a New York based soprano, pianist and composer; (3) Guitarist/composer Mary Halvorson; (4) vibraphonist-composer Matt Moran. These examples consist of the improviser-composer’s name modified adjectivally and syntactically. Example (1) engages the instrumental medium conjoined to composer by “and,” followed by the musician’s name. Example (2) incorporates the musician’s name and a predicate nominative construction conjoined by the verb to be. Example (3) is comprised of the instrumental

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35 The roles of fan, musician, and commercial entity frequently overlap.
medium and composer conjoined by a simple slash, asserting a neologism; example (4) comprises a variation of this neologism, but marked by a dash.

That I refer to my collaborators as improviser-composers—and not simply performer-composers (i.e. saxophonist-composer, violist-composer)—requires some unpacking. Improviser-composers seem to assume that improvisation, or their ties to networks in which improvisation is part of the requisite skill-set, is implied simply by stating their given instrumental medium conjoined to composer. As such, they are limiting themselves to certain fields of meaning and musical networks, particularly within NYC. To illustrate the particularly local, or at least American, politics of this locution, I recently told some Danish jazz musicians about my research and they had no idea what I meant by “improviser-composer”; among NYC-based musicians, conversely, this is rarely the case. NYC-based musicians who aspire to work primarily, and sometimes even exclusively, within jazz art worlds (particularly those considered “straight-ahead”) clearly state that they are “jazz” musicians. The omission of the word improviser from this locution is observable on personal websites. In an email to the author, for example, Lehman refers to himself as such, “my work as a composer/improviser spans a lot of different traditions” (email communication 1 February 2013). He also notes that his mentors were individuals who pursue(d) both improvisation and composition.

Whether viewed collectively, or individually for linguistic nuance, all of the examples leave room for multivalence. On one hand the self-depictions denote their general vocation for uninitiated readers; on the other, they convey a set of strategic, definitional parameters and present an amalgamated identity as performers and composers. While examples (1) and (2) make use of

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36 They may or may not improvise in a given style, see Bailey [1980] 1993 and Borgo 2002.
37 See Jackson 2012 for a study of the NYC “traditional” or “straight ahead” jazz scene.
38 Other variants of the locution are cellist/improviser/composer okkyung lee [sic], and Matana (m(a)-ta-na) Roberts, saxophonist/multidisciplinary sound conceptualist.
adjectival and predicate adjectival descriptions and arguably exist within the same field of meaning as that of (3) and (4), they engage with the improviser-composer as a locution to a lesser extent than the latter two do.

Figure 1. “Steve Lehman Website.” 2011. Screenshot by author.

The portal to Steve Lehman’s website (Figure 1) features his photographic image displayed above his name and the descriptor, “saxophonist/composer.”\(^{19}\) The all lower case text of his name intimates that while the ego is important, it is presented with deference. The camera’s angle of the headshot pans upward, capturing Lehman—alto in mouth—ostensibly in a moment of concentration and foregrounding his saxophone performance as central to the presentation of himself as an artist. The visitor’s eye is immediately drawn to his name, which is centered in the frame. Both “steve” and “composer” are in a slightly darker shade of grey, which draws the eye’s attention to them secondarily. Below it, the font of “saxophonist/composer” is one-third its size and appears as secondary information:

The sheer fact of using composition to start defining in a really concrete way what your music is [is important to me]. Everybody doesn’t do that, you know: Jackie

\(^{19}\) Chris Dingman (“Chris Dingman Website” 2011) displays his name and instrument—name in all lower case letters over the words “Vibraphonist & Composer”—with striking resemblance to that of Lehman.
McLean is somebody that did that; Anthony Braxton does that; Lee Konitz is not somebody who does that...It’s not that one person is right and one person is wrong, that’s something I grab from a model like that. (Lehman interview 3 April 2011)

Lehman notes that his principle mentors placed a primacy on composition and performance as part of artistic output, areas he adheres to in his own musical practice. Several of my collaborators told similar stories of established musicians encouraging them to develop a compositional body of work, and to assert themselves as a composer in addition to their work as an improviser and performer.

Improviser-composers’ emphasis on composition has roots in notions of being taken seriously, which again, follow the logic of the Cartesian mind/body split. After multi-instrumentalist-composer Tyshawn Sorey performed a solo set of his piano compositions at the Vision Festival (2005), veteran musician and instrument builder Cooper-Moore first complimented his performance, then prodded him to assert himself as a composer. Sorey recounted Cooper-Moore’s advice:

‘The next time you perform at this festival or any other festival, you need to first let these people know that you’re a composer, because if they see you as just a sideman they’re not going to take you seriously.’ (personal communication 17 July 2012; emphasis added)

Cooper-Moore’s admonition mirrors the way he professionally presents himself, as evidenced from this self-description on his personal website:

As a composer, performer, instrument builder/designer, storyteller, teacher, mentor, and organizer, Cooper-Moore has been a major, if somewhat behind-the-scenes, catalyst in the world of creative music for over 30 years. (“Cooper-Moore Homepage” n.d.)

Cooper-Moore places a primacy on composition by listing it first among his occupations.

Braxton also encouraged Sorey to pursue authenticity of the self through composition during a recording session for Andre Vida’s Child Real Eyes (Vidatone Records, VT5):

I had a conversation with Anthony Braxton about how to begin a body of work that I actually believe in...because I had thought, 'Well, who cares? I'm just a drummer
and I'll be playing in so-called jazz bands and that's all I'm going to be doing and nobody's going to be playing my music’ and at that time, I had written six or seven more 'jazzy' sounding tunes that I didn't care for at all, because they weren't reflective of what I was hearing or experiencing.

I had given up on the idea of being a composer and Braxton said, 'Well, you should keep writing your music, because there's somebody out there who will believe in your work...Just write a book of music that you believe. You don't want to pander compositionally; you want to do what you do.' (Sorey quoted in Lehner 2012)

At that time Sorey wanted to express himself beyond jazz forms, a sentiment not lost on the former AACM member. Braxton counselled Sorey to write more fully notated and through-composed music than he had in the jazz compositions he had previously written.

Cornetist-composer Taylor Ho Bynum was also encouraged to compose early in his training. Bass trombonist Bill Lowe mentored him while still a high school student:

I was getting the sense that I wanted to do something other than classical music, very clearly. So this friend of mine who was going to Northeastern [University] was like, ‘we need an extra trumpet player in the big band; you should just come sit in Tuesday nights. It would be cool.’ Bill Lowe was the teacher of that ensemble…and he just saw that I was eager and interested so he really kind of took me under his wing…He was telling me how to be writing my own music and…leading the band and really teaching me how to do those things—teaching me how to be an improviser, how to be a band leader. So that was very, very important. (Bynum interview 16 July 2010)

Lowe stressed the importance of composition and band leading as much as improvisatory performance to Bynum.

Later as a graduate student of composition at Wesleyan, Braxton urged him to articulate his artistic goals and pursue musical projects as a leader and composer:

Taylor Ho Bynum: I’d occasionally lead a quartet up in Boston or something. But [graduate school] really first made me recognize I needed to be doing more of my own projects and composing more. Anthony [Braxton] is so good at forcing you to articulate and clarify your artistic goals. So that really made me think about what I wanted to do as a solo instrumentalist, as a bandleader, as a composer.

Amanda Scherbenske: How did he help you to articulate your artistic goals? TB: Because he would sit you down and say, ‘okay, tell me, what are your artistic goals? What are you trying to do? How are you thinking about yourself as an improviser, a solo instrumentalist? What ensembles are you thinking about? What
projects are you working on?...posing those extremely difficult questions that really forced me...to step up my discussion of it. I couldn’t just say, ‘oh, you know man, I’m just trying to like make some music.’ You couldn’t get out with a lazy answer, so that was really important. I think that was a period in which I started developing an identity as a composer-bandleader in addition to just an identity as a performer-improviser, even though it had always been there. The seeds had been planted. Even [though] my primary focus through college had really been being a composer-bandleader, but I needed that five, six years of just playing gigs, learning how to be a professional musician, learning how to function in the professional music world. But this gave me the time to then take the next step and be a bandleader-composer in the professional music world. (interview 16 July 2010)

Bynum proceeds toward the development of the self, holding leadership and composition as in higher esteem than improvisation, performance, or interpretive work. Braxton helped Bynum solidify his individual narrative: he prodded him to articulate his artistic goals.

Braxton and Cooper-Moore, African American male artists who came of age in 1960s America, had to face the challenge of what Lewis deems the “putative jazz label” (2004:67), which essentialized the musical practices of African Americans. Had these not been their circumstances, perhaps they would not stress that their students assert themselves as composers in addition to improviser-performers. In doing so, they confer respect and seriousness on composition, qualities that had not always been equally accorded to improvisation. Lewis avers that the need to assert the position of the composer or composition seems to displace, and ultimately denigrate, the position of the improviser and improvisation (Wong 2004a:280), a sentiment that seems to not have taken hold among my collaborators.

Improviser-composers rely on collective solidarities to realize artistic aspirations as bandleaders and composers, out of necessity and choice. Berkson conceives of individualism partly through interaction and engagement with others, practices encouraged by her teacher:

[Maneri] also talked about new music and how we need to encourage each other...he spoke these inspiring words, about being active and taking things into your own hands and organizing and getting your own performances and being in touch with composing for each other and listening and staying together and playing scores and all this inspiring stuff. (interview 7 November 2009; emphasis added)
Maneri’s advice coupled grass roots organization and new creation with supportive networking, mirroring his earliest musical encounters: as a youngster in Brooklyn, Maneri’s parents frequently held “musical parties” that celebrated collaborative performance among his father, a clarinetist, his mother, “a self-taught singer of opera and folk songs” (Maneri quoted in Huotari 2004), and their peers.

Violist-composer Jessica Pavone learned the importance of solidarity as a member of the Middletown Creative Orchestra (MCO) and a mentee of Braxton. She first met Braxton and some of his students when she ventured outside the confines of her conservatory environment in search of greater internal fulfillment through music:

I just wanted music to be more expressive, and there was nothing expressive about this [conservatory] education I was getting…Then this friend of mine [from Hartt School of Music] was going to Wesleyan and taking Anthony [Braxton’s] class…[He] brought me to one of Anthony’s small ensemble concerts and I was just totally blown away by the concert. I was just like, ‘What is this? This is amazing!’ It was exactly what I was looking for and I didn’t even know it…and around that time I met some students who had been studying with [Braxton] and they were putting groups together and they asked me to [join]…so I started working with Wesleyan students or students who had just graduated Wesleyan and we had all just graduated college [and were] still living in Connecticut. That was what really started to open my world of music. It occurred to me, ‘oh, I can write music.’ You know I thought, ‘well I can’t write music, I’m not a composition major.’ That’s when the MCO was happening and that was really a great thing for me because I had this outlet: if I wanted to try writing I could. It was just a supportive environment [that was] completely different from the environment I felt in school where it was like, ‘tsk, tsk: you’re wrong, you’re wrong; you’re doing it wrong. Sit in the back of the section, your bowing is wrong.’ I just grew up being frightened to death. Going to the MCO was like, ‘whatever you want to try, let’s try it. Great. It’s awesome’…It just kind of grew from there and then I started writing my own music and then I got more serious about composition. (Pavone interview 17 April 2010; emphasis added)

Pavone’s engagement with the MCO inspired her to try her hand at composition. She learned to trust herself as a composer through reliance on a cohort of like-minded MCO peers. She gained

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40 Pavone studied music education and viola performance at the Hartt School of Music from 1994 to 1998.
confidence to attempt the unknown and cast feared “imperfections” aside with her MCO peers. The MCO prized process over product, mirroring their mentor’s adage: “the ‘how’ becomes more important than the ‘it’” (Braxton 2008).

Improviser-composers demonstrate their reliance on collaborators by positioning, and ultimately, defining themselves vis-à-vis their collaborators on personal websites:

since moving to new york in 2000, she has performed and recorded with numerous artists such as laurie anderson, carla bozulich, john butcher, nels cline, chris corsano, axel dörner, john edwards, carlos giffoni, vijay iyer, urs leimgruber, thurston moore, ikue mori, lawrence d. “butch” morris, evan parker, wadada leo smith, tyshawn sory, c spencer yeh and john zorn to name a few. [sic] (Okkyung Lee Personal Website “About” http://okkyung.wordpress.com/about/ accessed on 28 November 2012)

Okkyung Lee insists that her musical relationships are egalitarian by listing her collaborators alphabetically.

Halvorson first states her work as a leader, then as a sideperson:

Guitarist/composer Mary Halvorson has been active in New York since 2002, following jazz studies at Wesleyan University and the New School…In addition to her longstanding trio, featuring bassist John Hébert and drummer Ches Smith, and her quintet, which adds trumpeter Jonathan Finlayson and alto saxophonist Jon Irabagon, Ms. Halvorson also co-leads a chamber-jazz duo with violist Jessica Pavone, the avant-rock band People and the collective ensembles Thumbscrew, Reverse Blue and Secret Keeper. She is also an active member of bands led by Tim Berne, Anthony Braxton, Taylor Ho Bynum, Tomas Fujiwara, Curtis Hasselbring, Ingrid Laubrock, Myra Melford, Marc Ribot, Tom Rainey and Matthew Welch among others. (Mary Halvorson Personal Website “Bio” http://www.maryhalvorson.com/bio/ accessed 28 November 28, 2012)

She lists the ensembles for which she is the sole leader/composer before those for which she is a collaborative leader/composer, granting precedence to the former. This is followed by her collaborations with established and peer-group improviser-composers alphabetically.

Lehman and Sorey, closely linked by musical, friendship and institutional ties, approach referencing collaborators on personal websites similarly:

As a percussionist, trombonist, and pianist, Tyshawn has performed and/or recorded nationally and internationally with his own ensembles and with artists such as Muhal Richard Abrams, Steve Coleman, Butch Morris, Peter Evans, Roscoe Mitchell, Misha Mengelberg, John Zorn, Vijay Iyer, Wadada Leo Smith, Dave Douglas, Anthony Braxton, Steve Lehman, and Tim Berne, among many others. (Tyshawn Sorey Personal Website “Bio” http://www.tyshawnsorey.net/html/about.php accessed 28 November 28, 2012)

Lehman and Sorey first mention work with their own ensembles. This is followed by, in Lehman’s case, an alphabetical list comprised of about half elder generation and half peer-group collaborators. Sorey, alternatively, names collaborators neither alphabetically nor generationally; instead, he seems to list his collaborators in a stream-of-consciousness order.

Garchik takes a similar stance, mentioning collaborators in a stream-of-consciousness order:

As a trombonist Jacob [Garchik] has worked with many of the luminaries of the avant-garde, including Anthony Braxton, Anthony Coleman, Joe Maneri, Frank London, James Tenney, Josh Roseman, Don Byron, Terry Reilly, George Lewis, and Billy Martin. He has also played in ensembles led by rising artists such as Mary Halvorson, Dan Weiss, Miguel Zenon, and Steve Lehman. (Jacob Garchik Personal Website “Bio” http://www.jacobgarchik.com/bio.html accessed 28 November 28, 2012)

Garchik, however, includes his collaborations with established artists first, followed by those in his peer group. He categorizes his collaborators his elder as, “luminaries of the avant-garde”; it is important to note for our purposes, however, that they traverse scenes and art worlds such as jazz, new music, klezmer, and gospel, among others.
Conclusion

Improviser-composers’ listing or naming of collaborators on personal websites is significant for several reasons. First, improviser-composers attempt to guide the reader’s understanding of them and their work. They do not list collaborators ad infinitum; rather, they strategically locate themselves alongside established experts and peers, providing a snapshot of the way(s) they would like others to interpret their strategic network. Improviser-composers, in strategically naming collaborators, draw attention to: their work with prestigious actors; and their close musical and aesthetic ties. The peer-group collaborators listed may also signify those with whom they consider themselves musically and personally the closest. In so doing, improviser-composers narrow the aesthetic field(s) in which they wish to situate themselves. When improviser-composers show their connections to particular expert and established collaborators, they seek to transfer the symbolic capital accorded the listed collaborator to themselves. Sorey, in drawing attention to his work with Muhal Richard Abrams, suggests that the two overlap aesthetically and that his competency merits work with Abrams.

On one hand, positioning oneself vis-à-vis one’s associates is related to the tradition of boundary erosion discussed earlier in the chapter. Like the tradition of boundary erosion, the improviser-composer locution was inspired by an ambition to move away from musical essentialism according to race. Improviser-composers all have all engaged in practices of performance and improvisation prior to composition. None of my collaborators started off their life in music as a composer. Most frequently, elder African American artists have encouraged younger generations of improviser-composers to undertake self-realization through composition (in addition to their performance practice). Many of the available grants, even in the field of jazz (e.g. Chamber Music America’s “New Jazz Works” grant), support a work of art rather than the art of improvisation.
Braxton and Cooper-Moore, among others, stress the importance of composition to improviser-composers in formative stages of musical development. They encouraged Sorey to assert himself as a composer. Braxton encouraged Bynum to compose and assert his artistic goals via language and music. Braxton encouraged Pavone to self-produce and pursue her own aesthetics. Improviser-composers’ mentors may attach different meanings and political ambitions to the designation composer than their mentees may. This locution positions younger improviser-composers of various heritages vis-à-vis a tradition spearheaded mostly by men of African American heritage. It itself serves as a point of self-definition and shared belonging.

On the other, the improviser-composer locution emphasizes the precedence of individualism among improviser-composers. Rather than listing a category, such as genre, the person listed takes the place of said categories. Improviser-composers employ collaborations to do the work that style and genre do in other musicultural fields. Returning to Samson’s definition of genre, which, “make[s] knowledge both manageable and persuasive...[and] close[s] or finalize[s], our experience” (2010), we see that among improviser-composers, collaborators are listed on websites as points of definition, partly replacing the nomenclature that genre-definition does in other art worlds. Readers may finalize their understanding of a given improviser-composer through knowledge and assumptions about their collaborators. Improviser-composers define and present themselves through personal websites that then become part of the larger discursive framework for understanding them and their work. Websites serves as a primary place for improviser-composers to strategically assert their collaborations.

Improviser-composers express shared belonging, in spite of ostensible diversity, through common sensibilities. They stem from cumulative experiences in music frequently mentored by elder generations of experimental musicians. Ultimately, collaborations and multiplicity are usually practiced to realize the self. Improviser-composers value collaborations, in part, because they help
them realize their individual artistry. While sensibilities are mentored, they are not facilely donned; rather, improviser-composers assert their engagement with them through their personal websites, artistic statements, and pedagogy, while maintaining unique versions of them. Morris and Braxton influenced Halvorson to develop her “own sound and identity.” Maneri encouraged Berkson to musically explore through composition and collegial collaboration. While Halvorson and Berkson were both taught to value individualism, they articulate it differently.

Berkson was also mentored to realize the self through collaborative work. Pavone gains confidence through collaborative engagement and learned to embrace musical exploration and process from her MCO peers. Elder generations frequently mentor improviser-composers to seek recognition for their compositions and to assert themselves not only as improviser/performers, but also as composers. In the next chapter I discuss how punctualized formations of space engender shared musical and social places among NYC art worlds.
Chapter 2: Shared Place(s):

New York City and the Struggle for Space

Since at least the last decades of the nineteenth century, lower Manhattan,\(^{41}\) and more recently north Brooklyn,\(^{42}\) have hosted manifold cultural and artistic movements. Harbored within a vast array of performance spaces, and sketched broadly, lower Manhattan has served as a stage for the literary Bohemians of the late the nineteenth century, the Tin Pan Alley musicians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,\(^{43}\) the Dada artists of the 1910s and 1920s, the Abstract Expressionists, the Beat writers and beboppers of the post-war period, the free jazz musicians, Fluxus artists and Neo-Dadaists of the 1960s, the New Wave, Punk, “Downtown,” and hip-hop scenes of the 1970s and 1980s, and the Radical Jewish Culture movement of the 1990s.\(^{44}\) The majority of these artistic movements have been situated in neighborhoods subject to periods of economic downturn and depopulation. Manhattan’s Lower East Side\(^ {45}\) (LES) is an area-space that historically housed many of the musical and artistic movements underpinning contemporary improviser-composers’ practices, as well as an area long fraught with contestations of space.

The area’s recent musical history relevant for contemporary improviser-composers began with Cecil Taylor’s, Thelonious Monk’s, and Ornette Coleman’s extended engagements at the Five Spot in 1956, 1957, and 1959, respectively (Spellman [1966; 1970] 2004:9-11; 67-68; Kelley

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\(^{41}\) For my purposes Lower Manhattan is defined as below 14th Street.

\(^{42}\) The majority of improviser-composers whom I have worked with live in Brooklyn. It now represents an important site for the performance of experimental musics.

\(^{43}\) Tin Pan Alley refers to the area of West 28th Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues in Manhattan.

\(^{44}\) For an historical overview of musical and artistic movements in lower Manhattan see Stansell (2000), Barzel (2004), and Currid (2007). Commensurately important, but beyond the scope of this chapter, are the popular imaginings evocative of cultural and artistic associations of this area-space.

\(^{45}\) The Lower East Side is home to The Stone as well as countless other defunct and operative venues. Historically the LES has been a largely ethnic-based neighborhood with its own lore, described here in romantic terms by Scott Currie: “Throughout most of its history, New York City’s Lower East Side has served as a geographical metonym for the dangerous but alluring Other that haunts the racially, ethnically, and socio-economically structured imaginary of respectable bourgeois society” (2009:163). From the late nineteenth century onward, it was home to Italian, Jewish, Central European, Puerto Rican, Dominican, and East Asian immigrant communities (Diner (2000); Mele (2000:133-40); Schwartz and Abeles (1973:10-14)).
beginning in 1962 (Szwed 1998:218-28). The area’s relevant economic history began with the end of the Bretton Woods Agreement in 1973,46 “the rapid escalation in oil prices, precipitated by the reactions to the 1973 Arab-Israeli War” (Abu Lughod 1994:1) left the City’s economy in disarray. Further, the New York’s fiscal crisis and decrease in tax arrears’ property repossession from three years to one year caused LES real estate to suffer from arson and building abandonment (Abu Lughod 1994:2). The City was left with ownership of hundreds of vacant lots and apartment buildings. In spite of these downward trends, “sources of new boom” (ibid.) emerged. The expansion of jobs in finance, law, insurance, information, and administration, as well as an efflorescence of subcultural artistic movements eventually led to the area’s revival, and subsequently, to an escalation of real estate prices.

The stock market crash of late 1987 abruptly halted this real estate boom, and led to the City’s next great downturn. The situation only worsened following the 1990-91 national recession: the area’s development of local properties by private entities declined, and population of homeless persons increased (Abu Lughod 1994:4). One year later LES neighbors congregated to fight gentrification, despite emerging “cleavages between squatters and housing reformers that separated the united front” (Abu Lughod 1994:9-10). These actions resulted in Community Board 3 (an appointed body of 50 residents with advisory powers over land use decisions for the LES (ibid.)), and the Joint Planning Council (main group for reformers) whose, “goal was to minimize gentrification by outsiders while maximizing the number of rehabilitated units of affordable housing” (ibid.).

Contributors to From Urban Village to East Village: The Battle for New York’s Lower East Side trace the themes of reform, resistance, and real estate from the area’s early manufacturing economy

46 The Bretton Woods Agreement pegged international trade to the USD from 1944 to 1973 (Abu-Lughod 1994).
of the early twentieth century to its largely service-based economy of the late twentieth century. While its contributors’ period under consideration only extends to the early 1990s, they make two lasting points relevant not only for the LES, but for urban areas in general:

Increasingly, neighborhoods in the central zones of our largest cities no longer fit the old model ‘ethnic enclaves’ or ‘urban villages.’ Many no longer constitute—if indeed they ever did—natural communities where residents share a common culture and pursue a relatively unified set of interests vis-à-vis outsiders. (Abu-Lughod 1994:5)

Likewise, the venues I examine are in neighborhoods that consist of neither single ethnic communities, nor unified socio-economic strata. Even if we were able to fully account for diversity of races, ethnicities, religions, and incomes of area residents, the improviser-composers, aficionados, and cultural arbiters who inhabit these spaces frequently come from near and far, complicating our understandings of individual and group relationships to place.

Second, Abu-Lughod asserts that cycles of:

abandonment, arson and disinvestment, with the processes of reinvestment and ‘gentrification,’ and with community battles over who shall occupy and control given center-city neighborhoods are not unique to the Lower East Side. (1994:5)

Applied broadly, they assume similar points in question for the Manhattan and Brooklyn neighborhoods home to numerous improviser-composers and their performance haunts. As a general rule, artistic activities flourish in areas that are undergoing disinvestment. Under such conditions fledgling artists and proprietors take advantage of affordable housing and studio rents. This, in turn, allows artists to devote more time to music and less time on second jobs.47

Compared with other American cities, New York has had a particularly volatile history of real estate re/investments processes.

The venues examined here reside in the neighborhoods of the LES, Park Slope, and Gowanus. These neighborhoods, representing only a fraction of areas and spaces harboring

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improviser-composers, have been selected for the particular venues that they house. Just as the types, styles, and genres of the musics that my collaborators make, perform, and compose are multiple, so are the contexts and performance spaces that serve as the places where these musics ephemerally transform, vivify, and take on social meaning. On one night I attended a concert at a Chelsea loft, on another I found myself at a West Village café, in the basement of a Ditmas Park bar, or in a curtained-off back room of a Park Slope bar.

Given these conditions, consider for a moment the places of live performance as shifting constellations in a temporally flexible galaxy. Luminosities of individual stars vacillate—sometimes unpredictably—while their overall longevities vary considerably. Following this metaphor, the stars symbolize the numerous venues that open and close. They represent variation of impact and energy, some having more importance as sites of performance and social life than others. Depending on their endurance, radiance, and significance, they ultimately shift the larger picture of contexts for improviser-composers’ musics. At the present time, improviser-composers do not have a “home-base,” a sole, utopian venue where everyone performs regularly, interacts socially, and shows up to fulfill professional obligations. Scott Currie notes bassist William Parker’s itinerant, borough and neighborhood-crossing performance patterns during the late 1970s “loft jazz period:”

While many of the elder, more established players on the scene – and a few of their younger protégés – tended to become closely associated with particular lofts, some young musicians like bassist William Parker instead followed professional trajectories that took them on daily tours of the loft scene, tracing out song-lines through its musically defined urban geography. (2009:177)

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48 I take my definitions of space and place from anthropology, whereby space accounts for the physical area and place is space rendered meaningful through sociability; see Feld and Basso (1996) and Bennett (2004)).

49 Further, Lewis’ (2008) problematization of the erasure of persons of color in both “Uptown” and “Downtown” New York art worlds unveils the potentially racist implications of the unqualified use of these terms and the residual problems with dividing NYC art worlds in this manner.

50 This may be contrasted, however, with historically creative circles in NYC, such as punk rock’s location around CBGB’s during the 1970s or experimental music’s location around Tonic from 1998 through 2007.
Similarly, live performances occur on any and every night of the week, throughout New York, its surrounding areas, and beyond.  

Extending the metaphor, the life cycles of venues may be paralleled to stellar evolution: their duration varies by mass and energy, with classifiable types including red supergiants, red giants, main-sequences, and white dwarfs (from greatest to smallest; Lutgens and Tarbuck 2005). Likewise, the spaces that accommodate musical experimentalism and multiplicity function as social networking, community, and performance places undergoing cycles of formation, maintenance, and closure. Still, the venues themselves are far less subject to the laws of physics and the universe than they are to the laws of economics and cycles of investment and disinvestment as demonstrated by Abu-Lughod (1994).

Proprietors and a seemingly limitless number of musicians compete for a circumscribed number of performance spaces, opportunities, and audience members. Media coverage and consumer flow, too, coincide with musical performance and social interaction at venues. In order for musicians to economically and musically sustain themselves, they perform in multiple contexts. They do not play exclusively at the clubs detailed below. Because of this, improviser-composers inveigh meaning beyond the quotidian in these and other more luminescent locales, which serve as meaningful sites of creative incubation. The common aesthetic and network ties of those who frequent these venues leads to shared belonging within these places.

Local Formations of Place

The following case studies of venues in lower Manhattan and Brooklyn (three in operation and one defunct) illustrate a variety of funding strategies and localized aesthetic formations. The promise of offering what economists refer to as low barriers to entry whereby, “the only

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51 See Currid’s (2007) discussion of nightlife and the arts in NYC.
requirement to participate in the cultural economy is being creative” (Currid 2007:12), greatly appeals to musicians of multifarious stripes, yet remains a challenge for venue proprietors. Conditions for low barriers to entry include spaces where “gatekeepers and fledgling artists are able to engage in the same spaces” (ibid.). The venues I detail below by and large are ones that had low barriers to entry during the years that this generation of improviser-composers began their careers. Improviser-composers still perform in these venues nowadays; they are as likely, however, to perform in venues that are considered to have greater prestige within jazz and new music art worlds.

Conditions that historically and currently serve as fertile ground for creative circles are typically located in areas of disinvestment, initially making the rents affordable to musical subcultures that do not always produce immediate financial returns. This is particularly significant for club owners and not-for-profit entities whose entry fees go directly to the musicians. As Currid (2007) and Lloyd (2006) observe, the success of an area’s creative circles and musical subcultures greatly influences its return to times of reinvestment. As neighborhoods reenter periods of reinvestment, formidable economic obstacles challenge venue proprietors’ maintenance of musical spaces. Venue proprietors, nonetheless, frequently contest these obstacles. They remain true to their individual aesthetics, as well as personal, professional, and musical ties.

Each venue, through its modus operandi, owners, and investors, assumes localized practices and aesthetics. Their espousal of the values of individualism, collaboration, and musical multiplicity (see Chapter 1) helps define how they function as improviser-composers’ performance places, as well as overlaps with those of the improviser-composers they host. These values, while maintained and developed by community members and musical gatekeepers, do not always yield

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52 For now I will not interrogate what constitutes “creativity.”
53 Two exemplary junctions host to high levels of creativity referenced by Currid include, “the East Village art movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s and... the Abstract Expressionism of the 1950s” (2007:12).
direct economic benefits. Instead, they are often an unpopular voice during periods of investment, when the application of aesthetic principles may significantly impact business, or for not-for-profits, the ability to maintain overhead costs. These perennial economic obstacles present in operating venues housing improviser-composers recently have led to the foundation of new funding models; they combine top-down and grass roots financing, D.I.Y. strategies, as well as rely on social networks laboring in solidarity, particularly in times of perceived duress.

Improviser-composers’ shared sensibilities and strategies for maintaining creative places in NYC are inspired by and linked to African American grass roots initiatives. The AACM and other organizations committed to self-actualization and advancement, hosting DIY concerts during the late 1960s to early 1980s. Michael Heller discusses the role of loft spaces:

The lofts were a network of musician-organized spaces that served a variety of functions. Depending on circumstances, lofts could serve as rehearsal halls, classrooms, art galleries, living quarters or meeting spaces. Their most visible role, however, was as public performance venues, especially for younger members of the jazz avant. As few nightclubs regularly featured experimental styles, the lofts became an important base for a growing community of young improvisers. When musicians couldn’t find gigs in the city’s ever-shrinking club scene they could often arrange a performance at a loft—though circumstances were sometimes less than ideal. (2012:3-4)

Currie observes that these networks inspired William Parker’s organization of pre-Vision Festival activities:

The do-it-yourself ethos of the loft scene certainly made its mark on Parker, who had begun organizing ensembles and concerts at the Third World Cultural Center, and soon launched his first initiatives as musician-organizer on the Lower East Side loft scene. Parker recalls staging festivals, together with kindred musical spirits like Billy Bang, at lofts and clubs including Someplace Nice and the Nuyorican Village, beginning as early as 1977. (2009:181)

The venues detailed below serve similar functions for NYC improviser-composers, as well advance personalized aesthetics and musical affinities.
The Stone est. 2005
Ave. C & 2nd St., LES, Manhattan

Tyshawn [Sorey] and I pull up to the corner of Ave. C and 2nd Street, about an hour before the Stone’s monthly fundraising performance. Midwinter, the space feels chilly enough for me to keep my down-filled coat on inside before the audience’s bodies warm the space. Peter Gannushkin’s 54 several dozen black and white photographs that dot the north wall and three of the walls inside the lavatory are one of the most visually striking aspects of the space. The walls alternate between exposed brick, recently whitewashed, and those covered by dark velvet, sound-absorbent curtains. I’m beginning to consider the IKEA chairs framing the stage-area as “ubiquitous” to limited-budget New York City experimental haunts. The performance area is marked by a Yamaha baby grand, a beaten-up drum set atop a tattered rug, and several other pieces of backline. Behind it stands the self-constructed restroom, unavailable for use during performances. (Although I have seen Sorey use it as an additional part of his percussion set-up.)

The musicians sound the first notes without most of the audience noticing that they are “starting”—people’s conversations carried on for about a minute before everyone realized that the performance had commenced. This differs from the framing of the majority of performances I attend during my fieldwork, which are usually preceded by a brief introduction of the performers. Now, the musicians make their presence known by filling the space with sound. Tyshawn Sorey (percussion), Shanir Blumenkranz (contrabass), and Bryan Marcel (piano) play for about one and a half minutes. After the applause they quickly head down to the basement, which serves as The Stone’s “green room.” Next, Zorn appears on stage donning camouflage pants, t-shirt, half-open hooded sweatshirt, slippers, and tzitzit; he remarks to Jim Staley, “So much for that [paying for The Stone’s monthly rent through the proceeds of the benefit concert].”

Cyro Baptista (percussion) opens with pulsating breaths into the microphone. Marcel and Blumenkranz follow suit by strumming piano keys with house keys and bowing bass strings col legno, respectively. Now Baptista grabs his megaphone and starts reciting what sound to me like a mix of nonsense syllables and his native Portuguese. It seems as though his younger peers are just trying to keep up with the middle-aged Baptista, as he moves from instrument to instrument traversing the space. Marcel and Blumenkranz seem to wait for Baptista, the unofficial, yet obvious leader, to move before they react. As Baptista declares, “My pants are falling down” the audience behind me laughs with gusto. He then grabs the jaw harp, playing it directly into the microphone—Marcel is laughing now too. I enjoy how Baptista likes to play the space, and his body. This is the first time I have observed a lot of (well-received) laughter in The Stone—or any space of the like. Performers and audiences alike generally take these musics seriously.

The following highlight the range of techniques, traditions, and references invoked throughout the remainder of the evening: Erik Friedlander (cello) lays down a bass line, while Zorn (alto saxophone) and Jim Staley (trombone) overlay it with rhythmically fast, dodecaphonic melodic lines; Zorn and Sorey explore multiphonic and overtone logics with reeds (circular breathing) and bowed cymbals; Friedlander, Blumenkranz, and Marcel, compared with Zorn and Sorey, sound like a quiet chamber music configuration, underpinning ethereal sounds with late “Romantic” period harmonies; Friedlander explores chordal formations through unaccompanied Bach-style cello bowings. The evening brings together individuals who share certain sensibilities, but whose abilities, training, and reference points are greatly diverse. (Field notes 28 December 2010)

54 Gannushkin is well known for his photographic compositions of NYC “downtown” musicians.
In April of 2005 John Zorn opened The Stone as a not-for-profit performance space in the Lower East Side because he perceived a lack of venues “dedicated to the EXPERIMENTAL and AVANT-GARDE” (The Stone Website n.d.). He conceived of its launch as, “more a matter of
necessity...It seemed like something really needed to happen. I felt like I really didn't have a choice” (Zorn quoted in Fitzell 2005). In doing so he invoked an existential view commonly held among improviser-composers—that the music itself maintains its own being. Zorn denotes its autonomous status: “What this music needs is a space—an art space, a performance space that is just there for the music” (ibid.), referenced here first by the demonstrative adjective “this,” and later by the definite article “the.” Zorn took responsibility for the music’s perceived “need.”

To realize a space commensurate with his vision, he initially invested $80,000 to launch The Stone. Despite his considerable wherewithal, he also relied heavily on his personal network of contacts and friends within a community of artists and other individuals supportive of his concept for “the scene.” They assisted him with finding an affordable locale and launching the venue within a circumscribed budget. A long-time friend of Zorn’s owns the building housing The Stone; it thus has weathered the exponential rent increases that have affected many other businesses in its prime East Village real estate location. Currie observes that The Stone is the only remaining venue that, “anchor[s] New York’s jazz avant-garde in the Lower East Side neighborhoods from which it emerged” (2009:222).

The Stone sustains itself through private donations, the sale of Tzadik limited edition albums, maintenance of a volunteer staff, and well-known New York improvisers and improviser-composers’ monthly fundraising concerts. A roster of volunteers manages shows by taking admissions, opening and closing the space, and sometimes selling compact discs on behalf of the venue and the musicians. Zorn encourages volunteers and artists to help operate the venue for, “the community and their love of the music” (Zorn quoted in email to Sorey 2009). By funding the overhead costs in this manner, the artists receive 100% of door admissions (usually $10 per person

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55 See Janeczko (2009) for a study of John Zorn’s record label, Tzadik.
56 Previously this was a paid position held by multiinstrumentalist-composer Matthew Welch.
In addition to these financially supportive measures, Zorn has been financially “floating” the venue within a “tight” budget since its inception (Zorn email correspondence 2 February 2011). He is now nearly in the black on his investment because of his meticulous management. By financially maintaining the venue in these ways, he hopes that artists will have a space where they can, as summarized by Fitzell, “foster an atmosphere for taking chances and experimenting musically” (2005).

His selection of monthly curators serves as an extension of his personal aesthetic leanings. Sensibility-wise, he maintains that, “[e]veryone is different. I look for quality, originality, honesty, imagination, dedication, responsibility, [and] integrity” (ibid.). Read through the lens of values (see Chapter 1), rather than strictly musicological or economic aspects, I suggest that originality manifests itself as an articulation of the importance placed on individualism among improviser-composers. The space’s mounted photographs of individual improviser-composers outlining the main wall facing the entrance and inside the restroom demonstrate a minimalist décor as well as confer respect on these artists as individuals (Figure 3).

The tradition of jazz photography inspired Zorn’s decoration of the Stone in this way:

I had always seen photos of [John] Coltrane, Miles Davis, [Keith] Jarrett, Elvin Jones, [Pat] Metheny etc. on the walls of jazz clubs and thought it would be an important statement to put photos of our own scene on the walls of The Stone. To make it fair I chose to mount photos of the musicians who were Stone curators. Peter [Gannushkin] had the largest collection of these photographs and was amenable to letting us use them, so it seemed a good direction. (Zorn email correspondence 2 February 2011)

He simultaneously asserts a connection to a jazz lineage and the “Great Men of Jazz” narratives, while conversely distancing himself from it by asserting his own lineage. In speaking of our own scene, he invokes the collective solidarities of several generations of NYC improvisers and

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57 The Stone’s seating capacity is ca. 75. Audience size depends upon the popularity of the performer(s) and the promotion of the event; it varies greatly, ranging from a handful of people to over-exceeding its capacity.

58 See Wolff et al. (1995), Tanner (2006), Robinson and Young (2008), and Pinson (2010).
improviser-composers. He distances their position from other New York City art worlds, including neo-traditionalist jazz practices, by modifying scene with the possessive pronoun “our.” Moreover, the inclusion of women and the multiple races represented through the photographs on the walls mark an obvious deviation from his reference to the stereotypical composition of “The Great Men of Jazz” narratives. Further, they indicate the diversity of contemporary improviser-composers as well as Zorn’s conscientious decision to embrace a politics of inclusion among contemporary improviser-composers.59

Values frequently expressed as creativity, individualism, and finding one’s “own voice” abound within jazz discourses, ideas well established by Berliner (1994), Lewis (1996), and Monson (1996). Jazz—and its assumed commitment to individualism—takes up aesthetic space at The Stone, as evidenced through Zorn’s verbal acknowledgement and selection of photographs, highlights individual artists over ensembles, collectives or groups. Indeed, Gannushkin’s photographic archive includes hundreds of group and ensemble shots in addition to the shots of individuals present at The Stone, making Zorn’s selection not an arbitrary one. Further, the artists gracing the walls of The Stone are arguably as entrenched in and indebted to musical collaborations as they are to their own individualism through self-determination.

IBeam est. 2008
168 7th St., Gowanus, Brooklyn

After observing a rehearsal led by Michele Rosewoman at Roulette, I head out to 7th Street in Gowanus for a performance by the Jacob Garchik Trio at IBeam. The further I walk from the 9th St. subway stop, I become increasingly uneasy with the emptiness of the streets: there are no people within view and the shops in the vicinity seem to have gone out of business or do not operate after dark. The closer I come to the actual location, the more I think I’m lost. There are few signs of inhabitation in the largely industrialized Gowanus section of Brooklyn. As I reach the street address I had jotted down for IBeam, I feel relieved to spot a small computer-printed sign affixed with masking tape to the street entrance door that reads “IBEAM.” It is unlikely I would

59 Zorn is an important artistic figure and entrepreneur for improviser-composers. He models a DIY approach in many endeavors; e.g., his creation of the record label Tzaddik, hosting of house concerts, and publication and editing of a series of books entitled, Arcana: Musicians on Music.
have happened across it had I not known about this site prior to coming here. I wonder whether this is simply due to a low budget, or whether it signifies a particular aesthetic choice: perhaps the two exist hand-in-glove?

Particularly because my first visit to IBeam follows an observation of a rehearsal at Roulette, the differences between the two venues are striking. Funding-wise, Roulette appears to be an endowed institution, located in an easily accessible location. IBeam, in contrast, seems to be operating within a much lower budget. Its industrial carpeting, “un-exposed” brick covered by layers of paint, and brown, green, purple and blue sound tiles that polka-dot the walls give the place a DIY feel. Prior to coming here I thought that perhaps the photos on its website under-represented its size. Not so; except for its high ceilings, it is compact. It appears to be a former loft converted into two main rooms separated by a partial wall. A small table for doing business and a couch fill the entry space; folding chairs from IKEA set in rows divide to form a makeshift aisle.

The space takes on an intimate feel inhabited by individuals who are musically and socially in-the-know as the performers’ friends and acquaintances file in. I count thirteen audience members at the start of the performance, shortly after the musicians intone the opening phrases a couple more people enter and take a seat in the back row. The audience members are strikingly similar in their appearance—all “white,” nearly all male (except for myself, Jacob Sacks’s girlfriend, and Judith Berkson). A twenty-something man stands behind the partial wall with his recording equipment set up. A few minutes past 8:00 p.m. Jacob Garchik tells the audience, “Ben Gerstein said he’s going to show up.” As I later found out Gerstein came to film the performance. So in addition to myself, there were several other documenters on hand. (Field notes 10 April 2010)

Figure 4. Jacob Sacks, Jacob Garchik, and Dan Weiss (left to right) at IBeam. Brooklyn, New York. 2010. Photo by author.

Trombonist Brian Drye had lived and worked in New York as a musician and private lessons teacher for nearly ten years when he decided to search for a rental unit that could function

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60 At the time of this writing Roulette was located at 20 Greene Street in the SoHo neighborhood of Manhattan. It relocated to 509 Atlantic Avenue in Downtown Brooklyn in the fall of 2011.

61 Since the time of this writing IBeam has undergone remodeling: the industrial carpet has been removed and replaced by a beautiful hardwood floor and the makeshift wall separating the space has been torn down, resulting in both visual and sonic improvements.

62 Captions in all the figures refer to individuals from left to right.
as a teaching and a rehearsal space. He located (with the help of one of his music students specializing in commercial real estate) a suitable unit at 168 7th St. in Gowanus, Brooklyn. He and Allyssa Lamb, a fellow musician and music teacher, subsequently shared the costs of leasing and making the unit operational, incurring approximately $7,000 of credit card debt:

We didn’t take a small business loan. If I had it to do all over again [that’s] what we probably would do. We basically just borrowed the money on a credit card and opened it up…we needed to pay a bunch of rent up front. (Drye interview 26 April 2010)

Following their initial investment, one of the biggest tasks came in organizing and constructing IBeam as a multifunctional space. This entailed a great deal of carpentry work done primarily by Drye, occasionally assisted by fellow improviser-composers and friends, Oscar Noriega and Michael Hirst. The construction of walls for the bathroom shell and the large wall separating the main space from the entryway, installation of sound baffles, and refinishing of the floors was completed on a shoestring budget, “I did a lot of [construction] work because I didn’t really have a lot of money to have a good plan. I sort of did everything off the cuff” (ibid.).

The other significant challenge lay in creating a scheduling system that would match their vision for IBeam as a membership-run space. They realized that to do so efficiently they needed to develop an organizational structure that would meet the needs of the ever-changing schedules of musicians, “Musicians’ schedules are very flexible. They may be available certain days of the week for a while and then all of a sudden they’re never available” (ibid.). Drye hired a computer programmer to design a scheduling program that would allow members to book and un-book the space as needed, “it’s sort of like a zip car of rehearsal spaces, so that everyone has a login and they get their own number of allotted slots and they can reserve and unreserved as they wish” (ibid.).

Drye relayed to me that Lamb is largely a “silent,” i.e. financial, partner in operating IBeam. As such, this account represents Drye’s perspective on its management.
This contrasts with the way Zorn runs his venue: he operates a performance space for the good of the community, while arbitrating its aesthetics through the selection of monthly curators.

Upon opening, a steady stream of fellow Brooklyn-based creative musicians became members. They largely comprised Drye’s acquaintances and friends: alto saxophonist Matt Blostein, vocalist Yoon Sun Choi, trumpeters Shane Endsley, Rich Johnson, Kirk Knuffke and Nate Wooley, guitarist Jon Goldberger, pianist Jacob Sacks, bassists Geoff Kraly and Eivind Opsvik, and drummers Harris Eisenstadt and Vinnie Sperrazza. The members, according to All About Jazz’s Tom Greenland, “have all played active roles as monthly renters, resident artists and/or performers” (2009). From the start, members paid $75 per month for a minimum six-month membership; the membership allows access to letting out slots of rehearsal and teaching time. IBeam’s reliance on membership for covering overhead costs speaks to not only its grass roots funding model, but also a mutual collaborative model engendering solidarity.

Although Drye initially envisioned IBeam for teaching and rehearsing purposes, his participation in a number of overlapping genres and scenes in which, “the majority of my focus is on improvised music and creative music” (Drye interview 26 April 2010) made him acutely aware of the shortage of performance venues for these types of music. Drye identified a lacuna that IBeam could potentially fill, “Primarily it was my idea to open it up as a venue because I happen to be in the world of musicians that need places to play. So since we were so desperate for a place to play, this place works” (ibid.). Thus, by September of that first year he had also ventured into the milieu of venue management and maintenance, and began granting members and non-members access to a new performance space.

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64 In our interview Drye noted his participation and performance of “everything from an improvising chamber group, my own…quartet [for] guitar, trombone, drums and trumpet…a big band called the Four Bags…I also play a lot of world music [and] a lot of klezmer music” (telephone interview 26 April 2010).
Members are charged $25 to put on concerts; non-members with personal connections to Drye are charged $75; non-members who have neither personal ties nor music familiar to Drye are charged $175. He maintains that the non-members who have personal connection to him are given discounted rates because, “we really believe in their music and it works really well in the space” (ibid.). These fees all fund IBean’s upkeep, including rental payments and maintenance of musical and functional equipment. Drye informed me that the concerts create, “revenue and also giv[e] people a place to play. Most people put on an evening with two groups [in order to] split the cost” (ibid.). Ibeam’s structure allows artists to receive 100% of door admissions.65

Drye envisions IBeam’s overarching aesthetic as a concert space that accommodates ensembles comprised of fewer than ten performers. He asserts that stylistically they, “really focus on experimental, improvised, creative music, chamber music—anything that’s pushing the boundaries” (ibid.). Still, in order for IBeam to keep its doors open he realizes that he needs to be amenable to booking other styles of music:

We don’t…only do experimental music…[because] people are paying to rent the space to play there. If we had some big funding or grant, then I would create a focus…We tend to get more experimental, jazz, and creative music submissions because that’s really what works well in the space. (ibid.)

Although Drye declares that Ibeam lends itself well to “experimental, jazz, and creative” musics, I suggest that they constitute the networks of musicians with whom he is most closely connected (see Chapter 3).

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65 Door admissions generally cost $10, although the musicians may charge more if they wish.
I head out to Barbès for a Monday night performance by Michael Winograd’s klezmer ensemble. This is my second chance to hear Judith Berkson perform live; it contrasts considerably with the newly composed opera we performed in together a few months back. Heading northwest along 9th Street in Park Slope, I take note of the rows of prewar buildings flanking either side of the street. The confined, yet neatly manicured gardens and flowers color the otherwise grey urban scape.

I enter Barbès’s two-room space and make a beeline for the curtained-off back room where the opening act, a trio donning Muppet-like costumes, are already strumming, plunking, and striking out ragtime-era tunes. An electric sign that reads “Hotel D’Orsay” hangs above the area serving as the proscenium. Behind it, burgundy velvet curtains cover the two walls that form a vee to delimit the “stage” area. Such accoutrements make the space take on the feel of what I imagine an interwar Berlin Kneipe (Ger., bar) might have looked like.

The audience, seated on metal fold-up chairs and three café tables, face the performers on the other two sides of the vee. They appear ebulliently amused, especially when “Skunky” hops and dances to the melodic lines pouring forth from his xylophone. As I scan the room for a seat, it seems that anyone who wanted one either had arrived early or had their friends save them one. The approximately 25 audience members appear to range in age from 20 to 50-somethings, and with the exception of two individuals, they are all ostensibly “white.” A couple in their forties bounces their toddler-aged daughter on their lap—later Berkson introduces the father to me as a fellow musician. Strikingly, the audience’s ratio of females to males is about 3:1, which differs significantly from many other experimental shows I’ve attended, where the audience is mostly male.

Prior to the last tune one of the servers comes to the front of the performance space and alerts the audience that, “There is a very strongly suggested donation of $10. Everything goes directly to the musicians. We’re lucky to have them here.” She then proceeds to pass around a beer pitcher for people to input monetary contributions for the musicians. (Field notes 23 June 2009)

66 The Xylopholks is a trio comprised of Jonathan “Skunky” Singer (xylophone), Bridget “Pinky” Kearney (contrabass), Carmen “Doggy” Staaf (piano), Michael “Froggy” Calabrese (drums).
Native Parisian Olivier de Conan had resided in Park Slope for nearly 25 years when he became inspired to open a club in the neighborhood. His recent performance and organizational work at a festival in the south of France served as the motivational stimulus, “we had to do everything from scratch: build the stage; do the promo[tion]…It was so much fun…and that was kind of the catalyst that made me want to open my own place” (de Conan interview 12 May 2010).

For his own venue, he imagined a place governed by his musical tastes and aesthetics, and one in which he and his friends could play music together. He summarizes his artistic vision for Barbès, “it would just be run by my own aesthetic” (ibid.). His awareness that the neighborhood lacked such a venue, despite its booming population of musicians, served as an incentive to go forward with his concept.

After three months of daily searching for the perfect space, he came across Barbès’s current location near the corner of 9th Street and 6th Avenue in Park Slope. The partition between the
storefront (now a bar-area) and the back (now a performance room) seemed ideal for the atmosphere that de Conan wished to convey, “It was really important to have a place where…there’s a sense of decorum. There’s a sense [that] you’re going there because you want to listen to the people play, not just to hang out and drink a beer” (ibid.). To emphasize his point further, he contrasted Barbès to a comparable venue in Williamsburg:

I don’t like the fact that [Zebulon67 has] one big room and people talk loudly in front of the stage…listening to somebody playing live should be a very active engagement, and we try to do that at Barbès. (ibid.)

He vowed that his business practices would demonstrate respect for the performers, which, he submitted, many New York clubs failed to do.

He began to realize his vision for the club by selecting the locale at 9th Street and 6th Avenue and demarcating the performance space from the bar area through the installation of a thick curtain. He selected musical acts that aligned closely with his own eclectic tastes, generally shaping Barbès’s aesthetic principles:

A lot of what I like is more world music-oriented than jazz-oriented per se …there’s stuff I like, stuff I don’t like, and that’s pretty much how I run Barbès…I’m not a defender of a scene…We’re lucky we live in New York because there’s enough musicians for that, [which] I don’t think could happen in many places…I like composed music for the most part, whether it’s pop music or world music or classical or anything really. I love improvised music that fits in a very compositional grid…the best ones sound like they’re composing as they improvise, so that kind of fits in my world-view. I like people who mix tradition with breaking rules together. I like people who have a very strong historical sense of the music they play, while not respecting the rules. (ibid.)

During my research period Barbès programmed so-called world music traditions68 on a near nightly basis, with two sets each night. Musical styles that filled a regular space on Barbès’s monthly, if not weekly calendar included: Peruvian music from the Amazon, Balkan, Rom, Eastern European,

67 Zebulon closed in December 2012; it was located at 258 Wythe Avenue in Brooklyn’s Williamsburg neighborhood.
68 For discussions of the emergence of world music as a categorical creation by the global record industry and based in “commodity aesthetics,” see Erlmann (1996) and Guilbault (2006).
Mexican, and North Indian brass band musics, Guinean Authenticité, American vernacular traditions, North Indian Bhangra, and Western art musics. In addition, it devoted one Wednesday evening set to experimental and improvised musics.

Still, anytime I mentioned that I was doing fieldwork at Barbès to one of my collaborators, their responses ranged from insouciance to ambivalence. A typical reply sounded something like, “they don’t really program much creative music anymore,” indicating a general consensus among improviser-composers that it had decreased its programming of creative and experimental musics considerably within the past several years. Indeed, from 2007 to 2008 Barbès presented a weekly, double bill of experimental music. De Conan’s friend and saxophonist-composer Michaël Attias curated this series entitled, “Night of the Ravished Limbs.” In contrast, de Conan now allots a single, second-set performance for experimental music, which is usually preceded by a more “innocuous” indie-folk/jazz set.69

Financial concerns heavily influenced De Conan’s decision to present less experimental music:

The problem is, if you…[program experimental music], you go out of business in about a year…Of course I’m interested, not as a defender of the scene necessarily…But there’s other people I still love to book. I intersperse [them] more with other kinds of stuff because you don’t want to frighten the audiences very often. We used to do all Wednesday night, all improvised music and that really scared people. I mean it cost us a lot of money to have that series, which is one of the reasons we don’t do it as much…But it still is something that I’m committed to presenting at Barbès and I want to continue doing. (ibid.)

De Conan relayed the actual monetary implications of “frightening” the general public on the Wednesday nights that it presented improvised or experimental music:

Well, people would come in to Barbès, hear something even as benign as Tony Malaby and leave…and the word was, ‘don’t go to Barbès on Wednesday,’ and we would make an average of $300 a night; it costs probably $500 a night to operate Barbès, so it gives you an idea…It was just an actual losing proposition. (ibid.)

69 Oscar Noriega curates Barbès’ current experimental music series, The Palimpsestic Series.
De Conan and Vincent Douglas, his business partner and fellow musician, took out approximately $50,000 in credit card debt to initially open Barbès in 2002. Although he insisted that, “[music] was the only reason to open it; I had no interest in running a bar” (ibid.), he and Douglas decided that the most straightforward way to do so was to operate Barbès as a club, rather than as a not-for-profit. In lieu of a door fee they rely on patrons to give a $10 “strongly suggested donation”; the artists in turn receive 100% of the collected monies.

Now faced with a more challenging economy than in 2002, de Conan opted to slightly alter his artistic vision for the club by programming less experimental music. At the time of our interview, he expressed his uncertainty in renewing Barbès’s lease in 2012 if the rent were raised exponentially. He cited that its current challenges lay in navigating the rising rents in Park Slope; the effects of the 2009 economic depression (which resulted in decreased revenue); and the City’s myriad income collection strategies from small business owners:

[There’s] a lot of fines associated with doing business because the City is desperate for revenue, so they’ll send the Department of Health and they’ll find something that was fine for six years and now is not fine anymore and it’ll cost you $4000. It just goes on and on—the firemen come to inspect something that did not need inspection last year and it’s another $1000. It’s become really, really difficult and very unpleasant… It has a lot to do with the way the City’s going—gentrification, real estate, and all those things. (ibid.)

Although it is impossible to predict Barbès’ future, this case study demonstrates the tension between aesthetic values and financial bottom-lines that club owners and not-for-profit entities face. Just as de Conan expresses an aesthetic affinity for experimental and improvised musics, he—unlike Zorn—simultaneously concedes that he does not stand as a “defender of a scene” (ibid.). From a business perspective he has experienced first-hand the financially prohibitive

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70 Douglas (guitar) also performs with de Conan in the band Chicha Libre. Described on Barbès’ website as, “Psychedelic Surf Cumbia from the Amazon” (Barbès Website n.d.).

71 Since this writing Barbès celebrated its tenth anniversary and renewed its lease.
repercussions associated with programming entire evenings of experimental and improvised musics.

Although many improviser-composers criticize the club’s decrease in experimental music programming, de Conan has remained true to his original reasons for opening the venue. Further, his aesthetics concur with those of many contemporary improviser-composers (see Chapter 1). De Conan’s interview statements and his programming at Barbès evidence this commitment, above all, to his personal aesthetics. Barbès’ performance lineups are governed nearly exclusively by de Conan’s largely eclectic personal tastes. And while the particular musical utterances may not align with all improviser-composers’ affinities, they commonly value individualism.

**Tonic 1998-2007**  
107 Norfolk Street, LES, Manhattan

The venues presented thus far offer opportunities for improviser-composers to musically and socially interact. IBeam and Barbès stage far less experimental music of improviser-composers as compared with The Stone. As a listening room open to the public for only a short time prior to and following its musical performances, The Stone, however, fails to serve as a place where extended musical, friendship, and business interactions take place. While Barbès’ club atmosphere has the potential to provide social space for the experimental music crowd, its concerts are too infrequent for it to serve a community home. With these factors in mind, it seems that I never really experienced a *quintessential* performance venue for the musics of my dissertation—where performances continually unfold, and ample room and time for socializing among like-minded musicians and aficionados exists.
The collective memories of Tonic, a defunct Lower East Side club, intimate its reputation for balancing community and musical performances. Melissa Caruso and John Scott, a married couple, were drawn to the former kosher winery’s charm and rent low enough to venture opening a space largely dedicated to “experimental and creative” musics (Chinen 2007). John Zorn’s frequent performances just a few months after it opened in April of 1998 greatly increased its visibility. Ted Reichman, who curated a weekly experimental music series from Tonic’s onset, credited it as the, “only centralized haven for the avant-garde jazz and improvised-music crowd” (ibid.).

In addition to programming musics both experimental and eclectic, Tonic’s appeal lay in its provision of a social space for the disparate community of experimental music performers and aficionados. Taylor Ho Bynum demonstrated this point by comparing The Stone with the defunct venues of Tonic and the (old) Knitting Factory: 

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There’s something to be said for a place that’s not just there to listen to music, but there to hang out as a community and have multiple things happening; and to have

72 Here Bynum refers to the Knitting Factory’s Tribeca locale.
a place you can sort of stop by at…The Stone’s a great listening room…a place I go to when I want to sit down and listen to a concert, but it’s not a place that I’m going to go to cause, ‘oh, I’m not doing anything tonight, let me run by the Stone and see who’s playing and hang out.’ That’s not going to happen, and it’s important to have a place like that; and similarly with Roulette, they do amazing stuff…but again, it’s not a hang, it’s a concert thing. And concert venues are great, but I think it’s different than…a club vibe. (interview 16 July 2010)

In addition to serving as a home for experimental musics, Tonic also served as a haven for multiplicity, individualism, and collaboration (see Chapter 1). Clarinetist and composer Michael Winograd sent this emotional email to the Jewish Music List just prior to its closing in April of 2007:

[Tonic was] arguably the most important venue for experimental, or non-experimental and even just creative music in NYC…I remember when I was fourteen, and didn’t know anything about anything, getting driven out there on a Sunday afternoon by my parents from Long Island to see David Krakauer play and then continually coming out many Sundays until I left for college for the klezmer series. It was huge and happening! I think Tonic was a huge piece of evidence for the second (or third?) wave of the Klezmer [sic] revival in NYC in the [19](90s, and especially for my generation of musicians…it was our center! (listserv correspondence 6 April 2007)

Winograd submits that Tonic served as a “center” for several musical communities during the 1990s: experimental, creative musics, and klezmer. While he lists them separately, their musical intersections and common actors allowed them to share a performance home.

Tonic’s low barriers to entry fostered an inclusive atmosphere and transformed space into place. Experienced and fledgling artists alike co-mingled in the intimate club atmosphere (see Currid 2007). Cellist-composer Okkyung Lee benefited from its low barriers to entry upon first moving to New York:

I literally parked myself at Tonic; I didn’t have money or anything, but somehow I was able to. [I] just hung out there all the time because it was so new for me to listen to [this type of] music. (interview 27 February 2010)

By spending all her waking days there, she met and formed musical and personal connections with musical notables such as John Zorn, Ikue Mori, Sylvie Courvoisier, as well as younger, less-
established musicians. Tonic’s denizens confounded her expectations of a scene involving many well-established artists, “They’re just so friendly. You just go up to them and say, ‘Hey, that was great,’ and then they talk to you. It’s not like they brush you off as some fan” (ibid.). After only living in New York for a few weeks she performed Cobra with Zorn and a group of his close collaborators at Tonic.

Multi-instrumentalist-composer Tyshawn Sorey also credits Tonic as a foundational place during the formative period of his burgeoning career (personal communication 4 February 2010). There he met collaborators and mentors Steve Coleman, Joey Baron, Milford Graves, Matana Roberts, and Marcus Gilmore, among many others. Tonic also served as the setting for serendipitous meetings. After performing a set at Barbès, an acquaintance enthusiastically approached Sorey about his ostensible, upcoming performance with guitarist Brandon Ross (guitar) and Stomu Takeishi (bass) for a Tonic fundraising concert. Not having prior knowledge of this, Sorey decided to show up to the gig with his gear. Upon meeting Ross at the gig (whom he had met months earlier at Tonic), he expressed enthusiasm for their impending collaboration. Although the advertisements for the gig had been in error, the seasoned guitarist welcomed Sorey to the stage. Following their performance Ross invited him to be a regular member of the group. The trio went on to perform at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, The Stone, and at several festivals, among them, the Williamsburg Jazz Festival. Ultimately, this resulted in Sorey’s long-term collaboration with Ross and Takeishi.

In April of 2007 Tonic closed due to rent arrears. Caruso maintained, that while its rent had doubled since opening in 1998, its business had not. It did not close without a stir because of its dedication to “the avant-garde jazz and improvised-music crowd” (Chinen 2007). Two days before it closed, guitarist Marc Ribot led demonstrations that called for the City’s support and financial
recognition of “experimental music.” In an interview with The Times Ribot asserted that, “New music serves as research and development for a much larger music scene,” further, its, “cultural and economic weight [reaches] beyond its immediate audience” (Ribot quoted in Chinen 2007). The closing of this beloved club brought occasion to address the City’s lack of funding for musics that either fall outside of or straddle presumed musical categories, and to draw attention to cultural movements whose symbolic capital is not immediately convertible into economic capital.

**Conclusion**

As Currid shows, New York’s creative industries now make up “the third largest employer within highly skilled occupations,” largely giving it its “competitive advantage against other metropolitan and global cities” (2007:10). New York’s artistic movements have been indispensible to its economy as far back as the 1970s, when its creative industries led the way in its financial recovery from the recession. Both Currid (2007) and Ribot (2007) call for public policy makers to address social-structural issues and support its artists and artistic movements. Currid opines, “we are at a critical juncture in terms of sustaining New York’s creative advantage…the cohesive social arrangement that formed the backbone of NYC’s identity as a global tastemaker is being systematically eroded by high rents and unsupportive city policy toward night life” (2007:159).

I bring to the fore Tonic as a case study to advance several issues important to the current climate that improviser-composers, proprietors, and aficionados navigate within New York art worlds. Given that New York itself is contained to a limited geographic area, control over its spaces infrequently goes uncontested, particularly in areas desirable to developers. As Feld and Basso argue, contemporary studies of place are, “sites of power struggles or about displacement as histories of annexation, absorption, and resistance” (1996:5). Many of the spaces that harbor the

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73 This movement was known as “Take it to the Bridge.”
musics of improviser-composers to one extent or another are, “increasingly about contestation” (ibid.), reinscribing Feld and Basso’s arguments.

By combining not-for-profit business models, multiple fund-raising efforts (The Stone), D.I.Y. initiatives, grant monies and private donations, improviser-composers and aficionados themselves support the spaces in which they perform, listen, and interact socially. Proprietors and club owners and artists alike personally invest in the presentation of musics that espouse values of multiplicity, individualism, and collaboration. Tonic, toward the time of its closing, had incurred approximately $90,000 in debt (Ribot 2007), which its community of musicians and patrons helped to pay off through multiple fundraising efforts in an act of solidarity. To function on a budget that allows for only basic operational costs (through careful budgeting and using alternative business models) may be analyzed as mere maintenance. It may also be read, however, as a stance of active resistance to market challenges that at times all but prohibit the existence of such places. Proprietors and not-for-profits alike contest space impediments to support personal aesthetics.

Improviser-composers and their fans—who are frequently one and the same—often bemoan a struggle between the greater housing market, issues of gentrification, and the music’s lack of profitability. One respondent to my online reception survey aptly summarized these sentiments:

The music will always continue. The concern is with the venues. Unfortunately some have closed: I don’t think it’s right. But there are always places that open up to musicians anyway. Each venue has its own style and way of doing things. We

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74 Roulette, a venue and organization, “committed to supporting work by young and emerging artists as well as by established innovators” (Roulette Website 2011) is largely funded by grants, donors, and reliance on a roster of volunteers.

75 I conducted a reception survey via the Internet during the summer of 2010. As an introduction to the survey I submitted: “The following survey involves answering questions concerning your experiences listening to and attending performances of musics of Lower Manhattan (below 14th St.) and Brooklyn.” I sought to collect demographic data regarding the audience for this music and to learn about the frequency of concert attendance, motivations for concert attendance, most important/popular venues for these musics, musical preferences, multiplicity, and finally the “future” of creative/improvised/experimental musics in NYC. One hundred people took part in this survey, of which 60 completed.
continue to make a way in spite of the real estate revolution going on. (Anon., Reception Survey 2010)

Ultimately, the improver-composers and cultural actors transform these venues from space into place enacted, by listening, performing, networking, and socializing. To this end, the mostly nocturnal inhabitants take the first steps toward belonging within a vast array of musical choices and spaces in an expansive of urban-scape.

Returning to the stellar metaphor proposed at the opening of this chapter, the case studies discussed here do not demonstrate a single, centralized place in which musical and communal soundings happen under one roof; rather, they provide only a snapshot of New York’s greater performance spatial galaxy. Arguably, The Stone presents the greatest number of shows “dedicated to the EXPERIMENTAL and AVANT-GARDE” (The Stone Website n.d.); it has staged two sets of music Tuesday through Sunday since opening in 2005.76 IBeam hosts concerts, festivals, and music series on a comparatively ad hoc basis; while Barbès presents one set weekly.

Tonic, as a beloved performance venue, was a luminous star that expired because its profits could not match its steeply rising rents. Its afterglow still shines on, as it garners considerable appreciation retrospectively. The generally held presumption that New York now lacks a place melding both the musical and social realms of experimental and avant-garde musics signifies Tonic’s “authentic,” status over its contemporary counterparts. As Gupta and Ferguson observe, “places have, of course, often served as symbolic anchors of community for dispersed people” (2002:69). For those who demonstrate solidarity to experimental and improvised musics and their networked practices, Tonic was without a doubt one such anchor.

76 In January 2010 The Stone began offering seminars “DEDICATED TO CONTEMPORARY MUSIC PRACTICE” (The Stone Website n.d.), with its first seminar taught by guitarist Marc Ribot. More recently, it has offered workshops by Karl Berger and Butch Morris (1947-2013).
Although many of my collaborators maintain that there are neither enough gigs nor enough places to play, compared with many other cities, New York still offers opportunities. A slightly more detailed picture derived from my 2010 online reception survey cites the following venues located throughout Manhattan and Brooklyn as places where improviser-composers perform and listen to emergent sounds: 55 Bar, 5C Cultural Center, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Bowery Ballroom, Bowery Poetry Club, Cecil’s Jazz Club, Cornelia St Café, Death by Audio, Douglas Street Music Collective, Evening Time Place, Fat Cat, Freddy's Backroom, Goodbye Blue Monday, Green Mill, Highline Ballroom, Issue Project Room, Jazz Gallery, Jazz Standard, Korzo, Le Poisson Rouge, Local 269, Red Lion, Rodeo Bar, Rose Live Music, Shrine, Smalls, Smoke, Spike Hill, Sycamore, Tea Lounge, The Brecht Forum, The Knitting Factory (Brooklyn), Velvet Lounge, Village Vanguard, Yippie Museum Café, Zebulon, and Zinc Bar.\(^7\)

The above case studies demonstrate that the operation of venues housing experimental, improvised, and related musics—whether full-time or part-time—is laden with cleavages between adhering to localized, guiding aesthetics and maintaining operational costs. They represent a range in business models and individual aesthetic visions, and ultimately determine the amount of programming of experimental, improvised, and networked musical practices. For Barbès and The Stone, single individuals choose musical acts and curators, respectively. Except for delegating its experimental programming to a few trusted friends (and a more recent classical series curated by the Concert Artist Guild), Barbès’s aesthetics are governed nearly exclusively by de Conan and Douglas’s individual sensibilities. Zorn, while delegating day-to-day programming to selected curators, and thus conferring a great deal of choice on them, ultimately decides who is or is not a suitable arbiter of taste for his club. Finally, IBeam takes the most egalitarian stance toward concert

\(^7\) A particularly relevant venue for improviser-composers, ShapeShifter Lab, recently opened at 18 Whitwell Place in Park Slope, Brooklyn. It is run by bassist Matthew Garrison.
programming. Operating largely as a collective, members and non-members alike put on concerts for a fee. Even so, its programming reflects a tendency to align closely with individuals whose affinities overlap with Drye’s musical and social network.

Issues of space and place of creative and experimental musics within New York City, and more specifically, within lower Manhattan and Brooklyn are deeply connected to the ways in which belonging is expressed among improviser-composers. Just as Feld and Basso acknowledge, “the ways in which people encounter places, perceive them, and invest them with significance” (1996:8) are central to their interpretations, so too are individual and group relationships to place (whether based on experience or imagined conceptions of it) central to understanding issues of belonging among improviser-composers. New York itself is made meaningful by the numerous possibilities it holds for musicians. The places housing improviser-composers and their musics shape conceptions of the City, its musical landscape, and place.

In Part II of the dissertation, I trace multiplicity and belonging through personal histories and networks. This is followed by a musical discussion; the musical gives way to the personal, the social, and the political, and vice versa. I located improviser-composers’ lives and practices in New York in this chapter; constructions of the city, however, go from bounded to fluid when viewed in light of the transnational networks in which improviser-composers partake.

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78 The same may be argued of disbelonging. In the early years when saxophonist-composer Steve Lehman tried to establish himself in NYC, he was eager to get a gig at the Jazz Gallery. As he was yet largely unknown among NYC art worlds, this took considerable effort as compared to what the same process would involve today.
Part II: Tracing Multiplicity and Belonging

Chapter 3: Improviser-Composers: Individual Histories and Personal Networks

Multiplicity pervades improviser-composers’ practices and personal histories. Rather than sorting out its individual strains, I provide a topographical snapshot through five personal histories and networks. I trace improviser-composers’ musical and social encounters from their early years in music through the first decade of their NYC-based careers. The improviser-composers detailed here share a long-term engagement with musical multiplicity. Many grew up studying more than one music, or, at minimum, have maintained eclectic musical consumption from an early age. They perform multiplicity at the collegiate, and later, professional level,79 pursuing individualism, aesthetic interests, and financial sustenance. Their espousal of multiplicity, as a value and a practice, connects this generation of improviser-composers to African American musical aesthetics, practices, and political motivations.

As improviser-composers transition from students to music professionals they rely heavily on what I refer to as ‘formative networks’: nodes and links largely comprised of relationships established during secondary and collegiate school days made up of friends, classmates, mentors, and professors. For those who attend school in the greater New York metropolitan area, the development of a professional network and performance career frequently begins while still a student. For those who move to NYC after college, this process may begin later. I refer to the musical and social ties that improviser-composers initiate and determine—usually after or outside the realm of institutional training—as ‘strategic networks’.

Formative and strategic networks may overlap considerably; strategic networks, however, are those developed and maintained in the quest for an authenticity of the self. Collaborations—as

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79 They do so sonically and structurally, as I argue in Chapters 3 – 4.
we saw in Chapter 1—have begun to take the place of genre as a point of identity formation and self-definition. As implied by the word strategic, strategic networks reflect a considerable degree of choice on the part of the improviser-composer under consideration. Much in the way that Slobin refers to choice, affinity, and belonging as “overlapping spheres” (1993:55), improviser-composers articulate a personal sphere of belonging through their unique multiple affiliations rooted in shared aesthetics, demonstrated in their strategic networks.

In a city overflowing with music scenes and art worlds, improviser-composers frequently ground themselves in formative ties. For some improviser-composers, school of training engenders lasting collaborations; while for others it has little bearing on personal pathways. Improviser-composers commonly cast a wide net at the start of their careers to meet and perform with as many musicians as possible, pursue artistic self-definition, and earn income. Considerable success during this initial period later affords greater determination of performance opportunities and career directions in one’s strategic network. Improviser-composers variously downsize, maintain or expand the number and types of projects and collaborations that they undertake in the secondary stage of their professional life. Frequently, they do so to realize their own creative expressions. Adroit negotiation of musical networks, along with expert musical competence, can result in greater access to international touring networks and visibilities.

Degenne and Forsé prefer to examine the “total network—the sum of interconnecting actors or personal networks” ([1994] 2004:27)80, arguing that, “the best of personal network studies only capture a very rough structural picture of volume, frequency, multiplexity or density,

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80 In an attempt to deal with potentially endless complex large networks, Brinner brings attention to John Law’s concept of punctualization:

Rather than naming every individual involved, one often speaks of a band, a company, a school or the record industry, reducing a complex network of people to a single entity because ‘punctualized resources offer a way of drawing quickly on the networks of the social without having to deal with endless complexity.’ (1992:385)

While the term itself appears a bit awkward, it advantageously reduces the ubiquitous “complexity” that network studies tend to encounter.
and the statistical gain is a structural loss” ([1994] 2004:22). I suggest, however, the highly individualized nature of improviser-composers’ musical pathways lends itself to such an approach. I trace improviser-composers’ personal histories and networks to loosen individual strands in a tightly knotted musical system. Personal histories and networks press against binaries in American musics: through them, individualized and idiosyncratic depictions of American musical life unfurl.

Judith Ya’akova Berkson  
b. Boston, 1 September 1977

Figure 7 Judith Berkson at Littlefield.  
Photo courtesy of Peter Gannushkin (downtownmusic.net).

Meeting in Middletown, Conn.

The spring thaw in New England make possible a cup of tea on the back porch with my guest, Judith Berkson. We have stopped by my place to unwind before heading out to the cast party for our performance in Clara: A Music Box Opera, the final project of a Wesleyan graduate student composer in which Berkson sang the lead soprano role. During the past several days’ rehearsals I have had a chance to get to know Berkson a bit. I am particularly inspired and impressed by her aplomb. During one afternoon rehearsal the principle flutist and best friend of the composer advises Berkson to, “do whatever she can,” to rhythmically match up with the pre-recorded track. Berkson commandingly retorts that neither the rhythms nor the pitches on the recording are in accordance with the score. He retreats when she further asserts, “I know my part inside out.”

I ask Berkson about the incident during our chat on the porch that evening. She thinks the flutist displays technical and musical facility; she will not allow him, however, to position her alongside the undergraduate string students he has been assisting. “I knew if I gave [in] at all that he’d try to run the show
from there.” She seizes the moment to stand up for her integrity as a professional performer. I recall a conversation in which my friend, Hankus Netsky, raved about Berkson’s character and work. These things all make me want to learn more about her unique musical and political voice.

Further, I feel an aesthetic and moral camaraderie with Berkson. I am delighted to learn about her arrangement of the Karniol and Oysher recordings\(^{81}\) for the Kronos Quartet. I nod my head in agreement as she decries musicians who are not interested in rigorous edification, “for those really talented musicians who aren’t interested in learning about the background and the history of the music—I’m not interested in working with them.” I share with her a desire to understand connections between the professional and the personal, the musical and the intellectual, the structural and the aesthetic. (Adaptation from field notes 29 March 2009)

**Early Years**

In her youth, Berkson’s father guided her and her two older siblings in Western classical and Jewish cantorial music. Her father had trained at the Jewish Theological Seminary; at the time of her birth he served as cantor at Temple Beth Am in Randolph, Mass. When she was around three years old he began to teach her Jewish prayers and blessings:

[My father] had this little office in the basement and he had this special seat that he called the learning seat. I had to sit in it and he’d be teaching me, you know, the blessing for the wine, and the blessing for this…and I had to sing it back to him.

(Berkson interview 7 November 2009)

In addition to learning prayers and blessings, she observed her father perform cantorial services and liturgy.

In 1982 the family relocated to Albany Park in the north end of Chicago where he had taken a new cantorial position at Shaare Tikvah. Berkson began to perform with the family performance group, “My mom played piano, and then it was my father leading, singing…and we sang harmonies or, you know, arrangements with my sister and brother” (ibid.). Together they sang “all Jewish music” at their temple, community centers, and the home for the blind:

My dad really liked [Sol Zim] because he wrote a lot of new material for the synagogue…new liturgical stuff for the whole service, for every holiday…[but] it was really still rooted in tradition and *nusakh* and it had some Hasidic elements to

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\(^{81}\) Khaznaim Alter Karniol, Moyshe Oysher, and Freydele Oysher are well-known cantors of the Golden Age.
it…So it was that [music] and then more traditional cantorial piece[s]. (Berkson interview 31 January 2011)

Berkson began to study classical piano during their first year in Chicago, and describes her teacher from age six to eight as neither technically nor musically “memorable” (ibid.). Her second instructor was Judith Marinelli Godfrey, whose tutelage was strict and restrained: “the way she talks is so rigidly formal…to be in fifth grade and talked to in that way and have this atmosphere of stoicism and seriousness—it was bizarre” (Berkson interview 31 January 2011). Despite the lessons’ sober tenor, Godfrey taught Berkson pianistic foundations and shaped her “way of thinking that has really, really informed my piano playing” (ibid.).

Throughout her childhood her father guided her family’s musical engagements, leaving little room for personal volition. Making music was a “natural” part of her upbringing; she considered musical involvement neither unique to her own experience nor demonstrative of a personal proclivity:

Music was never something that I thought I was good or bad at, it was just something that I did and it seemed very easy, not easy, but there was no choice involved. There was no choice—I could never quit piano. That conversation would never exist. I couldn’t quit my family band; that doesn’t exist. I can’t not sing in the temple; that choice doesn’t exist. It was just something that we did. (Berkson interview 7 November 2009)

In addition to circumscribing her musical experiences, her father also attempted to determine her social relationships, but Albany Park’s urbanity provided a respite from parental supervision. Berkson explored unfamiliar places and made friends:

Living in the city was walking here, and going to the park, and going to the corner store…and exploring and not having to get into a car, necessarily. And different kinds of people and even though my parents tried to—my dad mostly—tried to shelter me from anything outside the Jewish community, I was very curious so I always had secret friends on the side and always had my neighbors. It was full of everything that cities are—you know, all these…diverse kinds of people and culture. (ibid.)
Chicago’s diversity and public transportation allowed her a measure of independence that she would lose as a teenager.

At thirteen, Judith’s family moved to Northbrook, a suburb north of Chicago; there she was placed in a private rather than public school. The transition proved difficult for her. “I just thought that we didn’t belong there and I really felt out of place” (ibid.). She “felt out of place” because, unlike Albany Park, Northbrook was socioeconomically and racially homogeneous. Further, her peer group valued materialism:

If you didn’t have the $100 Nike airs, you were a loser and you would get mocked. I never experienced that in my life until I went to the suburbs. I was horrified. I was completely horrified...where I was it was really materialistic. Really stuck up. [I] really had a hard time. (ibid.)

Northbrook’s uniformity allowed for neither economic nor racial difference, “[except for] a small minority of people [who] are aware and cool—but for the most part they [Northbrook residents] are very, very homogenized” (ibid.).

In spite of the difficulties she faced, music inspired her. At Godfrey’s behest, Berkson and her siblings advanced to study with Godfrey’s former piano teacher, Viola Haas. Haas was an immigrant from Bratislava who had studied with Bartók. Berkson valued Haas’s character and training:

[There] was this woman who was a very profound person in my life and that woman’s name was Viola Haas. She was totally steeped in tradition...[H]er teacher was Bartók and the teaching lineage went to Liszt and she had Brahms’s signature on her wall (ibid.)

Berkson’s proud recitation of her teacher’s lineage demonstrates a respect for Western classical music’s great, male star performer-composer. It is well known that Liszt advanced pianism “both imaginative[ly] and technical[ly],” and ushered in the era of the heroic performer (Walker et. al.
Brahms’s early training and composition also took place on piano: “from the start [he was] intent on transcending the virtuoso and salon traditions that dominated Europe in the 1830s and 40s” (Bozarth and Frisch 2011).

With Haas’s lineage part of a Brahms-Liszt continuum, Berkson connects her teacher to the period that ushered in the concept of a work of art and made musical works the most sanctified arts (Goehr 2007). Berkson, too, extols the position of the artist:

I actually was in the presence of somebody who was an actual artist. That was my first encounter with somebody who’s more a performer, somebody who had this really intense life in Europe and connected with that. (interview 31 January 2011)

The rise of the star performer and composer, and the ensuing respect for individual artistic expression, also developed as a concept post-1800 (Goehr 2007). This trend continues today, and Berkson’s respect for individual musical “genius” through her acknowledgement of Haas’s connection to Liszt, Brahms, and Beethoven places her within this tradition.

Berkson was attracted to Haas’s teachings because of her musical pedigree and her personality:

[S]he was totally old-school but very gentle, not gentle, but never judgmental…if we came and we weren’t very well prepared, she still treated us as if we were—she didn’t make us feel bad; she didn’t put us down. She just kind of picked up from where we left off. And we were analyzing Beethoven and technique and everything was just very relaxed and flowing and just, positive. I never remember her complimenting me, or putting me down, really. (Berkson interview 7 November 2009)

Haas’s affable demeanor contrasted with her father’s and Mrs. Godfrey’s sober teachings. For the

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82 Walker et al. observe: “[a]s the greatest piano virtuoso of his time, he used his sensational technique and captivating concert personality not only for personal effect but to spread, through his transcriptions, knowledge of other composers’ music” (2011).

83 Goehr marks 1800 as Western Classical music’s transitional moment from largely being functional to expressive. Music became emancipated from its former functionality; it was the position of composers, not patrons, to determine the musical factors of a work.
next three years the family drove an hour each way to the Hyde Park neighborhood for weekly lessons. Haas taught the Berkson siblings three-hour piano performance and music theory master classes, “[S]he had two pianos and we would sit and as she taught one we had to sit and watch everybody’s lesson” (ibid.). The Berkson siblings studied the canonical classical piano repertoire up to the works of the French impressionists. She now feels paradoxically about the lessons. “It was insane. It was super totally amazing and intense, but also overwhelming for a young person” (ibid.). While she respects the rigor of this method of musical training, she has a hard time accepting it as appropriately suited for youths.

Haas proposed that Judith board and study with her full-time following an in-home recital. Haas’s non-judgmental teaching style had previously made it difficult for Berkson to surmise whether her teacher deemed her progress significant:

What was lasting about the way that she treated me was that…I didn’t think I was special in any way [laughing]…I didn’t think I had any more ability than my brothers or sisters or anybody. (Berkson interview 31 January 2011)

Haas’s proposal, however, led her to newly consider her identity vis-à-vis music, “That was the only time that I got the sense that…she saw something that she would like to work with, [but] I have no idea” (Berkson interview 7 November 2009). Haas’s support made her consider herself as musically unique from her siblings. Sadly, though, the proposal never required a decision: Haas became ill and passed away within six months.

Berkson completed her high school piano studies with an erudite, yet lackadaisical DePaul University Professor, Dr. Tom Brown. She respected Brown’s intellectual prowess and bibliophily: “he had a million books. He was super smart…he was a brilliant, brilliant guy” (ibid.)—but became musically discouraged under his tutelage. While Haas had taken an individual interest in Berkson’s studies, Brown, in contrast, fell asleep during lessons. When the time came for her to choose a collegiate pursuit she “didn’t even want to go to school for music” (ibid.) because of this ambivalent
student-teacher relationship. Ultimately, however, she focused her attention on the artistic niche most familiar to her:

I think senior year, I was like, ‘oh god, what am I going to do?’ I just thought about music and I was like, ‘well, I can go to music school.’…I knew that…I felt sort of limitless within it. I saw that it had a lot of potential. (Berkson interview 7 November 2009)

She believed that she could develop her own identity through music, and resolved to pursue it. She began to take voice lessons toward the end of her junior year to prepare for conservatory auditions.

In fall, 1995, she started the classical vocal program at New England Conservatory (NEC) because, of the conservatories she had applied to, she considered that it, “had the best reputation [and] was really serious” (ibid.). The alienation she had felt as a high school student weighed on her as she embarked upon conservatory studies: “I thought I was maybe going to go to music school and drop out and do my own thing…I didn’t think I’d fit in at music school either” (ibid.). Her experiences at NEC both affirmed and negated her expectations. She felt at home enough to stay the course, but she was uncomfortable with the classical department’s insularity.

The difficulties Berkson faced at NEC stem from the gulf between her convictions and the Voice & Opera Department’s “guiding principles” (Nettl 1995). Its faculty strongly discouraged her self-directed study of the accordion and jazz, and her membership in Netsky’s Jewish music ensemble: “once I started to veer off and became interested in other things people were…very clear [about] what’s right and what’s wrong…Especially if you start to sway from what their program is” (ibid.). Henry Kingsbury (1988) and Bruno Nettl (1995) assert that American music schools’ transmission of Western art music value, “dictatorship, conformity, a rigid class structure, overspecialization, and a love of mere bigness” (Nettl 1995:42). Berkson, though, opposed the positioning of certain musical traditions over others.
Berkson became frustrated with the Classical Department’s dismissal of music outside its purview. Despite this, she pursued musical eclecticism, erudition, and individual expression, as well as collaborations with intellectually engaged musicians. She disapproved of the widespread apathy toward study:

We took humanities courses—those were wonderful. Wonderful teachers, and they were inspiring…and I started thinking and looking around and I noticed that…people…[in] the classical department, oh my god! They were so boring; they didn’t think; they didn’t raise their hand; they didn’t say anything in class. They were just locked in a room playing and I just thought, ‘these are musicians? They have nothing to say? They have no thoughts in their head?’ (interview 7 November 2009)

She sought a balance between the hands and voice with that of the mind; she engrossed herself simultaneously in performance and historical and cultural edification.

Berkson enrolled in as many classes as possible outside her major after she completed the program course requirements. Just as she had admired Viola Haas and Tom Brown for their erudition, she revered this quality in her conservatory teachers. She found kinship among NEC’s Contemporary Improvisation Department faculty: “I took all of [Netsky’s] ear training classes. I took his class on…Jewish Music Studies: it was absolutely wonderful. I did his ensemble and [the] TV stuff. He was great” (ibid.). Noted folk songster Theodore Bikel hosted the NEC Jewish Music Ensemble as part of the PBS specials *A Taste of Passover: A Celebration of the Joys & Music of the Holiday* and *A Taste of Chanukah*. Rounder Records, in turn, released sound recordings from the productions (3159; 3165) (Figure 16; p. 205)

Her attendance in Joe Maneri’s “Performance Techniques” class brought about a rich mentorship. After Berkson completed all the courses Maneri offered, she served as his teaching assistant and spent time with him and his family, “I became very close with him and his wife, and

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84 For a study of the Contemporary Improvisation Department, formerly the “Third Stream” Department, see Berkman 1999.
did a lot of work with him” (ibid.). Maneri’s knowledge and charismatic leadership drew her to his teaching:

Mostly I sensed in him that he had a deep knowledge…I wanted to be around somebody who actually knew something—who had a really strong background…I wanted to learn about theory and counterpoint, composition—I wanted to know and he had that. So he had the backing; he had the esoteric [knowledge] and the inspirational ideas, but he also had this foundation and that combination was very strong. (Berkson interview 7 November 2009)

Berkson’s work with Maneri inspired the professional recordings *The Boston Microtonal Society Presents the Firebird Ensemble* (1996), *Improvising Duets: The Art of Conversation* (1998), and *The Enchanted Circle Presents Sensibilities* (Kotlyn 2000) as well (Figure 16; p. 205).

In spite of her aesthetic camaraderie with Netsky and Maneri, her support network at NEC was relatively limited. Nonetheless, she pursued her musical and intellectual causes, and organized interdisciplinary projects at NEC with the help of a friend:

I was sort of isolated…although I was trying to do stuff for the school with my friend…They had this festival in improvisation and we organized three master classes that weren’t going to happen and had a jam session. We organized all kinds of stuff—trying to get people together. [With] people in the jazz department [we] would put on these shows where…we would have a jazz trio and then a classical singer and then this and then that…We did collaborations with [School of the Museum of Fine Arts]…we had installations along with a concert. I was constantly organizing stuff like that. (Berkson interview 7 November 2009)

She brought students studying Western classical, jazz, and “contemporary improvisation” performance, as well as multiple artistic disciplines, together. Her organizational work cultivated cultural relativism and interdisciplinarity, ideals that she further nurtured in NYC.

**New York Years**

Berkson moved to New York after graduating from NEC in 2000. Her transition to the City was not easy. Few of her conservatory peers had relocated there, and she forged new ties in a male-dominated profession:
Basically [I] started from scratch. I went to a million shows and went out every night to hear music and meet people. I met a lot of interesting people… I’d meet people for six months and something would happen… I’m confident enough to say that when I moved here—you know—music is a man’s world. There’re a lot more male musicians, and you go and you meet them and you just want to play or you just want to hang, or you want to just jam or whatever, and then sometimes they think whatever they think. Whether they like you and they want to date you, and you’re just like, ‘can we be friends?’ And then they’re like, ‘no,’ and they drop [you]—that happened to me several times. I didn’t have a circle to fall back on, so it was very painful. But I got through all that, I mean I never would have had the guts to say that. I’d be like [in a higher-pitched voice], ‘oh, it didn’t work out, we stopped being friends—but I’m going to say what it was, because I fully know what it was.’ (Berkson interview 7 November 2009)

Berkson frequently attended concerts and introduced herself to potential collaborators, but she was often disappointed: some of her male peers were more interested in dating than musical partnership.

When she had difficulty finding venues for her performances she began to present concerts in her Park Slope apartment, as Maneri had encouraged her at NEC. Her apartment concerts, like the events she had organized at NEC, were eclectic: “There’d be a saxophone player and a pianist doing some standards, and I would play some Schubert, or somebody would do something else and it would be like that” (ibid.). She recruited “who[m]ever I was hanging out with” (ibid.) to perform in these concerts. The performers were also audience members, and vice versa, demonstrating the multiplexity of her newly-initiated strategic network (Figure 17; p. 206).

Berkson endeavored to develop a musical concept that was still amorphous, “I had an idea, but it wasn’t ready” (ibid.). At first, she formed and led the Judith Berkson Quartet. She later realized, however, that the ensemble’s dynamics hindered the development of her nascent ideas:

I thought, ‘I need to just get rid of everybody and I need to figure out what… I am trying to express here.’ That’s when I decided, just for that moment, to work as a soloist… So drop the band, and just do it by myself and have this intimate, piano, maybe another kind of keyboard, kind of an intimate, personal [thing]— because… I felt that I hadn’t really gone inside [myself] yet and been able to understand all the parts of the music. (interview 7 November 2009)
Her musical concept emerged over the course of many laborious hours in the practice room and regular performances. Between 2004 and 2007 Berkson performed at Barbès every four to six weeks:

The two owners...supported me. I was still really insecure and shy, but they supported what I was doing...So I just kept doing it and it sort of became this thing. I kept doing it; kept doing it. Getting better at carrying the whole show, which is really hard. And jumping from one thing to the next...is pretty hard to do. (Berkson interview 7 November 2009)

The neighborhood’s relative affordability and Barbès’s owners endorsement of her artistry coalesced to serendipitously provide her with community support and form an important part of her strategic network (Figure 17; p. 206).

De Conan attests that Park Slope was still an affordable neighborhood in the early 2000s (interview 12 May 2010). Similar to Chicago’s Wicker Park in the 1990s (Lloyd 2006), it harbored a slew of young artists. When Berkson approached de Conan shortly after Barbès opened, he did not yet have an over-booked roster, and took on acts without anxiety about his investment. He invited her to its stage: “I love Judith. I think she’s a fucking genius…it was one of those rare instances [where] I didn’t know her at the time; she gave me a demo and it was great” (ibid.). Barbès’ owners and clientele appreciated her eclecticism, an eclecticism that does not readily align with the categories reinforced in music programming at many NYC venues. Performing publicly forced Berkson to make music without stopping and starting, and provided her project local visibility.

She positioned diverse musical traditions side-by-side within a single performance:

I went and I wrote all my compositions and I played every part and really got back into piano. [I took] that very seriously…and I started to realize, ‘oh my god,’ this concept came into view through doing a solo show where [I would play] a Schubert

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85 De Conan opened Barbès in part because of his familiarity with Park Slope’s lack of a musically eclectic venue, despite its high concentration of musicians residing within its environs (see Chapter Two).
song, one of my kind of crazy little compositions, [and] a jazz standard. (Berkson interview 9 November 2010)

She pushed against circumscriptions that had been instilled by her training. As a child and adolescent she operated within the musical and social boundaries constructed by her father and piano teachers; as a young adult she contested NEC’s departmental borders. During her early years in New York she respected the currents of cultural relativism:

**Amanda Scherbenske**: What was it about working in that mode—where you’d put a couple different types of things together in the same setting—that you liked?

**Judith Berkson**: It reminded me of the continuity of being inspired by lots of different things. That…not one [thing] is better than the other, not one is more valid…I was in a phase where I needed to feel that everything was accessible…and that there was endless possibility. You could go from here to here to here, and you could feel that there’s a thread through it all, and that somehow I needed at the time. (interview 7 November 2009)

In 2006 violist-composer Jessica Pavone released Berkson’s first album, *Lu-Lu*, on her independent label, Peacock Recordings. Berkson provided a snapshot of her early NYC shows in *Lu-Lu*, “It wasn’t supposed to be this uniform, one thing, it was just supposed to represent like if you went to a concert what you might have heard” (Berkson interview 31 January 2011).

Also during this period she led the East River Orchestra, a klezmer ensemble that featured Brandon Seabrook, Ron Caswell, Jacob Garchik, Alex Kontorovich, and Ben Holmes. Although she initially envisaged it as a wedding ensemble, it took on an alternate identity through the eclectic Williamsburg venue, Zebulon:

[At] first I wanted to get maybe weddings, or something like that, and then basically we played Zebulon, like a lot. They really liked us and he put us on their CD and stuff. I was like *lol*, ‘okay.’ It turned into that. (Berkson interview 14 December 2012)

In the East River Orchestra she led, sang, and played accordion as well as composed: “We did a lot of klezmer and then I started to write my own stuff, and that’s how that kind of started with that band. I started to write liturgical music that was…inspired by Moshe Oysher” (ibid.). She began to
first compose liturgical music because of her work with this ensemble. Writing her own music prompted her to reconsider the band’s “klezmer” identity: “Once I started writing my own music...I realized, ‘okay this is not a klezmer band anymore. What is this? What do I want this to be?’” (ibid.).

She disbanded the East River Orchestra and formed Platzmachen, a band that “came out of [the East River Orchestra], [but] it was all originals” (ibid.). In Platzmachen she continued to work with Garchik and Seabrook and added drummer Vinnie Sperrazza to the lineup. The group actively performed from 2006 to 2008. She discontinued several bands she was in with Garchik after she ended their romantic relationship in 2008: “that was sort of hard for me to reconcile that. But at the same time, I wasn’t really comfortable where that band was going. I wasn’t totally on board. I wasn’t sure” (ibid.). For a time, the split disrupted a part of her strategic network.

One of her first opportunities to collaborate with an established artist came in late 2002. When saxophonist-composer Steve Coleman began to form an ensemble for Lucidarium (2004), he sought musicians “who could handle non-standard tunings and microtonality without freaking out” (Coleman email correspondence 12 December 2012). The vocalist-composer Kyoko Kitamura, who studied with Berkson and Coleman separately, recommended Berkson to Coleman because of her expertise in microtonal theory and performance:

Kyoko Kitamura recommended Judith, I believe in the spring of 2003. I went to one of Judith’s microtonal classes that Kyoko was taking to check her out, so that’s why I was interested in Judith. I had not really heard her compositions, but since I was not looking for people to compose music, this did not make any difference. But I could see right away that Judith was an outstanding musician, and of course I was looking for people who would be able to deal with this musical concept. There were not that many singers around who had this particular skill set, at least not

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86 Lucidarium was informed by Coleman’s study of a computer program created by George Lewis (that facilitated the hearing of different tunings), Harry Partch’s Genesis of a Music (1974 [1947]), Hermann von Helmholtz and Alexander J. Ellis’s On the Sensations of Tone As a Physiological Basis for the Theory of Music (1954 [1877]), Marchetto of Padua’s Lucidarium (1985 [1317-18]), and Nicola Vicentino’s Ancient Music Adapted to Modern Practice (1996 [1555]) (Coleman email correspondence 12 December 2012).
many that I knew of. (ibid.)

Berkson’s intimate knowledge of an esoteric musical field led to a recording with Coleman, Ravi Coltrane (ts), Jonathan Finlayson, Ralph Alessi (tpt), Berkson, Kitamura, Theo Bleckmann, Jen Shyu (voc), Mat Maneri (vla), Drew Gress (b), Craig Taborn (p), and Dafnis Prieto (d), among others. The ensuant album, Lucidarium, was recorded at Systems Two (Brooklyn, N.Y.) in May of 2003 (Figure 17; p. 206). Although it provided Berkson experience performing with prestigious and expert improvisers, it did not lead to ongoing musical partnerships.

In 2007 saxophonist-composer Ohad Talmor received a commission from the Bruckner Tage (St. Florian, Austria), a festival devoted to the legacy of Anton Bruckner’s music. The festival commissioned Talmor to create a new work that “explore[d] Bruckner’s Mass in F minor” (Talmor email correspondence 11 December 2012). Talmor relied on established ties for most of the personnel (i.e. his “The Other Quartet,” i.e. Shane Endsley (tpt), Peter McCann (g), Mark Ferber (d), and Talmor (ts)). For the choral arrangement, however, he determined that:

Since I didn’t have the luxury of a budget allowing for a choir with soloists (like in the original piece), I decided to have only one singer, which I would “over-burden” with the immense task of dealing with all the parts… (ibid.)

He had met Berkson about a year earlier through Jacob Garchik, his collaborator and friend. Talmor chose Berkson for Mass Transformation because of her ability to perform jazz and classical musics, as well as their shared musical and cultural reference points:

I do remember being struck by her intelligence and vivaciousness. We also share a number of cultural stigmata in our relationship to Jewishness/speaking Hebrew and to music in general (a broad, encompassing vision and appetite for Classical turn of the Century and Contemporary Jazz)...Berkson combines many different elements in her musical world. They work together more or less seamlessly, pending on the musical circumstances, but no matter what, I find her to be one of the most honest and naked performer out there - the beautiful fragility that I often feel emanating from her performances is deeply touching, as one doesn't necessarily witness this kind of raw self in the daily musical grind...Judith Berkson was the best choice; she integrates classical and jazz vocabulary and combines them with her knowledge and true practice of Jewish liturgy (mostly Ashkenazy,
With the personnel secured, Talmor traveled to Austria with Berkson, Endsley, McCann, and Ferber in August of 2008.

For Berkson, the experience proved transformative for the opportunities and adventure that unfolded during her first trip to Europe:

All my friends had been touring in Europe and doing tons of stuff and I really had never been [there]...that trip was sort of a big deal because I went and we did the concert in St. Florian, which was this amazing experience at this huge cathedral where Bruckner was the organist and all the history. Then the [local Spring String Quartet]...took us everywhere and we just had this amazing time. I had such a great time with the guys [Talmor, Ferber, Endsley, McCann]. We bonded in this way; it was so special. (Berkson interview 14 December 2012)

Unlike some of the musical ties she formed upon moving to the City, Berkson’s male peers of the Other Quartet appreciated her. The tour first tied her to transatlantic musical networks, unlike her friends who regularly had been travelling to Europe as part of distinct jazz networks.

She also had her first business meeting with a major record label on this trip. Berkson had sent ECM’s Steve Lake *Lu-Lu* and informed him that she would be travelling to Austria. They convened in Munich:

We met up—I think in Munich—to have a meeting...and that’s when I found out I was going to be doing a recording. So it was just this like, ‘wow, my first time in Europe—this is so exciting.’ It was just very, very exciting. I felt like it was a little bit surreal. It’s not like you’re in a band, it’s like you’re by yourself experiencing these things; it’s kind of weird sometimes, you know. (Berkson interview 14 December 2012)

She travelled to Udine, Italy the following year to record *Oylam* (see Chapter 5).

She used the skills that she developed in her solo show (as performed on *Lu-Lu* and *Oylam*) for her collaborations with Frank London, a famed klezmer musician and bandleader, and tablist

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87 London was a member of one of the early klezmer revival band, the Klezmer Conservatory Band. Later, he cofounded the Klezmatics, an innovative second generation revival band known for blending klezmer with rock.
Deep Singh, “because there was no drummer [or]...bass player it was really dependent upon my playing—I kind of had to hold down the harmonies, like everything, and be singing” (Berkson interview 14 December 2012). Berkson first heard London perform with the Klezmer Conservatory Band in Boston when she was just five years old. After she moved to NYC she saw London from time to time at his Klezmer Brass All Star concerts:

Frank and I would always talk and we were always talking about doing something together, but we didn’t ever really do it until...[the] “Devotional Music” [project]—in a way. It’s mostly Jewish devotional music, but it does incorporate different traditions. So we had some that Deep would bring to the music. (ibid.)

In 2010 and 2011 she performed with London and Singh across Western Europe and in New York at such venues as Het Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), Museo Picasso Málaga (Spain), Zuiderpershuis (Antwerp), RASA (Utrecht), and the Manhattan JCC (Berkson website accessed 22 January 2013).
Concert in Brooklyn

I arrive at ShapeShifter Lab (18 Whitwell Place, Brooklyn) a few minutes prior to Jacob Garchik’s album release performance for The Heavens: The Atheist Gospel Trombone Album, which he has released on his own label, Yestereve. The album features Garchik overdubbing multiple horn parts. Tonight, however, the room is abuzz with the excitement of having so many of the City’s greatest trombonists in the same place at the same time. It is the first time I have had a chance to make it out to ShapeShifter Lab, an expansive, freshly painted (relatively) new performance space with a central coffee and beer/wine bar run by bassist Matthew Garrison. While chatting with a few friends and acquaintances, I deliberate on where to sit before the performance gets underway. I make my way through the crowd to the front and take a seat, even though so much heavy metal may prove too loud up close.

The ensemble begins to intone from the (stage) right side of the bar, processing towards the front. Garchik leads his brass band on trombone, with Alan Ferber, Curtis Fowlkes, Curtis Hasselbring, Matt Musselman, Josh Roseman (all trombone), Brian Drye (baritone horn), Joseph Daley (sousaphone), and Kenny Wollesen (drum kit and poyk (tenor drum with attached cymbal)) following close behind. Several times throughout the evening Garchik stresses that these tunes represent, “some ideas I had about religion and science and the universe, but a musical discussion of them” (quoted from memory). He emphasizes that he wishes the discourse to remain musical, not verbal, “some of you may want to discuss this with me; but I’d rather not” (quoted from memory). His insistence on this matter makes me consider the ostensible paradox between his introverted nature and his musical forthrightness. I became aware of this during an interview we did a few years prior:
Jacob Garchik: [The creative process] is a way to express everything that I think, using music. It translates my thoughts directly into this art form.

Amanda Scherbenske: What might you be trying to express?

JG: Well, that’s the thing that I don’t have the ability to say…in words. I can say it in music. It might be I’m trying to express my view of the world; or my own internal angst; or my own life experience; or my own impressions of what’s going on in the rest of the world, or in NYC; or it may be my impressions of what it’s like to be a human being or something more abstract, like the neurons firing in my brain. I don’t know. But I feel like music is the best way for me to express all those types of things. (interview 17 January 2010)

His musical expressions, spanning multiple styles and genres, and take into account minutiae and intricacies. He takes nothing for granted when he sets out to learn about any of the many musical “styles” with which he engages. Moreover, he is musically competent in many skills: composition, arrangement of extremely detailed microrhythms and –tonalities, and ornaments, and masterful performance on the horn in a plethora of styles. The breadth of New York musical milieus in which he is enmeshed and engaged in itself is extraordinary. (Adaptation from field notes 25 July 2012)

Early Years

Jacob Garchik was born in San Francisco in 1976. His parents and family friends informed his early life in music, which he earnestly pursued. He was inspired by his music lessons and self-directed improvisatory and compositional explorations. His father, a lawyer, and his mother, a journalist for the San Francisco Chronicle, listened to music spanning multiple styles: “klezmer, Broadway musicals, a little bit of classical music, like Mozart and Beethoven, [and] pop music, like Paul Simon, Linda Ronstadt, and the Beatles” (Garchik interview 17 January 2010). His mother regularly enjoyed playing J.S. Bach, Frederic Chopin, and Scott Joplin on piano.

Garchik began private piano lessons with a neighborhood teacher when he was five. He discontinued formal piano study after his teacher quit music teaching four years later. His interest in it reemerged about a year after that:

JG: I kept playing on my own—improvising on the piano. And for some reason…I was more interested in music [then], than I was when I was with her taking lessons. I became very interested in music…I would sit at the piano and just explore and see how did the black keys sound, how did the white keys sound. What’s a triad [and] how does it sound if I build a triad off of every note?
AS: Did you think of what you were doing as improvisation—or were you just kind of fooling around? Were you familiar with the concept at that point?

JG: I knew what improvisation was—probably from my brother’s friends who were interested in jazz and were playing in the jazz band. I knew that jazz had improvisation in it…and I knew that I didn’t know all the rules about jazz but that I was just making stuff up. (ibid.)

He based his self-directed playing and composing in exploration. In addition to improvising, he began to compose and teach himself the harmonica and the accordion, instruments he found around the house.

Around the same time, he took up the trombone in the middle school band and began taking weekly private classical trombone lessons. Garchik’s private trombone teacher, Doug Thorley, emphasized instrumental technique and classical solo and orchestral repertoire. The Herbert Hoover Middle School band, taught by veteran music teacher Ko Takemoto, was noted for its excellence and central to the school curriculum, “We had a band that received many superior awards. The band was so large that the head counselor programmed some of the academic classes around the band program” (Takemoto email correspondence 6 May 2010). Garchik embraced Takemoto’s rigorous pedagogy:

One of the things I liked about him was even though it was a middle school band he did a lot of heavyweight composers—really great music for band arrangements. In the seventh grade we played Brahms’s German Requiem arranged for band and we played Copland…just a lot of serious classical music. A lot of band teachers do these sort of dumbed-down arrangements. (Garchik interview 17 January 2010)

Takemoto’s pedagogy emphasized “the fundamentals of music: scales, arpeggios, etcetera” (Takemoto email correspondence 6 May 2010). He tackled difficult repertoire and instilled in students the importance of “quality”: “I think it is important that the students learn quality. The quality of a performance should make one feel proud. Proud of belonging in a group that has

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88 His (band) teacher Ko Takemoto described HHMS as, “a very desirable school [that] many parents sought to get their child enrolled into” (Takemoto email correspondence 6 May 2010).
quality” (ibid.).

A year later Garchik got his first personal record-cassette player. He combed his family’s record collection for selections “that looked interesting” (Garchik interview 17 January 2010), pulling recordings by an easy-listening percussion ensemble, the Beatles, Thelonious Monk, Harry James, Glenn Miller, Ludwig van Beethoven, and Amadeus Mozart. He also joined the school jazz band that year. Ron Madden, a horn player, composer, and veteran middle school jazz band teacher, had established a formidable after-school jazz band program by the time Garchik joined it:

My brother [who] was older than me…also went to that school and he had friends who were in the jazz band. I remember going to one of the concerts and seeing how it was very exciting. Everybody was screaming: they had a light show and they were playing big band. They played Glenn Miller and maybe Count Basie and some more modern big band stuff. But he really made it into a show and even for ten year olds: we were excited. I remember thinking, ‘oh, when I get to be eleven I want to be in the jazz band.’ It was cool. (ibid.)

Madden readily introduced his middle school students to jazz and open improvisation:

**JG:** He was really encouraging and he was very interested in improvising and avant-garde improvising, even for middle school students. We would have jam sessions in the auditorium starting when I was eleven and twelve…he would turn out all the lights in the auditorium and we would play in the dark, just free improvising.

**AS:** Did [Madden] have any particular ways of teaching improvisation?

**JG:** He started with the basics that everybody does, like the blues scale. I think we also played simple tunes like “So What,” or modal tunes to improvise off of.

**AS:** So the improvisation that you’re talking about is within the framework of “jazz”?

**JG:** That part was, but then we would do improvising games. He would say, ‘okay, we’re going to make up a fugue and pretend we’re playing classical music, and I’m going to make up a theme that you guys are going imitate in different keys.’ So most of it wasn’t within the framework of jazz. (ibid.)

Madden reserved the after school jam sessions for his musically committed students. He initiated improvisation between younger and more experienced players by inviting high school students to these sessions.
Garchik was engrossed in music throughout middle and high school: he performed in the school orchestra, the San Francisco Youth Orchestra (SFYO), the Stanford Jazz Workshop, the Tanglewood composition program, and with his peers. At thirteen he was accepted to the SFYO as one of its youngest members (it admits thirteen to 22 year olds) under the conductorship of Alasdair Neale:

I started playing with the youth orchestra, which was a big influence on me. The level of the orchestra was really high: in fact, a lot of the members were students at the [San Francisco] Conservatory…and it was really inspiring to be in an orchestra…The conductor was Alasdair Neale: he was [also] the Assistant Conductor with the [San Francisco] Symphony and all the rehearsals were held at [Louise M.] Davies Symphony Hall on the stage. So I was exposed to a lot of great music, like Stravinsky, Mahler, Tchaikovsky, and Barber. We even did contemporary music, like Takemitsu. [We played] Brahms, and all the standard types of orchestra stuff…and just the sound of the orchestra made a very deep impression on me—hearing instruments being played on a very high level and hearing those masterpieces. (ibid.)

Because Takemoto transferred from HHMS to Lowell High School around the same time as Garchik, Garchik continued band class with Takemoto through high school. Garchik also learned jazz improvisation based on chord changes during high school, “[At the] Stanford Jazz Workshop I was exposed to playing jazz standards in a traditional way, which I hadn’t really been exposed to before. It got me interested in that—in playing jazz and chord changes and things like that” (ibid.).

**New York Years**

After receiving admittance to his top two conservatory choices, Berklee College of Music and Manhattan School of Music (MSM), Garchik selected MSM. He appreciated its rigorousness, quality instructors, and commensurate jazz and Western curricula; but he ultimately chose it because of its location:

I wanted to study with people who were known in the jazz world. At Berklee College they had a famous teacher…and at MSM they had a famous teacher…You could get records of them and they were really players on a really high level…What influenced my decision to go to MSM, more than anything, was the
private teacher. I got into both schools and I decided to go to MSM, and the thing that won me over was living in NYC, instead of Boston. (ibid.)

For Garchik, the City stimulated self-application, hard work, and taste:

I’ve always found New York to be very inspiring. I love the way it looks. I love the architecture. I love the bigness of it and I feel like it always pushes me to think big and to be ambitious…The skyscrapers are so monumental; it’s like a reminder, ‘look at these huge things that human beings have done by applying themselves, and you too can apply yourself and make something on a large level.’ I also like the people: people are very driven and they’re hard-workers and they have very discriminating tastes. I think that drives me and forces me to also be ambitious and be discriminating and to make good decisions and to have good taste. I like all the confluence of different cultures in New York: all the different types of people—rich and poor—people from all over the world—different types of food, different types of art, [and] music. (ibid.)

He selected his private teacher based on his valorization of musical competence; he selected his place of residence based on its cosmopolitanism. These ideals have continued to influence the ties he has formed and preserved in his personal network.

Garchik explored several musical traditions and made his way through disparate music scenes while a jazz major at MSM. He credits bass trombonist Dave Taylor, one of his three private teachers at MSM,89 with fostering the importance of musical diversity:

[Taylor] has a very interesting perspective on music and a very varied career. He plays all kinds of classical music, and a lot of jazz and experimental music, as well as doing pop gigs and jingles, commercial music and all kinds of stuff. He always encouraged me to listen to a lot of different types of music and pursue a lot of different types of music. (ibid.)

Taylor has modeled participation across a range of genres and styles in his own career: he has performed with the American Symphony Orchestra (under Leopold Stokowski), the New York Philharmonic (under Pierre Boulez), and the Thad Jones Mel Lewis Orchestra. Additionally, his discography exemplifies engagement in myriad musics. He recorded with Duke Ellington, The Rolling Stones, and Blood, Sweat, and Tears (“Dave Taylor: Biography” 2004).

89 Garchik also studied with trombonists Steve Turre and David Finlayson at MSM.
As early as Garchik’s second year at MSM, trombonists senior to him began calling him to substitute for them in various “world music” ensembles: “I met some older trombone players at the school and they were encouraging. They liked my playing and they would throw me work” (Garchik interview 17 January 2010).\(^90\) His upper classmates’ approval of his musicianship gave rise to work in Haitian, salsa, and parade bands, as well as big bands and “other types of jazz gigs” (ibid.) (Figure 18, upper right quadrant; p. 207). These ties confirm Granovetter’s weak ties contention: they significantly expanded Garchik’s performance opportunities beyond his circle of close friends and were “indispensable to individuals’ opportunities and to their integration into communities” (Granovetter 1973:1378). Further, they augmented the scenes he actively was traversing.

Garchik tried his hand at performing various styles as a substitute for his MSM colleagues and teachers. Taylor recommended him as his substitute for the Mingus Big Band (Figure 18, lower right quadrant; p. 207), which performed weekly at the Fez under Time Café from 1991 to 2004 (“Mingus Big Band” 2011).\(^91\) Colleagues and teachers called Garchik to perform with professional jazz ensembles during his tenure at conservatory (1994 to 1998), as well.

His facility on the trombone and friendship with saxophonist and fellow MSM student Ohad Talmor led to a three-week European tour invitation with iconic jazz alto saxophonist Lee Konitz. The experience, which took place during his junior year, proved invigorating for Garchik, “It was sort of the first professional tour that I had done…and it was also really inspiring to be around Lee Konitz who…was like a legendary figure to me” (Garchik interview 17 January 2010). In addition to the personal and musical meaning that the tour had for him, it also resulted in more

\(^{90}\) Stephen Cottrell illuminates the problem of deputizing among London freelance musicians: “The reasons for choosing which particular individuals to put into a group are inevitably complex and require a detailed and particular appraisal of another musician’s personal and musical characteristics” (Cottrell 2004:86).

\(^{91}\) The Fez was a club that operated from 1992 to 2005 at 380 Lafayette Street (“Fez: Under Time Café,” n.d.). Since 2008, the Mingus Big Band has performed weekly "Mingus Mondays" at the Jazz Standard where it interchanges with the Mingus Orchestra and Mingus Dynasty (“Mingus Big Band” 2011).
recording and performance engagements with the bandleader. A live date he played with Konitz at the Jazz Standard in 2005 was recorded, and released as Konitz’s New Nonet (OmniTone, 15214) the following year.

Garchik’s multiplexed ties with Talmor resulted in work in other ensembles as well. Garchik has worked with him in Talmor and bassist Steve Swallow’s Sextet, releasing L’histoire du Clochard (The Bum’s Tale) in 2004 under Palmetto. Talmor’s Swiss upbringing partly explains the ensemble’s strong transatlantic connections. With the exception of its 2005 run at the Jazz Standard, they have performed mostly in Europe, for example, at PP Café (Brussels), EJMA-Masterclass (Lausanne), Jazz Contrebande (Geneva), La Palma (Rome), Le Vauban (Brest), Teatro Manzoni, Milano Auditorium (both Milan), Reign (Vienna), and Moods (Zurich).

His MSM colleagues continued to propose professional engagements; they encouraged him to develop a network rooted in myriad musics even after Garchik completed his degree in 1998. One former classmate ushered him into the klezmer world through a single recommendation (Figure 18, upper right quadrant; p. 207):

One of my school classmates…had been playing with a klezmer band and he recommended me to fill in for him. I didn’t know anything about Jewish music, although I knew what it sounded like from growing up and my parents listening to it. They had a klezmer band at my bar mitzvah and my brother’s bar mitzvah. But I thought, ‘well it’s an opportunity to play and it pays money,’ so I played with them a little bit. It led to playing with other klezmer bands very soon after and then…within a couple of months I was playing with a lot of klezmer bands—not as a regular member, but filling in here and there. (Garchik interview 17 January 2010)

The engagement spawned scads of other klezmer gigs. Unlike the klezmer scene participants who were motivated by musical magnetism and heritage exploration (Slobin 2000), Garchik took up klezmer to earn a living. He aligns more closely with the London freelance musicians about whom Cottrell writes, “Economic expediency dictates that musicians must be competent in a number of different performance styles” (2004:57).

110
Around the time he began forays into the klezmer world, Garchik joined Wet Ink, a new music collective led by MSM colleague Alex Mincek. Wet Ink’s members pursued a musical vision that was:

less bound by categorizations...That first crew was interested in listening to Mahler, Monteverdi and Webern just as much as Coltrane, Cecil Taylor, Braxton, Black Dice or Dillion. So it was about being open. (Mincek email correspondence 8 January 2013)

Wet Ink’s members, guided by a DIY philosophy, held apartment and loft concerts because “they came without any aesthetic baggage/track record....[and] we were free to do whatever” (ibid.). Wet Ink encouraged Garchik, “to continue writing classical music, or more through-composed music” (Garchik interview 17 January 2010), an interest cultivated during his studies at the San Francisco Conservatory and Tanglewood Institute (ca. 1990-1993) (Garchik email correspondence 17 October 2013). Although Garchik has not been a regular Wet Ink collaborator since 2003, he occasionally partakes in their concerts. In 2008 he performed works by the AACM at the Kitchen; in 2011 he performed works by George Lewis, Sam Pluta, Eric Wubbels, Seung-Ah Oh, Simon Steen-Andersen, and Stefan Prins at St. Peter’s Church.

While at MSM Garchik also established some of his closest friendship and long-term collaborative ties. He met and befriended fellow jazz majors, Jacob Sacks (pianist-composer) and Dan Weiss (percussionist-composer) during his sophomore year. The three have played together and cooperatively explored varied musical traditions. In 2001 they performed Garchik’s original compositions alongside his arrangements of Bulgarian wedding\(^{97}\) and Pakistani Qawwali music for

\(^{97}\) Garchik first heard Bulgarian wedding music in middle school when Lars Jacobson, a fellow musician and friend, gave him a recording. He later was reintroduced to Bulgarian musics in classes at MSM.
trombone, tabla, and melodica at the largely theatrical venue, Collective: Unconscious as a Wet Ink event.

Garchik’s reciprocal collaborations with Sacks and Weiss mutually benefitted the creative explorations and development of personal projects for the closely-knit cohort (Figure 18, upper left quadrant; p. 207). Sacks and Weiss comprise two legs of Garchik’s eponymous trio. The Jacob Garchik Trio released Abstracts (Yestereve 01) Romance (Yestereve 02), and At Play (Yestereve 03) on Yestereve Records, a label he created to disseminate his work. The trio has largely performed in NYC venues and festivals that program eclectic (e.g. Barbès), experimental (e.g. Ibeam), and jazz (e.g. Cornelia St. Café; Winter Jazzfest acts). They briefly toured in and around Sacks’s home state of Michigan, performing at Hungry Brain (Chicago), University of Michigan, and Canterbury House (Ann Arbor, MI).6

Garchik performs with Sacks and Weiss in ensembles in addition to his trio. Along with Sacks, Vinnie Sperazza (drums), and David Ambrosio (bass) he co-founded 40Twenty in 2011. The ensemble directly positions themselves vis-à-vis a jazz historical continuum, stating that they are “inspired by the challenge of jazz club engagements from the 1940s, 50s, and 60s” (“I Beam: 40Twenty – 10 nights, 2 weeks” 2010), in which musicians began each set twenty minutes after the

91 Collective: Unconscious was a nonprofit (1994-2008) housed first in the LES, and later in TriBeCa. It was funded in part by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and New York State Council for the Arts (S.D. 2008).
92 It is not uncommon for improviser-composers to self-release their work.
93 Yeah Yeah Records, a label run by Sacks and vocalist Yoon Sun Choi, has assisted Garchik to propagate his albums by listing them through their label. Among others, its artists include: 4inObjects, Tom Aldrich, David Ambrosio, Michael Bates, Matt Bauder, Andrew Bishop, Matt Blostein, Bob Bowen, Larry Campbell, Gerald Cleaver, Jeff Davis, Lainie Diamond, Mark Dodge, Andrew Drury, Brian Drye, Scott DuBois, Geoff Kraly, Tim Flood, Wells Hanley, Matt Glassmeyer, Greg Joseph, Tony Malaby, Mat Maneri, Mike McGinnis, Russell Meissner, Matt Moran, Sean Moran, Paul Motian, Quinsin Nachoff, Oscar Noriega, Eivind Opsvik, Reuben Radding, Matt Renzi, Jamie Reynolds, Jason Rigby, Jesse Stacken, Loren Stillman, Craig Taborn, Mark Timmermans, Kevin Turcotte, Peter Van Hufel, John Wojciechowski, Bruce Williamson, Kenny Wollesen, Nate Wooley, Khabu Doug Young (“Yeah Yeah Records: Artists and Bands.” n.d.).
94 Additionally, Garchik has performed with Sun Choi, Sacks, and Weiss in 4in Objects at Cornelia Street Café, 55 Bar, 55 Bar, koze lounge, 55 Bar, and Barbès (all NYC).
hour, played for 40 minutes, and repeated this process up to five times per night. They perform regularly at Ibeam.97

In addition to his work as a leader and co-leader, Garchik is a member of the Jacob Sacks Quintet along with MSM graduates Dan Weiss, Ben Gerstein, and Thomas Morgan (Figure 9). The Ben Gerstein Collective’s membership overlaps with Sack’s quintet, with the addition of bassist Eivind Opsvik, another MSM graduate (Figure 18, upper left quadrant; p. 207). Finally, Garchik and fellow trombonist Gerstein made cameo appearances on Weiss’s album Now Yes When (track 4), released in 2006 by Portuguese label Toneofapitch. Together, Garchik, Weiss, Sacks, Gerstein, and Morgan comprise a cohort with multiple overlapping ties.

Figure 9. Eivind Opsvik, Jacob Sacks, Jacob Garchik, Ben Gerstein, Dan Weiss, Thomas Morgan outside of Bar 4. Brooklyn, New York. 2006. Photo courtesy of Ben Gerstein and Todd Neufeld.

97 They have also performed at Puppets Jazz Bar and Barbès (both Park Slope).
Garchik maintains formative connections, particularly those with his MSM peers, in his strategic network. Meanwhile, his strategic network has branched out beyond its formative roots (Figure 19 throughout; p. 208). He continues to work with southeast European-based music ensembles in his strategic network. Frank London’s invitation for Garchik to play with his Klezmer Brass All Stars signifies his position among the top klezmer echelons. Garchik appears on Klezmer Brass All Stars’s album, *Carnival Conspiracy* (PIR1902), along with the prestigious klezmer performers Susan Hoffman Watts, Merlin Shepherd, Matt Darriau, Mark Rubin, and Aaron Alexander. He shares recorded space, through the 2005 Piranha release, on a label that categorizes their offerings by continent, ethnic or diasporic group, or identity construct, “Africa; Gypsy & Balkan; Jewish; Latin; Orient; Borderless; Special Projects” (“Piranha: Catalogue” accessed 19 December 2012).

Around 2003 Garchik met Slavic Soul Party (SSP) leader, Matt Moran, through his then-girlfriend and roommate, Judith Berkson. He informed Moran of his experience with klezmer, a related tradition stemming from southeast Europe, and expressed his enthusiasm for Bulgarian music. Moran first called him to substitute in SSP, and later, to be a permanent member:

[Moran] introduced me to a lot of Serbian music, which is similar and that’s the focus of Slavic Soul Party is Serbian music. I thought it was really exciting and really interesting, and that band began to become really busy and get a lot of gigs and also grew a little bigger than it used to be—originally it was a quintet and then it grew to nine people around the time that I joined. (Garchik interview 17 January 2010)

After performing with SSP for only a couple of months Garchik began to arrange traditional tunes and compose original pieces in the style of “mostly Balkan music, but also Mexican brass band music, which is another interest I have” (ibid.). He completed around 25 brass arrangements for the group and performed with them as a regular member through 2008. During his SSP tenure they performed nearly 100 concerts per year, including a weekly Tuesday evening gig at Barbès and
several U.S. tours. Additionally, they released *Bigger* (BR-7184U), *Teknochek Collision* (BR0015), and *Taketron* (BR0023), all on Barbè's Records.

Similar to the contemporary Balkanites (largely American-born aficionados of Balkan music, dance, and culture) that Mirjana Laušević (2007) details, SSP took several educational trips to Southeastern Europe, “[We] went to Europe a couple of times and studied in Serbia with these Gypsy musicians and also went to Turkey and listened to music and were immersed in that” (Garchik interview 17 January 2010). Although Garchik is no longer a regular member, he credits his experiences with SSP as enduringly affecting his aesthetics, “I think it really stuck with me…those sounds really stuck in my ears. I really enjoyed listening to the music and…I incorporate that into my writing and my playing” (ibid.).

In addition to shaping his affinities, Garchik’s work with SSP resulted in an auspicious meeting with the Kronos Quartet’s first violinist and founder, David Harrington. When SSP opened for Kronos’s 2006 “Celebrate Brooklyn” performance at the Prospect Park Band Shell, Garchik and Harrington found common ground discussing Balkan music:

[Harrington] was talking about [their] collaboration with Taraf de Haidouks, which is a Romanian Gypsy band. He was saying how difficult it is to play the music and how the ornaments…go by so quickly, that it’s almost impossible to hear them and to play them. I told him that I agreed, and I had transcribed a lot of music that is very difficult—that I had done a lot of transcriptions. A few days later he called me and he asked me if I would like to do a transcription of a piece from Iran…for an Iranian double-reed instrument. I said, ‘I’d love to.’ I did it and it was really hard and it had a lot of microtones and ornaments and was very complicated. But they liked it and they still play that arrangement; and he just asked me to do more and more stuff. (ibid.)

Because Harrington appreciated the quality of Garchik’s work he asked him to do more transcriptions and arrangements. This led to an ongoing partnership:

Originally [Harrington] just asked me to do a transcription and then the first chunk of it and he was pleased and he was like, ‘oh, this it going to be great…can you find a way to make this work for the string quartet? What do you think about dividing out the parts?’ So we sort of collaborated. I was like, ‘well, it makes sense to put
this on this instrument and he agreed. He called me back and said, ‘what do you think about switching these?’ So it was sort of a collaborative arrangement, but then in the future he would give me an assignment and he would say, ‘yeah, find a way to turn this into a string quartet.’ So I would do the transcription and the arrangement. (ibid.)

His ability to transcribe musics involving complicated microtones and microtimings and to expertly arrange them catapulted his work forward with Kronos:

I’ve done a couple dozen things with them at this point—almost all world music—music from China, Korea, Ethiopia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, Greece, but I also did an arrangement of Thelonious Monk for them. And I did a thing of Górecki for them—a choral piece I turned into a string quartet—all kinds of stuff. (ibid.)

Garchik’s arrangements have appeared on: Kronos’s albums Floodplain (Nonesuch, 518349-2) and Rainbow: Music of Central Asia Vol. 8 (Smithsonian Folkways, CD40527); and pipa virtuoso Wu Man’s album Immeasurable Light (Traditional Crossroads, CD 4343), with Kronos as guest. His Kronos arrangements have graced the stages of several of the most celebrated performance spaces in the West: the Barbican Theater (London), Carnegie Hall’s Stern Auditorium and Zankel Hall (New York), and the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (San Francisco).

Kronos, one of the first professional quartets to significantly expand its repertoire beyond the Western classical canon, has pursued an artistic vision that “combin[es] a spirit of fearless exploration with a commitment to expanding the range and context of the string quartet” (“Kronos Quartet: About” 2010). Many of the “explorations” that Garchik has arranged fall under the “world music” category, overlapping with a superficial categorization of SSP. Aesthetic interests alone, however, do not determine the art worlds and networks with which one engages. Slavic Soul Party performs in NYC mostly at Barbès; Kronos, on the other hand, performs at midtown concert bastions such as Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center. Garchik’s initial meeting with Harrington may be considered serendipitous, but it was their overlapping aesthetics that led to a shared

[^98] Immeasurable Light features the solo work of pipa virtuoso Wu Man.
performance space, partly facilitating an eventual collaboration. The Prospect Park Band Shell served as the weak tie that brought these two together, but Garchik’s musical facility perpetuated their ongoing partnership.

Garchik’s work with trombonist-composer Josh Roseman comprises another significant portion of his strategic network. Garchik first performed with Roseman’s group Water Surgeons along with Tyshawn Sorey and Curtis Hasselbring in December of 2006 at Bar 4 in Park Slope. Roseman initially sought out multi-instrumentalists for the ensemble, but quickly came to realize that his collaborators’ abilities to pivot from “eastern European,” to rock, to “traditional jazz” at will gave the ensemble musical possibilities beyond those he had first envisioned (Roseman interview 2 July 2013).

He shares membership with pianist-composer Barney McAll in Roseman’s Extended Constellations (also known as King Froopy All Stars) and Water Surgeons. Extended Constellations has recorded but not yet released an album; and they have performed at The Knitting Factory, Jazz Gallery, and Coco 66 (all NYC), as well as The Painted Bride (Philadelphia). Roseman's Water Surgeons have performed at The Stone, Rose Live Music, Bar 4, Winter JazzFest (2011), Barbès, and the Vision Festival (2011) since their formation in late 2008. King Froopy All Stars opened for Medeski, Martin, and Wood at Central Park SummerStage in 2011.

In addition to work with his own ensembles, Garchik has recorded with Anthony Coleman, John Hollenbeck, Billy Martin, Frank London’s Klezmer Brass All Stars, and Slavic Soul Party, among others. He argues that his work traverses “styles” of music:

**AS:** How would you describe yourself as a musician, or, if you don’t like that question, how do you think about your music?

**JG:** I’ve sort of settled into a description…I’m a musician; I play the trombone; and I do mostly experimental music.’ I feel like that cuts to the chase. I say mostly
experimental, but not entirely, because I do a lot of other different types of music…I feel that [experimental] is a broad term that encompasses a lot of different styles. I don’t want to say that I do jazz or that I do classical or that I do world music or avant-garde. Sometimes I would say avant-garde, but people know experimental means something that sort of pushes the envelope—and I feel like it sort of gives them the right idea. (Garchik interview 17 January 2010)

In Garchik’s formulation, experimental[ism], provides a space for him to create music that need not regard stylistic coherencies. It may involve aesthetic blending as well as trail blazing in multiple scenes.
Okkyung Lee  
b. Daejeon, South Korea, 3 March 1975

Figure 10. Okkyung Lee at Roulette.  
Photo courtesy of Peter Gannushkin (downtownmusic.net).

Meeting in SoHo and Chinatown

A couple of close friends of mine and I huddle together to shield ourselves from the wind blasting through the streets of lower Manhattan. Next to us a woman with cello and a man with guitar in tow survey the Jazz Gallery announcement placard as we wait for the house manager to unlock the stand-alone, two-story brick structure. I am immediately cast under the spell of the large-looming personality of the cellist, Okkyung Lee. She loudly spurns an upcoming Jazz Gallery performance promotion that features a photograph of a female bass player donning a low-cut strapless ball gown:

Look at how hyper-sexualized this announcement is—what is that about! Was that her idea or some stupid promoter’s? I mean if it’s her idea, more power to her—but why do women always have to be presented in this way? (Field notes 18 October 2009; quoted from memory.)

Her fearless vocalization of her frustration with the representation of the bassist impresses me, and I make a mental note that I would like to interview her to learn more about her political and musical voice.

Inside the Jazz Gallery that evening I find Lee has not only an opining viewpoint about women in music, but also a thunderous musical one. While performing Tyshawn Sorey’s For Kathy Change, I witness her

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99 At the time of this writing the Jazz Gallery was located at 290 Hudson St., Manhattan; it is now located at 1160 Broadway, Manhattan.
breadth of skill and musical vocabulary, as well as her feelingful connection to her instrument. The cello is said to most closely imitate the human voice, but the furor with which Lee pinches, squeezes, crunches, glissandoes, tip-toes, coaxes, slaps and sings from her cello has dizzying affects on me. She creates a sonic and kinesthetic world that implies a sort of musical abandonment that I have rarely felt so deeply. Afterwards I am too awestruck to formally introduce myself; instead, I briefly congratulate her on the performance. (Adaptation from field notes 16 October 2009)

[Several months later]: Following that night in October, I recall my impressions of her and the impact that that performance has had on me from time to time. Her strong convictions about the representation of women in music, as well as her expressivity and commanding instrumental facility affect me considerably. It is not until four months later that we come together for an interview. Lee suggests we meet at the 88 Orchard St. Café, a location not too far from her (then) LES residence. She is already seated in a corner of the noisy café when I arrive a few minutes early for our 1:00 p.m. meeting. I gratefully accept her suggestion to move to the basement room where we will have a quieter spot to talk. (Adaptation from field notes 27 February 2010)

Early Years

Lee began formal musical instruction with private piano lessons at age three, and from primary school through completion of a Master of Arts degree, exclusively attended schools specializing in music. At seven she also began also to play the cello because her Catholic elementary school required all students to play an instrument (other than piano). She took private cello lessons in addition to the lessons at her primary school. At twelve she moved an hour and 45 minutes away from her immediate family in Daejeon to attend Seoul Yewon School100 (middle school), and later, Seoul Arts High School. During her first three years in the capital she lived with distant relatives. Then at fifteen, she began to room with a fellow music student near her school. By sixteen, she moved into her own apartment.

Although Lee’s life revolved around Western classical music, “Everything was connected to music school…everybody was a music, art, and dance major” (Lee interview 27 February 2010), she resisted by, “study[ing] the cello as little as possible” (ibid.). Lee’s mother, a housewife, determined the course of her early musical life: “it was all decided by my mom” (ibid.). Lee, however, longed to be a writer: “I was doing music because of my mom. She wouldn’t let me stop

100 Kor., “Home of the Arts.”
when I wanted to. Between middle school and high school…I wanted to be a writer and my mom didn’t let me—so I had to go on [in music]” (ibid.).

Her middle and high school teachers taught and valued, “[the] one and only, classical music. There wasn’t any other music that was taught” (ibid.). Each week she took two cello lessons with a secondary teacher for technique, and one with a primary teacher for repertoire and style. Musical study grounded in replication of an idealized sound frustrated Lee:

[In] Korea…the teachers are really hard on you…especially the teacher I had was awful because whatever I did was wrong. Even when it came down to interpretation…it had to be exactly the same as your teacher did; it cannot be your own. (ibid.)

She resented her teachers’ unreachable expectations and circumscribed repertoire. Her teenage listening interests diverged significantly from the school curriculum’s strict diet of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms, “[I listened to] lots of pop music—Korean, some American…some metal…I thought it was heavy metal but it turned out to be hair metal, like Skid Row, a little bit [of] underground [Korean pop]…and some classical music, but not really [too much]” (ibid.).

Despite her discomfort with a system that she perceived as restrictive, she sometimes felt deeply connected to music and loved to play the cello:

There were times that I really liked playing cello but I didn’t want to admit it because I was so pissed at these teachers…As a teenager your teacher is saying all the time that you’re wrong; but then…I really loved playing…the Bach cello Suite No. 6 Allemande…it was maybe the second time…[that I] was like, ‘oh I can do it. I know how to play this. I own this piece.’ I really liked it and then of course [my] teacher was like, ‘that’s not the right way; that’s not the right tempo.’…I’m like, ‘oh fuck this.’ (ibid.)

Lee enjoyed personalizing and taking ownership of the music she was performing. Her teachers’ stipulation that she precisely replicate, rather than liberally interpret or newly create, countered the moments that she felt a connection to music, however.
As her high school years came to a close in 1993, she received a rejection notice from the top university for music in Korea. She felt relieved to not have to pursue a music that did not allow her to express herself. Still, she found it difficult to imagine a pathway other than music. She decided to pursue higher education in music engineering in America:

I thought it made sense to do something related to music, but not necessarily classical or cello. So I heard about Berklee…[from] this piano player who went to Berklee and came back and became rather well known. He played this music that we used to think is jazz, but now when I think about it, it's more like new-age music…I told my mom about this school, ‘they don’t teach classical, but they teach this new kind of music and [it] sounds really exciting. They teach this thing called music engineering’…I said, ‘that sounds cool, I’m going to do it.’ Then my mom was like, ‘okay.’ (ibid.)

Although her mother’s acquiescence to her request puzzled her, she eagerly applied to Berklee College of Music, and was admitted.

Lee began to study music engineering at Berklee in the fall of 1993. She quickly realized, however, that she disliked it, “I’m not going to stay up until 4:00 a.m. and turn the knobs” (ibid.). In search of inner fulfillment, she started a major in arranging, and later added film scoring, “I decided to become a film score major because I just love movies; [they are] one of my biggest passions” (ibid.). During this period she also picked up her cello again, “after thinking that I wasn’t going to touch it ever…I was like, ‘this is not so bad’” (ibid.). She began to do music on her own terms. The largely American faculty fawned over her playing, “Whatever I did they were like, ‘oh my god, remarkable’…I know it’s ridiculous but just the fact that they were so encouraging kind of made me feel—you know—a little more confident” (ibid.).

Berklee offered musical possibilities that her high school in Seoul had not. She attempted to understand her colleagues’ and teachers’ fascination with jazz based on chord structures:

It took me some time to get used to it. But also coming from [a] typical Korean educational system…there’s no way you can just say, ‘oh, I don’t like it.’ Because you’re a student, you have to study it so you can like it. So I spent some time
listening to it, [but I] didn't get it, didn't get it. And then [I] started to like a little big band music, and then...a little bit of saxophone, like Dexter Gordon. I think that was the first saxophone, jazz musician—I thought, ‘oh, that’s nice.’ (ibid.)

In addition to Gordon, she listened closely to recordings of Charles Mingus, Ella Fitzgerald, Wayne Shorter, Miles Davis, and Pat Metheny (Lee interview 13 March 2013). She experienced a breakthrough after three years of solitary listening and struggling to play chord changes, “All of a sudden I got it. I think somehow your ears need some time to get used to it and then...they just...open up and then you’re like: ‘wait a minute—wow! That’s why this is a good music’” (Lee interview 27 February 2010). Her ability to play chord changes marked facility in an area of performance.

At that point Lee associated all improvisation with the swing, bebop, and hard bop periods of jazz. Berklee’s strings faculty and students’ affinities did not interest her beyond a desire to acquire general knowledge:

At Berklee they had this string department and the main guy...came from Bluegrass and [was] more like a fiddle player...Stephane Grappelli was their god and...I just thought that it sounded cheesy, especially on cello. (ibid.)

Ornette Coleman, too, did not appeal to her, “It was the end of the first year at Berklee and some friends were like, ‘Ornette Coleman is coming! You have to go and see!’...So I went and Ornette was playing and then I was like, ‘what the hell is this?’...I was so not ready for Ornette” (Lee interview 13 March 2013).

Instead, she sought an idiom that spoke to her personally. Her mind and bow wandered as she practiced:

I was just playing something, making something up and then I started to think that it’s kind of nice. I mean I didn’t know what it was, but it was a very freeing experience for me to play cello without looking at the music, without thinking [about] what I’m supposed to do...It didn’t sound like jazz; it sounded a little more like classical but not 100 percent. It was some kind of personal thing...I wasn’t playing off the chord changes, so to me it wasn’t improvising. It was just me playing something. (Lee interview 27 February 2010)
Her practice room explorations mark the nascent stage of the musical fulfillment that she had been seeking.

Her improvisations took on increasing visibility—first for a neighborhood gathering, then for a noted American composer and pedagogue, and later, for art worlds in and beyond NYC. She first improvised publicly at a neighbor’s birthday party:

There were tons of people and then I didn’t have a gift for him...[and] I was like, ‘what the hell, I’m going to play cello for you. That’s my birthday present’...Usually I wouldn’t have, but because I was so wasted, I was like, ‘what the hell’...[I] came back and played something...And then people liked it...I mean I don’t know what it is, it doesn’t sound like jazz; it’s not classical; it’s not composed; but I guess it’s okay. (ibid.)

Retrospectively she conceded that it was “a ridiculous way” (ibid.) to obtain approval; at the time, however, she needed to be convinced that others could appreciate her private musical musings.

Meanwhile, Lee completed her undergraduate degree in arranging and film scoring. She stayed in Boston and began to shop around for master’s degree programs at her parents’ insistence. She learned about NEC’s Contemporary Improvisation Department (CI) via word-of-mouth, just as she had learned about Berklee:

A friend of mine went to NEC for jazz the year before...so she told me they have not only a jazz department but contemporary improvisation...at first I was like, ‘improvisation, I don’t improvise.’ She said, ‘yeah, but it’s not only about improvisation; it’s for music that’s not classifiable as jazz, but something different, kind of creative music.’ So I thought, ‘okay, maybe.’ (ibid.)

The idea that CI harbored music “not classifiable as jazz” (ibid.) appealed to Lee. She recorded two pieces and sent in her application; noted composer and pedagogue Ran Blake admitted her to NEC and awarded her a scholarship.

She cast her insecurities aside after she learned she had been admitted with financial support, and began graduate work at NEC in the fall of 1998. In her first semester she joined the
“European Free Improvisation Ensemble,” in which she fashioned a way of playing that personally and aesthetically satisfied her:

Over the course of the semester I got more comfortable and then I somehow started to play with more of a noise sound—more like gestures, but cello noise…I started to have fun with it. So I was getting into improvising with noise… (ibid.)

As she felt more at ease, she accepted her limitations and opened her ears and hands to improvisational practices previously unfamiliar to her:

I started [out] very intimidated because I didn’t know anything about anything. I just realized, you know what, if I don’t know something I should just admit it…because there’s no way that I can just hide or pretend that I knew what I was talking about. So I…let my ears open and if people talked about something then I’d try to go and check it out. I started listening to more CDs and did more research on my own. (ibid.)

Fueled by the musics that CI students and teachers enthusiastically endorsed, she undertook self-directed study. She familiarized herself with a vast array of musics and musicians, from Jimmy Giuffre to György Ligeti, and Misha Mengelberg’s graphic scores to klezmer recordings.

NEC versus Berklee’s contrasting approaches struck her. The Contemporary Improvisation Department (NEC) emphasized musical study grounded in historical engagement:

At Berklee it wasn’t like people talked about history…people liked playing, and playing jazz standards, but they wouldn’t necessarily talk about jazz history or what influenced what…But when I went to NEC people were more interested in the roots, where it all began…and then how it branched out and what kind of influences it gathered from different music [and] different cultures. (ibid.)

Gunther Schuller became president of the NEC in 1967, founding the Third Stream Department (which later became the Contemporary Improvisation Department) in 1972 and appointing Ran Blake as its chair (Blake had started as a Continuing Education NEC faculty member in 1968). Third Stream, a concept coined by Schuller in the late 1950s, called for the combining of Western classical and jazz traditions. At NEC, however, Third Stream served “as an institutional vision of musical hybridity” (Berkman 1999:10).
Although Blake had been the one to initially admit Lee to NEC, their student-teacher relationship proved neither productive nor long lasting. She found his opaque manner of communication difficult to understand:

As a teacher he’s just impossible in a way because…it’s hard to communicate with him…He would tell me something, but I could never understand if it was a question or a comment…so I was a little mystified by the whole aura of Ran Blake. (Lee interview 27 February 2010)

Blake and Lee eventually came to a quiescent understanding of one another through a mutual love of film. During their second to last lesson they saw an Egyptian film together:

We ended up somehow going to see this movie…we were both looking at the screen with our mouths open, ‘ah’—lost. Then after that experience we bonded…he didn’t say anything to me, [but] somehow he started [to] trust me…then I changed teachers. (ibid.)

Their shared appreciation for film allowed for a harmonious closure to their lessons.

Lee then selected Hankus Netsky as her new private teacher. Netsky, a leader of the klezmer revival and veteran NEC faculty member, significantly impacted Lee’s student career: “he’s one of the best teachers I’ve ever had, really. I really respect and appreciate him” (ibid.).

Netsky finely balanced benevolent support with constructive guidance, “[he] makes you feel really encouraged, but gives you enough feedback so you can think about it, but without feeling like you’re being criticized” (ibid.). Netsky helped her to approach composition aurally:

I was really following what my ears were telling me. So I think the last year at Berklee that’s when my writing became a little more fluid, a little more personal, a little more interesting. At NEC it kind of developed because also there were these people like Hankus. (ibid.)

Netsky assigned students to study a mixtape and re-create its stylistic microelements; later, he asked students to employ the microelements compositionally, “He would say, ‘okay, we are going

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101 For a case study of this teaching methodology in klezmer, see Scherbenske (2013).
to transcribe this rhythm of James Brown and...then write music based on that.’ Very small, but
kind of fun, and it can be challenging, and make music out of it” (ibid.).

In addition, Netsky helped Lee expand her musical and cultural literacy: he introduced her
to klezmer and Jewish cultural practices. She joined his Jewish Music Ensemble primarily because
of her enthusiasm for his teaching, “I thought, ‘why not, I’ll just do it,’ [I didn’t] know what
klezmer was, at all” (ibid.). She quickly realized that the music was inseparable from Judaism and
Jewish culture:

[I did not] know anything about it and I was too embarrassed to ask anybody; I
didn’t even know whom to ask; I didn’t even know what to ask, because it was a
totally different thing and everybody seemed to be so comfortable with it. (ibid.)

Despite this, she took part in professional performances. Her performance in the Public Television
special A Taste of Chanukah served as her first introduction to Jewish holidays. Although she did not
feel like an expert of Jewish musics, she accepted performances at Boston-area synagogues for
which Netsky had recommended her. Eventually, she acquired basic Jewish cultural literacy
through klezmer performance.

Meanwhile, trumpeter-composer Dave Douglas introduced Lee to new sounds and scenes.

In January of 2000 Douglas coached an NEC ensemble in the music from his album Convergence:

Until then I wasn’t really aware of what was going on in New York—I mean this
so-called “Downtown scene.” I didn’t know anything about it because most of my
friends were...more like straight-ahead jazz or jazz-jazz people. So I played Dave
[Douglas’s] music and then I was like, ‘wow, this is nice.’ I didn’t even know he
was big. (ibid.)

Lee felt encouraged by Douglas’s endorsement, and coupled with her enjoyment of his music, she
pressed into new musical worlds:

I checked out some of his recordings with different groups...the one with Mark
Feldman and Guy Klucevsek and the nice, beautiful stuff. They don’t sound like
jazz, but they are like jazz-influenced music, chamber music in a way. (ibid.)
Douglas’s music spoke to her in part because it diverged from what she considered “jazz-jazz.”

Her investment in Douglas’s music is rooted in a sense of disbelonging in jazz practices.

That the music she became involved in “wasn’t quite jazz” was important to her:

I…still felt like I was [an] outsider; [jazz] felt like I was just listening to it and liking it, but I was not really in it. It wasn’t music like, ‘oh, this is what I do.’…I became familiar with [it] and some I really liked, some is amazing, but it isn’t something that I’m like, ‘oh my god, this is me.’…[Jazz] was something I can appreciate, but it was not me. (Lee interview 27 February 2010; emphasis added)

Lee values a sense of ownership in the music she performs, and had felt a sense of disbelonging playing jazz. Slobin’s affinity, choice, and belonging triangulation (1993) appears germane here:

Lee expresses more than an affinity for jazz, but believes that it is not an extension of her identity.

In addition, Douglas shared her interest in texture through noise, an area she had explored since her first semester at NEC:

So I kind of developed a little bit of that [elements of noise] in two years [at NEC], and then I came to check out Dave’s [Douglas] music. There was a little element of that. It wasn’t like he was playing with lots of noise; he would use in more like an ornament…I think that kind of fit with what I was doing because what I was writing was kind of similar.

When it comes to music…I observed that when you find somebody who’s doing [something] kind of similar to what you’re doing, but they do it in a way that’s more complete…you’re drawn to it…So I think that’s why I was drawn to what Dave was doing, because it was kind of similar to what I was writing…with textural stuff. (ibid.)

Douglas’s aesthetics only hinted at her own interests, yet she envisioned this to be a musical space in which she aspired to develop and belong.

Lee contemplated what she would do after her graduation from NEC. Her status as a foreign student complicated her options: she was allowed to extend her F-1 visa and stay in the U.S. for one year of practical training after graduation. She explored NYC-based scenes because of her fascination with Douglas’s music:

n[I] started paying more attention to what was going on in New York…I was listening to…[The] Tiny Bell Trio—Jim Black and Brad Schoepach and Dave

128
Douglas]. My friend…also liked the group and…then my friend said, ‘oh yeah, Dave Douglas is playing at this place called Tonic: let’s go and check it out.’ I was like, ‘okay, what the hell,’ and I came down and it was great. That trip was amazing. (ibid.)

The trip introduced Lee to Tonic, a venue that has impacted her musical, professional, and social life. She decided to spend her year of practical training in the City:

I said, ‘I’ll probably end up going home after this, so I might as well go to New York and at least check out this music,’ because I was getting excited [about] this music coming from this area. I thought, ‘well, I’m just going to go down and see what happens, and the worst that can come out is [that] I actually get to listen to music…that actually excites me and then go home.’ (ibid.)

New York Years

Lee travelled by bus back and forth from Boston to New York throughout the summer of 2000; she brought a bag of belongings with her each trip. She moved to the City in August and slept on a friend’s couch until she secured an apartment in early October. Since many of her NEC classmates either stayed in Boston or moved to Chicago, she knew few musicians in NYC, but she made a home for herself at Tonic. “I literally parked myself at Tonic; I didn’t have money or anything but somehow I was able to…I just hung out there all the time because it was so new for me to like to listen to music” (ibid.). The musicians’ welcoming attitudes pleasantly surprised her: “They were just so friendly. You could just go up to them and say, ‘hey, that was great,’ and then they’d talk to you. It’s not like they brush[ed] you off as some fan” (ibid.). She found fellowship and performed her first prestigious New York gig there.

She met John Zorn after attending a Masada performance in July of 2000. Lee hand-delivered her demo to Zorn because Douglas had already “told him about her” (ibid.). Zorn subsequently called her to play Cobra at Tonic that September. Because she was largely unfamiliar with NYC improviser-composers, she did not realize that she would perform with a cadre of
experts her senior, among them Ikue Mori, Mark Dresser, and Susie Ibarra (Figure 20 throughout; p. 209). Their facility inspired her:

I found myself on the stage...playing totally different from what I had been playing...not just because it was at Tonic...but you realize you’re surrounded by certain musicians that you’re like, ‘oh my god.’ You have to play at a level that can at least match them...sometimes you become pushed and then you become really creative because you have to think really fast and then all of a sudden your brain start[s] to click. (ibid.)

The venue and acclaimed co-performers incited her to play exceptionally. The performance served as a pivotal moment for her future plans, “I was like, ‘yeah, that’s amazing. That’s where I want to be all the time’” (ibid.).

Not long thereafter, Butch Morris called her for a Conduction gig. Morris led Lee and ten other musicians in three Knitting Factory rooms connected via video monitor in Conduction No. 115 E-MISSION that December. The skills Lee learned as an orchestral player stood her in good stead:

I come from a classical background, so it’s really normal for me to look at the person in front of you and follow the cue and do exactly what you’re told...it’s not like I understood what it was, but I’m like, ‘wow that’s really an interesting way of making music’ and to me it felt familiar in a way. It felt easy. I didn’t understand why it was so difficult for so many people, to be honest. (Lee interview 19 March 2013)

In Conduction she bridged her Western classical with her more recent improvisation experience. Morris provided her first transatlantic performance opportunity, too: she travelled with Conduction musicians Brandon Ross, Tyshawn Sorey, and Charles Burnham, among others, for her first European performance in 2003. The ensemble collaborated with musicians from China and Africa in Venice.

Her Cobra and Conduction appearances afforded her symbolic capital and visibility within NYC music scenes, “in New York...when somebody’s new and there’s word that somebody or so-and-so is a good musician, then people want to check you out by playing together. And that’s what
happened” (ibid.). She met musicians following her gigs, “So I did that [the Conduction gig], and then I met more people there. I think that’s how I start[ed] to meet people” (ibid.).

In spite of her performances with noted artists, Lee still had to cover considerable ground to establish herself musically and professionally in New York. She accepted nearly all invitations to perform:

I said yes to everything…I did lots of small gigs…I don’t know what I was looking for in terms of music, I think was just excited I was playing; just the fact that I was playing was enough. It’s hard to say if I was satisfied musically all that much, but it was okay, it didn’t matter back then. (Lee interview 27 February 2010)

Lee had not yet formed exclusionary preferences; she experientially familiarized herself with New York’s scenes and art worlds. Near the end of her practical training year she was performing frequently enough to be approved for an artist’s visa, which allowed her to settle in the City on a more permanent basis.

During her first years in New York she also met and began to work with peers Raz Mesinai, Tim Barnes, and Toshio Kajiwara. She had met Mesinai, a percussionist, electronics performer, and DJ, at her first Cobra performance. They began to collaborate regularly thereafter, “[Mesinai] asked me to play in his group or his gig or maybe he asked me to come down to his studio and do something…I was playing with him quite a bit” (Lee interview 19 March 2013).

While their musical backgrounds differed considerably, their sensibilities overlapped:

So with Raz…I was looking for these in-between things; that’s what interests me, right? [In] electronics there is this thing that…I respond to but I don’t know what it is. So with Raz I think we just played a lot…probably mostly at Tonic and there was the subTonic scene going on: that was more of an electronics thing on Thursdays, so like DJ Olive and Toshio Kajiwara, they were doing Thursday nights and then people like Raz and Tim and those guys would come and they also had some concerts there and I would go and hang out. (ibid.)

She recorded three of Mesinai’s albums and performed with him regularly through 2005. Mesinai, Lee, and Barnes recorded Resurrections for Goatskin (TZ 7086) and Cyborg Acoustics (TZ 8003), both
released by Zorn’s Tzadik. Lee also recorded for Mesinai’s *Unit of Resistance* (ROIR, RUSCD8307). Additionally, Lee formed the TOT Trio (short for Tim, Okkyung, and Toshio) with Tim Barnes (drums) and Toshio Kajiwara (turntable): “we played together for like two/three years...We never did any actual recording or anything, but we were playing quite a bit in New York” (ibid.). She also played regularly with Barnes from 2002 to 2005, and they maintained a close friendship.

Her *Conduction* and TOT Trio experiences led to work with several prestigious musical leaders. Greg Tate asked her to perform with his Burnt Sugar Arkestra because of her work in *Conduction*. The Burnt Sugar Arkestra served as a pivotal engagement for Lee: in the Arkestra she met pianist-composer Vijay Iyer, one of her long-term collaborators. Iyer enthusiastically sought a collaboration with her after he heard TOT perform:

> I mean Vijay [Iyer] talks about this: the reason why he asked me was because he saw me play in this more noise trio at Subtonic [TOT Trio]...[Iyer] saw that trio and he was really into it. So I was kind of impressed [by] the fact that he comes from a jazz background and he saw that noise trio and then he got really into it. (ibid.)

In September of 2003 Iyer invited Lee to perform with his and Mike Ladd’s *In What Language* for the Time-Based Art Festival in Portland, Oregon. She initially substituted for cellist Dana Leong (who recorded *In What Language*), but began to perform regularly with the ensemble. *In What Language* was the first of many collaborations with Iyer.

In February of 2006 she began rehearsing Iyer and Ladd’s *Still Life with Commentator*, another mixed-media project combining improvisation, electronics, media collage, and spoken word. Iyer appreciated Lee’s noise sensibility that he had heard in TOT, and asked her to contribute similarly to *Still Life*. He guided her structurally, but left the details to her, “[I] usually have lots of freedom as long I know the form and I know what’s going on” (ibid.). Iyer and Ladd rehearsed *Still Life with Commentator*, “five-six times a week for two or three weeks in the period leading up to the premiere” (Iyer email communication 27 April 2013) at University of North
Carolina Chapel Hill in March, and recorded the album shortly thereafter for Savoy Jazz (SVY 17628). More recently, Lee rehearsed with Iyer and Ladd for Holding It Down: The Veterans’ Dreams Project in January of 2010. In the fall of 2012 they performed at Harlem Stage; in spring of 2013 they performed at the Atlas Performing Arts Center (Washington D.C.).

Lee’s work with many “Downtown II” artists comprises a considerable part of her strategic network, too. She met Christian Marclay a year after she had moved to the City. Marclay invited her to improvise with Swiss cellist Martin Schütz for his “After Yodel: New Swiss Music” festival at Tonic in March of 2003. Lee and Marclay performed and recorded at Tonic in December of that year, and released the LP From the Earth to the Sphere. After the album sold out, it was re-released by A Silent Place (ASP0) in 2006. In late summer 2010 Lee performed with Marclay for his “Christian Marclay: Festival” at the Whitney Museum of Art. Lee values Marclay for his innovation, demeanor, and work ethic, “His relationship with his turntable is still fresh...on top of that, he’s amazingly humble and generous...[and] such a hard worker” (Lee interview 19 March 2013).

In the early 2000s Lee collaborated with Zorn only on occasion—for his monthly improv nights at Tonic and periodical Cobra performances—because he was busy concertizing with his Masada groups. She performed in Zorn’s Improv Week at Tonic, for example, in June of 2004, along with Erik Friedlander, Ikue Mori, Mark Dresser, Cyro Baptista, Sylvie Courvoisier, and Tim Barnes. Lee and Zorn began to collaborate more regularly, however, after he invited her to perform his file card pieces with him:

[a file card] can be just a description, [or] sometimes it has just one word and then he’ll create something...from that one card on the spot. Because he’s a composer—he’s a real composer—he can do it. (ibid.)

This led to their recording of the albums Femina and Dictee Liber Vous. Lee also collaborated with Zorn for her first album as a leader, Nihm. Zorn performed on, produced, and released Nihm on his label, Tzadik, in 2005. Lee respects Zorn’s attention to the individuality of his co-performers:
[Zorn] knows how to create a space so that [each] person also feels like he or she can be very involved musically and emotionally and be able to make the music even better...He’ll say that he writes something with some specific person in mind and then he writes something that that person is going to be like so excited to play, which is so simple, but then that’s what makes the music even more special. That’s something I really learned. (ibid.)

Zorn also facilitated opportunities abroad for Lee. In 2005 Reiner Michalke, Moers Festival and Stadsgarten Artistic Director, asked Zorn to recommend two groups representing, “the younger generation of the NYC scene. One was me; and the other one was Shahzad Ismaily” (ibid.). Lee subsequently invited her friends Mesinai and harpist Shelly Burgon to perform for three concerts in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany.

Lee’s strategic network also includes former AACM and Creative Construction Company member, Wadada Leo Smith. She met Smith during the summer of 2002 after attending a performance of his Golden Quartet (Anthony Davis (piano); Malachi Favors (bass); Jack DeJohnette (drums)) when they opened for Sonic Youth at Central Park SummerStage. Smith invited Lee to be part of a new group of his, which he later called Organic. Along with Brandon Ross and Skuli Sverrisson, and others, they recorded Smith’s album *Spiritual Dimensions* at Firehouse 12 in April 2009. In New York, they performed at the Jazz Standard for the Festival of New Trumpet (2007) and Brooklyn Public Library (2008); in Europe, they performed at Jazz em Agusto (August 2011, Lisbon) and Sons d’hiver Festival (February 2012, Paris).

Lee relocated to Europe shortly after our first interview in 2010. She now concertizes across the continent for all but several months of the year. She frequently performs solo, or with British improvisers Evan Parker, John Edwards, and John Butcher. She first met Parker at The Stone, “I think the first time he met me he was a little skeptical, ‘who the hell is this person?’” (ibid.). It was not until Parker heard her recording with pianist Steve Beresford and Peter Evans (*Check for Monsters*, Emanem, 5002), however, that he invited Lee and Evans to play with him for
his two week residency at The Stone in October of 2009. The trio later recorded *The Bleeding Edge* (Psi Records, psi 11.10) in May of 2010. Lee now plays regularly in Parker’s Electro-acoustic Ensemble at London’s Café OTO or the Vortex, “I think Café OTO is more interesting for me; it’s more open. The Vortex is a little bit too much jazz club vibe, to me, but it’s okay” (ibid.). She spends her time off largely in Berlin, and occasionally visits New York to perform and catch up with friends.

But how does Lee’s current work as, ironically, something of a contemporary klezmer, relate back to New York? She returns to the City periodically to perform and record with her closest collaborators. Last year she rehearsed, performed and recorded with Iyer and Ladd in their *Holding It Down: The Veteran’s Dream Project*. Their performance took them to such stages as The Atlas Performing Arts Center (Washington) and Harlem Stage, venues (and their ilk) that regularly promote and produce concert seasons offering a smorgasbord of eclecticism. Pi Recordings, a label that over past decade has released a steady stream of albums to jazz audiences, released *Holding It Down*; its musical sounds and materials, as many emanating from Pi’s catalogue, however, are not reducible to a single stylistic container.
Mary Halvorson
b. Boston, 16 October 1980

Figure 11. Mary Halvorson at Douglas Street Music Collective.
Photo courtesy of Peter Gannushkin (downtownmusic.net).

Concert in Middletown, Conn.

Mary Halvorson’s reputation as a successful Wesleyan music alum precedes her. I learn about her and her music from Wesleyan students, acclaimed recordings, and New York-based critical reception, long before I start to research the lives and practices of improviser-composers. I first catch up with her following a Wesleyan Center for the Arts performance with Taylor Ho Bynum’s Trio in the fall of 2010. Halvorson and Bynum’s former teacher, Jay Hoggard, joins them on vibraphone for several selections this evening. Halvorson lays down highly distorted ostinati reminiscent of rock sensibilities, just as facilely as she intones polyphonically dense, fast-pasted, chords largely rooted in jazz vocabularies in her improvisations. Bynum aptly summarizes the values that guide many improviser-composers’ work before the concert starts, “The point of this music is to be ourselves, but to do things we’ve never done before.” At a post-concert reception hosted by the local bike shop, Pedal Power, Halvorson, Bynum, and Sorey ebulliently chat about how Hoggard has “played out” right alongside his former students, a practice for which they previously have not known him. (Adaptation from field notes 11 September 2010)

Early Years

Family, teachers, and collaborators—as well as serendipity and personal aesthetics—have guided guitarist-composer Mary Halvorson’s musical pathways. The only child of an architect father
and nurse-practitioner mother, Halvorson absorbed the sounds of the American folk revival and 1950s and 60s jazz from her parents’ record collections as a youngster:

My parents kind of were hippies so they had a lot of Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, and Grateful Dead. My dad really liked the Grateful Dead, so I was hearing a lot of that stuff, pretty early probably. And then he also had a pretty good jazz collection with like Miles Davis, John Coltrane, [and] Thelonious Monk, people like that, so I was exposed to that kind of music very early. (Halvorson interview 10 March 2010)

Her parents’ musical tastes influenced her affinities as a pre-teen. At around seven, she enjoyed rock, and repeatedly listened to a Beach Boys cassette that she had purchased, “I really liked the Allman Brothers…[and] Hendrix and the Beatles” (ibid.).

Halvorson also began musical instruction around this time, taking classical violin lessons for four years. She grew tired of the instrument and the style, however, and switched to guitar, “I didn’t want to play classical music and I don’t think I was very good at the violin. I just sort of lost interest at a certain point. I loved Jimmie Hendrix and I wanted to play guitar” (ibid.). Although she was keen to learn the instrument, she did not have a specific style in mind. She learned jazz, “the teacher who was recommended to me for guitar was a jazz guitarist, so just because I fell into it I started studying jazz” (ibid.).

Israeli-born, Boston-based guitarist Issi Rozen guided her instrumental foundations. Rozen, known for blending Middle Eastern music with post bop and straight ahead jazz, taught her technical rudiments, Beatles songs, and jazz standards. She earnestly applied herself, “I would practice whatever I was told to practice. He’d give me something to learn and I’d learn it and come back the next week” (ibid.). Rozen emphasized chord changes and repertoire from The Real Book, “[we] learn[ed] the song, learn[ed] the melody, the changes or the chords. I mean that was probably the bottom line” (ibid.).

She began listening to jazz regularly while in high school. Her peers encouraged her to familiarize herself with artists of the free jazz period:
A friend made me a cassette when I was in high school that had [Eric] Dolphy and [Charles] Mingus and Ornette Coleman on it; and I was really into all those guys. So I just kept branching out. I started with Miles Davis, John Coltrane, who I still love. Then I branched out from those people and it was sort of like a gradual thing, being exposed to different artists, through my friends or [by] checking it out myself. (ibid.)

She considered music a hobby and planned to study biology or another hard science in college, ultimately choosing Wesleyan University because, “I just liked it: it seemed like a cool place, but I wasn’t really intending to be a music major” (ibid.).

Halvorson started Wesleyan in the fall of 1998. She straightaway joined Anthony Braxton’s ensemble, which considerably impacted her decision to change her major and career path, “when I got there I kind of quickly dropped all the science classes and I got pretty sucked into the music program” (ibid.). She initially hesitated to major in music because she considered its post-collegiate career prospects limited, “It just seemed unrealistic to me or something” (ibid.). Braxton, her mentor, assuaged her trepidations, “I remember Braxton was a really encouraging and inspiring person, and I think being around him was actually a huge part of taking the plunge to make that decision” (ibid.).

In addition to Braxton, her Wesleyan teachers and colleagues encouraged her musical studies and fostered an ethos of experimentalism:

The whole music community there was important. A lot of the grad students and undergrad students were doing stuff. I mean I felt like people were really open to playing and open to trying out different things...In New York now, if I have a performance I can get my band together maybe once, to rehearse, and no one wants to rehearse anyway. But there...[people were] really wanting to work on things. I had some bands and we rehearsed weekly or more than that. I just felt like it was a community of people wanting to try stuff out. (ibid.)

She took private guitar lessons with Tony Lombardozzi, and classes with ethnomusicologist Michael Veal, experimental music luminary Alvin Lucier, and jazz vibraphonist Jay Hoggard. In addition to
Braxton’s ensemble, she played in the jazz orchestra, gamelan, and studied South Indian vocals, “I learned a little about a lot” (ibid.).

During her collegiate years in New England she travelled to the City and southern Connecticut to further fuel her affinities. She spent her junior year at the New School for Jazz Studies, honing her instrumental skills, partaking in local music events, and meeting new people. There, she met Mike Pride, a fellow jazz student and drummer (Halvorson email communication 20 February 2012). Pride introduced her to bassist Trevor Dunn and other collaborators. She approached Joe Morris after his gig at Tonic about taking lessons with him. When she returned to Connecticut the following year Morris taught her lessons in his Guilford home:

[Mary] had really good technique so it wasn’t like she really had to become a better guitar player. To me, she had to get more accustomed to using those materials on her own terms...I remember telling her, ‘you know, Mary, you’re doing pretty well. You have a lot of interesting ideas here and I think you might be able to do pretty well with this and go pretty far.’ (Morris interview 14 April 2010)

Morris encouraged her to engage her own musical ideas and believe in herself.

**New York Years**

Halvorson moved to New York after her Wesleyan graduation in 2002:

I was really into the music scene here. I’d drive down and see concerts and I’d spent my junior year at the New School, so I’d already lived in New York for a year. Basically, [I] went back and finished at Wesleyan and then went right back [to New York]. That was where I wanted to be. I really like the City—all the stuff that’s happening—the music. So it was kind of like a no-brainer for me at that point. (Halvorson interview 10 March 2010)

Halvorson’s prior musical encounters in NYC informed her conception of it. As Martin Stokes observes, “music is socially meaningful...largely because it provides means by which people recognize identities and places, and the boundaries which separate them” (1993:5); Halvorson, likewise, inferred an appreciation of New York based on its “music scene” and “all the stuff that’s happening, the music” (Halvorson interview 10 March 2010).
In addition, New York’s allure as a post-graduation destination for many Wesleyan alumni motivated her move there:

It seems like a lot of people move here from school anyway. So a lot of my friends from Wes… moved here and then I met… a bunch of musicians who… had gone to Wes, or [I was] friends with people who had gone, or people from The New School. So… when I moved there after college I felt like I did know a lot of people. (ibid.)

She rented a room from Chris Dahlgren, a Wesleyan alum and bassist-composer, upon first moving to NYC. Dahlgren introduced her to his circle of friends and Fort Greene neighborhood. Additionally, she met violist-composer Jessica Pavone at a house party hosted by Dahlgren (Figure 21 throughout; p. 210) during her first summer in Brooklyn.

Halvorson and Pavone “decided to get together and play and… both write something” (ibid.). As neighbors, they became fast friends:

We’d hang out; we’d cook dinner and you know, we were watching Six Feet Under or something. Then we’d have a rehearsal; it was sort of all tied together. We were rehearsing weekly. We played stuff, [but] we didn’t perform for a long time. (ibid.)

Their friendship resulted in two of her primary ensembles and long-standing collaborations: the Halvorson-Pavone Duo and the Thirteenth Assembly. Halvorson and Pavone have released Prairies (Lucky Kitchen, 031), On and Off (Skirl Records, 007), Thin Air (THI 57188.2), and Departure of Reason (THI 57200.2.) as a duet. They have performed at NYC venues that regularly host experimental, jazz, contemporary classical, and “world music,” such as Galapagos, Pete’s Candy Store, Barbès, The Stone, Brecht Forum, Union Pool, Zebulon, Bar 4, Hell’s Kitchen Cultural Center, Roulette, Le Poisson Rouge, and Littlefield.

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102 Dahlgren completed a Master of Arts in composition from Wesleyan in 2003.
103 Fort Greene is located in northwest Brooklyn, abutting the Clinton Hill, Boerum Hill, and Downtown Brooklyn neighborhoods.
Although Halvorson and Pavone perform less frequently than they used to, they continue to maintain the duet’s vitality:

We try to tour in the U.S. once or twice a year. So we’ll rent a car and we’ll drive to Chicago and back and make stops along the way...we’ll go to New England and we’ll go down South. We try to stay active, even though four or five months may go by and we don’t play a gig. (ibid.)

They have performed throughout the U.S. and Europe with several eclectic acts. In January of 2007 their duo toured the Northwestern U.S.\(^{104}\) with Good for Cows, an ensemble that includes, in addition to Halvorson and Pavone, Devin Hoff (bass) and Ches Smith (drums). That summer, they toured with Judith Berkson, performing at The Camel (Richmond), Presbyterian Church of the Covenant (Greensboro, NC), The Ice House (Lexington), The Hideout (Chicago), Bohemian National Home (Detroit), The Ice Box (Columbus), and 611 Florida (Washington). In Europe, Halvorson and Pavone have performed at the Wels Unlimited Festival (Wels, Austria), the Bimhuis (Amsterdam), Centro Stabile di Cultura (San Vito di Luguzzano, Italy), and Club 7 (Mainz, Germany).

Their performance relationship remains closely tied to their friendship:

[Pavone]’s definitely my closest friend and, yeah, we see each other a lot ... we know each other’s playing so well, so it’s nice to have an on-going collaboration like that where you know somebody really well. We know how to write for each other’s instruments and for each other. (ibid.)

Halvorson’s statement reinforces Borgo’s assertion that among improvisers, the “working group” allows for, “an intimacy and depth unavailable in the earliest stages of interaction” (2002:173-74). In Halvorson and Pavone’s case, however, their musical interactions are equally informed by the intimacy that comes from long-term friendship.

\(^{104}\) They performed at such venues as Grand (Oakland), Valentine’s (Portland), Gallery 1412 (Seattle), and The Java Lounge (Sacramento).
Musical intimacy based on lasting collaboration carries over into Halvorson and Pavone’s collective quartet with Taylor Ho Bynum (cornetist-composer) and Tomas Fujiwara (drummer-composer), too. Fujiwara recounts The Thirteenth Assembly’s formation in 2007, “we’d all been playing together for a while in various contexts and decided to tour [with] our respective duos (Taylor and I, Jess and Mary), as well as form a new collective quartet” (Fujiwara Facebook correspondence 1 December 2012). With Wesleyan alum Bynum, “honorary” Wesleyan alum Pavone, and New School alum Fujiwara, her formative ties comprise the group. The Thirteenth Assembly has recorded (Un)sentimental (IMPREC231) and Station Direct (IMPREC343) for Bynum’s label, Firehouse 12 Studios (New Haven). They perform occasionally in NYC (at Spike Hill, Barbès, IBeam), but more frequently, they perform in Europe. On a recent European tour (28-31 October 2011) the group graced the stages of such jazz venues as Jazzclub Singen (Singen, Germany) and The Vortex (London).

Halvorson established formative ties with other Wesleyan and New School peers, as well. She joined ensembles led by Jason Cady and Matthew Welsh, two of her former Wesleyan teaching assistants: Jason Cady & The Artificials and Matthew Welsh’s Blarvuster (Figure 21, upper left quadrant; p. 210). The ensemble’s membership overlaps (Leah Paul, Pavone, and Fujiwara) within a highly cohesive musical and social network (Emirbayer 1994:1448). These groups have released

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105 According to their website, the Thirteenth Assembly is composed of “distinguished musician/composers working together as equals to create distinctively eclectic, yet cohesive music. Drawing on years of collaboration, as well as its members’ diverse back-grounds in genres including classical, folk, rock, jazz and the avant-garde, this collective ensemble has performed across the United States and Europe since 2007” (“Thirteenth Assembly: Home.” 2012).

106 Sound engineer Nick Lloyd co-founded Firehouse 12, a recording studio, bar, and performance venue (“Firehouse 12 Records: About” 2012).

107 In 2007 they toured U.S. and Canada: Sanctuary for Independent Media (Troy, NY), Boston Center for the Arts/Hammond Concert Series, Metropolis Underground (Syracuse), Halls Walls (Buffalo), Somewhere There (Toronto), La Sala Rossa (Montreal); 2007: An Die Musik (Baltimore), The Camel (Richmond), Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art (Charleston), Hunter Gatherer (Columbia, SC), The 40 Watt (Athens, GA), The Eyedrum (Atlanta), Bo Bo Gallery (Asheville, NC). On a 2008 European tour they performed at Jazzatelier (Ulrichsburg, Austria), Jazzclub Cavete (Marburg, Germany), Jaegermayerhof (Linz, Austria), Alte Gerberei (St. Johann i.T., Austria), and Porgy and Bess (Vienna).
the albums Post-Madonna Prima Donna (Peacock Recordings)\textsuperscript{108} and Blrvst (Tzadik, 8077).\textsuperscript{109} In addition to her work with New School alum Fujiwara, Halvorson’s musical and friendship links with Mike Pride have led to collaboration in Pride’s MPThree (Halvorson, Pride, and Trevor Dunn) and Dunn’s Trio-convulsant. They have released the albums Sleep Cells (Utech Records, 2006) and Sister Phantom Owl Fish (Ipecac Recordings, 2004), respectively.\textsuperscript{110}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{anthony-braxton-mary-halvorson-taylor-ho-bynum-at-roulette-brooklyn-new-york-2011}
\caption{Anthony Braxton, Mary Halvorson, Taylor Ho Bynum at Roulette. Brooklyn, New York. 2011. \newline Photo courtesy of Peter Gannushkin (downtownmusic.net).}
\end{figure}

Halvorson’s work with Anthony Braxton has been central to her professional establishment and formative network. She is a member of Braxton’s Diamond Curtain Wall Trio, 12+1tet, Septet, Quartet, and Tri-Centric Orchestra (Figure 21, lower right quadrant; p. 210). She appeared on five of his albums from 2005 to 2008: Live at the Royal Festival Hall (LR 449), Trio (Victoriaville) (Victo, CD 108), 12+1tet, Victoriaville (Victo, CD 109), Musicworks 99 (Musicworks

\textsuperscript{108} Peacock Recordings is an independent label founded and operated by Pavone in 2000. According to its website it is “dedicated to documenting a new generation of creative musicians” (“Peacock Recordings: Home,” n.d.).

\textsuperscript{109} Tzadik’s Composer Series is described on their website as: “New concert works exploring and exploding the world of classical concert music” (“Tzadik: Composer Series,” n.d.).

\textsuperscript{110} The trio’s debut album, Debantatas & Centipes (1998, Buzz), features Adam Levy on guitar, Kenny Wollesen on drums, and Trevor Dunn on bass.
The personnel on four of these albums overlap (Figure 22; p. 211) to form several socio-musical clusters. The Wesleyan University nexus is integral: more than half of the performers on the 12+1tet studied there with Braxton (Chris Dahlgren, James Fei, Mary Halvorson, Taylor Ho Bynum, Steve Lehman, Andrew Raffo Dewar, Aaron Siegel, Carl Testa, and Katherine Young). It is the focus of high centrality in this latter web (Figure 23; p. 212). Of Halvorson’s records with Braxton, nine out of the fifteen performers are Wesleyan-affiliated. Braxton and the environment he created at Wesleyan serves as a hub, the object of far more connections than the rest in this musical cluster.

In 2007 Braxton’s Diamond Curtain Wall Trio (Braxton, Halvorson, and Bynum) performed at the Guelph Jazz Festival and Colegio Mayor San Juan Evangelista (Madrid). The following year, they played at the Mexico City Jazz Festival, Chiostro di Villa d’Este (Tivoli, Italy), and Kongsberg JazzFestival (Kongsberg, Norway). They added bassoonist-composer Katherine Young (also a Wesleyan MA alum) to perform as a quartet at the Opéra Théatre de Besançon (Besançon, France) and DOM Cultural Centre (Moscow) in 2008. Finally, Diamond Curtain Wall Trio played for Roulette’s 2011 Brooklyn grand opening. It is also worth mentioning that among the first times that Halvorson is mentioned in Downbeat, it is through her association with Braxton. In December 2007, for example, Howard Mandel mentions her as one of Braxton’s collaborators in Caught: Guelph Fest Sets Stage for Explanations and Explosions (2007:25). Then in August 2008, Halvorson garnered attention for her performance on Braxton’s Trio (Victoriaville); 12 + 1tet:

Most recently, Braxton’s best work has included collaborators Taylor Ho Bynum and Mary Halvorson—no surprise, since they are two of the most distinctive young performers around…Halvorson’s guitar—with its echoes of Derek Bailey and Joe Morris combined with her own odd chords and strumming techniques—demand attention. (Hale 2008:67)
Halvorson’s collaboration with Bynum extends beyond their work in Braxton’s ensembles and The Thirteenth Assembly. She is a member of his eponymous sextet, along with Jim Hobbs (alto saxophone), Bill Lowe (bass trombone; tuba), Ken Filiano (bass), and Fujiwara. Bynum has released two sextet albums with two different personnel iterations under his own label (Firehouse 12 Records): Asphalt Flowers Forking in Paths (hatOLOGY, 654) and, more recently, Apparent Distance (Firehouse 12, FH12-04-01-014). The pair also collaborates with Jim Hobbs in his ensemble Aych.

Halvorson has expanded her network significantly beyond its formative base, while maintaining numerous formative ties. Her strategic network is comprised of several socio-musical clusters, including her eponymous Trio, Quintet, and Septet, as well as the Tom Rainey Trio, Ingrid Laubrock’s Anti-House, and Ches Smith and These Arches (Figure 24; p. 213). Unlike Garchik, however, she formed her eponymous ensembles after she established herself under the leadership of others (e.g. Anthony Braxton’s ensembles). She continues to expand her strategic network by maintaining membership in and leading or co-leading myriad ensembles. The actors connected by multiplexed social and friendship links in her network overlap extensively.

In 2007 Halvorson formed her eponymous trio because she enjoyed listening to a guitar, bass, and drum instrumentation. She selected Ches Smith as the trio’s drummer because of her previous work with him; she chose to work with bassist John Hébert because: “I’d met John a couple of times and heard him play with a couple of different things and he just seemed like the right person for it” (Halvorson interview 10 March 2010). They performed their first gig during her February curatorship of The Stone. Since then, they have performed throughout the NYC...

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111 This reflects the ensembles’ current membership as heard on its 2011 release, Apparent Distance. Its lineup has changed since its first album, Asphalt Flowers Forking in Paths (2008, hatOLOGY), which included her close friend and collaborator, Pavone.

112 Along with saxophonist Tony Malaby and accordionist Andrea Parkins, Halvorson is also a member of Ches Smith’s These Arches.
metropolitan area, Europe, and Australia. In the greater NYC area they perform at The Stone, Le Poisson Rouge, Douglass Street Music Collective, Barbès, and Tea Lounge (all NYC) and The Rotunda (Philadelphia). Abroad, they have played at such venues as The Barge (Belfast, UK), Grand Theatre (Groningen, Netherlands), Espace 1789 (Saint Ouen, France), Stadthalle (Germering), Birdland (Neuburg), Jazzkeller Sauschdall (Ulm), (all Germany), Galerie Maerz (Linz, Austria), Sud des Alpes (Geneva, Switzerland), Teatro Fondamento Nuove (Venice, Italy), Cankarjev Dom (Ljubljana, Slovenia), Kulturni Centar Rex (Belgrade, Serbia), SIMA (Sydney) and the Melbourne International Jazz Festival (Melbourne).

Halvorson decided to augment the trio with horns following her 2008 release, Dragon’s Head (Firehouse 12, FH 12-04-01-007):

I started thinking about expanding it [the Trio] and I’d been re-listening to a lot of old jazz stuff that I used to be really into and did not listen to for years. I was listening to a lot of Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers: I’d been re-fascinated with harmonies and harmonies between horns and I kind of just wondered what it would sound like if I added horns to the trio. Not wanting to sound like that, but just being inspired by that music. (ibid.)

The Quintet first performed at Roulette in February of 2009. Later that year they recorded Saturn Sings, which Firehouse 12 Records released the following year. In addition to their NYC performances at The Stone, Cornelia Street Café, Joe’s Pub, and Barbès, they have performed for the Umbrella Music (Chicago) and North Sea Jazz festivals (Rotterdam). They have also been reviewed favorably in the critical reception. Downbeat gave Dragon’s Head 3.5 stars (out of five), and Nate Chinen of the Times listed Saturn Sings among his the top ten albums of 2010. Moreover, the Downbeat annual critic’s poll recognized Halvorson as the number three “Rising Star, Guitar” in 2009; number two “Rising Star, Guitar” in 2010; and number one “Rising Star, Guitar” in 2011.

113 This performance took place at Roulette’s Manhattan location at 20 Greene Street.
A significant portion of Halvorson’s strategic network is composed of her collaborations with the husband and wife pair, Tom Rainey (d) and Ingrid Laubrock (ts). After Laubrock moved from London to New York in 2008 she met Halvorson following a Barbès concert of Tomas Fujiwara and the Hookup (Laubrock email correspondence 4 December 2012). Laubrock considers Halvorson a “kindred spirit” (ibid.):

I think Mary and I also both share a sense of the absurd (in life) and a sense for story-telling in music, we don’t try to avoid rhythm and lyricism, but do try and disguise it and we both also love employing unusual sounds and extended techniques and don’t mind diving in. (ibid.)

Laubrock and Halvorson perform together in five bands: Ingrid Laubrock Anti-House, Ingrid Laubrock Orchestra, Tom Rainey Trio, Mike Reed’s Living By Lanterns, and Mary Halvorson Septet. Tom Rainey’s Trio is actually a reincarnation of an ensemble originally formed by his wife:

Ingrid actually got the first gig for this trio about four years ago and I decided to steal it from her when the time seemed right for me to finally lead a group. The reason I chose this combination is simply the chemistry felt right and the way Ingrid and Mary read each other when improvising is amazing to play with. I became interested in playing with Mary when I heard her several years ago with Trevor Dunn’s trio. (Rainey email correspondence 3 December 2012)

Halvorson has recorded *Pool School* (Tom Rainey Trio; CF185) and *Anti-House* (Ingrid Laubrock’s Anti-House; CD173) with the above groups.

In addition, she traverses music scenes with Curtis Hasselbring’s Decoupage, Marc Ribot’s Sun Ship, MAP, Crackleknob, People, and Weasel Walter. Halvorson and Kevin Shea collaboratively developed their ensemble, People (eponymous album released 2005 and *Misbegotten Man* 2007, both I and Ear Records):

It’s really a collaboration. Kevin Shea, [a] totally crazy drummer, but also writes kind of weird poetry and lyrics, and I kind of adapted those lyrics and made them into songs, like wrote songs around his lyrics and I’d never really sung before and originally the intention was to have a singer come in and sing them, but then I started writing stuff that was weird and kind of complicated. And I thought it
would just be easier to sing it myself, even though I don’t consider myself a singer—kind of like singing for that specific situation. So it was fun for me, it was something pretty different from all the other stuff I do. (Halvorson 10 March 2010)

In 2007 and 2008 they toured throughout the U.S. and Canada, appearing at mostly rock venues including Pepper Jack’s Cafe (Hamilton, ON) and Cinecycle (Toronto) (both with Sailboats Are White), and Zoo Bizarre (Montreal); (all with Alexis) Wham City (Baltimore), Twisted Branch Tea Bazaar (Charlottesville), The Black Cat: Sonic Circuits Festival (Washington), Spazzatorium (Greensville, NC), The Milestone (Charlotte, NC), The 40 Watt (Athens, GA), Scrummage University (Detroit), Ronny’s (Chicago), Skull Lab (Cincinnati), La Vie (Pittsburgh), Eclectic House, Wesleyan University (Middletown, Conn.). As frames, these venues help to define People.

People’s NYC appearances¹¹⁴ have been sporadic, and they have not toured Europe—unlike her projects that align more closely with jazz and improvised music networks. They have had a hard time finding a welcoming performance venue for their project because the music lies between perceived genre expectations:

We don’t really fit in anywhere [in terms of venues]. Usually we’ll play in rock clubs or something, but if we play in more jazz venues it just doesn’t really fit in, it’s definitely a little loud and a little abrasive and pretty weird—like a lot of people really hate it. People just kind of love it or hate it, which doesn’t bother me. But we’ve had a hard time finding a place to fit in; like right now we have a record that nobody wants to put out that we’re just kind of sitting on and I’ve been really busy with other stuff so I haven’t really had the time to actively pursue it. I probably could be trying harder, but, it’s pretty jazzy for the rock people and it’s too rock for the jazz people, and you know, it’s just hard to find a niche for that. (ibid.)

Halvorson and drummer Weasel Walter, upon sharing a bill at Cakeshop (NYC) and later in Philadelphia, decided to collaborate, “Weasel and I enjoyed each other's playing and talked about doing a collaboration” (Halvorson email communication 29 March 2012). They have produced

¹¹⁴ People has performed throughout NYC at Jalopy, New Sonic Headquarters, Barbès, Cakeshop, Zebulon, Glasslands Gallery, and Death By Audio.
three albums since they first performed at the Stone in 2007: Opulence (Stickfigure Distribution, 00635961120223), with the addition of Peter Evans Electric Fruit (Thirsty Ear Recordings, THI 57196), and Ominous Telepathic Mayhem (UgEXPLODE, ug51). Like her project with Shea, they have had more performances throughout the U.S. and Canada than in Europe. Halvorson, Evans, and Walter performed for the Ominous Telepathic Mayhem (2011) record release tour at Crossman Terrace (Rochester), Robinwood Concert House (Toledo), The Hideout (Chicago), Kerrytown Concert House (Ann Arbor), Placebo Space (Toronto, ON), and L’Envers (Montreal).

\[\text{\textsuperscript{115}}\text{ They have performed, for example, at Littlefield, Le Poisson Rouge, and The Stone (all NYC); The Rotunda, Highwire Gallery (Philadelphia), Sanctuary for Independent Media (Troy, NY), Bug Jar (Rochester), and The Wind Up Space (Baltimore).}\]
Meeting in Harlem and Amsterdam

I dart over and around the puddles of the early spring thaw, making my way east on 125th Street to Columbia University’s Computer Music Center. After being admitted through security, I head upstairs to meet Lehman for the first time for an interview. He conveys a soft, strong, and respectful speaking manner, with flourishes of jest. Personality-wise I am immediately drawn to his mildly self-deprecating humor that he employs to compare his musicianship to that of his peers. (Field notes 5 March 2010)

[Several months later]: After arriving jetlagged in Amsterdam, I awake from a quick nap and scramble to ready myself for Lehman’s octet performance next-door at the Bimhuis. I admire his ability to coolly gather together such a large ensemble and put on an awe-inspiring performance. It begins with what sounds like an homage to his mentor, Jackie McLean: Chris Dingman, his friend and former private lessons student, intones spectrally-influenced chords on the vibraphone. The way in which the octet makes the demanding charts sound deceptively easy strikes me. Lehman’s compositions bring together traditions as vast as French spectralist, free or avant-garde jazz, Braxton-ian temporal or rhythmic elements, hip-hop sampling, and drum and bass. The overtones doubled by the lower instruments give me chills. (Field notes 21 May 2010)
Early Years

Steve Lehman’s family informed his aesthetics and instilled in him an appreciation of the arts: “[music] was something that was encouraged and supported by my family a lot” (Lehman interview 3 May 2010). Although his parents were not full-time professional musicians, they actively listened and occasionally performed. His mother Sheila, an Adjunct Professor of Environmental Psychology at Polytechnic University (Brooklyn and Hawthorne, NY campuses), researched graffiti arts, owned a lot of early hip-hop records, and had a penchant for, “experimentalism in the arts” (ibid.). Stephen Jay, his father, attended Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts for the trumpet as a teenager. Professionally, he worked for Union Carbide’s artificial intelligence wing to introduce new technologies; avocationally, he performed as “a kind of semi-professional musician…play[ing] trumpet [and] trombone from time to time” (ibid.).

The youngest of five brothers, Lehman heard a great deal of 1970s and 1980s popular music throughout the household. His brothers “were teenagers when I was a baby, so their record collection was around” (ibid.). The repertoire and artists he recalls from his early childhood includes Michael Jackson’s *Off the Wall*, Sugar Hill Gang, Maynard Ferguson, Art Farmer, Wynton Marsalis’s *Fathers and Sons* and *Trumpet Concertos*, John Coltrane’s “Selflessness,” Ornette Coleman, McCoy Tyner, and Rimsky-Korsakov (ibid.). His parents approached him about taking piano lessons after they noticed him regularly tinkering on the household piano and listening to music on the hi-fi. Lehman learned to read music and apply his newly acquired music literacy to the corresponding piano keys in his weekly half-hour lessons.

The family moved to Hartford, CT in the summer of 1985 after his father was laid off from
his job and began working for Combustion Engineering. Shortly after, his father was diagnosed with a brain tumor and passed away within six months. That same year Lehman discontinued his piano lessons and joined the school band. The loss of his father influenced his decision to take up the saxophone:

I chose saxophone because I figured it was kind of—really it was just because it was kind of gold and shiny, like the trumpet, which my dad played. But not exactly the same thing, so I thought, ‘okay, I’ll do something that’s similar, but a little different.’ Not exactly like just copying him, you know. (ibid.)

His father’s life in music took on great importance for Lehman after his death. He copied his parents’ record collection onto the main media of the time, “right around when my dad passed away and he had this kind of big record collection and my mom did too…[I] put both of their record collections, basically like the whole thing…on cassette, just to preserve it a little more” (ibid.). In addition to the recordings he had copied from his parents’ LPs, Lehman began to amass his own modest record collection, constantly listening to *Dexter Gordon Live at the Village Vanguard*, Branford Marsalis’s *Mo’ Better Blues* (Spike Lee), John Coltrane’s 1963 Newport Jazz Festival recording of “My Favorite Things,” Deaf Leopard, Huey Lewis and the News, Heavy D, and A Tribe Called Quest.

In the middle school band Lehman played the popular soundtracks of the day, such as “Dances with Wolves.” As a sixth grader he played Beach Boys tunes and the theme from “Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles” in the school jazz band: “it wasn’t really jazz—we did ‘Someone to Watch Over Me’—that’s getting closer to jazz, I guess” (ibid.). He also began taking private saxophone lessons with Eugene Cantera, a student at the Hartt School of Music. Cantera emphasized instrumental technique, such as register changes and woodwind exercises from the Rubank method books. Lehman continued lessons with Cantera through the eighth grade.

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116 The layoff was a result of a Union Carbide chemical explosion in Bhopal, India in December of 1984.
117 Guest trumpeter Terrance Blanchard joined Marsalis on this soundtrack.
Lehman expressed his identity though his focused study of jazz. He expanded his saxophone repertoire beyond the middle school popular tunes and private lessons exercises to include initial forays into jazz. As an eighth grader he began to experiment with harmony-based improvisation:

I knew that certain scales went with certain chords, and then if you had a blues scale or a collection of notes that you could just kind of do permutations of those notes and kind of take a solo. So I remember I used to play ‘Watermelon Man’ a lot, I had the Herbie Hancock play-along and that was fun because I could just sort of play the D blues scale along with the recording. (ibid.)

He constructed his identity through jazz:

I really liked listening to jazz the most, because I kind of felt that it was something that made me special—you know—or set me apart from my friends. It was something that was unique to me, at least in my circle of friends. (ibid.)

He asserts that his level of interest in jazz underscored his self conception during his middle school years: “There were a couple kids who were starting to get interested in jazz, but no one who…listened to it all the time for pleasure the way I did. So it kind of made me feel like a little special, I guess” (ibid.).

Bird captivated him:

I bought my mom a Charlie Parker cassette as a gift because I knew she liked jazz, and then [I] really liked it myself a lot. You hear a lot of people having that lightning bolt moment with Charlie Parker—music in general—but I’ve come across a lot of people saying they had that experience with him in particular. I kind of was like that too. I was just like, ‘Wow, what is this?’ (ibid.)

On a trip to New York in the late 1980s, he and his mother perused the jazz bins at the now defunct Tower Records on West 4th Street and Broadway. When Lehman selected several Parker cassettes for purchase:

My mom was like, ‘well what about this guy Jackie McLean? He lives in Hartford.’ And I was like, ‘eh, I don’t think so.’ Because I was like, ‘I don’t want to put back a Charlie Parker cassette and replace it with this guy I’ve never heard of.’ So she was like, ‘you can add one more to the pile and that’ll be fine.’ So my mom knew what was hip; she knew he was an important person in Hartford and stuff. (Lehman interview 3 April 2011)
McLean’s *Dynasty* (1988) initially appealed to Lehman because he recognized the second track as the background music to a familiar Hartford jazz radio program. Its liner notes, which recounted a physical altercation that ensued the night McLean left Charles Mingus’s band to join Art Blakey’s band, captivated him, “It’s very the epitome of jazz anecdote, colorful stories. So it was like, ‘wow! What the fuck!’ And then I just started trying to find out more and more about him” (ibid.).

Lehman followed up this initial attraction to McLean’s music and persona by meticulously studying McLean’s recordings. He appreciated that McLean was also a Hartford resident, “it was cool that he lived right there” even though he, “almost never played in Hartford” (ibid.). Lehman attempted to interact with McLean:

Different times in high school I tried to talk to him when he would come up to Boston. There was a fundraiser for his cultural center, The Artist’s Collective, that he was at that I got a ticket to, and I went up to him and talked to him. (ibid.)

He further developed as an improviser after he moved eight miles south of Boston to board and attend the Milton Academy, a college preparatory school. Milton’s reputation impressed him, “I went to Milton...because it was really strong academically and they also had a jazz program there” (ibid.). He committed himself to jazz performance at Milton, “I was in this jazz combo playing tunes...different repertoire and taking lessons with Duncan Martin and still listening to jazz all the time and trying to get better, basically” (ibid.). Martin, an area pedagogue, Berklee alum, and Cantera’s childhood teacher, taught him music theory, “as applied to jazz standards,” “improvisation [based] on chord changes” (ibid.), and instrumental technique. He prioritized music:

In high school I even had to decide whether I was going to do extra music ensembles and lessons or be on a sports team, so I ended up picking music instead of being on the soccer team...at that point the groundwork was kind of laid. (Lehman interview 3 May 2010)

He appreciated Boston and Hartford’s live music performances. On weekends he frequently travelled to Boston’s Regatta Bar to listen to such artists as Joe Henderson, Jim Hall, Jackie
McLean, McCoy Tyner, and Elvin Jones. In Hartford, he attended concerts of Cecil Taylor and the Kronos Quartet (the latter were in residence at the Hartt School of Music at the time).

Lehman spent his high school junior year in Rennes, France. He regularly collaborated with Gilles Eckenschwiler, a local pianist several generations his senior, “[we] work[ed] together a lot and d[id] performances in Brittany, standards and stuff” (ibid.). Their bi-monthly concerts and minor festival appearances allowed him to familiarize himself with soloing and publically performing:

It really helped me a lot because I was really struggling to learn all this music, and memorize standards, and get comfortable soloing…I was fighting very hard to keep my head above the water with these older musicians, so I think I made a lot of progress that year because we were playing a fair amount, like a couple concerts a month, which was a lot for me at the time. (ibid.)

By the time he returned to the U.S. for his senior year, he knew he wanted to pursue music teaching or performance as his life’s work.

As he began to look at colleges, he initially set his sights on studying at the Hartt School with his idol, Jackie McLean. His mother supported his musical interests, but suggested that he consider Wesleyan because of its balance of the arts and academics. She informed him that Anthony Braxton, an important innovator and composer, taught there. At the time Lehman was familiar with Braxton’s name, but not his music. He listened to Braxton’s 1972 *Town Hall* (ART 6119) recording the summer before he entered college,118 “I didn’t like it, I was like, ‘what is this? This isn’t even’—but I thought, ‘okay.’ So I went to Wesleyan” (ibid.).

Lehman sought out Braxton during his first week at college in spite of his initial reaction to *Town Hall*. He immediately connected with Braxton because Braxton affirmed his tastes and shared his affinities:

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118 This recording features Anthony Braxton (saxophones, flute, clarinets, percussion), David Holland (bass), Phillip Wilson (percussion), John Stubblefield (tenor saxophone, flute, bass clarinet, percussion), Jeanne Lee (vocals) and Barry Altschul (percussion, marimba).
I somehow caught him in his office...I remember asking him about Jackie McLean and telling him about some record that I thought was really obscure—like some Blue Note record; I think it was *It's Time* and I was like, ‘You know, I don’t know if you know this record, I really—’ [and] he was like, ‘What? I have like eight copies of it,’ which I didn’t expect from him. So that was important to me. I already felt like I had a connection with this guy and we had stuff in common—music we really liked. And, yeah, it was significant. When you’re eighteen, that kind of stuff counts for a lot. (ibid.)

Braxton’s charismatic personality and contagious ebullience, for which he is known among his students, charmed Lehman. He took every class Braxton offered during his tenure at Wesleyan:

Braxton’s composition seminars, large and small ensemble classes, and the history classes *Music of Mingus, Coltrane, and Coleman*, and *Music of Lennie Tristano, Miles Davis, and Max Roach*.

As a sophomore Lehman took several lessons with Jimmy Greene, a saxophone student of McLean’s. Greene invited him to attend McLean’s saxophone seminar at the Hartt School, “I went to that class and basically asked [McLean] if I could keep coming to it and he let me do it. So that’s how I started being able to work with Jackie while I was at Wesleyan” (ibid.). Five to eight saxophonists, a rhythm section, and Kris Jensen (a local saxophonist and McLean’s assistant) attended the weekly seminars:

Sometimes we would pick a tune, like ‘Giant Steps,’ or a Bud Powell tune or something and then all go around the line soloing on it, including Jackie would take pretty extended solos. I remember one time he took a really long solo on ‘Giant Steps’ that was pretty amazing. And then [he] gave us feedback, [told] us things in his experience about how to have your sound be stronger or how to deal with chord changes or how to play fast and not have your time get pushed around. Sometimes he’d have direct feedback for us; sometimes he’d teach us by ear—like a Bud Powell composition. Bud Powell came up a lot because Jackie himself was mentored by Bud Powell when he was a teenager. The music was very close to him but also he had all these really valuable insights into the way the music was supposed to sound and stuff like that. (Lehman interview 3 April 2011)

Lehman occasionally took a private lesson with McLean, and he dedicated himself to learning from a selected group of jazz musicians: “I really wanted to get it together, specifically with the challenge of being comfortable with chord changes and doing everything with that language—of Jackie
McLean’s music and Charlie Parker’s music, and Coltrane, Bud Powell, and all these people…Even if I had other interests, that was the center of my focus at the time” (ibid.). Lehman tried to spend time with McLean in addition to the seminar and lessons. When McLean asked his students for a ride to Boston, Lehman seized the opportunity, “I just raised my hand and I didn’t even have a car…just to spend time with him. So I rented a car and drove up to Boston” (ibid.), affording him additional time to chat with his mentor. He occasionally visited McLean at his house, and he wrote his undergraduate thesis on McLean.

Lehman’s studies at Wesleyan were, “a fruitful period for me; a lot of change; a lot of transformation” (ibid.). His understanding of harmony was based mostly on Parker and McLean’s musics prior to his collegiate days. Wesleyan’s liberal arts and world music programs expanded his purview. He familiarized himself with the work of Alvin Lucier, an American experimental music composer and Wesleyan faculty member, first as a student in his class “Introduction to Experimental Music,” and later, in his composition seminar. He was particularly taken with Schoenberg’s “Pierrot Lunaire,” which he first heard in a course on nineteenth-century German literature. Braxton and Kevin O’Neil, a guitarist and music graduate student, acquainted him with works by Stockhausen, Xenakis, and Ferneyhough, among others: “I was starting to get more and more involved with contemporary classical music, and sort of twentieth-century European art music” (Lehman interview 3 May 2010).

Lehman established musical relationships at Wesleyan that later proved foundational to his career in New York. He played with Taylor Ho Bynum, a music student several years older than him. He met and began to work with percussionist Tomas Fujiwara through Bynum. Chris Dingman, a vibraphonist-composer and music student his junior, took lessons with Lehman for a few years before the two began to regularly collaborate. Lehman briefly interrupted his Wesleyan studies to spend the spring semester of 1999 (his junior year) in Paris. Toward the end of his MA
studies he started to work with Wesleyan percussion private instructor, Pheeroan akLaff. AkLaff suggested that he meet up with American ex-patriot and saxophonist, Steve Potts. Potts, then, quickly introduced him to other musicians “in that community” (ibid.), such as saxophonist-multi-instrumentalist François Théberge and bassist Jean-Jacques Avenel.

Kevin O’Neil helped Lehman expand his knowledge of repertoire, “[O’Neil has] a really encyclopedic knowledge of music, so he helped me a lot [to] find stuff inside of that world that I could relate to, and get access to it and g[a]ve [me] articles, recordings” (ibid.). In addition to O’Neil’s informal mentorship of Lehman, they played music together “all the time” (ibid.).

Lehman’s work with Braxton and O’Neil also helped him establish contacts with several other musicians in creative music. Kevin Norton, who at the time worked regularly as Braxton’s drummer, invited Lehman and O’Neil to record his album Change Dance. Lehman met Mark Dresser at the recording session. Lehman, in turn, invited Norton, O’Neil, and Dresser to record his first album as a leader, Structural Fire.

He explored his musical identity through composition. Although he had dabbled with “writing tunes” in high school, Braxton led him to reconsider the role of composition:

[Braxton] just really drives that point home, pretty hard…that writing your own music and how valuable a step that can be to really refining and defining what your music is, and what you want it to sound like and what you’re interested in, [and] using composition as a way to really formalize that and challenge yourself to really be specific about what you want to do. So I think it was mostly about him, because other than that I was just thinking in terms of writing tunes and stuff like that, to play, but not really thinking of that as a vital part of my output, like composing music. But he just made such a strong case for how valuable that could be that I think I just kind of got into it without questioning it. (ibid.)

He regularly took composition lessons with Braxton throughout the year in preparation for his recital. He composed and had performed Olivia (saxophone quartet), For 10 Musicians (chamber orchestra), System for Trio and Dance (flute, guitar, saxophone, and dancer), Rue de la harpe/Sahib
Shihab (jazz orchestra), and Panther, No. 80, GK, Mr. King, and Jacknife/Charles Tolliver (saxophone, trumpet, guitar, bass, and drums).

Prior to completing his undergraduate degree, Lehman applied to Wesleyan’s two-year master’s program in composition. As a graduate student he continued to engage with Braxton and O’Neil, as well as develop his chamber music. Lucier invited the Furious Band to perform graduate student works and funded his graduate students’ travel and tuition to the first Ostrava Center for New Music during the spring and summer of 2001. In Ostrava Lehman met and worked with composers Petr Kotik, Jean-Yves Bosseur, and Christian Wolff, as well as players in the Janacek Philharmonic Orchestra and the Hungarian-born conductor Zsolt Nagy. Nagy, an experienced conductor of “New Complexity” works, helped Lehman: “I was using some notational techniques derived from some of that, so he kind of helped me think about how to…get the same result, but make things easier to play or easier to read” (interview 15 August 2013).

New York Years

Lehman moved to New York to live with his girlfriend and soon-to-be fiancée, Olivia Newman, for his second year of graduate school. He began to solicit many of the musicians with whom he would later collaborate. He approached tenor saxophonist Mark Shim following a concert at the Jazz Gallery in the spring of 2002:

I tapped [Shim] on the shoulder after the concert and said, ‘hey, I really love your playing. Would you be open to doing a concert of some of my music? I can guarantee you…$75 for the concert and Mark Helias is going to do it.’ So I thought that that might be meaningful to him, that somebody else he knew [would be playing]. I think I knew Eric McPherson was going to do it too. And he said, ‘yeah, sure.’ (Lehman interview 15 August 2013)

Lehman and Shim first performed together in July 2002 at Kavehaz (123 Mercer St.). Lehman sought out bassist Drew Gress after he heard him on Shim’s album Turbulent Flow (7243 8 23392 29):
Drew Gress. I literally looked him up in the phonebook and called him...I thought he’d be well-suited for some of the stuff that I was doing...I called him...and his wife called me back and said, ‘he’s out of town, but he can do the gig,’ or, ‘he’s interested.’ So that’s how I met him. (ibid.)

Eric McPherson’s drumming on McLean’s record *Rhythm of the Earth* (314 517 075-2) motivated Lehman to approach McPherson after a gig at Triad (158 West 72nd St.): “I went—same thing—up to [McPherson] after a concert and said, ‘hey, I studied with Jackie...would you be open to doing some playing?’ and he said, ‘yeah, sure’” (ibid.).

Lehman and Newman spent the 2002-2003 school year in Paris following Lehman’s MA graduation from Wesleyan. Lehman investigated the critical reception of African American experimental composers in 1970s France with the aid of Fulbright grant,119 while Newman researched the work of French women filmmakers. François Théberge, a collaborator from his undergraduate sojourn in Paris, had since become director of the Jazz and Improvised Music Department at the Paris Conservatory. Théberge helped him to secure a yearlong teaching position there:

There were a lot of kids at the Paris Conservatory who were really into Steve Coleman and Tim Berne and stuff like that, but didn’t really know much about Julius Hemphill or Braxton or the Art Ensemble of Chicago, because a lot of those recordings that they did in the 1970s were sort of hard to get access to. (ibid.)

In addition to teaching, Lehman took orchestration lessons with Théberge and performed regularly with flutist Michel Edelin, drummer Karl Jannuska, and bassist Stephane Kerecki. He maintains these ties: in 2009, for example, Edelin featured Lehman on his album, *Kuntu* (Rogue Art, ROG-0019).

The couple visited New York for two weeks in February of 2003. Lehman interspersed concerts in the City and at Wesleyan with family time. He performed twice at Kavehaz with his

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quintet (Chris Dingman, Mark Shim, Drew Gress, and Eric McPherson). When McPherson was unable to make the second gig, Lehman asked Tyshawn Sorey to substitute:

He called me cold. That week I had a rehearsal with Vijay [Iyer’s] quartet. I go to the rehearsal at Vijay’s house, and Steve and I agreed to meet after the rehearsal…at Ollie’s [Asian Noodle Shop and Grill]. He brought this huge book of music (like fifteen tunes), pages of stuff. So the gig was the next day, and he gave me all the music and a cassette tape. I listened to the tape on the way home in the car. So I get to the gig [and] we basically played the music down perfectly—one or two minor mistakes—but I basically played the music from memory. I guess he was impressed by that, and that was the beginning of our working relationship. (Sorey personal communication 16 December 2012)

Their encounter was the first of what would become a fruitful collaborative bond.

Lehman and Newman returned to New York following their year in Paris. Lehman decided to settle there largely because of New York’s scenes and art worlds: “there’s such a high concentration of musicians in my areas of music that are doing stuff at such an incredibly high level that it’s just a luxury…There’re amazing, brilliant musicians all over the world, but…the density, [the] concentration in New York is unparalleled” (Lehman interview 3 May 2010). He worked 30 hours per week for the hedge fund D.E. Shaw to support himself; in his off time he worked on music as much as possible. In September he recorded Artificial Light (FSNT-186) with Dingman, Gress, McPherson, and Shim. The album demonstrates Lehman’s addition of New York-based musicians to his roster of regular collaborators, and, the onset of his strategic network.

In November Lehman performed twice for the “Interpretations” series at Merkin Concert Hall (129 West 67th St.). He performed a concert with Michelle Rosewoman and Sorey there per Shim’s recommendation. He asked Tom Buckner, the series’ curator, to consider him for a concert of his own music there: “[I] just asked him if he would consider me. He actually came to hear me with Mark Dresser and Pheeroan AkLaff at Tonic, and said, ‘yeah, if you want to do a concert, you can do a concert’” (Lehman interview 15 August 2013). Lehman shared a bill with Dave Burrell for

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120 Ollie’s, located at 116th and Broadway, was close to Iyer’s then residence at 606 West 116th.
a concert that featured his chamber works *Synthesis* (solo vibraphone), *Momentum* (piano and oboe), *For Frank Stella* (solo cello), *Lasers* (drum set and alto saxophone), and *Degrees of Density* (obo and sopranino saxophone).

Lehman envisioned an electroacoustic album partly inspired by Anthony Braxton’s *New York, Fall 1974* (AL4032) and Craig Taborn’s *Junk Magic* (THI 57144.2) for his first Pi release:

> I had been working with sequencing programs, [e.g.] Ableton Live, for a couple of years and I kind of wanted to record some of that stuff. A lot of my music at the time, and even now, is very—kind of took a lot of rehearsals—is very difficult to realize. So I thought it might be nice to explore what changed if I used basically midi or sequence instruments and what that might open up compositionally. (Lehman interview 15 August 2013)

He ebulliently collaborated with Meshell Ndegeocello, a vocalist and multi-instrumentalist whom he had recently met through Jahi Lake, a friend, fellow Wesleyan alum, and DJ: ¹²¹

> [Jahi and I] were roommates for a semester. He had these couple of nights at the Blue Note on Friday and Saturday, like a midnight set and had me. It was really based around Meshell Ndegeocello and Chris Dave, and then he invited me and I can’t remember who else, Roy Hargrove and—different people to come and play with him and play with Meshell. And that’s how I met her and we kind of kept in touch. (ibid.)

Ndegeocello subsequently invited Lehman to perform with her at Makor (a Jewish cultural center on the Upper West Side) and Madison Square Park.

Toward the end of the calendar year Vijay Iyer asked Lehman to join Fieldwork, after Aaron Stewart (ts) left the collective. He had met Iyer in 1999 during a festival appearance with Braxton in Verona, Italy; Iyer had attended his performance with Rosewoman and Sorey a month earlier. Lehman assiduously rehearsed with Iyer and Elliot Kavee (d): “once we had the music together we started talking to Seth [Rosner] and Yulun [Wang] about doing a Fieldwork record on Pi. That was kind of how I got introduced to those guys and [began] working with them” (ibid.).

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¹²¹ Jahi is a son of winds player and former BAG member, Oliver Lake.
Rosner and Wang approach Lehman about recording for the label after they released Fieldwork’s *Simulated Progress* (Pi Recordings, Pi16).

Sorey joined the collective in December 2004 after Kavee left. Fieldwork, in its Iyer, Lehman, and Sorey configuration has produced only one record to date (*Door*; Pi Recordings, Pi26). The group’s musical influence on Lehman, however, figures significantly by comparison:

We spend a lot of time in between working on pieces and before and after rehearsals and when we’re traveling, having pretty important discussions about aesthetics and our own ideas about our own music and music that we’re excited about and kind of in a sneaky way a lot of those conversations and what these guys have brought up has been really important for me…We’ll work on an idea in this group of mine, of Tyshawn’s of Vijay’s just to see if it’s even possible, or practical that will bear fruit in ten or twenty different ways in other compositions once I know how to make it work, how it functions, how to make it practical. That happens to me all the time, something that we develop together ends up being really beneficial in lots of [ways]. (Lehman, Fieldwork interview 13 March 2011)

In addition to Fieldwork, his collaborations with Iyer and Sorey have led to other performative partnerships. Lehman plays in Iyer’s Sextet; Sorey plays in Lehman’s Octet. Iyer invited both Lehman and Sorey to share the stage with him for his Carnegie Hall debut in the spring of 2013.

Lehman has performed on more than 25 commercial recordings, representing the broad range of collaborations he has cultivated. His formative network, indicated in the first five years of his discography, is largely comprised of a cohort of Wesleyan or Connecticut-based musicians with multiplexed ties:

When I first began performing in New York, I was mainly working with musicians that I had met either at Wesleyan or the Hartt School of Music. I also met some musicians who were studying at the New School including an old friend and a wonderful drummer named Tomas Fujiwara…I did a lot of really wonderful duo concerts with Kevin O’Neil, who is an amazing guitarist and composer. A lot of gigs with people like Tomas Fujiwara, Taylor Ho Bynum, Tony Leone and also Warren Byrd, an incredible Hartford-based pianist. (DiPietro 2005)

The overlap of actors among his Wesleyan and Hartford area associations is significant.
Lehman appeared on *Sous Rature* (Barking Hoop Recordings, BKH-003), *Andrew Hill: Nine Compositions* (Creative Improvised Music Projects, CIMP236), *Structural Fire* (CIMP245), and *Ceol Nua* (Leo Records, LR 336) with Kevin O’Neil between 1999 and 2002. He also performed on four albums with Kevin Norton, a percussionist-composer and an affiliate of Braxton. CIMP released Lehman’s first album under his own name, *Structural Fire*. During this period CIMP worked closely with Braxton, releasing four of his albums between 2000 and 2001.\(^{122}\)

Since moving to New York in 2003, Lehman has released the majority of his recordings on New York-based Pi Recordings\(^ {123}\) and Lisbon-based Clean Feed Records,\(^ {124}\) which Seth Rosner and Pedro Costa operate, respectively (Figure 26; p. 215). Lehman’s albums as co/leader on Pi include: *Demian as Posthuman* (Pi17), *On Meaning* (Pi25), *Travail, Transformation, and Flow* (2009), and *Simulated Progress* (Pi16) and *Door* (Pi26) (with the collective Fieldwork). Clean Feed releases include: *Interface* (CF022), and *Manifold* (CF097) and Steve Lehman and Rudresh Mahanthappa’s *Duel Identity* (CF172). All but *Interface* and *Manifold* have been reviewed in the national publication *Downbeat Magazine*. Notably, *Door* and *Dual Identity* received four (out of a possible five) stars, and *Travail, Transformation, and Flow* received 4.5 stars; further, in January of 2010 *Downbeat* recognized *Travail, Transformation, and Flow* as among the “Best CDs of 2000s.” *Downbeat* has further acknowledged Lehman in its annual critic’s polls: Lehman was listed as a “Rising Star, Alto Saxophone” in 2006 (tenth place), 2007 (twelfth place), and 2008 (fifth place); he was listed as a “Rising Star, Composer” in 2011 (fifth place).

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\(^{122}\) Kevin Norton appears on at least twelve CIMP albums.

\(^{123}\) Pi Recordings has committed to:

- releasing innovative music by artists with unique and defining voices…We spotlight composers, improvisers and bandleaders who are pushing music in new, groundbreaking ways. Jazz artists have never had a wider musical palette at their disposal than now, and they are using it to create music that is more varied, profound and vibrant than ever before. (Pi Recordings website http://pirecordings.com/about/ accessed 30 March 2011)

\(^{124}\) The recording label Clean Feed, “aims at recording innovative contemporary jazz projects that can make a difference, building a catalogue that will be internationally recognized by its quality and coherence” (Clean Feed website http://www.cleanfeed-records.com/aboutUs.asp accessed 30 March 2011).
From 2006 to 2012 Lehman balanced professional responsibilities and doctoral studies in composition with George Lewis and Tristan Murail at Columbia University. He had applied to Columbia’s program to support and develop his work in music:

**AS:** Why did you decide to apply for a D.M.A.?
**SL:** Sort of the same reason as I went to grad school at Wesleyan and applied for the Fulbright grant, because I thought that it would be a good place for me to get work done and to grow as a musician, as a composer, and mostly because it…seemed like the best setup for me to have the most amount of time to be focused on music…it’s a lot of support, and you have the infrastructure and all that stuff at the University. (Lehman interview 3 May 2010)

He expanded his ties to “new music” art worlds as a Columbia student. As a member of the graduate student concert programming committee, he invited the JACK Quartet to perform a concert of graduate student works. Josh Rubin, the clarinetist and program director for ICE, solicited him about collaboration in 2008: “they wanted to do a bigger concert, but didn’t have that much money. So we kind of waited” (Lehman interview 15 August 2013). In the meantime, the ensemble performed his piece *Baltimore/Berlin* at PS 122. In 2011 ICE approached him about being an ICElab collaborator, which culminated in a concert of his works at le Poisson Rouge in April of that year.

Lehman’s Columbia affiliation facilitated his work with the Talea Ensemble, as well: “Talea and Argento both reached out to me because the directors of both of those ensembles are Columbia grad students…Talea, one of the directors is Anthony Cheung, who got his doctorate at Columbia and then Argento is run by Michel Galante, who got his doctorate at Columbia” (ibid.). In December 2012 Talea performed his work *Khalid* for their concert, “Synchronicities: New Works,” at Mannes School of Music; Lehman’s composition was positioned alongside works by George Lewis, Christopher Trapani, and Anthony Cheung.
Conclusion

This chapter brings to the fore the inherent tensions between ground-level music making and art worlds. On one hand the former is guided by the agency of individuals, while the latter is governed by habitus. On the other, music cultures are never that simple. It is the work of individuals—and communities of individuals—who eventually chip away at binaries of American musics. The close-ups provided through these case studies make inroads in this direction.

Throughout Lehman’s years in NYC he has made a concerted effort to establish a presence within and across jazz and new music art worlds. George Lewis, his composition teacher at Columbia, not only models such a practice for his students, but also shares programs and stages with them. In February 2012 Lewis’ works book-ended those by Lehman and Sorey (his students) at the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art.

Lehman’s Wesleyan and Hartford-based ties helped usher him into a NYC-based professional life in music. He has worked with Braxton—beyond their Wesleyan association—most notably in Braxton’s 12 + 1tet. From 2004 onward, his recorded output demonstrates collaborations with his strategic ties. If you recall, Lehman initiated some of his most lasting and fecund collaborative relationships through cold-calling and shoulder-tapping efforts; his ability to maintain those ties, however, is based on far more than initiative. Lehman’s work demands a great deal of time and effort, something he alluded to in a public interview of Fieldwork: “I feel like I’m the one, [with] every piece these guys bring in sort of banging my head against the wall privately and then trying to put cover-up on the bruises when I show up to rehearsal,” (Fieldwork interview 13 March 2011). Admittedly, Lehman delivers this message in his usual self-deprecating manner, but this does not mar the “sheer labor” (ibid.) that goes into his creative processes.
Other improviser-composers similarly traverse the architectures of art worlds and the anatomies of scenes. Press accounts have recognized Halvorson for her work as a guitarist-composer in the jazz art world; but her activities in rock subcultural scenes (e.g. People) have largely gone unnoticed. Her work with People serves as an example of how Halvorson’s musical collaborations do not always follow the hardened structures of NYC art worlds. Indeed, most of her network lies outside such scene(s); perhaps more importantly, however, her formative links—which in many ways have aided in determining her strategic ones—were rooted largely in jazz art worlds.

Halvorson grounded her social and musical life in New York through her Wesleyan and New School ties. She met friends and collaborators, initiated performances, and adjusted to City life with the help of these connections. Her ongoing collaborations with Braxton (Braxton’s 12+1tet, Septet, Quartet, Diamond Curtain Wall Trio, and Tri-Centric Orchestra) initially brought prestige to her network. Many of Halvorson’s early European appearances were with Braxton, whose European agent Lalo (Alberto Lafocco) largely has ties to European jazz art worlds. This is not to say that his music should be positioned as such, but his business primarily is. Art worlds can and frequently do operate completely irrespective of the sounds that flow forth from them. (One need look no further than the developments of American country music over the past several decades, with its stars panoplying themselves in the comportments of American pop.)

Halvorson’s engagements with Braxton, however, by no means fully account for her current acclaim. She began to establish herself as an ensemble leader after grounding herself under the guidance of others. She now performs regularly in New York and throughout Europe with her ensembles. She even briefly toured Australia with her eponymous trio. Her strategic network has branched out, too, through the expansion of several overlapping collaborators; she performs regularly with Tom Rainey Trio, Ingrid Laubrock’s Anti-House, and Ches Smith and These Arches.
Her rigorous performance schedule has led to continued visibility and engenders new opportunities.

Lee learned to play Western classical-style cello in private Korean schools starting at age three. After high school she moved to Boston to pursue degrees in arranging and film scoring at Berklee, and later, contemporary improvisation at NEC. Upon moving to NYC she readily accepted performance invitations. Her openness guided her strategic network across myriad musical pathways. Lee collaborated with Mesinai, Barnes, and Kajiwara, as well as performed for Morris’s Conduction, Tate’s Burnt Sugar Arkestra, and Iyer and Ladd’s groups. She traveled with Conduction to Venice for her first European performance. Tate invited Lee to play with his Burnt Sugar Arkestra after hearing her in Conduction. Through the Burnt Sugar Arkestra she met collaborator Vijay Iyer. Lee’s noise aesthetic in TOT inspired Iyer to invite her to perform first in In What Language, then later in Still Life with Commentator and Holding it Down: The Veteran’s Dream Project.

In New York she most closely situated herself among a group of peers who are a generation her senior (e.g. Zorn, Mori, and Marclay, among many others). Douglas facilitated Lee and Zorn’s initial meeting. Zorn then invited Lee to perform Cobra at Tonic during her first fall in NYC. Lee initiated many of her strategic ties after concerts that she either attended or performed. Zorn helped facilitate connections; she led her first group abroad when Zorn recommended her to Michalke. The ties and reputation she established in New York have facilitated her itinerant work across Europe in recent years.

Lee first articulated a personal aesthetic through a noise sensibility in the European Free Improvisation Ensemble. Nowadays, her individualism as a performer facilitates her deft traversal of scenes and art worlds:
Especially in this music, I think, the most important thing for anybody is the fact that you are a very unique individual in your playing, in your personality, in terms of what you like to do, and everything...we are not a group of people who are just musicians for hire. It’s not like we’re playing in a pit orchestra; it’s not like we [just] have to read charts. (Lee interview 19 March 2013)

She credits Zorn with having taught her learned this lesson. She resists predefined categories and roles: e.g. Lee frequently contrasts her lack of musical volition in Korea to her “freedom” through improvisation in New York, and beyond.

Lee’s interest in freedom also applies to her self-definition and identity. She defied many of the gender expectations that her family had for her:

**Okkyung Lee:** When I was like twelve…I went to a lesson with my mom at this cello teacher’s house. She was in her forties, probably. She lived in this beautiful house; she was married to a doctor or somebody who was making lots of money. She had lived in the States or something—so she had this kind of air of something like—

**Amanda Scherbenske:** cosmopolitanism?

**OL:** Yeah...she was really flamboyant and attractive, and she was surrounded by beautiful things... when we left [my lesson] one day my mom says to me, ‘wouldn’t that be nice, when you get married you marry either a lawyer or a doctor, and when your husband comes home tired, you can play cello for your husband? Wouldn’t that be nice?’[and] that’s what people expect. In a way, even the fact that I was able to run away from it—it’s funny because obviously I came from a household that had enough money to send me to all these music schools and pay for the private lessons and...I was surrounded by these rich kids...and then basically they were doing music so they can have...kind of a certain air, ‘oh, you know, she is artistic, so she can make a good wife.’ Not to be an artist...So I did that and even when I went to Boston...you’d see lots...of Korean girls and that’s what they are doing. They are not there to become something, but to be qualified to be able to marry a guy from a rich family...but then...the International Monetary Fund that hit Asia in 1997 [happened], and the Korean economy collapsed...so [because of that] I was able to kind of escape from that mental setting: that now since I finished school then the next thing I should do is find a rich husband, but it became impossible in a way in Korea.

**AS:** Ah, because everyone was...having problems with the economy.

**OL:** Right. So I got into NEC and I got a scholarship, thankfully, so I could go; but then after that all of a sudden I had to find a way to make a living on my own. So this life that, ‘oh yeah, maybe we marry a rich guy,’ became totally...impossible. So in a way it’s like it’s good that it happened then; I was forced to go into this life and then make something on my own...it enabled me to tell [my parents], ‘okay, this is what I’m going to do. This is my life, I just have to do it.’ (Lee interview 19 March 2013)
Multiplicity is composed of the musical, as well as the personal. Berkson and Lee’s stories illuminate some of the challenges that improviser-composers who are women face. Berkson’s male peers had frequently disappointed her during her early years in the City as she grounded herself in NYC scenes and art worlds. She eventually looked inward for musical self-definition and fulfillment; I contend that this was partly motivated by the difficulties in negotiating issues of gender and sexuality in NYC’s male-dominated jazz art worlds. Instead, she developed an eclectic, solo project that that spans her early performance of Jewish and Western classical traditions to the values she learned from Maneri at NEC (Maneri championed her pursuit of musical multiplicity through serious study).

Berkson’s collaborations demonstrate her performance across scenes and art worlds: she has performed with her Jewish music groups, Platzmachen and East River Orchestra, at the eclectic Brooklyn venue, Zebulon; her collaborations with Coleman and Talmor led to local and international performances in jazz art worlds. Improviser-composers value collaboration, but not commensurately. Berkson collaborates from time to time; but her musical pathways do not align with the jazz networks that those of many of her contemporaries do. She does not rely as heavily on collaborations as many of her contemporaries with stronger ties to jazz networks have. I attribute this to her sense of dis-belonging among jazz communities. She defines her aesthetic parameters largely as a solo act.

Improviser-composers define themselves through their web of multiple affiliations (Simmel [1922] 1955). Garchik has performed jazz and classical musics since a younster. He studied piano and performed in the school band, jazz band, and San Fransisco Youth Symphony. His conservatory contacts championed performance across musical idioms and art worlds, and served as a point of departure for his network expansion within and beyond NYC. His MSM ties encouraged
performance in various jazz ensembles, too, such as Konitz’s Nonet and the Mingus Big Band. It was with Konitz that he made his first transatlantic musical tour. His teacher, Dave Taylor, modeled and supported his practice of this sort of bimusicality as well. The senior trombonists at MSM recommended Garchik for diverse “world musics” engagements. The new music collective Wet Ink showcased his arrangements of Bulgarian wedding and Pakistani Qawwali musics and his classical compositions. Garchik was initially motivated to play klezmer to supplement his income; his expert facility led to performance with prestigious klezmer groups, such as Frank London’s Klezmer Brass All Stars. Garchik’s work with MSM peers and friends Sacks and Weiss forms a substantial part of his formative and strategic networks. His interest in jazz and Western classical music goes back to his days as a middle school student.

Still, Garchik’s weak and friendship ties, alone, did not shepherd him across multiple musical terrains: his exceptional instrumental faculties granted him initial, as well as repeated performance invitations. His mastery of many musics led to his performance across music scenes, and at diverse venues. Although Garchik’s formative connections continued to play a major role in his primary ensembles, he expanded his professional network considerably beyond its base. His formative ties maintain centrality in his strategic network. They have helped him to extend his strategic network. His strategic ties to groups like Slavic Soul Party, Frank London’s Klezmer Brass All Stars, the Kronos Quartet, TILT Brass Band, and John Hollenbeck’s Large Ensemble demonstrate his traversal of scenes and art worlds.

Improviser-composers commonly balk at ways that their music is classified, or suggest that an appropriate category for their music does not exist. In part, their sentiments are based on an assumption that music is written about and conceived of by others based on its aural articulations, as opposed to its social-structural ones. Musical multiplicity and collaborations—while having vastly important sonic and aesthetic dimensions—are developed, maintained, and transformed.
through networks. The discourses surrounding improviser-composers and their work are based at least as much on the topographies of networks as they are on sounds. Musical categories are still governed by the social, financial, and cultural institutions that comprise art worlds within and beyond the City. In NYC, musical boundaries and structures are sometimes blurred and traversed; other times they are maintained, and even reified. Improviser-composers, nonetheless, are not complacent in the face of these determinations. They make inroads into deconstructing ossified categories and ideas about American musics. In the next chapter I detail musical examples by Berkson and Lehman to further illustrate this point.
Chapter 4: Sounding Multiplicity and Belonging

I have argued that musical multiplicity and collaborations are developed, maintained, and transformed through social networks. And it is indeed through the lens of networks that musics and musicians are frequently categorized. To fully understand multiplicity and belonging among improviser-composers, however, we must turn our attention to their sonic and aesthetic dimensions. Just as improviser-composers develop, maintain, and transform musical collaborations and multiplicity through social networks, their sonic and aesthetic dimensions have equal, if not greater, importance for improviser-composers.

Chromaticism paired with original lyrics, cantorial microelements imbued with personal modulations, and additive rhythms only begin to hint at the breadth of musical materials that improviser-composers engage. In this chapter I explore the music of two improviser-composers to show that classifications, while useful in “mak[ing] knowledge…manageable” (Samson 2010), are just as likely to obscure a more nuanced reading of multiplicity and belonging and to parse the aural dimensions of individualism, collaboration, and multiplicity. While improviser-composers express group belonging through these parameters, they are not realized uniformly: the ways and the extent to which they are expressed musically vary from person to person. At times, improviser-composers hold different or contrasting versions of these values.

I focus on improviser-composers’ shared sensibilities through musical analysis of works by Judith Berkson and Steve Lehman. While the music itself potentially contains numerous (perhaps even unlimited) issues to examine and scrutinize, I locate those relevant for the discussion of individualism, collaboration, and multiplicity. With this in mind, I do not discuss given works in their entirety: rather, I present and discuss excerpts that support the arguments at hand. Later on, I use these same examples to define multiplicity more broadly, while maintaining its integrity as an
overarching concept. Multiplicity’s advantageousness lies in its potential for multivalence: it means different things for different people in different situations. It encompasses amalgamated musical materials as well as engagement in multiple musics; it accounts for the traversal of myriad scenes and art worlds.

**Listening to Judith Berkson**

Throughout her life Judith Berkson has engaged musical multiplicity. At an early age, her father taught her the intricacies of Jewish prayers, blessings, and cantillation, and she studied Western classical piano and music theory. Later, her teacher Joe Maneri at the New England Conservatory of Music encouraged her to pursue all musics that piqued her interest:

> [Maneri] just said [that] you could do it all. I mean why can’t you be well versed in a variety of musics, if you wanted to; that you should. It’s actually good, and [play] a variety of instruments, not just voice, but piano, accordion, whatever else. And then also [learn] the fundamentals of the Western tradition too: harmony, counterpoint, [and] compositions. But yeah, definitely, you could do it all. ‘Why not?’ that was his [thing]. (Berkson interview 14 December 2012)

The principles she learned from Maneri guided her formative years in NYC, which culminated in her 2010 ECM release.

*Oylam’s* song titles illustrate the varied resources she has worked with over the years: “All of You” (Cole Porter, 1954), “Mi Re Do” (Berkson), “Ahavas Oylam” (music Berkson, liturgy traditional), “Little Arrows” (Berkson), “Der Leiermann” (Franz Schubert, 1827; lyrics inspired by Wilhelm Müller), “Fallen Innocent Wandering Thieves” (Berkson), “They Can’t Take That Away From Me” (George and Ira Gershwin, 1937), “Burnt” (Berkson), and “Hulyet, hulyet” (Mikhl Gelbart; lyrics Avrom Reisen). The songs stem from various transatlantic musics and time-place

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125 On the album Mordechai Gebirtig is erroneously listed as the composer. Her earlier album, *Lu-Lu* also positions songs of multiple traditions and repertoires side by side: “Darn that Dream” (Jimmy Van Heusen, 1939), “Lu-Lu”
nexuses, including cantorial compositions, Yiddish songs, Schubert Lieder, and jazz standards, as well as her own pantonal chamber works. The materials and titles ultimately unveil a study in assumed binaries. She arranges the sacred and the profane, popular and art song, twentieth-century American theater tunes and nineteenth-century German Lieder, newly interpreted jazz standards and original microtonal songs within a single album.

In the hands of some, the results of such an undertaking could be wanting, but Berkson’s treatment reveals long-term commitment, rather than dilettantism. Oylam gives expression to her meticulous study of jazz, Jewish music, German Lieder, and pantonality. She cultivated the belief that manifold traditions must be taken seriously, while studying with Maneri:

> If you wanted to actually learn [a given] style, immerse yourself and really get knowledge of it. That was very inspiring and I definitely went for that and the thing is you can’t just be a dilettante. You can’t just sort of do it; you have to do it, and to do it takes such a human sacrifice of your life. It’s like, if you want to be good at this, this, and this...you really have to spend a lot of time at it. So then you’re talking about a big commitment. (ibid.)

Berkson insists that while the album contents are eclectic, they are all embedded in a unified, personal aesthetic:

> It’s not just like a variety show—because I hate that—like some kind of vaudeville bullshit. But it has...a certain avant-garde edge to it. Like...a modern [leaning]...It’s a sound and a mood [and] a certain...economy of playing in kind of space and mood. (Berkson interview 7 November 2009)

She illustrates her aesthetic in the way she introduces and arranges material. She precedes the Yiddish song with a brief microtonal improvisation; adapts Schubert’s classical standard “Der Leiermann” to an instrumentation more common to jazz, blues, rock or gospel; she largely divests her performance of the ubiquitous vibrato of bel canto practice.

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(Berkson), “The Raven” (Franz Schubert), “Maltz” (Berkson), “Out of Nowhere” (Hyman), “Wait On” (Berkson), “You Are Special” (Fred Rogers), and “Penny Lasill” (Berkson), and “Some Enchanted Evening” (Richard Rodgers).

126 See Slobin (2000) for a sonic extension of Bakhtin’s chronotope.
Throughout her composition to “Ahavas Oylam” (also transliterated as “Ahavat Olam”), an evening Hebrew prayer in thanks of the gift of the Torah, she juxtaposes established cantorial practices alongside her approach to harmony. She maintains the nusakh (summarized by Jeff Summit as “traditional chant” (2000)) that she learned from her father and canonical recordings by performing its stylistic microelements: krekhstn (Yiddish—groans or sobs), slides, and turns. In audio track 1, for example, she facilely employs krekhstn at 0:08, 0:14, 0:43, and 0:58 (Example 1 throughout; marked as Kr in red). She makes regular use of slides, gliding from D4 to G4 at 0:41 and from G4 to C5 at 0:45 (printed in red). She signals the prayer’s cadence by sliding downward a major third from C5 to A and then by turning on A (audio track 1) before landing on the dominant.

Although she infuses “Ahavas Oylam” with stylistic elements common to cantorial performance practices, she also diverges from them through her treatment of harmony (Figure 14). To demonstrate the ways that she both maintains and subverts cantorial harmonic models, I provide a comparative analysis of three versions of the prayer “Ahavas Oylam” (Figure 14). I take my comparative examples from seminal cantorial recordings by Gershon Sirota ([190?] 2004) and Zavel Kwartin (1908). Sirota and Kwartin, among the first cantors to commercially record, are frequently considered representative of “traditional” cantorial practices that Berkson has referenced in our discussions.

Berkson’s composition contrasts with Sirota and Kwartin’s renditions in its harmonic tempo. Starting with the invocation of text, the recordings’ lengths differ by eight seconds (Sirota 3:30; Kwartin 3:28; Berkson 3:22). Sirota only uses four chords (i, iv, VI, V), their inversions, and

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127 For a detailed discussion of nusakh, see Slobin 2002 [1989]: 256-79.
the *misheberakh* cantorial mode in this time;\(^{128}\) Kwartin employs even fewer harmonies, relying mostly on i, with a single iv at around 1:56. Berkson, conversely, makes use of thirteen chords (in the original key, altered, and borrowed) and *misheberakh*: i, iv, III, VII, IV; iv/iv, IV/iv, V/v, i/v (borrowed); #VII, #IV, bIII (altered). The harmonic tempo of Berkson’s composition is considerably faster than that of the Sirota or Kwartin version.

Her use of harmony is considerably more sophisticated than that of her exemplars; she frequently employs borrowed, and occasionally altered chords. In the second line of the text (Torah umitzvos…), for example, she alternates between the IV/iv and the iv of C minor (the original key). She moves from *misheberakh* to a#VII in the second to last line of the text (Ve’ahavascha al tasir…). In the last line of the text, she oscillates between the i/v and the V/v. Subsequently, the harmonic rhythm moves quickly from VII, to #IV, to bII. The #IV and bII imply a Db major tonality, or an altered plagal cadence, which is an improvised deviation from the score. She concludes with a half cadence (iv to V). She simultaneously preserves cantorial modes and established harmonic practices while infusing the composition with original modulations.

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\(^{128}\) While mode encompasses more than just a sequence of pitches (see Powers (1981); Avenary (2007); Powers et al. (2013)), *misheberakh* is loosely comprised of a minor tetrachord with a raised fourth, followed by a minor tetrachord.
Example 1. Excerpt from Judith Berkson’s score for “Ahavas Oylam.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Prayer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sirota</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Ahavat olam [Ahavat olam] heit Yisra’el amcha ahavta [ahavta],</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwartin</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berkson</td>
<td>0:19</td>
<td>Ahavat olam heit Yisra’el amcha ahavta [ahavta], Torah umitzvot chukim umishpatim otanu limad’ta.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sirota</td>
<td></td>
<td>i iv (2x) i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwartin</td>
<td></td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berkson</td>
<td></td>
<td>iv/iv i iv/iv iv I VII i V</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Al ken Adonai Eloheinu b’shochveinu u’v’kumeinu naa’ach b’chukecha,

Sirota   | 1:00 | iv                                               |
| Kwartin  | 0:56 | i                                               |
| Berkson  | 1:16 | i VII i IV i                                    |

veni'lish mach b’divrei torat'cha u'vemitzvotecha le'olam va'ed.

Sirota   |      | iv VI MB² i                                    |
| Kwartin  |      | i                                               |
| Berkson  |      | IV/iv IV/iv IV/iv IV/iv V iv V                 |


Sirota   | 2:05 | i iv i                                        |
| Kwartin  | 1:56 | i                                               |
| Berkson  | 2:12 | i VII V iv V                                  |

Ve'ahavatcha al tasir mimenu le'olamim [olamim],

Sirota   |      | iv                                            |
| Kwartin  |      | i                                               |
| Berkson  |      | iv V MB #VII V/v V/v                          |

Ba ruch a ta Ado nai, ohev amo ohev a mo Yis ra el.

Sirota   |      | i iv⁵ V i                                     |
| Kwartin  |      | A³ i                                           |
| Berkson  |      | i/v V/v i/v V/v i/v V/v i/v i VII #IV#II IV V  |

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¹ Kwartin sings the subdominant, but the choir stays on i.
² MB stands for meholerah here.
³ Implied
⁴ Sirota goes to the iv, while the choir goes to V.

**Figure 14. Harmonic Comparison of “Ahavas Olam”**

“Inside Good Times” is striking for its great vocal leaps and pantonality, with moments of implied tonality (audio track 2). In m. 8, for example, she ascends a thirteenth from B♭₃ to G₅.
(0:18); in m. 9 she descends two octaves from G5 to G3 (0:20); in m. 12 she again leaps a thirteenth from A5 to C4 (0:32-0:33) (ex.2, marked in red). She uses pantonality throughout the composition, but without strict observance of twelve-note composition methods. In the first two measures she rapidly covers nine of the twelve semitones (with the exception of B♯, E♯, and G♯). Next, she reaches the B♯ on beat seven and G♯ on beat nine of m. 3. By the latter part of m. 3 she has covered eleven of the twelve semitones, with the exception of E♯. It is here that one technique emphasizes the other: she completes the twelve semitones for the first time by skipping from B♭3 to E5 in mm. 7 – 8 (0:17).

She occasionally implies moments of tonality: in mm. 10 and 11, for example, F6/3; m. 11 suggests either a sonority or an unstable chord; m. 11 could be considered a Bm/6, but its #1/3 (E♭) does not belong in the chord. She moves between a clear tonal center and pantonality in the song, e.g. in m. 14 she employs a minor pentatonic scale centered on A♭, but quickly returns to pantonal territory with the pitches F-F♯-E in m. 15.
Berkson’s compositions “Ahavas Oylam” and “Inside Good Times” give voice to a range of techniques, musical materials, styles, and contexts (Figure 15). Whereas “Ahavas Oylam” is largely tonal and sung in Hebrew, “Inside Good Times” is largely pantonal and sung in English. They differ in performance practice, too: Berkson performs with lots of vibrato and “ornamentation,” while she sings “Inside Good Times” without vibrato. “Ahavas Oylam” uses melisma and largely moves stepwise; “Inside Good Times” frequently employs great leaps in pitch. Her ability to perform technically-demanding and esoteric materials evinces her original approach,
as well as her competency. That she skillfully performs multiple styles alone serves as a form of individualism. Her rare combination of skills, affinities, and network involvement make her one-of-a-kind even within the vast expanse of NYC scenes and art worlds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>“Ahavas Oylam”</th>
<th>“Inside Good Times”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tonal</td>
<td>Fonal</td>
<td>Largely pantonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Hebrew Ashkenazic/Sephardic</td>
<td>English, onomatopoetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td>Lots of vibrato, slides, <em>Jakobin</em></td>
<td>No vibrato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Largely step-wise</td>
<td>Large vocal leaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumed setting</td>
<td>Synagogue/Sacred</td>
<td>Concert hall/Profane</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 15. Comparison of “Ahavas Oylam” and “Inside Good Times.”**

Finally, the two songs are influenced by different practices: the first by the sacred, the second by the profane. Their assumed settings are the synagogue versus the concert hall. Yet the contexts in which she has performed these materials, beyond the recording studio, also bespeak a sort of border-crossing endeavor.

Over the course of a decade working and performing in New York, however, shared sensibilities come in and out of focus in her work. While in years past she emphasized originality and difference, she now focuses on that which aesthetically pleases her:

[Having a musical voice in my work] used to be the most important [thing]—to have an identity, voice, something different than other people. But I find that less and less important...I feel I’d rather just be good...’what’s the best sound I can make, as opposed to, ‘I must sound different, or I must have my own thing.’ Or in composition, instead of trying to [think], ‘well, I want to do it this way and nobody’s going to do it this way,’ more like, ‘I want to create something cool that I like.’ (Berkson interview 7 November 2009)

Berkson expresses individualism of two types: the former is synonymous with one’s own sound, while the latter emphasizes an internal arbitration of taste. The first adheres to Lewis’s formulation of the Afrological (1996); the second aligns with Taylor’s (1992) authenticity, which is grounded in being true to the self and fulfilling an underlying moral imperative. The varied discourses surrounding individualism show how this value takes on multivalence even as espoused by a single
person. While improviser-composers share sensibilities, their articulations may change over time: the ideals that Berkson sought during her early years in NYC differ from those she now embraces.

Having examined Berkson’s individualism and multiplicity through “Ahavas Oylam” and “Inside Good Times,” I trace shared sensibilities in Lehman’s music.

**Listening to Steve Lehman**

Steve Lehman’s octet arrangement of the Wu Tang Clan member GZA’s "Living in the World Today" (from the album, *Liquid Swords*; Geffen Records, GEFD-24813) uniquely exemplifies improviser-composers’ shared sensibilities: he constructs a personal musical voice, relies on select musical collaborators, and engages musical multiplicity. Lehman applied for Chamber Music America’s New Jazz Works: Commissioning and Ensemble Development grant in 2007 to support his development of this material. The New Jazz Works grant requires applicants to propose a project for an existing ensemble; Lehman, thus, assessed his quintet’s material as the best representation of his work at the time and submitted a project that expanded it to an octet. In June of that year Chamber Music America awarded him a grant of approximately $13,000 for the reconfiguration and expansion of the quintet materials. It stipulated that he produce “a new work, the work’s world premiere, and one additional performance” and that the performances take place in “different venues in the United States or its territories” (“Grant Programs” n.d.).

Lehman invokes multiple resources in his arrangement and realization of “Living in the World Today.” He takes a 1990s hip hop selection and transforms it into a work for piano, bass,

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129 The NJW grant supports “the creation and performance of new chamber works by U.S. jazz ensembles; this program also funds activities that extend the life of the work and encourages the development of career-related business skills over a three-year period” (“Jazz Grants” n.d. http://www.chamber-music.org/programs/jazz/grants accessed 27 August 2012).

130 The octet premiered the resulting work, *Travail, Transformation, and Flow (TTF)*, at the Jazz Gallery on 1 December 2008. Later that month they recorded the TTF compositions at Systems Two Studio (Brooklyn, NY). After much personal and critical anticipation, Pi Recordings released the album on 9 June 2009.
drums, vibraphone, alto and tenor saxophones, trombone, and tuba. Lehman employs collaborators who largely perform within creative, experimental, straight-ahead jazz, and new music networks in and beyond New York. In its newly arranged and improvisational format, live instantiations of this piece are transported to stages different from those on which GZA usually performs. In 2009 and 2010, the octet performed throughout the West Coast, at the Jazz Gallery and le Poisson Rouge in New York City, the Bimhuis in Amsterdam, the moers festival in Germany, the Vortex in London, and the CBSO Center in Birmingham. It is not only the sonic iterations, but also the varied performance contexts, networks, and art worlds that demonstrate how musical multiplicity unfolds in this example.

Lehman negotiates the selection of collaborators and the expression of individualism—factors central to the ways in which he positions himself and his work—in his octet compositions. For him, individualism and relationships in music are intimately linked and equally important to his ideals:

**Amanda Scherbenske:** How do you position yourself and [the music] you’re doing?

**Steve Lehman:** There’s a couple different ways: one thing is I feel like I learn a lot from what’s around me and the people around me, and particularly the people I look up to and when I really reflect on the music that’s been the most important to me up to this point, it seems to always be put forth by people who are really obsessed, preoccupied with articulating their own selves, and their own personalities through music and developing really personal, unique, original music voices. So I’ve tried to make that my priority as well in the hopes of putting forth music that’s hopefully going to be at a high level, and [as] meaningful as all their music has been for me. And the way that those people have done it is somehow to find a balance between being really, kind of having this obsession with individualism, but having it informed by a really profound study and understanding of their own musical predecessors and mentors...

Separate from that, the most important thing for me about my work as a musician and why I keep doing it is the social interaction. That’s really my favorite part, is working with people and the time I get to spend with my peers and sharing music with an audience or people that feel like they can relate to something that I’ve put forth...It makes me feel very close to people. And actually, the more I can kind of chip away and develop what really I feel is my music, and the more personal it becomes, the more meaningful the relationships are. Because I feel like
this music is really a representation of who I am, the more powerful it is to kind of share that with another musician, or a listener. It feels like they can really relate to something, which is, coming directly from my own experiences. So they kind of go together in a way. (interview 3 May 2010)

Lehman articulates three interconnected values. First and foremost he seeks to develop a “personal, unique, [and] original musical voice” (ibid.). Next, he stresses that it must be rooted in competency and profound study through a particular lineage. Finally, he believes that sociability and mutual rapport are inextricably linked to authentic music making, and claims that the “more personal” (ibid.) the music, the more authentic the collaboration.

Lehman even codifies the role of musical and friendship ties; he stresses that musical collaborations are of paramount importance:

For me, [selecting collaborators is] the most important step that I make as a performer and as a composer…Basically for me I’m looking for a lot of people that have a lot of overlap in their musical interests, to me. And that usually manifests itself in their playing style, as well; and those [shared] interests are usually [found in] people that are interested in cultivating a really personal kind of voice and language on their instrument. (ibid.)

He seeks collaborators who share his ideals and affinities. His desire to collaborate with particular musicians informed his choice of instrumentation for the octet:

The best thing seemed to try and do something different [with the quintet material] with a larger ensemble…so I added three people and thought it would be nice because I hadn’t worked with Mark Shim in awhile. I found a way for us to collaborate again. And so I just added three instruments and I thought that tenor sax, and tuba, and trombone would be good. I knew I wanted to work with those guys, so I applied for the grant specifically to work with an eight-piece group. (ibid.)

He employs long-time collaborators Chris Dingman, Jonathan Finlayson, Drew Gress, Mark Shim, and Tyshawn Sorey, and expands the line-up with Tim Albright and Jose Davila.
During the period in which he composed the octet materials he explored his individualism through “a personal understanding of rhythm [and] a unique sense of rhythm” (Lehman interview 3 April 2011). He credits McLean with motivating his investment in rhythm:

[McLean] was somebody who really privileged rhythm and a really grounded sense of pulse and inner pulse in his music; so that’s something that I’m really interested in and [have] spent a lot of time thinking about: how to develop a personal understanding of rhythm, a unique sense of rhythm, how to get control of the way that I and other people perceive time to create something that’s really meaningful and powerful as a musical experience. (ibid.)

He articulates his approach to rhythm in “Living in the World Today” by selecting drummer-composer Tyshawn Sorey as a collaborator, altering the GZA source material, and creating rhythmic modulations.

Lehman first worked with Sorey in 2003 after cold calling him for a gig, “I got his phone number from Mark Shim and just called him up on the phone and left a message for him...we had never met or anything” (interview 3 May 2010). They performed Lehman’s quintet materials at the now defunct Kavehaz in February of that year. Sorey sensed an immediate and mutual rapport, “we walked away from that gig like, ‘well we should definitely do this again at some point soon’” (interview 10 February 2013). They shared an affinity for complex rhythmic structures and harmonic vocabularies rooted in jazz and Western classical music. Their common fascination with Anthony Braxton’s work cemented their friendship:

Tyshawn Sorey: We’d go [to Steve’s apartment] and hang out...we would order Chinese food or something and we’d sit there and basically we’d listen to Braxton and I’d digitize stuff from his turntable...we’d spend at least four or five hours talking about Braxton and talking about like-minded people. We’d just sit and hang out and just basically talk shop about music and composition and that kind of thing.

Amand Scherbenske: Why Braxton?

TS: Because Braxton was a very important influence to him too, as he was to me at that time. Braxton was kind of the person who I really look up to. Especially back then, because that was around the time that I started developing some of my own music. It had a similarity to what Braxton’s music sort of implied in terms of its social context and the musical context, which called for a kind of musician that
knew how to read through-composed material and also had an ability to improvise over any given structure. And I think that’s what Steve’s music kind of proposed, too, in some ways. (ibid.)

By the time Lehman began the octet project, he and Sorey already had established musical and friendship ties. They have worked in multiple bands (Fieldwork, Steve Lehman Octet, and Steve Lehman Quintet) and recorded four albums (Demian as Posthuman, On Meaning, Door, and Travail, Transformation, and Flow) together. Lehman values Sorey’s fluidity and expertise:

By 2008, when I was working on all of the octet music, I think Tyshawn and I had done three albums together…Tyshawn knew my music (playing and composing) extremely well at that point, and had a track record of constantly transforming my music, and making it so much better and more meaningful than I could have ever imagined. I feel a very deep connection to so many different things about Tyshawn’s playing that it’s hard to narrow it down. But, suffice to say that Tyshawn has a sound on drums that is instantly recognizable and totally distinctive to me. In addition, he’s able to play *any* music at an incredibly high, world-class level, in my view. And that’s important to me, because my work as a composer/improviser spans a lot of different traditions of performance practice and orientation. Some of my music is through-notated, some of it is based purely on oral instructions, and some of it involves some hybrid of notated and improvised musical strategies. With Tyshawn, there is never a compositional or organizational premise that functions as a constraint on his creativity, or as an obstacle of any kind. Every time we work on my music together, Tyshawn seems to treat each composition, no matter how difficult, easy, dense, spare, long short, etc., as an opportunity to create something fresh and to create something personal. So, not only was Tyshawn the first drummer I thought of to work on the octet music, he was the only drummer. (Lehman email communication 1 February 2013)

Lehman asserts that a piece’s identity partially depends upon its particular combination of collaborators.

During an informal conversation about his octet tour of the West Coast (2010), Lehman expressed how Sorey’s unique percussive strategies are essential to the music’s identity. Because Sorey was unavailable for the tour dates, Lehman enlisted Cody Brown as a substitute. Lehman carefully selected a replacement for the tour:

It was great to have Cody on board, because he didn’t have a problem with me asking him to copy everything that Sorey played on the album as closely as he
could, as a more established drummer might” (Lehman personal communication 3 August 2010).

His statement intimates the politics of selecting a substitute for his octet. It was more socially acceptable for Lehman to ask a less experienced drummer to “copy” Sorey’s performance on the recording than it would have been to ask a more established drummer. This is partly because as improviser-composers (see Chapter 1) advance in their careers, they are expected to be committed to their original musical voice.

Sorey’s playing on the arrangement of “Living in the World Today” elucidates his interpretation of Lehman’s rhythmic concept. With the exception of an embellishment in the vibraphone, Lehman retains roughly the original melodic content at the piece’s outset. Rhythmically, however, he alters the hip hop source material positioned atop a steady 4/4 meter (audio track 2) to a compound 3/4 + 3/16 + 2/16. This material cycles four times, comprising the piece’s introduction (Example 3, audio track 3). Prior to recording the album in 2008, Lehman gave Sorey the bass part and a midi file of the score as a guide (Sorey personal communication 3 November 2011). Sorey’s rendition, then, is part improvisation, part interpretation. In the introduction he intervenes by interpreting the 3/16 + 2/16 (spelled in the bass and drum lines) as a single, 5/16 beat (played by the cross stick on the snare). Because of the drums’ influence on the overall sound of the ensemble, it suggests a 3/4 + 5/16 meter, instead of the printed 3/4 + 3/16 + 2/16 meter.

Sorey tinkered with the rhythmic feel because he felt confident about his understanding of Lehman’s intentions for the piece:

If another drummer were to look at it and if they had no idea about the kind of thing that Steve was going for then what would be assumed to happen would be the drummer would play three 3s and two 2s…but in this case I decided not to do that, but to lay out for much of [it]. (Sorey interview 10 February 2013)
The rhythmic crux of the piece is its change from 3/16 + 2/16 to 5/16, and vice versa; mixing the two together as 5/16; and finally, implying several tempi by diversely subdividing the beat. The skills required to realize these rhythms in the ways that Sorey does are not found in every player. Lehman is well aware of Sorey’s skill set in his selection of him as a collaborator, “he’s able to play *any* music at an incredibly high, world-class level, in my view” (Lehman email communication 1 February 2013).

Example 3. Introduction from Steve Lehman’s score for “Living in the World Today.”

Example 4. Excerpt from Steve Lehman’s score for “Living in the World Today.”
Motive for trumpet, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, and trombone.
In addition to his close collaboration with Sorey, Lehman demonstrates his personal sense of rhythm through a rhythmic modulation of a motive played by the horn section later in “Living in the World Today.” In its first appearance in the middle of the piece (1:21), the motive cycles every two measures. Its meter alternates between simple 4/4 and compound 3/4 + 5/16, as spelled in Example 4 (audio track 4). The second time the motive occurs it retains its melodic content, but falls within the compound meters 5/16 + 2/4 + 5/16 and 2/4 + 5/16 + 5/16. Cycling every two measures, it is spelled in Example 5 (audio track 5). Thus, the motive is elongated by one ♩ in the last 5/16 beat of the first measure, and by one ♩ in the first 5/16 beat of the second measure (at 2:25–26). The motive’s overall duration is augmented by two ♩s (audio track 5). This furthers Lehman’s initial alteration of GZA’s source material, that, while spelled as 3/4 + 3/16 + 2/16, may also be interpreted as 4/4 plus one ♩.
Conclusion

These examples show multiplicity at work in various ways. I would like to extend its conceptual reach to the personal, the social, and the political, by invoking Goffman’s concept of frame analysis (1974). Perspective and context shape multiplicity as an interpretive framework. Adjustments to the aperture of our analytical lens—even incremental—affect the sort of picture that emerges. If we analyze multiplicity vis-à-vis institutional structures, we yield different results than if we examine musical sounds. Unique impressions of multiplicity appear based on whether we assess it synchronically or diachronically.

As we move from frame to frame, snapshots of multiplicity are malleable according to time, space, and perspective. At Barbès, Berkson performed her aesthetic ideas through an eclectic show that culminated in her album Oylam. If we assess multiplicity based on the performance of eclectic styles, we facilely may say that she performs Jewish music, Western Classical music, and jazz. If, however, we resituate the discussion vis-à-vis her relationship to those styles, the conversation conjures personal and political implications. Berkson relayed to me that upon moving to New York she did not tell people that she performed Jewish music because she did not want to be relegated exclusively to it (Field notes 29 March 2009).

Music was a compulsory part of her formative years:

[Music] was just something that I did…there was no choice involved. There was no choice. I could never quit piano: that conversation would never exist. I couldn’t quit my family band: that doesn’t exist. I can’t not sing in the temple: that choice doesn’t exist. It was just something that we did. (Berkson interview 7 November 2009)

Berkson talks about music in general terms, but the reality of her experience was that she performed exclusively Jewish-identified or Western Classical music. Her studies at NEC marked
the first time in her life that she explored music on her own terms, which she did by valorizing cultural relativism. She continued to pursue these ideals in New York.

Her desire to be understood on her own terms and not be pigeonholed resembles the political ambitions of the AACM, M-Base, and Radical Jewish Culture. Improviser-composers are tied to African American musical traditions through musical and friendship links. They have studied and collaborated with Anthony Braxton, Amina Claudine Myers, George Lewis, Wadada Leo Smith, Muhal Richard Abrams, and Butch Morris, among others. Halvorson has toured regularly with Braxton’s ensembles. Sorey performs on occasion for AACM concerts in New York. In addition to their ties, many improviser-composers prioritize Afrological values. Elder generations have mentored these values to improviser-composers, e.g. Lee’s collaborations with Butch Morris; Halvorson’s studies with Anthony Braxton. Musicians strive not only to develop an original performative sound or voice, but also to produce a unique compositional output. Improviser-composers do not desultorily undertake musical pathways; rather, they proceed teleologically to realize an authenticity of self through music. Still, expressions of individualism are not unified; they are, rather, colored by history and personal narrative. New York’s scenes and art worlds, at times, reward individualism: with so many musicians vying for performance opportunities, the ability to stand out can give visibility to an artist.

Despite improviser-composers’ links to African American traditions and values, they forge unique relationships to these histories. The motivations espoused by African Americans of elder generations differ considerably from that of a white Jewish woman from Boston. On one hand, Berkson’s experience mirrors the AACM’s desire to, “move beyond ethnic particularism toward the recognition of a multicultural, multi-ethnic base, with a variety of perspectives, histories, traditions, and methods” (Lewis 2004:52). Her desire to eschew categorization as someone who does solely Jewish music parallels the culturally relativistic ideals that she pursued:
AS: What was it about working in that mode—where you’re putting a couple of different types of things together in the same setting—that you liked?
JB: …it reminded me of the continuity of being inspired by lots of different things. That you could—it’s all the same—not one is better than the other, not one is more valid. (Berkson interview 7 November 2009)

She integrates eclectic materials as filtered by a personal aesthetic to express her individualism through multiplicity in Oylam.

On the other hand, she seems equally motivated by her musical upbringing and leadership experience, than by greater social and political currents. She began to develop a solo show, in the first place, because she struggled to run her own band. Shortly after moving to NYC she formed an ensemble to perform her compositions. She retrospectively realized that her dissolution of the quartet occurred because, “I think I was trying to reconcile this idea of being a jazz musician, and wanting to be that, but really not being that” (Berkson interview 14 December 2012). While she had had training in jazz at NEC, she had more practice-based experience in Western classical and Jewish music. Her pursuit of Oylam, a solo project, was initially motivated by a sense of disbelonging among jazz communities.

While the individual histories I draw on here share ostensible Jewish lineages, heritage alone explains neither musical expression nor motivation. Instead, multiplicity evolves over a lifetime’s worth of experiences and aesthetics. Affinity groups (Slobin 1993:98), too, do not fully speak to multiplicity: among improviser-composers’ networks, genre is more significant for its residual presence within institutional structures than in ground-level music-making and creative exploration. Still, Slobin’s work provides a starting point for the sort of willed affiliations present among improviser-composers’ nexus of sensibilities. He maintains that “[a] choice to follow up an affinity leads to belonging” (1993:56), which, additionally, involves a “complex act” dependent upon one’s level of commitment to a particular expressive cultural affiliation. Multiplicity, then, is
expressed through diversity of musical materials, as well as undergirded by collective and individual histories, identities, and expressions of belonging.

Improviser-composers’ relationships to scenes and art worlds vary considerably. Their performance of multiplicity is ultimately shaped by their relationship and sense of connectedness to the music cultures and histories from which these varied resources stem. In “Living in the World Today” Lehman arranges a hip-hop selection for acoustic instruments played by a group of his close collaborators. He constructs the “sample” not through collage, but through an arrangement realized by improvisers in the course of performance. One could argue that this is just another instantiation of jazz. Jazz historically has taken popular musics of the day and transformed them through arrangement and extemporization. That the piece’s identity relies upon select collaborators is also not an unfamiliar jazz story (e.g. Ellington did not simply compose for alto saxophone, but for Johnny Hodges). Here, multiplicity comprises the employment of myriad traditions within a given performance, album, or genre.

Lehman’s compositional treatment of “Living in the World Today” aligns with the history of jazz, but therein lies the rub. The rhythmic concepts (i.e. “groove” sensibilities, odd time signatures) that he explores in it are at least partly inspired by the work of M-Base. Already in the mid 1980s M-Base distanced itself from the “putative jazz label” (Lewis 2004:67) by extending the projects of the AACM (Iyer 1996). Lehman’s extension of rhythmic concepts explored by M-Base, then, means that his music already has strayed far from jazz solid ground. Its musical lineage alone destabilizes its identity as jazz. The history that undergirds his music demands a rejection of essentialization.

This snapshot focuses on a discreet musical example. If, however, we consider “Living in the World Today” within the context of *Travail, Transformation, and Flow* (the album on which it appears), another horizon of multiplicity dawns. The overtones in “Echoes,” for example, are
informed and realized by Lehman’s assiduous study of spectral harmony. In 2012 he completed his
doctorate in composition from Columbia University, where he studied with Tristan Murail and
George Lewis. In his doctoral thesis, Lehman (2012) asserts that his music has largely been
influenced by Afrological values, as articulated by Lewis (1996), and spectral harmonies, as
practiced by Murail and Gérard Grisey. Here, expressions of multiplicity are disciplined by
institutional structures.

Lehman’s network ties fall primarily within two art worlds. He has cultivated many of his
new music ties through his associations with Columbia University. Within new music art worlds
the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), Jack Quartet, and Talea Ensemble have
performed Lehman’s chamber works. In such instances he usually is present at concerts not as an
improviser-composer, but as “the composer.” A Chamber Music America “New Jazz Works” grant
supported the *Travail, Transformation, and Flow* compositions, and he recently received the same
grant to write pieces for the same collaborators. The octet’s performance venues, too, are largely
comprised of nodes linked to jazz art worlds.

If we look to Lehman’s personal network, we see that his collaborators work across art
worlds and display competence in multiple idioms. This summer Sorey performs his compositions
*New York/Copenhagen* and *Acts II* with ICE for Lincoln Center’s Mostly Mozart Festival. Within jazz
art worlds Sorey’s work has been considered too experimental to be invited to any of Jazz at
Lincoln Center’s stages. Yet, through his associations with ICE as an ICElab “collaborator,” he steps
onto the stage of this midtown concert bastion. His musical worlds are even more diverse when
viewed diachronically. As a teenager he played organ jazz nearly every Tuesday at the Peppermint
Lounge near his hometown of Newark, NJ. In the past couple of years he has added klezmer to his
performance palette. He plays traditional klezmer drumming iterations he learned from canonical
recordings and study with Elaine Hoffman Watts, as much as he improvises extended percussive techniques with the klezmer bands Leviticus and Frank London’s Shekhinah Big Band.

For Sorey, an African American man, the “putative jazz label” lingers. From 2009-2011 he attended graduate school in composition at Wesleyan University. He subsequently applied to doctoral programs in composition at two top American universities. He was accepted to Columbia University where he matriculated; the other school rejected him. A tenured professor at the latter institution wrote in a personal email to Sorey that he had expected him to submit more “jazz” compositions, and that, had he done so he would have been a stronger candidate. The pieces that Sorey submitted, however, were ones he had written for the ensembles Fieldwork, Paradoxical Frog, Sorey-Neufeld-Morgan and ICE; all but ICE have had greater visibility within jazz art worlds than classical or new music ones. The works he selected all demonstrated his musical interests irrespective of scenes and art worlds: improvisation and concepts of time exploring rhythmic cognition, tuplets, layered cycles and rhythmic synchronicity (Sorey personal communication 23 September 2013).

Forty-eight years after the founding of the AACM Sorey faces similar obstacles. I am reminded here of Appadurai’s “certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture and politics” (1999:221). Although Sorey has crossed genres and traversed the new music and jazz art worlds, he has quite literally been rejected by one of America’s preeminent institutions of higher education for not meeting the essentialist expectations of a white man in an authority position. For Sorey, a discussion of boundary erosion and multiplicity is not about artistic and cultural flows: it is, rather, about artistic and cultural networks disjointed by personal prejudice at the micro level, and, disciplined by structures of inequality at the macro level.

Improviser-composers’ individual work across art worlds and performance of internal multiplicity, however, do not erase broader distinctions, upheld by America’s bifurcated and,
ultimately, racialized depiction of its musics and musicians. The Times continues to divide its Listings as “jazz” or “classical” (and for that matter the New Yorker does so too, as “Jazz and Standards,” and “Classical”). These categories could be read as simply an instantiation of Samson’s definition of genre in Oxford Music Online (“to make knowledge…manageable” (2010) and to inform understanding of a subject). For a general readership, they perhaps serve this function. America’s musical history, however, makes such a benign position untenable.

When I spoke informally about the Times’ categories with one of its music critics, the critic told me that he is more concerned with writing about the music, than with the categories of its Listings. In a public talk, this same critic stated that he tries not to learn too much about a musician’s personal background, but just to write about the music itself (Field notes 14 November 2012). This seems rather naïve for a representative of one of the most influential institutions for the reception of NYC-based improviser-composers, and arguably, for American musics. This journalist is—at least ostensibly—in a position to help dismantle the distinctions in American musics. The apparent aversion to “personal” politics, however, circumscribes a voice for change.

In this dissertation I have explored the concept of multiplicity through the lives and practices of NYC-based improviser-composers. No central locale of musical and social life presently exists in the City for improviser-composers. Rather, they perform and interact in many spaces: from curtained-off back rooms in bars, to DIY musician-run collectives, to renowned concert halls. They make spaces meaningful by performing belonging—musically and socially—within places that welcome them and their musics. New York City, with its numerous scenes, artists’ networks, and diverse musicians, requites multiplicity; multiplicity, in turn, functions as a way to distinguish oneself among the masses.

Improviser-composers ultimately challenge extant binaries and one-dimensional formulations of being through their regular traversal of scenes and art worlds and diversity of selves
and musical practices. They express and encounter multiplicity throughout the course of their lives in music through formal and informal learning, patterns of consumption, and musical practice. Ears and hands are infrequently limited to hearing, listening, or practicing a single type or style of music. Finally, multiplicity also embraces the variegated identities of improviser-composers, and, how these identities further distance improviser-composers from singular notions of being and belonging.

Multiplicity’s relevance for improviser-composers, however, may be neither understood nor appreciated without the consideration of its African American historical underpinnings. African American collectives and individuals brought musical multiplicity to the fore as part of their political aspirations: to be understood on their own terms and to break away from being essentialized. The generation of improviser-composers about whom I write assume a multiplicity that stands in the penumbra of these artists. Their espousal of the improviser-composer locution connects them to elder generations, while simultaneously distances them from single art worlds.

Musical multiplicity and collaborations, while having sonic and aesthetic dimensions, are developed, maintained, and transformed through social networks. Improviser-composers generally include and work with many when starting out in NYC. Some maintain collegiate or conservatory ties in their formative networks; others forge completely new collaborative relationships in the City. Their strategic ties, however, largely are based on shared aesthetics and personal bonds. These ties take time to cultivate, and they ultimately shape belonging.

Among improviser-composers, understanding belonging involves untangling the strands present in multiple art worlds, scenes, institutional affiliations, and collaborations. While their expressive cultural affiliations may be multiple when observed through the myriad networks of musicians and institutional structures, it is their commitment to individualism, collaboration, and multiplicity that transcends difference, and forms the basis of personal, yet ultimately shared
Belonging. Belonging may be understood through ties, particularly those that take on centrality. Collaborative ties have even replaced genre among improviser-composers’ self-descriptions. It is with the help of one’s collaborators, however, that the other values are realized.

Looking Forward

Improviser-composers’ musical processes have been, for a long time, at once local and global:

Living in New York, you’re always kind of interacting with a local community of musicians and also a global one at the same time, because people from all over the country, all over the world live here…for [either] a long time or…not. (Lehman interview 3 May 2010)

Lehman’s articulations strikingly mirror Appadurai’s (1999) and Guilbault’s ([1993] 2006) dismantling of binaries such as “global/local,” and “urban/rural.” While many NYC-based improviser-composers live “locally,” the settings in which they perform bespeak of the multi-sited nature of their practices.

Improviser-composers frequently move to New York because of the potential that its musical marketplace holds: local success may translate into access to “global” visibility and touring networks. Lee asserts New York’s centrality with respect to global ties of musical exchange by declaring that Boston, as compared to New York, is “closed off” (Lee interview 27 February 2010). Lehman maintains that success in New York may allow for international cultural and economic opportunities:

I still think that New York has a really powerful gravitational pull to it for musicians from all over the world and all over the country...maybe a big part is because it’s an international—it’s a global marketplace. So if you are successful in New York in terms of critical response [and] in terms of people being aware of your work, it’s not uncommon to have that translate to a scenario where you can perform all over the world, all over the globe. I mean it’s not like that happens to everybody, but you may have access to that. And that’s not true...anywhere else on the planet, for improvised music. (Lehman interview 3 May 2010)
In NYC art and culture have made up the “third largest employer within highly skilled occupations” (Currid 2007:10) since the 1940s and 1950s. Creative industries comprise nearly as many of its employment opportunities as finance and medicine. Elizabeth Currid suggests that New York’s:

[D]ense concentration [of artists], [make it] a global tastemaker that dictates the direction of fashion, art, music, and design across the world. So if a creative producer is successful in navigating the networks of New York’s cultural economy, she has, in the process, undoubtedly established herself with the rest of the world. (2007:8)

I qualify Currid’s contention: success in New York does not “undoubtedly” translate into “establishment…with[in] the rest of the world” (ibid.). An artist’s creative abilities and cultural capital alone do not guarantee economic capital and global employment opportunities. Rather, improviser-composers must finely balance creative performance with business savvy to ensure that local success converts into work with international festivals, touring circuits, record companies, and other global musicians.

The transition from local to global visibility is neither certain nor immediate. Improviser-composers first ground themselves among NYC’s scenes and art worlds through formative ties. Halvorson’s formative network, largely comprised of Wesleyan and New School ties, helped facilitate performance and social connections. Some improviser-composers fashion their strategic network upon moving to the City. Lee, for example, positioned herself at a club that harbored her aesthetic interests to develop and network with many seminal improvisers. She relied upon personal and musical connections and serendipity to connect to NYC scenes and art worlds, and eventually, to stages along transnational musical circuits. The musical collaborations and

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111 Currid largely interviewed musicians who were once part of subcultural movements that later garnered global visibility: Aesop Rock, Beans, Coleman, Ben Dietz, Robbie Guertin, Jerry Harrison, Quincy Jones, JS1, Richard Lloyd, Marshall Law, Kevin McHugh, Soheil Nassari, Lee Sargent, Larry Tee, Sam Wheeler, and The Executioners for her work.
connections improviser-composers form in NYC, frequently are exploited later on in the expansion of their personal network. This may be done to set up performance or teaching opportunities. Both during the process of and after establishing themselves in NYC, improviser-composers seek touring opportunities, ultimately hoping to perform their music widely and expand the audience for it. Collaborators, who are usually themselves improviser-composers, perform musical pieces, as well as support and inspire their colleagues.

The expert improviser-composers whom I have focused on here have all conferred positive reception from peers, journalists, and cultural arbiters. Their success in New York has served as a conduit to working the touring circuits largely in Europe, and to a lesser extent, North America, Africa, Asia, and Australia. Improviser-composers who develop an international reputation are frequently invited to teach at institutions in America and abroad. Halvorson, who tours and performs prolifically, has appeared at least 25 times in North America (outside of NYC), 57 in Europe, and once in Australia since August of 2010. Saudades, a music booking agency of “jazz and more since 1983” (Saudades Website. n.d.), has scheduled her European appearances since 2012. Sorey has taught at such North American and European institutions as Cité de la Musique (Paris), Hochschule für Musik Köln (Cologne), Conservatorium van Amsterdam, Birmingham Conservatory of Music, Berklee College of Music (Boston), The New School (New York), and School of Improvisational Music (Brooklyn). Lee has positioned herself as an itinerant, trans-European musician.

Jerome Harris’s (2003) groundbreaking research details jazz’s international presence in a global marketplace. Among improviser-composers’ networks, however, the idea of a “global” marketplace is really not all that accurate. In most cases the musical “flows” are transatlantic, and they are neither multidirectional nor egalitarian. Most often, American musicians perform throughout Europe; the reverse scenario does not commonly hold true. Although well established
among London’s free jazz and experimental music scenes, saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock initially struggled to get regular gigs and performance opportunities upon moving to New York in 2008. These simultaneously local and global processes are equally affected by the inequality of cultural flows.

As I move forward in my research on improviser-composers I plan to examine the inequality of “global” cultural “flows” by analyzing my collaborators’ European appearances and interviewing cultural arbiters. I wish to shed light on the following questions through this research: What do improviser-composers’ transnational ties tell us about the politics of (dis)belonging in a “global” marketplace? What do the non-multidirectionality of links tell us about music, race, and the transmission of cultural practices “globally”? Which “global” art worlds are traversable and by whom? How does this case study disrupt ideas about “global” art worlds?
Appendix A, List of Dissertation Interviews


Halvorson, Mary. 2010. Interview by author, 10 March. Digital audio recording. Telephone.


Appendix B, Improviser-Composer Networks

Figure 16. Judith Berkson, Formative Network.\textsuperscript{132}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{132} I employ multiple diagrams of the networks detailed here. The ties represent various musical and teaching-learning interactions. While many of the actors I detail maintain friendship and other personal ties with one another, in an effort to maintain legibility, these connections are largely dealt with textually.
\end{quote}
Figure 17. Judith Berkson, Strategic Network.
Figure 18. Jacob Garchik, Formative Network.
Figure 19. Jacob Garchik, Strategic Network.
Figure 20: Okkyung Lee, Strategic Network.
Figure 21. Mary Halvorson, Formative Network.
Figure 22. Mary Halvorson, Albums with Braxton.
Figure 23. Mary Halvorson, Albums with Braxton and Wesleyan Affiliations.
Figure 24. Mary Halvorson, Strategic Network.
Figure 25. Steve Lehman, Formative Network.
Figure 26. Steve Lehman, Recording Affiliations, 1999-2002.
Figure 27. Steve Lehman, Strategic Network.
Appendix C, Improviser-Composer Discographies
Alphabetical by Last Name

Judith Berkson Discography

Maneri, Joe, Jared Sims, Steve Fisk, J. C. Sanford, Noel Sherr, Allan Chase, and Seth Cluett. 1998. *Improvising Duets: The Art of Conversation*. Cassette. Participants: Joseph Maneri, reeds; Kate Vincent, vla; Judith Berkson, voc; Christopher DuBois, g; Jonathan Vincent, p; Michael Bullock, b. Recorded 11 March 1998, 5:00 p.m.


Coleman, Steve. 2004. *Lucidarium*. Amiens, France: Label Bleu (LBLC 6673). Compact disc. Participants: Steve Coleman, as; Ravi Coltrane, ts; Jonathan Finlayson, Ralph Alessi, tpt; Grégoire Maret, harmonica; Dana Leong, tb; Mat Maneri, vla; Craig Taborn, key; Anthony Tidd, b; Drew Gress, b; Dafnis Prieto, d; Ramón García Pérez, perc; Jen Shyu, Kyoko Kitamura, Judith Berksen, Theo Bleckmann, Kokayi, Lorin Benedict, voc; Yosvany Terry, shekere. Recorded May 27-30, 2003 at Systems Two, Brooklyn, N.Y.
Firebird Ensemble, et al. 2004. *The Boston Microtonal Society Presents the Firebird Ensemble. Compact disc.* Participants: Ezra Sims, comp; Christina Ascher, as; Christophe [sic] von Erflà, clo; Group Dance: Julia Werntz, comp; Alicia DiDonato, fl; Michelle Doyle, cl; Biliana Voutchkova, vln; Rafael Popper-Keizer, clo; Aaron Trant, perc; Two Electro-acoustic Songs (1993): Gerard Pape, comp; Judith Berkson, s; DiDonato, fl; Like a Sick Eagle: Charles Ives, comp; Jen Ashe, s; Tali Morgulis, p; Osanj Jzohlharw: Joseph Gabriel Maneri, Kate Vincent, vla; Xi: Karlheinz Stockhausen, comp; DiDonato, fl. Recorded 28 October 2004, 8:00 P.M.


Jacob Garchik Discography

Participants: Dick Lowenthal, dir.; Mike Dubaniewicz, sax; Dan Cords, sax; Todd Williams, sax; John Simon, sax; Ohad Talmor, sax; Ernie Hammes, tpt; Brian Pareschi, tpt; Russ Johnson, tpt; Irving Grossman tpt; Joachim Petzold, tbn; Matt Bilyk, tbn; Jacob Garchik, tbn; Tim Newman, tbn; Jim Hershman, d; Misha Piatigorsky, d; Florian Feuser, d; Jason Wildman, d.


Kohn, Amy. 2005. I’m in Crinoline Advance. New York: Amy Music (AM 2006). Compact disc. Participants: Amy Kohn, p, Rhodes acc, glockenspiel, voc; Nikki Scheller, harmony; Peter Hess, piccolo, flute, cl, b cl, as, ts; Bob Carlisle, french horn; Erik Jekabson, tpt; Tom Gavin, banjo, g; Jonathan Dinklage, vln, vla; Wolfram Koessel, c; Benjamin Rubin, b; Scott McLemore, d.

Slavic Soul Party. 2005. Bigger. Brooklyn, NY: Barbès Records (BR7184U). Compact disc. Participants: Jacob Garchik, tb, baritone; Curtis Hasselbring, tb; Peter Stan, acc; Ron Caswell, tba; Take Toriyama, d; Matt Moran, tapan, bubanj, darabouka; Ben holmes, tba, tpt; Shane Endsley, tba, tpt; Jonas Müller, cor; Oscar Noriega, cl, as; Chris Speed, cl; Brian Drye, tb, baritone. Recorded Jan. 4, 2005 at Brooklyn Recording by Andy Taub.
Participants: Marco Cappelli, g and Jim Pugliese, perc; Tilt Brass Band; Joseph Kubera, p; Anthony Coleman, p, elec-organ, khene, mbira; Jim Pugliese, perc; Doug Wieselman, E-flat cl, b-cl, eg. Recorded at Brooklyn Recording, Brooklyn, N.Y. and Systems Two, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Participants: Lee Konitz New Nonet. Lee Konitz, as; Ohad Talmor, ts, dir; Russ Johnson, tpt; Jacob Garchik, tb; Oscar Noriega or Denis Lee, b cl; Dimos Goudaroulis, clo; Ben Monder, g; Bob Bowen, b; Matt Wilson, d. Recorded live, Aug. 10-14, 2005, at the Jazz Standard, New York.

Compact disc. Participants: Billy Martin, perc, mbira, conductor; Black Elk Orchestra: Jennifer Choi, vln; Jill Jaffe, vla; Okkyung Lee, clo; Trevor Dunn, b; Helen Campo, fl; Alexandra Knoll, ob, English horn; Doug Wieselman, cl; Charlie Porter, tpt; Vincent Chancey, h; Jacob Garchik, tb. Whirligig Percists: David Butler, Greg Burrows, David Freeman, Jonathan Grusauskas, Julia Jarch, Mark Karwan, Brad Koegel, Jed Kosiner, Billy Martin, Andrew McAuley, Luke Schneider, Aaron Shragge. Sirius String Quartet: Jennifer Choi, Gregor Huebuer, vln; Ron Lawrence, vla; Dave Eggar, clo; Anthony Coleman, cond. Recorded by Katsuhiko Naito at Thalia Theater, Symphony Space, NYC on Mar. 2, 2006; Nik C. at Spin Studio; recorded by Billy Martin at home.

Participants: Yoon Sun Choi, voc; Jacob Garchik, tbn; Jacob Sacks, p; David Ambrosio, b; Dan Weiss, perc. Recorded live at the Greenwich House Music School on 14 December 2003.

Participants: Dan Weiss Trio. Dan Weiss, d, recitation, frame d; Jacob Sacks, p; Thomas Morgan, b; Jacob Garchik, Ben Gerstein, tbn (track 4). Recorded August 7, 2005.


Compact disc. Participants: In the 1st work: Doug Wieselman, cl; Marty Ehrlich, ts; Gareth Flowers, tpt; Christopher McIntyre, tb; Stephen Gosling, p; Jim Pugliese, Kevin Norton, perc; Cornelius Dufallo, vln; Dan Barrett, clo; Sean Conly, b; Anthony Coleman, cond. 2nd work: Joseph Kubera, p. 3rd work: Retake Iowa, comp; Ashley Paul, Chris Veilleux, ass; Dana Jessen, boon; Matt Plummer, tb; Christopher McDonald, p; Cory
Pesaturo, acc; Jameson Swanagon, elec- g; Ben Davis, b; Eli Keszler, d; Anthony Coleman, cond. In the 4th work: Doug Wieselman, b-cl; Joseph Kubera, p; Marco Cappelli, g, elec-g, mandolin; Dan Barrett, clo; Ken Filiano, b; Jim Pugliese, perc; Anthony Coleman, conductor. In the 5th work: Doug Wieselman, E-flat cl; Marty Ehrlich, Ned Rothenberg, cls, b-cls; Jacob Garchik, tb; Joseph Kubera, p; Anthony Coleman, elec- organ; Ted Reichman, acc; Jim Pugliese, perc. Recorded May 24-25, 2007, at the Academy of Arts and Letters, New York.


Slavic Soul Party. 2009. *Taketron*. Brooklyn, N.Y.: Barbès Records (BR0023). Compact disc. Participants: John Carlson, Ben Holmes, Shane Endsley, tpt, truba (Slavic wooden tpt); Roland Barber, Brian Drye, Jacob Garchik, Tim Vaughn, tb, tenor tuba; Peter Hess, Oscar Noriega, as, cl; Peter Stan, acc; Ron Caswell, tuba; Brook Martinez, Chris Stromquist, Take Toriyama, snare drum, perc; Matt Moran, b drum, bubanj. Recorded by Marc Urselli at East Side Sound.
Internet-only live album. Participants: all compositions by Jacob Garchik, copyright Hogoe Publishing (ASCAP); Jacob Garchik, tbn; Jacob Sacks, p; Dan Weiss, d. Recorded 10 April 2010 live at Ibeam, Brooklyn.


Hazmat Modine and Natalie Merchant. 2011. *Cicada*. Brooklyn, NY: Barbès Records (BR0031). Compact disc. Participants: Hazmat Modine, comp; Bill Barrett, voc, harmonica; Pete Smith, voc, g; Wade Schuman, voc, g, hand clapping; Steve Elson, cl, pic, sax; Pam Fleming, tpt; Joe Daley, t, sousaphone; Michael Gomez, balalaika, electric mandocello, guitar, shamisen; Richard Livingston Huntley, d, perc; with additional musicians. Recorded 2008-2011.


Mary Halvorson Discography

Yang, Justin. 2000. 21 Short Pieces. Middletown, CT: J. Yang (0025). Compact disc. Participants: Julie Strand, cl in A; Joshua Dankoff cls; Brent Wetters, MicaH Silver, Samuel Morrison, Brett Deschenes, tpts; Ryuko Mitzutani, koto; Daniela Gesundheit, voice, c; Charles Looker, Mary Halvorson, Thomas Crean, gs; Marguerite Wilson, Sarah-Jane Ripa, Emily Meyer, Eve Harrison, fls; Lily Sutton, vln; Christopher Dingman, vib, d; Philip Gentry, vla; Maximilian Krafft, Tyler Goodwin, R. Chris Dahlgren, Nat Baldwin, b; Michael Peluse, hn; Frances Jacobus-Parker, Matthew Bauder, Rees Archibald, as; Christopher Miller, Timothy Keiper, d.


Braxton, Anthony. 2005. Live at the Royal Festival Hall. London, England: Leo Records (LR 449). Compact disc. Participants: Anthony Braxton, reeds; Chris Dahlgren, b; Satoshi Takeishi, perc; Taylor Ho Bynum, tpt; Mary Halvorson, g.


MPTHREE. 2006. Sleep Cells. Wisconsin: Utech Records. Compact disc. Participants: Trevor Dunn, b; Mary Halvorson, elec-g; Mike Pride, d.


Taylor Ho Bynum, cor, bugle, trombone, b and piccolo tpt; Anthony Braxton, sss, soprano, alto, baritone, b and contrab, saxophone, elec. Recorded Aug. 28, 2007.

Braxton, Anthony. 2007. 12+1tet (Victoriaville 2007). Victoriaville, Québec: Les Disques Victo (CD 109). Compact disc. Participants: Anthony Braxton, Andrew Raffo Dewar, James Fei, saxophones, cls; Taylor Ho Bynum, brass; Mary Halvorson, elec-g; Steve Lehman, sax; Nicole Mitchell, fls, pic, voc; Jessica Pavone, vla, vln, elec-b; Reut Regev, brass, perc; Jay Rozen, tuba, euph; Sara Schoenbeck, boon, suona; Aaron Siegel, perc, vib; Carl Testa, b, elec-b, b-cl. Recorded May 20, 2007 at the 24th Festival International de Musique Actuelle de Victoriaville, Québec.

Bynum, Taylor Ho. 2007. The Middle Picture. New Haven, Conn.: Firehouse 12 Records (FH12-04-01-002). Compact disc. Participants: Taylor Ho Bynum, cor; Matt Bauder, tenor saxophone, cl, bcl; Mary Halvorson, elec-g; Evan O'Reilly, elec-g; Jessica Pavone, vla, electric b; Tomas Fujiwara, d. Recorded October 20, 2005 - December 6, 2006.


Musicworks 99. 2007. Toronto: Musicworks 99. Compact disc. Participants: Anthony Braxton, as, ss and sss, cl, E-flat contralto cl; Taylor Ho Bynum, cor, flgn, trombone, piccolo and b tpts, mutes, shell; Andrew Raffo Dewar, ss, sax, cl; James Fei, as and sss, b-cl; Mary Halvorson, elec-g; Steve Lehman, as and sss; Nicole Mitchell, fl, alto and b-fls, piccolo, voc; Jessica Pavone, vln, vla; Reut Regev, tb, flugelbone, mutes, cymbals; Jay Rozen, tba, euph, mutes, toys; Sara Schoenbeck, boon, suona; Aaron Siegel, perc, vib; Carl Testa, b, b-cl; Jean Martin, d, turntables; Justin Haynes, Bernard Falaise, gs; Christine Duncan, voc; Alexander Ziborov, Nicolás Guevara, Alejandro Ruiz, Juan Fernando Montoya, Pilar Pérez, perc; Andrés Gómez Bravo, conductor. Recorded 2002-2007.


Cady, Jason. 2008. Post-Madonna Prima Donna. Brooklyn, NY: Peacock Recordings. Compact disc. Participants: Jason Cady and the Artificials. Deanna Neil, S; Sarah-Jane Ripa, fl; Mary Halvorson, g; Jessica Pavone, b g, vln, vla; Jason Cady, synth, d, perc, g; Amy Cinini, vla; Clay Holley, turntables; Leah Paul, Sandflower Dyson, Yassira Diggs, chorus of "The Artificials;" Erin Flannery, S; Emily Manzo, p; Aaron Siegel, vib. Recorded at Soul Fire in Brooklyn, New York.

Good for Cows. 2008. Calling All Portraits. Germany: Skycap Records (cap 049). Compact disc. Participants: Jessica Pavone, vla, voc; Mary Halvorson, g; Devin Hoff, b; Ches Smith, d.


Ches Smith & These Arches. 2010. *Finally Out Of My Hands*. Brooklyn, NY: Skirl Records (SKIRL 014). Compact disc. Participants: Tony Malaby, ts; Mary Halvorson, g; Andrea Parkins, acc; Ches Smith, d.


Laubrock, Ingrid. 2010. *Anti-House*. Zürich, Switzerland: Intakt Records (CD173). Compact disc. Participants: John Herbert, b; Kris Davis, p; Mary Halvorson, g; Tom Rainey, d.

MAP. 2010. *Fever Dream*. Taiga Records (TAIGA 9). Long play. Participants: Tatsuya Nakatani, d; Mary Halvorson, g; Reuben Radding, b.


Welch, Matthew. 2010. *Blarvuster*. New York: Tzadik (TZ 8077). Compact disc. Participants: Matthew Welch, bagpipes, ss, voc; Leah Paul, picc, fl, afl; Karen Waltuch, vla; Mary Halvorson, elec-g; Ian Riggs, bg; Tim Dahl, bg; Ches Smith, perc; Emily Manzo, p; Matthew Hough, elec-g; Ian Riggs, bg; Mike Pride, d, vib.


Weasel Walter. 2011. *Ominous Telepathic Mayhem*. New York: UgEXPLODE (ug51). Compact disc. Participants: Weasel Walter, d; in duets with Peter Evans, tpt; Mary Halvorson, g; Darius Jones, as; Alex Ward, g, cl. Recorded 2008-2011.


Pavone, Jessica. 2012. *Hope Dawson is Missing*. New York: Tzadik (TZ 7727). *Compact disc*. Participants: Pala Garcia, vln; Erin Wight, vla; John Popham, clo; Andrew Roitstein, b; Mary Halvorson, g; Tomas Fujiwara, d; Emily Manzo, voc. Recorded Jan. 20 and 22, 2012 in West Orange, N.J.


Walter, Weasel, Mary Halvorson, and Peter Evans. 2012. *Mechanical Malfunction*. Norwalk, Conn.: Thirsty Ear (THI 57204). *Compact disc*. Participants: Weasel Walter, d; Mary Halvorson, g; Peter Evans, tpt.
Okkyung Lee Discography

Sullivan, Katy, Evan Price, Barry Marshall, Paul Marienthal, Phil Swanson, Tim Jackson, and Dave Doms. 1997. Like a Child. Brookline, Mass.: Checker Records. Compact disc. Participants: Katy Sullivan, g, key, and voc; Evan Price, vl, acoustic & electric mdln, saw, and pw; Barry Marshall, g and perc; Paul Marienthal, fl; Phil Swanson, tb; Tim Jackson, d; Dave Doms, b; Matt Beane, g; Owen Beane, d; Joe Matino, lap steel and Hawaiian sl-g; Frank Wilkins, p; Cecily and Olivia Beane, voc on "Mango"; Okkyung Lee, clo; Audrey Markowitz, ob; Terry Myers, bsn; Mark Phaneuf, sax. Recorded and mixed at Waltz Audio, Massachusetts College of Communication, Kissy Pig, & Prophet Sound.


Netsky, Hankus, et al. 2000. Musical Boston in the 1990s: New England Conservatory Spring Festival: March 8, 2000, 4:00 P.M. Hearing Beyond. Compact disc. Improvisations 1-4: The Joe Maneri Trio; I'm Going to Take Off My Shoes: Chava Alberstein, comp; Netsky, arr. (NEC Jewish Music Ensemble); Then There was the Crescent: Okkyung Lee, clo, comp; James Falzone, cl; Eric Platz, d; Zack Wallace, b; Kin ari/Korean folk song: Okkyung Lee, clo; Sueung-Hee Han, voc; Preciosa: Rafael Hernandez, comp; Brenda Hopkins Miranda, p; Lonely raccoon: Ilona Tipp comp, voc; Goodmorning heartache: Irene Higinbothan, comp; Ran Blake, p; Journey for Ness: Vanessa Morris, comp; James Merenda, as; Andrew Stern, g; I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say: Horatius Bonar, text; Vanessa Morris, voc; Scott Sandvik, g.

New England Conservatory Little Big Band, and J. C. Sanford. 2000. NEC Jazz Little Big Band: April 11, 2000 at 8:00 p.m. Compact disc. Coexistence, Trudi Strebi; Vicious (Red) Cycle, Okkyung Lee – Improvisation; Just because, Ayn Inserto; Olinad, Gabe Gloege; Straight, No Chaser, Thelonious Monk comp; Javier Arau, arr; Eyes: Ives, comp; J.C. Sanford; Dark Codes: David Schumacher – Improvsation; Ran kan kan, Tito Puente.

**Compact disc.** Participants: Tom Abbs, comp, b, tuba; Brian Settles, sax, fl; Okkyung Lee, clo; Chad Taylor, d, vib. Recorded at The Spirit Room, Rossie, N.Y., Apr. 21-22, 2003.


Mesinai, Raz. 2004. *Cyborg Acoustics.* New York: Tzadik (TZ 8003). Compact disc. Participants: Mark Feldman, Ralph Farris, vln; Eyvind Kang, vla; Okkyung Lee, clo (1st, 3rd works); Mark Dresser, b; Tim Barnes, d, perc; Raz Mesinai, sampler, objects, perc; John Zorn, as; Shelley Hirsch, processed voc. Recorded at Hit Factory Mastering, NYC.


Stone, Irving. 2004. *Irving Stone Memorial Concert.* Key series. New York: Tzadik (TZ 7611-2). Compact disc. Participants: Stephanie Stone, p; Tim Berne, as; Sylvie Courvoisier, p; Tom Rainey, d; Mark Feldman, vln; Herb Robertson, tpt, voc; Andy Laster, Steve Swell, as; Joey Baron, d; John Zorn, as; Ikue Mori, laptop elec; Erik Friedlander, clo; Charles Gayle, ts; Satoko Fuji, p; David Sewelsen, bar; Kenny Wollesen, d; Karen Borca, bsn; Roy Campbell, tpt; Oscar Noriega, as; Trevor Dunn, b; Robert Dick, fl; Shelley Hirsch, voc; David Weinstein, key; Ellery Eskelin, ts; Marc Ribot, g; Annie Gosfeld, p; Roger Kleier, g; Greg Cohen, b; Ear: Mephista; Okkyung Lee, clo; William Parker and the Little Huey Big Band; Roy Campbell, tpt; Louis Belogenis, Tony Malaby, ts; Yuko Fujiyama, p; Lesli Dalaba, tpt; Wayne Horvitz, key; Chris Speed, ts.

Bynum, Taylor Ho. 2005. *Other Stories: Three Suites.* Avon, Conn.: 482 Music (482-1041). Compact disc. All compositions by Taylor Ho Bynum. Participants: Taylor Ho Bynum, cor; SpiderMonkey Strings: Jason Kao Hwang, Jean Cook, vln; Jessica Pavone, vln, vla; Stephanie Griffin, vla; Tomas Ulrich, Okkyung Lee, clo; Pete Fitzpatrick, g; Joseph Daley, tuba; Luther Gray, d; Jay Hoggard, vib. Recorded Feb. 13 and 20, 2005 at John's Place and the Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture, Brooklyn (works 1-2); Apr. 6, 2003, at John's Place (3rd work).


Martin, Billy, and Anthony Coleman. 2006. Starlings. New York: Tzadik (TZ 8025). Compact disc. Participants: Black Elk Orchestra: Jennifer Choi, vln; Jill Jaffe, vla; Okkyung Lee, clo; Trevor Dunn, b; Helen Campo, fls; Alexandra Knoll, ob, enhn; Doug Wieselman, cls; Charlie Porter, tpt; Vincent Chancey, hn; Jacob Garchik, tb (1st-5th, 8th-10th). The 1st-6th and 8th-11th works recorded by Katsuhiko Naito at Thalia Theater, Symphony Space, NYC on Mar. 2, 2006.

Burnt Sugar. 2007. Chopped and Screwed, v. 2. New York: Burnt Sugar The Arkestra Chamber. Compact disc. Participants: Lewis Barnes; Greg Tate's Garage Band; Micah Gaugh, Myles Reilly; Matana Roberts; Shariff Simmons, Frank Lowe, Lewis Barnes; Poem by Asha Bandele; Nikiki Nicks); Petre Radu Scafaru, Okkyung Lee; Lewis Barnes, Bruce Mack; Burnt Sugar & Butch Morris.


Wadada Leo Smith's Organic: Wadada Leo Smith, tpt; Michael Gregory, Brandon Ross and Lamar Smith, Nels Cline, el-g; Okkyung Lee, clo; Skuli Sverrisson, el-b; John Lindberg, b; Pheeroan AkLaff, d. Disc one recorded live at Vision XIII, June 13, 2008, New York City; disc two recorded live at Firehouse 12, April 17, 2009, New Haven, CT.

Zorn, John, Laurie Anderson, Jennifer Choi, Okkyung Zee, Carol Emanuel, Sylvie Courvoisier, Shayna Dunkelman, and Ikue Mori. 2009. Femina. New York: Tzadik (TZ 7377). Compact disc. Participants: Laurie Anderson, opening narration; Jennifer Choi, vln; Okkyung Lee, clo; Carol Emanuel, hp; Sylvie Courvoisier, p; Shayna Dunkelman, perc; Ikue Mori, elec.


Lee, Okkyung. 2011. Noisy Love Songs (for George Dyer). New York: Tzadik (TZ 7724). Compact disc. Participants: Cornelius Dufallo, vln; Christopher Tordini, b; Satoshi Takeishi, perc, elec; Peter Evans, tpt; Craig Taborn; p.


Steve Lehman Discography


The Kevin Norton Quintet. 2001. *Change Dance (troubled energy)*. New York: Barking Hoop Recordings (BKH-005). Compact disc. Participants: Kevin Norton, d, glockenspiel, perc; Mark Dresser, b; Dave Ballou, tpt, cor; Steve Lehman, as and sss; Rachel Telesmanick, as and bs. Recorded at Tedesco Studios, June 8, 2001.


Participants: Steve Lehman, as; Mark Dresser, b; Pheeroan akLaff, d. Recorded in Coimbra, May 7, 2003.


Afro-Punk Mix. 2006. Compact disc. Participants: Gnarls Barkley; Tamar-Kali; K’naan; The Eternals; Dr. Madd Vibe; Steve Lehman; The Spontanes; Bad Brains.

Musicworks 99. 2007. Toronto: Musicworks. Compact disc. Participants: 1st-6th works: Paul Dutton, voc; 7th work: Anthony Braxton, as, ss and sss, clarinet, E-flat contralto clarinet; Taylor Ho Bynum, cor, flugelhorn, trumpbone, piccolo and b tpts, mutes, shell; Andrew Raffo Dewar, ss, and C-melody sax, cl; James Fei, as and ss, b-cl; Mary Halvorson, elec-g; Steve Lehman, as and sss; Nicole Mitchell, fl, a-fl and b-fl, piccolo, voc; Jessica Pavone, vln, vla; Reut Regev, tbn, flugelbone, mutes, cymbals; Jay Rozen, tuba, euphonium, mutes, toys; Sara Schoenbeck, boop, suona; Aaron Siegel, perc, vib; Carl Testa, b, b-cl; 8th work: Jean Martin, d, turntables; Justin Haynes, Bernard Falaise, gs; Christine Duncan, voc; 9th work: Alexander Ziborov, Nicolás Guevara, Alejandro Ruiz, Juan Fernando Montoya, Pilar Pérez, perc; Andrés Gómez Bravo, cond. Recorded 2002-2007.


Anthony Braxton 12(+1)tet. 2007. *Victoriaville 2007*. Victoriaville, Québec: Les Disques Victo (VICTO CD 109). Compact disc. Participants: Anthony Braxton, Andrew Raffo Dewar, James Fei, sax, cl; Taylor Ho Bynum, brass; Mary Halvorson, e-g; Steve Lehman, saxs; Nicole Mitchell, fls, picc, voc; Jessica Pavone, vla, vln, elec-b; Reut
Regev, brass, perc; Jay Rozen, tuba, euphonium; Sara Schoenbeck, boon, suona; Aaron Siegel, perc, vib; Carl Testa, b, elec-b, b-cl. Recorded May 20, 2007 at the 24th Festival International de Musique Actuelle de Victoriaville, Québec.


**Steve Lehman Octet. 2009. Travail, Transformation, and Flow. New York: Pi Recordings (Pi 30). Compact disc.** Participants: Steve Lehman, as; Mark Shim, ts; Jonathan Finlayson, tpt; Tim Albright, tbn; Chris Dingman, vib; Jose Davila, tuba; Drew Gress, b; Tyshawn Sorey, d. Recorded Dec. 22, 2008 at Systems Two Studio, Brooklyn, N.Y.

**Duel Identity, Steve Lehman, and Rudresh Mahanthappa. 2010. Duel Identity. Lisbon, Portugal: Clean Feed (CF172). Compact disc.** Participants: Rudresh Mahanthappa, as; Steve Lehman, as; Liberty Ellman, g; Matt Brewer, b; Damion Reid, d. Recorded Dec. 22, 2008 at Systems Two Studio, Brooklyn, N.Y.

**Eskisse. 2010. MCK Projeckt. Compact disc.** Participants: Maciek Lasserre, ss, comp; Olivier Sens, elec; Chander Sardjoe, d; Ablaye M'Baye, voc; Dabrians, voc; Steve Lehman, as.

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Taborn, Craig, Mat Maneri, Aaron Stewart, and Dave King. 2004. *Junk Magic*. Norwalk, Conn.: Thirsty Ear (THI 57144.2).