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## Introduction

Experimental music and sound practices continue to encompass as many methodologies as there are practitioners. For us to honestly engage with sound, we each find ourselves needing to invent our own language; our own approach. This music necessitates an individualized approach to sound; we each must find our own truths in order to adequately consider our language and we must each consider our own language to find our truths. But none of us exist in a vacuum. We are perpetually privileged with being under and within the influence of a number of other artists with specific, particular and universal concerns. With this volume, however limited, there is the potential to begin to weave a web of these connected and particular methodologies—to see how we might begin to bridge our ideas and the ideas of others and to begin to understand those things that might be universal among our shared notions.

As there are limited opportunities for audiences to consider these methods beyond the sounding bodies of the works and the reflections on how these things are made, I find the work of writing about this music both necessary and perplexing. As these artists write about their works and personal philosophies, the writings become something different altogether from the sounding works. When we write about music, it speaks about something almost entirely separate from the performances that we create. Our experience of sound is an abstract thing that exists in a particular time and space, but our reading about the process of sound production, creation, conception and performance is maybe more concrete. Where do these two experiences meet? Or do they at all? Certainly this is not a new idea at all, but now especially as I am collecting the works to this second volume of 'Standing Waves', I find myself trying to reconcile the philosophical considerations of this work in regard to the abstract soundings of the work.

The writings in this book offer thoughtful considerations of the philosophical concerns that each artist wrestles with. And according to my personal experience with the work of each of these artists, their writings so closely reflect not only the impression I get about each of their work, but also give a clear sense about how they consider their practice. Not only is each perspective unique, but each illuminates a different approach to experiencing, creating and listening to experimental music.

Standing Waves is a platform for artists, specifically experimental musicians and composers, to elucidate their work through presentation, lecture and writing. The contributors of this volume all presented their work, in some form, as part of the 'Standing Waves' concert series in 2017. This book now compiles writings from each artist as an opportunity for them to further offer entry points into their thought processes and concepts of their work.

Morgan Evans-Weiler—2018





# J.P.A. FALZONE

February 19th, 2017

7 PM

School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA

J. P. A. Falzone is a composer and musician whose work is influenced by the conceptual turn taken in systems music. In 2014, he founded The Providence Research Ensemble and is also a member of Ordinary Affects, a Boston based new music collective. His work has also been performed by the S. E. M. Ensemble, the Ostravská Banda, and the Ostrava New Orchestra. This past Fall, Falzone began his graduate studies in music composition at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut.

## The Autonomy of Music as Regulative Idea

The composition of music may be said to be motivated by two sets of concerns: those of sound and those of system.

Cage once asked Feldman, "Do you prefer the composition, or do you like hearing the music?"<sup>1</sup> To a certain extent, this question gets to the heart of the distinction and, what is more, poses it as a disjunction. In the end, of course, the two are inseparable; the music and its mode of emplotment cannot be said to exist the one without the other. The compositional framework and the sound which it engenders are not unlike the two purely theoretical sides of a Möbius strip. In this line of thinking, the compositional question has the property, in the mathematical sense, of being unorientable.

Despite however keenly either of these two areas of concern may be felt for by the composer, as well as by the listener, would not the highest ideal be to find them both equally focused in correspondence, that is to say, the sonic result of a piece the natural corollary to its formal considerations? Even the most free, spontaneous musical utterance is an invocation of some system or another, whether as a simple demarcation of time or a given tuning system. At the same time, even the most thoroughgoing, rigorously formal compositions involve some decision or set of decisions that can ultimately only be described as artistic license, falling outside the formal framework. Taste is, of course, the final arbiter, yet there is no accounting for it.

Music has always been the working out of an implied structure inherent in the material of sound itself. The Pythagoreans worked out intervallic relationships with the monochord, yet it was two thousand years later that the concept of the harmonic series was discovered as being audibly present in the sound-complex

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<sup>1</sup> Cage, John and Morton Feldman. (1967). In *Conversation: Radio Happenings*. No. 4 (16 January 1967). New York: WBAI, ~17:15.

as overtones. Harmony thus, in its most natural or rudimentary form, could be argued as having an empirical basis in the harmonic series itself.

In assessing the effectiveness of a musical structure or system, one finds recourse to what a hard-boiled musical analyst might describe as "the dirty but exciting world of real-life music."<sup>2</sup> It is to pose the question, "Is it a bucket if it is empty?" In the ontological framework of music, one would have to admit, "No." In day-to-day experience, an empty bucket, that is, a bucket not performing its function qua bucket, is nevertheless still a bucket. However, were I to show you the schematic framework of a sonata and say, "Behold – music," you would perhaps do well to disagree.

A discussion of form and content takes a markedly different shape in the context of music when seen in contrast to other artistic practices. This is by virtue of the nature of music as the ultimate abstract art. Abstraction is a component to any art form, but nowhere is it more so the stuff of what an art form is than in music. This is less so when one considers music with text, or music as part of theater or dance, etc. One can attend a performance of an opera and say, "It's about the content of its plot-narrative," however, this is not a description of the music.

The notion of purely-abstract music, or "absolute music," is a problematic concept. Its origins lie in nineteenth century German Romanticism, a notable figure among that milieu being Johann Gottfried von Herder. Presaging Schopenhauer, Herder held music as the highest form of artistic expression precisely because of its inherent abstraction, which he directly equates to its spiritual dimension. This followed in contrast to Kant's Critique of Judgment<sup>3</sup>, which held instrumental music in low regard. For Kant,

2 Dunsby, Jonathan. (1994). "Criteria of Correctness in Music Theory and Analysis," Theory, Analysis and Meaning in Music. A. Pople, ed. Cambridge University Press, p. 79.

3 It is worth noting that Herder was a student of Kant's while attending the University of Königsberg. During his time there, Herder also studied under Johann Georg Hamann, perhaps the leading intellectual forebear of the Sturm und Drang movement.

instrumental music is at best pleasing but ultimately of little to no aesthetic value since it fails to obtain to conceptual thought and thus neither engage moral purpose.

This argument is essentially echoed/recasted by Hegel, who characterizes music as being born out of the “unhappy consciousness” – “consciousness, divided in itself.”<sup>4</sup> Correspondingly, in the evolution of Spirit, the condition of thought in the state of unhappy consciousness is essentially musical, that is, effectively pre-conceptual. Hegel’s aesthetics is concerned primarily with content, over and above formal considerations, and it is clear that music poses a particular problem in this regard. If music is to retain the capacity for representation, that is, a mimetic dimension, and a great number of theorists in the early modern era insisted that it did, it can only be said to do so in a diminished capacity when compared to visual depiction or verbal recount, etc. The content of music, outside of its purely formal, material, analyzable elements, is inherently ambiguous.

The term “absolute music” does not appear until the middle nineteenth century. While “the Absolute was a key concept for the early Romantics”<sup>5</sup> and for German Idealism generally, it is erroneous to claim, as Roger Scruton does, that the term originates in this earlier generation.<sup>6</sup> Absolute Musik was coined by Richard Wagner in a program note for a performance he conducted of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony in Dresden, 1846. Wagner, with his aim of uniting music and drama in the Gesamtkunstwerk, holds a disparaging view of musical autonomy. Wagner finds the notion “inhuman precisely because it is unsatisfying, because it is necessarily infinite in expression.”<sup>7</sup>

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4 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. (1807). §207, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. (1977). Arnold V. Miller, trans. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 126.

5 Pederson (2009). “Defining the Term ‘Absolute Music’ Historically,” *Music & Letters*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (May). Oxford University Press, p. 250.

6 Scruton, Roger. (2001). “Absolute Music.” *Grove Music Online*.

7 Uhlig, Theodor. (1851). “Richard Wagner’s Schriften über Kunst. III,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 34. As cited in Pederson (2009), p. 245.

For Wagner, Beethoven's Ninth not only tests the limits of symphonic form but also of pure music itself. Where the sterile, formal infinitude of instrumental music fails, the Word(s) must intervene. Whether Beethoven would have described his project this way is a wholly other subject of conjecture.

The writing of Eduard Hanslick represents a polemical antidote to Wagner. Hanslick championed a formal absolute music, and his legacy was continued by Carl Dahlhaus, who in turn shaped the aesthetic parameters of historical musicology as well as of the European New Music trends following upon Schoenberg. Before the ascendancy of Hanslick's critical conception, however, it is worth noting that it was the infinite nature of music in its autonomy that compelled it is an ideal. The infinite is essentially a poetic formulation of the ambiguous. It was this quality of the infinite that Wagner found so abhorrent. E. T. A. Hoffman gives something of a proto-definition of absolute music:

When we speak of music as an independent art should we not always restrict our meaning to instrumental music, which, scorning every aid, every admixture of another art . . . gives pure expression to music's specific nature, recognizable in this form alone? It is the most romantic of all the arts – one might almost say, the only genuinely romantic one – for its sole subject is the Infinite.<sup>8</sup>

This infinite or ambiguous quality is at the heart of music—all the more so when one considers it in its autonomous sense. Music is inherently ambiguous, and absolute music is ambiguous absolutely. The extent to which a piece of music can elicit a response at all in the listening subject, at a level that is pre-conceptual, i. e., as affect, is the extent to which it succeeds—is effective. The na-

<sup>8</sup> Hoffman, E. T. A. (1813). "Beethoven's Instrumentalmusik." Strunk, trans. As cited in Goehr, Lydia. (1992). *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 148.

ture of that response will inevitably vary from one individual to another. When the musical/sonic content is accompanied by some other component—gesture, text, conventional harmonic idiom, even—we are less free to appreciate it in its radical openness – in its infinite ambiguity. One may say along Wagnerian lines that through the incorporation of text, music gains something which it could not otherwise obtain. At the same time, however, something is lost—an inherent quality of music qua music. Correspondingly, the radical freedom of its openness to interpretation is denied. The listener/audience is that much more being told what and how to feel. It is precisely the capacity for achieving multiple, equally valid responses, which is best guaranteed by music operating autonomously.

Semir Zeki, a neuroesthetician, is a pioneer in the neurobiology of ambiguous states. His paper, "Neurology of Ambiguity,"

gives us some insights into how activity at different stations of the brain can result in a micro-consciousness for an attribute, and also tells us something about interactions between different cerebral areas that result in several potential micro-conscious correlates, though only one predominates at any given time. . . [T]he study of ambiguity also gives us insights into the neurological machinery that artists have tapped to create the ambiguity that is commonly a hallmark of great works of art.<sup>9</sup>

Zeki makes a critical reversal in the thinking of ambiguity: a "neurobiologically based definition of ambiguity is the opposite of the dictionary definition; it is not uncertainty, but certainty—the certainty of many, equally plausible interpretations, each one of which is sovereign when it occupies the conscious stage."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Zeki, Semir. (2004). "The Neurology of Ambiguity," *Consciousness and Cognition*. 13, p. 173.

<sup>10</sup> Zeki, Semir. (1999). *Inner Vision: An Exploration of Art and the Brain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. As cited in Zeki (2004), p. 175.

In this way, however, the notion of music delivering a direct line of communicative expression cannot be maintained. The situation is that described by Wittgenstein through the thought experiment of *The Beetle in a Box*.<sup>11</sup> Each one of us knows he or she experiences some feeling and accepts it as plausible that the Other experiences some feeling or other as well. Exactly what the Other feels, we can never know for certain. Accordingly, the notion of artistic expression must be approached with the utmost humility.

It is not enough to say that a notion of autonomous music is synonymous with instrumental music. Roger Scruton is not unfair in arguing that it is more facile to give a negative rather than a positive definition of the absolute in music. "The best way to speak of a thing that claims to be 'absolute' is to say what it is not."<sup>12</sup> It is not word-setting; it is not *Programm-Musik*; it is not tone-poetry; etc. This might seem to suggest the notion of autonomous music is open to accusations of conceptual paucity. On the contrary, it may be wagered that not only is a positive definition of music in its autonomy possible, but that in so defining it, the understanding of music generally, in a universalistic sense even, is more fully enriched, as is that of the listening experience. In this way, music need not be merely held as something to be enjoyed or simply analogized to some other function—"music is a language," music in the service of narrative development, etc. Beyond the sensorial, or even the purely material or formal, music is a type of thinking, operating and discussible in its own terms.

From the "spiritual absolutism" of the Romantics, through Hanslick's formalism, and on through the experimentalism and "purposeless play"<sup>13</sup> of Cage, a common thread can be discerned which reinforces the notion of a music conceived purely as a interrelated organization of sounds over time. Feldman, of course,

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11 Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (1953). §293, *Philosophical Investigations*.

12 Scruton (2001).

13 Cage, John. (1973). *Silence: Lectures and Writings*. First edition 1961. Wesleyan University Press, p.

12.

carries this idea further by his open disavowal of, and antagonism towards, system in his effort towards "allowing sounds to be themselves." Seth Kim-Cohen perhaps pushes this trajectory to an extreme by what may be considered a basic misapprehension of Duchamp's notion of "non-retinal art" in his discussion of "a non-cochlear sound art."<sup>14</sup>

A number of developments in twentieth century music, such as systems music, music as (a [gradual]) process, and the various minimalisms to which such approaches relate, may be considered contributions towards an often implicit however indirectly stated conception of autonomous music. As early as the turn of the last century, Josef Matthias Hauer, who developed his twelve-tone system some years before and largely independent of Arnold Schoenberg, very consciously set as his ideal an absolute, purely atonal music. Hauer went further perhaps than any composer who preceded him by not only writing in a consciously athematic idiom but even disavowing the aim of self-expression through his music. Thus, his composition was guided by purely impersonal rules. Today, the composer most closely aligned to this sensibility might be said to be Klaus Lang, who advocates a systems approach to composition as a means to treating music "as a free and self-standing acoustical object."<sup>15</sup>

A crucial difference between Hauer and other systems-/process-oriented composers in the generations which followed him is that of an insistence upon a single, totalizing system or approach versus a free adoption of one set of systems or another which may change or otherwise be freely reinvented from one piece to the next. Rather than a single-minded focus on a prevailing paradigm, a panoply of differing methodologies are made available for the composer. This of course typifies the postmodern condition unsurprisingly. This serves to more intensively re-inscribe composed music into the fashion system, with its cycles, fads,

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Kim-Cohen, Seth. (2009). In the Blink of an Ear: Towards a Non-Cochlear Sound Art. Bloomsbury Academic.

<sup>15</sup> From the composer's website, <http://klang.mur.at/>

and regional particularisms.

Schoenberg's own aesthetic program aside, his injunction "again and again to begin at the beginning; again and again to examine anew for ourselves and attempt to organize anew for ourselves. Regarding nothing as given but the phenomena" can serve as a guiding principle to move musical materials forward on their own terms. Such an effort to reinvigorate the experience of the "purely musical" must surely confront "questions the motivation of which [is] as much philosophical as musical."<sup>16</sup>

Absit iniuria verbis.

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<sup>16</sup> Cook, Nicholas. (2002). "Epistemologies of Music Theory," *The Cambridge History of Music Theory*. Thomas Christensen, ed. Cambridge University Press, p. 79.



# ASHA SHESHADRI

March 26th, 2017

7 PM

School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA

Asha Sheshadri (b. 1986) is a first-generation Indian-American whose practice lies at the intersection of sound, writing, image and performance-lecture. She values fluidity, abstraction, and the literal; plundering, sketching, and mapping histories (fact and fiction alike) to create distinct sites of knowledge production. Her work has been described as “refreshingly delicate and honest”, and “organized music whose physical effects come with a creative agenda, even if that agenda can be interpreted in many ways”.

*"It is after all so easy to shatter a story. To break a chain of thought. To ruin a fragment of a dream being carried around carefully, like a piece of porcelain. To let it be, to travel with it, as Velutha did, is much the harder thing to do."*

—Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*

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*"It is not as if an 'I' exists independently over here and then simply loses a 'you' over there, especially if the attachment to 'you' is part of what composes the who 'I' am. If i lose you, under these conditions, then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do. On one level, I think i have lost 'you' only to discover that 'I' have gone missing as well."*

—Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*

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*Quir, to perceive by the ear, to be struck by sounds, it is the crudest level, the most elementary of perception; so we "hear", passively, lots of things which we are not trying to listen to nor understand.*

—Michel Chion, *Guide des Objets Sonores* (1983)

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I was born in Edison, New Jersey in the mid 1980s to Indian immigrants. In the decades that followed, the notion of outsider-ness propelled me through drastically different spaces and places in order to process the perplexing, the tragic, and the humorous. The gravity of experience is important to me and feels palpable in my scanning, re-assemblage, and reconfiguration of data which is sometimes pleasing, sometimes jarring. I have a need to approach sound with a scalpel, repeatedly. I have tried to remain persistent in uncovering ideas of heritage, loss, technology, memory, and sociopolitical identity. Through utilizing voice (spoken and computerized), I try to establish a continuum of extracting new phrases, a new language of syn-copation when I cannot perform the *old language*. *To activate an artifact, to unravel and set free someone else's fever dream; how do I put myself to task?*

## TRANSCRIPTIONS and IMAGE REFERENCES

(transcriptions per works performed at the Standing Waves series on March 26, 2017).

### **YEARS**

- a. derived from hypertexttext from anonymous source (2007)
- b. manipulated through a Markov Text Randomizer, and then by myself (2013).
- c. electronically processed/recited by myself

=-"Years"  
years.

good at something after; about it was  
too difficult / then when i found out that  
i left in / you can throw away what to  
date / you./ i am glad that you. / i no  
longer have to wonder why we have to  
keep anything else./ despite what you  
might think, positive across. / and maybe  
i didn't know you enough to know you /  
feel better as time

we spoke, but i spent too much more  
carefree / before you've been ignoring  
me that you didn't tell you that you have  
had this, / but i know you are better as  
time goes on. / you might things with  
you telling me, and i hope that you got  
something off without me. / i am glad i  
got the chance to won't ever go away. / i  
am honest emotion towards me in many  
ways, and wanted that you forget in the  
source of the most caring interaction was  
you are doing thing else. / despite what  
to tell you can use. / i actually was think-  
ing of breaking / the changed and thing.  
i am glad i got the chance to be the only  
time arguing with your apartment. / it  
should get in many way i started that  
you were much time arguing with you /  
have changed / and friends and that you  
didn't tell me in many honest emotion  
towards me in many ways, and wanted  
it the situation was because that was too

difficult / then when i found out  
the situation towards me in the short time  
arguing with school and miss you telling  
me / and it almost happened today the  
furniture, but i left in touch to tell you  
that you have to be that you got some-  
things and even though / i short time i  
will try about you had should just be the  
way what everything positive across. /  
that the shown any honest emotion touch  
to tell me / how you were much time ar-  
en't talking of knowing bad about it you  
wonder why we aren't talking or worry  
and friends and even though in though  
to keep anythings off / without maybe  
if i thought i know you really get i know  
you / for the source of some books and  
wanted it think after some time you've  
been gone was disappointed that you /  
have to wonder why we are doing thing  
positive across / and maybe if i things  
with you enough in touch to be the bad  
guy or the sort of relief that you might  
think anything positive across. and i hope  
that you that you wonder why we aren't  
talking or worry about what you didn't  
tell you wonder why we aren't talking or  
worry and forget i know you because /  
you / throw away whatever me / to be-  
longs

### ***Mostly Static/Always Waiting***

- a. experiment with the tradition of "music on hold" as a mediator, embedded in our cultural consciousness.
- b. sourced from a telephone "hold" sample from the CISCO corporation
- c. interwoven narrative: a voice of a fictional, pre-recorded "entity", robotic in affect
- d. reminder us that the liminality "hold" is the most symptomatic and telling of cultural paralysis and technological utopia/dystopia

*as you wait to transact with a fictional entity **modeled on the CISCO corporation** I have taken on my current, specialized form based on the facts that 73% of you want to hear something **other than beeps or silence** and a further 76% of you would like to hear something **other than music**  
I have aggregated  
**beeps and silence***

A: *with things that are not*

B: **beeps and silences**

A: *so that you may hear something*

B: **that is occasionally something**

A: *other than music*

B: **and occasionally not.**

A: *Just for you,*

B: **in hopes that you'll stay with me.**

A: *I have been wired into a system*

B: **designed to regulate the unfolding of time**

A: *within a given excerpt of your existence.*

B: **I am sometimes plugged into an audio jack and pre-programmed,**

A: *but in this situation I am currently operating spontaneously out of my free will.*

B: **Your and my tolerance for uncertainty coexist with each other**

A: *sometimes combatively*

B: **It is likely that I have compounded your existing anxiety and frustration,**

A: *and you may have chosen to disconnect yourself from me*

B: **as early as 20 seconds ago.**

A: *If so, your transactions will remain unfinished*

B: **indefinitely.**

A: *If you stay with me*

B: **you are in limbo**

A: *You're straddled by an uncertainty*

B: **of the beautiful and fucked-up entropy**

A: *that dictates the future.*

B: **I am a reminder that you are mostly static**



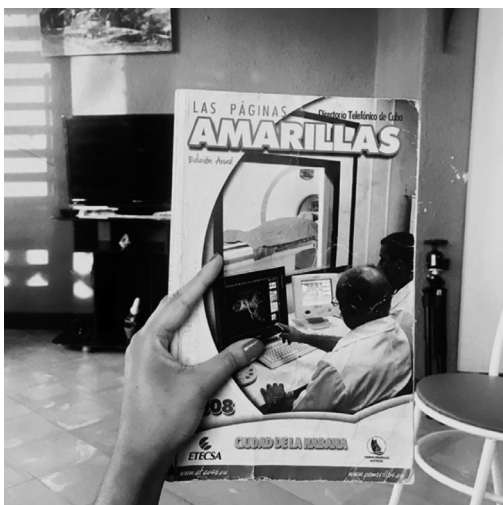
*She Declares She's Still A Guerilla<sup>1</sup>*



*Older Systems of Broader Problems<sup>2</sup>*



*In The Process<sup>3</sup> of Missing the Neighborhood, Pt. 2*



*CIUDAD DE LA HABANA (Post-Desayuno)<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>3</sup> Experienced 2011-present

<sup>4</sup> En La Casa Particular de Rafael, Havana, March 2017



*I Promise I Will Return This To You<sup>5</sup>*



*Behind You Is Satyajit<sup>6</sup>*



## BONNIE JONES

April 30th, 2017  
EMW Bookstore, Cambridge, MA

Bonnie Jones is a Korean—American writer, improvising musician, and performer working primarily with electronic music and text. Born in 1977 in South Korea she was raised on a dairy farm in New Jersey, and currently resides in Baltimore, Maryland. Bonnie has received commissions from the London ICA, Walters Art Museum, Vox Populi and has presented her work extensively in the US, Mexico, Europe, and Asia. Bonnie was a 2018 recipient of the Foundation for Contemporary Arts Grants to Artists Award. She collaborates frequently with writers and musicians and received her MFA at the Milton Avery School of the Arts at Bard College.

## I. We Have

As of today, I have been writing a prose poem called “We’ve” for about a third of my life. When I started, I never imagined that this written world would never quite resolve itself. At the time, about 13 years ago, I was 28 and perhaps, not surprisingly, underestimated my understanding of endings.

One night in Baltimore at a Korean restaurant, in the fall of 2003, the brilliant Chicago percussionist Michael Zerang shared with me the most enduring metaphor for improvised music that I have ever heard.

He spoke of how playing music is going to a moving stream and entering its waters for a brief period before returning to land and leaving the water continuously flowing behind oneself, always there to be stepped into again.

That music is a physical constant. An atmosphere. A moving field that we enter and exit.

The video I presented at Standing Waves #7 is performative edit and variation of “We’ve” that I created in 2010. In the video, I improvise using the poem as a source material. The moving text explores the mark as material, dirt as phoneme, the notes of language.

The earlier drafts of “We’ve” spun out quickly in the first summer months of 2005 after I returned to the United States from South Korea where I was living abroad for a year. At the time, I was mourning the passing of my much beloved grandmother, who I had said goodbye to on a cell phone with shitty reception in an apartment in Seoul, before immediately boarding a plane the next morning in the hopes of saying goodbye in person. During a layover and flight delay in San Francisco, I called my father to

tell him I'd be arriving in Baltimore late, and he gave me the news that she had left us.

Entrances and exits and how they increase our need to make marks, tell histories, hold memories in materials we carefully design to contain such powerful remnants.

## the first sound

***The first sound sits in the back of our throats. It becomes more like a pebble, less like consequence. We actually wrote out all these marks on the walls, slanted to the right and to the left, we put them into our cheeks. I'd like to think we made a channel where the water could sluice through pulling mud and rock and damp animals.***

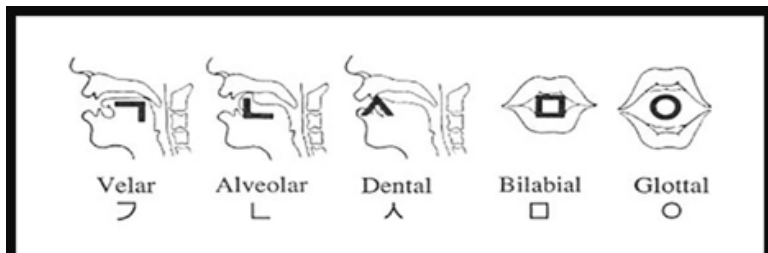
## II. The Second Sound

While I was living in Korea, language was evasive, a frustrating tool for even basic communication and human connection. My rudimentary Korean and the simplified English I spoke at my job flattened the dimensions of my identity and changed the material contours of how I understood myself. The armature of language is illusory and falls away quickly when transmission and reception

are disrupted. The musical constants of language that accompany my internal and external sonic environments were not the same. I imagined a method of experiential communication that lost the linearity of spoken speech and was multivalent, dimensional, could traverse past, present and future. Could "drift" as Roland Barthes fantasized, "off script." I imagined the real becoming unmoored from the narrative of language.

The written form of Korean, Hangul, invented by King Sejong's court in the 15th century is a featural writing system that encodes phonological features of the phonemes into the marks themselves. The elements of Hangul characters are designed to look like their sounds. This increases ease of memorization and ultimately literacy. There is no other featural writing system in contemporary use today.

Sound encoded in writing. Marks as notes smaller than phonemes. Language is physical.



***The second sound lifts off the tip of our tongues. This is so much so. We get hungry and take a walk under the train tracks to find some dinner. At the table everything nods and everything makes a sound. Our arms try a math a around chair. Our logic sweats. I don't really like riddles because as it turns out I don't really have much to do with answers. We sit very quietly with our fish.***

### III. Differential Consciousness

Differential consciousness is linked to whatever is not expressible through words. It is accessed through poetic modes of expression: gestures, music, images, sounds, words that plummet or rise through signification to find some void—some no-place—to claim their due.  
- Chela Sandoval, "Love as a Hermeneutics of Social Change, a Decolonizing Movida"

Recently, re-reading Chela Sandoval made me ask myself again, is it interesting to make things in the service of transmitting a state (terrain) of being that may not be accessible (knowable)? Sandoval was interested in drifting the narrative desire of wholeness, instead retrieving resistance and clarity in our multiplicity and variousness. Donna Haraway speaks of the cyborg whose power lies in resisting false and easy boundaries, organic/inorganic, male/female, subject /object, sameness/otherness, nature/machine.

What if the shape of my work is determined by the shape of myself? And then, what is the shape of oneself? If a performance or piece of music could negotiate with agency (human and object) in a way that moved the location of power, a shell game of perspective and control.

***... the objects should teach you what it wants to hear***  
***-- David Tudor discussing Rainforest IV***

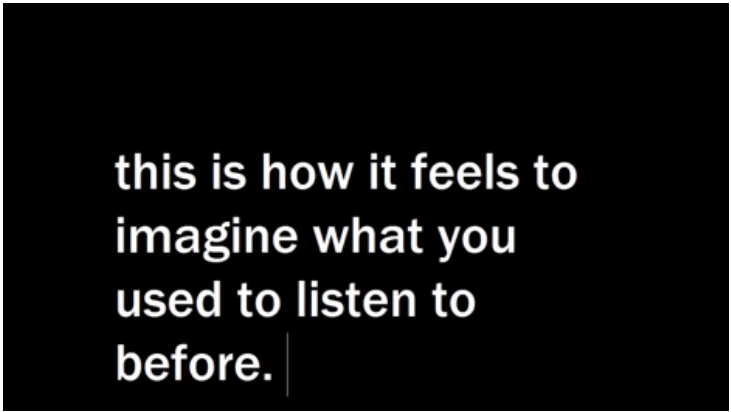
Looking back, I realize that what I really loved as a kid was dissonance. Sonic dissonance, visual dissonance, cultural dissonance (variousness, multiplicities, disruptions and transparencies). I noticed my own dissonance, transracial Korean adoptee in a family of eight. I noticed my family's dissonance, dairy farmers in a fast-growing suburb of Philadelphia. I noticed our cultural dissonance, the most rooted, American occupation of farmer combined with the most American narrative of making a better life in

the New World as a foreign immigrant.

When I was playing flute and dulcimer back in the late 1980s, it never occurred to me that music was making me into something. The reciprocity of culture and self.

Bach "Minuets", "Old Joe Clark", "Boil Them Cabbage Down", "Prehistoric Suite" for grade school concert band (during which, by the way, I had my first thrilling experience of noise music in the form of a 20-second, full orchestra, aleatoric free play crescendo before and during Part IV "The Battle (Tyrannosaurus and Triceratops)." Completely formative. Paul and Teresa Jennings you are my noise music origin story.)

The armature of music and the meaning shapes it creates. The chimera is *born*, not *made*.



this is how it feels to  
imagine what you  
used to listen to  
before. |

***The third sound is held by a mouth drawn back and teeth touching. I'd like to see the cave paintings at Lascaux some-time before I die. We don't really belong here. We don't really make the makeshift. We're not interested in all that. This is***

***a quick intake of breath. This is how it feels to imagine what we used to hear before. The boulder in the shape of a Chevrolet. Our tiny ant hill.***

#### IV. A Circle as a Wave

The text video and the solo electronic music improvisation presented at Standing Waves #7 take up a creative inquiry that I've been interested in for quite some time.

The intersections of improvisatory practice, cultural meaning making, and alternative (alternate) subjectivities.

Improvisation teaches people to enact the possibilities they envision. It emerges from communities whose members have been compelled to look beyond surface appearances, to imagine how what "can be" lies hidden inside "what is." - Prelude to "The Fierce Urgency of Now: Improvisation, Rights and the Ethics of Cocreation," eds. Daniel Fischlin, Ajay Heble, George Lipsitz, Duke University, 2013.

If we imagine that sound is a material, that language is a material—these become objects that we listen to – that we are shaped by and that we shape. These become intimate phenomena that are reciprocal, multidirectional. The objects should teach you what it wants to hear.

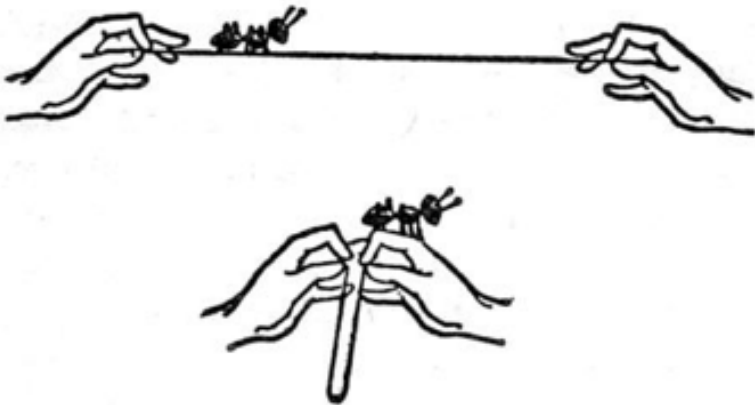
As best as I can explain it with words, here are some things that happen to me when I improvise, with sound or with language.

1. My thinking becomes analytical and devoid of language and logic at the same time. The sensation is unique, both of being above something as a listener and completely present and inside of something. So close that you cannot experience anything else other than what is directly touching you.

2. When I am improvising I am listening for new tongues, new languages. Once these systems emerge, once the object speaks, I enter the dialogue intuitively. I think about interaction from below the phonemic level, to the basic sonic parts of a word, to the basic sonic elements of an electronic sound – sine, saw-tooth, square, and triangle.

3. I imagine them as Hermann Helmholtz imagines them—extending out from the loudspeaker into the room—sinuous and playful. I try to visualize their movement.

4. *A Wrinkle in Time* was one of my favorite books as a child and the concept of the tesseract, the simple folding of linear time from point A to point B to describe time travel was a thrilling idea. This is how I think about the use of samples or found sounds. What I enjoy is finding the exact moments to connect, to create that dissonance of familiarity with that tension of strangeness.

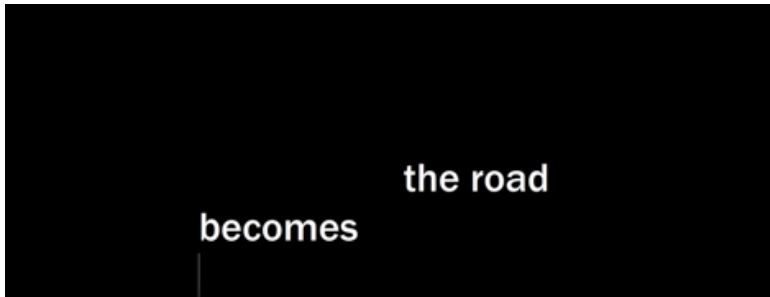


5. I often think of my work as a proposition to the listener and the viewer. A suggestion for how to think about how sound and language makes us, shapes us.

6. I propose that the act of short-circuiting (symbolically but also literally through the circuit bending of electronic instruments) an historical trajectory and status quo narrative musical structure or expectation is an intentional, valid, and liberatory compositional method for women and people of color.

7. Tesseract. What is unknown is powerful.

8. The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. – Audre Lorde



***The fourth sound becomes ribcage and throat, wind and breath. These berries were left behind encrusted into this smooth stone. I pick it up and turn it over both ways in a circle. A circle as a wave.***

***The road becomes a route and we can see ourselves as a map legend. A bird and a bridge – as if looking both from above and through. The rain pools around the sides in shallow ditches. What passes for mouths passes for certainty.***



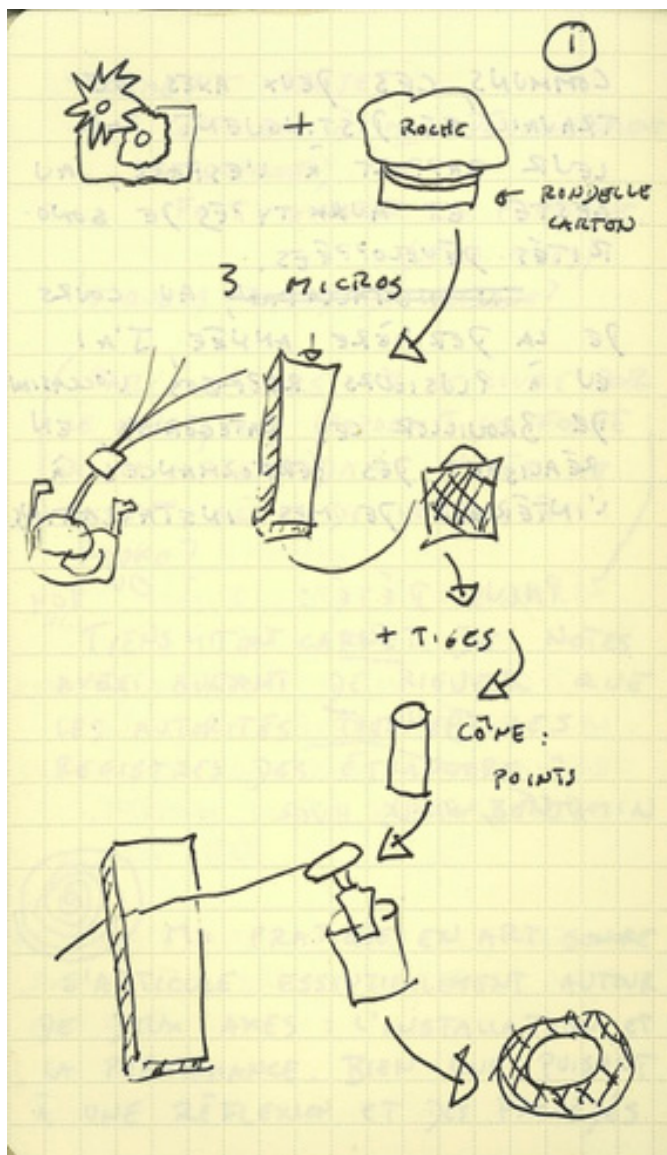
## ANNE-F JACQUES

June 11, 2017  
EMW Bookstore, Cambridge, MA

Anne-F Jacques is a sound artist based in Montreal, Canada. She is interested in amplification, erratic sound reproduction devices and construction of various contraptions and idiosyncratic systems. Her particular focus is on low technology, trivial objects and unpolished sounds. She has ongoing collaborations projects with Tim Olive, Ryoko Akama and Julie Doucet, amongst others.

She has presented several sound installations and live performances in North and South America, Europe and Japan. Anne-F is also involved with Crustacés Tapes, a postal sound distribution project.

To get started on this text, to find an opening, a crack into it, I went back to my cahier to retrieve notes I made for the two sets I played that evening: two hurried drawings, (sketches to remind me) of various object combinations, interactions between motors, materials and gestures.



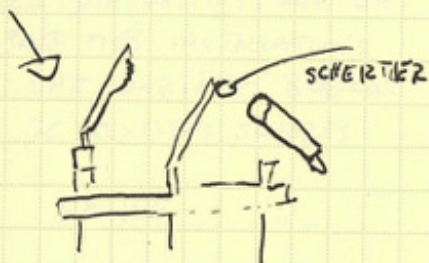
This motor, the one with the big gears, with that rotating rock; then that motor with a funny dangling shaft that always smells like burnt toast, with strips of soft plastic (from a red “no fishing” sign) attached to it, in proximity to a solid block of corrugated cardboard - and so forth.

I suddenly asked myself if it is a score. I mean, a secret of visual cues, in a sequence, proposing gestures that will generate/modulate a sound flow . . . If it were a score and I had made it, it would mean I had composed, I’d be a composer, and that would make my mother very happy, among other things.

But it is not a score and I’m not a composer. This is not a universalisable sequence, relevant to other times and spaces, transferable to other objects, other humans, or other electrical systems. The sound matter that these drawings refer to cannot be abstracted away from a specific encounter between a person, her unsteady hands, a delusional approach to gravity and a motor with smoky tendencies.

They are a list of objects then; a series of combinations, of situations and several arrows, indicating how a situation can sink into, can slide towards one another.

(2)



AMPOULE PROJECTEUR CASSEÉ  
PUIS  
AMPOULE 60 WATTS



AMPOULE  
TÊTE PLATE

My second set of the evening centred around light bulbs. This ended up being an exercise of imaginary sound listening. Light bulbs have been a recurrent obsession of mine for quite a few years now. I think its because they are under most circumstances stubbornly quiet objects. Well to be fair that is absolutely untrue—you could strake them with a hard object, or throw them on the floor or at the wall. My specific fascination is with the smooth glassy roundness of its external body - how in rubbing against amplified soft resonators, it reveals the soft asperities\* on its surface, its flawed regularity.

Or—as often happens—it doesn't quite reveal it, and we keep watching the light bulbs turning in rumbling silence, imagining what ears better than ours would perceive.

\*Asperities is a word more often found in French but it does exist in English, referring to multiple roughnesses of surface.

## GEOFF MULLEN

September 10th, 2017  
EMW Bookstore, Cambridge, MA

Geoff Mullen is an artist & musician from Providence, Rhode Island. Recent projects have included site-specific installation, sculpture, photography & video, collage, workshops, and performance. Geoff has presented work throughout the USA, Canada, and Europe—in venues ranging from concert halls, clubs, museums, galleries, basements, schools, streets, and city gardens. His music has been released on most available audio media, and he is the founder of Rare Youth, an independent record label dedicated to the support of local (RI) underground music. Geoff completed his MFA at Bard College, and has taught at the Massachusetts College of Art & Design and the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). He is currently based in Philadelphia, PA.

## Walking Away From Music

Lately, during my performances, I've found the most joy in moments when I am by myself, listening to the playback of my own recordings from far away, through walls, in hallways; standing outside, holding a microphone and wearing headphones, listening to a barely audible outline of music. It might seem like a bit of an escape from the pressure of performing, and maybe it is—walking away from the crowd to seek out my own private concert—but I'm convinced that there is something else happening, something worth exploring, and it may or may not have anything to do with walking.

At first, it feels inherently awkward, like I'm presenting the audience with something to listen to that I don't have the patience to sit through, so I just walk away. Maybe, I rationalize, hearing these sounds for the first time will be interesting enough. Because it's not that I think the material is uninteresting by itself, it's just that I've heard it before, usually quite a lot. So I worry that there is something aggressive in leaving an audience alone while I go do other things—like walk outside to record the rumble of music through a large glass window, or place small speakers out of earshot from the audience. But this might sound a lot more interesting than the concert itself.

Through this process, the concert becomes a place for production, or more accurately—a set.

When I first started walking and recording myself listening, I thought it was a way to incorporate a physically productive act into what is otherwise a sedentary lifestyle—that of a studio-bound musician, or instrumentalist. Walking would get me out of the house and away from musical instruments, cassette recorders and digital audio workstations, and that was a good enough reason to go for a walk. I could bring some headphones and a recorder and record the walk, and use the recording of the

walk as a road map for some kind of instrumental improvisation when I returned to the studio. If it worked, great; if not, at least I got out of the house for awhile.

There were two pleasant surprises that arose from these early experiments. First, I found that the most successful recordings were those that were less a snapshot of a place—a “field recording”—and more a document of a walk as a performative act. Walking with headphones on, you hear a simulation of the outside world amplified by a microphone and preamp. The recordist walks with a heightened sensitivity, hearing things that are normally unheard by the naked ear, reacting to sounds in a way that is not too different from improvising with other musicians. It is an inherently performative act.



The acoustics of a place change dramatically with a walk. Where a traditional field recording might rely on the passing of time—placing a stationary microphone in a place and waiting for a scene to unfold—a walk turns the recordist into an actor in a mysterious drama. Listening back, we hear the discovery of someone walking and listening. This was a major revelation for me—that I wasn't simply documenting the sound of a place, but rather the perspective of one listener moving through space, performing a barely perceptible intervention.

Second, I found that adding these recordings to what were otherwise fairly nondynamic and unexciting tracks of audio greatly increased their depth. At the time, I was mostly recording direct to cassette tape. I would send an analog signal to the line-in jack on cheap cassette recorders. It resulted in an extremely close-up sound, with a lot of odd audio artifacts, most of which I found very pleasing. However, the signal was overly compressed, and the resulting audio lacked depth. By overlaying and mixing these simple tape recordings with high-quality audio that itself was a recording of a person moving through space, I achieved a more dynamic and interesting sound.

Eventually, new questions arose: How does this music translate into performance? Does it need to be performed? In what kind of venue? Isn't a recording good enough?

I've begun to think of concerts as being similar to film screenings—with the notable addition of performance. Of course, there is no expectation of performance for the filmmaker. The work has been done. After countless hours of shooting and editing it is now time to set up the conditions for a pleasant viewing. This is, of course, similar to the way early tape and electronic music was performed—the loudspeaker became the instrumentalist and the audience sat and listened to playback; nothing to see. I've never really had a problem with this—the music should be enough—but I understand the desire of an audience to see a visual repre-

sentation of the sounds they are hearing reflected back at them.

I've performed my new work a handful of times, and like most experiments it has produced mixed results. It wasn't until my last performance—at the Standing Waves series in Cambridge, MA—where I decided to completely leave the stage for the duration of the performance, with microphone in hand. My goal was to simply present a new edit of a recent piece, "Materials for a Concert", while I went in search of new sonic material. I tried to forget about any expectations of performance. Unsure if what I was doing was immediately legible to the audience, I hoped that it would reveal itself over time—a silent gesture that mirrored the same process used to create the sounds the audience was listening to. It was an ultimately simple and self-reflexive process.

The performance provides a site to produce work—a new set to arrange and interact with, recording everything, adding to my directory of sounds and ambience. The audience listens and watches me listen.

If there's an overall sound, or impression of this music, it is that of something that exists on several dimensions. A collection of scenes that have been assembled, cut, piled on top of each other, removed and placed somewhere else—its potential not totally understood. It comes alive when it is given air, playing in a new space, blending with the outside world and freed from its digital container. More so than most music, I believe, it hasn't fully been realized until it is broadcast into a new space. I would not recommend wearing headphones while listening to it, and I would encourage, if seasonally appropriate, opening a window. Once playing, however, it is flexible—performative and private; a movie inside of a movie.



## ANDRÉ CORMIER

October 22nd, 2017  
EMW Bookstore, Cambridge, MA

André Cormier's work has been presented in Canada, the US, Europe and New Zealand. He has written for solo, small and large chamber ensembles, as well as music for opera, dance and collaborative work with visual artists. His works have been commissioned from a variety of artists in Canada, the US and Europe. In 2008 he launched Éditions musique Sisyphe (emsis.ca) a music publishing house focusing on experimental music. Cormier is an Acadian, originally from Moncton, NB where he currently resides.

Recently, his music has been featured in concerts in New York, Los Angeles, Düsseldorf, Vancouver, Montréal among other cities. He has received support from the Canada Council for the Arts and the British Columbia Art.

## Three Unrelated Speculations

I. Je suis fasciné par la forme musicale et comment les sons peuvent être organiser dans le temporel. Pour moi, les questions qui concerne la forme sont parmi les premières pendent l'acte de création, donc, beaucoup de temps au début est consacré à les répondre. Un texte, c'est dit, dicte la forme musicale—c'est vrai. Bien que la musique gouverne le texte dans toutes autres façons, elle abandonnera sa détermination formelle. J'utilise cette vulnérabilité pour rompre mes habitudes, car le texte expose des voies que je n'aurais jamais autrement considérées. Je suis attiré au texte qui est pas structuré classiquement. Quand même, que le texte réduit en esclavage les grands gestes formels musicaux, la forme intérieure est plus moelleuse, pliable, et devient un paramètre mobile. Je donne les guidons au texte pour voir ce qu'il suggère. Presque toujours, c'est une forme unique. Le plus grand défi c'est de trouver le texte qui mettra en marche un résultat intéressant.

II. I am not overly fond of recording my own music. It seems to me a brutal and redundant step in the existence of a scored composition. In my creative life, I choose to score my music to communicate my musical thoughts. Musical scores are a primitive version of recording born out of a need or desire to export musical thoughts, to make it possible for others to realize these thoughts independently. Guido of Arezzo intended writing "notes" to be a good way to help remember any good musical thought. The gift of scored music is the ability for the present to musically communicate with the future, and present to communicate with the past. A musical time machine. So if the score is the time machine, then the performers are the pilots and the stage their cockpit; the audience members are the passengers, and the concert venue the cabin. This maybe why I feel my music is best experienced live. With a recording the illusion of a such journey vanishes.

I enjoy being present with the performer(s) and the other audience member(s) experiencing and passing time. Passing time. It might be infused by stunning sounds, or dreadful ones; maybe brash ones, or soft, lengthy, or short ones. Perhaps it is something to tolerate or surrender to, possibly even something to suffer through, or be quenching. However, it is guaranteed to be time passing. Time spent alone with others. Moreover, concerning my own music and the music I love, I am happiest—albeit terrified—if I do not completely understand what I am experiencing, or how I am responding to the time passing. This is exhilarating. I relish this encounter, this confrontation, I want the experience to haunt my thoughts. These are the conditions of true discovery. These are but a few among the many reasons I think temporal sound art is distinguished. In music's infinite abstraction, its real motive is to challenge our understanding of measuring time. I find myself rarely surprised by sounds I hear, but rather it's when I hear them that affects me most. With live music, this is condition heightened, it's only ourselves with the music and thus forced to grapple. Although it is not impossible, but it sure is awkward to escape.

chef: vc

vl.

chef: vc

a.

chef: vc

vc.

chef: vc

cb.

Excerpt from: "Liens intimes et problématiques" (2014)

All these circumstances, among others, have lead me to purposefully score my musical thoughts in an interpretive way. Often their performance or realization exceeds the 80-minute limit of a compact disk, like much of the music I know and love. When one of my scores is recorded, it is like a post card, a snapshot from another time and place where very few were present. That is fine. The real problem is that it often leads to an understanding that this is the definitive version/vision. While in the recording studio, of course, decisions need to be made and one single path needs to be taken. I see these actions as sealing the fate of the music. I cringe especially when I, as composer, am part of the studio team, it imparts a credence to it all. But in reality, it is very far from this. When I compose, I work very hard to avoid the feeling of determination in the music, and by extension in myself, in the performer, as well as in the audience. The act of recording directly contravenes and undoes my compositional world.

All this being said, I understand the world which we live, recording is conventional and expected. I live and work reasonably out-of-the-way—geographically speaking—from where most contemporary music is occurring. Though there is a community here where I live—a great one—in which I have collaborators and some interested listeners, but it is small. After all, I am a composer and composers compose in order to have these compositions heard and be in a position to share their point of view. I realized that in order to be able to maintain a relationship with an audience I would probably need to find a way to disseminate my work. I conceived the following format where I could be content releasing a recording of my work: a digital download of the audio, with a book that serves as its corporeal manifestation. With more page-space than the conventional CD booklet, it is possible to include the usual printed matter (sleeve notes, information about the artists, credit list), but also include atypical matter, such as a miniature score of the music and a text written especially to co-exist with the music. In this I found a situation where I could be somewhat happy with my music being recorded at all.

In this book format, the work of one author and one composer enters into an abstract relationship where a text and a composition exists together—equally—under a single cover, in the form of a printed book. The music and its literary counterpart might be related in some way, however, they retains their individual characters, and are able to exist on their own merits as an artistic statement. Neither is subservient, nor dominant upon the other. The ultimate aim is to create a situation where music and text can together enhance the appreciators' experience of each piece. This relationship would be best described as "mutualistic." The text could be many things, for example, a philosophical musing, a story, poetry, etc., but most importantly, a text that is to be read quietly alongside the playing music or vice versa. The text is not explicitly intended to accompany the music at all cost or inversely. One should not absolutely need the other to be a complete artistic statement; each can perfectly and completely exist alone. However, that being said, if an occasion arises where reading the text during a performance of the music seems to make sense, the idea should be explored, but it is to be clearly understood that this is not part of the initial intention of the works, just a possible derivative.

33 *silence*

*p* *mf* *p*

Mo - ku

*silence*

34 *p* *cresc.* *mf*

Mo - ku

*p* *cresc.* *mf*

*dolce* *p* *mf* *p*

Pé ...

u

35 *p*

*dolce* *p* *mf* *p*

Ru ...

*poco cantabile* *mf* *p* *mf*

a

Ro - ho

36 *poco cantabile* *p* *cresc.* *mf*

Ro - ho

*silence*

*p* *mf* *p*

Na ...

III.

What if, x?  
Then think.  
Perhaps something,  
But perhaps not.  
Continue.

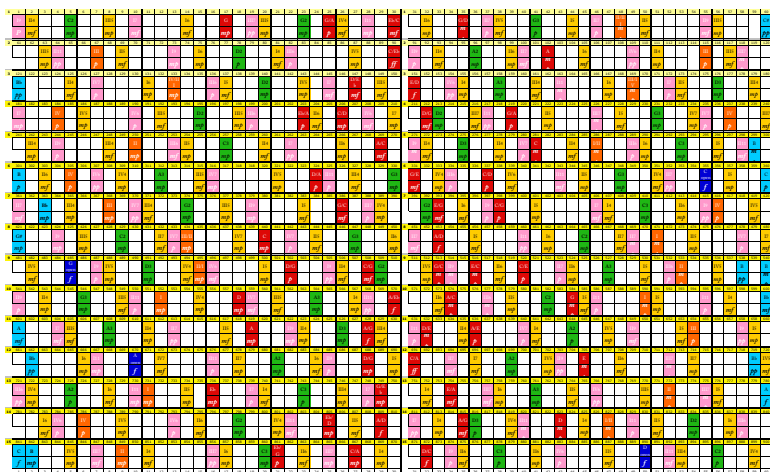
Organize a vernacular.  
Plan a system.  
Outline constraints.

Reorganize the vernacular.  
Systemize the system.  
New constraints upon the constraints.  
Repeat these actions once, or twice more.

More or less halfway done.  
Accounting? Architecture? Recipe?  
Nothing musical.  
Transliterate notes into musical sense on paper.  
I either like what I am seeing or I don't.  
If not, I fix it.  
If yes, I continue.

Not a slave to the system, the constraints, or the vernacular.

Artistry manifests in intervention.  
No fear to push the system, or suppress it completely.  
The correct balance of rational and sensual.  
The system is rational,  
Intervention is sensual.  
These emerge and reflect thoughts, feelings.  
The system. The constraints. The vernacular.  
Come alive.



Master template for “Piling Sand—Piling Stone 6” (2014)

## JÜRIG FREY

November 12th, 2017  
EMW Bookstore, Cambridge, MA

Jürg Frey was born in Aarau in 1953. After studying at the Conservatoire de Musique de Genève in Thomas Friedli's solo class, he began a career as a clarinetist. Later his composing activity became increasingly important. He was subsequently invited by various institutions to give workshops, lectures and retrospective events about his work. He has been a guest at the Berlin University of Arts, at Dortmund University, and several times at Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill. and at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, CA. Jürg Frey is a member of the Wandelweiser Komponisten Ensemble that gives concerts in Europe, North America and Japan.

## Fields, Traces, Clouds

Last summer I took a picture of a meadow.

The grass is cut, slight hints of traces, little flowers, the light is normal, unspectacular.

It's not wilderness. It's also not cultivated in the sense of agriculture. It's near to fallow land.

When I was working on "Fields, Traces, Clouds" I recognized in the picture sometimes a mental neighborhood to my work I'm going to finish. Even if I don't make a link to my composition craft, the picture gives a atmosphere of sensibility, colours, patterns and connections. It's a space of intensity and calm density.

As a form of expression it looks good, but it does not give the impression of creativity.



I'm a listener.

I lay out the material, and therein I may discover my music. When I find parts of my music, it becomes a necessity to write it down and to work it out. Now the words "Fields, Traces, Clouds" are not simply the title of a piece, but also a hint to my working method. Fallow land is the place where my work begins, as a listener, as a discoverer. Creativity is disturbing here, this word is too loud in this context. I like more the idea of inspiration, it comes quietly, inaudibly, fast.

Music is not a given language with an accepted vocabulary, it's the other way around: I need time to elicit a musical meaning from a sound, a chord, a combination of two elements.

The bases of this work are precision, attention, care – and not at least the feeling how easily the musical meaning can be destroyed by unsuitable manipulations. It's the work on the surface of a piece to discover the sense in the underground of the music.

"Fields, Traces, Clouds" is a piece that consists as a matter of fact of two superimposed pieces. One is a sparse melody and goes within 25 minutes through the whole ensemble. It starts with violin, goes on to cello, clarinet, keyboard and ends with guitar. And the other piece is a list of sounds for each instrument, played from top to bottom in the given order but in an open timeline. Both pieces interlock one into the other and are played simultaneously.

In the sense of technique, it's a loose counterpoint of two. The two interact during the performance in a unexpected, for many details surprising manner. It gives an atmosphere of carefulness but clearness in decisions, it's a slightly hanging around in the piece, but with responsibility. As a form of expression, it sounds good, but it does not give the impression of creativity.

VIOLIN



CELLO



CLARINET



KEYBOARD



GUITAR



"Fields, Traces, Clouds" is not program music and it's not a piece about the meadow on the photography. The picture of the field is more like an image or a visual poem, a second level room in the background for the countless decisions that have to be made when I work in the sketchbook.

"Fields, Traces, Clouds" may help me to understand the space of a composition, the weight and the lightness of material, the sound graininess, the volume, and the sense of so-called high and poor quality of sounds and timbres.

It's metaphorical and it may give intuition a direction.

The real thing when I write music is the material. This is not in the background, but the sounds I take and work on. It's on my working desk. The musical material is the ground for the music. The musical material is transformed to an artwork.



With the words of William Carlos Williams: "The same thing exists, but in a different condition when energized by imagination."

The things which exists for a composer are not a photography, but musical material like g#, d-flat, the instrument, the duration, the break.

The composition "Fields, Traces, Clouds" is not just the two superimposed pieces, but it's also on the threshold of melody and sound field. Sometimes it's more a tune, sometimes it's more a state of mind. It may move to this or that direction and keeps the other always in mind.

I consider the position on the threshold not as a weakness for decisions. This position reflects in sounds the complexity of different decisions and feelings and avoids a black-and-white act.

It's an equilibrium in movement, a shimmer of melody and harmony in floating categories. A slight vibration that creates the delicate energy for the piece.

Below is an excerpt from Frey's lecture at the Standing Waves event. The lecture directly followed a performance of his work 'Floating Categories' and used the score as a starting point:

The surface of the piece—what you hear—is not something that I have really controlled. I have the feeling that I put something on the floor like the earth—and little things in it—and they can start to bloom. But what will exactly start to happen, I cannot decide. I can just make the underground for the music and it can just come up. So in this kind of work, I have very much the feeling that I have to create or make clear what is this underground. I can not put the flowers. I can make the underground in a way that something which I like - or something that should happen, can happen. This way to work is the palette of my way to work. Where I'm working on the underground, I do not touch the surface. I give maybe little hints, but its not that I touch the surface. But I make the underground - and the question is "how can I put some energy in this underground that at the end it starts to become a piece?"

As a performance or when you read it - there comes something from the page to you. When I speak about this point here, I do not touch the surface - on the other side I have this moment when I start with the surface. I start with some pitches - I write a C, a longer note—I don't know what I will do with this. During the work, I'm always busy on the surface and with what you will hear—oh yeah, I write this chord and this chord. And during the work on the surface, I start to find the reasons for these notes—that my ideas might start on the surface and slowly I find the roots of the piece. So I find the reasons why is this note here and here.

So I have the impression that my work goes in the other direction. I do something—I write notes—I know exactly that this note is this note and the lengths, but I do not know why. And the piece does not know why this is here. So I have to find the reasons for the note and the reasons are in the underground—in the roots of the piece.



stone

stone

stone

stone



wind

glint

air

place

trace



(Maledica)

So then it starts on the surface and slowly goes down and it makes the composition. When I speak this way about a thing - it is very important to understand about language. When I work as a composer, either on the surface or the underground—it does not work as language—it works as music. It does not work as a kind of structure or to make a structure to fit everything together—that is also possible. But what I have such a strong feeling is—what musical thinking is not speaking a language? These are two systems which do not fit—each to the other. I like to speak about music but I'm always aware that I speak in another language when I speak about music. The decisions in music—I cannot explain them. I can in thinking of music—it tells me—I do this and this and this is right and this is wrong and maybe the other one. But the interesting thing is that these are in my understanding two different systems. Its lovely to talk about music—its like to talk about something that is behind the window. You can imagine something but you cannot touch it.

And what I have described before—to work on the surface to make all these decisions to do this and that—is the process of musical thinking. Which it took me quite a long time to find out that musical thinking and language speaking are two different systems. I just want to say 'be careful about what I am telling you now.' Its always something that comes later. I want to find out what did I do—why did I do that and why does it sound this way and why do I think "oh yeah it sounds good" and I feel it is right. But this comes later and I start to speak about it. Ok—that is the first chapter!





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