

Playing Music Badly in Public
Brian Eno and the Limits of the Non-Musician

BY

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THESIS

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For Bambina
&
In Memory of Carole Finer

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Preface

The non-musician is an inherent contradiction. Its nomenclature suggests both “bad” musician and literally anyone not playing music. “Playing” for the non-musician, takes a double meaning: playing with the instrument but not necessarily playing the instrument. The non-musician is a conceptual artist, a cyberneticist, a plumber, a punk rocker, a performance artist, an anti-musician, an experimentalist, a dilettante, a painter, someone just mucking about, attempting to change the world, or all, or none, of these.

The non-musician is lumpen, not necessarily on account of political disinterest, but in that they are near-impossible to organize coherently. The non-musician eschews formal training to be among the masses. The non-musician typically comes from the position and/of privilege to deskill, meaning they likely had some formal training at some point. The non-musician, like art, is disorderly, a situation cyberneticist Morse Peckham describes as creating “expectations for an audience in order to violate them.”¹ This is to say, the non-musician proceeds from a space of incompetence to restructure notions of competence, to start from zero and build something unknown, to be “experimental.”

The non-musician is a poor relative to the musician. They can’t hold an instrument correctly. They purposefully destroy their instruments or themselves in the process of denying body to instrument accommodation. So distant are the sounds produced by the non-musician that it seems impossible to be considered music as all. Their sonic disarray births new types of notes, “music without,”

¹ Morse Peckham quoted in Kevin Eden, “From Ambient Lightworks,” <http://web2.uwindsor.ca/courses/visual/wcl/596/Site/pedagogy/%20notes.html>

depicted by cartoonists and artists as mangled and spiky outlined eighth and quarter notes.

The non-musician was once the object of derision, a testament to liberatory efforts gone awry, the mud on the shoes of musical tradition. Their contemporary acceptance, as evidenced by the bounty of untrained, unskilled, deskilled, unwilling, barely-learned, idiot-savant, computer assisted, studio enhanced, autotuned, sample heavy, app friendly, get-rich-quick, YouTube naïve and vainglorious found on the internet, exemplifies the cycles of absorption and niche market drives of capitalism. Non-musicians, available at the click of a trackpad, can still be the subject of mockery, but unstoppable nonetheless, as a resistant strand of freedom to sound as “bad” as one desires. Non-musicians reveal the unexpected, the horrendous, provoke questions of their very existence, and if we can actually manage or tolerate to listen to them, what do they say?

In Vera Chytilova’s film *Daisies* (1966), the opening scene finds the film’s protagonists, two teenage girls, both named Maria, sitting in swimwear in a sauna, looking the height of youthful disaffection. Brunette Maria pulls a trumpet from out of the ether, attempts to play it, fails, and laments, “I can’t even do that.” Her accomplice replies: “So what can you do?” Maria, now a failed trumpeter, admits: “Nothing, really.” This admission of incapability, predicated on musical quality, is the catalyst for the film. One’s purpose as societal contributor seems daunting: what space is there for the not quite good enough? The rest of the film is a patchwork of the two Maria’s accepting their positions as youthful outcasts, each day’s events culminating in their causing more and more social chaos. The film was banned by the Ukrainian government.

Contemporary musical incompetence is both beloved and scorned, has a market use value, but is a medium of comparison. Look at any competition based

televised musical talent show and this becomes illustrated well. In pre-recorded live auditions, judges – typically music industry moguls, past their prime pop stars, or pop producers – castigate and verbally abuse those who do not meet a marketable standard of excellence. As music theorist and critic John Corbett suggests, the music market rarely assembles its own acts, but instead plucks from various scenes and innovations that occur in small clubs, underground venues, or artist networks.² On these televised musical talent shows, the industry gets to have it both ways: if a poor singer catches on with the public, they can be marketed as such with an “as seen on.” Simultaneous to this marketing, the poor singer will also illustrate a striking contrast to whoever might advance as victor during the competition.³

To be sure, a trained or preternaturally capable musician sounds impressive and pleasant, as accessible as they may be inaccessible. Similar to the non-musician that might fill out a DIY punk scene, the capable musician galvanizes our sense of “I want to do that.” Today, with online social platforms that allow for the broadcast of any and every impulse, there is no shortage of videos featuring individuals displaying their musical mastery or vain attempts otherwise. Untrained singers attempt to sound like those with years of vocal training, guitarists cover difficult solos, and the able is fetishized at the expense of the unable. That all of this can exist simultaneously on a platform establishes that, despite the freedom to sound however one likes, musical performers often turn to emulate the familiar music industry approved. Technologies like YouTube allow for the illusion of creativity for the masses, while at the same time monitoring and maintaining that hierarchies of musical excellence – always predicated on ruling class and capitalist imperatives – are firmly in place.

Insisting on musical capability has also had an unintended consequence. For

² John Corbett, “Free, Single, and Disengaged: Listening Pleasure and the Popular. Music Object,” *October*, Vol. 54 (Autumn, 1990).

³ I am thinking particularly of *American Idol*’s William Hung here.

every exquisite cover of a Rihanna song is its bad twin, a warbling, tone deaf, “pitchy” version. These are failures seemingly only on the part of ego, and simultaneously fracture and reaffirm aesthetic consensus and consciousness. The listener is more often than not left with little to do but compare and be found wanting.

In the case of contemporary poor cover versions, the impulse to perform outweighs the impossibility of rising to aesthetic challenges. This is indicative of contemporary capitalist mandates towards constant production, but also has some historical precedence with the singer Florence Foster Jenkins (1868-1944), blissfully unaware of her tone deafness, mocked discreetly by her social circle, and later exploited as novelty in a burgeoning musical market for failure. As Francesca Britten writes, this market thrives on masking failure as success, an impulse born as a means to satiate the alienated who might feel promises of American upward mobility as impossible: “deficiency and prosperity might go hand in hand.”⁴ It matters little that there is no calculus of profitability in the market for musical incompetence, as long as this illusion that failure is impossible is maintained. To this end, there is no such thing as a non-musician, only the musically deferred, temporarily embarrassed tone deaf.

On the other end of the spectrum there are vernacular strands of less than capable musicians who prove popular in major music industries, such as folk, punk, and hip hop. The seeming authenticity of this music, based on class values that deny virtuosity as unnecessary or anathema to expression, gives it its drive. That these genres have existed long enough in cultural zeitgeists to craft their own markers of aesthetic acceptability is a testament to neoliberal capitalism’s deftness at restructuring capability. On account of this, vernacular non-musicianship more often

⁴ Francesca Britten, “Cultures of Musical Failure,” in Sara Crangle and Peter Nicholls, eds. *On Bathos: Literature, Art, Music*, London: Bloomsbury, 2010, 126.

than not exists under the pretense of its former authenticity, tributary to the anti-virtuosity of the past.

For the truly musically incompetent, working naively, actively embracing their deficiencies, or deskilling to imagine a new set of skills (re-skilling), their place is typically out of sight. This accounts for the feverish cult of noise music, experimentalism, improvisation, and the truly strange hybrids that arise from eschewing musical idiom. Performances by these types of acts typically (but not exclusively) occur in low capacity bars, apartments, squats, backyards, street corners, on cheap homemade audio, or buried on the internet. Independent record labels, journalists, academics, or art galleries discover or excavate these often strange or forgotten acts, almost always dismissed in their time, and re-present their work almost as relics of a forgotten moment. The non-musician of this type is akin to what Gregory Sholette terms “dark matter,” the wretched of the marketplace who “self-consciously choose to work on the outer margins of the mainstream art world for reasons of social, economic, and political critique...embrac[ing] their own structural redundancy” and their efforts are often excavated, repackaged, and re-presented to this niche market via an interested intermediary who wishes, for any number of ambitions or reasons, to resuscitate them.⁵

That non-musicians often appear in subterranean materials and places is significant in what these appearances say about the conditions of such marginalization. On one hand, the significant gains of the 1960s to legitimize borderline practices – performance, conceptual, music, non-specialized – opened art institutions (at times begrudgingly) up to accept a variety of practices that might

⁵ Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter*, New York: Pluto Press, 2011, 4. I am thinking particularly of the recent trend of reissuing long out of print and deep cut cult records by labels such as Numero Group or Light in the Attic. A relevant example of such an act could be a group such as The Shaggs, a trio of musically untrained sisters forced to be a pop band through the desperate ambitions of their father. However, using Sholette’s schema, it could just as easily be a group who made willfully market-resistant music.

have had little legibility as capital “A” art prior to the 1970s. On the other, this expanded definition of art lead less to greater artistic liberation than it did toward a refinement of what these myriad of practices might look like.

The institution of art, creates the illusion of being an all accepting entity - to artists, students, and the general public - but in reality is a fickle curator.⁶ The reaction to this capriciousness of the art institution materialized in, of course, more art, but also an alternative venue of showcase. Indebted to, but markedly distinct from the salons of the 19th and early 20th century, apartments, store fronts, lofts, garages, and any other number of ramshackle space were recalibrated as bunkers to challenge the primacy of major art exhibition. These various sites were often run by artists, organized with little financial security, and prized friendship economies over market imperatives of sale and scale.

That by the 1990s these venues seemed to do little more than mirror the various institutions they meant to provide respite from, is a testament to the sea change in artist priorities following the 1980s. As Lane Relyea writes, by the 1990s, the rise of neoliberalism seemed to have successfully absorbed the institutional criticality of artists – and by virtue their venues meant to challenge the institution – and this was evidenced by their various practices and organizations that seemed to have “the very attributes that today’s dominant system so loudly promotes.”⁷

Yet, on the other hand, neoliberal concepts of perpetual productivity have not given rise to any barometer of market success to much of this class of DIY art practitioners. Sharing attributes of dominant systems does not necessarily equate to

⁶ We can quote from Sholette again to make this point clearer: “Consider the structural invisibility of most professional trained artists whose very underdevelopment is essential to normal art world functions. Without this obscure mass of ‘failed’ artists the small cadre of successful artists would find it difficult, if not impossible, to sustain the global art world as it appears today.” *Dark Matter*, 2-3.

⁷ Lane Relyea, *Your Everyday Art World*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013, 12. On the converse, Relyea also argues, that museums and galleries adopted strategies of organization and presentation from loose artist run and DIY spaces. We can see a corollary here with Corbett’s notion that the music industry often profits (financially, critically, and institutionally) from signing and broadly marketing smaller groups and acts.

a direct corollary (“startups” although lifting the vernacular and appearance of DIY are not DIY). This is particularly true of the non-musician, whose thorniness often means that they are ephemeral, have zero market potential, and resist pat classification that allows any easy calculus of institutional support. If the rise of the alternative exhibition space put into greater clarity how artists simply mimic global capital mandates (and vice versa), it also magnified to an even greater extent just who or what wasn’t fit for such a rubric: the disabled, the conceptually hermetic, woefully ephemeral, poorly produced, willfully strange, or the entirely unwilling and unable to engage with any proscriptions on activity. Again, everything *can* theoretically be a part of the art system per capitalism’s reimagining of the American dream, but in reality, everything certainly is not.

The simultaneous prevalence and dismissal of “dark matter” types of creators, with the non-musician being one of them, is noted as a feature of industrialization in Luigi Russolo’s Futurist classic, *The Art of Noises* (1913). In this text, Russolo writes, “sound, foreign to life, always a musical, outside thing, has come to strike our ears no more than an overly familiar face does our eye. Noise, gushing confusedly and irregularly out of life, is never totally revealed to us and it keeps in store innumerable surprises for our benefit.”⁸ The noises that Russolo referred to were of the everyday – department store doors, shoes on pavement, factory sounds – and his ambition in this text was to spur musicians and artists to “conquer” such sounds, to reproduce (and thus normalize) the uniqueness of this noise. Daily life would come to the music stage and the enterprise of music would be confused within daily life.

In his text, Russolo, states, “I am not a musician” but a painter who “projects on a profoundly loved art his will to renew everything.”⁹ Russolo is wholly “unpreoccupied” with his “apparent incompetence” in his pursuit toward “the

⁸ Luigi Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, New York: Something Else Press/Great Bear, 1967.

⁹ Ibid.

renovation of music,” and his conceiving of performing music this way foresees developments towards sonic and musical performance considerations in the 20th century. This could be a music for the people, if the people could just hear it.

In a way, Russolo was one of the first of the non-musicians: treating his anti-virtuosity as a creative virtue and considering a workable concept as a challenge towards aesthetic norms.¹⁰ In August of 1913, Russolo performed a concert with his buzzers, bursters, thunderers, whistlers, rustlers, gurglers, snorters, shatterers, and shrillers, that, rather than simply replicate the noises of the world created something altogether “unforeseen and like nothing but itself.” Despite the excitement in the discovery of unforeseen musical forms, Russolo could not have predicted the general ambivalence towards this new way of hearing. Non-music and the non-musician, as Russolo illustrates, can grace the world with sonic variables and new ways of thinking about the composition and performing of music. The artistic innovations spurred by this type of thinking and activity have without question had a profound effect that, as this dissertation shows, ripples into all kinds of different forms. However, the effect of these innovations didn’t mean the general public would want to hear it.

By the mid-1960s, both a renewal of Marcel Duchamp’s strategies of selection as a valid means of art production (Pop Art, Fluxus, Minimalism, junk art) and more liberal interpretations of experimental composer John Cage’s (Russolo informed) ideas became fixtures of vanguard practices in the arts and these moves recalibrated and sutured music to all matter of extra-musical activity. In a 1978 letter, Brian Eno, who had by then built a career out of making conceptual pop music, reflected on this formal sonic shift in music during this period: “any type of noise was by now,

¹⁰ We might also give this title to composer Erik Satie, who claimed: “They will tell you I am not a musician. That’s right...take the Fils de Etoiles or the Morceaux en forme de poire, En habit de cheval or the Sarabandes, it is clear no musical idea presided at the creation of these works.” Erik Satie quoted in John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan, 1961, 79.

acceptable concert material.”¹¹ Noise had been “conquered” as “acceptable” in one network but still remained wholly unacceptable to the general public. Thus, the networks where non-musicians and non-music live simultaneously illustrate their potential and limited potential.

By 1980, noise had become slowly translated or assimilated into vernacular practice. This happened through a lot of independent factors: the prominence of the LP – the shift from notation to listening as musical communication – the staggering dividends of the music industry’s engaging with the youth market after World War II allowing for rock and roll, and the refinement of that form’s initial simplicity through the translating of vanguard practices. Counterculture slowly transmogrified into dominant culture, art into pop, and the occasional outlier, such as Laurie Anderson’s “O Superman,” or Phillip Glass’ *Songs from Liquid Days* were inexplicable hits. Yet neither Anderson nor Glass were non-musicians. The closest thing to market success for the musically untrained was with the success of punk, which, despite a shared attribute of anti-virtuosity, often had a clear ear for melody.

Today, we might see the reconfiguring of the potential of the non-musician to find music that was “nothing but itself” as a repositioning of non-specialized knowledge within a capitalist territory. However, the mixed dividends of this pursuit, both in artistic and economic terms, suggests that a critique of the non-musician’s role in dominant culture can be difficult to parse out. The non-musician’s enigmatic activity and freedom to explore and operate outside of the art world and capitalist production has and does offer a tactical riposte to demands of use value in both networks. On the other hand, the non-musician’s lack of musical capability is justified through conceptual strategies useful for the creating and proliferating of more and more forms. When playing a guitar out of tune becomes just another

¹¹ Brian Eno letter to Stafford Beer (1978) in Christopher Scoates, ed. *Brian Eno: Visual Music*, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2013, 101.

acceptable node in a market, it becomes a “renovation” at the service of constant rebirthing, of selling a spectrum of more and more things.

But also, perhaps paradoxically, the myriad of forms that come out of the near infinite variables inherent in performing non-specialized knowledge, as with the non-musician, reflect the many aspects of life suppressed by capitalist imperatives. The playing of a guitar incorrectly, singing out of tune, starting a band to spend time with friends, performing badly in public all have written on them the history of the performer. These histories have to do with class, race, gender, education, leisure, play, the social, and, of course, all other manner of oppression.

The non-musician can thus share a network of resistance and shared histories. The intersection of this network comes at the point of the body as a site of refusal and provokes new translations of musical activity. Music seems to start over from zero, and in these shambolic efforts come new discussions and debates over what constitutes artistic efficacy. This pursuit of new musical forms can take shape as a performer’s overindulging in their search for freedom but also, as guitarist Davey Williams writes, can create “a power relationship in which a construct of ‘freedom’ is generated by power and simultaneously regenerates that power.”¹² To that end, Corbett imagines that musical performances eschewing idioms (and thus hierarchies of musical capability) “develop and employ a repertoire of possibilities,” one not content with simply being a free-for-all, but a real desire to explore new, but not always visible, modes of sociality.¹³

The contradictory nature of searching for the social through these networks of resistance, often hidden and out of sight, demonstrates Hannah Arendt’s idea that real change happens daily, but that change may not be immediately visible: “What

¹² Davy Williams in John Corbett, “Ephemera Underscored: Writing Around Free Improvisation,” Ken Gabbard, ed. *Jazz Among the Discourses*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1995, 221.

¹³ Corbett, “Ephemera Underscored,” 221.

the public realm considers irrelevant can have such an extraordinary and infectious charm that a whole people may adopt it as their way of life, without, for that reason changing its essentially private character.”¹⁴ Musical hobbyists or amateur players, the home piano tinkerer or the shower singer, all have a shared public intimacy, one that is wholly known in its generalization (see: the singing into a hairbrush motif in TV shows and movies) but are hardly desired for major performance. When the non-musician moves these otherwise private affairs into a network that has no space for such activity, its “essentially private character” doesn’t change per se, but it may catch on with a select few. Thus, the non-musician, as ambivalent as their reception and definition may be, nonetheless has spurred and actualized a number of historical ideas and moves, and it is in their very porousness that their potency remains.

The photographs above are culled from the book, *Playing the Violin: An Illustrated Guide* (2006), written by Mark Rush with photos by Dana Duke. What is striking about the photographs from this meticulously illustrated book for beginning violinists, is that, when removed from their equally scrupulous instructional captions, the little gestures, postures, fingers and hands expanding and contracting, read as something different, almost a kind of minor gesture dance. Like dancer and choreographer Yvonne Rainer’s emphasis on the muscles of the body when contacting others and objects or the artist and filmmaker Vsevolod Meyerhold’s biomechanical Constructivist movements, born from his desire to comprehend the body’s location during industrialization, Duke’s photos, when isolated from their purpose, explicate the great lengths, fashioning, and conditioning the body must endure to play the violin. Presenting these photos as documentation, and not instruction, magnifies the body’s relationship to best playing an instrument, and thus its relationship to social constructions.

¹⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958/2018, 52.

That so much of *Playing the Violin* is dedicated, as the photographs show to posture and the proper handling of the instrument, indicates there is indeed a *way* to play and a way *not* to play. Part of this has to do with injury – twisting the neck and contorting the upper body is hard on the muscles of a violinist - while the other part is about discipline. The historic baggage of playing the violin demands a form of punishment, attaining the beauty of its sound requires sacrificing the comfort, at least at the beginning, of one's familiar bodily movements. It is not hard to see the connections between the often unruly and discomforting movements required in dances such as Rainer's (or much endurance performance about the limits of the body). But what I want to think about here is what Michel Foucault called a "meticulous meshing" of the body and its encounter with manipulating an object.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault writes that discipline meticulously refashions the body, not just physically but socially. The body becomes part of a patchwork at the service of something else's demands, which reduces its capabilities and also makes it inextricably connected to the thing with which it interacts. Examples of this are most easily observed in the early 20th century, as Fordism and Taylorism sought to standardize human movement for the sake of maximum efficiency (lampooned to great effect in Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* and evidenced in Frank and Lillian Gilbreth's chronophotographic experiments documenting human movement). In Taylorism and Fordism, scientific research was being conducted (and later enacted) to machinate the human assembly line, to literally discipline the body to mimic a machine.

The fervent desire to maximize efficiency in body movement in order to circumvent mistakes - to ostensibly create automatons - is a shared attribute of both the assembly line worker and the professionalized musician. While there are differences of scale, both operate on a schema of formalized instruction, gestures emptied at the service of a finalized product intended for someone else (often a

consumer): the automobile or an aesthetic expression from the musical instrument. To be clear, this is not to say that professionalization, technique, or skillful performing cannot be at the service of artistic expression or is simply a formulaic process solely at the whims of power. However, we cannot ignore certain industries of education and tradition that limit the greater potentials of artistic expression by insisting on artistic homogeneity, i.e. music must sound and look a certain way, and to get there requires a reconfiguring of bodily gestures.

An immediate distinction between maximizing movement on the assembly line and training one's body to properly handle a musical instrument is largely elective: one's role as a cog in manufacturing a car often comes out of necessity (which is to not to discount those who might enjoy such work) while the playing of a musical instrument more often than not is born from desire, to think "I want to do/express that" (which is not to discount those forced to learn to play an instrument). Following this distinction, we can return to scale and mistake: when discipline is scaled down to intimate moments such as the communion between player and instrument, which is to say presence (we hear the fruits of musical playing and say "I want to do/express that," while an assembly line is almost always behind closed doors) a kind of universal relationship predicated on power is troubled in that one can opt to revel in mistakes. Again, while it is certainly true that artistic reveling can occur at the level of technique and skill, that virtuosity can lead to new and unexpected forms, I am interested here in why we culturally defer to the virtuosic or the technically proficient over the mistake makers, why a certain type of musical process is favored while another is generally scorned.

Mistakes can occur on account of the limits of capability. Attaining mastery means surpassing "good," "good enough," "unable," or "unwilling." When professionalization, largely the *raison d'être* for "how to play" books, is disregarded, the bodily meshing becomes less meticulous. Either for politics, critique, or inability,

a refusal of conditioning comes when one finds the demands required to properly play an instrument optional. What can possibly emerge out of this refusal is the constituting of new or unexpected processes. Perhaps most importantly, this refusal denies power's inquest for automation in that such a refusal is not predictable, is undisciplined, and largely un-useful for even creative capital.

Let's consider for example a series of stock photographs from someone named omkar a.v., that feature two different models playing the violin. Even for someone with no real knowledge of the violin, it does not take much imagination to see that the playing on display here is illusory. The titles might give this away with their adjectives: "glamorous," "teenage," "young," and "beautiful." Look at the absurd gestures in these photographs. The violin seems not to rest but leap off the model's shoulders. The violin bow, held haphazardly, seems to nearly miss jutting into the model's cheek. The facial expressions, almost grimacing, menacing, eyes popping out of the faces, hint at wild musical activity. Each model seems to be holding their respective instrument with a flagrant disregard for propriety, and if these photographs were culled from a live performance, we might imagine a concert of reckless abandon.

Skeptics will hone-in on that "might" in that last sentence. Here, "might" is right, as these photographs are not performance documentation, or even "art" in that hallowed designation we usually reserve for more thoughtfully composed or chosen visual entities. These are stock images, and with that title comes a specific function of use (the coveted "license"). But where would these images possibly find a place to exist outside of the internet? A music textbook? A musical retreat? It's unfathomable that any of these images could be used to represent musical playing, and this is maybe where their value might be found: imagine these images making up a "how to play the violin" book - what strange combinations of musical activity might take place if one were to learn from the clearly untrained?

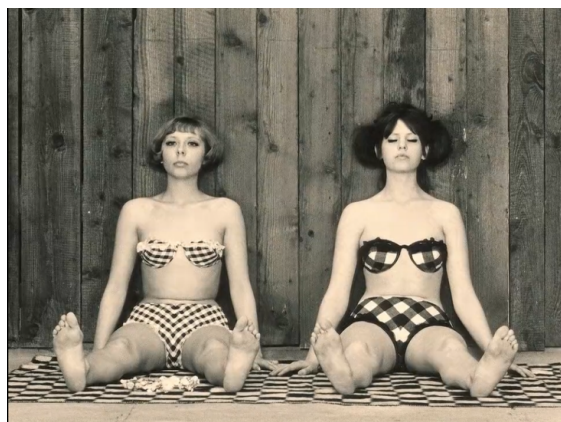


Figure 1 Stills from *Daisies* (1966) dir. Vera Chytilova.



Fig. 11: Arri Up of The Slits proclaiming, "We're not musicians!" From Caroline Coon, "White Riot on the Road," *Melody Maker*, June 25th, 1977. Collection of the author.

Introduction:
Non-Musicians and Non-Music

Playing Music Badly in Public explores the significance of the “non-musician” within musical practices of the 1970s, a time when ideas from the conceptual and performance arts traversed their way into vernacular music practices. What emerges from this study is a detailed look at how a generation of young art students in the 1970s negotiated the counter-knowledges inherent in both networks of experimental and pop music making, recasting and framing the respective musical expectations in these two different fields.

While there have been a number of studies that have charted the shift from art to pop during this period, none have specifically focused on the role of the “non-musician,” a tendentious, thorny, and contradictory term. Despite the openness of the term, it nonetheless was ubiquitous by the end of the 1980s in music magazines and media. In a 1989 article for *Music Technology* attempting to define the non-musician, writer Tom Goodyer notes: “The term non-musician has become almost as common (if not as acceptable) as that of musician these days.”¹

In the early 1960s “non-musician” was a less common – and thus, loaded – term. On September 9, 1962, two graduate students – Philip Krumm and Robert Sheff – put on a concert at the San Antonio Music Company Recital Hall titled “A Concert of Music Without Notes.” The works performed were, as Krumm’s introductory notes explain, “compositions by contemporary composers which utilize verbal instructions for their performance rather than the standard system of notation.”² The verbal instruction score, also known as (although not necessarily interchangeably) Word Events, Event Scores, text instructions, and verbal scores, were a 20th century innovation, originating from impulses to

¹ Tom Goodyer, “The Art of Repetition,” *Music Technology*, November 1989.

² Philip Krumm, “Music Without Notes,” program notes, 1962. It is unclear where Krumm and Sheff got the written scores, although it is likely through personal correspondence.

emancipate what constitutes musical sound, and to expand and experiment with how music gets written and performed.

At “Music Without Notes,” Krumm and Sheff sat silently at a grand piano (John Cage, 4’33” *for a Piano*, 1952), gently plucked a small plastic men’s comb (George Brecht, *Comb Music*, 1952), and did a number of extramusical activities for Gordon Mumma’s *Four Part Music* (ca. 1960) that instructed a performer to:

1. Do anything you want
2. Do anything
3. Anything
4. Any¹

Cage’s and Brecht’s works at “Music Without Notes” exemplified the non-musical use of musical instruments and the musical use of non-musical instruments. Compositions such as Mumma’s focused attention on the performative act – within or adjacent to – of musical performance.² Scores such as these invited performer interpretation, and although some performers were hesitant about all this instructional demanding, many understood these compositions as a means to enact creatively their given prompts. The looseness of the verbal score form, simultaneously disassembling and reassembling notation as poetry, performance prompt, reconsideration of conventional sound and music, and even the experience of time and space, lead to a number of differing and disparate approaches to composing and performing by those wanting to reconsider the making of music and art.

Public performances of verbal scores, were often met with incredulousness, condescension, and baffled laughter by the general public. These public reactions were not entirely unexpected given the often-absurd gestures and activities that came out of such performances. A 1962 editorial on Krumm’s text accompanying “A Concert of Music Without Notes” in the *San Antonio Express* begins:

¹ Gordon Mumma, “Four Part Music” reprinted in *generation*, Winter 1965, University of Ann Arbor. I have formatted the score’s text here to match its appearance in *generation*.

² This was particularly true of the score to La Monte Young, “Composition 1960 No. 13 for Richard Huelsenbeck, 1960,” that reads “The performer should prepare for any composition and then perform it as well as he can.”

We like a good joke as well as the next one and one of the good jokes of the week is the one that goes like this: 'Whether what is in...[Music Without Notes] is music or not is not up to the reader or the listener, but rather the composer to know and realize.' When you have stopped laughing, we'll explain.³

Setting aside the author's punchline necessitating explanation, the editorial proceeds to take umbrage with Krumm's suggestion that "what the listener hears doesn't matter." "When a composer says that what the listener hears doesn't matter," the editorial continues, "he is claiming more independence than a composer can justly claim."⁴ This is a valid critique given the norms of what composers typically do, but one that nonetheless misses the goal of the type of compositions being performed at "Music Without Notes," and to some extent verbal scoring altogether: this was not music solely for the ear, but an experiment in the possibilities of music making, which is to say, extra aural.

Thus, the editorial headline, "And Non-Music" while meant as disparagement, was entirely apt in describing what kind of musical compositions were performed at "Music Without Notes." Verbal compositions, and later graphic scores, were "non-music" in that they recalibrated conventional musical activity from the system of notation to the concept of what sounds constituted music. Some of these scores required studied musicians to realize, but just as many could theoretically be performed by anyone, a lasting effect of John Cage's compositional influence. It is this latter allowance that marks an early corollary between vanguard and vernacular modes of musical activity, not at the sounding level but in the act of developing modes of musical expression that disregarded requisites of musical training.

A guitarist for a rock group did not need to know how to read music, but to act from an intuitive sense of what did and didn't work for their musical situation, and this could also be true of the verbal text performer. A leitmotif (or repeating melody) in this dissertation is the act of deskilling, a purposeful abandoning of formal training to enact an unexpected or

³ "And Non-Music," *San Antonio Express*, September 6th, 1962.

⁴ Ibid.

uncontrolled artistic expression. It would be disingenuous to call rock music “deskilled classical music,” even if it borrows from conventional Western musical structures. Nonetheless, there were plenty of trained musicians who recalibrated their musical capabilities to suit the format of rock. This was equally true in the world of performance and experimental music making, with professionally trained musicians and composers of the 1960s disassembling their musical training to explore other forms and creative possibilities.⁵ Thus, as much as this might be de-skilling, it becomes in this transitional act a matter of re-skilling, of learning a new way through the forgoing (or mutating) of the old. This is what Krumm is speaking about when he states that “non-music” was for the “composer to know and realize”: performing “non-music” was a process of both self-edification and displaying public knowledge, one that suggested new ideas could come about when willing to learn from the “unlearned.”

George Brecht, a non-musician who worked as a research chemist for Mobil, Johnson and Johnson, and Pfizer, is an exemplar of this idea, as many of the academy trained music educators and their students discussed in this dissertation found a profound educational system in his scores, works, and ideas. Brecht took Cage’s “Experimental Music” course at the New School of Social Research in 1959, which had been taught by Cage since 1956. The class course description read: “A course in musical composition with technical, musicological, and philosophical aspects, open to those with or without previous training.”⁶ Although Cage permitted trained and untrained to take his course, his seeming preference was for the latter. Class alumni and artist Al Hansen recalled his first in-class interaction with Cage:

J.C.: "And what instruments do you play?"
Al: "None."
J.C.: "But you've composed music?"
Al: "No."
J.C.: "But you can read music?"

⁵ Examples include video artist Nam June Paik, Fluxus artist Benjamin Patterson, and experimental cellist Charlotte Moorman.

⁶ “EXPERIMENTAL COMPOSITION, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 6:00-7:50PM, beginning June 24, \$27 (Reg. fee: pg. 6), John Cage.” In *New School Bulletin*, Vol. 15, No. 32 (Summer, 1958), 31.

Al: "No."

J.C.: (Beginning to smile as if delighted) "So, you can't read or write music and you don't play any instrument..."

Al: "I can remember music, popular tunes, I could whistle a tune or sing a song...But you could blow a pitch pipe all day long and if I got any Do, Re Mi's right, it would be an accident."

J.C.: "Well, I think that's wonderful..." He waved his arm at the class, "They know an awful lot, and I'll have a problem unteaching them...but you don't know anything, so you have nothing to unlearn. I think we'll get along fine."⁷

"Unteaching," was Cage's teaching methodology. This was not to say that he was an anti-educator, but rather came from the position of teaching the music academy trained how to use their education otherwise. Those without formal music educations, such as Brecht or Hansen, were students with great potential for Cage, as he viewed them as relatively more open to his unconventional musical ideas (as they had nothing to unlearn). Some of those ideas were to do with reconsidering music's formal fixity: if music was a collection of sounds, then why do we not consider the pattering of water drops from a faucet onto the metal drain of a porcelain bathroom sink as music? The sounds of everyday life were an indeterminate, but nonetheless time-based form, full of varying timbres and tempos, and, riffing on Russolo's "Noise Sounds" of 1913, Cage believed that these sounds were not only music, but could be "conquered" by a musical composer and performer as such.⁸

Brecht finished Cage's class having invented the Event Score, a type of composing that did not use any musical notation, but nonetheless was concerned with musical matters such as time and timbre. Reflecting both Brecht's lack of formal musical training and the lessons he learned from Cage, Event Scores did not require any expertise to interpret, making them relatively easy to be performed by anyone willing to engage with them. It is perhaps on account of this relative accessibility that Event Scores caught on as a workable form in the early 1960s, their format most notably being utilized by those affiliated with

⁷ Al Hansen, "Notes on a Mini Retrospective," <http://www.alhansen.net/mini.htm> Accessed March 28th, 2020.

⁸ I am unsure if Cage would have liked the term "conquering" given his strong sentiments against authority, and perhaps "generated" would be a better word. Cage nonetheless made the capturing of the aleatory attributes of the extramusical world a significant part of his musical practice.

Fluxus, a loose international group of performers, musicians, and artists, bound (barely) by a collective impulse to engage with a type of expanded arts practice.

Fluxus impresario George Maciunas' publishing of Brecht's Event Scores in a collected edition – *Water Yam* (1963) – coincided with the publication of composer La Monte Young and poet Jackson MacLow's edited book collecting a variety of work done by adventurous musicians and artists, *An Anthology of Chance Operations, Concept Art, Anti-Art, Indeterminacy, Plans Of Action, Diagrams, Music, Dance Constructions, Improvisation, Meaningless Work, Natural Disasters, Compositions, Mathematics, Essays, Poetry* (1963). The former was a boxed collection of Brecht's Event Scores reprinted on small paper cards, the latter was a bound book that was nonetheless dizzying both in its formal design and its breadth of content and contributors (as its title suggests). Although both were self-published in small editions, these objects circulated their way into the hands of experimentally minded or curious artists, musicians, and, particularly in England, teachers.

Following a turn toward a more progressive and experimental model of pedagogy in the English arts education system that began in the early 1960s, a strand of adventurous composers and musicians, shunned by most music conservatories, found themselves teaching at fine arts colleges. Composer educators such as Gavin Bryars (Portsmouth College of Art, Leicester Polytechnic), Cornelius Cardew (Royal Academy of Music, Morley College), Michael Nyman (Kings College, Trent Polytechnic), and Michael Parsons (Slade School of Art, Portsmouth College of Art), found warm reception to their ideas from the visual arts students who populated their classes, classrooms, and visiting lectures.⁹ Like Cage, these educators taught “experimental” composition, and their musical ideas had a clear affinity with the epistemological foundations of what was considered ‘music’ in a Cagean sense. However, these educators expanded upon Cage's immediate influence by

⁹ Cornelius Cardew taught experimental music classes at the Royal Academy of Music and Morley College. Of the Morley class Cardew notes that “the class ran for five years with up to 20 or 30 people involved – musical amateurs, avantgardists [sp] from the visual arts, music students (some from the Royal Academy of Music).” In Cornelius Cardew, *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*. New York: Primary Information, 2020/1974, 105. Bryars, Parsons, and Tilbury all taught at Portsmouth College of Art, and Nyman taught at Trent Polytechnic.

honing in on the potentials of performer interpretation, a tendency no doubt informed by their experiences among musical improvisation (shunned by Cage). What emerged by the late 1960s in England, was a Post-Cagean aesthetic, one that favored performer interpretation over Cage's preference of musical composing sans performer ego.

Brecht (who also taught at Leeds College of Art in England briefly in the late 1960s) and his work was extremely important to these composer educators, with Cardew praising *Water Yam* as "a course of study, and following on that, a teaching instrument."¹⁰ Tilbury, Bryars, and Parsons all taught this publication (and *An Anthology*) in their classrooms, and Nyman included Brecht (along with the entirety of Fluxus musical activity) as fundamental to English experimentalism in his canonizing book on musical currents of the 1960s and early 1970s, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (1974). That these composer educators, all academically trained, turned to Brecht, an untrained musician who dismantled the locus of musical activity, as a pedagogical and compositional model, not only gives a sense of their shared aims to contest and reconsider the making of music, but also their deep interest in moving the tenets of art making into the hands of everyday people.

Yet, acting upon a utopic impulse to make music more generally accessible in terms of composition and performance was a double-edged sword. Having untrained musicians performing in public despite their limited capabilities or performing a piece of music on a small plastic comb, indeed suggested that the tenets of musical performance had been made more accessible. However, this very openness towards musical performance meant that the music itself would be quite unconventional, and thus, largely inaccessible to a general audience. This catch-22 - music for all that was difficult to listen to and understand - was precisely the problem that a young Brian Eno, a visual art student who turned his attention to conceptual music, took to in the early 1970s.

¹⁰ Cornelius Cardew in Thomas Kellein, Julia Robinson, George Brecht, eds. *George Brecht: Works from 1959-1973*, New York: Gagosian Gallery, 2004.

Brian Peter George St. John le Baptiste de la Salle George Eno was born in Suffolk in 1948. After studying Fine Arts at Ipswich Civic College and Winchester School of Art, he moved to London where he became a collaborator and friend to many experimentally minded artists and musicians around the city. Eno performed with the mixed ability ensemble the Scratch Orchestra, assisted the painter and composer Tom Phillips, and photocopied scores and ephemera for Gavin Bryars. Upon his joining the rock band Roxy Music in 1970, Eno scaled up experimental music ideas he had come in contact with both in and outside of school, to complement and complicate the notion of a rock band, feeding his bandmate's instruments through a synthesizer and playing audio tape loops.

As Roxy Music became a massive success in England, Eno's methods became fodder for great press attention. It was during these halcyon days of Roxy Music that Eno first publicly stated that he was a "non-musician," an identity that was prevalent – if not ill defined – in experimental music practices in England at the time but had little explicit exposure in rock music. For Eno, the "non-musician" term was built upon his belief, again coming from experimental music practices, that skill was not necessary to play music, that all one needed were ideas and a willingness to try them. Departing Roxy Music in 1973, he embarked on a solo career that continued to fine tune this position. Although author Geeta Dayal writes that Eno's "whole 'non-musician' claim seems a little bit trumped up in retrospect," it is nonetheless a concept he returned to again and again, in print and in practice, for the first decade of his career.

First appearing in print during his early days "treating" musical instruments in Roxy Music, there have been literally hundreds of articles in the ensuing decades that probe Eno's own self-dubbing as a "non-musician." In 1974: "A determinedly intellectual non-musician"; 1985: "Much as he considers himself a non-musician (and relishes the fact), he is also a non-technician"; 1996: "How did this self-proclaimed non-musician so profoundly affect three decades of music?"; 2009: "the ostrich feather bedecked 'non-musician'..."; 2019: "Eno

describes himself as a ‘non-musician’...”.¹¹ The “non-musician,” for Eno, was conceptualized out of two burgeoning late-1960s forms of musical literacy: new conceptions of reading and writing notation and learning to play music by listening to (and emulating) pop records. Eno could be musically literate in both of these modes, and his envisioning of a corollary of these two literacies is what made his position novel within the conventional music world, if not still an anomaly (as the ongoing press fascination with Eno as non-musician attests) today.

Playing Music Badly in Public is an expansive look at the non-musician, and Eno’s sentiments on what being a non-musician entails guides the emphasis I place on the term throughout this dissertation. However, *Playing Music Badly in Public* uses the format of centering a study around a lauded figure as a means to de-center canonical assumptions. This dissertation is about Eno’s *effect* on a network and vice versa. In the 1970s, Eno translated conceptual music and art into rock bands, solo albums, a deck of cards to break creative blocks, his own experimental music label, video art, producing LPs for up and coming artists, and through hundreds and hundreds of interviews in widely circulated rock magazines and newspapers. There is no denying Eno’s impact on a wide range of musical and artistic activity in the 1970s, and this dissertation uses the concept of the ‘non-musician’ to look at a small axis of what that impact might have been, and how his associations, connections, and affinities shaped or misshaped certain networks of activity.

All of this is to say that of all the “non-musicians” that might appear in a study like this, Eno would be the one with the highest profile (I would only imagine second to Yoko Ono). What further makes Eno a compelling figure here is his presence within three different networks of non-musicians. In the Scratch Orchestra, he participated in public performances, was present for their sole (official) recording of “Paragraph 2” and “Paragraph

¹¹ Martin Hayman, “Dancing with Mr. E,” *Sounds*, February 9, 1974; Andrew Warde, “Eno on Eno,” *Option*, November/December, 1985; Michael Fremer, “Brian Eno: Perfect Masters Thrive on Disasters,” *The Tracking Angle*, Spring, 1996; Gustavo Turner, “Brian Eno Can Still Walk Into a Porno Store Undisturbed (And Other Thoughts on Art, Criticism, and Airports),” *The Boston Phoenix*, September 29, 2009; Far Out Staff, “Watch Brian Eno explain the loss of humanity in modern music in 36 seconds,” November 28, 2019. <https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/brian-eno-loss-of-humanity-in-modern-music/>.

7” for Deutsche Grammophon, and would write a widely circulated essay underpinning the group’s theoretical possibilities as he saw them;¹² he performed with the Portsmouth Sinfonia (1972-74), a classical orchestra with the performer pre-requisite that one could not be familiar with their chosen musical instrument, often bringing their recordings along with him during press junkets, and producing their first two LPs; used his celebrity and music/art credentials to procure major label backing to produce *No New York*, a compilation record of select “No Wave” – a raucous, loosely bound group of mostly visual artists playing, by virtue of capability, deconstructed rock music – while living in New York City. Eno produced the public translations of the groups, speaking for these collectives either through interviews, writings, or record production.

Playing Music Badly in Public looks at these three groups of non-musician activity – The Scratch Orchestra, The Portsmouth Sinfonia, and the No Wave scene – through their various translations by Eno. The aim here is twofold: to understand what these groups might have been doing to bolster Eno’s own forays into non-musicianship and also how they might have been publicly considered, translated, and repositioned by others through Eno’s own works and thoughts on them. Eno’s role as a kind of spokesperson, or at the very least more public face for these groups, is the locus of this study.

Bruno Latour’s Actor Network Theory (ANT) defines networks as the various labors, entities, and materials coalescing to make a group of people and ideas into a recognizable and tangible thing. The complex of non-musicians of this study is ideal for this form of analysis. In light of ANT’s adherence to the tireless study of a set of social and ideational relationships, it is tempting to say that intention and consciousness play little to no part in a study of a network of associations. Because this study is centered around the conscious intention of non-musicians to engage in musical activities publicly this study also

¹² “Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts” first appeared in *Studio International* 984 (Nov/Dec 1976) 279-83; repr. in *Breaking the Sound Barrier: A Critical Anthology of the New Music*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1981) 129-141; repr. in *Systems*, ed. Edward A. Shanken (London: Whitechapel Gallery & Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015) 166-171.

shows the limits of ANT. This simple display of subverting conventions of professional expectations – “professionalism means you’re being protected from the truth!” went one late 1970s rallying cry – touches on broader artistic, social and political implications, coalescing by the early 1980s as arguably a general cultural tendency in its own right.¹³

In light of this focus on intention, one could debate the usefulness of ANT as a method in terms of being a guiding principle in this study. While I remain skeptical of the anti-intention tenet of ANT, I do find that ANT’s demand of the scholar to scavenge for how differences get made in a network via a host of critics, historians, marketers, recordings, and of course, the performers themselves to be of tremendous value. Latour says, “to say something is to say it in other words,” meaning that in ANT, the way things touch the world has to do with action, and in a network of associations, an action is always a kind of translation. The value of translation, different than the study of influence, is in how translation takes shapes in a variety of forms, media, and places. Rather than simply say “Brian Eno was influenced by Roy Ascott,” studying translation puts the scholar at the level of the minor, asking instead “Brian Eno was influenced by Roy Ascott and here is how that made that a difference in a host of other, sometimes wildly different, projects, ideas, objects, and movements.” At its best, translation can put us in conversation with the historically overlooked, seeking how meaning gets made through a variety of different interactions, a project that can be both used at the service of critique but also for the benefit of historical elucidation. How is it that we have the histories that we have?

¹³ We might go very broad and look at the US Presidential election of Ronald Reagan, a movie star espousing the need for less government intervention, as an example of this. Space prohibits a lengthy exploration of this shift, but generally, countercultural attitudes regarding the over reach of political structures became cynically weaponized by conservative elites in the United States as a means to enact private power (i.e. deregulation). With Reagan in power, government became an intuitive structure, relying on individualistic desires and feelings, rather than learned and measured governance meant to represent the needs of people/constituents. Although having some political experience as governor of California, Reagan was less useful by the Republican party for his ideas, than for his speaking capabilities, learned as an actor and skill for General Electric products. It is in this way that a “deskilled” politician could become an asset to those in power, and that liberatory ideas of freedom were taken up and exploited for the benefit of the marketplace (and thus, power). See: David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford University Press, 2007.

The action that resonates loudest in this study is the decision, by lots of people (many visual art students) to make or play music despite their technical shortcomings. ANT as a method (and less a theory) allows for us to better understand the effects of this decision by demanding that the scholar be mindful of their assumptions. While experimental music and art networks are generally considered as open – an experiment resists fixity after all – the inherent variables in musical incompetency, and the various shapes this action took, could not necessarily find a place in experimental networks.¹⁴ Thus, we are left with questions regarding the conventional wisdom of the way experimental art and music networks are formed, historicized, and exist.

Lastly, ANT is useful in helping us to understand how borderline cases like Eno, the Scratch Orchestra, the Portsmouth Sinfonia, and the No Wave groups, are made. Both rock and experimental music networks in the 1960s-70s, shared certain aesthetic traits – loudness, eschewing virtuosity, expressive gestures – and both could certainly inform the other.¹⁵ However, what has kept rock and experimental music networks separate (as well as experimental art and music networks) is less to do with aesthetic certainties, but rather the various sets of relations, labors, funding, and organizing that go into the maintaining of networks. Thus, difference is made not just on the level of intention or aesthetics, but on the various mediating factors that contribute to any set of social relations. While I diverge from the ANT idea that borderline cases – of which non-musicians often are – have little to do with human intention, I do believe that what makes them “borderline” are the various mediating factors that keep network legibility maintained. How might a rigorous study of

¹⁴ This has been particularly true in experimental networks following the 1960s-70s. Stefan Szczelkun, a non-musician who performed with the Scratch Orchestra writes, “I have huge frustration that the musicians have gone their merry way from those events with ‘pure’ music...and never invited me or other visual artist/non-musicians to be part of their performances (unless redoing Scratch pieces, and then very rarely).” Szczelkun continues that he suspects that this is to do more with economic survival rather than anything personal, which gives us a sense of how even in experimental music, there must be some sense of conceptual virtuosity if disregarding technical skill. Personal Correspondence with Stefan Szczelkun via email, February 19th, 2019.

¹⁵ For a discussion on the mutual resonances between rock and experimental music, see “Experimentalism meets in Iggy Pop” in Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

the way the non-musician has been publicly received help us to consider other possibilities when looking at the categorical imperatives of networks?

Playing Music Badly in Public is written in four chapters. The whole is divided into two sections: “The Non-Musician’s Musicians” and “The Non-Musician’s Non-Musicians.” The first section deals with Eno’s working as a non-musician with trained musicians, the latter with untrained musicians. As will be seen in this dissertation, Eno seemed to prefer working with capable musicians over those without much musical background, a curious preference given his general interest in the non-musician and performing of conceptual music. In a lengthy interview with Eno for *Wired* magazine in 1995, writer Kevin Kelly asks, “Since you’re asking musicians to forget about the history of music, why don’t you just cut to the chase and work with non-musicians?” Eno answers:

Non-musicians often respond to it much better. Because a non-musician is thrilled to be doing music and is quite happy to sit there and plunk one note all day. And is very alert to the effect of that. Non-musicians really listen sometimes, because that’s the only thing they have available to them. Musicians very often don’t listen; they work from the program, and the program says move your fingers fast or whatever... There’s an axis between musicians and non-musicians, and I tend to pick people right across the axis. Non-musicians have a certain freshness. On the other hand, of course, a really good musician will not only listen but will be able to isolate and develop whatever is peculiar and interesting about what he or she is doing. A really good musician is not embarrassed to play something simple and will play it well. Ideally, what you want to have are systems for switching you between the very different roles of creative-person-who-wants-to-try-lots-of-clever-new-tricks and listener-who-wants-a-moving-experience. In fact, pop music is extremely sponge-like in terms of the talents it uses. Pop music can absorb so many peculiar talents, ranging from the completely non-musical poser who just uses music as a kind of springboard for a sense of style, to people who just love putting all that complicated stuff together, brick by brick, on their computers, to people like me who like playing conceptual games and being surprised. I mean, calling it “music” is really sort of a mistake. It’s drama with noise.¹⁶

But people do call it “music,” and Eno was certainly collaborating with musicians, whether they were flipping their musical habits or not. Many non-musicians were also clearly not content to simply “plunk one note all day,” otherwise we could not account for the myriad of ways in which non-musicians took to performance and other activities. Eno’s own

¹⁶ Kevin Kelly, “Gossip is Philosophy,” *Wired*, May 1995.

working relationships and philosophies dealing with musicians and non, tell us much about his own ambitions, priorities, conceptual interests and even politics. Dividing this dissertation up in terms of his very different relationships between musicians and non-musicians underscores the importance of both collaboration and, as the above quote makes clear, Eno's vision of a form of musical education in the conception and production of his work.

The first chapter of this dissertation, "The Non-Musician and the Interview as Performance," begins with a meditation on the making of Eno, through his finely crafted stage persona and attitude while performing in Roxy Music. This brief section is followed by two complementing situations: Eno scaling up the practice of open performer interpretation from networks of experimentalism, particularly in the work of La Monte Young and George Brecht, into rock music; the role of cultural intermediaries, namely the rock music press, in aiding Eno in cementing his identity and ideas of the "non-musician" to a larger public. Rather than tour his music around like a conventional musical act, Eno instead went on marathon press tours, talking to journalists and reporters for hours about his ideas on art and music. He regarded these interviews as performances in their own right, and this definitional shift in the performing expectations of the musician are discussed in terms of how Eno was managed into networks of artistic activity. Although diverging slightly outside the purview of his collaborations with capable musicians, this chapter sets the stage for the rest of the dissertation, introducing Eno's own distinction between the musician and the non, and where he sees himself within this schema.

The second chapter, "Organizing and Generating: Cornelius Cardew and the Scratch Orchestra," looks at the corollaries between Cardew's efforts to create non-idiomatic music through collaborations between trained and untrained musicians alongside Eno's own. Cardew was a major influence on Eno's thinking, and The Scratch Orchestra, a massive ensemble made up largely of visual artists and musicians looking to artistically and socially experiment, would be one of his earliest public forays into performing. Despite Eno's

looking to Cardew's theories and methodologies in his own work, the two diverged quite distinctly both in practice and ideology. Both Cardew and Eno sought to teach the potentials of letting go of fixed solutions, but while the former was motivated by humanist concerns of self-edification for a better world, the latter was almost myopically focused on creating new forms of art. This exposes the key difference between two modes of heuristic utopia: one saw music as a tool for human improvement, the other saw it as a rehearsal space that revealed untapped facets of human behavior. Eno would consider Cardew and the Scratch Orchestra under this thinking in his widely published essay, "Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts," and the effects of Eno's speaking for the Scratch, empirically as a brief member, and historically as a British experimental emissary, is explored in detail.

The third and fourth chapters, which form Part Two: The Non-Musician's Non-Musicians, are "The Popular Classics: Eno and the Portsmouth Sinfonia," and "The Non-Musician in New York: Eno and *No New York*." These explore some problems that arose when non-musicians found themselves affiliated with Eno and his own network of associations. The Sinfonia's most prominent public activity was occurring adjacent to Eno's own rise as a solo artist, and how this ensemble of non-musicians working with a vernacular form like classical music fit into Eno's own self-fashioning as a non-musician are explored in detail. The No Wave groups, popping up in New York City towards the end of the 1970s, were relative to Eno at the opposite end of this spectrum, representing the influence of his own attempts at making experimental hybrid music and non-musician advocating. When Eno, a new resident of New York City at the end of the 1970s, decided to produce *No New York* (1978), a compilation of select No Wave bands, it fractured the scene and, according to musician Thurston Moore, who performed adjacent to these groups at the time, this recording "pissed everyone else off, because there were scores of other [bands]."¹⁷ Moore's

¹⁷ Thurston Moore, "Is Barbara Ess Your Real Name?," in Barbara Ess, *I Am Not This Body*, New York: Aperture, 2001, 72.

comments speak to the representational quality that *No New York* had on account of Eno's own profile, and the controversy around this perhaps inadvertently represented the last gasp of Eno's collaborations with non-musicians. Why this was, and what it meant for Eno's own artistic maturation closes out this dissertation.

I am aware of the meta-contradiction in writing a dissertation centered around Eno that aims to dissect how attention on Eno might have obscured or transformed other non-musician endeavors. Hundreds of individuals in England participated in large ensembles, orchestras, and pop groups that put musically trained and untrained on even footing. Many of these same members or ensemble leaders would produce writings, scores, essays, dissents, and records on the possibilities and problems in regard to this practice. The question remains then, how is it that Eno is one of their most resonant historiographers and also *the* non-musician par excellence?

In *Playing Music Badly in Public* Eno is simultaneously an undecipherable voice in The Scratch Orchestra's massive choir of mostly untrained singers and one of their most prominent theorizers with "Generating and Organizing." Eno's mere presence playing with the Portsmouth Sinfonia, was understood by *Rolling Stone* magazine as "a by-product of Brian Eno's experiments into the nature of the accident in music."¹⁸ Yet there were also limits to Eno's championing: his support and producing of *No New York* was not enough for No Wave to gain entry into an experimental network but was plenty to cause irreparable rifts in a scene.

On a general level, *Playing Music Badly in Public* looks at an artistic and cultural shift: One of the legacies of new music and, particularly the verbal score, was the notion that music could be performed by the musically unskilled, untrained, deskilled, or innocent. However, this was an allowance that was mostly at the service of an entire reconsideration of what constituted music in general. When this physical attribute of new music moved into

¹⁸ Frank Rose, "Portsmouth Sinfonia *Plays the Popular Classics/Hallelujah!*" *Rolling Stone Record Guide*, New York: Random House, 1979.

familiar and vernacular modes of popular music, particularly rock, it was translated quite differently, but with a similar impulse towards reimagining sonic standards of music. In 1978, the rock critic Nick Kent, attended a particularly raucous performance by the musically untrained all female group, England's The Slits, and wrote: "How had this concept that you could legitimately stand onstage holding a musical instrument even though you couldn't actually play the thing taken root and why was no else viewing it as a musical version of the emperor's new clothes?"¹⁹ Kent's anxious question speaks to this translating by young musical performers, many of them from a visual arts milieu, as well as a critical skepticism on the merits of such playing. What was this idea of playing music badly in public and why were so many visual artists by the end of the 1970s turning to such a mode of performance?

Part of this transition from visual art to musical performance was a pragmatic solution to a general disaffection towards a stagnant and inaccessible art world at the time. The 1970s was a time in which more young people enrolled in art school than any other moment in history.²⁰ If higher education deigned to suggest there was a *way* to be an artist, then what could be made of an art world that seemed to be entirely disinterested or unable to accommodate these young artists? A generous read could be that the surplus of artists overwhelmed the art world, but this was largely not the opinion held by the artists discussed in this dissertation. In some ways, the number of artists who abandoned or translated their learned artistic practices into a more vernacular or experimentally minded means of musical performance that eschewed any formal training can be read as a rebellion against the vocational promises of their arts education. These artists performing non-specialized knowledge could just as easily be seen as a rebuttal to perceived failed institutional promises as it was a new means of creating work.

¹⁹ Nick Kent, *Apathy for the Devil*, 299-300. Kent, a rock music critic, had his own brief foray into this "concept," playing keyboard – an instrument he had no training on – under the pseudonym "Nick Kool" for the song "Blank Frank" on Brian Eno's *Here Come the Warm Jets*.

²⁰ Quoted on page 103 of Tim Lawrence, *Hold on to Your Dreams*, cannot find the footnote right now.

This feeling by young artists in the 1970s that art institutions did not or would not accept them seemed to be pervasive enough to be a shared condition. Starting bands or performing music in public was both a way to sidestep such career or artistic anxiety and to engage more immediately and directly with a more general public. “At that time being in a band was the hot thing to do,” recalls Christine Hahn, a No Wave performer who had studied at the Art Academy of Cincinnati and moved to New York City in the mid-1970s, “The artists weren’t getting enough feedback from being artists, so they did music too, which is where they got the most feedback.”²¹ Thus, this cultural shift was somewhat to do with that old stalwart of artists consistently seeking out modes of creative freedom and reception. To do such a thing meant to critique, abolish, or ignore the hierarchies of artistic tradition for the sake of some kind of liberation.

Yet, such lofty ambitions were hard to carry for these small groups, often financially precarious (much of this music was hardly marketable) and having limited visibility outside of small music scenes and rock music press. Often as quickly as they came loudly, both vocally and musically, into the world they very quickly fizzled out, which is perhaps partially the reason for the often-historical scarcity of some of this artist as musician work. This was equally true when artists largely known for their visual or conceptual work in galleries and exhibitions turned to music making. Joseph Beuys’ pop-song *Sonne Statt Reagan* plays uncomfortably next to a somber felt covered piano; Disband, Barbara Kruger’s feminist punk band with Martha Wilson is a dense contrast to the immediate detoured messages the artist has become renowned for; Martin Kippenberger worked with Hahn in his raucous musical group, Luxus, a brief trifle recorded to a 7” record that is long out of print. The overall ephemerality of these musicians rallying for cultural change began to take a different tenor by the 1980s. Taro Suzuki, a visual artist and member of the band, Youth in Asia, recalled of his decision to pick up a musical instrument and start a band despite any

²¹ Christine Hahn quoted in David Browne, *Goodbye Twentieth Century, A Biography of Sonic Youth*, New York: Da Capo Press, 2009, 39.

conventional skill: “We were raging against the death of modernism. We just didn’t see any place for visual arts to go. So, we expressed this rage with a band. We really didn’t have any musical training. We were just making noises with a beat.”²²

Developments in art and music that eschewed technical skill, incubated in the 1960s, ensconced and exhausted in the 1970s, had become a given in the 1980s, with visual artists and musicians alike dismissing both expertise *and* dilettantism. The interdisciplinary character that these maneuvers took in the 1970s became, by the early 1980s, what the art historian Hal Foster called “pluralism,” a haphazard intermingling of forms that for Foster created a “stagnant condition of indiscrimination” in the arts. Foster’s anxious statement has resonance with the contemporary global relationship to expertise, with Tom Nichols diagnosing this condition in his book, *The Death of Expertise*, that the world has “reached the point where ignorance...is an actual virtue.”²³ Performer, rock musician, and writer, Ian F. Svenonius, perhaps summarizes the corollary between a non-musician aesthetic and contemporary politics most succinctly:

In a sense I’d say George Bush and Donald Trump are punk presidents because the idea behind them is that they are not politicians; it’s almost an extension of punk to have these people up there ranting and saying vulgar things, you know? People forget that George Bush was very similar to Donald Trump; he wasn’t overly vulgar, and he wasn’t such an extrovert – but he was an idiot. So punk ideology says: “Anyone can do it.” And the person who has not studied is better than a virtuoso.²⁴

While ice caps melt, measles return from extinction, and “outsider” politics reign supreme, the tendency to believe one is smarter than those with expertise is a dangerous one, and on account of this depressingly prevalent stubborn ignorance, experimentation in the arts has largely suffered. What makes this situation lamentable is that mistakes are necessary to make sense of the world: actually understanding being wrong is a form of learned humility. Admitting that you are incapable of something is hard and entirely out of

²² Taro Suzuki quoted in Michael H. Miller, “Not Nothing: The Remains of No Wave Three Decades Later,” *The Observer*, 11/10/10. <http://observer.com/2010/11/not-nothing-the-remains-of-no-wave-three-decades-later>.

²³ Tom Nichols, *The Death of Expertise*, London: Oxford University Press, 2017, x.

²⁴ Ian F. Svenonius in Cristina Mari, “Ian F. Svenonius: Bush and Trump are Punk Presidents,” *Kosovo 2.0*, October 14th, 2016. <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/ian-f-svenonius-bush-and-trump-are-punk-presidents/>

fashion in our contemporary moment. Even if branded incapability (something like “punk” nowadays) prevents its full potential, explicating being bad at something is still an admission that even the worst politicians won’t stand on, i.e. lawyer Michael Dershowitz during Trump’s 2020 impeachment trial justifying a shifting position from the past that “I wasn’t wrong, I’m just more correct,” Reagan’s stating “Mistakes were made,” over “I made a mistake,” etc.

Jenn Pelly, in her book on the English all female band, The Raincoats, writes,

In the late 70s, many punks masqueraded as untrained musicians. But the original Raincoats actually did find their way in public, embracing the mistakes as part of their idiosyncratic art... “We always felt like we played a bit beyond our ability,” [Raincoats musician] Gina [Pane] says. We always try to play things that were a bit harder than we were actually competent to do.” The Raincoats found poetry in the vulnerability of this reach. “Basically,” violinist Vicki Aspinall said then, “we try to do something which possibly we can’t achieve...that’s why we may sound a bit shaky.”²⁵

This example, while illustrating how the vanguard language and notion of embracing mistakes in art making had entered into the lexicon of a punk band, also demonstrates a desire to circumvent mandates of expertise as a means to stretch oneself, to attempt to do something “which possibly we can’t achieve.” That the act of attempting was deigned good enough by many of the artists, musicians, and non-musicians in this dissertation is a legacy that has, far from its utopic impulse and potential, unfortunately helped to sow a positive reception of the condition of confidence based on incapability and non-expertise that permeates contemporary politics and social attitudes.

Playing Music Badly in Public is not necessarily a rescue mission, a spirited defense of the many deconstructive impulses in art making of the 1960s and 70s that might have contributed to a “stagnant condition of indiscrimination” that rippled into flexible forms of capitalist production and proud amateur politics. But I do want to suggest that there are other ways to interpret this complex history, one that touches on education, learning empathy through mistakes, finding new forms of sociality through collective

²⁵ Jenn Pelly, *The Raincoats*, London: Bloomsbury, 2017, 3.

engagements, legitimizing play and humor, all in the pursuit of seeking out new forms of art making. The embrace of one's inabilities – a central premise found in the Scratch, the Sinfonia, the No Wave groups, and of course, Eno – while promoting the possibilities of leveling playing fields, was not arguing for equivalence. They were highlighting difference, but also how the familiar might still have some promise.

I hope to argue that circumstances within but also outside of their intentions shaped their experimental processes into other more manageable forms. It is not my intention to settle the debate of the efficacy of these groups in regard to their jettisoning of explicit political questions in favor of postmodernist strategies. While many members of the Scratch Orchestra, and particularly Cardew, directly confronted the failures of experimental music in addressing political action, many in my case studies, especially Eno, did not (but were nonetheless critical of dominant modes of capitalism). As they are, however, firmly hesitant to engage with the idea of “professionalism” in favor of deskilling (as it had been understood to that point), it would be disingenuous to avoid this shared philosophical attitude with contemporary political dynamics that have enabled the rise of figures such as Donald Trump. To this end, the coda will take a critical position of how these endeavors are both symptomatic of, feed into, but also divert from such political dynamics.

However, despite my focus on the limits of these non-musicians, I will not simply use these figures as illustrative of the naivety artists concoct in devising strategies to push against capitalist systems. I do not wish to put forth a bleak diagnosis but hope to instead embark on this story as a critical examination that is both skeptical but also sympathetic to the possibilities that can (and did) arise in these respective modes of resistance against the status quo. What I find particularly useful in terms of music making in regard to this rather dire diagnosis is the particular way it allows for easy mistake. So much of musical playing begins with a minor gesture - a grasp, pluck, poke, squeeze, touch - and within these small movements we can find not just fragments of processual conditioning necessary for learning, but a whole world to play within, to find what Erin Manning calls “new processes

that will likely create new forms of knowledge that may have no means of evaluation within our current discourse models.” In this way play, thought experiments, and incapability can be a form of resistance, a means to not proudly proclaim unearned expertise or go through the process of standardized professionalism, but a way to be otherwise.

In the 1970s, there was a post-1960s current that suggested giving oneself permission to not understand something was a means to learn about, accept, or even embrace the chaos of the everyday, the otherwise unknowable, and each other. But maybe this is all better summarized by a piece of music, *Hands* (ca.1972) from the Scratch Orchestra’s Catherine Williams, a non-musician, that reads, over a traced outline of a human hand, like the type a child would do in primary school art class,

Get to know your own hands, their texture, consistency, capacity, their potential. Get to know other people’s hands, largely by means of your own – in comparison with your own let them be witty, kind, strong, capable, avenging etc....together or apart.

Similar procedure for feet, ears, head, parts of face, face, back, front – of body – and so on.²⁶

It should be noted I come from a non-musical background. I have played plenty of music, growing up in punk bands, moving into experimental music (a shamelessly pretentious outfit called The Terrible Coats of which I played tape loops on old tape players), and the occasional performance art outfit here and there today. I can understand music by ear, craft music intuitively, and naturally get rhythm, melody, etc. This is as far as I’ve ever been able to go as a musician. I cannot read music, do not understand music theory, and even basic musicological terminology can be challenging for me. Thus, I come to this study on the same level as many of the subjects I discuss: an artist with very little conventional musical skill. As I am also an art historian, I understand many of the efforts made by the non-musicians in this study as having art historical precedent elsewhere, and further, their desire to perform their knowledge and research to the public.

²⁶ Catherine Williams, *Hands*, In Cornelius Cardew, ed. *Scratch Music*, London: New Latimer Editions Limited, 1972, A.

I mention all of this not to simply suggest I have a corollary with my written subjects, as any good writer would hope to have some at least minor intrinsic relationship to their subject. Rather, I want to be entirely forthright about how my limitations are a boon and folly in a study like this. Let's begin with folly: there are many things in this dissertation I do not discuss, particularly on the musically theoretical level, and it is my hope that others could fill in the gaps that I have left. On the subject of Eno, those looking for a labored investigation into his discography and life will be disappointed. This dissertation looks at Eno and his relationships; to the press, musicians, and non-musicians. While I commit a good amount of space examining his working methodology, and most of his work pre-1980 gets attention, I am more interested in how his ideas were received and where these ideas came from. There are several quite thorough books on Eno's life and work, and I would recommend Eric Tamm's *Brian Eno: His Music and the Vertical Color of Sound* for the musicologist, Geeta Dayal's *Another Green World* for those looking for a less academically written insight into how Eno approached his work, and Christopher Scoates' *Brian Eno: Visual Music* for artists interested in Eno's visual work. In terms of biography, David Sheppard's *On Some Faraway Beach* is insightful, but, as this dissertation notes time and again, seems to dismiss minor, but entirely pertinent, details, particularly in terms of the influential subjects and relationships that informed Eno's working identity.

Lastly, I want to talk about representation in this dissertation. I have found it difficult to place performance strands of improvised and aleatory music by important groups such as AACM, the Jazz composer's guild, and the Jazz Composers Orchestra under the rubric of "non-musicians." I view the work by these groups as a type of liberatory searching that exceeds limitations, defies the pat categorization of even an entirely porous concept like "non-music." Their work was no less concerned with the idea of musical and personal freedom as many of the subjects I discuss in this dissertation, but they nonetheless were coming from a place in which musical innocence meant something otherwise, in which the freedom to play was not a privilege afforded. Part of this is pragmatic, as "non-musician" is

largely Eno's term, and the focus on him as a node in a network has been to essentially chart how musical amateurism was fostered into a working arts concept. As I do not feel these groups had any real affinity with amateurism as Eno (re)presented it, I did not think it wise to attempt to fold their efforts into his rubric. For those looking for robust studies on these groups I would suggest George E. Lewis' indispensable *A Power Stronger than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music*, Benjamin Piekut's *Experimentalism Otherwise* on the New York Loft Jazz scene, Valerie Wilmer's *As Serious as Your Life: The Story of the New Jazz*, and Georgina Born's *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music* as well as her edited volume, *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*.

Chapter One:
Music for Non-Musicians

I.
The Making of Eno

I.
Brian Eno's Face

The front cover of the April 7, 1973 issue of the British rock magazine, *Sounds*, features an article detailing folk band Lindisfane's upcoming tour; an announcement on the new record by Rod Stewart's band, The Faces; a black and white photograph of the Rolling Stones' Ronnie Wood; and in the top right corner a color portrait of Brian Eno, Revlon makeup on the eyes looking at the reader, lipstick on a modest smile, the thinning blonde hair at the top of his head in contrast to the long mane behind his ears.¹ At the top edge of the magazine cover, just above the *Sounds: Music is the Message* logo, and a beveled banner with a protruding arrow points at Eno and reads: "Roxy Color Poster Inside."

The "Roxy" of the promised poster refers to Roxy Music, a musical group founded by Newcastle school of art student Bryan Ferry. Ferry's initial conceit for Roxy considered rock and roll not as genre but as medium, one loose enough to be programmable as a patchwork that could accommodate many different musical styles and sounds. The novelty of Roxy's concept, presented through surprisingly accessible music, garnered critical, mainstream, and financial success in England almost immediately. With this success came the development of a rift between Ferry, the principal song writer for Roxy, and Eno, the group's conceptual center who neither wrote music nor could play a conventional musical instrument. This tension would be aided in part by magazines such as *Sounds*, in which the color poster is not a photo of the five members of Roxy Music, but an enlarged version of the same Eno color portrait from the cover. Without straining the metaphor, by 1973 Eno had literally become the face of Roxy Music.²

¹ "My makeup...consists of a large selection of things, including Quant, Revlon, Schwarzkopf's, and Yardley." Eno in "Any Questions," Staff Writers, *Melody Maker*, April 21, 1973, 34.

² The other mention of Roxy Music in this issue is Steve Peacock's negative review of Roxy's two-night stint at the Rainbow Theatre, "The Roxy Machine Leaves You Cold."

“I was easily the most photogenic person in Roxy,” Eno told *Rolling Stone* writer Cynthia Dagnal in 1974, “I don’t say I was the most attractive, but if they wanted to print an article about Roxy, they’d always have a photograph of me.”¹ Eno’s sartorial pageantry and rock star posing was an important aspect of his early career, one often undercut in subsequent writings on account of his later more public intellectual persona. Mining the libidinal terrain paved by the androgynous self-fashioning glitter of Marc Bolan and David Bowie through a healthy application of facial cosmetics and Carol McNicoll’s costuming.

Carol McNicholl was a student at Leeds College of Art during its halcyon artistic moment of experimental activity and playing in the margins between high and low culture. Her work during this period covered everything from performance, painting, and ceramics, and she was provided a Princess of Wales Scholarship for distinguished female students to attend the Royal College of Art in 1970. It was around this time that she began a friendship and working relationship with fashion designer Zandra Rhodes, who would often include McNicoll’s ceramics in her interior design work. McNicoll designed and sewed the costumes for Eno – her live-in paramour at the time – and Roxy oboist/saxophone player Andy MacKay. The playful nature of these costumes would aid in manifesting the musical hybridity of Roxy’s sound visually, with Eno’s cockerel feather padded costume invariably becoming an iconic symbol of glam rock (for example see: the front cover of the catalogue for Lentos Kunzmuseum’s 2013 exhibition, *Glam! The Performance of Style* which features Karl Stoecker’s image of Eno in this costume). In terms of any popular success afforded to Eno during his tenure in Roxy, a good deal of credit must be given to the vision of McNicoll.²

Eno and McNicholl crafted a visual spectacle that proved irresistible to the rock music press. Physical descriptions of Eno from rock journalists and critics were breathless and bordered on the romantic: “the colorless prominent cheek-bones...the eyes framed in

¹ Cynthia Dagnal, “Eno and the Jets: Controlled Chaos,” *Rolling Stone*, September 12, 1974, 12.

² See: Tonya Harrod, Rose Lee Goldberg, eds. *Carol McNicoll*, London: Lund Humphries, 2003, and for a brief interview and segment of McNicoll fashioning Roxy’s costumes together: *Eno*, Dir. Alfons Sinninger, 1973.

subtly effective mascara, the sparse hair and comely scarecrow physique resplendent in leopard-skin print shirt and black Oxford bags;³ “like one of Tolstoy's starving artists. Gaunt, aquiline, sensitive nose, high cheekbones topped with thinning white hair which is streaked with reddish rust coloring over the right ear.”⁴

At the release of Roxy's second album, *For Your Pleasure*, in early 1973, *NME* writer Nick Kent's prophecy that Eno would be “the face of '73,”⁵ had all but come true, with the band's marketing utilizing Eno's omnipresent allure. A 1973 Japanese advertisement promoting *For Your Pleasure* features a near-page sized Eno, frocked in McNicoll's feather plumage costume, strapped with an electric guitar, and towering over miniature profiles of the rest of the band. The advertisement is a striking image, one that speaks to the dominant persona of Eno at the moment that was largely predicated on his pageantry that appealed to a host of cultural intermediaries, such as record companies, journalists, magazine editors, designers, and costumers. Eno's assuming a rock star persona during this time could also be considered as a way to offset his unorthodox musical role in Roxy Music: quizzed on his sex-symbol status by Kent in 1973, Eno responded: “Marvelous, particularly as I'm totally useless at playing music.”⁶

2. Brian Eno's Hands

At the 2-minute mark of Roxy's 1972 performance of their song “Virginia Plain” on *Top of the Pops*, it is Eno's turn for an instrumental solo. The camera zooms in on Eno's VC3 synthesizer, and his hands, wearing sequined gloves, gently play a repeating simple sequence of four notes. It's an underwhelming moment in this context, almost as if a parody of the virtuoso synthesizer “solo” theatrics – most notably in figures such as Rick Wakeman of Yes – found in progressive rock bands at the time. That this moment was Eno's main

³ Nick Kent, “A Flight of Fantasy,” *New Musical Express*, February 3, 1972, 5. Nick Kent, like Richard Williams, was a big supporter of both Roxy Music and Eno in their early days.

⁴ Geoff Brown, “Eno's Where It's At,” *Melody Maker*, November 10, 1973, 41.

⁵ Nick Kent, “A Flight of Fancy,” 5.

⁶ Nick Kent, “Last Tango in Amsterdam: Cruisin' with Roxy Music in the Land of Tulips,” *New Musical Express*, June 9, 1973.

contribution (both musically on camera) to the three minutes of “Virginia Plain,” is evidence of his minimal musical proficiency, a position that, as we shall see, liberated Eno to serve as conceptual center in Roxy Music.

Despite Eno’s pose in the *For Your Pleasure* advertisement, left hand in place on the strings of the electric guitar neck, right hand mid-strum, he had no general faculty for playing the instrument.⁷ Although rock music could be played generally with minimal musical skill, Eno’s role in Roxy was more akin to that of a producer, adding a cloud of sonic flourishes to the overall sound of the group through electronic treatments with an occasional synthesizer sound punctuating a given song.

In early Roxy performances, Eno would be in the back of the venue near the sound mixer, eventually moving his way to the stage, bringing along his large Revox tape machine and VC3 synthesizer. “I was stuck behind masses of electronic gear,” Eno remarked to *New Musical Express* writer Nick Kent in 1973, “People didn’t even know I was onstage with the band, showing real surprise when I suddenly appeared from amidst this barrage after the set.”⁸ We could consider that Eno’s campy and flamboyant persona in Roxy was a result of this situation, to compensate for the hindrance to stage presence that such an uncouth arrangement might provoke in a rock band. In terms of theatre, how expressive could one be feeding your bandmate’s instruments into a tape recorder?⁹ Lacking musical proficiency but clearly versed in aesthetic provocation, Eno’s theatrical elegance would become the main event of Roxy. “Roxy Music was, and is, Ferry’s band,” the critic Richard Cromelin comments, “but all eyes...were invariably fixed on the enticing, sinister, spangled and feathered vision at stage right that was Eno.”¹⁰

⁷ The guitar pictured is Eno’s guitar a Starway model purchased in 1968 at a secondhand shop. He would use the instrument on many of his 1970s solo recordings, although never changing the strings, and feeding it through electronics. David Sheppard writes of Eno’s guitar playing: “Mastering the guitar was of little importance – his theories on composition at the time mostly circumvented the need for any faculty at all.” In David Sheppard, *On Some Faraway Beach*, London: Orion Books, 2009, 54. See also Alfons Sinniger’s film, *Eno* for evidence of Eno’s guitar experiments.

⁸ Kent, “A Flight of Fancy,” 5.

⁹ As any contemporary DJ might attest, such concerns are minimal today.

¹⁰ Richard Cromelin, “Eno Music: The Roxy Rebellion,” *Phonograph Record*, November 1974.

On the other hand, Eno's visuals worked directly in tandem with his conceptual ideas of rock music. Eno had decided, post-art school, to try and reconcile subterranean with popular by bridging strategies of experimental music into rock and roll. Eno outlined his musical ambitions to *Rolling Stone's* Cynthia Dagnal in 1974: "Avant-garde music is fiercely intellectual, fiercely anti-physical. Whereas rock is fiercely physical and fiercely anti-intellectual. I wanted to find a meeting of the two which would actually not be frightened of either force."¹¹ Disenchanted with the more hermetic tendencies of the art world following his art school education and galvanized by two separate strands of musical activity that permitted music making sans proficiency – experimental and rock music – Eno's mission throughout the 1970s was to synthesize these two very different networks of activity. Yoko Ono (and to some extent The Beatles) had attempted such a move with somewhat successful results, as did Eno's heroes The Velvet Underground, with their indifference to musical proficiency in Mo Tucker's drumming, and the avant-garde bona fides of John Cale's viola drones. Eno differed from these groups in that he wasn't particularly interested in just blurring lines on account of more subterranean influences but desired an entirely new musical form, one predicated on hybridity and contradiction: aesthetically beautiful and simple experimentalism with academically justified, process-driven rock and roll. In Roxy Music, Eno represented this impulse, the "meeting of the two": a rock star veneer that contained a conceptual art project and an experimental musician as vainglorious sex symbol.

3. Brian Eno's Voice

It became apparent not long after Roxy Music's self-titled first LP appeared in 1972, that the structure of a rock band and its concomitant duties – particularly the cyclical onstage performing of "hits" and long tours – would be a difficult fit for Eno. While Roxy Music was constructed as a means to showcase musical hybridity and the trappings of the

¹¹ Cynthia Dagnal, "Eno and the Jets," *Rolling Stone*, September 12, 1974, 12.

rock and roll genre itself, it nonetheless operated technically as a standard rock and roll group. Breaking this cycle – at least creatively - would require greater experimentation and risk, a point of creative contention between Ferry and Eno, the latter of which was becoming more and more the “fiercely intellectual” input of this particular system.¹²

Eno’s loquacious intellectualism on a variety of art subjects in interviews had been an irresistible addendum to his visual appeal for rock journalists and critics (and their parent magazines and newspapers). A pin up star who could articulate high art concepts in a perspicuous way was a marketing best of both worlds, assuaging both the superficiality of image and high art desires of early 1970s rock and roll. Rock critics and journalists in the 1960s-70s were particularly fascinated with the transition of visual artists entering into the less rarified world of pop and rock music. For example, *Melody Maker*’s Richard Williams wrote in 1971 that “A curious feature of modern rock music is the way it’s taken potential artists away from other spheres. Men who might have become poets, painters, or even classical musicians have instead found an outlet for their creativity in the new medium, which also offers the chance of wide exposure – not to mention lots of loot.”¹³

The English art student move to pop and rock music was not entirely an anomaly by the 1970s, with quite famous examples including members of The Kinks, The Rolling Stones, The Beatles, and The Who. Ferry had studied under Pop Artist Richard Hamilton while at Newcastle, Eno worked with artists Tom Phillips and Roy Ascott while attending Winchester School of Art and Ipswich College of Art, and Andy MacKay studied at Reading College of Art. “When I was seventeen or eighteen I had hung with art students and knew what they were like – I enjoyed the attitude that art students from the sixties had,” Williams tells Roxy biographer Michael Bracewell, “it was great to discover, not least

¹² I am using Eno’s own terminology here: “We [Roxy Music] regarded the rock idea as a system that can be programmed in many different ways. We chose to program it with not only the jazz/rock/blues tradition, but also with the less familiar [in rock music/to rock audiences] ‘serious’ music tradition.” In Michael Bracewell, *Re/Make, Re/Model*, London: Faber and Faber, 2007, 348.

¹³ Richard Williams, “New Names that Could Break the Sound Barrier,” *Melody Maker*, August 7, 1971.

in Roxy Music, some music after the Velvet Underground that had a pop veneer, but also a potential for the kind of experimentation I was interested in.”¹⁴

Roxy’s art school bona fides were not only a boon to their creative success for Williams but held a personal interest to the critic. His constant plugging of the group in print (sometimes in multiple features a month) was the basis for Eno’s claim that “Richard Williams was a major contributor to our success.”¹⁵ Given the close relationship between music journalists and musical acts during this time, it is no surprise that artists like Eno (and to some extent, Ferry) would learn to utilize the press for their own ends. Although most articles and magazines were largely supportive of Eno and Roxy as an anomaly in rock music some critics looked at the group, particularly Eno, with great suspicion, questioning just what his contribution to rock and roll was. Martin Hayman summarizes Eno’s precarious position within a rock and roll network (and perhaps speaks for others) in a 1974 article for *Sounds* magazine:

For some, [Eno is] an exponent of all that's fake in the music business, an overeducated, over-promoted and overestimated fiddler with tape machines, lacking his apprenticeship in music and the skills to master the tools of his trade. A dabbler whose only creative work so far consists in adding some bleeps and whistles to Bryan Ferry's songs...Eno is not interested in the music business, as far as I can see. I've never seen him in a studio: never talked to him about the usual old stuff: What direction do you think your music will take? When will your new album be released?¹⁶

While Eno would eventually check off all the rock star archetype demands that Hayman found wanting (particularly time in the studio), Hayman’s criticisms show the difficulties inherent in breaking the set boundaries of networks: how far could Eno go in Roxy Music when his musical ideas could be deciphered as “bleeps and whistles” in a rock and roll network? In a relatively structured rock group located in a rock network, experimental activity could only go so far. Thus, the tension between Ferry’s representing Pop’s emphasis on product and Eno’s push for conceptual processes ultimately exposed the

¹⁴ Bracewell, 366, 368.

¹⁵ Bracewell, 364.

¹⁶ Martin Hayman, “Dancing with Mister E,” *Sounds*, February 9, 1974.

limits of Roxy's ambitious conceit, as well as the fortified boundaries firmly in place between experimental and rock and roll networks. If Roxy Music was conceived as "an art movement,"¹⁷ it would have to choose between a classic arts binary: product or process. In this case, product won out, and Eno would leave the group in the summer of 1973 to pursue his own ideas on his own terms. Although Roxy would prove to be a straitjacket for Eno in terms of his own creativity, it established him as a press fixture, one that he would use to great effect in the crafting of a post-Roxy identity.

II:
The Non-Musician &
The Interview as Performance

I.
CJOM Radio, Windsor Radio, "Crystal Set," 1974

"The length of time necessary to prepare for a tour is about a month, and then the tour lasts say six weeks, and then to recover takes about six or eight weeks something like that. So it's talking about three and a half or four months. Which is quite a lot of time for me, and it's time that is basically unprogressive time, it's not unproductive time, but its unprogressive, one doesn't expect to move very far in that time."

- CJOM Radio, Windsor Radio, *Crystal Set*, Brian Eno Interview, July 21, 1974¹⁸

Following his tenure in Roxy Music, Eno almost entirely eschewed live performance for the remainder of the 1970s. One notable exception to this was Eno's 1974 tour supporting his first solo album, *Here come the Warm Jets*, with the pub rock group The Winkies as his backup.¹⁹ Almost from the start, Eno felt his heart wasn't in the endeavor, admitting to Nick Kent in 1974 that while on stage he "kept staring at the 'Exit' sign" of the theatre venue.²⁰ A few dates in, Eno was hospitalized with a collapsed lung, effectively ending his first, and last, conventional music tour as a solo artist.

¹⁷ Eno in Bracewell, 369.

¹⁸ A recording of this interview is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uP4F4lKE7Qc>. Accessed April 10th, 2020.

¹⁹ A recording of this lineup exists from a radio session with influential British DJ John Peel here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7QehJBUwyQ> and a lo-fi bootleg recording of one of the few live shows is here: <https://shardsofbeauty.blogspot.com/2011/07/eno-winkies-live-1974-co-presentation.html>. Brian Turrington, bass player for the Winkies, would play on four of Eno's records in the 1970s, co-arranging the track "Third Uncle" from *Taking Tiger Mountain*.

²⁰ Eno in Nick Kent, "The Freewheelin' Brian Eno," *New Musical Express*, 1974.

Eno's solo records were recording studio constructions, relying on experimental techniques (difficult to replicate in live performance at the time) and featuring a rotating cast of supporting musicians (difficult to assemble for a proper tour). Given the nature of his musical output, and general ambivalence toward proper touring, Eno thought of the press interview and his own public lectures as the locus for his live performances. "The way I do interviews I regard it as a performance," Eno explained to future Patti Smith guitarist Lenny Kaye in 1975, "It's much more a creative performance for me than playing on a stage. I work much harder at it and I'm better at it."²¹

Reading Eno's interviews from the early 1970s, almost exclusively with rock magazines and journals such as England's *New Musical Express*, *Melody Maker* and out of the U.S., *Rolling Stone*, there is nothing inherently performative about them in a conventional sense, or even particularly creative in terms of how Eno approaches them. Unlike other more well-known performance interviews, such as John Lennon and Yoko Ono's "Bed-In for Peace," in which the pair exploited their own press spectacle (and wedding honeymoon) as an opportunity to slogan for change, David Antin's *Talk Poems* (*Talking* (1972), *Talking at the Boundaries* (1976)), or even the more attitude-driven short circuit soundbites of Johnny Rotten and other punk performers to journalists later in the decade, Eno's interviews with the press are often simple question and answer format.²² In the early Roxy and post-Roxy interviews (ca. 1972-1974), Eno performs in a manner more typical of the rock star Lothario, introducing to journalists various sexual conquests who happened to be in the room, inviting journalists to witness his posing nude for an (unpublished) male pornography rag, and exuding the misogynistic attitudes not atypical of the times.²³

²¹ Brian Eno in Lenny Kaye, "What's Next for Eno?" *Rock Scene*, March 1975. 31.

²² The interview as performance was also an attribute of some No Wave artists, particularly James Chance and Lydia Lunch. See Chapter 4.

²³ Eno: "I would like to take this opportunity to exhort, through the auspices of *New Musical Express*, all these young girls who have a definite sexual interest in me to enclose photographs of themselves. I would be more than grateful." This said, he pulled a pair of Op-art undergarments sent by a panting fan over his exquisitely balding pate and grinned obscenely." In Nick Kent, "Last Tango in Amsterdam," *New Musical Express*, June 9, 1973. Further, in a 1974 interview with future Pretenders frontwoman Chrissie Hynde for *NME*, he subjects her to long conversations about the virtues of pornography and ends the interview with: "Did you know there's a girls' school with four hundred girls just around the corner? Very nice, I'll tell you, it

These interviews were often punctuated, in a sometimes-sharp contrast, with the expounding on subjects dear to Eno's heart and musical processes, such as systems theory, mathematics, and cybernetics, as well as musical heroes and influences such as Steve Reich and La Monte Young. As the decade wore on, Eno's sex-symbol antics gave way to long pontifications on these processes and ideas, a maturation toward becoming a public intellectual that would become his defining characteristic by 1980. For Eno, these marathon interviews were not only a larger forum to proselytize experimentalism, but also a space to test out and analyze his own ideas and problems. "I've done an average of five solid hours of talking a day," Eno tells Kaye, "...specifically about ideas...I've become very clear about a lot of my own methods."²⁴ This is also mentioned by Peter Leahy, editor of the Brian Eno fan club newsletter, *ENOVations*:

Eno said he felt this way of promoting an album [press junkets and interviews rather than musical touring] was much better than going through the whole procedure of sound check etc etc. He regards talking as a performance as its more creative than playing on stage. He is able to talk out ideas and discuss them with people then gradually he can reject some things after realizing that they are not practical or useful. This way he becomes much clearer in his own mind about his own methods. In a way it's exposing himself to the public by thinking out loud and analyzing himself."²⁵

Eno's utilizing public media as a forum to test and gain clarity on his ideas has a direct correlation to his own musical work. In the early 1970s, Eno became deeply influenced by Morse Peckham's book, *Man's Rage for Chaos* (1965). In this book, Peckham, who was an American professor of English and a behaviorist, stated that art making was a socially accepted form of creating chaos, one that served a biologically adaptive function for humans not only to survive but to innovate in the real world. Peckham writes,

Man desires above all a predictable and ordered world...but because man desires such a world so passionately, he is very much inclined to ignore anything that intimates that he does not have it...It is clear that art is useless,

really is lovely. I mean they're so beautiful those little girls are. My conscience won't let me tamper - I feel I might damage their lives if I do anything." In Chrissie Hynde, "Everything You'd Rather Not Know About Eno," *New Musical Express*, February 2nd, 1974. In a revealing profile for *Ritz* in 1977, author Caroline Coon – who managed The Clash and The Slits – calls Eno out on several occasions for his chauvinistic statements and attitudes. See: Caroline Coon, "Brian Eno," *Ritz*, October 1977.
http://www.moredarkthanshark.org/eno_int_ritz-oct77.html. Accessed April 10th, 2020.

²⁴ Brian Eno in Lenny Kaye, "What's Next for Eno?" *Rock Scene*, March 1975.

²⁵ In *ENOVations* no. 1, 1974, 4.

that perceiver and artist are arrogant and indifferent...Art tells us nothing about the world that we cannot find elsewhere and more reliably. Art does not make us better citizens, or more moral, or more honest...Clearly the perceptions of art and the affective response to its signs and its discontinuities prepare us for no mode of behavior, no role, no pattern, no style. But it is preparation...We rehearse for various roles all our lives. We rehearse our national, our local, and our personal styles. These things we rehearse so that we may participate in a predictable world social and environmental interaction. But we must also rehearse the power to perceive the failure, the necessary failure, of all those patterns of behavior...Art is the reinforcement of the capacity to endure disorientation which makes innovation possible.²⁶

By 1976, Eno had integrated Peckham's thinking as a position, stating in a lecture at Hatfield Polytechnic college, "Art is not a goal-less titillation, and neither is it the quasi-religious experience that most art historians would have us believe. But it is an important mechanism that supports and rehearses our ability to innovate, which in turn is our ability to adapt, and finally our ability to survive."²⁷ Finding a biological imperative for art not only allowed for Eno to dismiss any anxiety he might have had about cultural distinctions between high art and popular art, but also gave him a framework for which to consider his own work and activities as behavioral "rehearsals."

For Eno, art couldn't move linearly – which is to say progressively –and he would theorize that contemporary experimental music moves vertically, not horizontally, forgoing any kind of logical Point A to Point B. Art had to be constantly transforming, and this being in flux was paramount for attuning one's ability to cope, survive, and troubleshoot the difficulties encountered in the day to day. "I constantly evaluate things, I must say," Eno stated to John Cage and Rob Tennenbaum in 1985, "I don't think I'm past evaluating at all."²⁸

Considering Peckham's influence, the restless spirit of Eno's 1970s musical output that played with genre, musical conventions, and network borderlines, can be critically assessed as less the products of capricious anti-asceticism but as a genuine desire to keep

²⁶ Morse Peckham, *Man's Rage for Chaos*, New York: Chilton Books, 1965, 313-314.

²⁷ Program notes to Brian Eno, "Art as a Means of Survival – a Lecture by Brian Eno," at Hatfield Polytechnic, 1976.

²⁸ Rob Tannenbaum, "A Meeting of Sound Minds: John Cage + Brian Eno," *Musician*, September 1985.

experimenting, to refuse art as categorically set in any particular way. The interview format was crucial to this desire, in that it could serve as a sketchbook of sorts, a place outside of the studio to audition concepts. In short, this is something of a meta-process, redefining performance to incorporate workshoping and experimenting with ideas.

Although rock critic Lester Bangs would call Eno's press pontificating on his musical processes "boring as shit to listen to,"²⁹ he nonetheless interviewed Eno multiple times, and even set an especially long written interview piece for an incomplete book.³⁰ This arrangement speaks volumes not only to the charismatic appeal of Eno to critics and journalists, but also to the robust public following he had: consider the preface to a 1979 featured Eno interview in *Synapse* magazine stating: "*Synapse* has received more requests to publish an interview with Brian Eno than any other artist."³¹ What is surprising about the *Synapse* statement is the notion that there would be public demand to read the musings of a 1970s rock musician who, throughout the decade, had completely abandoned the crucial archetypal accoutrements of rock: a performing tour, a standard band, and, importantly here, musical proficiency.

What we might glean from this situation is the public propagation of difference, here utilized by cultural intermediaries such as rock critics/journalists, record company marketing teams and of course, Eno himself, to carve out a space in which a facet of popular/dominant culture – rock musician – could be reflected upon. Eno's solo recordings were critically praised, innovative, and are retrospectively influential in pushing the boundaries of pop/rock music as a form. Yet, they were never immediate "hits," and appealed largely to "cult" underground music audiences. This situation seems to give weight to a thesis that Eno's public success had much to do with his use of the media, a notion

²⁹ Lester Bangs, "Eno Sings with the Fishes," *The Village Voice*, April 3, 1978

³⁰ Tentatively titled, *Beyond the Law: Four Rock and Roll Extremists*. Bangs finished the chapter on Eno, "A Sandbox in Alphaville," before his death in 1982, and it has been published online here: <http://www.furious.com/perfect/bangseno.html> Pieces of this interview appear in Bang's article, "Eno" for *Musician* magazine, November, 1979.

³¹ Kurt Loder, "Eno," *Synapse*, January/February 1979.

journalists themselves would broach. “Eno became a celebrity in England not because he released a record that everyone loved and bought,” rock journalist Richard Cromelin observed in 1974, “but because he was clever and glib and talkative and extremely photogenic and unafraid of mild controversy – good copy as opposed to Ferry’s forbidding, taciturn, aloof aura. It was as if Eno turned his records or concerts or even his ideas into stars, rather than have his output establish him as one.”³²

Cromelin argues that Eno was effectively able to turn his ideas into “stars” through “good copy.” One of Eno’s most famous and enduring “star” ideas was his oft-repeated claim in the rock press that he was a “non-musician.” Eno parlayed the media dividends of his Roxy persona to become a public translator of experimental music, effectively scaling up the local and intimate community of English experimentalism. If Eno’s stated goal in the early 1970s was to reconcile the seemingly incompatible networks of rock and experimental art, one way to do this was to utilize the mainstream press, an arena often hostile to experimentalism.

As I have mentioned, Eno’s commitment to the interview format can be understood, as Cromelin suggests, not simply as a reflection of his musical output but as another manifestation of it, with the testing of ideas – particularly those sourced from other experimental thinkers and makers – being the main impetus of Eno’s 1970s arts philosophy and body of work. This is not to say that Eno’s interviews and musical activities are on equal footing. As I mentioned above, there is a clear attention to aesthetics in Eno’s music that has always made his work distinct from the more discordant experiments in sound by someone such as John Cage, for example.³³ However, all of Eno’s 1970s musical work builds its foundations on experimental processes and ideas, proceeding from a “what would happen if” orientation, and it is this tendency that is shared with his treatment of the press

³² Richard Cromelin, “Eno Music: The Roxy Rebellion,” *Phonograph Record*, November 1974.

³³ Eno’s attention to aesthetics is perhaps most pronounced in his later solo records, *Another Green World*, and *Before and After Science*, as well as his later ambient records meant to conjure scenery and geography. See Chapter Four for this discussion.

interview. Like his solo recordings, his interviews are predicated through his establishing a discursive understanding of his contradictions, best exemplified in his position as a “non-musician.”

Eno both established his avant-garde bona fides through the media, while at the same time using this forum as a means to explore public reception to avant-garde ideas. This dual position locates Eno as both artist and cultural intermediary, the cultural producer as producer and the effects of this unique position have remained entirely unremarked upon by writers on Eno’s work. One reason for this is that Eno’s consideration of the press as a component of his overall practice was a boon for journalists and critics seeking to have their work legitimized. When Cromelin writes that “the regular stream of [Eno] interviews and photos certainly qualify as pieces,”³⁴ he is effectively implicating himself as a collaborator in the fabrication of a work. A 1973 article by Ray Fox-Cumming, “Eno Reads the Review and then Writes the Album!” posits that “[Eno] rang up a journalist friend and asked if he would review the totally non-existent record. The journalist complied and Eno is now writing the album to fit the review.”³⁵ This account has not been substantiated in any later writings focused on Eno’s recordings from 1973 (the “non-existent record” is likely his first proper “solo” album, *Here Come the Warm Jets*, released in January of 1974) but gives a glimpse into Eno’s creative recasting of his relationship to music journalists and critics.

Three narrative threads in the autobiographical framing of the life of Eno appeared in the press throughout the 1970s: his art school experience under Roy Ascott in 1966, who introduced him to cybernetics and process based art; his performance of La Monte Young’s composition *X For Henry Flynt* while at Winchester School of Art in 1968; and his feedback experiments – often done with tape loops – ca. 1966-1975 culminating in his album *Discreet Music*.³⁶ Writers on Eno’s work have often pointed to these encounters as culminating

³⁴ Cromelin, “Eno Music: The Roxy Rebellion.”

³⁵ Ray Fox-Cumming, “Eno Reads the Review and then Writes the Album!” *Disc*, December 15, 1973, 9.

³⁶ Eno’s high praise of La Monte Young was the headline of a 2020 *New York Times* profile on Young: “The Man Who Brian Eno Called ‘The Daddy of Us All.’” Michael H. Miller, “The Man Who Brian Eno Called ‘The

events in his artistic development, particularly in terms of his claim to being a “non-musician,” and that these events happened during or coincided with his tenure at art school explains this impulse. However, Eno’s art school education was, as we shall see, hardly conventional, operating outside of both stereotypes of art school as a place for rigorous training or a romantic bohemia. Given the haphazardness of Eno’s education, it is not my contention to simply say that art school had a profound effect on Eno’s musical practice and artistic rigor, a sentiment that is no doubt true. Instead I am interested in how writers on Eno have come to make this claim and how Eno’s many press interviews helped to confirm it. How might these early encounters with experimental activity have provided Eno with both an unwavering desire to expand the parameters of music making and a useable vocabulary in which to fabricate an identity? How was this picked up, historicized, and canonized as music or as art?

Nick Kent, “A Flight of Fantasy,”^{2.} *New Musical Express*, February 3rd, 1973

Although Roxy Music had only just been picked up for professional management, and had barely performed twenty live shows, this early profile entirely dedicated to Eno is an early example of his press allure. While all of the hallmarks of an interview with a rock musician are here – Kent refers to Eno’s cramped post-college apartment as a “playboy bachelor flat,” a photograph of a posed Eno in his cockerel costume, the difficulties of a touring rock band, closing out the article with the author leaving on account of an impending BDSM session with a Roxy groupie – there are enough outliers to this tendency for Kent to exclaim – “Ah, ha. Obviously this man is an intellectual.”³⁷ In this interview Eno expounds upon The Velvet Underground being reflective of the inertia present in Andy Warhol’s films, perceptual possibilities in electronic music and Muzak, and notably, we read one of his earliest abnegations of musical proficiency. Commenting on a musical

Daddy of Us All,” *The New York Times*, July 23, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/22/t-magazine/la-monte-young.html>. Accessed September 27th, 2020.

³⁷ Kent, “A Flight of Fantasy,” 5. Fripp became a lifelong friend and collaborator for Eno.

collaboration with the (virtuoso) King Crimson guitarist Robert Fripp that would eventually be released as the record *No Pussyfooting* in late 1973, Eno remarks: “Fripp and I tend to complement each other greatly in the sense that I am by no means a musician, whereas Fripp most certainly is and can therefore form my fantasy ideas and turn them into something of substance.”³⁸

Considered as a kind of public introduction feature to Eno, Kent’s profile establishes Eno as a contradictory figure, a musical “intellectual” who proudly claims he’s not a musician. It is also here where Eno broaches themes that he would return to again and again throughout the decade, most notably using trained musicians to translate his musical ideas. The crux of this impulse was born out of his interest in the potentials of setting in motion situations or systems that provoked unexpected creative behavior. In musical collaborations with trained musicians, such as Fripp, the tension between trained and untrained could, at its best, not only provoke unforeseen musical arrangements, but compel creative self-investigation. A trained musician would not necessarily have to deskill their playing to work with Eno (although his musical arrangements were often structurally very simple) but consider different or novel ways to approach their playing. “I describe things in terms of body movements quite a lot,” Eno tells Lester Bangs in 1979, “...I say, ‘I don’t want something that makes you do this, I want something that makes you do that!’ Or I dance a bit, to describe what sort of movement it ought to make in you, and I’ve found that’s a very good way of talking to musicians.”³⁹

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Lester Bangs, “Eno,” *Musician*, November 1979. Fripp would often cite his guitar playing on *No Pussyfooting*, which consisted of two long tracks in which he played over Eno’s tape and synthesizer loops, as “the most expressive I’ve ever done.” In Steve Rosen, “Robert Fripp,” *Guitar Player*, May 1974.

Ian MacDonald, “Before and After Science Part 1: Accidents Will Happen,”
New Musical Express, November 26, 1977^{3.}

NME’s Ian MacDonald, who would write on Roxy Music, Ferry, and Eno throughout the 1970s, published an ambitious two-part, 12,000 word, mini-autobiography - “some monologues recorded and compiled” - on Eno and his work up to late 1977. In the photo of Eno accompanying the article, taken by his partner at the time Ritva Saariko, gone is the Revlon eye shadow and the feathered shoulder pads, the long hair replaced with Eno’s natural baldness. The somewhat blurry photograph with Eno leaning both into a corner and into a shadow bears all the hallmarks of the romantic, pensive artist, and represents well the shift in just four years both in Eno’s artistic development and self-presentation.

The “part one” of MacDonald’s interview largely covers Eno’s early life and formative arts experiences. Establishing Eno’s place and date of birth – Woodbridge, Suffolk, May 15, 1948 – and his decision to enroll in art school at sixteen all in one short, perhaps telling, sentence, MacDonald goes on to say: “Although young Brian knew he didn’t want to be ordinary, his conceptions were, at that point, quite as ordinary as those of his fellow students. He was in need of a shake up.”⁴⁰ Immediately following this sentence, Eno is given significant space to elaborate:

By a stroke of luck, I happened to go to a very good school. Ipswich was run by a guy called Roy Ascott - a very brilliant educationalist, I think - and what he and his staff were concerned with was not the teaching of technique so much as experimenting with notions of what constitutes creative behavior...So, instead of sitting there doing little paintings, we found ourselves being required to get involved in discussions and self-investigation projects. Like, the first thing we had to do was a 'mind-map', which was constructing a series of tests to find out what sort of behavior we exhibited in different situations, from which it was decided what sort of character type we each were. Having established that, we had to behave in a way diametrically opposed to our normal selves, i.e. if you were naturally extrovert, you had to be introvert; if you were a born leader, you had to be a follower, etc. All of this was very exciting and disorienting and aroused in me a lasting interest in

⁴⁰ Ian MacDonald, “Before and After Science: Part 1: Accidents Will Happen,” *NME*, November 26, 1977.

working with other people under what might normally be considered quite artificial restrictions.⁴¹

Here, Eno is describing Roy Ascott's Groundcourse, a pedagogical experiment in student behaviorism and behaviorist art. While it is perhaps unusual to read about an experimental behaviorist artist in the pages of *NME*, this would not be the first time Ascott's name would appear in the context of a rock and roll network, with his former student, Pete Townsend of The Who, crediting Ascott's teachings (and "destruction artist" Gustav Metzger's work) for his decision to often smash his guitar on stage.⁴²

A student of the artists Victor Pasmore and Richard Hamilton, Ascott decided early that art was a process, that the development of a work could be as crucial as the object itself. In line with, but different from the burgeoning conceptual art that was on the rise by the early 1960s, was Ascott's belief that the triad of artist, artwork, audience must experience a shared symbiotic behavioral system. "I make structures in which the relationships of parts are not fixed and may be changed by the intervention of the spectator," Ascott writes in his 1963 text, "The Construction of Change," "As formal relationships are altered, so the ideas they stand for are extended."⁴³ An impetus for Ascott was how an object could be thought of as an idea itself, not simply as an idea made concrete. In this way Ascott was interested in how art, when presented in such a way, could alter or modify behavior, and lead to greater didactic possibilities. "All art is, in some sense, didactic," Ascott writes, "every artist is, in some way, setting out to instruct. For by

⁴¹ Ibid. In 1961, the British art education system implemented the Diploma in Art and Design (Dip A D), shifting final examinations away from Royal British institutions (who would judge student work on a dictated theme and size) and back to the university itself. This shift, with the Dip A D being comparable to a standard university degree, signaled something of a death knell to the more bohemian individualized arts education that preceded it. However, the Dip A D, with its requirement of (gen ed?) theory and history courses, moved British art students (reluctantly or not) into more inter and extra disciplinary activity, something in step with the more experimental fringes of 1960s art.

⁴² For more on Destruction Art of the 1960s and Gustav Metzger, see: Kristine Stiles, "Sticks and Stones: The Destruction in Art Symposium," *Arts Magazine*, January, 1989, 54-60; "Survival Ethos and Destruction Art," *Discourse*, Vol. 14, No. 2, Performance Issue(s): Happening, Body, Spectacle, Virtual Reality (Spring, 1992), 74-102; *The Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS): The Radical Social Project of Event-Structured Art*, PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1987.

⁴³ Roy Ascott "The Construction of Change" in Edward Shanken, ed. *Telematic Embrace*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 97.

instruction, we mean to give direction, and that is precisely what all great art does.”⁴⁴ Thus, Ascott’s art (and art for Ascott) is in itself an agent of transformation, one that seeks to, like other innovations in society and culture, enforce real change.⁴⁵

Along with art, the most pressing discipline altering the social for Ascott was the field of science and technology. Ascott felt that for an artist (and their art) to remain a force for cultural change, their “moral responsibility” was to have an understanding of fields that produced such change. He is not orthodox enough in this position to demand that all artists be scientists – “science...[has] too many specialized fields...for the artist to consult them all”⁴⁶ – but offers up the field of cybernetics as an “integrative” and generative solution. Cybernetics, coined by the social scientist Norbert Wiener, is the study of the relationship between systems, particularly how interactions between a viable system organically create a loop of information that says something about said system.⁴⁷

Cybernetics gave Ascott a theoretical model in which to consider art an integrative system that could affect human behavior in a profound way, and he used this notion as a framework for his pedagogical approach. Ascott writes: “The new student’s preconceptions of the nature of art and his own limitations (‘Art is Van Gogh’; ‘Art is what my teacher said it was to get me through my art exam’; ‘I am no good at color’; ‘I am the class clown’; ‘I am thick, but good at patterns and posters’) must first be severely shaken and opened up to his close scrutiny.”⁴⁸ Ascott aimed to make his students aware of their own positions in the

⁴⁴ Ibid, 98.

⁴⁵ This is a key distinction, according to Edward Shanken, between Ascott’s notion of behaviorism and the psychological theory of behaviorism as outlined by B.F. Skinner: “Skinner believed that behavior could be understood on the basis of environmental conditioning alone. As such, he conceived of the organism itself as a black box whose internal processes offered no significant clues to predicting behavior. Ascott, on the other hand, ascribed great significance to the ability of internal processes of his artworks and those who participated in them to transform the behavior of the system as a whole. By merging cybernetics and behaviorism, his work countered Skinner’s deterministic conception by striking a balance between how internal and external factors affected the behavioral dimensions of art.” Shanken in *Telematic Embrace*, 46.

⁴⁶ Shanken in *Telematic Embrace*, 97.

⁴⁷ Edward Shanken gives a rough summation of cybernetics via Norbert Wiener:

1.) Phenomena are fundamentally contingent 2.) the behavior of a system can nonetheless be determined probabilistically 3.) animals and machines function in quite similar ways with regard to the transfer of information, so a unified theory of this process can be articulated 4.) the behavior of humans and machines can be automated and controlled by regulating the transfer of information. Shanken in *Telematic Embrace*, 20.

⁴⁸ Ascott, “The Construction of Change,” in *Telematic Embrace*, 106.

classroom, how their prejudices, limitations, and expectations might help them in understanding that their roles as budding artists was not just simply a private world of personal exploration, but one that was inherently tied to real social (if not biological) change, via feedback. Feedback, for Ascott, is the basic principle of inclusive participatory art, and the interactivity of the observer puts the work of art in a perpetual state of transition. Thus, a work of art that desires real interactivity (not just the act of viewing) contains uncontrolled variables and moves the work (and the artist) into a non-static social situation. This troubles the historical hierarchy of the artist at the top and puts them on the level of the audience member, which creates a conceptual (and social) shift from what things *are* to what things *do*.

By the time of his 1967 essay, “Behaviorist Art and the Cybernetic Vision,” Ascott had cemented his belief that cybernetic art could reveal systems that shape and alter behavior. While this notion is predicated on the study of systems of control (by the 1960s and 70s, many cyberneticists were attempting to atone for their role in aiding in probabilistic military strategies) engaging with art’s potential to reveal certain interactions and behaviors was considered by Ascott as a means to open up a greater understanding of how humans think and thus to better communication (like Marshall McLuhan, Ascott believed that a key to solving the world’s problems was fixing the gaps in human communication).

“Roy had three specific ideas,” Eno recalls,

One was that art was the politically, socially and psychological transformative activity of society; and second was that it had to be allied to an awareness of science: it was no use just saying that it all just “came out of your imagination.” He wanted to set up a situation in which people were articulate about what they did, and where they were expected to be questioned about it: a critical kind of place, in fact, unlike what was going on in most art schools at the time, one might add. In 1964, art schools were just dissolving out of the rigid, pre-1960s idea of people drawing from life, but they were not resolving into anything – it was more of a kind of “Do what you like.” In my experience Roy Ascott[’s]...notion was that part of what an artist could do was create a sort of different behavioral conditioning for society: how do you change the mental landscape against which people are acting, if your actions are always predicated on assumption of where you are in the world, and what the world is? Retrospectively I can see that he wanted to say you could detach actions

from context and re-think them – he wanted to break that coupling.⁴⁹ Although Ascott espoused a semi-utopian role for the artist through behavioral modification, his own methods were at times considered not just uncouth, but ethically dubious. Ascott's Ipswich colleague, the painter, composer, and poet Tom Phillips later called him “a magister and an authoritarian,” adding that “cybernetics matched his authoritarianism and he embodied it too; he was really quite daunting for the students and me. He told you what to do and you did it.”⁵⁰ Eno and his Ipswich cohorts would be party to all matters of behavioral and sociological investigations, sometimes unbeknownst to them. One particular event, what Eno dubs “the Quadrangle Dilemma,” found Ascott assembling students in the college quad and then locking them in. Phillips read a quote from Lenin about trapped chickens while the students tried in vain to escape their plight. All the while, Ascott and faculty watched the event unfold from a nearby roof. While the consequences of this uncouth methodology from a bureaucratic end are not confirmed anywhere, some students “quit the college” afterwards, and Ascott would find employ elsewhere shortly after Eno graduated on to Winchester in 1966.

Paul Rambeli, “Brain Waves from Eno,”^{4.} *Trouser Press*, June/July 1977

Participating in Ascott's Groundcourse, among the mind maps and role play exercises, Eno quickly became disenchanted with traditional painting, stimulated instead with behavioral effects and processes. “My inclinations moved increasingly towards stipulating procedures by which paintings could be made and then performing them,” Eno wrote in a letter to cyberneticist Stafford Beer in the 1970s, “This was not only interesting in itself, but it took the emphasis away from the product and placed it instead on the process. I took the rather doctrinaire view that what emerged at the end of the process was,

⁴⁹ Bracewell, 203.

⁵⁰ Tom Phillips in Sheppard, 43.

if not irrelevant, largely residual, and that its only value would be that it in some way referred you back to the process.”⁵¹

In a 1977 interview with Paul Rambeli for *Trouser Press*, Eno discusses his disenchantment with painting further:

My intention was to become a painter but whilst at school I became progressively more frustrated with two things about painting. First of all, it was part of the art world, which meant that it was subjected to a whole lot of restrictions, quite a lot of which were to do with the marketing difficulties of painting. The second thing was that painting wasn't a social art; it's something you do on your own and I've never been very good at things like having an idea and struggling through with it, then presenting it to a fairly unsympathetic world, which you do with painting. I got more and more interested in collaborations, in things that you do with other people... Another thing was that I began to get frustrated with the slowness of painting, whereas music is a very immediate art form. What you're doing now is the piece and as soon as you've done it, it's gone. Also, I was interested in arts of process rather than arts of product, arts that dealt with periods of time. First of all, I tried all kinds of things to integrate these ideas into painting. It took quite a lot of time for me to realize that all these things I was doing were quite similar to what musicians do, what composers do. So, the transition was fairly slow; after about four years of dabbling with music I realized that this was what I would probably end up doing.⁵²

Eno's transition from painter to conceptual artist with an interest in music making was likely exacerbated by his growing friendship at the time with his instructor Tom Phillips. Phillips took Eno into London for concerts of experimental music, introducing him to the milieu of Cornelius Cardew, Cage, Feldman, Nyman, Christian Wolff, and budding English composers/musicians such as Christopher Hobbs, Gavin Bryars, and John Tilbury. Eno remembers that “the same twenty-three people were at every concert. We all knew each other, it was a tiny, tiny scene. A La Monte Young-Cornelius Cardew kind of world and practically everyone in the scene was someone who was also doing music. So, it was people listening to each other's music basically.”⁵³ Given the relative accessibility of this

⁵¹ Eno In Paul Rambeli, “Brain Waves from Eno,” *Trouser Press*, June/July 1977. Eno goes on to say that “this is not a view, incidentally, I have carried into music,” although this assertion seems to contradict practice, particularly in works such as *Discreet Music*.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ “Brian Eno in Conversation with David Toop,” Haywood Gallery, May 2, 2000.
https://www.moredarkthanshark.org/eno_int_sonicboom-may00.html. Accessed April 10th, 2020.

small experimental scene, it was no surprise that Eno kept in contact with many of these musicians and became deeply influenced by their methods and practices.

When Eno arrived at Winchester School of Art for his secondary education, he found a very different and much more conventional art school. “When I went to Winchester it was all to do with product, the picture at the end” Eno recalls, “So at Winchester I was looking for anything that would keep me involved with process. It’s hard to think of music certainly without thinking in those terms.”⁵⁴ With his early works at Winchester, Eno began to attempt to reconcile strategies from experimental music and systems processes into visual art making. One particular project had Eno giving four different painters, four identical blank canvases and identical sets of instructions. When the painters completed their works, Eno assembled them all together to scrutinize the differences and similarities between them. Another work, *Detective Painting*, would present a kind of police sketch artist scenario. A completed painting would be hidden, and it would be up to a second painter, who had not seen the original, to reconstruct the work based on clues, questions, etc. Upon completion, the original and reconstructed painting were brought together to compare results.⁵⁵

These early works by Eno were essentially extensions of activities and games that might be found in the Groundcourse at Ipswich. However, their common denominator was an investigation into how other people – art students here – would follow or diverge from a set of given instructions. What Eno relished in this process was the potential for variables that either evidenced a move outside of one’s own expectations (“forgetting the self”) or added unforeseen permutations to an original artifact. Growing further disenchanted with the notion of a “product” at the end of these procedures, Eno realized that a way around this issue was a complete engagement with music making, particularly of the type found in instructional scores.

⁵⁴ Bracewell, 250.

⁵⁵ As of this writing, it does not seem these paintings have survived.

Ian MacDonald, “Under the Influence” *NME*, March 10, 1973⁵⁶

“LA MONTE YOUNG: *X for Henry Flint* [sic]. This was the first piece of music I ever performed from a score - and the first piece that, having performed, I felt really convinced that I'd made music. In terms of technique it's very simple to play but it's extremely beautiful to listen to. I don't think it's been recorded.”— Eno in Ian MacDonald, “Under the Influence” *NME*, March 10, 1973.⁵⁶

In one of the earliest *Melody Maker* profiles on Roxy Music by Richard Williams in 1972, Eno lists his formative influences: Cornelius Cardew’s *Schooltime Compositions*, Cage’s *Silence*, and “the systems artists - their emphasis is on the procedures rather than the end product.”⁵⁷ The following year, Eno presented an expanded, but similar list for *NME*’s “Under the Influence” feature, where artists speak “about their musical progenitors.”⁵⁸ An eclectic sampling, just before The Tokens’ “The Lion Sleeps Tonight,” and Buddy Holly’s “Wait ‘Til the Sun Shines, Nellie,” is La Monte Young’s “X for Henry Flynt.”⁵⁹ Young’s “Arabic Numeral (Any Integer) for H.F.” (more commonly known as *X for Henry Flynt*) was composed in 1960, and the score called for the performer to use their forearm and repeatedly bang out chromatic clusters on a piano keyboard, the “X” integer designating the number of repetitions (up to the performer).

According to Young biographer, Jeremy Grimshaw, Young had a far more meticulous typewritten score for the piece:

Young’s typescript of the original handwritten score fills two and a half pages and gives specific instructions about the length of the piece (ideally thirty minutes or longer), the tempo and articulation of the ‘bangs’ (one or two seconds per cluster, un-pedaled but sustained briefly, and with short pauses between), the way the title should appear on the program (the number of bangs, the date of composition, April 1960; and the dedication) and

⁵⁶ Ian MacDonald, “Under the Influence” *NME*, March 10, 1973. The misspelling of Flynt’s name would occur multiple times in print, most notably in an early edition of Sheppard’s *On Some Faraway Beach*, in which the piece is dubbed *X for Larry Flynt*, inadvertently giving the *Hustler* founder some avant-garde credentials.

⁵⁷ Richard Williams, “Roxy Music,” *Melody Maker*, July 29, 1972.

⁵⁸ Ian MacDonald, “Under the Influence,” *New Musical Express*, March 10, 1973.

⁵⁹ Filed under “Early 60s American Moody Rock,” at Eno’s request here, alongside The Essex, “Easier Said than Done,” Dick and Dee Dee, “The Mountain’s High,” The Fleetwoods, “Tragedy,” Shep and the Limelites, “Daddy’s Home,” The Dells, “Mission Bell” (this title is likely an error and Eno meant “I’ll Never Hear the Bells”) and The Elegants, “Little Star.”

suggestions for keeping track of the number (an assistant with notecards or a doorman's counter, etc.). Young also indicates that performer should prepare the piece in consultation not only with the score, but with an accompanying recording, which the player should scrutinize closely in order to replicate precisely the intended note lengths, short intervening pauses, tempo, and sonority.⁶⁰

X for Henry Flynt is also cited in Dave Sheppard's biography of Eno, perhaps from Eno himself, as "Repeat a loud, heavy sound every 1-2 seconds as uniformly and regularly as possible for a long period of time."⁶¹ The open nature of the verbal score, as well as its transmission from instruction to live performance could sometimes alter the piece itself, often outside of the original score. In some cases, the score could change to reflect the live performance altogether. Fluxus artist Benjamin Patterson's *Paper Piece* (1961) was scored with meticulous actions and sounds using paper at various given intervals. The score's appearance in a 1966 Fluxus edition simply read: "Improvisation with Paper." Fluxus curator Jon Hendricks writes, "These simplifications were typical of George Maciunas' approach to work for Fluxus concerts and to distribute publicly for others to perform. They are reproduced here to give a sense of how performers might have interpreted Patterson's work for Fluxus concerts in which Patterson was not the performer."⁶²

X for Henry Flynt premiered in a performance by artist and musician Toshi Ichiyanagi on May 14, 1961 and made it into Cardew's periphery by 1963 which could likely account for its circulation among the English experimentalists – and their students – during this time.⁶³ Eno performed *X for Henry Flynt* twice in 1968. For the first performance, Eno chose one hour for the given integer, and splayed his arm across the piano keyboard, trying to hit all notes at once. On the second performance, he hit the open piano frame with a block of wood for the duration of an hour. The dexterous endurance that the piece requires meant

⁶⁰ Jeremy Grimshaw, *Draw a Straight Line and Follow It: The Music and Mysticism of La Monte Young*, 80.

⁶¹ Sheppard, 51.

⁶² Jon Hendricks in Valerie Cassel Oliver, ed. *Benjamin Patterson: Born in a State of Flux/us*, Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2012, 133

⁶³ Flynt claims the title was *566 to Henry Flynt (April 1960)* at its debut performance. *Sound and Light*, 52. Cardew defended the work to the BBC's Hans Keller who asked if the work was not "the aural equivalent to a beautiful mountain, plus a little sweat," to which Cardew responded, "I think it is very rare that a piece of music arouses more than a beautiful mountain in the average listener." *Conversations from New Comment*, BBC 3, Sunday December 22, 1963.

that after a given bit of time the performer would become wholly aware of the minute sonic differences in each repetition, an effect not unlike listening to the phase music of Steve Reich or Terry Riley. In works by Reich and Riley, musical phrases would be repeated over and over and layered on top of one another, and this simple act - although requiring dexterous performers - created an aural illusion, causing the ear to hear musical information that was not there.⁶⁴

While performing *X for Henry Flynt*, Eno recalled that his ear began to “hallucinate” sounds on account of the “buildup of shifting ringing harmonics in the piano strings and the tendency of the brain to focus increasingly on what is changing in the sound rather than what is constant.”⁶⁵ This effect was a revelation for Eno, and in 1981, he would cite *X for Henry Flynt* as “a cornerstone of everything I’ve done since.”⁶⁶ As early as 1973, Eno described the profound sensory effect of performing *X for Henry Flynt* and what it meant for the performer: “At first [*X for Henry Flynt*] is very boring, for about the first fifteen minutes when you’re still responding to it in a conventional way. Then you become aware of the differences between each crash. When you start to hear a tapestry of errors rather than a tapestry of intentions. You hear the things that weren’t intended.”⁶⁷ Six years later, he expanded on the piece for Lester Bangs, saying that, “It’s one of those hallucinatory pieces where your brain starts to habituate so that you cease to hear all the common notes, you just hear the differences from crash to crash, and these become so beautiful...After a little while you start to hear every type of sound...You hear trumpets and bells and people talking clear words, sentences coming out, because the brain starts to--it’s like the opposite of sensory

⁶⁴ This idea that a profound listening effect could occur through a rather simplistic maneuver was, as we shall see in Chapter Two, become of great artistic importance to Eno’s foundational work and thought process.

⁶⁵ Eno letter to Stafford Beer, In Christopher Scoates, ed. *Brian Eno: Visual Music*, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2013, 101.

⁶⁶ Jim Aiken, “An Interview with Brian Eno,” reprinted in *Keyboard Wizards*, Winter, 1985.

⁶⁷ Eno continues on to say, “I’m interested in anything that attempts to create a behavioral pattern in me rather than presenting a behavioral pattern. That’s why I like repetitious, some would say boring, music. What I like about the Velvet Underground is that they have that sort of feeling. I’m interested in monotonous things because they throw the weight on the listener to do the work.” In Geoff Brown, “Eno’s Where It’s At.” Eno’s read of *X for Henry Flynt* is remarkably similar to Cornelius Cardew’s “What the listener can hear and appreciate are the errors in the interpretation.” In *Treatise Handbook*, xiv.

deprivation, but it's the same effect. You start to hallucinate, because you telescope in on finer and finer details..."⁶⁸

In his "Under the Influence," article Eno describes "systems music" under nearly the same terms he gives to *X for Henry Flynt*, stating that, "The main point of interest is that the more simple and repetitive the elements of a piece of music, the more work the brain does in investing it with meaning... what actually happens is that the ears begin to reject the common elements of a repeated sound so that you aren't hearing the repetition, but the minute differences which happen every time."⁶⁹ Nearly twenty years later, Eno discussed Steve Reich's early tape phase piece, *It's Gonna Rain* (1965). This piece was one of Reich's first to exploit the effect of tape, when played on two players simultaneously, inevitably going out of sync with one another due to technological variables – types of players, tape length, playback speed, etc. *It's Gonna Rain*, with its exploiting technological variables, was for Eno, a seminal work of "systems music." In a 1996 lecture, Eno says,

The piece is very, very interesting because it's tremendously simple...But the

⁶⁸ Bangs, "Sandbox in Alphaville." The full quote:

It's one of those hallucinatory pieces where your brain starts to habituate so that you cease to hear all the common notes, you just hear the differences from crash to crash, and these become so beautiful. They're just entrancing. The difference can be like trying to cover both the black and white keys at the same time, sometimes you don't get a white down properly or miss a black, and just missing one note out of the fifty or so you're covering is a very noticeable difference, you really can hear that. You start to hear these omissions as melodies, or sometimes your arms creeps up a little bit further or down a little bit further or you hit too hard or your rhythm switches, and of course since I had the sustain pedal down as well it was just a continuous ring and eventually the whole piano was just really resonating and the richness of the sound was just amazing. After a little while you start to hear every type of sound, it's the closest thing in music to a drug experience I've heard. You hear trumpets and bells and people talking clear words, sentences coming out, because the brain starts to—it's like the opposite of sensory deprivation, but it's the same effect. You start to hallucinate, because you telescope in on finer and finer details, like for instance the acoustics of the room become very, very obvious to you. You notice that one note always echoes off that wall and another always echoes off that wall. And you can hear interplays like that in space as well, which of course are facts that in a normal performance you wouldn't be aware of, since things are going by so quickly and they don't repeat.

⁶⁹ MacDonald, "Under the Influence." Full quote:

The main point of interest is that the more simple and repetitive the elements of a piece of music, the more work the brain does in investing it with meaning. Most people would call a lot of the music I like monotonous because of this characteristic of repetition, but what actually happens is that the ears begin to reject the common elements of a repeated sound so that you aren't hearing the repetition, but the minute differences which happen every time. After sufficient time has elapsed, it's as if your brain has systemically rejected what's obvious and mundane, and you're hearing it in a way far more acute than that engendered by much of the more conventionally 'interesting' music.

results, sonically, are very complex... Quite soon you start hearing very exotic details of the recording itself... if you know how the piece is made, what you become aware of is that you are getting a huge amount of material and experience from a very, very simple starting point.⁷⁰

The subtle variations in Eno's impressions both express that he articulates the sonic effects of *X for Henry Flynt* as a systems work similar to Reich's, but also to illustrate his commitment to this talking point in the press over the course of his career. As I will explore later on, the possibility for rich sonic variety that can occur out of relatively simple circumstances – a performer's tired arm striking an unconcentrated cluster of piano keys, two cassette players gradually going out of sync with one another – would be a methodological staple of Eno's work and conceptualizing, represented well by "one of his most famous" *Oblique Strategy* instructions that "repetition is a form of change."⁷¹

Eno's impressions of the perceptual activity that occurs with systems music changed subtly over two decades, but what remains intact is a clear fascination with the role of the "listener," that a piece of music changes according to one's attentive listening. It is not difficult to detect the influence of Ascott in Eno's sentiments on the piece, to praise the value of a work of art that could be unfixed, in a perpetual state of transition, thus not representing a "behavioral pattern" but causing a new one. As a synthesis of process based and behavioral art, *X for Henry Flynt* represented for Eno both a gateway to other artistic possibilities – music making – as well as early confirmation that art does not develop in one firm linear fashion, but is more nuanced, shifts and transforms subtly, in ways that may go unnoticed. Perhaps most of all, works like Young's confirmed Eno's suspicion that

⁷⁰ Brian Eno, "Generative Music: A Talk Delivered in San Francisco, June 8th, 1996. <http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/enoi.html>. Accessed April 10th, 2020. Full quote: For many years I was the only person I knew who thought [Steve Reich's *It's Gonna Rain*] was a beautiful piece of music. It's quite a long piece, it's about 17 minutes long. It's produced by a very, very simple process... The piece is very, very interesting because it's tremendously simple. It's a piece of music that anybody could have made. But the results, sonically, are very complex. What happens when you listen to that piece is that your listening brain becomes habituated in the same way that your eye does if you stare at something for a very long time. If you stare at something for a very long time your eye very quickly cancels the common information, stops seeing it, and only notices the differences. This is what happens with that piece of music. Quite soon you start hearing very exotic details of the recording itself... if you know how the piece is made, what you become aware of is that you are getting a huge amount of material and experience from a very, very simple starting point.

⁷¹ Rick Poyner notes, "Repetition is a Form of Change" would be "one of the most famous of his *Oblique Strategies*"⁷¹ instructional cards. In Russell Mills and Brian Eno, *More Dark than Shark*, London: Faber and Faber, 1986, 43.

remarkable art did not require a standard form of academic training or even proficiency, that music making could be affectively accomplished by non-musicians. “I realized there were certain areas of music you could enter without actually learning an instrument,” the then 24-year-old Eno told Richard Williams in 1972, “which at my age I certainly wasn’t about to do.”⁷²

Around the time of performing *X for Henry Flynt*, Eno would write in his personal notebook:

Art schools manage to believe themselves on the fence between telling you what to do, step by step, and leaving you free to do what you want. Their orientation is basically towards the production of specialists and towards the provision of ambition, of goals, and identities. The assumption of the correct identity – painter, sculptor – fattens you up for the market. The identity becomes a straitjacket; it becomes progressively more dangerous to step outside of it. As Desmond Morris writes, ‘The answer is that there is a serious snag in the specialist way of life – everything is fine as long as the special survival device works. But if the environment changes, then the specialist is left stranded.’ The environment is unstable, and, what is more, we cannot avoid being involved with all men, all the time. These two conditions are conducive to experts, specialists, and professionals.⁷³

Expertise, specialization, and professional practice became anathema to Eno during his remaining time at Winchester, distancing him from his professors (and occasional cohorts). As his notebook entry suggests, specialization for Eno was a crutch, something that doomed an artist to a solitary life of patiently requesting outside validation. To let go of specialization was a social act for Eno, one that allowed a form of art making that could “involve[e] lots of people in visual events.”⁷⁴

Remarking on the small scene of experimental musicians in England at this time, Eno says, “So there was this tiny highly intellectual scene that I think was very fruitful really, but had no audience, there was hardly anybody listening to it. And then on the other hand, you had pop music, which had a huge audience and looked capable of carrying some of those

⁷² Richard Williams, “Roxy Music,” *Melody Maker*, July 29, 1972,

⁷³ Bracewell, 251.

⁷⁴ Paul Rambali, “Brain Waves from Eno.” This is very similar to John Cage’s sentiment from 1967: “art instead of being an object made by one person is a process set in motion by a group of people. Art’s socialized. It isn’t someone saying something, but people doing things, giving everyone (including those involved) the opportunity to have experiences they would not otherwise have had.” (find source, but in Nyman, 130).

ideas. So that's why everybody got excited. It looked like the place where things were going to happen.”⁷⁵ Eno began to theorize that certain arenas of popular music could and did represent certain strands and tendencies found in the more “highly intellectual scene” of experimentalism. By the time of his “Under the Influence” article, Eno would speak of The Velvet Underground almost on the same terms as systems music:

The thing that the Velvet Underground took from their whole experience with Warhol and the Factory was that you didn't have to force things to happen – and you didn't have to think of music in terms of progressing. You could be making the same statement over and over again. And the fact that it happened before made it different. And the number of times that it had happened before made it different. Which is what Steve Reich and La Monte Young and Terry Riley are completely hip to, and which is a cornerstone of their music: the fact of repeating something changes it.⁷⁶

Although a group like the Velvet Underground has retrospectively been critically lauded, no doubt on account of the influence they had on musical artists such as Eno, it should be noted that Eno (and particularly Bryan Ferry), despite his more outré taste in experimental music, did not necessarily make a distinction between pop music (generally defined as music constructed solely to make a profit) and rock music (not always considered strictly on commercial terms).⁷⁷ As an adolescent, Eno had an appreciation for American singles such as The Tokens' “The Lion Sleeps Tonight,” and would remark later on the ephemeral nature of “one hit wonders” – a musical group's brief capability to touch a mass audience – as an interesting phenomenon in cultural development whether cynically engineered or not.⁷⁸ Certainly pop and rock music could have a “recipe,” a list of sonic and performance attributes that theoretically could be exploited for maximum financial success, and it was these conventions that Eno found rife for exploration in his own work (and found

⁷⁵ “Brian Eno In Conversation with David Toop.”

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ The Velvet Underground was one of Eno's first realizations that rock music could exist outside of the commercial world, and he talked often about their self-titled third LP (and eventually covered that album's “I'm set Free” on his 2016 record, *The Ship*). It is difficult to consider now, but at the time of its release, The Velvet Underground's first LP *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, was largely critically and commercially a failure. The quiet influence of this LP (and their subsequent four albums) on many artists over many years would aid in many critical reassessments of their work and legacy. Repetition is a form of change indeed.

⁷⁸ Eno recorded a cover of “The Lion Sleeps Tonight” as a single in 1975, which later became “an early evening favorite” at one of New York City's seminal punk venues, The Mudd Club. In: Richard Boch, *The Mudd Club*, New York: Feral House, 2017, 116.

subtly reconfigured through the Velvet Underground's pugnacious attitude towards musical skill).⁷⁹

Eno's final written thesis for Winchester, *Music for Non-Musicians*, has been described by Eno's biographer David Sheppard as "lessons learned from [John] Cage, [Christian] Wolff, and [George] Brecht. Effectively it was: 'create, set it off, see what happens'... Eno proposed to circumvent composition in the accepted sense altogether."⁸⁰ In Sheppard's description of this lost publication, he synthesizes the two main events in Eno's art school: engagements with experimental music and experiments in social processes. Simple processes – verbal scores, gestures, repetitions – could set off wildly divergent perceptual results, changing the behavior of a given system.⁸¹ That such rich variety could be achieved without any rigorous adherence to conventional skill or training provided Eno the basis for which to approach his role in Roxy Music, both in practice and in theory as "non-musician," to work in an unexpected vernacular within the convention of pop and rock music. Further, these concepts would be expanded and solidified as Eno began to work on his own hybrid songcraft that was largely the product of experimentation and collaboration between different musical skill sets. "It may readily be perceived that {*X for Henry Flynt*} requires very little specific skill, and is the antithesis of virtuosity," Hayman remarks in a 1974 article, using Eno's performance of Young's piece as a paragraph transition, "Eno's all for that. Skill, he feels, acts like a kind of barrier to real innovation...For this reason he now

⁷⁹ In the 1970s, Lester Bangs would christen the musical amateurism several one-hit wonder groups 1960s groups such as Question Mark and the Mysterions, The Count Five, The Seeds, among others as harbingers of punk music on account of their dedication to musical expressiveness despite their musical ineptitude. See Chapter Four for how this led to punk and new wave genre designators.

⁸⁰ Dave Sheppard, *On Some Faraway Beach*, 54. Sheppard dedicates a sizeable section of his biography of Eno on his art school tenure, and Michael Bracewell's biography of Roxy Music, *Re/Make Re/Model*, is almost entirely dedicated to the art school experience and orbit of Eno, Ferry, and MacKay.

⁸¹ Eno would bring this text up several times in interviews from the early 1970s. In a 1972 *Melody Maker* article "That One Cost £2.80 for the Tape," Richard Williams writes, "Eno's theories on tape delay were published in book form on March 6th, and five days later, three thousand miles away, Terry Riley published his own theories in America. They were almost exactly the same. 'What an example of creative confluence,' chuckles the Captain [Robert Fripp's nickname for Eno, revealed in this article]. 'Actually, shortly afterward I found out that John Cage had discovered the same things years ago. But he was a creep, and anyway didn't know how to use it.'"

works with musicians who are either beyond the point of skill as its own reward...or who are musically naïve.”⁸²

6.
Brian Eno, “Decay and Delay,” *Clare Market Review*, Summer, 1968

By the late 1960s, the official student paper of The London School of Economics, *Clare Market Review*, running since 1905, shifted focus into more countercultural concerns of the times. Renamed *Clare* to reflect this change in priorities, the paper featured critical geopolitical essays by Bertrand Russell and student penned pieces protesting political violence. *Clare* took on the visual aesthetic of like-minded countercultural magazines of the time, such as *Oz* and the *East Village Other*, and the May 1968 issue of *Clare*, with its two color print cover flashing a bare ass at the reader, featured poems by Roger McGough, Adrian Mitchell, and Peter Porter, a short story by experimental novelist BS Johnson, and Eno’s score for a tape composition, *Decay and Delay*, his first published work.

Part instructional score and performance description, *Decay and Delay* in *Clare* features a black and white photograph of a grinning young Eno, and a diagram illustrating three interconnected tape players. Eno’s interest in the musical possibilities of tape recorders began during his time at Ipswich, an endeavor encouraged by Phillips, and greatly influenced by Reich’s use of phasing tape players for *It’s Gonna Rain*. Amassing around thirty tape players, in various states of functioning, Eno composed several musical works for tape recorders, including *Decay and Delay*, which was performed publicly at Reading College of Art with grand piano accompaniment in 1967.⁸³ *Decay and Delay* was another early example of Eno’s interest in the results of performer feedback, and featured three tape loop connected four-track tape recorders (A,B,C), two (A & B) of which recorded on different tracks of the tape, while the third (C) played them back simultaneously. The score continues,

A noise made at a given time will record on both tracks of the tape and will be played back at C after a delay, this delay dependent on the distance between

⁸² Martin Hayman, “Eno and the Endless Arc,” *Sounds*, December 22, 1973.

⁸³ Williams, “Roxy Music.”

the separate machines, and on the rotation speed of the tape. When the noise is played back at C it is re-recorded on both A & B, but this time it will be recorded in a decayed state due to such factors as the imperfectability of tape recorders, the acoustics and natural echo of the room, the influx of incidental noises obscuring the original. After a delay, the noise plays back in its decayed state, and is again re-recorded, once more incurring delay. The piece can last for any length of time.⁸⁴

Although treated largely as a footnote in Eno's long career, *Decay and Delay* was a crucial work in that it was the bridge to Eno's introduction to Ferry and subsequent invitation to join Roxy Music. *Decay and Delay*'s performance at Reading is how Andy MacKay became aware of Eno and his tape recorder: "Andy remembered Eno...from art school [MacKay went to Reading] some years earlier and knew that he had been experimenting with phonetic poetry, tape recorders and allied electronics in making a sort of systematic music."⁸⁵ Although MacKay was impressed with Eno's novel compositional work, his invitation to Eno to visit the early incarnation of Roxy seemed also grounded in pragmatic necessity: a cassette player is a useful tool for a burgeoning rock group looking to cut a demo: "I joined Roxy Music almost by accident," Eno remarked in 1974, "I was invited around by Andy, Bryan, and the bass player we had then, just to tape some of their songs. When I was there, I began showing them some of the things you could do with a tape recorder other than just record music."⁸⁶

Decay and Delay was essentially a blueprint for Eno's primary role in Roxy Music, "treating" the conventional instrumental players in the group. "I'm mostly interested in modifying the sound of the other instruments," Eno would tell Richard Williams in 1972, "You get a nice quality, the skill of the performer transformed by the electronics. Neither the player nor I know what each other is going to do, which means you get some nice accidents."⁸⁷ "Transforming" the skills of his cohorts through electronics and their ensuing variables, gets to a hallmark of Eno's 1970s musical output and thinking. While human

⁸⁴ Brian Eno, "Decay and Delay," *Clare Market Review*, Summer 1968, 32-33.

⁸⁵ Lisa Robinson, "Roxy Music: Terror in the Rue Morgue," *Creem*, May 1973.

⁸⁶ *Eno*, dir. Alfons Sinninger, 1974.

⁸⁷ Williams, "Roxy Music."

action and performance was still an important attribute of art making for Eno, he nonetheless looked to electronics as a means to facilitate what he believed was a growing orientation for the artist to negate skill for judgement (illustrated later with *Discreet Music*).

As his 1967-68 Winchester notebook attests, skill, for Eno, was actually a crutch in terms of creativity in that it allowed one to bypass “unfamiliar situations.” Judgement and choice, whether externally guided (verbal scores) or intuitive, was often the most important factor in the creation of art for Eno, a sentiment shared with art precedents, perhaps most famously apparent in Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917).⁸⁸ In a 1974 essay outlining his methodologies and written for his fan club journal *ENOVations*, Eno wrote, “You see, a studio offers you perhaps 20,000 alternative courses of action at any moment. All of them are pretty much equally available and none of them require the kind of dexterity that is normally associated with playing instruments. So, the important part of the process is not what you can do (since ‘anyone can do it’) but what you choose [sic] to do. In fact, this has always been the case, but it has taken electronics (where ultimately all things are equally available to all men) to highlight it.”⁸⁹

Staff Writers, “The Roxy Music File,” *Melody Maker*, October 14, 1972⁷.

“[Eno’s] Compositions: Water Music (1968), Delay and Decay [sic] (1967), Father Johnson (1968), Sinister Dexter (1971), You Don’t Ask Me Why (1972)”⁹⁰

Along with *Decay and Delay*, Eno would list several other early compositions in a 1972 Roxy Music profile. *Sinister Dexter* was a tape loop piece dedicated to Dexter Lloyd, an early Roxy member and draft dodging American who disappeared due to “unexplained

⁸⁸ Eno would much later cite Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917) as a pivot in art from a classical to more experience-based mode of artmaking in the 20th Century.

⁸⁹ *ENOVations*, No. 1, 1974, 8-9. Eno’s statement regarding “equal availability to all men” is somewhat problematic in its universalizing and has a tenor not unfamiliar to more capitalist driven economic sentiments of the infallible and liberating effects of consumer choice. Eno’s work has largely eschewed the rationality of profit that defines neoliberalism, but he nonetheless exemplifies, in his courting of technological choice, an affinity for technocratic management, which is a major tenet of neoliberal political thought. See: Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.

⁹⁰ Staff Writers, “The Roxy Music File,” *Melody Maker*, October 14, 1972.

circumstances.”⁹¹ *You Don't Ask Me Why* is a tape phase piece, clearly inspired by *It's Gonna Rain*, featuring the voice of Judi Dench – cribbed from a radio play – speaking the phrase that titles the piece, dubbed eight times at varying speed into one tape piece. Richard Williams writes that the voices “begin together and then gradually shoot out of phase until the effect is like an aural hall of mirrors...the multi-tracking turns its [the phrase “you don't ask me why”] meaning a thousand different ways...it's utterly mesmerizing: ‘youyou do-don't ah-ah-ah-ah don't a-ask why why why don't oh-ask you-you-don't...”⁹²

While I can find no information on *Father Johnson*, the other early composition of Eno's listed here, *Water Music*, is in actuality referring to his realization of American artist George Brecht's *Drip Music*. In 1968, while still at Winchester, Eno performed George Brecht's *Drip Music* twice, the score of which reads:

For single or multiple performance.
A source of dripping water and an empty vessel are arranged so that the
water falls into the vessel.
Second version: Dripping⁹³

Eno first performed *Drip Music* in a fairly conventional manner (that won him a college award) and later as a more complicated variation, with the assistance of two Winchester classmates. Honing in on the score to *Drip Music*'s stipulation to arrange an empty vessel, Eno constructed a large cubic container from a type of sheeting metal with various tubes containing noise making devices. Building the object on the Winchester back lawn by the river, when the vessel would collect rainwater (or collected water from Eno and his cohorts) the dripping would set off a number of indeterminate sound sources. At the bottom of the vessel, resting on a built surrounding wall, were ink laden papers that, when hit with water, would slowly fill with their various latent colors. “It was a very lovely thing, it made the most beautiful delicate noise,” Eno told Lester Bangs in 1979, “I had the water just dripping onto little cans with skins stretched across them so that they made little percussive noises, little

⁹¹ Sheppard, 72.

⁹² Williams “That one cost...” A snippet of this piece is heard at the very end of “For Your Pleasure” on Roxy Music's album of the same name, 1972.

⁹³ *Fluxus Performance Workbook*, eds. Ken Friedman, Owen Smith, and Lauren Sawchyn, (e-published, 2012), 23.

dings and tinkles and so on, a very, very delicate noise, and it was right by a river, so the gentle bubbling of the river was in the background.”⁹⁴ Shortly after its construction, the work was destroyed by vandals.

Eno also began making his own Brecht-like verbal scores around this time

Simplepiece [sic] for two players

Two players playing identical
tune at moderato. Both play till
one makes a mistake.
At this point the second player
begins a second tune etc. etc.

6.9.68⁹⁵

A positive Use of the Puddle

Carve a poem in reverse on
the soles of a pair of boots.
walk through puddles.

11.11.67⁹⁶

These early verbal score compositions by Eno have a clear Brecht influence. Conceptually, Eno follows Brecht’s Event Score model by scoring miniature activities from the minutiae found in daily life, and the formal presentation follows Brecht’s in the use of brief verbal notation with composition’s date appended. Somewhat surprisingly, there has been little to no comparison of the influence of Brecht on Eno in critical appraisals of his work. Only Gavin Bryars has publicly noted that: “The whole “Oblique Strategies” thing [Eno’s deck of cards created with Peter Schmidt that offer up aphorisms and strategies for creative working solutions] was basically taken from George Brecht’s *Water Yam* ideas, and compared with that it’s not really interesting stuff, though at the time people were calling it the next best thing after the Tarot.”⁹⁷ Regardless of this unacknowledged aspect, these early

⁹⁴ Bangs, “A Sandbox in Alphaville.”

⁹⁵ Scoates, 87.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Bryars in Sheppard, 179.

verbal scores by Eno, coupled with his take on *Drip Music* are foundational expressions of his burgeoning interest in simple systems that can set off complex variations.

Brecht's work was often associated with a more Cage-centric strand of composition, taken up and recalibrated by Fluxus in the often-generalized notion of aestheticizing everyday life - the overlooked, simple, underappreciated - as art. Similar strategies withstanding, Michael Nyman notes a key distinction between Brecht and Cage:

Cage, despite his desire to dissolve the art-life dichotomy, is still dealing with the facts of *musical life*, Brecht is dealing with the facts of *life*... When Cage noticed the horn player emptying the spit out of his instrument was more interesting than the sounds of the orchestra, he might put it into a piece whose complexity guarantees that it remains insignificant, a mere incident - but in a highly 'significant' context, no matter what Cage says. Brecht, on the other hand, by isolating the insignificant and making an event out of it, could - if viewed in conventional terms - be accused of raising its level of significance... Cage did not have the nerve to reduce musical performance to its essence - the horn player's spit; Brecht, on the other hand, does: shaking (*String Quartet*), putting it down (*Solo for Wind Instrument*), exchanging (*Concerto for Orchestra*) etc.⁹⁸

Unlike Cage, Brecht was interested in the creation of "borderline art," what he defined as "Sounds barely heard, sights barely distinguished - see which way it goes (it should be possible to miss it completely)."⁹⁹ Brecht's work could inspire all matters of haphazard activities, and at the root of much of his work, as Nyman notes, is spectacle's antithesis: a discreet engagement with the insignificant.¹⁰⁰ "Hermetic, quiet, obscure," what Brecht learned most from Cage, according to his friend and Fluxus artist, Dick Higgins, was "an understanding of his love of complete anonymity, simplicity and non-involvement with what he does."¹⁰¹ Roy Ascott remarked much later of Eno's musical work (his ambient and instrumental compositions that make up most of his solo musical output) in similar Brechtian terms: "(Eno's work is an) aesthetic of surrender and meditation...a kind of Duchampian indifference, flowing from a process of removal of the self from reflection,

⁹⁸ Michael Nyman, "The Experimental Tradition," *Art and Artists*, October 1972, 46.

⁹⁹ editorial to *ccV TRE*, February 1964.

¹⁰⁰ See: "Journey to the Isle of Wight," discussion in Appendix A.

¹⁰¹ Dick Higgins, *Postface*, New York: Something Else Press, 1964, 51.

toward a quiet celebration of uneventfulness.”¹⁰²

Of course “uneventfulness” is a type of event, for why else would there be a celebration, no matter how quiet.¹⁰³ Eno’s 1975 album, *Discreet Music*, is perhaps the pinnacle of this tendency and has much in common with the methodologies he used during his time in Winchester despite being composed in 1975: “The structure or process that I used in *Discreet Music*,” Eno noted in 1981, “is almost identical to the structure of Reich’s *It’s Gonna Rain*...but the *sound* of the two pieces is very different.”¹⁰⁴ *Discreet Music* is an entirely electronic and self-generating composition. Eno produced a short melody on a synthesizer that was put into a digital recall system. The sounds journey through an echo unit and a tape recorder delay system, and the results of these travels – somewhat indeterminate given the melodies movement through the electronics – are the sonic makeup of the composition. Eno set the synthesizer in motion and the machines did the rest of the work, making *Discreet Music* his most effortless composition in terms of actual musical playing.

Discreet Music’s conceptual aim was born from a notable misfortune: leaving the recording studio while working on his third LP, *Another Green World*, Eno slipped on the pavement and was struck and nearly killed by a taxicab. Recovering at home, the musician Judy Nylon, brought Eno an LP of harp music. As Nylon tells the story, Eno “

lay immobile on pillows on the floor with a bank of windows looking out at soft rain in the park on Grantully Road, on his right and his sound system on his left. I put the harp music on and balanced it as best as I could from where I stood; he caught on immediately to what I was doing and helped me balance the softness of the rain patter with the faint string sound for where he lay in the room.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Ascott in Scoates, 3.

¹⁰³ Gilles Deleuze writes that “Events always involve periods when nothing happens...they’re part of the event itself: you can’t for example, extract the instant of some terribly brutal accident from the vast empty time in which you see it coming, staring at what hasn’t yet happened, waiting for ages for it to happen.” In Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations 1972-1990* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 160. Any given event is thus either too early or too late. Too late in the sense that the past as a whole has its own existence that allows the present to pass in the first place. Too early in the sense that the future is the selection of a subset of the totality of the past, a selection which determines what we might call a lived present. Although the event is always too early or too late, time, as the totality of virtual, it can never really run out. It is always there as a sort of ontological reservoir.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Palmer, “Brian Eno: New Guru of Rock Going Solo,” *New York Times*, March 13, 1981.

¹⁰⁵ Judy Nylon in Bart Plantenga, “Live Now, Wise Up: Die Well: An Interview with Judy Nylon,” *3AM Magazine*, 2001. https://www.3ammagazine.com/litarchives/oct2001/interview_judy_nylon.html. Accessed April 10th, 2020.

Nylon's story differs from Eno's, and there could be any number of reasons for this: personal - Nylon was Eno's partner for a number of years - or artistic - Eno wanted this novel musical discovery to be his own. While we can only speculate the rationale, in the written liner notes of *Discreet Music*, Eno claims to have discovered the ambient effect independent of Nylon, crediting his medical immobility as a catalyst:

After she had gone, and with some considerable difficulty, I put on the record. Having laid down, I realized the amp was set at an extremely low level...I hadn't the energy to get up and improve matters, the record played on almost inaudibly. This presented what was for me a new way of hearing music."¹⁰⁶

However the music/environment synthesis might have initially happened, it is Nylon who remarks, "Neither of us invented ambient music."¹⁰⁷

8.

James Wolcott, "Nearer my Eno to Thee," *Creem*, April 1976

"So, influenced by Erik Satie, he set out to make a piece that could be listened to and yet be ignored... Well, the cunning bastard has succeeded smashingly, though his aesthetic triumph will never be a commercial one since there isn't a radio station in the country which will play it."¹⁰⁸

Writers on Eno's work have often pointed out the similarities between his ambient musical endeavors, of which *Discreet Music* was the first, and the composer Erik Satie's concept of "furniture music."¹⁰⁹ Satie was an important figure for both the US and English contingents of experimental musicians, particularly Cage and Gavin Bryars. Both men seemed fascinated with Satie's concept for music as decoration, wrote essays on his work (Bryars' "Satie and the British" and Cage in *Silence*), and performed marathon sessions of his *Vexations*, a strange short piano piece bearing the instruction that it must be played 840 times, with Satie suggesting: "It would be advisable to prepare oneself beforehand, and in

¹⁰⁶ Brian Eno, liner notes to *Discreet Music*, 1975.

¹⁰⁷ "Live Now, Wise Up..." *3AM Magazine*, 2001.

¹⁰⁸ James Wolcott, "Nearer my Eno to Thee," *Creem*, April 1976, 60.

¹⁰⁹ *Discreet Music*, however, was not part of Eno's official "Ambient" series of recordings.

the deepest of silence, by serious immobilities.”¹¹⁰ Given the close proximity of experimental musicians invested in Satie, Eno would also “strongly identify” with Satie’s work.¹¹¹ In *Silence*, Cage quotes Satie saying “I am not a musician,” a clear precursor – of which Eno surely borrowed given his early fondness for *Silence* – to Eno’s own claim as a non-musician.¹¹²

“Furniture music” was another of Satie’s ideas of which Eno’s ambient works are clearly indebted to. In a note to his friend Jean Cocteau, Satie defined “Furniture Music”:

‘Furniture Music’ is something which is manufactured. What usually happens is that people make music on occasions when music has *no* purpose. People play waltzes, ‘fantasies’ based on operas, and similar things, written for another reason. We, however, want to establish a musical genre made to satisfy ‘needs.’ Art doesn’t come into it. ‘Furniture Music’ creates vibrations, it has no other aims; it fulfils the same role as light, heat, and *comfort* in all its forms.¹¹³

What Satie was essentially formulating was background music, what would later become known and monetized as Muzak. Eno had been fascinated with the creation of Muzak as early as 1972, telling Nick Kent, “I’m very interested in Muzak as a form. I used to suffer from long stretches of insomnia and was forced to construct a piece using tape-loops that took the form of Muzak which, in turn, was conducive to sleep. Really, the potential to be found in the use of electronic music has only just begun to be mined.”¹¹⁴ In early 1977, Eno reached out to Muzak companies in the hope of selling them on his ambient music. In an uncannily similar statement to Satie’s own definition of “Furniture Music,” Eno’s selling point was that ambient music could “work in the same way as nice lighting: it tints the environment.”¹¹⁵ The Muzak companies balked at Eno’s proposals, a rejection that prompted him to “make a much stronger commitment to experimental music,”¹¹⁶ and

¹¹⁰ Erik Satie score to *Vexations* ca. 1886

¹¹¹ Eric Tamm, *Brian Eno: His Music and Vertical Color of Sound*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1989/1995. 17.

¹¹² Erik Satie quoted in John Cage, *Silence*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961, 79.

¹¹³ Reprinted in Ornella Volta, ed. *Satie Ecrits*, Paris: Champ Libre, 1977, 190.

¹¹⁴ Kent, “A Flight of Fantasy,” 5.

¹¹⁵ Eno in Michael Watts, “He’s into Something New,” *Melody Maker*, January 29, 1977.

¹¹⁶ Ian Macdonald, “Before and After Science, Part 1” *NME*, November 26, 1977.

Ambient 1: Music for Airports would be completed and released in 1978 to initially ambivalent reception in England.

Kristen Grimshaw, “Brian Eno,” ^{9.} *All Music Guide to Classical Music*, 2005

“Born Brian Peter George St. John le Baptiste de la Salle Eno in Woodbridge, England, Brian Eno took his early music training at art school in Ipswich and Winchester, where he studied with composers Christian Wolff and George Brecht.”¹¹⁷

Eric Tamm remarks that “Eno’s own philosophy of ambient music is not so peevish as Satie’s, and Eno has been more interested in enhancing and incorporating the environment’s extraneous noises than in neutralizing them.”¹¹⁸ “Furniture Music” for Satie was, in its aim for musical comfort, to evoke comfort, canceling out the clatter of dishes or the din of the street outside. Eno, like Cage, would bring the everyday world into a musical one by using music as a vehicle to get the listener to focus on everyday sounds, and in this framework – “everyday life” incidental to the music - is where we might locate Eno’s ambient works. Of course a crucial difference between Eno and Cage is in just how they distributed their respective musical works: Cage, almost hostile toward the recording of LPs, relied on live performance and notation (Yasunao Tone notes in his essay on encountering Cage on LP: “Was it not Cage who forbade above all else the consideration of music as an object?”¹¹⁹); Eno, almost hostile toward live performance, relied on studio recordings and intuitive instructions. Getting to the material conditions of how Eno and Cage looked to incorporate “extraneous noises” reveals perhaps a distinction from Cage, and a closer conceptual kinship to Brecht.

Brecht’s notebooks from the 1970s feature several unrealized proposals for LPs: three LPs to Apple Records (the vanity record label of The Beatles), featuring works by

¹¹⁷ Kristen Grimshaw, “Brian Eno,” in Chris Woodstra, Gerald Brennan, Allen Schrott, eds. *All Music Guide to Classical Music*, San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2005, 420. While it is possible Eno invited Wolff and Brecht to Winchester using Student Union funds (he would often invite composers to lecture or perform) Eno did not “study,” in any conventional sense, with these composers. Further, there is no mention of Brecht in Grimshaw’s entry.

¹¹⁸ Tamm, 17.

¹¹⁹ Yasunao Tone, “John Cage and Recording,” *Leonardo*, Vol. 13 (2005) 11.

LaMonte Young, Terry Riley, Walter de Maria, and himself (recordings of rhythm by different sorts of modulation);¹²⁰ a 2 sided LP of the silences between recorded tracks of well-known music - one side without cues (silences only), one side with (e.g. last two chords and opening bar);¹²¹ one proposal is titled “I Wasn’t Been There Yet: Quiet Pieces from Recent Decades,” featuring pieces from two Scratch Orchestra alumni, Howard Skempton and Hugh Shrapnel, as well as Terry Jennings; another title, “27 Silences,” a kind of field recording record featuring the ambience of the Gobi and Mojave desert, empty buildings at night, etc.¹²²

Brecht’s repeated desire to create a listening experience of recorded silence and “quiet” seem proposed to put tension on the material demand of the LP: its physical listenability and the turntable apparatus itself. Eno’s suggestion to the listener of *Discreet Music* to hear it at “comparatively low levels, even to the extent that it frequently falls below the threshold of audibility”¹²³ seems not only about the incorporation of outside noises (the rain, the street, etc.), but to get one to think about how they listen to a *record*.¹²⁴ It is one thing to walk outside and listen to the sounds of the city, or to hear a composition that makes use of outside sounds, and quite another to go out and purchase an LP, put it on a turntable, place the stylus on, and turn the volume down almost as low as it will go. Such an activity brings attention to just what minor gesture or intervention does, a project that nearly all of Brecht’s work deals with.

¹²⁰ George Brecht notebooks, Jun.1968-Oct.1968, 132.

¹²¹ George Brecht notebooks, Jul. 1972-Dec. 1973, 155.

¹²² George Brecht Notebooks, Dec. 1973- Jul. 1975, 133.

¹²³ Eno, liner notes to *Discreet Music*, 1975. We might contrast this with Robert Ashley’s instructions for listening to a vinyl recording of his seminal *The Wolfman*: “to be played at the highest possible volume level.” On the label for an included LP of Ashley’s *The Wolfman* for *The Source: Music of the Avant Garde*, No. 4, July 1968.

¹²⁴ There is of course a relationship between this shift and the rise of the non-musician. As more visual artists and non-musicians took up a craft that was not beholden to musical proficiency (or the ability to read notation) so too would come a niche of listeners who would emulate or be influenced by what they heard. This prompted something of an industrial change that not only made access to proper recording equipment more accessible, but also found individuals establishing record labels and distribution centers (Factory, Antilles, Rough Trade) that stepped up to fill this market niche. The material apparatus here becomes quite important in terms of distinguishing old garde from new, in that experimental music was no longer necessarily beholden to a score and could even be entirely constructed in a recording studio.

Although *Discreet Music* would appear almost a decade after Eno's *Drip Music* performance, it is not difficult to sense Brecht's influence on this work, from the perpetual event of the composition itself (self-generating music) to the proposal to listen to the record at non-audible level (the profound effect of a simple activity). Theodor Adorno writes that background music "is an objective event above [an audience]," which is to say that it assumes a priority outside of noticeable activity.¹²⁵ What Brecht and Eno attempt with their respective discreet music is to flip this schema, to ponder how the ignorable or overlooked could also be grounds for inquiry.

A key distinction between Eno and Brecht, however, was Eno's concern with aesthetics. In 1975, Eno told *Time Out*'s Adrian Jack:

I must say that I'd always go for a sensuous sound when making a piece. In *Discreet Music* I was very concerned to make something that wasn't uncomfortable. It's intended as music you don't have to concentrate on. It's like adding to your ambience, changing the condition of the room a little bit. If you want to focus on another level, there's a set of ideas that are interesting in terms of systems working like Steve Reich's piece *It's Gonna Rain*. And to stop it being monotonous - and, I suppose, completely ignorable - I did make changes during the piece. This touching up is very much a philistine idea in the experimental composer's terms; it's wanting to entertain. But I think that borderline area is a very interesting one.¹²⁶

The borderline between "entertainment," i.e. a composition's "sensuous sound," and Eno's perception of this as a taboo in experimental composition (the pursuit of new sounds trumping any desire for traditional aesthetics) will be taken up in greater detail in chapter two, but it was broadly this contradiction that compelled Eno's interest in working with a popular medium like rock and roll.

¹²⁵ Theodor Adorno, "Background Music" in Music in the Background." In *Essays on Music*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002, 506. In Chapter Four, I examine Eno's use of ambient music as a conduit for expressions of blankness – another Brechtian strategy – upon moving to New York City.

¹²⁶ Eno in Adrian Jack, "I Want to be a Magnet for Tapes," *Time Out*, March 18-19, 1975.

IO.

“Eno: The Non-Musician’s Musician” Island Records Advertisement for
Here Come the Warm Jets, ca. 1974

An advertisement used to promote Eno’s first solo LP, *Here Come the Warm Jets* that circulated ca. 1974-75 in music periodicals features a photograph culled from the cover of his 1974 single *Seven Deadly Finns*. The original photograph, taken by English rock photographer Doug Smith, features a rouge cheeked Eno, in kimono, flanked by Judy Nylon and Polly Eltes, both of whom would later appear in a low budget music video (also shot by Smith) for “China my China” from his second LP. The three vertical line design behind Eno’s name here (and also on the single’s cover) was featured prominently on an exclusive Eno “fan club” button.

All of this extraneous material – rock single cover photos, designed name logos used for club pins – makes the advertisement’s point of sale text, “The Non-Musician’s Musician,” all the more of a strange marketing tact, while also speaking to the ubiquity of Eno’s usage of the term to the press. “Non-musician,” as a marketing angle was an uncouth decision, and one that speaks well to Eno scholar Cecilia Sun’s assessment that the term was used in the 1970s “as a shorthand way for journalists and critics to indicate the unorthodoxy of Eno’s career.”¹²⁷ What was unorthodox in the network of rock and roll journalism was the language of experimentalism, and what Eno’s interviews during this time present is the set of borderlines on both networks being pulled into focus. It is astonishing to think that *Melody Maker* would assume their readers were interested in Eno’s theories of autopoietic systems music.

Experimentalism was, in effect, being scaled up, taken out of its smaller community-based confines and into a relatively more open, populist network. Eno was able to use this

¹²⁷ Cecilia Sun, “Brian Eno, non-musicianship and the experimental tradition,” in Sean Albiez, David Pattie, eds. *Brian Eno: Oblique Music*, London: Bloomsbury, 2016, 30.

set of contradictions – a non-musician talking about music making in a pop music periodical – to his advantage, emphasizing that his difference could invigorate the form of rock and pop music. That Eno’s lack of technical abilities, his being a “non-musician,” was broached by critics and journalists over and over again throughout his long career, to become one of his most potent legacies is a testament to Eno’s canny use of contradiction, leaning on his art school and experimental music experiences to craft a dissident but exciting musical identity in a rock music network.¹²⁸

Some critics were particularly skeptical of Eno’s claim, regardless of his theoretical underpinnings for adopting the term. “The vanity, of course, is that he’s a non-musician, therefore able to break the rules, to not be tied to a structure,” rock critic Wayne Robins writes in an article for *Creem* in 1975, “I’m skeptical about the rationale, since Eno surrounds himself with high intellect musicians on all his records.”¹²⁹ Lester Bangs, held a similar view, writing “the famous ‘I’m not a musician’ quote from early in his career...confounds fans and critics alike to this day. It seems like a conceit turned inside out, inasmuch as I’ve got almost a dozen albums of his music sitting here.”¹³⁰ Eno scholar Eric Tamm dedicates an entire chapter of his 1989 monograph, *Eno: His Music and the Vertical Color of Sound* titled “Eno the Non-Musician,” and concedes, “we must allow that Eno is in fact a talented and versatile, if intuitive and marginally skilled, multi-instrumentalist...although Eno’s manual and vocal skills may be limited in depth, they are broad in scope...completely adequate for the type of music he has been interested in playing.”¹³¹ Tamm locates Eno’s non-musician claim as a mechanism that “forces one to be creative: it makes one confront one’s own vulnerability.”¹³²

¹²⁸ The “non-musician” tag has stuck with journalists for the duration of Eno’s career. See for example: “Brian Eno, the influential ‘non-musician’ at 66,” <https://blog.oup.com/2014/05/brian-eno-influential-non-musician/>. Accessed April 10th, 2020.

¹²⁹ Wayne Robins, “Taking Rock’s Future by Artifice,” *Creem*, March 1975

¹³⁰ Lester Bangs, “Eno,” *Musician*, November 1979.

¹³¹ Tamm, 44.

¹³² Ibid. 47.

Tamm's sentiment is one often taken up by other Eno scholars, with Geeta Dayal writing in her book centered on Eno's *Another Green World* that, "In a way, Eno's lack of formal training was a gift. It meant he approached the synthesizer for what it was: a generator of complex sounds, not as a keyboard. He came at synths from tape machines and from using tape recorders as generators of strange sounds. This was in stark opposition to the famed progressive keyboard melodies of the time..."¹³³ Cecilia Sun, in her essay "Brian Eno, Non-Musicianship, and the Experimental Tradition," concludes that "Eno's self-professed non-musicianship was always about challenging entrenched definitions of 'music' and 'musicianship' and not a self-abnegating admission of inferiority. A lack of virtuosity, and the absence of formal music training did not hamper Eno's musicianship but, on the contrary, became an integral part of his creative practices."¹³⁴ The summation of most of this material is that Eno's choice to eschew formal training was a boon to his working process in that it removed any learned skills that might prove difficult to unlearn.

The three events I have outlined in this chapter, and coordinating press coverage are formative examples of Eno's intense desire to work outside of the limits of both art and music, motivated by an intense procedural reflexivity, typical of the times with art forms such as Pop, conceptual, performance, etc., and the way they were redistributed to a larger audience of dominant culture. Eno's hybrid impulses, his need to demolish disciplines through the import of strategies and methods from other disciplines, through a facet of the mainstream culture industry is an impulse located in what Robert Smithson noted as "supporting a cultural prison that is out of [one's] control," an incarceration theme shared by Theodor Adorno who wrote of the consumption of popular music being like "the prisoner who loves his cell because he has been left nothing else to love."¹³⁵ Smithson rallied

¹³³ Geeta Dayal, *Another Green World*, London: Bloomsbury, 2009, 41.

¹³⁴ Sun, in Sean Albiez and David Pattie, 45.

¹³⁵ Robert Smithson, "Cultural Confinement," (1972), in Jack Flam, ed. *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, 155. Theodor Adorno, "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," in Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, New York: Continuum, 1987, 274.

against the seemingly neutral spaces, the “white cube” as Brian O’Doherty would later dub them, where art lived, while Adorno posits that popular musical forms kept the masses ambivalent in their formulaic qualities. Examining a culmination such as the Eno advertisement above, in which we see the music industry attempting to capitalize on an idea – “non-musician” – that seems by all intents and purposes to impede any rational calculus of profitability, gives this paired critique by Smithson and Adorno a lot of validity.

I do not want to suggest necessarily that there is a kind of essentialist innocence when a term like “non-musician” is used in circles outside of popular media. As Smithson goes on to note, “I am not interested in art works that suggest “process” within the metaphysical limits of the neutral room. There is no freedom in that kind of behavioral game playing. The artist acting like a B.F. Skinner rat doing his “tough” little tricks is something to be avoided. Confined process is no process at all. It would be better to disclose the confinement rather than make illusions of freedom.”¹³⁶ “Non-musician,” as it was often considered in experimental music circles, was more often than not a nomenclature that reflected a behavioral modification: playing music sans cultural normative scrutiny. While such a conceptual move did pose a critique of dominant systems of power in art making – skill being at the service of a normative aesthetic – an argument could be made that this was a “confined process,” its artistic and political efficacy largely done for the service of few rather than many. This question of how the non-musician could lead to liberation became a particularly thorny issue for the Scratch Orchestra, as we shall see in Chapter Two.

In the case of “non-musician” used as a selling point for Eno, a critical diagnosis most assuredly reveals a case of the market absorbing artistic novelty, putting the rejoinder “non-musician” in a position of the very market imperatives it was attempting to disrupt. Yet, a more generous interpretation can view Eno’s work in this period, both musically and in the press, as a mode of constant reinvention, an almost immanent critique of the very

¹³⁶ Ibid.

apparatuses of facets of the culture industry, its infrastructure and the various ways in which it was constructed. Using the network of rock and roll, with its various characteristics and players, in unintended ways, Eno directly influenced its shape, not through a refusal of its structure – this was the domain of the miniscule number of experimentalists after all – but to activate a reflexive tropism that looked beyond the limits of the network. By engaging in Ascottian role play (the glittered rock star) or bringing into the mainstream rock press names like Steve Reich and George Brecht, Eno utilized lessons learned in systems and cybernetic behaviorism – feedback – to see what new possibilities might open up, refract back, and be reassessed.

As the 1970s wore on, and largely galvanized by the personal artistic success he found in *Discreet Music*, Eno moved deeper into more experimentation, although, as the example of *Discreet Music* also shows, never too far into outré territory. While imperfect, Eno's redefining musical means, media, aims, and importantly credentials – conventional skills – would not only quietly transform both networks of rock and roll and experimentalism (as we shall see in Chapter Four) but also reflect a larger transversality in the arts that moves elsewhere and extends outwards. To say it another way, “non-musician” provokes considerations of the limits – practice, theory, network, normative modes of capability – and grants permission to stray, not only from contained and managed networks of artistic activity, but within the everyday world. “Non-musician” is shorthand for many things, but perhaps most enduring is its implication that we are still imperfect human beings, and that fallibility, no matter how technologically corrected or mediated, is a key attribute to the self and others. How these terms are picked up and used by others, and Eno's role among them, is the basis for what follows.

II.

Melody Maker, “Eno Quits Roxy,” July 21st, 1973

The front cover of the July 21st, 1973 issue of *Melody Maker* highlighted two rock departures. The first was Ray Davies, front man for early “British Invasion” group, The

Kinks, who announced he was leaving the group from the stage of London's White City Stadium. A large photograph of Davies onstage, arm outstretched in a wave that could be construed as a goodbye, accompanied this news, the singer's hand entering the space of the *Melody Maker* cover banner, an inadvertent visual metaphor of exiting a frame. The second departure, set to the left of Davies, and highlighted in a red text box, announced: "Eno Quits Roxy."

Eno's Roxy exodus was the result of his own feelings of creative claustrophobia in the group, a feeling no doubt spurred on by Ferry's ownership of the music. As press increasingly turned to Eno, partially for his cutting a flamboyant spectacle onstage, partially for his loquaciousness in interviews relative to Ferry's more modest appeal, a rift began to develop between the two. "It was a typical clash of young male egos," Eno recalled later, "What had happened was because I was so visually bizarre looking, I got a lot of press attention. I made good photographs. That distorted the impression of where the creative leadership of the band was. It was definitely Bryan's band."¹³⁷

Things came to a head between Eno and Ferry following Roxy's concert at the "New York" Festival in England on July 2nd, 1973. The first offense was to do with Eno's invitation for the Portsmouth Sinfonia to perform at the concert earlier in the day, creating an Eno double bill that bemused an increasingly insecure Ferry.¹³⁸ The second offense occurred on behalf of the audience. During Roxy's performance of their delicate song "Beauty Queen," the crowd erupted into chants for Eno, obscuring Ferry's vocals. Eno tried to quell this situation by leaving the stage, but the damage had already been done. Following the concert, a livid Ferry announced to Roxy management he no longer wanted to share a stage with Eno. Ferry, not one for confrontation, refused to discuss his issues with Eno, and by his own

¹³⁷ Eno in David Buckley, *The Thrill of it All: The Story of Bryan Ferry and Roxy Music*, Chicago: A Cappella Books, 2005, 131.

¹³⁸ Eno's/Roxy's management was also none-to-pleased with his performing with the Portsmouth Sinfonia. See Chapter Three.

admission, “essentially froze him out” from any further conversations on Roxy or his own personal feelings.¹³⁹

Roxy’s management was reticent to get involved with Ferry’s new position on Eno, as was the rest of the group. Rather than walk on eggshells, or confront Ferry himself, Eno decided to call it quits. “I was pissed off at the subterfuge and wanted Bryan to actually say it to my face,” Eno recalled later, “But he didn’t. So eventually I just stood up, said, ‘OK, fuck it, I’m leaving’ – and walked out.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Ferry in David Sheppard, *On Some Faraway Beach*, 132.

¹⁴⁰ Eno in Sheppard, 133.

Chapter Two:
Generating and Organizing Variety: Eno & The Scratch Orchestra

I

Steve Peacock, "Hysterical Hybrids and Musical Mutants," *Sounds*, July 28, 1973

In a late July 1973 profile on Eno in *Sounds*, writer Steve Peacock assured any skeptics, "Two days after he left Roxy Music...Eno said he was brimming with ideas and energy for the future."¹ During this time Eno publicly percolated and dreamed of potential projects. There was the oft-press mentioned "Luana and the Lizard Girls," that would have had Eno fronting an all-female band who "aren't into seeing how well they play and displaying their skills";² the "Plastic Eno Band" (a pun on Yoko Ono's "Plastic Ono Band" with John Lennon), a rock band where performers only used plastic or toy musical instruments; "Hysterical Hybrids and Musical Mutants," another non-musician centered project in which Eno wanted to produce and collaborate with "interesting oddities which probably otherwise wouldn't get on record," such as the Pan-Am International Band (a British steel drum band that sounded like a symphony orchestra) or the Majorca Orchestra, a group of students from Portsmouth College of Art, who performed original musical compositions despite no musical proficiency.³

None of these specific projects came to fruition, and Eno's next move was a far more expected one from a recently deposed member of a rock band: the solo album, perhaps the first offered from a major music label to a conceptual coordinator of a rock and roll band (giving a sense of how far his media personality had taken him). Titled *Here Come the Warm*

¹ Steve Peacock, "Hysterical Hybrids and Musical Mutants," *Sounds*, July 28, 1973.

² Eno in Rick Sanders, "Eno's Sparkling with New Ideas," *Record Mirror*, August 4, 1973. The painter Russell Mills, who created a large body of paintings based on Eno songs from the mid-1970s – early 1980s, created a painting *Luana-Chemical Choices*, based on a description of a dream Eno describes in Peacock's *Sounds* article. The description is as follows: "One of the Lizard Girls is bound, naked and gagged, face down on the operating table. One of the rhythm guitarists is stretching her arms. Luana the surgeon lifts the whip (the bamboo whip). The first six blows occur at regular school intervals. The pace quickens for the final eleven. The dream is subtitled 'The Punishment of The Lizard Girls'. The rest of the Lizard Girls wail at each blow." In Peacock, "Hysterical Hybrids..."

³ Everyone involved in the Majorca Orchestra also performed with the Portsmouth Sinfonia (see Chapter Three and Appendix B). Eno pursued this idea of producing records by under sung artists both with his own record label *Obscure* and with *No New York* (see Chapter Four).

Jets, Eno's first "solo" album was recorded in 1973, and surprisingly, given his public aspirations to work with non-musicians, its personnel are almost entirely technically proficient (and virtuoso in the case of Robert Fripp) musicians.⁴ In a less than discreet maneuver, *Here Come the Warm Jets* features all of Roxy sans Ferry.

II *Here Come the Warm Jets*

Eno's intention on *Warm Jets* was not to gather a super group to be his backing band, but to assemble musicians that were seemingly incongruous together. As a non-musician, Eno directed the album's performers with small musical sketches via vague instructions for performance or simple piano or guitar lines. Eno outlined this process in 1974 to *Rolling Stone's* Cynthia Dagnal:

... on *Here Come the Warm Jets* I assembled musicians who normally wouldn't work together in any real-life situation. And I got them together merely because I wanted to see what happens when you combine different identities like that, and you allow them to compete. My role is to coordinate them, synthesize them, furnish the central issue which they all will revolve around, producing a hybrid. It's very dangerous at times...it is organized with the knowledge that there might well be accidents, accidents which will be more interesting than what I intended.⁵

While it is difficult to discern any "accidents" in a conventional sense on *Warm Jets* – it is all well composed, if not outré, rock music – the "competing identities" comes across rather clear sonically. On the album opener, "Needles in the Camel's Eye," the guitar trio of Chris Spedding, Phil Manzanera, and Eno coalesce to create a metallic din of fuzzy sound seemingly on the verge of, but never quite entirely, falling apart.⁶

Eno continued to assemble groups of musicians based on their seeming incompatibility or ideological or ideological and conceptual differences on all of his non "Ambient" albums of the 1970s, reflecting on this process to Glenn O' Brien in 1978,

⁴ The title is a clear allusion to urination and sexual "watersports."

⁵ Cynthia Dagnal, "Eno and the Jets," 12.

⁶ Chris Spedding played at this time with Eno's Island labelmates Sharks, a mostly conventional rock group. Eno is credited as playing "snake guitar" on this song. "Snake guitar" was the name Eno gave to the wiggly sounds of his jangly Starway guitar strings, particularly through electronic treatment. The "snake guitar" also appeared on *Taking Tiger Mountain By Strategy*.

They were definitely from schools of music that were not compatible with one another. One of them was from [English progressive psychedelic band] Hawkwind, another one was Phil Collins from [English progressive rock band] Genesis, and certainly those two are quite far apart, and there's Robert Fripp [of English progressive rock band King Crimson] on top of that.⁷

As my context brackets in the quote above hopefully make obvious, the “incompatibility” of the musicians featured on these records seems relative in terms of drastically different musical identities, as many of them were above average musical players from British progressive rock or rock groups.⁸ Further, the reappearances of Fripp, Manzanera, McKay, Brian Turrington, among others on Eno's 1970s records suggests that despite a desire for incompatibility, Eno preferred musicians, or at least musicians who he assumed would understand his ambitions, much in the same way that Cage frequently turned to pianist David Tudor to play his more physically demanding compositions. While not quite session players then, the musicians on Eno's solo records served a professional musical function. “With session men, most people treat them as if they are interchangeable,” Eno remarked in 1975, “You get the best bass players as you can, but you tell them what to do. But the musicians I work with play a very creative role – they're not there as executives of my ideas. Perhaps every group of musicians should have written above them, ‘this group is a musical instrument, treat it as such.’”⁹

Eno's method of collaboration in the recording studio on his solo records lead critic Richard Cromelin to note in 1974 that “Eno concocted rather than performed, in the accepted sense, *Here Come the Warm Jets*. The materials he worked with were really people.”¹⁰ Cromelin's assessment brings to mind Eno's treatment work in Roxy Music as mentioned in Chapter One, in which Eno reconfigured the skill of the performing musician through electronics, or even the *Detective Painting* type works from his Winchester days,

⁷ Glenn O'Brien, “Eno at the Edge of Rock,” *Interview*, June 1978.

⁸ Progressive” here referring to “Prog Rock,” a genre that was often characterized by either extreme musical proficiency or utilizing compositional techniques from classical music etc. as a means to elevate rock music as a more respectable form.

⁹ http://music.hyperreal.org/artists/brian_eno/interviews/unk-75a.html. Unknown author ca. 1975.

¹⁰ Richard Cromelin, “Eno Music: The Roxy Rebellion,” *Phonograph Record*, November 1974.

creative acts “involving lots of people” with a conceptually dictated system of his own design. Cromelin’s interpretation speaks well to Eno’s position of conceptualizing over conventional performance. These performing musicians, while given autonomy to explore different methods of playing for Eno, were nonetheless part of a system Eno had put in place. With this mode of working in mind, we might ask how these performing musicians – Eno’s “materials” – can be considered as anything other than subordinate, “executives” of Eno’s ideas, or as session musicians?¹¹ Despite Eno’s remarks that the players on his albums were not simply at his conceptual command, their being given “verbal instructions” or some other directive for the realization of his own compositions (that would later be altered or edited by him in the studio) seems to contradict this claim.¹²

As stated in Chapter One, the flexibility of one’s identity and behavior was an important concept for Eno, as he felt such fixity produced stultifying and otherwise expected creative results. By suggesting a concept such as “the group as a musical instrument,” Eno makes the roving parts of disparate personalities, musical baggage, attitudes, and social factors sound homogenous, a type of music making dictated by a non-musician instructing trained musicians. Such an endeavor posed a creative challenge for both Eno and for the performers on his albums, one that was rife for challenging musical possibilities and also, in a very Ascottian way, the limits of one’s behavioral identity (see Chapter One). Recording with Eno as a trained musician meant one had to undergo something of a re-education, examining not only their style or capability, but their approach. These recording sessions became as much an arts collaboration as a behavioral experiment, testing a professional musician’s predilections for letting go of their own personal ways of working, and in some cases, deeply engrained training.

Eno’s didactic ambitions in the adaptive possibilities of untrained with trained musicians has a precedent and corollary with English composer Cornelius Cardew’s *The*

¹¹ An art historical similarity can be found in the debate over creative agency with the posthumous facsimile reproductions of Marcel Duchamp’s readymades.

¹² See Chapter One, Page 86, footnote 41.

Great Learning (1969-71) and the roving ensemble of artists and musicians he co-founded, The Scratch Orchestra. Eno knew Cardew and his work well, inviting the composer to lecture and perform while a student at Winchester, and performing with the Scratch Orchestra in 1970-71. Writers on Eno's work often point out the importance of his tenure performing with the Scratch: Cecilia Sun uses Eno's "very brief period" of playing with the Scratch as an establishing factor for his experimental tendencies in music making;¹³ Geeta Dayal submits that his "briefly" joining the Scratch would "be a formative experience" and a key influence on his critically revered album from 1975, *Another Green World*;¹⁴ Sean Albiez and David Pattie, editors of an anthology of academic essays on Eno's work, describe Eno's contact with the Scratch as "the most important" factor in establishing Eno's interest and subsequent move from visual art to music making.¹⁵ These writings, alongside the many mentions of the group in various press and by Eno over the course of the last forty years, help to give the impression that Eno's stint with the Scratch was life-altering in terms of creative acuity.

Eno performed with the Scratch four times in 1970-71. The Scratch performed their own compositions, as well as *The Great Learning*, a notational interpretation of the seven paragraphs that make up Book One of the Confucian texts of the same name, written by Cardew for the ensemble to perform.¹⁶ Eno performed "Paragraph 2" and "Paragraph 7" with the Scratch, and the latter composition, a vocal piece for trained and untrained singers, was the basis for his essay, "Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts," published in 1976 for the arts magazine *Studio International*. Using this performance as an empirical case study, Eno posits that non-musicians, when paired with trained musicians, could provoke profound change, not just musically but on a behaviorally adaptable level. Such a thesis

¹³ Cecilia Sun, "Brian Eno, non-musicianship, and the experimental tradition" in Sean Albiez and David Pattie *Brian Eno: Oblique Music*, London: Bloomsbury, 2016, 29-48.

¹⁴ Geeta Dayal, *Another Green World*, New York: Continuum Publishing, 2010, 32.

¹⁵ Albiez and Pattie, *Brian Eno: Oblique Music*, 5.

¹⁶ *The Great Learning of Confucius* was translated into English by the poet Ezra Pound in 1928. Cardew preferred this translation when working on *The Great Learning*, and his ability to overlook Pound's anti-Semitism and support of the fascistic economic policies of Mussolini says much about Cardew's general indifference to politics at this time.

justified Eno's own position as a non-musician, but is distinct, both artistically and politically, from Cardew's own ambitions, as we shall see, with *The Great Learning*.

The formative nature of the Scratch left a clear impression on Eno and impacted his practical and theoretical working methodology in a profound, but distinct way. While his performing and learning from his brief foray with the Scratch is often mentioned in interviews and writings on Eno, there has been little work done in exploring what this experience was, how it impacted his own work as a "non-musician" in the 1970s, and how it revealed Eno's own personal politics. How might we understand the appeal to Eno of a work like "Paragraph 7," conceived as a socialized music, which is to say political, to the apolitical Eno? Lastly, how did Cardew and Eno converge and diverge in their respective thinking on the potency of mixing trained and untrained? These questions speak to Eno's translating of vanguard ideas into his own work, practice, collaborations, and in the media. To get an answer, requires an in-depth examination of the tenets of Cardew and the Scratch, and how they collide and differ from Eno's own.

III
Cornelius Cardew
& The Scratch Orchestra

I.
Treatise

Treatise was both the culmination of [Cardew's] avant-garde career and carried the seeds of destruction with his relationship to the avant-garde.
- John Tilbury in *Cornelius Cardew: A Life Unfinished*.¹⁷

As the epigraph above from Tilbury states, *Treatise* (1963-67) firmly cemented Cornelius Cardew's vanguard status among experimental music circles of this time and at the same time indicated his distance from them.¹⁸ *Treatise* is a graphic score, part novel, part drawing, and a piece of music. It is truly intermedial in its character. The score's massive length of 193 graphically scored pages, marked not just a firm move for Cardew towards experimentation with notation, but also the beginning of his explicit desire to decenter the composer/performer hierarchy via composition.

Cardew, who had studied composition at the Royal Academy of Music and was apprentice to serial composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, increasingly considered the act of composition not simply as a means to execute his ideas, but as a collaboration between himself and the musical performer. By the mid-1960s, (around the time Eno began art school) Cardew was growing increasingly dissatisfied with the relationship between composer and performer. As he became a musical educator, working directly with a mixed

¹⁷ John Tilbury, *Cornelius Cardew: A Life Unfinished*, Essex: Copula, 2008, 247.

¹⁸ By the early 1960s, Cardew had become a leading composer in the British experimental milieu. The American composer Morton Feldman praised Cardew's innovations in the mid-1960s:

Any direction modern music will take in England will come about only through Cardew, because of him, by way of him. If the new ideas in music are felt today as a movement in England, it's because he acts as a moral force, a moral center. Without him the young "far-out" composer would be lost. With him, he's still young, but not really lost.

In Morton Feldman, "Conversations without Stravinsky," in ed. B.H. Friedman, *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000, 52.

group of student performers, his compositions began to represent his burgeoning desire to allow for performer interpretation while engaging with his works.

Cardew's mid to late 1960s work was predicated on the idea that the performer was integral to the realization of any sonic investigation, and that their interpretation – the human gesture – was crucial to the realization of a work over any composer expectations. Although Cardew was avowedly apolitical at this point in his life, *Treatise* was a highly political work in that it suggests that notation is a form of policing, one that assumes a value system anchored by the muck of the history between composer and performer, a social dynamic rooted in structured systems of power. "Perhaps what Cardew wanted to demonstrate in *Treatise*," writes John Tilbury, Cardew's life-long friend, collaborator, and biographer, "was the incompatibility to the permanent symbolism of notation and the transience of sound."¹⁹ To say it another way, the musical concern of *Treatise* was the effect it had on the performer, not the audience or composer, and this would be both a boon for his approach to experimental music and a catalyst for his later political commitment. At the request of the musical publishers, CF Peters, Cardew wrote a demystification on *Treatise* titled, *The Treatise Handbook*, that was meant to aid stumped, but curious, would-be performers. "I wrote *Treatise* with the definite intention that it should stand entirely on its own," Cardew writes in the handbook's introduction, "without any form of introduction or instruction to mislead prospective performers into the slavish practice of doing 'what they are told.' So it is with great reluctance...that I have let myself be persuaded to collect these obscure, and where not obscure, uninteresting remarks into publishable form."²⁰


What follows in the *Handbook* is a collection of remarks from Cardew, dated while composing the piece, that outline his own thoughts on a possible notational logic for *Treatise*. Far from a key, although illuminating potential approaches to reading *Treatise*, Cardew's "uninteresting remarks" give a sense of the many musical procedures,

¹⁹ Tilbury, *Cornelius Cardew: A Life Unfinished*, 247.

²⁰ Cornelius Cardew, *Treatise Handbook*, London: Edition Peters, 1970, i.

contradictions, and problems he was attempting to work through (in *Treatise* and generally) in the four years of its production.²¹ The *Treatise Handbook* includes an annotated list of pre-publication performances of *Treatise*, and it is here that Cardew makes perhaps the clearest statement on his aims with this work: “I hesitated...to talk of the sounding music as my music. What I hope is that in playing this piece each musician will give each of his own music – he will give it as a response to *my* music, which is the score itself.”²² This unwieldy but nonetheless fervent desire on Cardew’s part for performer collaboration with *Treatise* is what set him apart from other contemporary composers (particularly Cage).

Treatise can also be formulated within Roland Barthes’ notion of the “writerly text,” theorized in his 1970 book *S/Z*. “The writerly text is not a thing,” writes Barthes, “We would have a hard time finding it in a bookstore...the writerly text is ourselves writing.”²³ Barthes’ extrapolating the potential for agency through the reading of texts, the exquisite open-endedness of being “within the field of infinite-difference,” had been percolating in

²¹ “ is alright if it is exactly what you want (although how interesting is it to want exactly that? Well, that depends on how badly you want it). But it is bad if it is a confession of failure. And that’s the point; where is the difference located? Certainly not in the squiggle. Hence for you, dear listener, there is no difference whatever. (Which is why I can never turn to you for advice). (March 14th, 1963)

On the distinction between *Treatise*’s visual and aural attributes:

Once you have written music, not just dreamed it but actually committed it to paper – and not great music by any means, you can never be the same again even if you never write another note. Once you know what it is like to move in that sphere you always want to return there. The *Treatise* is almost like a document or movie of that sphere – a travelogue of the land of composition. A real piece of music of course is *not* [sic] a document from the sphere of activity in which music is written, it is “just” a piece of music, which all lovers of music can understand. *Treatise* tells *what it is like* to manipulate sounds in composition. Sounds – ideas; reading *Treatise* is a twilight experience where the two cannot be clearly distinguished. (January 3rd, 1964)

On *Treatise*’s intermedial character:

Treatise: What is it? Well, it’s a vertebrate... (March 11th, 1965)

On the written score’s place in the world of musical activity:

Reflection before a performance. A musical score is a logical construct inserted into the mess of potential sounds that permeate this planet and its atmosphere. That puts Beethoven and the rest in perspective! (Jan. 20th, 1967)
(*Treatise Handbook*, np)

²² *Treatise Handbook*, np

²³ Barthes, *S/Z*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1970, 5.

Barthes' writing as early as the essay "Toys" in 1957. In "Toys," Barthes laments the indoctrination of children to adulthood via plastic representations (toys) of cash registers, guns, stethoscopes among others. Non-imitative toys, such as a basic set of blocks "implies a very different learning of the world...the actions [the child] performs are not those of a user but those of a demiurge. He creates forms which walk, which roll, he creates life, not property."²⁴ Cardew never publicly mentioned any immediate influence from Barthes. However, it is not difficult to see a correlation between Barthes' ideas of how the reader performs the text (or the child plays freely with a set of blocks) and Cardew's hope to galvanize new possibilities in the performer through reading his intermedial score. *Treatise* is, of course, no doubt Cardew's score, and as the *Handbook* and various subsequent performances might suggest, there is a logic and language in the score that a seasoned musician might decipher. However, Cardew makes rather clear in his notes and comments on *Treatise* that his most desired manner of approach was in the performer's response articulating new meaning, avoiding the fixity relative to the historic import of the musical score.

An inherent desire for a multitude of interpretations from Cardew meant that *Treatise* was taken up in a variety of ways by a variety of performers. Keith Rowe, a painter who turned his attention to guitar when playing with Cardew in the Scratch and the improvisational group, AMM, could not read musical notation. Rowe approached performing *Treatise* visually, looking for visual markers that inspired him. In 1966, a group of art students at Leeds College of Art enlarged and painted the graphic score a variety of bright colors, accentuating its visual character into a more conventional artwork. Tilbury, who is a virtuoso pianist, performed highly creative and musically complex variations on the work. The experimental musician and composer Mauricio Kagel completely ignored deciphering any internal logic of the score, creating his own musical impression.²⁵ Given the

²⁴ Barthes, *Mythologies*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1970/1957, 54.

²⁵ See Virginia Anderson, "Well it's a Vertebrate," *Journal of Musicological Research*, Volume 25, Issue 3-4; Twentieth Century Performance Practice: Four Perspectives (2006), 291-317.

open-endedness of the composition, and the myriad of possibilities in interpreting it, it is important to remember that *Treatise* was not designed as an anarchic program, or a license for the performer to simply do whatever they wanted. Rather, *Treatise* is a means to inspire the performer to develop a repertoire of possibilities through the act of music making. Thinking of *Treatise* as a writerly text, in which meaning was inscribed through performer interpretation, allows us to conceive further Cardew's emphasis on the importance of the performer's role in the composition to performance process.

In 1966, in the throes of the *Treatise* compositional process, Cardew joined AMM, which consisted at that time of Rowe (guitar and radio), Eddie Prevost (drums, xylophone, bells and cymbals), Lou Gare (tenor saxophone and violin) and Lawrence Shaeff (cello, accordion, clarinet, radio). Through AMM, Cardew, who played piano, cello, and radio, found himself in a musical situation he had heretofore not explored: direct engagement with improvised music. AMM compositions aimed to be non-idiomatic, coming from places of intuitive collaboration (inspired by texts of Eastern philosophy) play, and a genuine willingness to accept and trust the musical direction of one's cohorts.

British guitarist and musician Derek Bailey writes in his book, *Improvisation*, that "Idiomatic improvisation, much the most widely used, is mainly concerned with the expression of an idiom – jazz, flamenco, baroque – and takes its identity and motivation from that idiom. Non-idiomatic improvisation has other concerns and is usually found in so-called "free improvisation," and while it can be highly stylized is not usually tied to representing an idiomatic identity."²⁶ As a counter, musician George E. Lewis notes that such pushing back on recognized expressions of improvisation, particularly American jazz, serves a function of erasure:

Clearly jazz must have been a powerful force in postwar improvised music, as so many fledgling Eurological improvisers needed to distance themselves from it in one way or another. In this way, the ongoing Eurological critique of jazz may be seen as part of a collective project of reconstruction of a Eurological

²⁶ Derek Bailey, *Improvisation*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1992, xi-xii.

real time musical discipline. This reconstruction may well have required the creation of “other” – through reaction, however negative, to existing models of improvisative musicality.²⁷

Lewis goes on to quote AMM’s goal to “Break away from the very emulative style of American jazz,” as evidence of this tendency.²⁸

The complexities regarding the approach of performing non-idiomatic music, its necessity on the personal and political level, are laid out in a working statement of sorts on the back cover of AMM’s first LP, *AMMMUSIC*:

Does group direction, or authority, depend on the strength of a leading personality, whose rise and fall is reflected in the projected image; or does the collation of a set of minds mean the development of another authority independent of all the members but consisting of them all?...The reason for playing is to find out why I want to play...There is no guarantee that the ultimate realization can exist...There is no certain knowledge, in relation to your development, that the effort you are making at the time is the right effort.²⁹

While it reveals more of a working concept than a summary statement, the probing questions in this statement give a good sense of the influence that performing with an ensemble with such a creative philosophy towards music making would have on *Treatise* and, as we shall see, Cardew’s future endeavors with *The Great Learning* and the Scratch Orchestra.

AMM was a crucial turning point for Cardew, not only in his reconsideration of his musical processes and the act of composition up to that point, but in terms of his musical reach, as *AMMMUSIC*, put out on the major label Elektra Records, suggests. AMM shared venues and bills with rock musicians, opening (to audience bewilderment) for the earlier Syd Barrett fronted incarnation of Pink Floyd. Cardew never directly engaged with rock music himself during this time, and his thoughts on LP recordings, as we shall see in greater detail later, remained ambivalent. Readerly texts were, after all, “products” according to Barthes,

²⁷ George E. Lewis, “Improvvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives,” in *Black Music Research Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Spring, 1996), 144.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Back cover notes to *AMMMUSIC*, Elektra Records, 1966.

and an LP recording, whether full of meditative improvisation aspiring to reveal group edification or not, was nonetheless a (literal) record of a musical event. Nonetheless, AMM and its musical orbit fermented a willingness for Cardew to engage with a variety of performers, an openness that was sometimes lacking in his American experimental music counterparts.³⁰

As a confluence of direct engagements with improvisation, and a reassessment of the composer's role and the potentials in the identity of the musical performer, *Treatise* set the stage for Cardew's next large work, *The Great Learning*, which would be the determining factor for forming the Scratch Orchestra.

2. *The Great Learning*

In his short 1970 essay, "From the Repertoire of Musical Memories and the Disadvantages of a Musical Education," Cardew, a musical educator for some years by this point, writes, "My most rewarding experiences with *Treatise* have come through people who by some fluke (a) acquired a visual education (b) escaped a musical education and (c) have nevertheless become musicians, i.e. play music to the full capacity of their beings."³¹ Cardew is clearly describing a player like Eno, who turned the "disadvantages of a musical education," (i.e. the adumbration of specialization) to his advantage, adopting a non-musician stance: "I can't play any instruments in any technically viable sense at all," Eno

³⁰ John Tilbury takes the somewhat outspoken position that

Time and time again, Cage expressed a concern for the inviolability of the score, that is, of the work of art. This led to a protectiveness and a consequent preference for professionals, 'experts' rather than say, a ragbag of students available at a given time and venue. In contrast, Cardew's music was based on the acceptance of human vulnerability, fragility, and imperfection, of contingency. Whereas with Cage generally little, or no spontaneous expression was permitted during the performance. Cardew never denied the performer's history or background.³⁰

In Tilbury, *A Life Unfinished*, 608. For a more nuanced position on Cage and his relationship to interpretation of his music, see Benjamin Piekut, "When Orchestras Attack!" in *Experimentalism Otherwise* for a study on Cage's preference for professional musicians and a strong philosophical distaste for musical improvisation. See also: David Grubbs' *Records Ruin the Landscape* for both a detailed survey on the debate between recordings of improvised music and the tendency for experimental antipathy for LP recordings by American experimentalists, particularly with Cage..

³¹ Cardew, "Toward an Ethic of Improvisation" in *Treatise Handbook*.

confessed to Dagnal in 1974, “and it’s one of my strengths, I think, actually. Simply because I believe technique is as much a barrier as a way of opening something up...”³²

The artist or musician’s re-evaluation of tenets of technique, or the dismissal of institutionally mandated hierarchies of skill - via education, museum, or market - had long been a staple of the avant-garde. With Cardew, and later, Eno, technique became something not necessarily to dismiss entirely, but to work around in the pursuit of unexpected or unforeseen possibilities, an education in both untapped potential and in the pursuit of performer and artistic freedoms.

Such liberatory ambitions were in the air with the egalitarian attitudes of the 1960s, with Simon Frith and Howard Horne writing,

The idea that artists are natural rebels gained wide cultural exposure during the student occupation of Hornsey College of Art in 1968...with their bohemian beliefs of living ‘spontaneously’ and ‘creative autonomy,’ the students resented new pressures to direct their skills toward feeding the culture industry, in a classical example of the culturalist distinction of culture from commerce...By 1968, the loose hippie movement had created its own version of aesthetic revolt.³³

The “culturalist distinction” that Frith and Horne mention can be generally boiled down to the counterculture (or “the loose hippie movement”) identification with popular culture.

Eno, with his desire to find a space to entangle the more capital “A” art music and performance experiments and pop music, is a perfect example of such a tendency, in which the perceived freedoms of popular culture – the ease of starting and performing a rock band – trumped the ivory tower of the art world – the difficulty of entering and adhering to the trends of the art world.

Eno aligns well with Frith and Horne’s notion of student resentment towards culturalist imperatives of “good” and “bad,” but was, like Cardew, avowedly apolitical in terms of party activism or cause during the 1960s. Eno was particularly skeptical of student activism, writing in his 1967 notebook: “how remarkably easy it is to be anarchic, subversive,

³² Eno in Cynthia Dagnal, “Eno and the Jets.”

³³ Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop*, London: Routledge, 1987, 51-52.

and generally disgruntled when the powers that be aren't around, and note the remarkable and clam like facility with which these same zany rebels shut up when there is authority present.”³⁴ Cardew never explicitly engaged with pop music in his own musical work, and we can surmise this was partially to do with his musical training. Cardew was classically trained, and despite his virtuosity in musical composition, piano, and cello, was wholly unable to grasp playing rock or pop music. “I remember trying to teach him to play ‘Yellow Submarine’ in a pub,” recalls Rowe, “but he couldn’t get it, although he wanted to do it so badly.”³⁵

Cardew may not have been able to play pop music, but in the late 1960s and at the beginnings of the Scratch Orchestra he never stopped his pupils or cohorts from engagement with popular forms. Virginia Anderson recalls that Scratch member, Carole Finer, performed seven folk songs on a banjo (an instrument she could barely play at the time) in response to the number seven appearing in Christian Wolff’s score to *Burdocks* (1970) much to the consternation of Cage, Feldman, and Tudor, in attendance at the concert, who believed Wolff’s instructions indicated sounds not song.³⁶ This example of the looseness of interpretation, the haphazard approach toward popular and avant-garde music, was, as we shall see, a staple of the Scratch Orchestra.³⁷ As Feldman suggests, Cardew was a “guide” for young people, and given the youthful makeup of his music courses (many of whom would join the Scratch Orchestra) it is not surprising that he would provide open structures for them to explore the music to which they felt connected.

As an educator, Cardew was often an odd-fit, teaching both at respected art and music academies – Morley College of Art and the Royal Academy of Music – and the alternative and experimental London Anti-University alongside RD Laing, Stuart Hall,

³⁴ Eno notebook quoted in Michael Bracewell, *Re/Make, Re/Model*, 236.

³⁵ Keith Rowe in Edward Fox, “Death of a Dissident,” *The Independent*, May 9, 1992.

³⁶ Virginia Anderson, “British Experimental Music After Nyman,” in Benjamin Piekut, ed. *Tomorrow is the Question*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014, 165.

³⁷ It was Carole Finer’s “weird” playing with the Scratch that inspired her cousin Jem Finer to pick up a banjo for the pop/pub rock group, The Pogues. “I liked her approach, so I thought ‘I’ll try playing the banjo.’” Jem Finer in Carol Clerk, *Kiss My Arse: The Story of the Pogues*, London: Omnibus Press, 2009, 40.

Juliet Mitchell, Allen Ginsberg, and Stokely Carmichael. Christopher Hobbs, a student of Cardew's at Morley College, recalls that "There can be little doubt of Cardew's dislike of formal teaching and of the Teacher-Pupil relationship...he seemed to need a certain distance between himself and his students."³⁸ This could also account for Cardew's own hesitation with a direct affiliation with pop music, despite student interest. Further, more like Roy Ascott's student imprisonment experiment, Cardew also locked his students in a classroom. Hobbs writes,

Perhaps his most overt comment of the [teacher/student dichotomy] – certainly his most decisive action during my time in the academy – came one summer's day when he left us in the teaching room on some pretext, locked us in, walked out of the building, and went home. We were eventually released by a porter. He never spoke of the incident afterwards, but the subsequent enquiry, at which all of us were interviewed one at a time by the Principal, only increased the wide gap between Cardew and the college which reluctantly employed him.³⁹

Despite the abusive tenor of this anecdote, and Cardew's own ambivalence towards conventional teaching, he nonetheless saw his course at Morley on experimental music, with its mixed roster of musical novices and art students as fertile site to test out *The Great Learning*. Cardew was commissioned for a piece of music by the British organization, McNaughton Concerts, in 1968, and took his interest in "Chinese attitudes towards sound and the social function of music" – influenced by his time in AMM – as the basis for what would become "Paragraph 1" of *The Great Learning*.

Scored for chorus, whistles, organ, and stones, Cardew premiered "Paragraph 1" at the Cheltenham festival on July 9, 1968. Featuring future Scratch member Michael Chant on organ, and the Louis Halsey Singers (members of a singing academy founded by choral conductor Louis Halsey) on (perhaps ironically) whistles and stones, the piece was met with mixed reactions. Gerald Larner, in a review for *The Guardian* wrote "The susceptible members of the audience giggled at first [at "Paragraph 1"] then got very cross and finally

³⁸ In Christopher Hobbs, "Cardew as Teacher," *Perspectives of New Music*. Vol. 20, No ½ (Autumn, 1981-Summer, 1982) 1982, 3.

³⁹ Christopher Hobbs, "Cardew as Teacher," 3.

walked out...[“Paragraph 1”] was deliberate infantilism in the context of a serious concert...”⁴⁰ *The Birmingham Post*’s K.W. Dommett took the criticism a step further, writing “[“Paragraph 1”], one must charitably assume, was intended as a joke. Its thirty minutes of monotony and silly noises became quickly an affront...juvenile and anarchical nonsense.”⁴¹ The din of approval and disdain from the audience is a familiar story in the recounting of public performances of experimental music, with Tilbury writing that the music “could hardly be heard” over the noise.⁴² One vocal supporter was Michael Nyman, who wrote in his review of “Paragraph 1” on the “gentle honesty,” and “very delicate tensions,” remarking that the work was “as real as a drizzly afternoon, gradually eating away at our blinded and cluttered music mentalities.”⁴³

The response to “Paragraph 1” only deepened Cardew’s growing dissatisfaction with professional musicians, concert festivals, and the general atmosphere of the contemporary and experimental music worlds. “What the *Great Learning* teaches,” Cardew writes under “Content” in the score for “Paragraph 1,” “is to illustrate illustrious virtue, to renovate the people, and to rest in the highest excellence.”⁴⁴ Aligning his own composition with the Confucian text that called for self-cultivation (“illustrious virtue”), Cardew found the restrictions of the straight musical world, with its ensconced notions of skill, hierarchies of performance, and orthodox means of performances, a less than ideal place to cultivate both his work and his performers.

At the beginning of 1969, Cardew introduced “Paragraph 2” not to a stable of trained, capable musicians, but to the students in his Morley College course. Scratch Orchestra co-founder, Howard Skempton, a student of Cardew’s during this time recalls,

When he started the Morley class, there were people there who clearly didn’t have the skills to go to the academy, but they had plenty of enthusiasm. They

⁴⁰ Gerald Lerner “The Cheltenham Festival,” *The Guardian*, July 10, 1968, 6.

⁴¹ K.W. Dommett, “McNaghten Rebels” *The Birmingham Post*, July 10, 1968.

⁴² John Tilbury, “Cornelius Cardew,” *Contact*, 26, 1983, 8.

⁴³ Michael Nyman, “Minimal Music,” *The Spectator*, October 11th, 1968.

<http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/11th-october-1968/22/minimal-music>. Accessed April 13th, 2020.

⁴⁴ Cornelius Cardew, *The Great Learning*, Experimental Music Catalog, 1971.

might have been visual artists. Some of them taught at art colleges. He was excited by this and felt there was huge potential there.⁴⁵

“Paragraph 2,” in contrast to its predecessor, is a relatively straightforward score for voice and drums, using text and instructions to guide performers, with minimal standard notation. Utilizing his position teaching a course of students with mixed musical abilities and training, Cardew dedicated the winter 1969 term to working out performances of “Paragraph 2,” testing his thesis on the need for notational strategies that adhered to more “social considerations.”⁴⁶

Cardew’s aim in “Paragraph 2” was to illustrate tenacity in the face of human fallibility. The loud repetitive crashing of the drums inevitably drowns out the sung lines (repeated five times), creating a tension between performers in a constructed hierarchy of instruments vs. human voices. The piece premiered at the performance venue The Roundhouse in May 1969, with Cardew joined by twenty-odd friends and composers – Tilbury, Parsons, Bryars (all part time educators in various art colleges) among them – intending to perform the piece themselves.⁴⁷ Not long into rehearsal, the group realized their volume level was no match for the scale of the venue, and they quickly wrangled together anyone who was available to join – students, friends, family members – to perform the piece as a much larger ensemble.

This performance would be the first iteration of the Scratch Orchestra.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Tony Harris, *The Legacy of Cornelius Cardew*, London: Routledge, 2014, 53.

⁴⁶ Tilbury, “A Life Unfinished,” 481.

⁴⁷ Tilbury, Parsons, and Bryars all taught at Portsmouth College of Art. See Chapter 3.

⁴⁸ This first iteration of the Scratch was called “The Music Now Ensemble,” named for the festival of which they were playing, Victor Schonfield’s ongoing series of music concerts *Music Now*. Other works performed included Cage’s *Atlas Eclipticus*, Christian Wolff’s *Stones*, Skempton’s *Stones*, Eddie Prevost’s *Silver Pyramid*, La Monte Young’s *String Trio*, Terry Jennings’ *String Quartet*, George Brecht’s *Candle Piece for Radios* and Christopher Hobbs’ *Voice Piece*. Skempton, Prevost, and Hobbs would all eventually become key Scratch members.

3. The Scratch Orchestra

The public and critical reception to “Paragraph 2” was far more positive than “Paragraph 1,” with music critic Tim Souster writing in a review, “One has come to expect bold strokes from Cardew, and a strong atmospheric quality in his ideas, but no one could have foreseen the strength, vitality, and even ebullience of this wild but happy music. I cannot remember having used the word ‘happy’ in connection with a piece of new music before.”⁴⁹ Cardew’s excitement over this new performance ensemble led to his publishing an open call for performers in “A Scratch Orchestra: Draft Constitution” published in *The Musical Times*, 1969. The opening paragraph is presented here in full:

Definition: A Scratch Orchestra is a large number of enthusiasts pooling their resources (not primarily material resources) and assembling for action (music making, performance, edification).

Note: The word music and its derivatives are here not understood to refer exclusively to sound and related phenomena (hearing, etc.) What they do refer to is flexible and depends entirely on the members of the Scratch Orchestra.

The *Scratch Orchestra* intends to function in the public sphere, and thus function will be expressed in the form of – for lack of a better word – concerts. In rotation (starting with the youngest) each member will have the option of designing a concert. If the option is taken up, all details of that concert are in the hands of that person or his delegates; if the option is waived, the details of the concert will be determined by random methods, or by voting (a vote determines which of these two)⁵⁰

“The Draft Constitution” goes on to list five “basic repertory categories”: “Scratch Music,” referring to disseminated notebooks that requested original compositions – in whatever shape that may take – from Scratch members; “Popular Classics,” which were essentially performances of works familiar to other members, led by a “reading player” with untrained performers following along “as best they can”; “Improvisation Rites,” a warmup piece of sorts, typically performative and resembling Fluxus instructional scores, designed to

⁴⁹ Tim Souster, “Three ‘Music Now’ Programmes,” *Tempo* 89 (Summer, 1969), 25.

⁵⁰ Cornelius Cardew “A Scratch Orchestra Draft Constitution,” *The Musical Times*, Vol. 110, No. 1516, 12^{5th} Anniversary Issue (June 1969), 617-18.

“establish a community of feeling or a communal starting point through ritual”; “Compositions,” original works written for the entire Scratch Orchestra that are different from the “Popular Classics” category; “Research Project,” in which Scratch members were requested to keep ongoing research into a subject of their choice that could be shared with the group for possible avenues into a larger performance.

“The Draft Constitution,” equal parts teaching syllabus and DIY manifesto, illustrates Cardew’s utopian impulse to not just revise the tenets of musical activity and sound, but to turn the act of composition and performance over to greater social possibilities. Being a “musical innocent,” relatively interchangeable with - though not as declarative as - non-musician, didn’t mean one did not have music in them; if anything, their lack of formal training and musical capability was a boon to the creation of music and a means to rethink its tenets altogether. “Edification” is placed in parenthesis in the opening line of the “Draft Constitution” (as are music making and performance), the grammar marks giving a sense that these activities were flexible, secondary to “assembling for action.” Given the vagueness of such a request – action for what? – it seems that, from the start, Cardew is avoiding explicit prescriptions, a hesitation in leadership in order to keep the Scratch an open entity. Edification (music making and performance) were suggestions, just a few ideas of how “assembling for action” might manifest.

A central tenet of the Scratch was bringing individuals into an unfamiliar but open composing and performing environment to learn through doing. The musical results of the Scratch Orchestra could often be (and were) quite hairy, if not a bit self-indulgent, but they were never treated as expendable (examples of the relationship between action and sound in Scratch compositions can be seen in fig. 2.5 below). The transitory act was a means to learn, not only about oneself, but about others: their performance and interpretation of your work, its reception, feedback, collaboration, etc. The music critic Brian Dennis perhaps sums up The Scratch Orchestra’s unique emphasis on edification through self-education in

its historical context, writing in 1971, that, “the Cageian idea of each reacting in his own way” is taken a stage further to “each learning in his own way.”⁵¹

Their most immediate relation, in terms of formal characteristics, verbal scoring, and multiple performances happening simultaneous, is with Fluxus and, to a lesser extent, the happenings of Allan Kaprow et al. Two collections of early works, *Nature Study Notes* and *Scratch Anthology* (Experimental Music Catalog, 1972) are filled with fantastical verbal scores, cryptic instructions, and visual and graphic experiments in musical scoring. Retroactively, some members of the Scratch Orchestra have pushed back against similarities to Fluxus outside of some more general tendencies. Tilbury writes that their shared sentiments, “found beauty in the accident and created an evanescent and improvisational art based on silent music, invisible creation, and chance utterance,” but that “Fluxus claimed to embrace artists and non-artists alike, yet its membership consisted predominantly of people who were then, or who have become since, professional artists, successful artists.”⁵² Scratch member Hugh Shrapnel, responding to whether Improvisation Rites had a correlation with Fluxus, “...the rites are about collective and group activity, which is what the Scratch Orchestra was about, whereas Fluxus was about something else, i.e. Fluxus!”⁵³ While Tilbury and Shrapnel find difference between the Scratch and Fluxus among desired personnel and ambiguity of ideology, the influence of Fluxus on the group could at the very least be found in George Brecht, a figure who also had a profound effect on Eno’s work.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Brian Dennis, “Cardew’s *The Great Learning*,” *The Musical Times*, Vol. 112, No. 1545 (Nov. 1971), pp. 1066-106

⁵² Tilbury, *A Life Unfinished*, 435. To Tilbury’s point, Fluxus, generally, embraces democratic aspects of art making, but this was often achieved “invisibly” – i.e. through the audience interactive nature of the scores and objects. Only until very recently have performances of Fluxus scores occurred regularly outside of the Fluxus performers themselves. This could be on account of the more institutional acceptance of Fluxus and its relative unpopularity during its time (which is to say nothing of the organizational porousness of the enterprise, the disputes over ideologies among members, and the overall openness of its premise) as well as an impulse by younger artists to perform their works posthumously. Further, the guardedness of Fluxus membership – for a myriad of reasons both political and personal – by its self-appointed chairman, George Maciunas, had a clear effect on the open nature of membership for the group. On the other hand, both Fluxus and the Scratch were largely made up of white males, with females making up just small percentages, and people of color being nearly non-existent in Fluxus, and entirely absent in the Scratch. Thus, the premise of “embracing” everyday people and being against anti-normative art practices seemed an overall goal rather than a practice in both groups.

⁵³ Shrapnel in Stefan Szczelkun, *Improvisation Rites: From John Cage’s ‘Song Books’ to The Scratch Orchestra’s ‘Nature Study Notes’ Collective Practices 2011-2017*. London: Routine Art Co, 2018. 65.

⁵⁴ See Chapter 1 and Appendix A on Brecht’s influence on Eno and the Scratch Orchestra.

In August of 1969, one month before the first official meeting of the Scratch Orchestra, Cardew completed “Paragraph 7,” written for “any number of untrained voices.”⁵⁵ “Paragraph 7” is the only section of *The Great Learning* that is a verbal score, meaning it was the most accessible to performers lacking musical literacy. Forgoing standard notation and musical complexity, a verbal score for a number of voices could be, according to Nyman, “absorbed into a larger organism which speaks through its individual members ‘as if from a higher sphere,” which was key to Cardew’s ongoing mission of this period to solve the dilemma of unlocking the creative potentials in the collaboration between trained and untrained musical performers.⁵⁶

“Paragraph 7” is organized around singing, humming, and speaking the lines

If the root be in confusion nothing will be well governed. The solid cannot be swept away as trivial, nor can trash be established as solid. It just does not happen. Mistake not cliff for morass and treacherous bramble.⁵⁷

The sentences are broken up into fragments – sing for five measures “the root” – turning the content of the words into a slowly morphing note by note long endurance chant. To emphasize the social relationship in music making between score and performers, Cardew breaks down the Confucian text into an exercise that draws attention away from message and onto both the formal qualities of the vocal sound and its related collision or harmony in a multitude of singing voices. Tilbury, who performed in “Paragraph 7” many times since its inception, writes

...the whole piece is based on a procedure of listening and responding to others, of direct unambiguous communication between people without any instrumental paraphernalia...[“Paragraph 7”] was founded on a rapport between musicians and non-musicians in which the cash nexus took no part; it betokened a human need and was regarded by participants as a life enhancing activity, no less⁵⁸

“Paragraph 7,” perhaps more than any other section of *The Great Learning*, is to do with the interactions that occur between humans.

⁵⁵ *The Great Learning*.

⁵⁶ Nyman, *Experimental Music: John Cage and Beyond*, Cambridge University Press, 1999/1974, 122.

⁵⁷ *The Great Learning*.

⁵⁸ Tilbury, *Life Unfinished*, 501.

On February 15th, 1971, the Scratch Orchestra convened at Chappell Studios in London to record “Paragraph 2” and “Paragraph 7.” Organized by composer John White and producer Richard Hill for Deutsche Grammophon’s “Avant Garde” imprint for contemporary experimental music, the ensuing LP was the Scratch Orchestra’s sole official recording. Given that this recording is the sole sonic historic record of the Scratch, who had a firm footing in music, it is puzzling that little to no information exists about this recording in major literature on both Cardew and the Scratch.⁵⁹

Complicating this further is the lack of any record of just who performed at this recording session. Cardew’s written correspondence to the Scratch mailing list that “as many as possible come to the rehearsal [for the recording]...to hear how best the orchestra can be recorded in a studio,” as well as the large ensemble nature of the pieces, give a sense that it was a well-attended affair.⁶⁰ “I’m not sure if I was there,” says Scratch member Stefan Szczelkun in response to my question about attending the recording session, “I remember standing on my head in the pulpit of the Chapel place in North London once.”⁶¹ Szczelkun’s answer, that calisthenics in a church were more memorable than a proper recording session, is revealing both in terms of the importance of the event to the Scratch and in getting to the tension between The Scratch Orchestra as an entity independent of Cardew. Although Cardew had written most of *The Great Learning* for the Scratch, performances of the work were only a small piece of the larger Scratch project.

One individual that we know for sure was there is Eno.⁶² This recording session marked Eno’s first experience in a recording studio and the ensuing LP would be his first

⁵⁹ The recording of the album gets a brief mention in Virginia Anderson’s *British Experimental Music: Cornelius Cardew and his Contemporaries*; appears only in a discography appendix in Tilbury’s 1072-page biography of Cardew (of which nearly half is dedicated to the Scratch) and in Michael Nyman’s much vaunted history of 1960s-70s British experimental music, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*; goes entirely unmentioned in Tony Harris’ monograph *The Legacy of Cornelius Cardew*, The Drawing Room’s exhibition catalogue *Cornelius Cardew: I Play for Today*, Cardew’s own collected writings in *The Cornelius Cardew Reader*, and in the Cardew edited volume on Scratch activity, *Scratch Music*. The album has been reissued as a CD several times since 2000 with an additional track from a 1981 performance of “Paragraph 1.”

⁶⁰ Cardew, Scratch Orchestra Letter January 18, 1971. Richard Ascough Archive.

⁶¹ Personal email correspondence with Stefan Szczelkun, Feb. 19, 2019.

⁶² Eno in BBC4, *Arena*, *Brian Eno: Another Green World*, 2015. Originally broadcast May 9th, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPOz5-rcIeA>. Accessed April 13th, 2020.

appearance on a record. Thus, while there is little information on this recording in histories of the Scratch, it is of tremendous relevance in histories of Eno. This has been particularly the case since Eno used his experience performing “Paragraph 7” and the LP recording as the basis for his essay “Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts,” a text often analyzed and outlined by writers on Eno’s work. This text was important for three reasons. First, the essay demonstrates Eno’s theory of biological adaptation in art, placing a cybernetic emphasis against the need for skilled musicians. Secondly, the essay’s publication in Nyman’s edited issue of *Studio International* affirms Eno’s position in a more stable network of experimentalism, moving him further away from his self-cultivated role of rock musician (something that was happening organically in his musical work by 1976). Lastly, “Generating and Organizing...” gives a window into Eno’s politics of the time, contrasting sharply with Cardew’s.

IV Organizing & Generating

I Heuristics and Systems of Control

“Paragraph 7” is, according to Eno, “one of the most interesting pieces of modern music ever written.”⁶³ In “Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts,” Eno explains exactly why this is. The score for “Paragraph 7,” is extremely simple, accessible to anyone with literacy and a willingness to perform. Eno contends that despite the score’s specific notated instructions and potentially haphazard performer makeup, performances don’t devolve into chaos but just the opposite: the results are “intensely beautiful” – an anomaly for much experimental music says Eno – and subsequent performances always sound nearly

The only other known primary document of Eno with the Scratch is his name on a mailing list for Scratch Orchestra correspondence in 1970.

⁶³ Eno in Kurt Loder, “Eno,” *Synapse*, January/February 1979.

identical.⁶⁴ To the latter point, how such identical performances were possible given the lack of a specified harmonic goal was an opportunity for Eno to use cybernetic theory to explore how Cardew's "Paragraph 7" score "set in motion a system or organism that will generate unique (that is not necessarily repeatable) outputs but that, at the same time, seeks to limit the range of these outputs."⁶⁵

Eno writes that "Paragraph 7," as a system, contains self-regulating "automatic controls" that create its identity, making the "natural variety" that occurs during performance the actual musical material. Ultimately, what Cardew's score sets in motion is an autopoietic system, meaning its identity is forged, sustained, and maintained and Eno locates the cause of this in three factors: the resonant frequency of the concert hall (typically large, as we have seen, to accommodate the number of performers) that settles the initial dissonance of the singers into a harmonic drone; the admixture of trained and untrained singers introducing new notes into the piece; and taste, with the group of singers having a natural inclination to adjust notes to their surroundings/the other singers.

According to Eno, the simplicity in which the score for "Paragraph 7" – a verbal score with minimal instructions – generates variety that self-organizes is an example of what cybernetic theorist Stafford Beer calls a heuristic. Beer's notion of a heuristic states that instead of trying to specify a goal explicitly, you "specify it only somewhat; you then ride on the dynamics of the system in the direction you want to go."⁶⁶ Beer continues

[a heuristic is] a set of instructions for searching out an unknown goal by exploration which continually or repeatedly evaluates progress according to some known criterion" and further, "a method of behaving which will tend towards a goal which cannot be precisely specified because we know *what* it is but not *where* it is.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Brian Eno, "Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts," *Studio International*, November/December 1976, 280.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Eno parsing Stafford Beer in Jim Aiken, "Eno," *Keyboard Wizards*, Winter, 1985.

⁶⁷ Stafford Beer, *Brain of the Firm: The Managerial Cybernetics of Organization*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1972, 68.

An example could be a signpost near a staircase that says “go up” – useful instructions that set in motion a range of possibilities.⁶⁸

Eno received *Brain of the Firm*, Beer’s book on management structures in commercial companies as a cheeky gift from his then mother-in-law in 1970 and found it a revelation in terms of helping him to enunciate his own theories about what happens in experimental or indeterminate music. It is not difficult to see what the attraction of heuristics, as Beer defines them, would be for Eno. Simple instructions with a variety of possible results is a mainstay of Eno’s work from his early affinity to performing scores by Young and Brecht, to his collaborations with musicians on his solo records to the *Oblique Strategy* cards, with their cryptic aphoristic koans and “creative dilemmas.”

Ostensibly then, a heuristic could be a work of art, or at the very least a blueprint for a work of art, such as a verbal score. Pairing this notion of heuristics with Eno’s sentiments, parsing Morse Peckham, on artist behavior being a means of rehearsing for surviving the chaos of the real world (as outlined in Chapter One), we can find one of several theoretical justifications for Eno’s role as a non-musician. Eno was not musically competent in a standard way (although, as Tamm notes in Chapter One, he was mostly competent for the demands of a rock band), but he could create systems or “rehearsals” that brought in cybernetic controls.

In a 1975 letter to Beer, Eno writes,

If a system is ‘viable’ it has, by definition, in-built and automatic controls that stabilize it; and I believe that a great deal of artistic behavior is the attempt to create systems that are viable in this sense, and to examine, or if you like, rehearse, the orientation that allows these cybernetic controls to come into play.⁶⁹

If we consider Eno’s working methodology on his 1974 album, *Here Come the Warm Jets*, and other solo records as a means to create “viable systems” in order to expose “in-built” and

⁶⁸ Many of Brecht’s Event Scores have a clear relationship to this idea of a heuristic, particularly *Exit* (1961), a metal “Exit” sign.

⁶⁹ Brian Eno letter to Stafford Beer (1978) in Christopher Scoates, ed. *Brian Eno: Visual Music*, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2013, 101.

“automatic controls” of stabilization, then we can better understand his use of trained musicians on these records. Eno thought that there was a distinction, however, between his rock music and his explicit systems work such as *Discreet Music*. “Some of my works are systems pieces, in the sense that they are set up and then carry on. This is quite contrary to the way I work on my solo rock albums. The whole business of those is intervention, all the time, feeling that my role is to intervene at any level I want to, so that nothing is fixed, nothing is there for sure.”⁷⁰ I would argue that Eno’s interventions are almost always at the level of the studio – editing, reconfiguring, and omitting other’s work – rather than in the act of musical creation, hence the volume of trained players on these solo rock albums. Of course, Eno asked for different takes, other approaches etc. Yet, it seemed, particularly with an example like the *Oblique Strategies* cards, with their vague prompts for creative ideas and solutions, that set off a system with minimal intervention – instruction, verbal cue, or his own minimal musical example – was featured a good deal on his solo rock albums.

Perhaps most importantly, what Eno learned from “Paragraph 7” was that an admixture of capabilities – a non-musician dictating loose ideas to musicians in the case of Eno’s albums – was a necessary component to set off stable systems and working collaboratively without a fixed goal. A heuristic, after all, could be such a way to generate such results. “Paragraph 7” was a particularly special piece for Eno in that performances of the work seemed to show adaptation in motion and also proved Morse Peckham’s thesis, that in the act of the creation of art, humans could collaboratively evolve together.

Both Cardew and Eno proposed a heuristic method, be it through a written score or suggested verbal instructions, but it is only Cardew’s work that takes place outside of a reified medium, i.e. the LP. As noted in Chapter One, Eno rarely performed his music live. His work is limited basically to recordings, a fact unsurprising given the studio constructed nature of his compositions and songs. With the Scratch Orchestra particularly, Cardew was concerned with what this musical situation achieves in a public sphere, a fact that ultimately

⁷⁰ Eno in John Rockwell, “The Odyssey of Two British Rockers,” *The New York Times*, July 23, 1978.

resulted in less than desirable results (and a key reason for the group's dismantling, as we shall see).

Two years before the Deutsche Grammophon recording of the Scratch Orchestra performance of "Paragraph 2" and "Paragraph 7," Cardew wrote in his essay "Towards an Ethic of Improvisation,"

What a recording produces is a separate phenomenon, something really much stranger than the playing itself, since what you hear on tape or disc is indeed the same playing but divorced from its natural context. What is the importance of this natural context? The natural context provides a score which the players are unconsciously interpreting their playing. Not a score that is explicitly articulated in the music and hence of no further interest to the listener as is generally the case in traditional music, but one that coexists inseparably with the music, standing side by side with it and sustaining it.⁷¹

Cardew was referring to the (still continuing) debate over the merits of recording improvisational music. His position that a recording is a closed off document, contained for the listener and thus moved away from its musical situation and site of inception, is not out of step with other more ambivalent attitudes towards recording by other composers and musicians in his milieu.

Recordings of the Scratch Orchestra outside of Cardew's compositions are even more difficult to understand outside their context, aiding in the sentiment that Cardew and the Scratch aren't equivalent entities. As noted, many of these Scratch performances were visual and performance-based means of generating sound and music. To make this point clearer, not featured on the Deutsche Grammophon LP: the voice of Scratch member Bryn Harris, who, having lost his voice performing just prior with the Scratch subgroup The Slippery Merchants, had to stick to percussion; various members who refused to perform on the grounds of Cardew's authority as the composer of the recording in question.⁷²

⁷¹ Cornelius Cardew, "Towards an Ethic of Improvisation," (1971) in ed. Edwin Prevost, *Cornelius Cardew: A Reader*, Essex: Copula Matchless, 2006, 127-128.

⁷² . See: Virginia Anderson, *British Experimental Music: Cornelius Cardew and his Contemporaries*, Leicester: Experimental Music Catalogue, 2012/1983, 38. A host of live recordings, often poorly recorded, or, as Hobbs mentions above, bewildering in their content do exist in various locations online, most notably in the Scratch's 40th anniversary show on Scratch member Carole Finer's radio show for Resonance FM. Live documentation exists in Hanne Boenisch's documentary on the Scratch's 1972 country tour, *Journey to the North Pole*, of which footage was repurposed and used in Luke Fowler's film on the Scratch *Pilgrimage to Scattered Points*.

Cardew's antipathy towards recordings at time puts him on quite different footing from Eno, who often used trained musical professionals in the privacy of a recording studio – a much more manageable but smaller system – with the resultant offers being presented through the marketplace – record labels, executives, LPs sold in retail spaces. Eno's allegiance to the recorded form over public performance also points to one flaw in his general thesis regarding "Paragraph 7." There is only one official recording of "Paragraph 7." Live performances of the piece would typically run around ninety minutes, whereas the limitations of the recording onto LP, meant that the recorded version of "Paragraph 7" was a little under twenty-two minutes. This truncated recording of "Paragraph 7," while certainly an accurate realization, nonetheless does not show the full breadth of the work.

With this in mind, as well as Eno's decision to write on the piece "due to its availability on LP," his thesis that "Paragraph 7" does not differ radically from one performance to another is something of a challenge to prove.⁷³ While Eno provides a "hypothetical performance" alongside his own recounted "real" one, assumedly while listening to the LP recording, the question lingers of just what differences might arise in a non-recorded setting and how might the natural variety change with another hour of challenging note sustaining?

2. Organizing and Generating

In 1974, The London Musicians Collective, a loose group of improvisational minded experimental musicians founded *Musics*, a self-published magazine of writings, compositions, and reviews by LMC members and affiliates. The limited production value of *Musics*, done on a xerox machine and assembled by hand, meant that its function was essentially a newsletter of sorts, a record of ideas (and dissents) of a small contingent of

⁷³ "I have chosen ["Paragraph 7"] not only because it is a compendium of organizational techniques but also because it is available on record." Eno "Generating and Organizing..." Eno, "Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts," *Studio International*, 280.

people in the English experimental milieu. On page two of the October/November 1974 issue of *Musics*, printed in the “Letters” section, was an advertisement under the guise of a notice from Eno:

Dear Musics,

Perhaps you’d like to point out in your magazine that, in collaboration with Island Records, I’ve recently started a record label specifically for the recording and distribution of the kind of music you seem to be talking about. The label is called “Obscure Records” and its first releases are as follows:

1. Gavin Bryars: The Sinking of the Titanic/Jesus Blood Never Failed Me Yet
 2. Max Eastley/ David Toop: New and Rediscovered Musical Instruments (Tentative Title)
 3. Brian Eno (that’s me): Self-regulating Systems (Tentative Title) [Later *Discreet Music*]
 4. Michael Nyman: Bell Set [Later *Decay Music*]/ Jan Steele: Ensemble Pieces
 5. Ensemble music by Gavin Bryars, Christopher Hobbs, John Adams, and John White
- Regards,
Brian Eno (Bari Neon)⁷⁴

Nearly every musician featured on Eno’s *Obscure* roster contributed to *Musics* in some fashion, with Tom Phillips and David Toop writing for this same issue. The relatively localized nature of the British experimental music scene, “the same thirty-one people...a tiny crowd,” according to Eno, meant that mutual support and encouragement through direct encounters and collaborations occurred frequently (although this support system was not immune from ideological and artistic squabbles, as *Musics* can attest).⁷⁵ The British experimental music historian Virginia Anderson perhaps summarizes this moment best, writing that direct encounters among this community “resulted in shared beliefs and intangible values held.”⁷⁶

On account of this localization, Nyman’s 1974 book, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, a survey text on developments in experimental music post-Cage, found the author historicizing individuals he knew, and activities that were ephemeral and fleeting.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ *Musics*, No. 4, October/November 1974, 2. In his book, *Rip It Up and Start Again*, Simon Reynolds called *Musics* a “Squabblezine” on account of the many interpersonal debates and fiercely outspoken positions that appeared on its pages.

⁷⁵ Eno in *Re-Make/Re-Model*, 238.

⁷⁶ Anderson, “British experimentalism after Nyman,” 161.

⁷⁷ For an in-depth critique of Nyman’s organization of *Experimental Music* see Benjamin Piekut, “Indeterminacy, Free Improvisation, and the Mixed Avant Garde: Experimental Music in London, 1965-75,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 67, Number 3, 769-824.

Experimental Music was an attempt at organizing this scene into a workable historical lexicon, a usable canon to outline developments within the British experimental music scene. During Nyman's writing of this book, Eno was still translating experimental ideas into adventurous pop records, an activity that did not comfortably fit Nyman's articulation of experimentalism in the book, with chapters headed under his own formulations of "indeterminacy," "minimalism," and "electronic systems."

Although still listed as a "rock musician" in his contributor bio (it is unclear who provided this), Eno had garnered enough experimental goodwill to be included in Nyman's guest edited November/December 1976 issue of *Studio international*.⁷⁸ By 1976, Nyman had become a well-respected music critic on British experimental music, and had a brief stint writing a music column for *Studio International* in the early part of 1976. The issue is something of a spiritual successor to *Experimental Music*, with interviews with George Brecht (Nyman was a champion of Fluxus and Brecht, dedicating a chapter to the group in *Experimental Music*), Steve Reich, an essay from Portsmouth Sinfonia member and Portsmouth College of Art instructor, Jeffrey Steele, and many others who appear in *Experimental Music*.

One possibility for Nyman including Eno in *Studio International* was the more recent turn in Eno's work, with *Discreet Music* being his most experimentally minded work yet.⁷⁹ Another possible reason for his inclusion could be Eno's founding of his own record label, *Obscure*. In 1975, Eno had convinced his record label, Island Records, to bankroll *Obscure*, releasing ten LPs of, as its namesake suggests, little heard music and compositions by mostly experimental British composers, before folding in 1978. *Obscure* releases are a small compendium of the thick of the British experimental scene, featuring multiple releases and appearances by Bryars, the Scratch Orchestra's Christopher Hobbs, David Toop, composer

⁷⁸ *Studio International*, November/December 1976, 326.

⁷⁹ Musician Peter Cusack, in a review for *Musics*, seemed relatively ambivalent, however: "[*Discreet Music*] is easy to listen to and easy to produce." *Musics*, February/March 1976, No.6, 12.

John White, Tom Phillips' (Eno's former Ipswich painting instructor) opera, written with art historian, Fred Orton, and Nyman's first LP of recorded music, *Decay Music*. Like Nyman, Eno took on the role of cultural curator, promoting (and producing) many of the period's music innovators. "It was refreshing that someone who had got a bit of success was prepared to use it to...give support to people who were finding it difficult to access," recalls Toop, "Brian had access at that point and used it in a very generous way, I think."⁸⁰ With *Obscure*, Eno revealed himself to be neither a borrower of experimental methods in his rock music, nor a proselytizer in the press, but also a career supporter.

In "Generating and Organizing..." Eno closes the essay with a meditation on the distinction between conventional classical music and experimental music and discusses briefly two pieces of music from the *Obscure* series, Bryars' *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet* (1971) and Nyman's *I-1000* (1975). Both works are mentioned in the essay for their "experimental" qualities, with Nyman's *I-1000* exemplifying experimental music's "movement towards natural variety as a compositional device," and Bryars' *Jesus' Blood* representing experimental music's concern with "the simultaneous permutation of a limited number of elements in a moment in time as well as the relations between a number of points in time."⁸¹

Eno's highlighting of these two specific compositions for their respective formal contributions to experimental music is theoretically sound, and while both are novel, there were certainly other, perhaps better, examples in this mode of music making for Eno to draw from. Wolff's *Burdocks* made great use of performer variables, as did Bryars' Portsmouth Sinfonia, who are surprisingly absent from Eno's formulation on recalibrating the conventions of classical music (see Chapter Three). Bryars' *Jesus' Blood*, while a beautiful use of slow building repetition, is a far less potent example of music designed for listener perceptual shifts than any work by Reich or Reilly. Eno does tie these works by Nyman and

⁸⁰ David Toop in Dayal, *Another Green World*, 75.

⁸¹ Eno, "Generating and Organizing..." *Studio International*, 281-282.

Bryars together with “Paragraph 7” in their reorganizing found material, a compelling insight that goes unexplored in the essay. While by no means egregious, Eno’s inclusion of his *Studio International* editor (Nyman) and his fellow contributor (Bryars) in this essay, can be understood, at its most charitable, as a means to promote a still incubating experimental music scene, as his own *Obscure* label aimed to do. A more pessimistic view might see nepotism and an attempt at commercial synergy.

Perhaps more than anything else, the intellectual rigor and density of “Generating and Organizing...” feels right at home in Nyman’s *Studio International* among a cadre of established experimental musicians and artists theorizing and writing on their own practices or historical precedents. Eno’s pontificating on systems theory and musical processes was always, as we have seen in Chapter One, an indication of his outlier status as a “rock musician,” and up to the point of “Generating and Organizing...,” Eno had mostly presented these views in various press interviews, a classroom lecture tour, and occasional writings for his fan club newsletter *EnoVations* with “Generating and Organizing...” included in the 1977 issue. “Generating and Organizing...” was Eno’s first large public foray into straight theoretical writing on British experimental activity. This piece of writing gave him access to the *Studio International* table of contents page with heavy hitters such as Bryars, Nyman, Reich, Brecht, and, in a bit of irony, Cardew. This position among experimental musicians also indicated, as we shall see, a shift and maturation in artistic goals, one that would slowly move his own interests away from the “hysterical hybrids” and towards more focused and musically theoretical endeavors.

“Generating and Organizing...” would appear in print again in 1977 for the small arts journal *Interstate*, alongside writings by Dick Higgins, Bern Porter, and Richard Kostelanetz and others. Yet, it was the essay’s appearance in writer Gregory Battcock’s edited anthology *Breaking the Sound Barrier: A Critical Anthology of New Music*, in 1981, where Eno would be introduced by the editor as a “well known composer of new music,” quite a move away from

“rock musician.”⁸² For *The Musical Quarterly* in 1983, Terence J. O’Grady reviewed *Breaking the Sound Barrier* and wrote that “Generating and Organizing...” was “fully representative of the newest attempts to cast off the cultural baggage of Western musical traditions” and that it “provides additional insight into the motivations associated with some of the New Music.”⁸³ O’Grady’s assessment of Eno’s thinking in this essay again indicates that, although Eno’s music was still largely located within a pop network, his presence in an experimental music and art network was slowly but surely establishing itself.⁸⁴

Following Battcock’s anthology, “Generating and Organizing” became a widely cited essay in books and articles on experimental music, with Eric Tamm writing in his 1989 book on Eno, *Brian Eno: His Music and the Vertical Color of Sound*, that the essay was “Eno’s primary written statement concerning compositional processes in the abstract and social aspects of music-making.”⁸⁵ Eno included the essay in his own published diary from 1996, *A Year with Swollen Appendices*, prefaced with the sentiment “I think the ideas are still good.”⁸⁶ The essay would be reprinted again in all editions of Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner’s survey textbook, *Audio Culture* (2004/2017) with the editors noting in the introduction to the essay that Eno “performed in Cornelius Cardew’s Scratch Orchestra” and “was immersed in the

⁸² Gregory Battcock, ed. *Breaking the Sound Barrier: A Critical Anthology of New Music*, 129. In his introduction to the book, Battcock inexplicably decontextualizes Eno’s original text to craft a definition of experimental music:

Is the term avant-garde synonymous with experimental? To take that...question...we are reminded of Brian Eno’s observation...‘Experimental music, unlike classical (or avant-garde) music, does not typically offer instructions toward highly specific results, and hence does not normally specify wholly repeatable configurations of sound.’ Thus, according to Eno, experimental music is essentially music that may turn out differently each time it is repeated. On the other hand, avant-garde music need not subscribe to this quality.” (Battcock, x)

While Battcock is not incorrect in noting Eno’s formal distinction between avant-garde and experimental music, the crux of “Generating and Organizing” is that some pieces of experimental music – “Paragraph 7” – actually do turn out the same each time, troubling such an easy read differentiating “experimental” from “avant-garde” music.

⁸³ Terence J. O’Grady, “Breaking the Sound Barrier: A Critical Anthology of New Music by Gregory Battcock,” *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 69, No. 1 (Winter 1983), 141.

⁸⁴ Eno mentions to curator Hans Ulrich Obrist many years later that “A record like *Music for Airports* was a very strange record to release in 1978, because it was completely minimal, but it was being put out into a pop context. It wasn’t being put out as: here is a piece of arcane minimalist music. I put it out as a pop record.” Eno in Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of New Music*, 249.

⁸⁵ Tamm, *Brian Eno: His Music and the Vertical Color of Sound*, 59.

⁸⁶ Brian Eno, *A Year with Swollen Appendices*, London: Faber and Faber, 1996, 333

British ‘experimental music’ scene.”⁸⁷ Lastly, media theorist Edward Shanken included the essay in his edited volume, *Systems*, with the biographical note that Eno is “a British composer, musician, and artist.”⁸⁸

I have outlined the travels of “Generating and Organizing” over the last forty years here – moving from a popular art magazine to firmly academic literature contexts - to illustrate the longevity of the piece and show how Eno evolves from “rock musician” to “British composer” over this period of time both in his own work and through the maintenance of various editors and publications. This maintenance, taking the form of re-translating Eno, is theorized as a type of translation action by Bruno Latour in *Reassembling the Social*, with translation always being present in a network of associations. Latour writes, “action...should be felt as a node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled...we are never alone in carrying out a course of action.”⁸⁹ For Latour, the chain of translations that occur in an action spread (and mediate) agency. The travels of “Generating and Organizing” in academic and popular media – textbooks, journals, edited anthologies - under this theorization become as much spokespeople that manifest Eno’s public reception as Eno himself, as we have seen in Chapter One.

Thus, it is important to account not only for how Eno’s artistic thought process was changing during the period of the late 1970s, but also in the ways that others – Bryars, Battcock, Shanken, and eventually, Nyman – took to translating Eno’s work into their own respective projects. These projects took on lives of their own, and through their travels – into libraries, personal bookshelves, the genre shelving of bookstores, prominent places in classrooms – create a chain of new potential translations. While I would not necessarily argue for equivalency between Eno’s intentions and the social reception and recognition that his appearance in these “spokespeople” make, I do believe it important to be cognizant

⁸⁷ Christoph Cox and Daniel Werner, *Audio Culture: Reading Modern Music*, New York: Continuum, 2004, 226.

⁸⁸ Edward Shanken, ed. *Systems*, London: White Chapel, 2015, 228.

⁸⁹ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 45.

of the things that help to alter the unfolding of historical events. For this reason, “Generating and Organizing” is not only important for its content, but also for what its travels in a number of different places means for Eno’s historical reception – as a musical intellectual – today.

Following “Generating and Organizing,” Eno’s final album of conventional pop music was *Before and After Science* (1977), a labored effort in which the almost jarring idiosyncrasies of the songs reveal Eno’s creative struggles with the record and working within a pop music context.⁹⁰ For the rest of the 1970s and the whole of the 1980s, Eno dedicated himself to composing ambient music and soundscapes and making video work and installations. “Generating and Organizing” was the signal of Eno firmly entering into the more rarified and serious world of experimental music and art, via historical organizing and canon building of the localized British experimental music community and by his own personal maturation as an artist.

The moderate ubiquity of “Generating and Organizing...” also has the effect of positioning the Scratch as equivalent to Cardew. As I hope I have made clear earlier in this chapter, Cardew and the Scratch are not equivalent entities. When Eno “performed in the Scratch Orchestra” he performed Cardew’s work *with* the Scratch, a small but important detail. Eno’s cultural presence is far more wide reaching than Cardew or the Scratch, particularly in the United States. It is likely that one could come to discover Cardew or the Scratch through Eno’s writings or biographical footnotes from others like those I have presented.

⁹⁰ “I abandoned [*Before and After Science*] three times before I finished it,” Eno confessed to *NME*’s Ian McDonald in 1977, “It really caused a lot of stress and heartache, I suppose. At one point I thought that I could never achieve anything more musically. Not that I’d achieved everything, just that there was nowhere else for me to go, you know. It affected everything I did in the end. I found myself saying ‘You’re just a dilettante. You’re not doing anything with the kind of intensity it deserves. It was a crisis of confidence that went very deep. I still don’t know how pleased I am with what I’ve done. Robert Wyatt said to me once that ‘you commit yourself to what you’re left with – you know that this is the only thing left that you can do.’” Eno in McDonald, “Another False World,” *NME*, December 3, 1977. Eno would not sing on his own records again until his 1990 collaboration with John Cale, *Wrong Way Up*.

Scratch work was produced as a visual and performance-based means of generating music, a fact that Hobbs notes when discussing the scarcity of any commercially available recordings by the group:

merely listening to the sounds [of the Scratch Orchestra] without being able to see their source...or imagining those events which had no sound at all was a wasted exercise...Sorry, but you had to have been there. There's no eavesdropping on history in this case.⁹¹

It is without a doubt that, despite the Scratch's ambition as a "classless orchestra," Cardew held a place of authority within the group, often serving as their spokesperson to the press. This fact is hardly surprising as Cardew was the most publicly known member of the Scratch and its founding was predicated on his artistic desires. The musicologist Benjamin Piekut notes, following Bruno Latour, that a spokesperson has no choice in their role but to reduce and inflect the many conflicting voices in a given organization, leaving it rife for leaky translations by others. "When a network reaches far and long," Piekut writes, "it drifts, starts going places and interacting with things and people that could not be foreseen. It gets twisted up, misconstrued, repurposed, compromised, or revised. It moves unpredictably."⁹² The Scratch is rightfully historically tethered to Cardew, but their different ambitions have largely been tangled up in the various minor omissions that go with extending and managing an unstable network like experimental music and art.

Eno's reading of "Paragraph 7" is wholly his own, applying his own theory to, as we shall see shortly, Cardew's very different aims with the piece. It is other cultural intermediaries, Nyman, Battcock, Shanken, et al, who decide where to place Eno's essay in cultural productions, whether any context of Cardew or the Scratch needs to be fleshed out or not, and this is where the unpredictable nature of network translation that Piekut mentions comes in to play. "Experimental" is a fragile concept (one need only look at the

⁹¹ Christopher Hobbs in Tilbury, *A Life Unfinished*, 435. A further example of this is Hobbs' remark that the Scratch Orchestra was not "a sublime organism on a higher plane telling us what to do, but just us making music together." (From "Agenda for the Meeting on 7/1/69" in Richard Ascough Archives). Hobbs' assessment seems to conflict with Nyman's read of "Paragraph 7" as a "larger organism speaking through individuals from a higher sphere," a sentiment, as I have stated, is more in line with Cardew's thinking of the work.

⁹² Benjamin Piekut, "Actor Networks in Music Theory," *Twentieth Century Music*. Vol. 11, Issue 2 (September 2014), 199.

very different aims and works of the musicians gathered in both Nyman's *Experimental Music* and *Studio International*) and is as much about shared conceptual or aesthetic attributes as it is about direct encounters and forging or establishing communal support systems and careers. Eno's bilocal position in both experimental and rock networks make this all the more difficult. Although he stopped composing explicit rock and pop music by 1977, Eno continued to produce and be associated with rock and pop acts – Talking Heads, Devo (both born out of art schools), U2, among many others – making his pluralistic music contributions all the more difficult to manage. The limits of his capabilities to manage these two networks will be taken up in greater detail in Chapter Four.

3.
“What Kind of Society do We Want and Blah, Blah, Blah”

Eno did finally appear in a second edition of *Experimental Music*, writing the foreword to what was essentially a reprint, save for a new cover and new introduction by Nyman. In his foreword, Eno recounts explaining his thoughts on *The Great Learning* to Cardew in the mid-1970s: “I remember a long discussion with Cardew in which I tried to convince him that his magnum opus, *The Great Learning* represented a powerful new idea about social organization, and where he in turn dismissed the work as bourgeois elitism.”⁹³ By the time of his 1976 essay “Wiggly Lines and Wobbly Music” for *Studio International*, Cardew had abandoned avant-garde music, and almost completely disowned his previous musical efforts, for revolutionary politics. In “Wiggly Lines...” Cardew writes that “the artistic avant-garde is a component of...the superstructure of western imperialist society...and hence helps to protect that society against radical social change...”⁹⁴

Profoundly influenced by Mao Tse-Tung's “Talks at the Yen'an Forum on Literature and Art,” Cardew found himself politically reborn and on a completely different musical path, considering art only important when it served the cause of the masses and the

⁹³ Eno in Nyman ed. *Experimental Music*, xii.

⁹⁴ Cardew, “Wiggly Lines and Wobbly Music,” in *Studio International*, November/December 1976, 249.

proletariat.⁹⁵ Cardew loudly pronounced his break from experimental music with a book length published polemic, *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism* (1974), a scathing rebuke not only of his former mentor, Karlheinz Stockhausen, but of John Cage, the Scratch Orchestra, and his own role within the 1960s-70s avant-garde. “People often speak of the ‘dilemma of the bourgeois artist,’” Cardew writes in “John Cage: Ghost or Monster,”

as though he was trapped, paralyzed, unable to act. This is not the case. Ghosts have some sort of dilemma; they can never be alive. Monsters have one; they can never be human. But I see no dilemma for Cage. It may not all be plain sailing, but there’s no reason why he can’t shuffle his feet over to the side of the people and learn to write music which will serve their struggles.⁹⁶

As this typical quote makes clear, Cardew could no longer accept the role implicit as an experimental composer. He could not bear to see himself as a node of an imperialist order in bourgeois culture against the class struggle. Repudiating his former mentors and artistic influences seemed to be one way to mark the seriousness of Cardew’s political transition, to announce loudly – and controversially – to his experimental network that, barring their own political awakening to his side, he was among them but no longer one of them.

Mid-1970s public performances of his 1960s works occurred only on the occasion that Cardew – either in person or via written concert program – could complement the performance with pronouncements of the work’s complicity within an oppressive imperialist tyranny, effectively altering the tenor of any given performance. This political radicalization was a logical outgrowth of his aims to “renovate the people,” an ambition initially set to music making. It was the perceived failures of the Scratch (and by proxy Cardew’s complicity in forming and performing with the group) to enact any real substantial social change that sowed the seeds of Cardew’s discontent.

In *Journey to the North Pole*, German filmmaker Hanne Boenisch’s short documentary film on The Scratch Orchestra’s 1971 tour of the English countryside, Boenisch interviews two members of the Scratch, as they sit barefoot in the tall grass of their rural camp site,

⁹⁵ See: Timothy D. Taylor, “Moving in Decency: The Music and Radical Politics of Cornelius Cardew,” *Music & Letters*, Vol. 79, No.4 (Nov. 1998): 555-576.

⁹⁶ Cardew, *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*, New York: Primary Information, 1974/2020, 40.

adorned in all the sartorial conventions of 1971. “What is Scratch Music?” Boenisch asks the pair, with Cardew’s VW bus parked just in the background, “Is it contrary to other types of music?” The male interviewee picks at the grass for a few moments before stammering something of an answer: “Uh...the music played by the Scratch Orchestra...it’s, um...it seems necessary to involve other people...it’s social...uh....” Riding out a long pause for as long as she can, Boenisch asks another question: “Do you want to tell the audience anything?” The female interviewee, silent until now, loudly proclaims, “No,” stretches her body across the grass and adds, “maybe they can tell us a thing or two.”

Later in the film, Cardew, again the Scratch’s unofficial spokesperson, no longer in the suit, tie, and coiffed hair of the archetypical experimental musician of the 1960s, but a modest untucked dress shirt and a head of long unkempt curly hair, tells Boenisch:

The Scratch Orchestra does not have an aim. It accepts new influences through the people who come and the people who go. It is how the structure develops with this changing material. The purpose is defined by this.... it’s quite a heterogeneous group. This is how good effects arise, get together, and produce fruitful ideas.”⁹⁷

Although more lucid, Cardew’s answer to the goal of the Scratch Orchestra essentially restates what was said by the other pair of interviewees: the point of the Scratch was up to other people.

Encouraging social engagement was largely the impetus of the Scratch Orchestra’s countryside tour to Newcastle and the North East that Boenisch’s film documents. Cardew and the Scratch desired to see how their “structure” might develop away from the usual concert hall and the city. This endeavor inadvertently exposed the limits of The Scratch Orchestra’s experiment in heterogenous musical and social practice. In June of 1971, the Scratch Orchestra played The Metro Club, a club for young immigrants in a racially tense area of Notting Hill. The program performed, according to Tilbury, was a “perfect example of chalk and cheese,” received ambivalently by the working-class audience in attendance.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ In *Journey to the North*, dir. Hanne Boenisch, 1971.

⁹⁸ Tilbury, *A Life Unfinished*, 520. The concert was arranged by Scratch member Jenny Robbins, who performed her work *Toy Symphony*. Robbins’ score is as follows:

This failure to draw and connect with a non-arts audience came to a head in a performance at the New Castle Civic Center in the same year. Cardew performed Greg Bright's *Sweet Fa* (ca. 1971), which instructed the performer to "Act as obscenely as you can until the authorities intervene." Cardew wrote a series of four-letter words on some found toilet paper rolls, which promptly brought the police to shut down the concert and ban the Scratch from playing the venue ever again.

The English press jumped on this incident, turning a minor controversy into a major event, with *The Sun* providing the headline, "Drummed Out – Prof's Toilet Roll Orchestra." Cardew was still at the time, a professor of composition at Morley College, and many members of the Scratch Orchestra were current or former students of Cardew's course. A Morley spokesman did damage control: "Mr. Cardew is not a professor in the sense that he has a chair and a department. He is simply a part-time teacher of composition. He has only one pupil, and I understand she is in the hospital."⁹⁹ The fate of the hospitalized student remains a mystery. Another, more dire threat was made by the Musician's Union to withdraw funding for the Northern Arts Association "if further grants are given to groups similar to the Scratch Orchestra..." with one member of the Union stating "there could be no justification for the obscene and vulgar performance given by the Scratch Orchestra."¹⁰⁰

This clear disconnect in communication between what Parsons calls, "what we were doing, and the wider perception of what musicians could do and might be doing," put a wrinkle in an already politically strained premise. Factions of the group, including Tilbury, Rowe, and Cardew, had been picking up on the current strand of Maoist thought that was

Clockwork toys – soldiers, cars, aeroplanes, etc.

Toy pianos, saxophones, drums.

Each performer must have at least one toy which will make a noise, anything which the performer classes as childish may be used, e.g. Mickey Mouse alarm clocks.

The toys should be used to make the piece an improvisation lasting $\frac{3}{4}$ - 1 hour.

(In Scratch Orchestra Letter 1/18/71. Richard Ascoug archives.

⁹⁹ T. Beaumont, "4-Letter Musician's Get Art Director's Support," *The Daily Telegraph*, June 26, 1971.

¹⁰⁰ "Threat to Northern Arts," *The Stage and Television Today*, July 15, 1971.

permeating English universities. By 1974, the Scratch had begun to entirely fall apart. The group was briefly christened The Red Flame Proletariat Orchestra and Cardew, alongside a small handful of other Scratch members, fully pledged themselves as publicly active members of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) an almost evangelical orthodox Maoist party at the time.

While this is an incredibly abridged episode here, it nonetheless illustrates two interesting threads: the Scratch's survival being predicated on the need to solicit social desires and the precariousness of being structurally and formally open-ended.¹⁰¹ Squinting through the more anarchic sprawl of the Scratch Orchestra, what comes into focus is a question about just what kind of future exists for music making (or perhaps more specifically what future might collaborative free form musical playing have). The shift from an anarcho-libertarian quest for musical and social freedom to near orthodox Marxism (via Mao Zedong) for the Scratch is a dramatic one that suggests that at least key players in the group thought that this kind of musical approach held no benefits for the future at all.

Cultural theorist Raymond Williams dubs alternative communal engagements like the Scratch Orchestra “heuristic utopias”:

The more admired contemporary utopian form is...not based on a new system as a form of critique of an existing system, or as a whole worked-through alternative to it. Its purpose instead is to form desire. It is an imaginative encouragement to feel and to relate differently, or to strengthen and confirm existing feelings and relationships which are not at home in the existing order and cannot be lived through in it.¹⁰²

A heuristic utopia for Williams is a profoundly social endeavor and defines well the urgency in soliciting participation often through instruction, individual and collaborative education, and feedback in communal style counterculture collectives.¹⁰³ The Scratch Orchestra was

¹⁰¹ See: John Tilbury, *Cornelius Cardew: A Life Unfinished*, Tony Harris, *The Legacy of Cornelius Cardew*, Virginia Anderson, *Experimental Music in Britain*, Tony Harris' *The Legacy of Cornelius Cardew* and Cardew's own *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism* for detailed histories of the radical politicization that splintered the Scratch Orchestra.

¹⁰² Raymond Williams, *Towards 2000*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1986, 13.

¹⁰³ We might look at groups like Videofreex and Ant Farm with their respective mission to improve communication via public sharing of new technological apparatuses like television, EXIT, a loose performing collective that lead an agrarian lifestyle (and would eventually become the anarcho punk band CRASS) or Ken Isaac's blueprints for nomadic living structures as examples of this tendency. Yet, the necessity to inspire

truly heuristic: what could you bring to the group – intellectually, artistically, musically, in performance – and what might you learn from this engagement? In 1971, before his transformation, Boenisch asks Cardew, “How do you see the reproach by the political faction in the Orchestra that without politics this is just a playground?” Cardew responds:

Everyone must play. A playground is what we want for all, regardless of the politics. In play, you return to the essential situations of humanity, and from these basic positions one can disperse into any direction. The political faction can do their political music when they have left the Scratch Orchestra. Those who perform respectable music in concert halls they can take that direction too and benefit from their Scratch work. The Scratch Orchestra should be a place for going back to basics. That’s it.¹⁰⁴

The looseness of Cardew’s proposal, not to mention the seeming high performer turnover rate (many people came and went in the Scratch Orchestra with seemingly little bearing on the direction of the group, Eno, among them) made it difficult to make out the stakes, to generally view the Scratch as a project with lofty counterculture ambitions to truly change the world. Despite their grand size, Scratch projects, performances, and even musical compositions were often intimately scaled, their hermetic nature difficult to relate to any grand gesture outside of expressive experiment (exemplified by *Sweet Fa*). Utopic projects with an intimate scale are what Williams sees as a general weakness to a heuristic project, in that atomizing politics risks negating any potential for larger scale change: “When the alternative values run deep and include others, there is a persistence in this mode, if only among what are seen as negligible minorities.”¹⁰⁵

Williams is careful to include a “perceived as” clause in mentioning “negligible minorities.” We might debate whether art and music dictate their own trends to an eager

desire for social participation and engagement was arguably more focused in these groups than the Scratch. Scratch member Stefan Szczelkun’s had the semi-Isaacs influenced *Scratch Cottage*, constructed of recycled building materials as a “challenge – [to] the often classically trained musicians – to construct a shelter with their own hands” <https://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/16230/scratch-orchestra>. Szczelkun also published a series of *Whole Earth Catalog* style manuals called *Survival Scrapbooks*, each centered on different means of self-sustaining activities. See also: Stefan Szczelkun, “Shanty Chalets” in *Architectural Design*, No. 46, Vol. 6, 374. Michael Parsons notes that Szczelkun’s *Scratch Cottage* inadvertently became a visual metaphor for the Scratch: “The Orchestra could pull together sufficiently to build a fire-hazard, unfit for human habitation, and then withdraw to write its discontents. It became apparent that, like the cottage, the Orchestra was just a shell without any real substance.” Parsons quoted in *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*, 28.

¹⁰⁴ *Journey to the North Pole*, 1971.

¹⁰⁵ Williams, *Towards 2000*, 14.

marketplace or vice versa, and if it is the former, what then could be made of the power of negligible minorities (I am thinking specifically of the very quick market absorption of punk – the “do it yourself” strand of resistance to normative power structures – of the late 1970s). Further, a number of social theorists have wondered if outsiders might have a unique capability to anticipate or even transcend flawed prevailing orders given their cast-off position in society (Tony Harris locates the Scratch Orchestra in this order in his book, *The Legacy of Cornelius Cardew*).¹⁰⁶ What ultimately comes out of this formulation is a dialogue between the old and new Left, The Red Flame Proletariat Orchestra vs. The Scratch Orchestra, planning for change on a global scale vs. chipping away at an authority for certain freedoms and minor reforms.

Cardew eventually came to believe, as Williams concedes, that collective endeavors that sought to focus on more subterranean issues could never be as potent as those that worked for immediate global and political change. Cardew makes this point clear in regards to art and politics in *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*, writing that

The artist cannot ignore politics...to deny [politics' primacy over art making] is to cast yourself adrift in the realm of fantasy and, if you are an artist, your work will still be judged according to the political criterion first and the artistic criterion second, and it will be seen – notwithstanding any artistic merit it may have – to be misleading the people, not raising their level of consciousness, and hence supporting capitalism and serving to prolong its domination of the work and oppressed people.¹⁰⁷

With his political priorities firmly in place, Cardew, along with Scratch members Keith Rowe and Birgit Burckhardt, formed People's Liberation Music in 1973, a rock band that performed their own and others' political music. PLM played almost exclusively at political protests and rallies, sometimes coupled with Cardew's own political piano miniatures such as the Mao tribute, “Revolution is the Main Trend in the World Today.” This music was designed to inspire the disaffected alienated working classes – with a larger goal of reaching the masses – and despite the often beautiful (if not a touch treacly) melodies of Cardew's

¹⁰⁶ One example is Jacques Attali's idea in his seminal book *Noise*, that independent jazz record labels owning their own means of production gave them more creative autonomy.

¹⁰⁷ Cardew, *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*, 64.

political piano music, it often served as ambience for an already converted or actively sympathetic audience. Cardew, it seems, had moved musically from one niche to another, disowning and moving away from the rarefied and localized world of experimental music and ironically entering into another one, albeit with “the masses” in mind.

In early 1975, Cardew was invited to perform at the New York performance space The Kitchen, at the request of Arthur Russell, a cellist and composer, who, like Eno, was interested in bridging the space between experimental and pop music.¹⁰⁸ *The New York Times*’ John Rockwell, in a review of Cardew’s Kitchen performance, writes:

Mr. Cardew sounds sincere, but one has to hope that he is still finding his way between the demands of artistry and revolution. He says he has rejected all the technical baggage of his misguided adult years and is back to a 16-year old stage in his musical idiom. It sounds that way. He has “dolled up” (in his words) the songs in vapid 19th-century parlor arrangements, and his own pieces noodle on in an adolescently fustian manner. Obviously, he is not appealing to workers; he realizes that he isn’t reaching them with recitals like these. And yet he can’t be reaching many avant-gardists either, at least artistically. Perhaps, dialectically, he can make them think with the sheer badness of his music. But surely there must be a way to change the world through good art too.¹⁰⁹

Critical appraisals like Rockwell’s were not uncommon in regard to Cardew’s political music. However, Russell, speaking in 1977, had a different take on this event:

Music is a very personal thing. How you deal with your music is very linked up with how you deal with your life. If you misuse your capacities as a musician, you’re misusing your capacities as a human being and you’re taking humanity in the wrong direction. About two years ago I put on a concert of Cornelius Cardew’s music at the Kitchen. People thought he was trying to make music for the masses, but he explained that he was making music for music school students. He also said that he was trying to get back to a state of mind he was in when he was 16 years old.¹¹⁰

Russell’s astute observation is that Cardew was wholly concerned with the possibilities of self-education, and its potential to bring one “back to the basics.” Whether through the advent of the Scratch Orchestra via his experimental composition class at Morley College, creating graphic notation that asked the performer to try to learn its internal language, or

¹⁰⁸ See: Tim Lawrence’s indispensable biography, *Hold on to Your Dreams: Arthur Russell and the Downtown Music Scene, 1973-1992*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2009. Russell will be examined further in Chapter Four.

¹⁰⁹ John Rockwell, “Cornelius Cardew, Pianist-Composer, Is Heard at Kitchen,” *New York Times*, February 7, 1975.

¹¹⁰ Peter Zummo, “Eclectic Bubble Gum,” *Soho Weekly News*, March 17-23, 1977,

simply his ongoing dedication to creating systems that advocated for self-edification and improvement, these endeavors, like most any educational tool, were always more locally scaled, gifted to those eager to learn in the hope that the ideas would permeate. It is not surprising then that Cardew began his political concerts with lectures or polemic discussions, and what his change in musical (and social) direction meant was a reappraisal of his pedagogical approach. If an education gleaned from hands-on collaborative experiences was the minor utopia that Cardew posited with the Scratch Orchestra – a truly heuristic mode – groups like People’s Liberation Music, with its fixed orthodox message, found him grappling with being an evangelical, suggesting people take his message or suffer the consequences (the message behind *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*).

“My personal opinion is that the Maoist thing for him is a very big mistake and it significantly reduced his music,” Eno remarked in a 1979 interview,

[artists with political convictions like Cardew] say, ‘The job of an artist is to radicalize society,’ for example, and they say, ‘How do you do that?’ And so, then they start thinking, ‘Well, you do it by this and this and this’ - and suddenly, the music becomes like an advertisement for a doctrine. Furthermore, a doctrine nearly always lags behind the real implications of the music that they were doing previously.

And further,

I think political systems are all doing what the old composers were doing. They’re all saying, ‘What kind of society do we want?’ If you give the most generous interpretation, they’re saying that. Then they say, ‘Alright, so let’s constrain the behavior there and let’s encourage this here and blah, blah, blah.’ And they’re all trying to govern by rote a highly complex system. You don’t need to do that, that’s the thing. The Cardew piece, for me, proved that, under the right circumstances, you can set the system up so that it goes there itself.¹¹¹

It is difficult, as I’ve stated in this chapter, to differentiate how Eno’s own methods of creating structures, certainly predicated on encouragement and constraints, are distinct from the “political systems” he criticizes above. As we’ve seen, for Eno, he envisioned his role as someone who collaborated with others through creative exercises designed to explore untapped behaviors, believing his role to be simply more of a nudge than command.

¹¹¹ Eno in Loder, “Eno,” *Synapse*, 1979.

This is in line with his view of cybernetics that “the structure of a system governs its behavior...if you want to change the behavior you have to change the structure.”¹¹² This sentiment speaks quite clearly to Eno’s behavioral experiments in his collaborations with musicians on his solo records, but also speaks to Eno’s political thinking of the time, as evidenced by his comments on Cardew’s attempts to reinstate a more controlled (via a Maoist demand for the authoritative role of the state) society. In short, Eno theoretically seems to be against notions of control, while at the same time has some difficulty ceding it in practice. This is perhaps what he found so appealing about “Paragraph 7,” with its setting in motion a self-organizing “micro society,” in which performer contributions were valued and essential for the makeup of its realized existence (natural variety), and this was done with the most minimal of suggestion (a verbal score) and intervention (no performer skill necessary).

In Eno’s work, he was often concerned with how to conform to a given structure or system, as we can see in the sonic atmospheric blending of *Discreet Music*, or the quiet meditations on travel with his Ambient records. “My decision to work in the way I do has political resonances,” Eno stated in 1982, “The decision to stop seeing yourself as the center of the world, to see yourself as part of the greater flow of things, as having limited options and responsibility for your actions – the converse of the ‘me generation’ ‘do your own thing’ idea – that is political theory; and it’s what the music grows from.”¹¹³ The Ascottian influence of this quote suggests that Eno – and by proxy his work – was preoccupied with losing the self to “the greater flow of things.” Yet, in Eno’s personal working philosophy here, there is little concern for what the greater flow of things might look like. This was Cardew’s domain, before and after the Scratch. Cardew believed, although painting himself into a dogmatic corner with his political work, that self-improvement in a collaborative situation was a boon to society. His aim was not necessarily to teach prospective performers

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Eno in Mick Brown, “Life of Brian According to Eno,” *The Guardian*, May 1, 1982.

to disengage from external controls (rules) or interventions, but to get them to think about said controls creatively, with care, and eventually, direct action.

“Cardew’s intention was not to replace trained with untrained performers,” Michael Parsons writes, “but to bring them together in a participatory situation in which different abilities and techniques could be fruitfully combined and contrasted, and in which performers from different backgrounds could learn from each other, and so extend the creative capacities of all participants, often in unexpected ways.”¹¹⁴ Cardew’s thesis that a composition was characterized by its performers, even when guided by the score, became with *The Great Learning*, and by extension the Scratch Orchestra, a basis to explore the social implications of collaboration, rooted in the act of music making, and a more general humanism. Such is the difference between Cardew’s “people’s processes” and Eno’s “people as material,” the performer as the creator of a new system and the performer as a passive participant within it.

¹¹⁴ Parsons in Prevost, ed. *Cornelius Cardew Reader*, 319.

SINGING. The notes written as semibreves are sung very slowly and held for the length of one very long breath. The words written vertically one note are distributed freely along that one very long breath. Sing these notes in the within order making shorter phrases between notes and longer phrases at barlines. The text is sung through five times. If a note is out of range transpose it up or down an octave. The commencement of each sung note should coincide with the initial stroke or rest of the accompanying rhythm.

DRUMMING. Each drum rhythm is repeated over and over like a tape loop for the duration of one bar of the vocal part. The 26 rhythms fall into 11 groups: 2 pentads, 1 tetrad, 4 pairs and 4 unigues. The words in front of the rhythms are a mnemonic based on this grouping. Like the vocal phrases, the drum rhythms are to be played strongly and energetically throughout. Unlike the vocal phrases, they may be played in any order, and the selection of a tempo for each one is up to the individual drummer. The rhythms should be memorized.

A PERFORMANCE

A number of groups are formed each consisting of the following: one drummer, one lead singer, and a number of supporting singers. These groups take up positions as widely separated as possible, and each group functions autonomously as follows. The drummer starts with the rhythm of his choice. When this rhythm is established the lead singer sings through the notes of the first bar as described above, each entry coinciding with the initial stroke or rest of the rhythm. The supporting singers do the same, getting the notes from the leader and entering on the note as soon as possible after the leader. Their function is to support and amplify the leader's voice so that it is not placed under undue strain. The leader must be careful not to sing a new note until all his supporters have finished the preceding one. When all singers are finished with the last note of a bar the leader makes a sign to the drummer, who then free (at his leisure) to select a second rhythm and establish that. He should not leave a gap between the two rhythms. So the cycle proceeds, each drummer going through the 26 rhythms in any order and all singers singing all the phrases in the order given, sticking by their respective leaders.

The final rhythms of all the drummers (i.e. each one's 26th rhythm, probably all different) should be played in the same tempo. To achieve this a position visible to all drummers is pre-selected, and the first drummer to complete his 25th rhythm walks over to this position to play his 26th. Then, as the other drummers reach their final rhythms, they take their tempo from him.

One of the singers may start and stop the proceedings from the same position. Start the piece clearly: all drummers enter with their chosen rhythms simultaneously on the chosen singer's beat. End it raggedly (probably best if the lead singer of the first drummer to reach his final rhythm does this). At any time after all drummers have achieved the same tempo or when it appears that this is unlikely to occur, the singer may signal the end, whereupon all drummers complete the rhythmic pattern they are in the middle of and stop (don't end on the next downbeat!).

This performance is not the only possible one: circumstances may encourage the devising of others (e.g. all members of the chorus could both drum and sing).

Drumming

Singing

Fig. 2.4: Cornelius Cardew, "Paragraph 2" of *The Great Learning*, 1969

EFPR139 Think of a rose petal (choose your favorite colour) / think of a rose petal magnified a thousand times / think of a rose petal's scent, texture, existence and imagine them / magnified a thousand times / magnify your perception // of being // (after this you may play or you may be silent or you may be) // continue your perception of the imaginary petal.

BHBR140 Have a battle. (Try to avoid fatalities).

HMSSB141 "It is all very well to keep silence, but one has also to consider the kind of silence one keeps."

MPJR143 Before playing jump up and down 25 times. While playing, jump once for each sound you make. You may save up your jumps, up to 25, but not more. (i.e. you can play up to 25 sounds without jumping and then do your jumps all at once). When you've had enough, make it clear that you've not doing this rite any more.

MPER144 [needed: 2 eggs and 1 whistle] Choose a referee. The rest of the players divide into two teams. One person in each team is elected to push an egg, with his nose, from one end of the performing space to the other. The nose of the player who is pushing the egg must not lose contact with the egg. If the referee sees that either of the eggs is not in contact with the player's nose, he blows his whistle. The penalty for this is that the egg is moved back half the distance so far traveled by that team. The two teams begin at opposite ends. The referee blows his whistle to start. The teams advance towards each other - the object is to reach the other end first (without breaking the egg). Players advance in a group or line, always keeping behind the egg. If anyone gets in front of his team's egg he is OFFSIDE. If the referee sees a player offside he blows his whistle and a FREE KICK is awarded to the other TEAM. After the game the two teams sing SONGS together.

CFIRNTFM145 A bunch of assorted flowers is provided. An impartial non-performer hands one flower to each player. Look at your flower / play music or react in any way. Take the flower to pieces carefully / play music or react in any way. Take some pieces from other players giving some of your own in return / play music or react in any way. The exchange of pieces can happen as often as you choose. When a player wants to stop, he throws the pieces he has in his possession in the air.

CFIRT146 Page one of the Evening Standard current on the day of the performance. Each performer has a copy which he will use as his score. Performers decide individually how they wish to interpret the score and perform accordingly for a given length of time.

CFEOR147 Instruments on floor, players all around. To start: Players go to instruments and select one not their own. They may then play; any player who did not get the instrument he wanted (because someone else got it first) may pursue the player who has this instrument, and let him know - physically, verbally or musically - that he desires it. If the other player is willing, they will exchange instruments; if he is not and no further pleading will make him change his mind, then the refused player should give up pleading and accept the instrument he has, or go after another player whose instrument he would like. At sometime

during the rite each player should exchange his first instrument for at least one other (still not his own), either when asked to, or by doing the asking himself. After having played two strange instruments the player is free to accept his own instrument if it is offered to him, or to go to whoever has it and ask him for it (the player who has it may refuse if he wants).

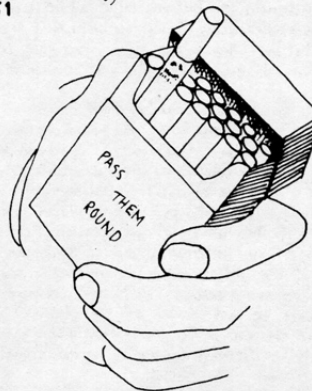
Any number of exchanges may be made before a player returns to his own instrument, the only rule being that at least two strange instruments should have been played. Force must not be used in trying to get a desired instrument from a player who is not willing to exchange. Once everyone has his own instrument back the rite can stop. So, if no-one wanted to go back to his own instrument the rite could go on for ever? When an individual wants to stop playing he must get his own instrument back before stopping.

CFSNAP!R148 Groups of 4-8 players. Each group plays its own individual game. Play as ordinary 'snap' (see notes for rules) but "SNAP!" must be a sound, not verbal. At least 3 groups are desirable. All groups start play simultaneously. At the end of one game, rite is over (one-pack game would be very short; two-pack game would take longer - This should be decided on before play starts). When a group finishes they wait quietly for the others to end. When all groups have completed one game, rite is over.

CCIR149 At some point in an improvisation let the absence of something strike you. Set to detecting its hidden presence and exposing it (drawing it out).

CCWR150 Wand instruments may be divided into 2 categories: 1) Strikers, 2) Strokers. The uses of each of these types of instrument can fluctuate between a) extreme brutality, b) extreme sensitivity. Representatives of the two extremes in each category are chosen some time in advance of the performance by the group as a whole (an arbitrary example: 1a) Sledgehammer, 1b) cricket bat, 2a) Saw, 2b) bow). For the improvisation each player provides himself with a specimen of one of these representatives and either starts with it and moves away from it, or starts with anything and moves towards it (and reaches it).

DJ151



HSDNT152 The drum is without form. A simple extension of the soul.

Fig 2.5: Page 11 from *Nature Study Notes* (1970) handwritten by Cornelius Cardew with an illustration of David Jackman's *Rite 151*. Each composition, called a "Rite," was labeled with an acronym that stated author name, "Rite" type, and number. Ex: CCIR149 was Cornelius Cardew, "Improvisation Rite" number 149.

The Great Learning, paragraph 7

→ sing 8 IF THE ROOT
sing 5 BE IN CONFUSION
sing 13(f3) NOTHING
sing 6 WILL
sing 5(f1) BE
sing 8 WELL
sing 8 GOVERNED
sing 7
hum 7

→ sing 8 THE SOLID
sing 8 CANNOT BE
sing 9(f2) SWEPT AWAY
sing 8 AS
sing 17(f1) TRIVIAL
sing 6 AND
sing 8 NOR
sing 8 CAN
sing 17(f1) TRASH
sing 8 BE ESTABLISHED AS
sing 9(f2) SOLID
sing 5(f1) IT JUST
sing 4 DOES NOT
sing 6(f1) HAPPEN
hum 3(f2)

→ speak 1 MISTAKE NOT CLIFF FOR
MORASS AND TREACHEROUS BRAMBLE

NOTATION
→ The leader gives a signal and all enter concertedly at the same moment. The second of these signals is optional; those wishing to observe it should wait for the leader and choose a new note and enter just as at the beginning (see below).
sing 9(f2) SWEPT AWAY means: sing the words "SWEPT AWAY" on a length-of-a-breath note (syllables freely disposed) nine times; the same note each time; of the nine notes two (any two) should be loud, the rest soft. After each note take in breath and sing again.
hum 7 means: hum a length-of-a-breath note seven times; the same note each time; all soft.
hum 3(f2) means: hum the given words in steady tempo all together, in a low voice, once (follow the leader).

PROCEDURE
Each chorus member chooses his own note (silently) for the first line (if eight times). All enter together on the leader's signal. For each subsequent line choose a note that you can hear being sung by a colleague. It may be necessary to move to within earshot of certain notes. The note, once chosen, is a really firm intention. It must not be changed. If there is no note on which the notes you have just chosen singing, or only a note or notes that you are unable to sing, choose your note for the next line freely. Do not sing the same note on two consecutive lines.
Each singer progresses through the text at his own speed. Remain stationary for the duration of a line; move around only between lines. All must have completed "hum 3(f2)" before the signal for the last line is given. At the leader's discretion this last line may be omitted.

Fig. 2.6: Cornelius Cardew, "Paragraph 7" of *The Great Learning*, 1969

Chapter III
The Popular Classics: Eno and the Portsmouth Sinfonia

I.
Two Stickers

Affixed to the shrink wrap of The Portsmouth Sinfonia's *Plays the Popular Classics* LP is a circular sticker, its radius cropped around the magnificent dome of Eno. The profile of Eno's made-up face peeks just barely around his left peacock-feathered shoulder, his long blonde hair nearly obscuring it. The blue-violet hues of the printed sticker make Eno's face appear gaunter, the cheek rouge, lipstick, and mascara more prominent, accentuating the alien androgyny that was such a staple of David Bowie-era glam. Beginning at the start of Eno's loudly pronounced – via alopecia – forehead and arching to the back of his skull are the words “produced by ENO,” and from the tip of his nose to the back of his shoulder is simply “ROXY MUSIC.”

As I have discussed in Chapter One, it was not surprising to see Eno's face used to market Roxy Music, or for the media to utilize his strange, but camera-ready, looks to represent the group. In the case of this sticker, Eno and Roxy Music – or Eno as Roxy Music – is used to market an Eno “production,” suggesting that if one likes the work of Eno and Roxy, they should give *Plays the Popular Classics* a try. On the recording itself, there is no discernible trace of Eno among the cacophony of clarinet stutters, nor is there any real novelty to the album's production, none of the “Enofication” that he would later become renowned for.

On the front of *No New York*, a compilation documenting the brief musical phenomenon dubbed No Wave ca. 1977-79, in New York City, are the words: “NEW YORK'S AVANTE-GARDE [sic] PRODUCED BY ENO.” The groups featured on this compilation – The Contortions, DNA, Mars, and Teenage Jesus and the Jerks – were, like Eno, musical boundary pushers, wedding both the vanguard and vernacular (rock) traditions of eschewing formal training to make a (noisy) hybrid of both. By 1978, as we saw in Chapter

Two, Eno was moving in a direction that shared a closer corollary with experimental and avant-garde music. We can question the avant-garde status of the *No New York* bands (a label, as we shall see, none of these players would have agreed on), but there is no doubt that Eno was moving into more musically adventurous – yet always pop minded – territory.

As a producer at this time, Eno was straddling both worlds, adding quirks and studio strategies to records by the Talking Heads (1978's *More Songs About Building and Food*) alongside straightforward recording duties of experimental acts and musicians on his *Obscure* label (John White and Gavin Bryars' *Machine Music*, Harold Budd's *The Pavilion of Dreams*). His associations with both rock and roll and the thornier edges of new music's fringes were well documented in press and practice, making a sticker advertising his role among New York's "avant-garde" a selling point for those who followed his varied career at this point.

On *No New York* there is barely any trace of Eno among the cacophony of guitar skronks, his most noticeable contribution being the delay put on Nancy Arlen's drums on Mars' "Helen Forsdale." All in all, on *No New York* there was, again, no real novelty to Eno's production. Which establishes a trend: on these records featuring either purposefully deskilled or musically untrained performers, what was Eno doing in the production booth? Why such a light touch on these albums from Eno who, on his own solo records, deeply conceptualized and championed the artistic, musical, and even behavioral potentials of the recording studio, the author of the essay, "The Studio as a Compositional Tool"?

I do not want to suggest that Eno approached the production of these groups carelessly or was simply driven by career ambitions, although, as we shall see, opinions from some of the musicians on these records did question his motives. What I want to examine is how Eno worked with non-musicians, particularly given their relative absence on his own recordings. Surveying this relationship not only gives some insight into Eno's working methodology but also allows us to discern more generally the fruits of his thesis regarding the creative potential of the non-musician:

One important idea for me has been to deliberately put people who aren't qualified in any particular way into creative situations and say to them, 'Look

you can do it. You are capable of operating creatively, you don't have to be skillful. It has to do with the way you use your brain, not your hands."¹

In Eno's formulation, musical production is possible without skill, haptic interactions being just one function of the creative act. By the end of the 1970s, there was no shortage of musical performers ignoring or circumventing the problem of musical proficiency but binding them together under this shared attribute does a disservice to their many different aims and ambitions through this musical choice.

Historic contingency is why I am drawn to *Plays the Popular Classics* and *No New York* as case studies: their performers were largely art students, shared sympathy towards vernacular forms of music making, had an appreciation for vanguard traditions, favored listening over notation, eschewed musical training as a prerequisite for composition and performance, were both on the Antilles record label, are aesthetically difficult listens, and were produced, associated, and translated by Eno. To strain the similarities, both records even have out of focus album covers (*No New York* is far blurrier, however).

Despite this wealth of similarities, these two records are nothing alike, and have been translated, poorly, into very different networks of activity. The Sinfonia have one of the strangest arcs in music, moving from Cardew sanctioned new music concerts to the *Ripley's Believe It or Not?* television show.² The No Wave groups have fared even less successfully in terms of historical translations, presented often as a post-punk footnote or written off as a nihilist byproduct of New York City's dire late 1970s infrastructural squalor.³ Ignoring the problem of musical proficiency could indeed be liberating, but its

¹ Eno in Frank Rose, "Scaramouche of the Synthesizer," *Creem*, July 1975. Eno's sentiments on the artist's realization of creativity here are reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp's in his lecture, "the Creative Act," (1957). In this lecture Duchamp theorizes that the artists are beholden to outside factors of reception, regardless of their creative intentions. On account of this, how a work of art is created, the artists intention, and so on are in consistent flux and unstable. Duchamp writes, "All [the artists] decision in the artistic execution of the work rest with pure intuition and cannot be translated into a self-analysis, spoken or written, or even thought about." In Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp*, (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 77.

² A clip of the Sinfonia playing at the Royal Albert Hall (1974) played on the Jack Palance *Ripley's Believe It or Not?* television show on September 26th, 1982.

³ An advertisement for the Los Angeles riposte to the record, *Yes L.A.*, in the L.A. based punk magazine, *Slash*, reads: "When 2-bit nihilism isn't enough to put you on the map. Not produced by Brian Eno." *Slash*, December 17th, 1978, 34.

products could also be porous enough to be interpreted as potentially anything, which could account for the varying types of public receptions to the Sinfonia and the No Wave groups.

That both the Sinfonia and the No Wave Groups were, despite their various translations, were always viewed as Eno projects by the media, returns us to Eno and the subject of network translation. Although Eno could be thorny and unpredictable as an artist, this very incalculable quality was something that was, as we have seen in Chapter One, able to be publicly managed, largely through Eno's use of media to explain in great detail his various rationale for his many projects. To say it simply, by the mid-1970s, the unexpected had become expected from Eno, and this quality of adventurous music making would be projected onto his many collaborators and cohorts, to the point where collaboration could become a detriment to those working with him to escape his shadow.

In a *No New York* review for *Slash*, writer Gorilla Rose postulates that, "If there were ever four groups seriously trying harder to be experimental, different, anti-music, flippantly postured, rhythmically chaotic, vocally strident, cultishly self-absorbed, or can't-play-won't-learn-let's approach the instruments differently - these are them. And the one man to put them all together conceptually on an album is Brian Eno."⁴ As Rose's statement suggests, an *outré* project, particularly one featuring non-musicians, was a logical place for Eno. By the end of the 1970s there were plenty of artists and musicians working in a "can't-play-won't-learn" situation – most prominently in punk – and Eno's prescience in advocating for and practicing this type of playing throughout the 1970s gave him a certain cultural cache, with *Slash*'s William L'Amato proclaiming in 1978: "Eno is the legitimate spearhead of the sound of the '80s."⁵ Eno mused on this legacy to (perhaps ironically) *Musician* magazine in 1981:

I don't claim any special role in generating New Wave. It just happened to be a movement of people giving special emphasis to musical values I once had an interest in - although people well before me, like The Velvet Underground, had already focused on the same ideas...When the punk revolution happened - and these ideas received new attention and were combined in new ways - it still wasn't too much of a revelation for me. However, one influence I think I

⁴ Gorilla Rose, "The Contortions/Teenage Jesus and the Jerks/Mars/DNA: No New York," *Slash*, December 17th, 1978, 30.

⁵ William L'Amato, "Before and After Science: Brian Eno," *Slash*, November 1978, 32.

had in New Wave - and I'm quite pleased about it - is that I was one of the people who popularized the notion that music isn't only the province of musicians. When I first started making records, there was this whole accent in rock & roll on heroic instrumentalists who could play quickly, skillfully and technically. I thought then, and still think, that isn't what music is really about. I was a non-musician at the time - I couldn't play anything - and I wanted to make the point that, just as one doesn't have to be an accomplished realist to make valid art, one doesn't have to be an adept instrumentalist to make effective music. In fact, it's what I would describe as a painterly style of music, because the musician uses the instruments as a paint brush and the studio as a canvas.⁶

With such artistic and conceptual resonance to Eno's work and ideas, it is not surprising then to see critical reception to albums like *Popular Classics* or *No New York* translated into Eno's terms. *Rolling Stone*'s Frank Rose summarized the entire Sinfonia project as "a byproduct of Brian Eno's experiments into the nature of the accident in music," and Sinfonia violinist Robin Mortimore recalls that some critics "thought that the Sinfonia was created by [Eno] and dressed up as an orchestra."⁷ The *New York Times*' John Rockwell headlined his review of *No New York* with "Eno's *No New York* has no future," while Gorilla Rose wrote that The Contortions "just may be Eno, split six ways."⁸ As these reviews suggest, Eno's involvement with these groups made conceptual sense, but also had the unintended effect of making it difficult to discern exactly just whose project it was.⁹ In the following two chapters, I examine the Sinfonia and the phenomenon of No Wave in order to extrapolate how this situation might have happened. What effect did Eno's public visibility have on the radical musical work and gestures these groups were proposing?

The concept of the non-musician, a creative position that suggested "music isn't only the province of the musician," could and did take a variety of shapes and forms. Examining how this broad activity was managed and translated into a more stable network, such as that of Eno who, paradoxically, advocated instability in art, allows for us to see the limits of the

⁶ Mikal Gilmore and Spotiswood Erving, "Brian Eno," *Musician*, April/May 1981.

⁷ Frank Rose, "Portsmouth Sinfonia Play the Popular Classics" in 1979 *Rolling Stone Record Guide*. Robin Mortimore in Christopher M. Reeves and Aaron Walker, eds. *The World's Worst: A Guide to the Portsmouth Sinfonia* (Chicago: Soberscove Press, 2020), 45.

⁸ Gorilla Rose, "The Contortions/Teenage Jesus and the Jerks/Mars/DNA: No New York," *Slash*. The "no future" line is a clear reference to the infamous lyrics to the Sex Pistols song, "God Save the Queen."

⁹ This would be particularly true with the Sinfonia as they had little to no presence in the United States in the 1970s.

non-musician. How far could a premise of musical incompetence go and who got to decide its direction? What might have been the long-lasting effects of Eno's using his niche but potent celebrity to champion and produce this strange conceptual music, a selfless act that nonetheless had unintentional historical consequences? More broadly, how might the reception of and management by cultural intermediaries both be a boon and folly in extrapolating efforts towards attempts at new or non-idiomatic art, and what might we learn from this situation moving forward?

II Use Non-Musicians

A card from Eno and Peter Schmidt's original 1974 deck of *Oblique Strategies* reads: "use non-musicians." Eno didn't use the cards on his own records until his second LP, *Taking Tiger Mountain (By Strategy)*, but even with this particular card in play there are hardly any non-musicians other than himself on any of his own albums. As discussed in the previous chapter, most of Eno's musical collaborations were at the level of getting capable musicians to deskill themselves, to unlearn their habits for the sake of unexpected creative results. Of his solo records, there are only three examples of truly untrained musicians appearing: rock journalist Nick Kent on organ for *Here Come the Warm Jets* song, "Blank Frank,"; model and performance artist in The Moodies, Polly Eltes on *Tiger Mountain's* "The True Wheel" and "Mother Whale Eyeless"; and the Portsmouth Sinfonia on that same album's "Put a Straw Under Baby."¹⁰

¹⁰ Polly Eltes was a former art student at Reading University, who was, at the time of *Tiger Mountain*, a member of the mostly female lead performance group, The Moodies. According to writer Adrian Whittaker, The Moodies "seemed to bring the honed amateurism of the Scratch Orchestra to the art school rock of Roxy Music." Like Eno, they followed their art school experience with a high concept act that emphasized blurring the distinctions between art and pop and using radical self-fashioning – loud costuming and makeup – as a means of performing and playing with then-norms of identity. They performed cabaret versions of pop staples, such as the Shangri-Las' "Remember (Walking in the Sand)" and paired them with more arts inclined numbers, such as Captain Beefheart's "Golden Birdies." In Whittaker and Michael Bracewell, "Non Stop Exotic Cabaret," *The Wire*, March 2010, The Moodies' loudly amateurish, but conceptual art driven take on theatre can be seen as a starting point for the types of cabaret and costume nights that began to appear in abundance in New York City in places such as Club 57 and The Mudd Club in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Tiger Mountain was arguably Eno's first "mood record," setting scenes of military waltzes, film noir MacGuffins, secretarial daydreams, and a climb up Tiger Mountain itself. *Tiger Mountain* was inspired by a book of postcards Eno found of the Chinese cultural revolution Opera – also titled *Taking Tiger Mountain By Strategy* – and the songs of the album feel like ten sonic postcards, with the music evoking strange places (this would be a full concept on Eno's subsequent record, *Another Green World*). Eltes and the Sinfonia were brought in, it seems, not for their experimental qualities, but for their lack of capabilities. On "The True Wheel," Eno wanted to "get the feeling of a school assembly" and "invited a bunch of friends who weren't particularly singers to sing the chorus."¹¹ Fabricating a name – Randi and the Pyramids – for the group of singers from a dream he had, Eno created a musical role for this ad hoc chorus of "not particularly singers," a sort of casting based on the needs of the composition.

The casting of a musical role to the non-musician is, as we have seen in previous chapters, quite different than Eno's collaborations with trained musicians who he often encouraged to push against their typical role and behavior. Eno's use of the Portsmouth Sinfonia on *Tiger Mountain*'s "Put a Straw Under Baby" both typifies this tendency and complicates it. The song, driven by a pump-organ and celeste, with surreal lyrics referencing Jesuit rituals, features the Sinfonia violin section struggling to stay in time with one another, barely remaining in key with the organ, and attempting, somewhat disastrously, to play higher up on their instruments. Cecilia Sun astutely observes that the "juvenile quality" of the instrumentation makes the Sinfonia's presence appear as a "primary school orchestra," an observation heightened with the inclusion of the strange singing voice of Robert Wyatt, one of Randi and the Pyramids on the school assembly of "The True Wheel."¹²

¹¹ Eno in Bracewell *Re/Make, Re/Model*, 240.

¹² Cecilia Sun, "Brian Eno, non-musicianship and the experimental tradition," in Albiez and Pattie eds. *Brian Eno: Oblique Music*, 36. Sun also presents a brilliant analysis of the Sinfonia's playing on this track in this essay. In terms of Robert Wyatt's status as a "non-musician" who was a musician, drumming with the group Soft Machine, Matching Mole, among others. Wyatt went on to have critical and commercial success as a singer, but even his closest collaborators admit that the strength of his singing is its unusual quality. See: Marcus O' Dair, *Different Every Time: The Authorized Biography of Robert Wyatt*, Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2014.

The Sinfonia's performance on "Put a Straw Under Baby" would be an anomaly in their career in that it was the only piece of music they ever recorded that was an original bit of music. One caveat for joining the Sinfonia's open membership orchestra – along with unfamiliarity with one's instrument and sincere performance – was that they only played familiar music, typically popular classical music. The Sinfonia offshoot group, the Majorca Orchestra, would play original compositions with the same unfamiliarity caveat, and indeed their violin playing on "Put a Straw Under Baby" bears a striking resemblance to Sinfonia and Majorca member James Lampard's original composition "The Caterpillar."¹³ Nonetheless, the group that performed on *Tiger Mountain* chose to be credited as the Portsmouth Sinfonia, and in doing so, can theoretically be counted as yet another group of performers on an Eno project who pushed against their usual musical activity.

The ensemble's choice to be billed as the Portsmouth Sinfonia on this record made some sense in terms of public visibility both for them and for Eno. The two had enjoyed a reciprocal public relationship, the Sinfonia getting some attention with their affiliation with Eno's rock and pop network, and Eno able to further his twin ambitions of proselytizing the creative advantages of non-musicians making music and bridging the divide between pop and experimental music.

The following, asks: what was Eno's interest in an ensemble of art students playing classical music badly and vice versa and how did their shared projects of scaling up experimentation converge and diverge? Eno's working with the Portsmouth Sinfonia would be his most direct and robust collaboration with non-musicians of his career, and although the Sinfonia is often a footnote to his own work, their legacy is almost entirely bound to his. Investigating such a situation allows us to see how experimental networks get translated

¹³ A recording of The Majorca Orchestra's "The Caterpillar" was released by the "cassette magazine," Audio Arts, Vol. 3, No.2: *Recent English Experimental Music* in 1976. Available to listen here: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/archive/items/tga-200414-7-3-1-10/audio-arts-volume-3-no-2>. Accessed April 10th, 2020.

into more stable fields of activity and more manageable (and marketable) acts like Eno. With this in mind, we can ask quite generally, just what is the origin and legacy of the Portsmouth Sinfonia and what does Eno have to do with it?

III Playing Music Badly in Public

“The classics are becoming too familiar. Our music makes you realize how often you listen without listening.”

- John Farley, conductor Portsmouth Sinfonia, 1975¹⁴

The Portsmouth Sinfonia began as a one-off ensemble among a small group of visual art students at Portsmouth College of Art and their music instructor, Gavin Bryars. During his brief tenure as a music and composition instructor at Portsmouth in 1969-70, Bryars used his class to introduce Portsmouth art students to works by Robert Ashley, Christian Wolff, La Monte Young, Terry Riley, and Cage, and brought in visiting experimental artists such as the composer Morton Feldman, artist George Brecht, and members of the Scratch Orchestra to work directly with the students. Bryars’ course also emphasized “non-serious art,” screening films by the Marx Brothers, reading the schmaltzy poems of Patience Strong, and examining in depth actor Lee Marvin’s musically tone-deaf version of “Wand’rin Star” from the musical *Paint Your Wagon*, a surprise hit in England.¹⁵ Bryars saw a virtue in the naivety inherent in these efforts by Strong or Marvin a sincerity that found equal expression in the proudly amateurish works by certain members of the Scratch Orchestra.

Bryars’ fondness for the sincerely naïve and the often very serious expressions and modes of experimental composition created an atmosphere in which an idea such as a group of untrained visual art students wanting to start a classical orchestra was met with encouragement. To underscore this, Bryars would procure funding to record the Sinfonia’s

¹⁴ John Farley in Charles Nicholl, “Portsmouth Sinfonia: Roll Over Beethoven, it’s a Classical Gas,” *Rolling Stone*, March 13th, 1975, 19.

¹⁵ Gavin Bryars’ own composition from around this time, *Marvelous Aphorisms are Scattered Richly Throughout these Pages* (1969), in which a small sound devices to his shirt and pants, and hiding them in his hat, various pockets, and in the lining of his trench coat was a discreet nod to the seemingly infinite number of objects hiding in Harpo Marx’s coat. A type of “discreet music” and a wink towards vaudevillian humor, *Marvelous Aphorisms* represents the serious humor of Bryars’ early compositions well.

rendition of Rossini's *William Tell Orchestra* – known primarily to most of the Sinfonia as the theme from *The Lone Ranger* television show – on to a cheap flexi-vinyl to give away as an invitation to the end of term (Dip A D – Diploma Art and Design) art show at Portsmouth. On this first recording of the Sinfonia, a grating, off-key horn blasts out the familiar opening fanfare of *William Tell*, while the rest of the orchestra clatters incoherently into a dense fog of squeaks and squeals of orchestral instruments. The listener can barely trace Rossini's original melody through the sputters of woodwinds and the crashing and clanging of off beat drums and cymbals. This record is a grueling two-and-a-half minutes of music from the Sinfonia, an acetone time capsule of Rossini's work as it had, despite its ubiquity in concert halls, never been heard before. This notion was illustrated quite well in an anxious letter from Lyntone, the record's pressing plant:

Having had no advanced warning of the somewhat novel interpretation of Rossini's creation we were bewildered by what we heard. We should be most grateful if you would advise us by return that this is indeed what you had recorded and what you want to be captured for posterity.¹⁶

Bryars mailed copies of *William Tell* to notable figures and media outlets, including Mao Zedong, Edward Heath, Richard Nixon, John Lennon, and other (more accessible) media outlets. *Melody Maker*'s Michael Watts reviewed the record with only a minimum of hyperbole in late 1971:

I have just heard the record that will possibly change the whole course of contemporary music – a record so profound in its implications and rhythmic sweep that it will reduce John Cage to silence. It is a music that approaches the cosmic, and totally alters one's aesthetic appreciation of Rossini. I cannot do justice to this extraordinary record.¹⁷

Indeed, if what Cage found lacking in the Western canon was that “if you listen to Mozart or Beethoven, it always sounds the same,” the Sinfonia seemed to have found a way to listen to classical music with a new perspective, a method to assure that the popular classics wouldn't sound the same way twice.¹⁸

¹⁶ Letter from Paul S. Lynton to Gavin Bryars, June 10th, 1970.

¹⁷ Michael Watts, “Portsmouth Sinfonia: *William Tell Overture*,” *Melody Maker*, December 18, 1971.

¹⁸ Cage in Gramophone, “John Cage – Manhattan Music,” August 12th, 2015.
<https://www.gramophone.co.uk/feature/john-cage-manhattan-music>. Accessed March 23rd, 2020.

Evidence of the Sinfonia's variations on playing the classics can be heard on their second recorded version of *William Tell* on *Plays the Popular Classics*. Their 1973 version of *William Tell* is still a musical butchering by any conventional standard. On this piece, the members of the ensemble are consistently out of time with one another, and like their 1970 version, percussionists Jenni Adams and Maggie Wooten come in too late after *William Tell*'s familiar opening fanfare. Yet, comparing the two *William Tell* recordings, there is a marked difference in overall clarity, less the cloudy din of off-key noise surrounding the original composition and more a haze. The listener at home would have no trouble immediately recognizing *William Tell* on the 1973 recording, and the Sinfonia's slight improvement in playing aided their ambitions of reinterpreting familiar music. As I will return to shortly, it was crucial that the Sinfonia rehearsed often in this regard, as conventional wisdom suggests that if one were to present a revision of the familiar to a public this audience would need to be able to recognize it.

The two *William Tell* examples give a sense of the Sinfonia's goal of reinterpreting the classics through the variables inherent in the capabilities of the performer, but also, in terms of documentation on an LP, give a sense of the limits of this premise. Robin Mortimore states that the Sinfonia's "commercial recordings became definitive versions of each piece, but since we unashamedly used the popular classic as our point of reference this seemed appropriate."¹⁹ The question of recording spontaneity – here the Sinfonia performer's mistakes – is one that is often taken up in conversations and debates on recording improvised music. Generally, the argument is a metaphysical one, questioning whether the preservation of an improvised performance on an LP encroaches upon the very musical freedom such performances are meant to enact. If certain music is not meant to sound the same way twice, a recording would be an oxymoron.²⁰

¹⁹ Robin Mortimore in Chris Reeves and Aaron Walker, eds. *The World's Worst*, Chicago: Soberscove Press, 2020, 46. To underscore Mortimore's point, Sinfonia players who could not read music would rehearse by listening records of the classical pieces, slowed down.

²⁰ I do not want to suggest that the Sinfonia had anything to do with improvisation. Although some of their members did perform in improvisational groups – notably Nigel Coombes and Steve Beresford – the Sinfonia

On their second – and final – studio recording, *Classic Rock Classics*, the Sinfonia confronted this problem by allowing only for one recorded take, suggesting that they were aware of the effect this binary between performing to tape and playing live had on their premise. If one aspect of the Sinfonia was to put pressure on a perceived ambivalence towards the musically familiar from an audience, then it would seem playing badly in public, where there was a guarantee of variation – particularly given the Sinfonia’s rotating membership – best suited this aim.

It’s important to note that the Sinfonia performing badly in public does not mean that they desired a bad performance. It would be counterproductive to their goal to simply get on a stage and purposefully fail at what they were playing. Eno recalls that the Sinfonia “chucked a guy out for farting around, a trumpet player who tried to make silly mistakes. Being thrown out of the Portsmouth Sinfonia – that really must be the lowest of the low.”²¹ Eno’s anecdote is telling in that it shows the Sinfonia’s dedication to performing a work to the best of their capabilities. Finding a space in public performance where mistakes could be sincerely considered as a virtue would put them in a camp more closely aligned with the experimentally minded, particularly The Scratch Orchestra and certain works by Cardew. On the other hand, this premise could also exist, as we shall see, in an entirely different network of activity: exploitative comedy. When considering the Sinfonia’s premise as one best understood live in public performance, we should also consider just what publics they were reaching and how that informed their reception.

always used, as would be appropriate given the source material, arranged notation, of which a good number of their members could not read (they either followed the movements of other players, or tried to play according to the pattern of the notation). However, they do share a conceptual problem with improvisation and even some experimental music that made unplanned variables a core of their music in that a recording on a commercial LP does indeed suggest “definitive versions,” as Robin Mortimore states. (In Chris Reeves and Aaron Walker, eds. *The World’s Worst: A Guide to the Portsmouth Sinfonia*, Chicago: Soberscove Press, 2020, 46.) As musical variables appeared in the Sinfonia through their performer’s haptic mistakes with their instruments, a controlled recording studio, with the possibilities of takes, do-overs, and production values, could seem to not only inhibit this process – although still conventionally bad, we might assume this is the Sinfonia’s “best” recording of *William Tell* – but also the conceit behind a perpetual revising of the familiar. Musical renewal via the remix will be taken up in Chapter Four.

²¹ Eno in Andy Gill, “The Oblique Strategist,” *Mojo*, June 1995.

I.
Beethoven Today and the Royal Albert Hall

The Sinfonia's first public performance was at the Portsmouth College of Art student talent show, *Opportunity Knocks*, where they came in second place to James Lampard's Elvis impersonation.²² The warm reception the Sinfonia received at this event encouraged them to continue with the project, and although key founder members graduated, the ensemble carried on through private rehearsals in London. By the time the Sinfonia's 1970 *William Tell* flexi-record made its way to the steps of Zhongnanhai, Bryars had stepped down from his position at Portsmouth, moving on to teach music at Leicester College. In his place came the Scratch Orchestra's Michael Parsons and John Tilbury, who continued to advocate experimental music practices and ideas.

Parsons invited the Sinfonia to perform at *Beethoven Today*, a celebration of the bicentennial birthday of the composer with a "program of reinterpretations and arrangements," at the Purcell Room, an esteemed venue for an ensemble playing only their second live concert.²³ At the concert, John White played selections from Beethoven's piano sonatas on bass tuba; there were tape preparations from the *Eroica* symphony from Gavin Bryars and Christopher Hobbs; a chamber reduction of the *Pastoral* symphony was a meticulous exercise in playing out of concert; the Portsmouth Sinfonia and the Scratch Orchestra both shared faux conductors, with John Farley conducting the former's version of *Symphony No. 5* and Howard Skempton conducting the latter's rendition of *Ode to Joy*.

In a review of *Beethoven Today*, a staff writer for British newspaper *The Observer* observed that works performed were "aimed at entertainment rather than erudition."²⁴ Another reviewer remarked at the playfulness of the Sinfonia's *Symphony No. 5*: "never before had Beethoven's music been greeted with such serious and voluntary laughter" – it is

²² Accounts of the winner vary – Bryars says the Sinfonia won while Mortimore says they lost to Lampard/Elvis. See Bryars and Mortimore in Reeves and Walker, eds. *The World's Worst*.

²³ *Beethoven Today* program, September 25, 1970, np. Richard Ascough archive.

²⁴ "Beethoven Today," *The Observer*, Sunday September 20th, 1970.

reasonable to consider just how seriously one was supposed to take this work.²⁵ According to Virginia Anderson, many of the musicians and groups involved in *Beethoven Today* more generally shared an “ironic approach to music history and ‘the great composer’ lineage.”²⁶ Anderson locates a detached, but sincere, approach to classical music by the British experimental composers through their questioning the “great composer” lineage by re-evaluating canonical works in their own compositions (on Johann Strauss alone is Michael Nyman’s *The Otherwise Very Beautiful Blue Danube* (1976), Dave Smith’s *Post-Romantic Strauss Disorder* (1981)) and by displaying an attraction to minor composers such as Ezra Reed, Albert Ketèlbey, and Lord Berners.

The deconstructive impulse of these varied approaches to canonical classical works, were not, as Anderson notes, about demolishing music history or mere critique. Instead, they often revised the rules of the structure itself – rearranging the score or shifting the performer personnel – to suggest that there might be other possibilities for confronting this music that continues to avail itself as timeless for a variety of reasons. What these composers and musicians were getting at was their own responsibility in upholding tradition. This is revealing in that they thought of themselves as musical heirs to the canon, but is also perhaps assuring in that, unlike their more conventional peers, these composers and musicians were wondering aloud about the social conditions that inform such traditions. “Classical music couldn’t have become the respected institution it has become if it was accessible to any working-class lad,” Mortimore remarked in 1973, “so the idea of a kind of social audition was created.”²⁷

A “social audition” was something of a catch-22, in that joining the Sinfonia required no audition at all, with Michael Nyman joining the group minutes before their *Symphony No. 5* performance at *Beethoven Today*. Although the *Observer* was keen to point out that erudition was lacking in the performances at *Beethoven Today*, the Sinfonia’s premise was

²⁵ a.d.r. “The Portsmouth Sinfonia,” *The Source*, Vol. 10, 78.

²⁶ Anderson, “British Experimental Music After Nyman,” 162.

²⁷ Robin Mortimore in Steve Lake, “Slightly Out of Tune,” *Melody Maker*, March 16th, 1974, 9.

essentially allowing individuals to join in and reverse the private/public binary that constituted musical rehearsal and practice on one's instrument. Bryars reflected on this in a 2012 BBC Radio 4 interview with Jolyon Jenkins:

Gavin Bryars...you were a lecturer in music, and I would have thought that as such you might have felt that people ought to learn their advancements in their own padded bedrooms, rather than inflict their inabilities on an audience.

To which Bryars responds:

Well I never did it that way. When I was a music student, I taught myself to play the double bass, and within six months I was a professional bassist.²⁸

In Bryars' answer is a challenge to what constitutes professionalism: it is a learned skill or an attitude? Bryars continues on to say that "I play the best I can whenever I play," and we can surmise that for him, and perhaps his students and followers that made up the Sinfonia, "professionalism" meant "seriousness" or "sincerity." We must remember that, although anyone could join the Sinfonia, playing badly on purpose was not tolerated.

It is not surprising to see how such care and attention to process, which is to say nothing of revising historical givens, in Bryars thinking on professional musicianship might resonate with visual art students at the time in Portsmouth. 1970 was still a time in which the burgeoning forms of conceptual and performance art were earnestly attending to problems of reception and systems of power in the social and institutional worlds (art and generally). This was the time of the *Information* show at the Museum of Modern Art, in which Vito Acconci rerouted his home mail into the museum, Keith Arnett announced "the content of my work is the strategy employed to ensure that there is no content other than the strategy," and future champion of No Wave, Dan Graham, measured his own distance in miles to Pluto, Times Square, and the lens of his glasses.²⁹ Given this atmosphere in the arts, the *way* music was being made as important as, if not more important than, the music itself.

²⁸ BBC Radio 4. *In Loving Memory* Series 14, Episode 4. "The Portsmouth Sinfonia." Originally broadcast June 19, 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b013fj17>. Accessed April 15th, 2020.

²⁹ Keith Arnett in Kyanston McShine, ed. *Information*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970, 8.

Sinfonia clarinetist Suzette Worden considered the artistic ramifications of this 1970 moment in a 2019 interview with the author, stating “This was a time where students questioned the relevance of traditional expertise in artistic practices. There may have also been a stronger consideration of the nature of the process rather than the quality of the end result.”³⁰ The program notes to a 1973 concert of six works (including Scratch favorite “The East is Red”) put on by Worden at Portsmouth read:

We play the music as well as we can and one of our aims is to be technically competent. This does not mean we are trying to be highly trained musicians; technical competence should be regarded as a means for expressing the ideas in the music more clearly and not as end in itself. A performance, because it illustrates the stage we have reached in our ability to perform a piece and not how the piece can be perfectly played, shows just one stage of our progress. I would, therefore, like to emphasize, while not ignoring the performance aspects of our music, that playing these simple pieces both helps us improve our technical ability and serves as a practical form of analysis. These two aspects are developed simultaneously, and the pieces were written for this purpose.³¹

Worden’s concert of “simple pieces” featured music designed for gaining technical erudition and signaled a dismissal of the prerequisites of public performance, i.e. the distinction between a rehearsal and a polished performance. A concert such as this one, was largely heretofore reserved for primary school orchestras (putting an added emphasis on Sun’s earlier point regarding the Sinfonia). The musical performers in Worden’s concert could be perceived as musically training out loud, an admission of incompetence. As a “practical form of analysis,” a performance such as this one served a more discreet purpose of questioning the boundary lines of musical performance.

There is of course, musical precedence to this type of performance. As mentioned, primary school musical concerts, particularly given the ubiquity of the Kodály method, in which music education was reconfigured into simplified games and exercises, are often sites to present a kind of progress report on musical education (to parents and a general audience). Another corollary can be found in adult vocational schools, in which a semester’s

³⁰ Personal correspondence with Suzette Worden via email, 2019.

³¹ Program note to concert put on by Suzette Worden at Portsmouth Polytechnic (former College of Art), Monday July 2nd, 1973.

end public concert represents the sum of musical lessons learned in a particular class. Both of these types of concerts (as well as Worden's) come out of a progressive education model, notably espoused by education theorist John Dewey, who wrote in 1938 that

[An educator] must survey the capacities and needs of the particular set of individuals with whom he is dealing and must at the same time arrange the conditions which provide the subject-matter or content for experiences that satisfy these needs and develop these capacities. The planning must be flexible enough to permit free play for individuality of experience and yet firm enough to give direction towards continuous development of power.³²

A public musical concert that is predicated on an ensemble's musical progress is one such example in which "free play," i.e. learning to play an instrument, is directed towards "development of power," i.e. displacing the idea that only an ensemble of musical experts have earned the privilege of public concert, musical venue, etc.

However, as Worden makes clear above, and as would become evident in the Sinfonia project, technical competency (progress reports) was not the impetus for their musical concerts. Dewey writes, "The principle that development of experience comes about through interactions means that education is essentially a social process. This quality is realized in the degree in which individuals form a community group."³³ He goes on to say that "it is absurd to exclude the teacher from membership in the group," and this is the key difference between what an ensemble like the Sinfonia is doing with tenets of progressive education, and why their concerts are distinct from Dewey's formulation of experience based education.

Worden's concert, and the Sinfonia, exemplify an individualized approach to communal education, in which both ensembles are self-directed. On account of this relatively leaderless structure (we shall see the conductor's role in the Sinfonia shortly) the emphasis is placed on the "social process" over any legible statement of educational merit. To say it simply, the social process of collectively playing music together, as the Sinfonia's forebearers the Scratch Orchestra exemplified, was the most important thing. This is not to

³² John Dewey, *Education and Experience*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1938/2015, 58.

³³ Dewey, 58.

say, as Worden points out, that fortitude on one's musical instrument was not also important to an ensemble like the Sinfonia. Rather, it was the conceptual freedom – playing music regardless of social and cultural expectations and mandates – that appealed to the Sinfonia and found liberatory musical corollaries with their more firmly experimental musical peers.

The electronic composer, Gordon Mumma, upon seeing the Scratch and Sinfonia perform at Harvey Matusow's *ICES 72* concert, reflected that the two groups “demonstrated with considerable success that new music can be innovative and useful, both socially and musically,” with the addendum that the Sinfonia's music was “so beautiful that I must beg the inability to describe it.”³⁴ In terms of aesthetics, the Sinfonia's music was certainly not conventionally beautiful, but what was striking was the way in which the Sinfonia all struggled together to reach that final note. This was “beautiful” music in the sense that its creation was based upon the act of ignoring the likelihood of success. That there was joy not in reaching a set outcome, but in the collective attempt is a process that has a clear corollary with any “experimental” musical project.

The discrepancy between intention, results, and familiar in Sinfonia performances lead to a common critical adjective to describe them: humorous. Anderson writes that “The result [of the Sinfonia's poor playing] is equally hilarious to traditional, avant-garde, and experimental music listeners,” and it was their bipartite appeal as a serious art project and comic novelty that appealed them to the British independent record label Transatlantic. The Sinfonia were signed to Transatlantic Records in late 1972, catching the attention of Transatlantic's deputy manager, Laurence Aston, who had an attraction for offbeat music and novel approaches to classical music.

Prior to Transatlantic, Aston was a manager at Nonesuch Records, a record label founded in 1964, as a budget classical music label. With the financial success of their

³⁴ Gordon Mumma, *Cybersonic Arts: Adventures in American Music*, Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015, 75-77.

classical records, Nonesuch expanded into releasing non-western, niche experimental, and folk music, garnering the label (and Aston) a reputation for eclecticism. Moving into the 1970s and Transatlantic, Aston's reputation for eclecticism and classical music was well suited for the somewhat strange place canonical classical music found itself in the 1970s. There was Wendy Carlos' *Switched on Bach* (1968), a painstaking construction of pieces by Johann Sebastian Bach performed on the unwieldy Moog synthesizer, had inexplicably become a hit record and cultural phenomenon, selling over a million copies by 1972, and launching a host of sequels and bizarre imitations. On the strength of *Switched on Bach*, – and perhaps cold, offbeat sound of a synthesizer performing as an orchestra – filmmaker Stanley Kubrick asked Carlos to perform electronic versions of Beethoven work for his film *A Clockwork Orange* (1972) of which Beethoven's music was a crucial plot device. In the same year, the pop group Apollo 100 had a massive hit in England with "Joy" (1972), a rock and roll tinged cover of Bach's *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*, that inspired the group to release a (largely unnoticed) full LP of classical music renditions. Just a few years later, Walter Murphy released a disco tinged dance reimagining of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*, titled "A Fifth of Beethoven," that became a staple of dance clubs in 1976. The song was included on the massively successful *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack, cementing it in the time capsule of the decade's moment with disco music. The success of disco (and perhaps "A Fifth of Beethoven") inspired the enormously popular "Hooked on Classics" (1980) series, in which classical music performed by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra was overdubbed with a disco beat.

Canonical classical music was being reimagined during this time as a means to showcase the inherent possibilities of new musical technology (Carlos) or a symbolic gesture to reflect the staying power of new popular musical forms (rock and disco). That the canon could still be potent – commercially and artistically – in these musical forms gives a sense of its general ubiquity and malleability in culture. New or novel takes on classical music in popular musical forms was something that Aston was surely aware of when he took on the

Sinfonia, but this was not necessarily where the Sinfonia's assigned manager, Martin Lewis, took them.

Lewis, who had previously managed Transatlantic's "medieval rock band," Gryphon, saw immediately commercial appeal in the Sinfonia in the humorous aspects of their playing. Rather than attempt to bill them under any commercially artsy auspices, Lewis devised a tagline to sell the ensemble to the media: "The World's Worst Orchestra." "When I went to the tabloids with that angle, it was irresistible," Lewis recalls of his tagline for the Sinfonia, "Who goes out and says, 'I've got the worst in the world?' Everybody's always saying they [have] got the best. I was going out there saying they're the worst and probably that the 'worst' doesn't really do it justice."³⁵ Sinfonia double bassist Ian Southwood recalled that the moment Lewis "became involved with the Sinfonia, he changed Sinfonia concerts from being fairly low profile, fairly serious - political even - which took place mainly at art schools, colleges, and avant-garde/experimental music events, to being on the front page of every UK newspaper - both quality papers and tabloids...obviously the angle the he promoted with the media was completely the comedy aspect - 'the world's worst orchestra.'"³⁶

Such branding moved the Sinfonia publicly away from its more thoughtful aspects - "political" in its questioning of class hierarchies of just *who* gets to perform this music - and into a more carefully manufactured spectacle. Thus, a tension between genuine and manufactured sincerity arose, capitulating the act of failure as being "good enough," and not a process of learning that it should and does generate. While risk and uncertainty would still typify a Sinfonia performance, a brand like "World's Worst Orchestra," nonetheless makes failure generic, expected, and makes possible a new type of success in its own right. This branding situation raises a question: what happens to the Sinfonia's premise of

³⁵ Author telephone correspondence with Martin Lewis, May 16th, 2019. Transcript available.

³⁶ Author email correspondence with Ian Southwood, March 15th, 2017.

reinterpreting classical music through rehearsing out loud and “social auditions” under such branding spectacle?

The answer is complicated. The Sinfonia’s performance at the Royal Albert Hall, the highlight of their career, presents a good example of how this tension between sincere and novelty played out. “The Royal Albert Hall was an imposing building and the venue had a reputation to match, as the ‘proms’ [long-running promenade classical concerts] were held there each year,” Worden recalls, “I remember the unusualness of its circular form and the plush but rather dusty and old-fashioned interior, which made me aware of its place in history and association with musical traditions...It was our special occasion that had to bring the place alive.”³⁷ Their program included fragments of Rossini, J. Strauss, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Grieg, Bach, Schubert and Handel, a roster that prompted one stagehand to remark, “we’ll be here all bloody night if they play that lot.”³⁸

As concert attendees begin to file into the Sinfonia’s 1974 Royal Albert Hall concert, filmmaker Rex Pyke was on hand to gather pre-performance reactions. On a reconnaissance mission, Lewis, in a “Transatlantic Records” t-shirt and blazer, asked people filing in if they had heard of the Sinfonia, and while many claimed familiarity, just as many seemed to be attending on the media promoted promise to hear so many works of classical music in one concert. Not long after the Sinfonia’s rendition of Tchaikovsky’s “Op. 71a – March” from *the Nutcracker Suite*, some members of the audience began filing out, no doubt appalled at what appeared to be a public ruse. “A lot of people came to the Albert Hall expecting a trained orchestra,” Sinfonia flautist Clive Langer recalls, “so people were leaving the entire time. People were misled [by the straightforward presentation of the RAH concert that gave no indication of the Sinfonia’s conceit]...in a cruel way it was quite funny.”³⁹ There were unsubstantiated rumors of audience members demanding their money back to apologetic Albert Hall staff members, but by and large the audience seemed to enjoy what was

³⁷ Author email correspondence with Suzette Worden, August 18th, 2016.

³⁸ Author email correspondence with Robin Mortimore, October 5th, 2017.

³⁹ Langer on *In Living Memory*.

unfolding in front of them. “Only a few [audience members] were to suffer musical indigestion and had to leave,” John Farley wrote in the liner notes to the live RAH recording, “but for those who stayed a whole feast of surprises lay in wait.”⁴⁰

True to Farley’s word, there were many new additions to this performance iteration of the Sinfonia. Sally Binding, an exceptional pianist played a significantly transposed – from Bb to A-minor so the Sinfonia could actually play it – rendition of Tchaikovsky’s “Piano Concerto No. 1 in Bb Minor, Op. 23,” bringing a piano into the ensemble for the first time. A working (unloaded) cannon burst off time during “Overture 1812,” prompting audience members to cover their ears at the deafening booms. Perhaps most memorable, was the introduction of a choir to the Sinfonia. Farley writes,

The choir was to sing [Handel’s] Hallelujah Chorus and was originally expected to consist of 100 singers; however, on the day of the concert it was found to exceed 350. So vast an undertaking, together with the Sinfonia membership at an all-time high of 82, caused certain communication confusions which were eventually solved by the services of a special choir conductor, Mr. Michael Parsons, who approached this test of strength with a flawless and classical quality.⁴¹

The Royal Albert Hall concert ended with Part II of Handel’s *Messiah*, the *Hallelujah Chorus*. The audience—estimated around 850 people—was asked to join the Sinfonia choir. If throughout the concert the audience was prone to exodus or bursts of laughter at the Sinfonia’s mangling the classics, this big finale that invited the audience into the chaos elicited pure glee. This was the Sinfonia’s “social audition” scaled up massively, and if it was unclear what it might feel like to play in the ensemble, watching the “Sinfonia choir” in action shows that thoughtful conceits and unbridled joy are not necessarily contradictory. To this end, we might be able to salvage the Sinfonia’s acquiescing to the form of spectacle that a tag like “the world’s worst” branded them as, at least in this moment of the *Hallelujah Chorus*, as the major scaling up of a methodology from the world of experimentalism translated to eliciting a palpable sense of joy from nearly everyone in attendance.

⁴⁰ John Farley, liner notes to *Hallelujah: The Portsmouth Sinfonia at the Royal Albert Hall*, Antilles, 1974.

⁴¹ Ibid.

As perhaps an exhibition like *Information* makes clear, art had been firmly recalibrated by the 1970s to become generally less of an expression and more of an occasion for an experience. *Information* was not uniformly experimental, but it certainly hinged on conceptualism. This type of work was not only a challenge to sell or show, but could, for a general public, require a good degree of demystification to wholly understand or experience. The simplicity of the Sinfonia's conceptual art premise was its general accessibility, giving a viewer or listener an "in." Such access could explain why the Sinfonia was more warmly received than not by audiences. Someone could witness the folly of the Sinfonia's bungling the classics and relate to their shambolism, and thus partake in the joy of rooting them on. While the Sinfonia never billed themselves as such, a case could be made for the ensemble as a rejection of seemingly joyless conceptualism. Thinking of the Sinfonia in this way is how their *Hallelujah Chorus* at the Royal Albert Hall could represent an apex of conceptual art at its best. This was a little parenthesis in experimental and conceptual activity that condoned the virtue of collective play and allowed others into the sandbox, a utopian gesture that in its more covert intellectualism easily allowed for unbridled joy, both in performance and reception.

After the concert ended, Mortimore remembers "sitting on the steps outside [the Royal Albert Hall] and just laughing uncontrollably," and asking himself, "What had we done?"⁴²

⁴² Mortimore in Reeves and Walker, *The World's Worst*, 51.

IV
What Had They Done?

I.
An Orchestra?

“We’re nothing to do with the avant-garde. It’s avant-classical if you like!”
- Robin Mortimore, 1972⁴³

The RAH performance was the first Sinfonia performance in which the ensemble wore the costume of a traditional classical orchestra (with the exception of conductor John Farley, who almost always wore tails). Unlike the various other venues where the Sinfonia played - particularly the more experimental art inclined and colleges – the entity of the Royal Albert Hall seemed to demand this sartorial decision, with black suits, ties, and dresses as the evening’s attire. The Sinfonia’s decision to dress like a conventional orchestra inside of an esteemed arts institution marks a shift from what the sociologist W.I. Thomas terms “the definition of the situation” i.e. the social construction of a framework of given behavior and activity.

An orchestra is a type of presentation in which competence is contracted with members and expected by the receiving audience. Such an arrangement is historically governed as tradition and is thus applicable to national values – i.e. the dominant and excellent character, in this case, of European bloodlines. This lineage is reflected not only in the material excellence and scale of the architecture of the space a professional orchestra might play, but in its namesake: the RAH was named after Prince Albert, the husband of Queen Victoria, which points explicitly to national heritage and conservative values. A conflict arises when these monarchical values are replaced by something from an altogether different tradition.

Erving Goffman writes in his book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, that

The more closely the imposter’s performance approximates to the real thing, the more intensely we may be threatened, for a competent performance by someone who proves to be an imposter may weaken in our minds the sacred connection between legitimate authorization to play a part and the capacity

⁴³ Steve Lake, “Slightly out of Tune,” *Melody Maker*, March 16th, 1974, 9.

to play it. (Skilled mimics, who admit all along that their intentions aren't serious, seem to provide one way in which we can work through some of these anxieties).⁴⁴

Goffman's use of the word "performance" here refers more generally to the way of human social behavior, but his use of the word is not unintentional. For Goffman, human behavior was so mediated by constructions of social conditions - expectations in both public and private spaces - that it could be discussed in the language of theatre, the world as a stage, etc. An actual performance, such as an orchestra performing, is distinct only in its granularity, i.e. the violinist dressing up to perform at the orchestra is a variation on dressing up in pajamas to go to sleep. The activities are different, but the behavioral mediation remains. However, if one were to prepare for sleep by dressing in the violinist's tuxedo, we would suspect something was off, and wonder about this person's sleeping rituals, a situation that would likely provoke anxiety.

By almost all conceivable rules, the Sinfonia is a classical orchestra, approximately a classical orchestra's sound, but, by all standards of performance - Goffman's usage included - incorrectly. In 1972, Sinfonia founder member Ivan Hume-Carter stated to *Time Out London's* David Gale that "We use precisely the same rules as a straight orchestra like the Royal Philharmonic, but because we're not conventionally accomplished, the sound comes out quite different, but as recognizable as the conventional version."⁴⁵ The "quite different" quality of the Sinfonia's music in relation to the "conventional version," is an immediate tell in terms of understanding the Sinfonia as classical orchestra "imposters."

Let's consider conductor John Farley as a pertinent example. Farley was the "least musical member" when the initial idea to form the Sinfonia arose and was therefore cheekily given the part of the most integral element of an orchestra, the leader/conductor.⁴⁶ Albert

⁴⁴ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in the Everyday*, New York: Anchor, 1959, 38. In Goffman's text, the word "performance" is used to refer to socially conditioned human behavior in everyday life.

⁴⁵ Ivan Hume-Carter in David Gale, "Symphonic Socialism," *Time Out London*, Issue 129, August 4-10, 1972. Sinfonia conductor John Farley essentially repeats the same refrain to *The Daily Mirror* in 1974: "We play the same rules as the London Philharmonic. The Only difference is the sound." Peter Senn, "Playing it By Ear," *The Daily Mirror*, March 5th, 1974.

⁴⁶ Bryars in BBC Radio 4, *In Living Memory*.

Lavignac and Lionel de La Laurencie's *Encyclopedia of Music* established the importance of the conductor all the way back in 1913: "In summary, the orchestra leader must possess the qualities of a leader of men, an always difficult task that is more particularly delicate in the case of artists."⁴⁷

Lavignac and Laurencie associate an orchestra with the normative interpretation of artists as preternaturally predisposed to difficulty on account of their romantic tendencies, and the role of the conductor – like other bourgeois – is to tame. Jacques Attali, in his seminal book *Noise*, makes this point crystal clear: "The ruling class— whether bourgeois industrial or bureaucratic elite—identifies with the orchestra leader, the creator of the order needed to avoid chaos in production. It has eyes only for him. He is the image it wishes to communicate to others and bestow upon itself."⁴⁸

The completely unlearned Farley, in theory, is a conductor identifiable not to the ruling classes but to working classes, who might display just as much acumen in terms of musical conducting. Bryars remarks, "(Farley) was chosen because he looked most like a conductor. He studied all the photos...he had long black flowing hair. He looked terrific. He was completely incompetent as a musician....He wouldn't know a beat if he saw one...in a sense he's rather like a mime artist."⁴⁹ If a conductor acts the way they act because they must explain their role as a conductor—i.e., it would not make sense for the conductor to not conduct - and if they are simply fulfilling a social function (acting a certain way), and therefore denying their own autonomy (their choice to be a conductor), what can be said about Farley, who steps up to the podium to conduct an orchestra, having studied what a conductor looks like, but not how to be a conductor? What Farley does, ultimately, is critique the notion of surrendering subjectivity to professionalism on its own terms, a gesture that reflects an undesirable image of something desired. This should not be read

⁴⁷ Albert Lavignac and Lionel de La Laurencie in Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977, 67.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Bryars on *In Living Memory*.

necessarily as a critique of that position – Farley truly tries to be the best conductor he can possibly be – but as a comment on how the social function is mediated on those in power.

Farley would suitably confuse the Sinfonia players – counting off “1,2,3,4” to a work in $\frac{3}{4}$ time – and troubles any natural pretenses they might have at being a traditional orchestra, as such entities do not aim to reveal structures of power in their very existence, but covertly enforce them. It stands to reason that the Sinfonia, certainly aware of the social framework and contract in which their premise entered, were skilled mimics, but were unwilling to “admit all along their intentions aren’t serious.” To say it another way, the Sinfonia couldn’t *just* be a traditional orchestra, knowing full well that an orchestra’s conventions require a standard of instrumental acumen to represent historical achievements in composition. In this light, they might have more affinity with experimental and vanguard art practices than they would wish to admit.

2. An Experimental Orchestra?

There were two immediate historical precedents to the Sinfonia within their own network of activity: The Scratch Orchestra and the Fluxus group.⁵⁰ As noted in Chapter Two, a section of Cardew’s *Draft Constitution* for the Scratch Orchestra was dedicated to working with “popular classics,” and I include this section in full below:

Only such works that are familiar to several members are eligible for this category. Particles of the selected works will be gathered in Appendix 1. A particle could be a page of a score, a page or more of the part for one instrument or voice, a page of an arrangement, a thematic analysis, a gramophone record, etc. The technique of performance is as follows: a qualified member plays the given particle, while the remaining players join in as best they can, playing along contributing whatever they can recall of the work in question, filling the gaps of memory with improvised variational material. As is appropriate to the classics, avoid losing touch with the reading player (who may terminate the piece at his discretion), and strive to act

⁵⁰ Michael Nyman makes a connection to the Portsmouth Sinfonia and Nam June Paik’s *Sinfonie for 20 Rooms* (1961), a score made up of twenty rooms with different musical activity: “[the room featuring] the ‘free orchestra made up of bad players’ recalls the British Portsmouth Sinfonia, formed by art students in 1970 and famed for its dedicated but somewhat inadequate performances of classics...” Nyman, “Nam June Paik, Composer.” In John Hanhardt, ed. *Nam June Paik*, New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1982, 89.

concertedly rather than independently. These works should be programmed under their original titles.⁵¹

The origins of this category are not entirely clear. Parsons notes that it may have come out of work done in Cardew's course at Morley College, in which students stumbled their way through sight readings of Beethoven works. In a letter from Cardew to the Scratch, the intention behind the category reads much more aggressively: "The Popular Classics idea is directed against a class of music lovers, aiming to outrage or otherwise awaken them. It represents an aggressive invitation to those who are saturated with the classics to the exclusion of the new to change their ways."⁵²

The Sinfonia did not share with Cardew a disposition "aiming to outrage" through their playing the popular classics, but there were clear similarities in regard to their approach to non-hierarchical membership and performance. It is tempting to see the Sinfonia as an outgrowth of the Scratch Orchestra, an ensemble manifested solely to perform the "Popular Classics" section of the *Draft Constitution*, and this is the position Sinfonia member Tom Phillips took, stating that the ensemble "was really one of Cardew's ideas extended."⁵³

⁵¹ Cardew, "A Scratch Orchestra Draft Constitution" *Musical Times*, 618.

⁵² Cardew letter to the Scratch Orchestra, ca. 1970. The "Popular Classics" were in full effect for a memorable Scratch performance based on the *Draft Constitution's* "Research Project" category. *Pilgrimage from Scattered Points on the Surface of the Body to the Brain, the Heart, the Stomach, and the Inner Ear*, performed at Queen Elizabeth Hall, Nov. 23rd, 1970, used the popular classics to sonically and conceptually designate parts of the body (it was loosely inspired by a preliminary research screening of the 1966 fantasy film *Fantastic Voyage*, in which a shrunken Raquel Welch journeys the inside of the human body). Hobbs lead the journey to the brain with Mahler's *Sixth Symphony*, based on the rationale that the composer was the "most cerebral." The journey to the stomach was represented by Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*, with Michael Parsons guiding the musical performance, while Cardew performed the composition via a game of table tennis – final score: 18 to 12 (1812). Like Mahler's *Sixth Symphony*, *1812 Overture* was chosen less on a musical basis and more on a conceptual reading, "following Napoleon's dictum that an army marches on its stomach." Terry Riley's popular phase music work, *In C*, was chosen to represent the inner ear on account of the auditory phenomenon it produced, while pop singer Lulu's Eurovision winning song "Boom-Bang-a-Bang" was used for its logatome chorus as a journey to the heart. The inclusion of Riley and Lulu as "Popular Classics" speaks to the porousness of the "Popular Classics" category, in which contemporary or experimental works – pieces by Cage but, strangely, never Cardew – mingled with known bits of pop music (Scratch offshoot The Shrapnel Wood and Metal band occasionally performed the standard, "It Had to Be You"). As *Pilgrimage to Scattered Points* makes clear the use and definition of "Popular Classics" for the Scratch often changed by a certain need. In terms of the audience response to their use of the "Popular Classics" in this concert, most of those gathered left before the concert ended, leaving the Scratch largely outnumbering their audience, and the effectiveness of Cardew's desire of "awakening the audience to the new" through canonical deconstruction pretty clear.

⁵³ Tom Phillips in *On Some Faraway Beach*, 66.

Michael Parsons locates the Sinfonia's musical "variations" at the level of technical capability and finds the distinction between the Sinfonia and the Scratch in the former's attempting notational accuracy in performance over improvisation. This is an interpretation of the ensemble also held by semi-regular Sinfonia member Michael Nyman. Nyman describes the Sinfonia as "having no interest in any music other than that which has been hallowed by time, proven by popularity," and concedes, "it might seem odd to find the Sinfonia in a book on experimental music."⁵⁴ Yet, Nyman hones in on the performer's varying degrees of capability, the "wide discrepancy between intention and effect," as indicative of a quality often found in experimental music.⁵⁵ In short, and perhaps ironically, what gave the Sinfonia experimental variables was how straight they played their parts.

In a 1974 interview, Mortimore lays the distinction between the Sinfonia and the Scratch clear: "The Sinfonia came about partly as a reaction against Cardew," Mortimore stated in 1974, "He had the classical training and his audience was very elitist. But he wasn't achieving anything."⁵⁶ As discussed in Chapter Two, despite their open-door policy and liberatory methods of music making and performance, Scratch concerts could be almost aggressively inaccessible to an audience, an experience Mortimore recalls:

They [The Scratch Orchestra] used to do these concerts at the Queen Elizabeth Hall and people used to come along and do whatever they wanted. I saw them doing [Tchaikovsky's] 1812 once, with a guy playing the electric guitar, trying to play as loud as possible to compete with everybody else. It just degenerated into a boring hippie free-for-all.⁵⁷

In the same way that we should be cautious to allow for Cardew to speak to the Scratch's overall aims, we should take a similar approach to Mortimore's sentiments. Translating the myriad of ambitions and feelings of large ensembles through their spokespeople is one thing among many that leads to general misunderstandings and slanted perspectives that burrow their way into official histories. However, it does seem readily apparent that the Sinfonia's

⁵⁴ Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music*, 162

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Mortimore in Steve Lake, "Slightly Out of Tune."

⁵⁷ Ibid.

handling of performing classical music, despite sharing experimental variables via the open-door parameters of the Scratch, was a much more streamlined and focused project, particularly in terms of its social reach.

The Scratch could be described almost as a sociological project, one that studies and describes social information. Categories were set in order to re-evaluate the efficacy of the categories, i.e. the “Popular Classics” section of the “Scratch Orchestra Draft Constitution” was a means to allow novices and experts to play with the canon with a desired outcome of edification or “outraging a class of music lover.” A Scratch performance under “Popular Classics” (and particularly under the “Improvisation Rites”) was an invitation towards more study, to evaluate an outcome and approach it again, but differently.⁵⁸ The intense scrutiny of their own project is ultimately what lead a core faction of the Scratch to move away from such a sociological premise and into the social outright, with direct action and public engagement with politics. The Sinfonia, on the other hand, was almost, sans justifications, simply about playing familiar music together, a wholly convivial project. The distinction between sociological and social with the Sinfonia and the Scratch, is not definitive, as it would be a fool’s errand to try and summarize the amorphous tendencies of the Scratch under such a broad interpretation. However, there is a strand of populism within the Sinfonia project, particularly in their dedication to only familiar music, that is absent in the Scratch.

In his book, *Distinction*, Pierre Bourdieu argues that “classical music devalued by popularization” was, in a hierarchy of taste, under the category of “popular taste.”⁵⁹ The “popular classics” were then distinct from a composition by someone such as Stockhausen, in terms of both “symbolic profits” – cultural distinction – and “guaranteeing profits” – the

⁵⁸ See Chapter Two for more on the “Improvisation Rites” as well as Stefan Szczelkun, *Improvisation Rites: From John Cage’s Song Books to the Scratch Orchestra’s Nature Study Notes: Collective Practices 2011-2017*, London: Routine Art Co., 2018.

⁵⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984, 16.

market.⁶⁰ Performing music, although indebted to one's habitus – how social experiences shape dispositions – is inherently linked to “establishment in the world of art but also economic means...and spare time.”⁶¹ Thus, when Mortimore states that classical music “couldn't have become the respected institution it has become if it was accessible to any working class lad,” he is speaking to the class privilege that has kept it guarded as an institution, i.e. inaccessible for most despite its relative popularity in general culture.

The accessibility of classical music was the immediate target of a memorable Fluxus event in five years before the Sinfonia's inception. The Fluxus event took place at Carnegie Recital Hall in New York City.⁶² Just a few months before the concert, Fluxus impresario George Maciunas sought performers through a want-ad in *The Village Voice*. The classified, wedged between a notice for a clambake and the Humphry Bogart fan club, read:

INSTRUMENTALIST WANTED BY FLUXORCHESTRA for Carnegie
Recital concert of Sept. 25. No skill needed. Write: Fluxus, P.O. Box 180.
N.Y. 10013⁶³

Ten individuals responded, or at least, made the cut to the final concert, and their qualifications were announced via a second *Village Voice* advertisement that boasted, ““La Monte Young conducting an orchestra of unskilled instrumentalists.”⁶⁴ An orchestra of unskilled musicians headed by a conceptual artist/musician waving the conductor's baton at an esteemed musical institution could certainly seem, at least on paper, readable as a proto Sinfonia project.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 86.

⁶¹ Ibid. 75.

⁶² See Chapters One, Two, and Appendix A for more on Fluxus and particularly the influence of Fluxus member George Brecht in Britain at this time.

⁶³ *The Village Voice*, August 5th, 1965, 2. This was a sequel event of sorts, following the first Fluxorchestra concert on June 27, 1964, which was also held at Carnegie Recital Hall. This concert featured the Fluxus norm of performing each other's works. It did share, at least from Maciunas' instructions, an emphasis on formal dress code. In a “Notice to Flux Orchestra Players,” Maciunas writes: “FOR CONCERT COME PUNCTUALLY ON [SIC] 8:15 PM (dark suit is available if you do not have tuxedo or tails).” Reprinted in Hans Sohm and Harald Szeeman, eds. *Happenings & Fluxus*, Cologne: Kölnischer Kunstverein, 1970, n.p.

⁶⁴ *The Village Voice*, September 23, 1965. Respondents included: Stephen Barry (trumpet), Lynn Bunn (French horn), John Cavanaugh (guitar), Henry Greenfiber (trumpet), H. Kapplow (violin), Dan Lauffer (violin), Joan Matthew (horns), Linda Sampson (violin), Helen Vasey (melodica), Stephen Vasey (horn), Christopher Wilmarth (recorder), and John Worden (trumpet). Frequent Fluxus performers and friends filled out the rest of the orchestra: Anthony Cox (violin), AY-O (trumpet), Joe Jones (violin), Shigeko Kubota (violin), James Riddle (trumpet), Jonas Mekas (accordion), Yoko Ono (violin), and Stan VanDerbeek (violin). Reprinted from George Maciunas *Fluxorchestra Concert* poster in *Happenings & Fluxus*, 1970.

The ten “unskilled instrumentalists” performed loosely orchestral or thematically recital hall relevant works by Ben Vautier, Chieko Shiomi, George Brecht, Joe Jones, Yoko Ono, Anthony Cox, Maciunas, Robert Watts, La Monte Young, Willem de Ridder, Shigeo Kubota, Stan VanDerbeek, Tomas Schmit, and Ben Vautier. Although the concert featured works by mostly longstanding Fluxus members, Maciunas was dealing with something of a personnel crisis in 1965, and advertised for performers out of need, and perhaps less for conceptual dividends. In his book, *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude*, Owen Smith writes,

The people who performed in the second Fluxorchestra mostly consisted of those who responded to the ad, some of the artists who were still active in Fluxus, along with some of their acquaintances. Thus, the concert was the first Fluxus performance in which the performers were not primarily the artists themselves. This change was in part a reflection of the shifting dynamics in the group, but it was also an indication of the changing emphasis of the performance work of Fluxus. These works presented in the concert stressed humor, structures of play, and games...From 1965 on...the emphasis on humor became a much more central feature in Fluxus.⁶⁵

At the *Fluxorchestra* event, La Monte Young conducted Brecht’s *Symphony No. 3*, a work in which all gathered orchestra players slowly fall off their seats; Yoko Ono wrapped an orchestral musicians in ribbon while they attempted to play for her *Four Pieces for Orchestra to La Monte Young*;⁶⁶ wind instruments shot peas and strings used rubber band projectiles to simulate an orchestra battle in Anthony Cox’s *Tactical Pieces for Orchestra*. Like the Sinfonia’s performance at the Royal Albert Hall, the Carnegie venue itself was cause for a change in appearance to emulate the institution’s sense of distinction, but also did not necessarily mean a change in attitude. Although engaging with the classical orchestra accoutrements (conductors, black tie and dress, “symphony” scores) the Fluxorchestra, in both their lampooning and unconventional musical practices, would not be confused a conventional orchestra.

⁶⁵ Owen. Smith, *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude*, San Diego: San Diego University Press, 1998, 177.

⁶⁶ In a coincidental connection to the Sinfonia, one of the individuals wrapped at this concert was the classical musician Joshua Rifkin, whose non-ragtime versions of Scott Joplin’s compositions would be marketed by Martin Lewis to great success.

Fluxus, particularly in their musical activity, shared several conceptual affinities with the Sinfonia, but in terms of adventurous conceit, were quite different. Fluxus artists wrote their own compositions. They shared an interest in performer deskilling but at the level of putting the extra-musical activity front and center. Given the myriad of approaches to this musical conceptualizing, it would be difficult to pin down any sort of Fluxus consensus, but we can generally say that they were interested in the whole of music – performance, conventions, scores, actions, gestures – as much, if not more, than the sound itself.

Douglas Kahn essentially takes this position in reading Fluxus' musical output:

...just as music does not exhaust sound, neither does sound exhaust music. Fluxus in essence asked why, given the array of factors that comprise music, should sound be given the decisive role in determining what is and what is not music, or what may or may not direct its development? Fluxus artists systematically isolated various extra aural aspects of music as moments that could themselves undergo artistic transformation just as easily as any sonic material.⁶⁷

Fluxus' highlighting of the extra-aural phenomenon of music, which is to say the sometimes-discreet gestures and confounding traditions that went into the production of music, is more complex, but nonetheless has some obvious affinities with the Sinfonia. There are several Fluxus scores such as Ay-O's *Rainbow No. 2 for Orchestra* (date unknown) that calls for "a totally unexperienced orchestra" to play a "7 note major scale on various instruments," or Young's (who was Fluxus adjacent) *Composition 1960 #13 to Richard Huelsenbeck* (1960), that reads, "the performer should prepare any composition and then perform it as well as he can."⁶⁸ The Sinfonia's special attention on *how* to get to a sound – what a performer does to make music – finds them, at least in terms of emphasizing the material conditions of performance, on similar ground as a small fraction of Fluxus work.

⁶⁷ Douglas Kahn, "The Latest: Fluxus and Music" in Elizabeth Armstrong, Joan Rothfuss, eds. *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1993, 108.

⁶⁸ Ay-O *Rainbow No. 2 for Orchestra* in *The Fluxus Workbook* eds. Owen Smith and Ken Friedman; La. Monte Young *Composition 1960 #13 to Richard Huelsenbeck* in La Monte Young and Jackson MacLow, *An Anthology of Chance Operations*. Mortimore was keenly aware of Young's work, saying that *Composition 1960 #13* particularly "could have initiated the Sinfonia." Personal correspondence with Mortimore.

Like Fluxus, music making for the Sinfonia was predicated on considerations of the materials and social conditions and expectations although, quite differently, they kept their role as on orchestra straight. In short, the experimentalism of the Sinfonia was far more discreet: the anarchic qualities appeared at the level of sound making and less in terms of performance. One immediate thing they shared with Fluxus, particularly the later iteration of Fluxus that Smith outlines, is their shared awareness of the humor of a given situation. In a photograph from the Fluxorchestra concert, Yoko Ono throws paper airplanes across the venue, while John Cage, Nam June Paik, and others have their heads tilted skywards in laughter, clearly delighted at such a gesture happening at Carnegie Recital Hall.

Maciunas' vision for Fluxus was often along the lines of the misfit, small scale pranksters who shared as much affinity for the avant-garde as they did a good vaudeville pratfall. This was a quality of the Sinfonia as well, and the sense of humor that permeated both groups in their respective activity raises significant questions in terms of the parodic aspect. In their porousness, and certainly when performed in esteemed concert venues, Fluxus works could also become scathing punchlines, endless critiques at the normalcy of institutions and traditions that controlled them. The Sinfonia, on the other hand, particularly when embracing their "world's worst orchestra" tagline, could be read as a parody of experimental activity altogether.

A Parody^{3.} Orchestra?

By beating the audience to the punch, the tagline of "World's Worst" allowed the Sinfonia to feel like they were in on it, a good-humored experience that suggested there might not be much of a difference between an avant-garde orchestra hall and a sketch comedy one-liner. On the other hand, the risk that could, and inevitably did, mark such a premise was that the Sinfonia became entirely novelty, and their legacy a kind of joke orchestra—more Monty Python than Cage—particularly in the United States where they

had little to no presence.⁶⁹ This transition from intellectual deconstruction to punchline symphony is a trajectory in art that has little precedent and points to a more general tendency in the arts throughout the 1970s of moving from commenting or critiquing dominant culture, to becoming subordinate to it.

The Sinfonia's brand of deskilled-trained musicians and a few non-musicians playing canonized popular classical music poorly was intended to be received through immediate recognition, directing the audience to pleasure through an all too seldom utilized facet in the arts: humor.⁷⁰ The question of whether the Sinfonia is a parody act is a complicated one. Parody exists as a mode indebted to foregrounding elements of the past, simultaneously commenting upon and participating in a given (typically) known structure. In the Sinfonia's case, the "target" is obviously an orchestra in the Western musical tradition, including its virtuosic makeup and valorizing and propagating select works of music (the canon). An orchestra of this kind, say the Royal Philharmonic or the London Symphony Orchestra, inseparably encodes politics and ideologies. Rather than simply deconstruct or reinvent, as did their other new music brethren, the Sinfonia could be interpreting as using parody as gentler form of critique, writing back to their target while building on its conventions.

"[Parody] is an intentional dialogized hybrid," Mikhail Bakhtin writes, "Within it, languages and styles actively and mutually illuminate one another."⁷¹ As a visual example of Bakhtin's notion of parody, we can look at the front cover of the Sinfonia's first LP, *Plays the Popular Classics*, which bears all the hallmarks of a conventional classical music LP sleeve.

⁶⁹ This was not for lack of trying. The Sinfonia were signed to Columbia Records in 1974 in the US by longtime label head Goddard Lieberson, who had overseen the signing of Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen. According to Martin Lewis, Lieberson died just a few weeks before Sinfonia delegates arrived at Columbia HQ, and with him went any label interest or support for the group. Lewis remarks of the American release of *Popular Classics*: "It could never have any success because there was no one who understood it." Personal correspondence with Lewis, November 2019. Transcript available.

⁷⁰ It should be noted that The Scratch Orchestra was not a humorless affair. Many of their performances, proposals, improvisation rites, and scores are marked by dryly funny instructions, as well as an almost childlike sense of play and whimsy. The Sinfonia, to say it simply, was a more focused premise, but in that regard, entirely more limited in terms of innovation when compared to the Scratch, particularly in their mostly limited skillset. On this point, John Tilbury makes the distinction that the Sinfonia "introduced variations through sheer unabashed incompetence; not as was the case with the Scratch Orchestra's anarchic design." Tilbury, *A Life Unfinished*, 418.

⁷¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 76.

What the cover of *Popular Classics* does is use the visual codes of classical music LPs and discreetly changes them. Unlike the cover designs produced for someone like John Cage or Karlheinz Stockhausen, which often used formless visuals to represent their respective sonic experimentation (usually psychedelic or minimalist abstraction), *Popular Classics* makes legible visually the “art” at hand, i.e., an orchestra.⁷² To this end, the Sinfonia works much more legibly as parody than experiment. However, as Linda Hutcheon notes in her book, *Theory of Parody*, “tension between conservative representation and revolutionary difference is a common denominator [of parody].”⁷³ To this end, the “revolutionary difference” – the experiment – of the Sinfonia is not only important, but crucial to the parodic aspect.

The tension between the Sinfonia as a parody orchestra or an actual orchestra or an experiment in orchestral playing is what ultimately led to a myriad of receptions of the group. *Rolling Stone* awarded *Popular Classics* “Comedy Album of the Year,” and also a one-star review, citing the album as “perhaps the worst record ever made; best dismissed as an intellectual joke.”⁷⁴ Meanwhile, Bryars stresses that the Sinfonia was “not a sendup. We’re not sending up the pieces we are playing. It’s not a musical joke . . . deliberately created for people in the know, in-jokes for professionals.”⁷⁵ Thus, the Sinfonia was an experiment against pat virtuosity that lent itself well to parodic comment, and more often than not was wholly sincere. The Sinfonia makes a case for the sincerity of goofing off, the hilarity of experimentation, and the politics of a lampoon. Most effectively perhaps, they make a case for the joy of inclusion.

⁷² A few examples of experimental music LP covers with this type of design include Richard Mantel’s bricolage art for *New Electronic Music from the Leaders of the Avant Garde* (Columbia, 1967); Ron Koro’s op-art portrait of Cage for *Music for Keyboard, 1935–1948* (Columbia, 1970); the pop-infused portrait of Stockhausen by Horst Baumann for *Complete Piano Music* (CBS, 1967); the biomorphic abstraction on the cover of *Panorama Electronique* (Mercury, 1968); Gunther Stiller’s minimalist designs for Wergo Records LPs of Christian Wolff (*For Piano I*, *For Pianist*, *Burdocks*, 1972) and Josef Anton Riedel (1972). Thanks to Jon Lorenz for sharing these examples with me from his collection.

⁷³ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth Century Art Forms*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000, xii.

⁷⁴ Rose, “Portsmouth Sinfonia Plays the Popular Classics/Hallelujah!” *Rolling Stone Record Guide*, 1979.

⁷⁵ Bryars in *In Living Memory*.

By the time the Sinfonia appeared on the Jack Palance hosted *Ripley's Believe it Or Not?* television series in 1982 (playing a clip from the Albert Hall performance), this move towards full novelty act seemed complete. It's difficult to surmise if this gradual transition impeded any later attempts by critics or writers to consider their work seriously, but writing on the Sinfonia since their retirement in 1980, following a final back-to-basics popular classics concert in Paris, has been sparse to non-existent.⁷⁶ Was it that the branding, "the world's worst," that made their failure generic, or a mode of success in its own right, thus relegating the act of failing obsolete?

The Sinfonia do get consistent mention in histories, profiles, interviews, and surveys of Brian Eno. While there was certainly a friendship and creative kinship between Eno and the Sinfonia, there was also a form of quid pro quo in some respects, both benefiting from creative and marketing capital through their mutual association. This entanglement gets to the question I posed at the beginning of this chapter, concerning the benefits and limits of networked associations, and how history organizes these particular cases. The Sinfonia was its own project, with its own ambitions, yet their historical position is now inextricably linked to Eno's, which were quite different. This may seem like conventional wisdom but translating the Sinfonia into Eno's terms – and vice versa – speaks more broadly to the limits of the non-musician: formal affinities of deskilled or unskilled performance could find them translated into other terms.

III The Impact of the Familiar

Eno, Alfons Sinniger's 1974 documentary, is a twenty-five-minute portrait of Eno, covering the bulk of his artistic interests and productions of the moment, one of which was his playing with the Sinfonia. The Sinfonia is first introduced via the pained strains of their rendition of *William Tell*, used to dissonantly soundtrack Eno's walk along a London street

⁷⁶ See: Francesca Brittan, "Cultures of Musical Failure" in Sara Crangle and Peter Nicholls, eds., *On Bathos: Literature, Art, Music* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), p. 112-31; Cecilia Sun, "Brian Eno, Non-Musicianship, and the Experimental Tradition," in Albiez and Pattie, eds., *Brian Eno: Oblique Music* 29-48.

with Farley, Lampard, and the photographer Doug Smith. The trio enter a music shop, and inside Eno browses a wall of clarinets. The salesclerk, all too aware of the camera, offers Eno assistance, and poses for a picture. A voiceover of Eno is heard:

The Portsmouth Sinfonia originated from avant-garde music. The Sinfonia attempts, to the very best of its abilities, to play the popular classics. Any variations from the originals occur simply because people are unable to play the original, and in trying their best to do so make mistakes. When we recorded the album, I played clarinet. and previous to the recording, I didn't actually own a clarinet myself. For recording and producing the album, they made me a present, a fine clarinet (laughs) made in Shanghai.⁷⁷

Onscreen during this voiceover, Eno takes off his oversize, black furry coat, and starts to play the clarinet. True to his word, the resulting shrieks and sputters that come from the instrument leaves no doubt that Eno did not own a clarinet previous to the Sinfonia recording. Eno leaves the shop with Farley and stops to pose for a photograph by Smith, showing off his new clarinet and a book, Basil Tschaikow's *Play the Clarinet*. Following this scene, the film cuts back to Eno in the recording studio, watching him and guitarist Chris Spedding work through *Warm Jets* opener, "Needle in the Camel's Eye," a piece of music that is clarinet-free.

The Sinfonia scene is brief, but its inclusion in *Eno* creates the sense that this was an important project for Eno in 1974. The Eno familiar would have read about his participation with the Sinfonia in various rock magazines as early as 1972. "The vast majority of these people can't play their instruments and yet they are definitely producing music," Eno tells *Melody Maker*'s Geoff Brown in 1973, and with that statement it becomes clear what a "non-musician" like Eno might find interesting in the Sinfonia.⁷⁸

Like the Scratch, the Sinfonia appear almost always as formative events in experimentalism for Eno in writings on his work and life. David Sheppard writes that the Sinfonia allowed Eno to don "his avant-garde hat"; Cecilia Sun, one of the few writers to actually elaborate on the Sinfonia as an entity, nonetheless writes that they are an

⁷⁷ *Eno*, dir. Alfons Sinninger, 1974.

⁷⁸ Eno in Geoff Brown, "Eno's Where It's At," *Melody Maker*, November 10, 1973.

“experimental ensemble”; Sean Albiez and Ruth Dockwray write that Eno “pursued his experimental music as a member [of]...Gavin Bryars’ Portsmouth Sinfonia before joining Roxy Music in 1971”; Christopher Scoates write that Eno was interested in the Sinfonia on account of their “great relevance to experimental music;” like the Scratch, Geeta Dayal cites the Sinfonia as a rationale for calling himself a “non-musician.”⁷⁹ It is only Eric Tamm who avoids ascribing much weight to the Sinfonia, succinctly noting “Eno produced two albums for the Portsmouth Sinfonia, the “world’s worst symphony” – an ensemble founded on high camp satire consisting of non-musicians and musicians playing instruments they didn’t know how to play, stumbling through outrageously butchered versions of the classical repertoire.”⁸⁰

The sum of these accounts seems to amount to a relatively straightforward narrative: Eno was attracted to the Sinfonia because they made, or at the last came from, the context of experimental music, in which he was also interested. The rationale for this is likely that Eno refers to them a number of times as experimental in his interviews, and that the Sinfonia was directly linked (and shared members with) more firmly classifiable experimental acts such as Michael Nyman, or Gavin Bryars. Tamm’s neglecting to mention the Sinfonia’s “avant-garde” or experimental qualities is somewhat telling in that the Sinfonia’s orchestral structure calls to mind “Western European art music” and that Eno’s “debt to that tradition...is [the] avant-garde” and composers that believed “everything we do is music.”⁸¹

Eno’s work in the 1970s was largely to do with the potency of a concept like “everything we do is music” as it was historically situated in the different networks of rock and pop and experimental art and music. His approach to this tradition, as we have seen,

⁷⁹ Sheppard, *On Some Faraway Beach*, 154; Cecilia Sun ““Brian Eno, non-musicianship and the experimental tradition,” in Albiez and Pattie, *Oblique Music*, 30; Sean Albiez and Ruth Dockwray, “Before and After Eno: Situating ‘The Recording Studio as Compositional Tool,’ in Albiez and Pattie, *Oblique Music*, 142; Christopher Scoates, “The Aesthetics of Time: Mistake and Random Errors: Chance Systems and Process,” in Scoates, ed., *Brian Eno: Visual Music*, 90; Geeta Dayal, *Another Green World*, 41. It is not confirmed, but it is highly unlikely that Eno performed with the Sinfonia pre-Roxy music, as we shall see later in this chapter.

⁸⁰ Tamm, *Brian Eno: His Music and the Vertical Color of Sound*, 2.

⁸¹ Tamm, 16.

doesn't necessarily favor one tradition over the other, but attempts to find a fertile meeting space for both. Musique concrete could be in a pop song, Fluxus Event Scores could be retooled as creative problem-solving device, "furniture music" could be an LP.⁸² The closest Eno came to a statement on the avant-garde tradition, however, came at the end of "Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts," in which he compares an entity like the Scratch Orchestra to a conventional classical orchestra. Eno writes,

[A classical orchestra] regards the environment (and its variety) as a set of emergencies and seeks to neutralize or disregard this variety. An observer is encouraged (both by his knowledge of the ranking system and by differing degrees of freedom accorded to the various parts of the organization) to direct his attention at the upper echelons of the ranks. He is given an impression of a hierarchy of value. The organization has the feel of a well-functioning machine: it operates accurately and predictably for one class of tasks, but it is not adaptive. It is not self-stabilizing and does not easily assimilate change or novel environmental conditions.⁸³

Eno, parsing the theories of Stafford Beer, sees a "well-functioning machine" like an orchestra, with its ranks and hierarchies, as resisting organic change. The orchestra's behavior is so set, their roles so confined, that performance is rote and expected, regardless of the beauty of their musical efforts.

As Eno believed during this time that human change through art making was only possible through variety and behavioral innovations, the classical orchestra was a less than desirable structure given its emphasis on control.⁸⁴ A composition like Cardew's "Paragraph 7" on the other hand, called for an ensemble that was unpredictable, and such an organization was more typical of the avant-garde.⁸⁵ That a performer could operate creatively without skill was, according to Eno, "not true in a conventional symphony orchestra, but it is true in certain other kinds of music. So, the cultural lesson is finding out what it is that allows that kind of freedom, and whether the musical environment can be generalized to the external environment."⁸⁶

⁸² See Chapter One for Eno's conceptual music similarities to Erik Satie and his idea of "furniture music."

⁸³ Brian Eno, "Organizing and Generating Variety in the Arts," in Gregory Battcock, ed. *Breaking the Sound Barrier: A Critical Anthology of the New Music* (New York: Dutton, 1981) 139-140.

⁸⁴ See Chapters One and Two for Eno's ideas on art and cybernetics.

⁸⁵ See Chapter Two for a full breakdown on Eno's thoughts on both the artistic and behavioral possibilities in "Paragraph 7," in his essay, "Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts"

⁸⁶ Eno in Rose, "Scaramouche of the Synthesizer"

With Eno's theories on the limited efficacy of a symphony orchestra, we can understand his interest in the Sinfonia being that their thorny premise – not quite orchestra not quite experimental – troubles past distinctions of organizations. Despite the Sinfonia's insistence on having "the same rules as the Royal Philharmonic," the performer variables in musical capabilities made strict adherence to orchestral hierarchies such as ranks and chairs difficult to uphold. Gavin Bryars recalls that

From time to time, there were people who did join the orchestra who were professionals on their instruments. I remember at one point there was a trumpeter called Ted (Brum), who was a professional trumpeter, and he played with us at the Roundhouse when we played in 1972. We thought he was going to show us up and it would be really very embarrassing. But of course, Ted like a good musician, was someone concerned with following the score and following the conductor. In both cases, there were huge gaps in conveying the information. So, Ted...would fluff his note like everybody else.⁸⁷

Even when allowing someone who was proficient on their instrument into the ensemble – a "from time to time" occurrence overall – the incompetence of the Sinfonia's conductor, whose role is historically to hold the performance together, made conventional performing difficult.

Eno may have found a conventional orchestra unproductive as a structure, but the Sinfonia was something else, a covert experimental project in a vernacular mode. This conceptual similarity obviously had some resonance with Eno's own musical ambitions, and he knew many of the ensemble's core members from his art school days. "Eno was a friend from the start," Mortimore notes, "He was into a similar scene at Winchester Art School, but he was on his own there. He did concerts with 44 tape players, we did concerts with 44 people."⁸⁸ Although "on his own" at Winchester he crossed paths with many future Sinfonia members – Mortimore, painter David Saunders, Tom Phillips, and perhaps most directly Sinfonia co-founder Gavin Bryars.

Mortimore writes that Eno's first public performance with the group was at Harvey Matusow's *ICES-72* (International Concert of Experimental Sound) concert. This runs

⁸⁷ Bryars in BBC Radio 4, *In Loving Memory*.

⁸⁸ Robin Mortimore in Nichols, "Roll Over Beethoven, it's a Classical Gas," *Rolling Stone*, March 13, 1975.

counter to the information from Eno historians and writers who often put his membership prior to Roxy Music, perhaps unintentionally propagating a narrative that upsells Eno's formative experimental encounters.⁸⁹ "I don't remember Eno being at many of the concerts I took part in overall," recalls Sinfonia constant, Worden, who would certainly see Eno in her clarinet section, "I think his involvement was more on the management side as he had contacts for promotion and getting access to recording facilities."⁹⁰ As Worden's comments suggest, placing Eno's starting point with the Sinfonia at 1972, as opposed to 1970, makes quite a difference, in that 1972 saw Eno's public profile rise dramatically on account of Roxy Music.

"His management did not want him to have anything to do with the Sinfonia," remembers Mortimore, "He had to disguise himself in glasses and a silly hat to play at [the York Music festival]."⁹¹ This disguise was apparently ineffective, as Sheppard remarks that Eno's presence brought the Sinfonia "one of their most noisily appreciative audiences to date."⁹² Eno's management (John Gayden in 1973) caring to protect his public image against endeavors like the Sinfonia, that theoretically could damage his reputation, gives a sense then of what kind of cache Eno might have carried during this time. Bryars writes that Eno's celebrity pull was instrumental to the Sinfonia getting a record deal:

Brian was instrumental in putting together the first album because his contacts meant the label, Transatlantic, were able to do it. Without that link we wouldn't have had an album. He wasn't acting as a producer in the sense that he was buzzing around the control room, but he was certainly the person who got it all together and he was certainly the person who liased with the record company to get it made.⁹³

⁸⁹ David Sheppard writes that Eno was a Sinfonia "regular" by the time of *Beethoven Today*, a fact that runs against Mortimore's claim and *Beethoven Today* program information and photographs. The earliest press mention I can find of Eno's membership with the Sinfonia is a *Melody Maker* profile on Roxy Music from October 14, 1972. Eno is listed on the roster as a performer for the Sinfonia's September 1972 Music Now appearance at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. A liner note on a later edition of *Discreet Music* puts Eno performing with the Sinfonia at the same time as the Scratch, 1969-1970, adding more confusion to this timeline. It is entirely possible that Eno rehearsed with the Sinfonia occasionally before playing publicly with them in 1972, although I have seen nor heard any evidence of this from anyone affiliated with the Sinfonia.

⁹⁰ Personal correspondence with Suzette Worden.

⁹¹ Personal correspondence with Mortimore.

⁹² Sheppard, 132.

⁹³ Bryars in Sheppard, 154.

As would be the case later with *Obscure*, and to some extent his producing the records of smaller, lesser-known artists, Eno parlayed his moderate fame and warm relationship with record company brass to fund and release adventurous (and risky from a marketing standpoint) LPs by others. *Plays the Popular Classics*, so it seemed, was one of the earliest examples of Eno flexing his clout, convincing a record label to produce and release an album of classical music played poorly by incapable players on his superstar media status alone.

Bryars recollection of the importance of Eno to the Sinfonia record coming into existence runs counter to Sinfonia manager Marin Lewis' claims that Transatlantic Records – the Sinfonia's British label - Laurence Aston was the determining factor in getting them signed and getting the record made. "In those days Eno was still with Roxy Music," Lewis recalls, "He was just branching out. [The Sinfonia's] own natural qualities were far bigger and more attractive bait to the media than [Eno's] name. [Eno's] name was a cool way to get the attention of *Melody Maker* or artsy-fartsy journalists, but the Sinfonia was going to appeal to [larger media outlets]." ⁹⁴ Lewis' pushing back on Bryars version of events makes sense in that it tethering the Sinfonia's success to Eno could be perceived as downplaying their own achievements. On the other hand, if the Sinfonia's "natural qualities" were enough to carry them on their own, we might wonder about the appearance of Eno all over Sinfonia marketing – his essay on *Popular Classics*, his face on their press photograph and the hype sticker affixed to the LP – giving him a fairly prominent and frontward (literally the face) position within this roving group of performers who had over 100 members in their decade together. Eno may have only appealed to "arts fartsy" journals, but this did not stop Lewis or Transatlantic from taking full advantage of his relative fame.

In 1973, Gaydon came across the press photograph of Eno and Farley in the recording studio (fig. 36) that Transatlantic distributed to promote the Sinfonia. Lewis recalls getting a phone call from an incredulous Gaydon, claiming that the press photograph

⁹⁴ Personal telephone correspondence with Martin Lewis, May 16th, 2019.

“was exploitative.”⁹⁵ Lewis responded, saying “It is exploitative, but we don’t mind promoting Brian Eno. If it helps his career being associated with the Portsmouth Sinfonia, I’m totally happy to help.”⁹⁶ Lewis chalks his flippancy in this situation up to “being twenty-two, full of piss and vinegar,” but there is a kernel of truth in his sentiments. Eno’s affiliation with the Sinfonia was certainly a boon to his own particular image that he was crafting during this period, as a rock and roll infused experimentalist who advocated publicly against musical skill.

Thus, it could be argued that the Sinfonia was less of a formative project, as writers on Eno have suggested, and more of a continuation of a crafted public image, one born out of sincere dedication to experimental proclivities and a clear knowledge of provocation in the arts. In Eno’s commercially released work, there is little to suggest that the Sinfonia had much of an impact on his own conceptual thinking. The Sinfonia’s “fine line of a melody...surrounded by this cloud, this halo of everyone else,” as Eno visually described their sound, would be utilized as a method in two compositions, one, unsurprisingly, that explicitly engaged with classical music. On the song “Golden Hours” from his third solo LP, *Another Green World*, David Sheppard writes that

Eno wanted other, wordless backing voices to ape the ‘approximate’ quality of the Portsmouth Sinfonia. To achieve this, he overdubbed his own vocal several times without reference to headphones, singing in response only to Rhett Davies’s visual cues. The results were a ‘cloud’ of slightly off-key, randomly timed ‘ahs’, which emitted the requisite amateurish charm.⁹⁷

The second example is not so explicit but can be read as a borrowing of Sinfonia processes and methods, nonetheless. On the B-Side of *Discreet Music* is *Three Variations on The Canon in D Major by Johann Pachelbel*, Eno’s reworking of Pachelbel’s original. Eno conceived of the piece through his reading of “charmingly inaccurate translations” in the liner notes to a 1968 French LP of Pachelbel’s works. Eno handed the concept over to Gavin

⁹⁵ Personal telephone correspondence with Martin Lewis, May 16th, 2019.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Sheppard, 206. I am unsure if this is quoted from Eno or is Sheppard’s analysis. I would suggest that the “approximate quality” on this song has a closer link to a phase music experiment than the Sinfonia’s attribute of being slightly out of key/tune and offtempo.

Bryars who scored and conducted a small group of musicians – “The Cockpit Ensemble” – to realize three conceptual deconstructions of Pachelbel’s *Canon in D*, each titled with a phrase from the mistranslated liner notes that inspired the work (“Fullness of Wind,” “Brutal Ardour” and “French Catalogues”).

Eno’s liner notes to *Three Variations* read,

[A] way of satisfying the interest in self-regulating and self-generating systems is exemplified in the 3 [sic] variations on the Pachelbel Canon. These take their titles from the charmingly inaccurate translation of the French cover notes for the ‘Erota’ recording of the piece made by the orchestra of Jean Francois Paillard. That particular recording inspired these pieces by its unashamedly romantic rendition of a very systematic Renaissance canon. Paillard plays the piece at somewhere near half its notated tempo, and I have made the tempo slower still in deference to the evident wisdom of his decision.

In this case, the ‘system’ is a group of performers with a set of instructions – and the ‘input’ is the fragment of Pachelbel. Each variation takes a small section of the score (two or four bars) as its starting point, and permutes the players’ parts such that they overlay each other in ways not suggested by the original score. In ‘Fullness of Wind’ each player’s tempo is decreased, the rate of decrease governed by the pitch of his instrument (bass = slow). “French Catalogues” groups together sets of notes and melodies with time directions gathered from other parts of the score. In ‘Brutal Ardour’, each player has a sequence of notes related to those of the other players, but the sequences are of different lengths so that the original relationships quickly break down.⁹⁸

Eno’s formulation of the various performers and their fragmented instructions give a sense of his own working methodologies elsewhere – the instructions to performers (“bass=slow”) and the permutational potentials of reworking fragments of music and musical activity, as heard in his early solo rock albums. Yet, despite its emphasis on process – as a systems work or in Eno’s own compositional approach – when paired with the machine generated *Discreet Music*, *Three Variations* can’t help but sound anachronistic. The lush romanticism of Pachelbel’s original shines through, even in these conceptualized reworkings.

Listening to *Three Variations* at the suggested low levels perhaps evokes the setting that Eno conjures in *Discreet Music*’s LP liner notes (see Chapter One), a meta-tableau

⁹⁸ Brian Eno, liner notes to *Discreet Music*, Obscure, 1975.

recreating the circumstances that lead to the album's creation. In this regard, as many reviewers were keen to note, side A's *Discreet Music* was a far more successful endeavor in conjuring a quietly sublime environment if, for nothing else, the actual discreteness of the music. Like a pop John Cage work, each gentle repetition of *Discreet Music* - via digital recall of the synthesizer - feels like a comfortable ellipsis, the space between musical phrases flowing softly, breathing openly. It is the sonic sparseness of *Discreet Music* that washes over the listener and blends rather effortlessly into the hum of one's surroundings. Given the translucence of *Discreet Music*, *Three Variations* is downright opaque.

Three Variations retains the stirring polyphony of the orchestral ensemble of Pachelbel's original, with musical lines crossing into others despite Eno's systemizing the work to "break down." Each variation is a mutation to be sure, but what it rests on is the listener's familiarity with *Canon in D* to notice these changes. *Three Variations* is a discreet music for those invested in the popular classics, which, as a reviewer of *Discreet Music* in *Creem* notes, wasn't your average rock or pop music listener: "side two features *Three Variations on the Canon in D Major by Johann Pachelbel*...and I know that given such deliciously enticing data, readers by the thousand will immediately line up at Sam Goody's, with money in the fist and fire-of-longing in the heart."⁹⁹

While clearly a spiritual descendent of the Sinfonia, what *Three Variations* gets at is the listener's own preconceptions and expectations when engaging with the familiar. Lewis suggests that, "The joy of the Sinfonia was in the juxtaposition between what you knew in your head the music ought to be and what you actually heard in your ears. To a great degree we increased the probability of the juxtaposition occurring by playing only pieces that were widely known. It wouldn't have created such an impact if the audiences were unfamiliar with the melodies."¹⁰⁰ Lewis' statement is interesting for the purposes of a larger discussion on the potency and classification of experimental music in that an experiment, by its design,

⁹⁹ James Wolcott, "Nearer My Eno to Thee," *Creem*, April 1976.

¹⁰⁰ Personal correspondence with Lewis.

is meant to be unfamiliar, unforeseen. The Sinfonia, and to a great extent, Eno, represent a contingent of artist-performers who experimentalism as a backdoor process to popular forms that pushes against standard art and music critical tools of assessment. These are strange hybrids, and in their thorniness is the potential to consider the way we engage or accept certain forms.

Unlike Eno, the Sinfonia was too strange a concoction to cut through the various borderlines and boundaries that are placed on networks of experimentalism and popular music. In a critical review of the Sinfonia for *The Guardian*, music writer Merion Bowen takes to task the Sinfonia and Eno's role among them. Bowen writes,

I do believe Transatlantic Records perform a disservice to contemporary music when they single out for special treatment a group like Portsmouth Sinfonia; not because I personally or anyone else happens to think it's a load of rubbish, but because there is an element of fraud in presenting it as the latest exotic arrival in the fun palace of commercially recorded music. One aspect of the promotional deception here is the presence of Brian Eno of Roxy Music, both as performer in the group and producer of their record. Many pop musicians today would dearly like to be highly regarded within the serious music sector; the corollary, of course, applies as well. So here, says Transatlantic, is a project that breaks down the barriers between serious contemporary music and 'pop.' This, they can also say to the pop world, is an avant-garde group that must be good because Eno is in it. It's a key ingredient in a campaign that takes in radio and television appearances by the Sinfonia, concerts at the Mermaid Theatre...and Royal Albert Hall, the goal being to push them in the direction of the charts, whereupon Transatlantic will be laughing all the way to the bank. If it sells, it must be good.¹⁰¹

Bowen's considering Eno as a "key ingredient" in a two-pronged Transatlantic marketing campaign to appeal the Sinfonia to both experimental and pop audiences, speaks volumes to the ensemble's mission. Subjugated to Eno's appearance and Transatlantic's apparently calculated marketing that disingenuously suggests network "boundary breaking," the Sinfonia themselves barely break through. Whether billed as "the world's worst" to the mainstream, amounting to an Eno project in "artsy fartsy" rock newspapers or journals, or appearing as cautiously "experimental" in Nyman's *Experimental Music* book, the Sinfonia's constant mediation through other cultural producers inadvertently stretched their already

¹⁰¹ Merion Bowen, "The Malady Lingers On," *The Guardian*, May 1st, 1974.

self-contradictory premise of not-quite classical, pop, or experimental into weak translations of all three, a condition that has permeated since their “permanent hiatus” in 1980.¹⁰²

The Sinfonia, like Eno, puts into focus the limits of the non-musician, in that the Sinfonia’s lack of musical capabilities gives them precarious footing in terms of such management. The non-musician’s attempts at breaking boundaries could be read as less than successful in terms of their incidentally making themselves borderline cases, open enough to be readily absorbed through the independent projects of others or telegenic comedy. Given this situation, it becomes important to reassemble an organization such as the Sinfonia back into their terms if we are to assess what their contribution might have actually been, a consideration I will carry into the next chapter in examining No Wave.

The Sinfonia’s conceit was not simply, as I hope I have expressed, a distanced critique or a celebration of one’s freedom to choose to remain incapable. The Sinfonia believed in a collective power to transform, setting an example not just of incapability, but of tenacity in numbers that articulated resistance. The Sinfonia’s political legibility was minimal, but what they represented, at their best, is something that is often promised in vain through communicative technology today: a connection. As the Sinfonia violin section struggles through *William Tell*, each player is attempting to get through it together. This struggle is distinct from a general orchestra, in that there is no expectation on another player to get the note right, in fact, the opposite. What is left for the Sinfonia musical player is to attempt to work together with the hope of getting it right. With this interpretation in mind, it is not a stretch to see a utopic corollary between this mode of

¹⁰² To speak of my own, firsthand empirical experience with this situation, I included, at the suggestion of my publisher, both Eno and Nyman’s on the blurb for the back cover and press release of my book on the Sinfonia, *The World’s Worst*. Although I don’t believe there is anything disingenuous about noting Nyman and Eno’s involvement with the group, I am not naïve enough to believe that this wasn’t done for the sake of sales through familiar name recognition. The effect of famous cultural intermediaries on small groups is complicated, and there are a number of reasons – marketing, normative politics, and cultural capital among them – that assist in the continued propagation of culturally mediated narratives of lesser known groups. Lastly, in my conversations with Martin Lewis, he referred to that covered Eno in the 1970s as “artsy fartsy.”

playing music together and other more grassroots collective endeavors, whether in the arts or in activism.

When watching or listening to the Sinfonia's Royal Albert Hall performance, we might question the audience laughter: are they laughing with or at the Sinfonia's bungled playing? The latter laughter suggests a moment of coming together over in collective detached irony, catharsis at the expense of the Sinfonia's musical failure. While there were certainly audience members who saw the ensemble this way (and to some extent, their management as well), I argue the Sinfonia project is better represented by the former. The Sinfonia can be understood as three different types of orchestra, serious, parodic, and experimental, but to make sense of how an audience might find themselves laughing with, rather than at, the Sinfonia, it might be useful to add one final type: camp.¹⁰³

Camp converts failure, the very thing that the Sinfonia does over and over again in their musical playing, into victory. Susan Sontag writes that "things are campy not when they become old – but when we become less involved in them, and can enjoy, instead of being frustrated by, the failure of the attempt."¹⁰⁴ Popular classical music is time honored in its carrying standards of musical tradition and performance. The virtuous character of this music makes it not only difficult to musically perform, but *sound* difficult. Thus, for both the burgeoning musician and the general listener, there is an air of inaccessibility about this music, despite its popular ubiquity.

Viewing the Sinfonia as a camp orchestra concedes what a generous audience might already know: the ensemble isn't just poking fun at classical orchestras but making fun out of them. Their doing this is located largely at the level of allowing others in. This includes

¹⁰³ That the Sinfonia is malleable enough to be reconsidered under so many "types" aligns well with Sianne Ngai's theory of a "zany" aesthetic. Ngai writes that a zany aesthetic is often to do with mimetic behavior, particularly that that requires strenuous labor. The social inflexibility of labor conditions meeting the flexibility of a precarious laborer is a dialectic of comedy that aligns with a zany performer. It is not difficult to see how the Sinfonia, mimetic, performing as an orchestra should not, and wholly flexible (John Farley as incompetent, almost cartoonish figure of a conductor) could fall into this aesthetic category. Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015.

¹⁰⁴ Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," in Raymond James Sontag, ed. *A Susan Sontag Reader*, New York: Farrar Straus, 1982, 113.

the audience (literally so in the *Hallelujah Chorus*), and if they understand the Sinfonia for the campiness that it is, they can laugh not at how bad they are, but rather how difficult it is to be an orchestra, as witnessed by the ensemble's fluffed notes, bungled tempos, and missed beats. What the Sinfonia allowed for, or even demanded to some extent in their premise, was that those listening understand what it might be like to be someone else, to sympathize, empathize, or find joy with them. To say it another way, of utmost importance was the positive value of participation. While operating on a different class of goals than their more musically adventurous contemporaries—many of whom they played alongside—the Sinfonia offered up an experiment in experience by giving their listeners an immediate in, a concession, as Eno notes in “Generating and Organizing,” few of the best orchestras can offer.

Chapter Four:
The Non-Musician in New York: Eno & “No New York”

I.
Four Bursts

On Sunday, March 25th 1979 at New York City’s outré music venue, The Mudd Club, an orchestra of nine players calling themselves the Idiot Orchestra start off their set with four discordant bursts of orchestral instruments (and the very non-orchestral synthesizer). These brief sonic eruptions, a kind of deconstructed count-off, barely phase the gathered audience and Mudd Club regulars but serve their function introducing an orchestra of mostly musically untrained players having a go at being an orchestra. “Four Bursts’ was the way we always started our shows,” Idiot Orchestra co-founder Richard McGuire recalls, “just to blast as loud as we could to clear the air and loosen up.”¹

On the recording of this Mudd Club performance, the “Four Bursts” last barely a minute, but in this sixty seconds of public discord a good deal is revealed about this moment of artistic activity in New York City, that a group of amateurs could find a stage to “blast as loud as they could,” and a gathered audience would act (or react) with indifference. Many miles away, and under slightly different circumstances and milieus, a group of players had recreated the Portsmouth Sinfonia.² Like the Sinfonia, the Idiot Orchestra was formed out of bonds with experimentally minded educators – in this case Fluxus members teaching at Rutgers – alongside a desire to bring art strategies into the seemingly more open world of music making.³ A further parallel with the Sinfonia is found with the *raison d’être* for the Idiot Orchestra, with McGuire stating, “I needed a few more credits to finish my college

¹ Rich Jacobs, “Interview with Richard McGuire,” *Liquid Idiot/Idiot Orchestra Zine*, Superior Viaduct, 2016. The Idiot Orchestra was something of a spinoff of Liquid Idiot, a more rock-oriented group. Eventually, members of both groups would form the more focused dance punk ensemble Liquid Liquid, whose song “Cavern” would famously be sampled on Grandmaster Flash’s “White Lines.” These transformations and affiliations speak to the wide range of activity among a large but incestuous scene.

² To split hairs, the Idiot Orchestra’s performing their own original compositions might better align them with the Majorca Orchestra, but structurally they are similar to the Sinfonia.

³ Fluxus members Robert Watts and Geoffrey Hendricks both taught at Rutgers. See: Geoffrey Hendricks, ed. *Critical Mass: Happenings, Fluxus, Performance, Intermedia, and Rutgers University 1958-1972*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003.

degree. I worked out a deal with a professor to give me the remaining credits if I put together a new band (separate from Liquid Idiot), and he raised the stakes to include recording a record and playing at least one show.”⁴ In the course of the decade, it would seem a sympathy among performance art and music educators towards popular music performance was shared on both sides of the Atlantic. In a final bit of serendipity, McGuire notes “Brian Eno’s solo records were a big influence.”⁵

On Tuesday February 24th, 1981, Glenn O’Brien, an associate of Andy Warhol and host of the public access television show *TV Party*, filled his hour program with a “heavy metal show.”⁶ A prequel to a later event held at the Mudd Club, O’Brien’s band for the evening was an all guitar lineup with Blondie’s Chris Stein, the Contortions’ Patrick Geofrois, Snuky Tate, Jean Michel Basquiat, with “*TV Party Orchestra*” (the house “band”) regulars Lenny Ferrari and Walter Steding on a cardboard guitar (and wearing a long curly black wig). Mocking all the posturing and conventions of acts like Led Zeppelin or Deep Purple, this ensemble creates an excruciating wall of guitar feedback and distorted strumming, the kind not atypical of teenagers starting their first band. “No boundaries, no frontiers!” a performer yells over squealing guitar feedback, and perhaps to prove it, Basquiat leads the band in an impromptu pseudo-rendition of The Kingsmen’s “Louie, Louie.”

It is unclear if the musicians are playing poorly to simply parody the more virtuosic posturing of heavy metal acts, or if the players are simply not very good. Stein, Geofrois, and Tate, were capable guitar players, and Steding was a talented violinist and electronic music composer. Basquiat performed at the time in the band Gray, a group that O’Brien

⁴ The Idiot Orchestra had spun out of Liquid Idiot, a more performance art driven band that once asked audience members to bring their own instruments to play along at the venue. The name of the band came from an Event card work of McGuire’s while in Geoffrey Hendricks’ performance course at Rutgers. I had a box full of words written on cards that were picked randomly and then wrote on a chalkboard. The first two words were “liquid” and “idiot” ...I guess we collectively felt it fit the sounds we were making.” Quotes from *Liquid Idiot Zine*, Superior Viaduct, 2015. The record McGuire refers to is a very limited self-released 7” from 1980, repressed on the compilation *Liquid Idiot/The Idiot Orchestra*, Superior Viaduct, 2015.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *TV Party* appeared weekly on New York City’s ETC public access channel and for a brief period on Channel J from 1978 – 1982.

summarized as, “Like many bands of [their] time...not made up of highly schooled musicians, but...proved that all you need really is a good ear. They were all great listeners.”¹ Nearly everyone in the band approached their chosen instruments intuitively, finding novel ways to play conventional instruments – a steel file on guitar strings, masking tape ripped over and over again on a snare drum – and an affinity for using unconventional ones – tape cassette players and a repurposed shopping cart.

Returning to “The Heavy Metal Show,” O’Brien goes through the motions of introducing the guitar players, noting that one player is “on Les Paul tuned by Brian Eno himself! Just kidding, Bri!”² While a total throwaway line, the joke would seem to imply that such a guitar sound could only come about through the guitar tinkering and treatments of Eno, i.e. the jangly strings of his “snake guitar.”³ For this generation of “great listeners,” Eno had become a household name, not simply for his records, but for methods that gave permission to simply do something to see what happens.⁴ This sense of musical freedom could no doubt allocate a space for extreme self-indulgence – “The Heavy Metal Show” is sybaritic even by public access television standards – but it could also be a liberating force, one that provoked a sense of experimentation or play without an obvious careerist necessity. Just above the Chambers Street subway station, the words “Eno is God” had been spray-painted. Mudd Club doorman and historian Richard Boch mentions seeing this graffiti around New York City so much that it became a symbol of “my New York in 1979.”⁵ If Eno was God for a subset of young artist musicians in New York City in 1979, these little parentheses of musical art activity like “The Heavy Metal Show,” can be seen as apostles.⁶

¹ Glenn O’Brien, “Gray Matters: Rambling Reminisces of Basquiat and his Orchestra,” *GQ*, March 21, 2011.

² *Glenn O’Brien’s TV Party*, “The Heavy Metal Show,” Brink DVD, Dir. Amos Poe, 2007/1981.

³ See footnote nine of Chapter Two on Eno’s snake guitar.

⁴ McGuire recalls that he “remember[ed] reading an interview with Eno where he says he was making art and having fun. We were also listening to Talking Heads and Devo. These were all signals to not take ourselves too seriously.”

⁵ Richard Boch, *The Mudd Club*, New York: Feral House, 2017: 117. The phrase would inevitably be used by Eno’s marketing team on advertisements for his record *Music for Film* (1978) in 1979.

On Wednesday March 19th, 1975, at the invitation of Arthur Russell, Jonathan Richman's band The Modern Lovers played at The Kitchen, a performance art and new music space that grew out of the Mercer Arts Center. Russell had been slowly making his way into a variety of musical circles in the early 1970s, performing in Charlotte Moorman's 1973 New York Avant-Garde Festival on a train, touring with Alice Coltrane, and his performing his own pop-oriented compositions. His tutor, the composer and musician Christian Wolff, was supportive of Russell's forays into popular music, recalling "Composers were so tired of having people not like their music...They were moving into areas where they thought they would give people pleasure...Arthur did this by going into something current...not from a commercial point of view, but because it was interesting."⁷

Like the support of Fluxus faculty for Idiot Orchestra members, an older generation of composers and musicians were giving license to a new one to blur boundaries. The performance artist and musician Jill Kroesen, who studied with Robert Ashley, notes that because he taught them to refuse categorical imperatives – a composer makes music – they thought often in terms of "components," as "artists doing art with music...we didn't think too much about combining art and rock, we just sort of did it."⁸ Resisting categorical imperatives was precisely Russell's move with The Modern Lovers. While The Kitchen was still largely an exclusive venue for performing Post-Cage, experimental, and minimalist music in the early 1970s, boundaries began to shift, not just in compositional ideas, but in sites of performance.

Wolff invited Russell to perform on his *Exercises and Songs* at the Kitchen in May 1974 and in less than a year Russell was programming events, beginning with Annea Lockwood's *Humming and Other Sensory Meditations*. As we saw in Chapter Two, Russell's Kitchen invitations were equal parts expected and non: a venue with a more set ideology of who and what performs like The Kitchen would be a perfect place to host a composer like

⁷ Tim Lawrence, *Hold on to Your Dreams: Arthur Russell and the Downtown Music Scene, 1973-1992*, 160.

⁸ Ibid.

Cornelius Cardew. Cardew's political refusal to engage in any type of "experimental" music making in 1974 was something that Russell had to have been aware of, and the booking almost reads as a means to subvert these expectations.

In 1975, The Modern Lovers had been almost universally heralded as heirs to the throne of The Velvet Underground. Championed by the Velvet's John Cale and name checked by Eno in a song from *Taking Tiger Mountain*: "We saw the Lovers/The Modern Lovers/and they were very good/they looked as if they should."⁹ Such accolades from more artfully minded peers did not change the fact that The Modern Lovers were a rock band and fully proficient as such, featuring songs in a verse chorus verse format, and even a cover of a Chuck Berry song ("Back in the USA"). Rhys Chatham, who began his career as a pupil of composer Morton Subotnick and was The Kitchen's first music director, recalls, "Rock was somehow less. Back in the early 1970s, people were still questioning rock's validity... introduc[ing] rock groups to [The Kitchen's] programming...[was] considered heresy at the time...I was shocked, but it made me think, and I ended up joining in."¹⁰ If Russell's booking of Cardew was an implied sentiment on set borderlines, the appearance of The Modern Lovers at The Kitchen was his grand statement, one that presciently announced a new fickle relationship between art and pop, not even a year after Eno outlined to Cynthia Dagnal his desire to find a meeting place between the two.¹¹

On Friday May 5th, 1978, the fourth, of a five-night exhibition of "New Wave Rock" titled *Bands* at New York City's Artists Space was underway when an altercation broke out. Accounts vary: Contortions front man, James Chance, influenced by the confrontational style of the band Suicide and the sonic assaults of free jazz, had begun to physically assault music critic Robert Christgau's girlfriend; Chance's audience-baiting antics were so

⁹ Brian Eno, "The True Wheel," on *Taking Tiger Mountain (By Strategy)*, 1974.

¹⁰ Chatham in *Hold on to Your Dreams*, 70. Composer and musician Garrett List explains further: "Arthur and I shared this thing about wanting to deal with a language that was more open than minimalism or Cagean music or the uptown scene. We were all talking about trying to find alternatives to this, and the fact that Arthur programmed the Modern Lovers was more like saying, 'Let's really do this shit – let's not just talk about it.'" List in Lawrence, 70.

¹¹ See Chapter One.

obnoxious that Christgau poured a beer on his head; Chance physically assaulted Christgau; Chance was slapping the wife of one of Christgau's friends; some combination of all these. Whatever the case, the general recalled consensus is that the longstanding fantasy of artist and critic fisticuffs finally came to fruition: "I just sat on the scurvy little motherfucker," says Christgau.¹²

"It was a fairly famous gig," says Chance in an interview with Pitchfork's Andy Beta in 2003, "because it was the gig where I attacked Robert Christgau. People always bring that up."¹³ Chance's assessment of his role in giving notoriety to *Bands* has at least some credence from *Artnews*' M.H. Miller. Unable to get any information on the Teenage Jesus and the Jerks performance, from Lydia Lunch ("Don't ask me, because I don't remember") Miller writes, "History, however, remembers this as the night where James Chance...had a confrontation with Robert Christgau, then Village Voice's news critic."¹⁴ As Miller goes on to recount yet another rendition of what artist Michael Zwack (in-attendance at *Bands*) remembered as simply "more show than real...just part of the act," we might begin to wonder just what it was about this one event, this dubious in-performance conflict, that is so resonant, particularly given the scale of the event.¹⁵

"Artists Space will present a five-night series of New Wave Rock," reads the press release for *Bands*, "This area of music has lately received much attention by artists, both as listeners and performers. The series is in keeping with Artists Space policy of presenting what is currently of interest in the art community."¹⁶ Then-Director of Artists Space Helen Winer and Associate Director Ragland Watkins (who replaced Paul McMahon, who played in the group Daily Life at *Bands*) were intrigued by the phenomenon of visual artists starting

¹² Robert Christgau in Coley and Moore, eds. *No Wave*, 74.

¹³ Beta responds, "I'm sure we all still appreciate it," to which Chance dryly replies, "Just you writers. Every writer who brings it up says how glad they are that I attacked him." Andy Beta, "James Chance," *Pitchfork*, April 1, 2003, <https://pitchfork.com/features/interview/5904-james-chance/>. Accessed April 15th, 2020.

¹⁴ M.H. Miller, 'Don't Blame me for Courtney Love!' Lydia Lunch on No Wave, Brian Eno, Rent Strikes, and Legacy." *Artnews*, May 25, 2015.

¹⁵ Michael Zwack in Claudia Gould, Valerie Smith, eds. *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space: 25 Years*, New York: Artists Space, 1998: 82.

¹⁶ Artists Space press release for *Bands*, 1978.

bands. With the assistance of Rhys Chatham (performer in two bands – Tone Death and The Gynecologists- at *Bands*) and artist Robert Longo (who would later do cover art for Daily Life's Glenn Branca) who contacted friends and other performers, the event came together, mingling for a brief moment Lower East Side bands and their Western counterparts.

Of the all performers who played at *Bands* only a handful had a visual practice (most notably sculptor Nancy Arlen), but almost all of them shared the attribute of being amateurs on their chosen musical instruments. Chatham, a skilled piano player and flautist had only just begun playing a guitar as had Branca; Barbara Ess of Daily Life had spent the earlier part of the 1970s working in filmmaking, and was briefly active in the Scratch Orchestra before picking up a bass guitar in 1977; three Eckerd College of Art (St. Petersburg, Florida) graduates, DNA's Arto Lindsay and Mars' Mark Cunningham and Connie Burg had only recently started playing guitar, but immediately set about to using their unfamiliarity to their advantage, crafting a unique, intuitive, and discordant sound; Ikue Mori (DNA) was a Japanese tourist who had never played drums before and could barely speak English, recruited by Lindsay on looks alone, a criteria that would also make up a good number of the Contortions and Teenage Jesus and the Jerks; both Robin Crutchfield (DNA) and Nancy Arlen (Mars) had visual arts practices, and each approached their respective instruments – keyboards for the former, drums for the latter – in a sculptural sense; the classically trained Chance was (ironically) one of the most skilled performers in this group, alongside Daily Life's Christine Hahn who came from a jazz-inclined musical family.

What becomes clear in this assembly line of ramshackle musical talent is a patchwork of anachronistic approaches to what constitutes a rock group. The writer Bernard Gendron observes that many of these artists were “new to rock instrumentation...such amateurishness in turn provided the perfect occasion for [them] to

explore in an unconventional manner the sonic possibilities of their instruments.”¹⁷ These approaches could theoretically be understood in the same way Michael Nyman located experimentalism in the “uncontrolled variables” that occur when a performer is unfamiliar with their musical instrument, such as with the Sinfonia. The Contortions’ Don Christenson puts it another way: “To use a visual arts metaphor, it’s almost like collage. Taking these found objects and putting them in a context of a composition. You get a result that’s very unique and very rich.”¹⁸

Given such an emphasis on visuality and conceptualism by some of these performers at *Bands* (others, like Lunch, would strongly resist any comparison of their work to artistic practices) – the wild slide guitar of Burg, Contortions’ Adele Bertei playing organ like “it was an extension of my nervous system” – it is not necessarily surprising that *Bands* is less remembered for its musical output than it is for bringing together a collection of people that were almost preternaturally infusing rock music with art strategies. Couple this with the standard difficulties of documentation, particularly for smaller events, of this time, and the fickle and fleeting nature of these bands, and what we are left with is an apocryphal scene, precarious and documentarily obstinate. In the audience on all five nights of *Bands*, was Eno, a fresh expat to New York City, who, around the time Christgau either attacked Chance or vice versa, was already formulating a way to document this unwieldy

II They and Their Friends

New York City decayed into 1980, still reeling from near bankruptcy in 1975, with large swaths of vacant lots peppered clearly on account of “white flight” to the suburbs. Meanwhile, O’Brien was penning a solution. In the *TV Party Manifesto*, O’Brien coins a deliberate oxymoron, “mass localization,” and calls for New York City to become a

¹⁷ Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002, 281.

¹⁸ Marc Masters, *No Wave*, London: Black Dog Press, 2007, 90.

sovereign state, re-structured as an independent port city, “THE FREE PORT OF NEW YORK CITY [sic].”¹⁹ Using the homogeneity of television programming as evidence, O’Brien writes that, “CONTINENTAL PROGRAMMING [sic] is the enemy of culture which is always local. A national American culture is as impossible as it is undesirable.”²⁰ O’Brien continues

The only cure is MASS LOCALIZATION. Independence for NEW YORK is just the first step in creating a DIVIDED STATES OF AMERICA and a DIVIDED NATIONS (D.N.). Culture begins with LOCAL PROGRAMMING. The failure of National Networks [sic] is the same as the failure of the National Government [sic]. Local programming and fully empowered local government can make this city as good as it is in REALITY. But as it is our REALITY is constantly assaulted by dreams and visions of an inferior quality. NEW YORK is American’s greatest center of culture, but this culture is nearly totally blacked out of radio and television communication. NEW YORK has dozens of the greatest bands in modern music, but their music is not played on the radio... Why should we import all of this “talent” so inferior to our own? We are not doing it. It is being beamed in. The Networks [sic] are polluting our environment.²¹

Part polemic, textual performance, and screed mimicry, it’s difficult to pin down the seriousness of O’Brien’s sentiments in *TV Party Manifesto*. O’Brien, planning to run for New York City mayor at the time of his writing this essay, always began *TV Party* with something of a catchphrase: “TV Party, the cocktail party that might also be a political party.” While the TV Party’s set featured hung posters of Nietzsche and Lenin, its politics were, much like *TV Party Manifesto*, seemingly obtuse or performed, with the most direct political commentary often coming from Basquiat’s playing with the camera’s screen text keyboard. Of course, a cocktail party entails social activity, and O’Brien’s belief that “SOCIAL affinity groups will provide the foundation for any effective political action,” gives us a small communitarian demystification of what it “might also be.”

¹⁹ Glenn O’Brien, “TV Party Manifesto,” *East Village Eye*, 1980. There is a precedent to this act with Gertrude Drick, Marcel Duchamp, Frederick Ellis, Allen Russell Mann, John Sloan, and Betty Turner climbing the Washington Square Arch and declaring it the Independent Republic of Greenwich Village on January 23rd, 1917.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

What can be parsed out from both *TV Party* and *TV Party Manifesto*, is the strong urge to support, engage, and espouse the power of localized scenes.²² What made *TV Party* such an anomaly as a television program was the sense that you truly had wandered into a party, and retroactively it acts as a time capsule of the concerns, ideas, people, music, art, and id of its time (1978-82). Fab Five Freddie (Fred Braithwaite) dresses as a dime bag for a Halloween episode; Blondie's Debbie Harry teaches the audience to pogo dance; famous folks like George Clinton and David Bowie get the royal treatment, while Robert Fripp and the Clash's Mick Jones get stuck answering viewer phone calls; which is to say nothing of the acts that performed: Arthur Russell's Loose Joints, David Byrne, Tuxedomoon, David Van Tieghem, DNA, Klaus Nomi, Charles Rocket, John Lurie, among a number of other then-contemporary (and now forgotten) groups and artists of late 1970s New York City. In short, *TV Party* was a landmark, like the Mudd Club, CBGB's, or Max's; this was a large black "x" marking the spot where youth culture converged.

Histories of this moment have largely organized these sprawling and unwieldy acts into site specific networks. In their book *Art into Pop*, Simon Frith and Howard Horne write, "[the] most significant art/pop community came together in the Mercer Arts Center...where experimental artists (like Laurie Anderson) met a new generation of pop-oriented art school graduates (like Chris Stein of Blondie and Alan Vega of Suicide). The importance of the Mercer lay in the way it accounted for rock n' rollers and avant-gardist's mutual interests...[it] encouraged continuation of the kinds of collaboration between high and low art staged in the 1960s in The Factory."²³ The Mercer Arts Center, which would also be home to The Kitchen during this time, is described in similarly influential terms by Bernard Gendron, with the aesthetics of its many pluralistic activities "embracing a return trip to innocence through a kind of hopeful, energetic, vivacious amateurism."²⁴

²² See Ken Weiner's "Punk Map of NYC" in *Punk Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 14, May/June 1978.

²³ Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop*, London: Routledge, 1987, 112.

²⁴ Gendron, 187.

Tom Lawson, who, with Susan Morgan, co-founded *Real Life* magazine (1979), a publication “by and about artists,” writes that, “There was a kind of hub of activity for artists coming to the city around Artists Space at that time – it was a place where you met people. It was an exhibition space, but it also had a social aspect to it and the mission was to encourage things.”²⁵ Artist and drummer for the bands Daily Life and the Static, Christine Hahn recalls that “Barnabus Rex was the place to be...Richard Serra came in a lot, Dennis Oppenheim, Rupert Smith, other artists...it was a gathering place for artists, musicians, filmmakers, and videographers.”²⁶ Then there were of course the inexpensive neighborhoods, the proximity between friends and spaces being enough to encourage ample cross pollination and experimentation. Rhys Chatham recollects:

We all lived in close proximity to each other and went to the same breakfast places, bars, and performance spaces, which consisted of living lofts as well as alternative arts spaces. This prompted the sharing of ideas and all manner of cross experimentation. We were a close family playing in each other's bands...²⁷

Predictably, there was scene competition between the Soho contingent of musical performers, who leaned more towards an avant-garde and arts tradition, and their East Village cohorts, who leaned towards a more outwardly deconstructive approach to their activity (which is to say nothing of this scene's general lack of integration with black and queer scenes, particularly disco).²⁸ Outside of this geographic temperament, what becomes clear is that many artists who came to New York City during this time were not necessarily bound by any political affinities, ideological goals, or manifestos, but rather were guided by a network of associations. At least, this is what the wealth of material on this scene, and the participants within it, suggests.

²⁵ Thomas Lawson in “Interview with Tom Lawson and Susan Morgan, July 6th, 2015.” In Sarah Lowndes, *The DIY Movement in Art, Music, and Publishing: Subjugated Knowledges*, New York: Routledge, 2016, 222.

²⁶ Christine Hahn in Moore and Coley, *No Wave*, 59.

²⁷ Chatham in David Toop, “The Flying Heart,” *Wire*, January 2004.

²⁸ See Tim Lawrence's *Hold on to Your Dreams and Love Saves the Day: A History of American Dance Music Culture 1970-1979*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004 for two surveys on the lack of integration between rock and disco cultures in New York City during this time period.

Another way we might see this network put itself together is through the various nomenclatures, banners, (sub)genres, zines, and recordings – which is to say, media materials-designated by other cultural intermediaries. These locutionary forces aimed, to various degrees of success, to give order to this vast and difficult to define activity that was occurring seemingly on account of this mass localization. Latour writes that

We are always misunderstanding the efficacy of forces: we attribute things to them that have only been lent. We hold them to be pure, though they would be completely impotent if this were the case. When we look at the way in which they work, we discover bits and pieces that can never be added up. Each network is sparse, empty, fragile, and heterogeneous. It becomes strong only when it spreads out and arrays weak allies.²⁹

The most lasting of these efforts to organize this messy network by “forces,” have been two genre markers: “new wave” and “no wave.”

In the early 1970s, music critic Lester Bangs, and those influenced and affiliated with him, championed the sloppy musical playing of 1960s rock groups such as Question Mark and the Mysterions and the Troggs. The musical ineptness of groups such as these, coupled with their willful disengagement from any kind of grand artistic statement, were christened punk. By 1976-77, this tendency in musical playing came quickly to the forefront, particularly in Britain, and flamed out. In its wake were artists, many of them studied (art college graduates) attracted to the pieces of punk, its rebellious disaffection, allowance of musical ineptitude without the grandstanding of vanguard tradition and working-class acceptance. Tethering these attributes to the poetic or conceptual, these performers would be dubbed “new wave,” a genre marker that would orbit a number of groups into the 1980s.

“No Wave,” is a far trickier nomenclature, one that attempts to give order to a small scene of artists-cum-musicians, many of them entirely unable to play their chosen instruments and typified by the performers at Artists Space. The etymology of the term is, like most scene marker identifications, permeable, with its origins coming from either the surf-inspired cover of a NYU music/arts scene report zine, *NO* magazine, an offhand

²⁹ Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988, 206

interview comment from Teenage Jesus and the Jerks frontwoman Lydia Lunch, or as a general riposte to new wave. Subsequent (and few) histories of no wave, have honed in on that “no” as a guiding principle to summarize a noisy and perceived nihilistic performance and music aesthetic, but the term, like “new wave” or “punk” was never a formally agreed upon thing by anyone, except perhaps retroactively as a means to organize their activity.

A major exception occurs in 1978, and this is where we return to Eno, watching Robert Christgau sit on Chance during *Bands* at artists space. I have outlined the many different ways in which New York City performance activity was organized or self-organized during this time – site specific socializing, scene building by media apparatuses – to give a sense of the precarious and fiercely local world that Eno was entering into. The “Eno is God,” subway graffiti was a tell: this was a network that Eno very well could have influenced into being. Yet, this kind of essentialist logic of influence ignores what has always been the subtext between god and men, the struggle against orthodoxies of the old and the realities of now.

The mass locals of New York City in this time, although sharing the tendencies and aesthetics of Eno, the non-musician par excellence, viewed Eno with reverence and suspicion. In a scene where religion was, to parse the artist Dan Graham (who strongly championed no wave groups The Static and its guitarist Glenn Branca), rock, and its accompanying attributes of friendship, survival, and shared collective activity and art making, Eno was as much insider as outsider. For evidence of this, when Eno decided, following *Bands*, to produce a recorded compilation of the acts he saw, he simultaneously “lift[ed] up” No Wave, and “destroyed” it.³⁰ To understand how this happened requires an investigation into what Eno might have found appealing about these groups, his attitude towards the LP as a viable reproduction of time and space, particularly in relationship to his own newfound home in New York City, and finally, a tracing of the precarity of how

³⁰ First quote: Marc Masters, *No Wave*, 199. Second, Branca in Coley, Moore, eds. *No Wave*, 78

networks get formed, are tended, and can dramatically shift directions with certain interventions.

III Into the Emotional Base

Eno's first time in New York City was in 1972. He took a 24-hour, whirlwind tour of record company wining and dining before kicking off Roxy Music's first U.S. tour. Midway through an evening dinner with Roxy and various friends and label honchos, Eno expressed his frustration: "What am I doing here? This is my first time in New York and I'm sitting in a bloody restaurant. I feel as if there are magnets surrounding the entire building and I'm trapped in here! I want to go to Harlem, I want to go to 42nd Street, I want to go downtown, uptown!"³¹ Despite the limited exposure, and New York's ambivalent reaction to Roxy's debut Eno was smitten with the city.³²

Reflecting on this New York City visit to *Creem*'s Lisa Robinson, Eno reveals that "there are two places where I'm emotionally based...One is the English countryside, where I was born and bred, the other is the heart of New York City, partially because where I was brought up there were two American air bases which left their mark on me in terms of music in particular, and I kind of lived with that mood. And I've got this feeling, which is totally unfounded in fact, that I will be totally at home in New York, and that I really know it very well."³³ Eno put his gut feeling to the test when he moved to New York City in 1978, drawn in part to his perception of the city as "the center of the most tension and energy [on the planet]," as well as having a close bond working with the Talking Heads' David Byrne.³⁴ Yet, as Simon Reynolds remarks, as Eno's New York City tenure wore on, his work increasingly seemed to air a sense of "homesickness," and further, "all the things that he once found so magnetic about New York – the border crossing conversations, the musical

³¹ Eno in Lisa Robinson, "Ferry Across the Atlantic," *Disc*, December 30, 1972.

³² Roxy's opened for the much more conventional rock band Jethro Tull.

³³ Eno in Lisa Robinson, "Roxy Music: Terror in the Rue Morgue," *Creem*, May 1973.

³⁴ Eno's song "King's Lead Hat" from *Before and After Science* is an anagram of "Talking Heads." Further, Eno's vocal delivery on this song bears a strong resemblance to Byrne's.

ferment – had become negatives, a form of mental crowding threatening to his own creativity and equilibrium.”³⁵

Reynolds’ assessment of Eno’s eventual sense of creative and social alienation the longer he lived in New York City is an astute interpretation. But, I would argue that Eno was searching for ways, almost desperately as we shall see, to creatively process his relationship to the city from the start. Eno got an apartment via the Mudd Club’s Steve Maas in mid-May 1978, and by the end of the month decided to use his pull to make a compilation recording of select performers at *Bands*. At this time, Eno was increasingly interested in both capturing space, real and imagined, on record, alongside a growing interest in the physical and social conditions of listening to a recording, a point I will return to shortly. Couple these conceptual concerns with Eno’s psychological adjustment as a cult-celebrity in New York City (“everywhere I go people are running up with cassettes”) and it seems apropos that one of his first initiatives upon moving to a new city would be to capture an element of this new environment – No Wave – on recording.³⁶

IV Of Gynecologists, Visual Music, Agony and Ecstasy

In early 1978, the artist Michael Zwack was tasked by Winer and Watkins to put together a concert series at Artists Space that represented the burgeoning scene of artist-cum-musicians in New York City. Zwack turned to reinstated director of the Kitchen, Rhys Chatham, who just a few years earlier was expressing horror at Arthur Russell’s decision to open the home of vanguard music and performance to the pop driven Modern Lovers. Chatham had studied under electronic musician, Morton Subotnick, and tuned pianos for Glenn Gould and La Monte Young. His founding of The Kitchen (from within the Mercer Arts Center) was to carve out a physical space for emerging and established performance

³⁵ Simon Reynolds, “Brian Eno: Taking Manhattan by Strategy,” *Red Bull Music Academy*, April 25, 2013. <https://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2013/04/brian-eno-in-nyc-feature>. Accessed April 15th, 2020.

³⁶ Eno in Richard Williams, “Energy Fools the Magician,” *Melody Maker*, January 12, 1980.

artists and experimental musician. By early 1978, Chatham had turned his focus almost exclusively to rock music and guitar playing. What changed?

A concert by the Ramones in 1976 was Chatham's first rock concert. It galvanized his interest in rock music as a fertile form to explore. In the Ramones' rank amateur playing – variations on three repeating barre chords – Chatham heard an unresolved dialectic of rock and minimalism, that he immediately took up as a project. Having long resisted rock music, Chatham, a skilled piano player and flautist, found himself back at square one by picking up the guitar. Rather than practice guitar at home, Chatham almost immediately started a band, "a research project more than anything else," with his friend, artist Robert Appleton, and the performance artist, Nina Canal.³⁷

Canal was a Hornsey College of Art graduate who hadn't played music until spending time with Chatham and their mutual friend Robert Appleton. Canal recalls,

I wasn't playing any music...with anyone...[Robert and Rhys] said, 'Do you want to play guitar with us?' and I said, 'Yeah, sure,' and went out and bought a guitar...I had never picked up one in my life before...we started rehearsing and I started trying to play the guitar. And very, quickly, within a few months, we were performing."³⁸

Canal, Appleton, Chatham, and photographer Daile Kaplan (under the pseudonym Heddy Van Dyke) dubbed themselves The Gynecologists. The project "was fun and a bit jokey," says Canal, "but we took it very seriously!"³⁹

There is nothing particularly revelatory about this origin story, and the Gynecologists existed for a little over a year. There are plenty of examples of friends of all musical stripes, starting bands just to play music, particularly around this period of 1976-1980, in which the rise of punk seemed to give permission, as musician Weasel Walter puts it, to let "every asshole in the world [become] a musician..."⁴⁰ Artist Arto Lindsay "cobbled a

³⁷ Rhys Chatham in Will Hermes *Love Goes to Buildings on Fire: Five Years in New York that Changed Music Forever*. New York: Faber & Faber, 2011, 178.

³⁸ Nina Canal in John Tuma, "Nina Canal: Pre-Ut," *Ut: The Wound of Music*, May 18, 1997. <http://web.archive.org/web/19991105141324/http://www.geocities.com/SunsetStrip/Disco/6402/ninar.html>. Accessed April 15th, 2020.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Weasel Walter in Marc Masters, *No Wave*, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007, 5. The full quote reads: "Punk actually turned out to be as much of a failure as it was a success. In the mid-1970s, the punk movement

band together” after being asked by Television manager Terry Ork if he wanted to play at Max’s Kansas City;⁴¹ the conceptual artist and trained pianist Jeffrey Lohn “just decided to start this band” after witnessing a performance by punk band, The Dead Boys, that was “almost like theatre”;⁴² when scouting for players to make up the first iteration of the Contortions, the conservatory-trained musician, James Chance, chose his bandmates visually, choosing artists Pat Place, Adele Bertei, and filmmaker James Nare on their looks rather than any musical competence.⁴³

What was unique about the formation of these groups is that they demonstrate not only the network of activity that was motivated by friendship in New York City at this time, but the appeal of rock (as an artform) to conceptually minded artists and adventurous musicians. Chatham was galvanized to rock through watching the Ramones, but he didn’t go out and start a Ramones-like rock group. Instead, Chatham translated the Ramones into his own terms that were largely informed by his history and work in a network of experimentalism. This type of translation – experimentalism or conceptual art into a vernacular form like rock – exemplifies the corollaries that were cropping up in both networks, particularly with regard to a shared interest in musical deskilling and disavowing training.

The similarities between performance art, vanguard practices, rock and punk performance was particularly noted by the artist Dan Graham. Graham, “desperately, deeply into punk music,” according to Glenn Branca, was a staunch supporter of the crop of art-minded New York bands that began to crop up in the late 1970s, inviting them to play at his

stormed the gates screaming ‘anyone can be a musician!’ This was its success. The fact that in the aftermath every asshole in the world became a musician was its failure.” Lydia Lunch submitted a similar sentiment to *New York Rocker* writer Roy Trakin in 1978: “Every fool in the world has a band now. That’s why I formed a band; I didn’t want to subject myself to some other idiot’s opinions any longer.” Lunch in Roy Trakin, “Out to Lunch,” *New York Rocker*, July/August 1978.

⁴¹ Arto Lindsay in David Fricke, “Freedom Now!” *Mojo*, January 2004.

⁴² Jeffrey Lohn in Masters, *No Wave*, 112.

⁴³ Pat Place: “I was hanging out at CBGB’s and James came up to me and said, ‘I like your hair, do you play an instrument?’” James Nare: “I think Chance just liked the way I looked. I wasn’t doing anything at the time, so I borrowed a guitar off someone and said I could do it.” James Chance says of Adele Bertei: “I just groomed her into the band because I thought she looked great.” All in Masters, *No Wave*, 84.

performances and even briefly starting a record label to press their music.⁴⁴ In 1979, Graham invited The Static, a trio of Glenn Branca, Barbara Ess, and Christine Hahn to follow his performance of *Performer/Audience/Mirror* at Riverside Studios in London. In an interview with William Furlong for the *Audio Arts* recording of this particular performance, Graham explained his theories on the potency of a group such as The Static:

The Static are representative of a group of younger performance artists in New York, who in the last year and a half, have turned to rock music, music that's a synthesis of first generation New York new wave, experimental jazz, and classical music....I think that in a sense there is a gap, that is, they gave up performance to do rock music, firstly as a diversion, and secondly it offered a very serious set of possibilities in terms of entering a much large structure. However, if you look into their music you can see that there are links with John Cage and experimental music which has analogies to advanced theatre. There came a point where it seemed that performance itself wasn't totally exhausted but had become formalized in New York. Everyone was doing it but a number of artists felt the need to try something different, something that was a little more vital and exciting...You have to look at first generation new wave rock like Blondie, The Ramones, or the Talking Heads and you see that when these groups began the theatrical part of what they were doing was predominant, as they became better musicians, the musicianship took over. You had an interest by some of these groups, in particular the Talking Heads, in conceptual art because that's what they were doing in Art School... I also think that you could say that conceptual art leads to performance art leads to the aesthetic of entertainment which in turn leads to professionalism and leads away from the notion of performance as self-expression or autobiography."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ "Graham in "Dan Graham and The Static," *Audio Arts Supplement*, 1979, np. Graham started Theoretical Records which produced three 7" singles: a self-titled release by Theoretical Girls (Glenn Branca and Jeffrey Lohn) in 1978, The Static (Glenn Branca, Barbara Ess, Christine Hahn), *Theoretical Record* (1979), and Glorious Strangers (the duo of Wharton and Carol Tiers), "Media, Media!/Why don't you join the army?" (1980). It's unclear why Graham never started a band himself, particularly given the movement in this direction by other, even well-established artists during this time. A possible reason could be in his own theorization of the links between art and music. If punk bands were performance art of a different name, bound together by the discrete differences of audience and performer, there was already an outlet for Graham in place to explore such a relationship in his own work. p

⁴⁵ Dan Graham in "Dan Graham and The Static," *Audio Arts Supplement*, 1979, np. Despite theoretical links to Cage and his music with these New York bands, there's only one immediate homage in Glenn Branca's composition "Indeterminate Activity for Resultant Masses" (1981). The piece related to Cage's work in that the performer pitches were notated as free and debuted at Chicago's *Dip in the Lake* festival at Navy Pier in 1982, where Cage also performed and witnessed Branca's guitar ensemble play. In an interview during the festival with composer Wim Mertens, Cage spoke strongly against "the political implication" of Branca's performance, saying:

I wouldn't want to live in a society like that, in which someone would be requiring other people to do such an intense thing together...I really didn't like the experience...The Branca [performance] is an example of sheer determination of one person to be followed by the others. Even if you couldn't hear, you could see the situation. That is not a shepherd taking care of the sheep, but of a leader insisting they go eat with him, giving them no freedom whatsoever. The only breath of fresh air that [came was when] ...the amplifier broke. That was the one moment of freedom from the intention. But the moment it was reinstated the intention resumed...I don't think...that the image of that power and intentions and determination would make a society I would want to continue living in.

Graham notes a familiar situation we've encountered with nearly every major subject in this dissertation: a disaffectedness towards a perceived hermetic art world in the 1970s that spurred these artists to engage with the relatively more open – in terms of access and audience – world of pop and rock music. This want for autonomy (whether an art institution was truly a barrier to this or not) was felt to be achievable by these artists outside a recognizable calculus of profitability or an expectation of professionalization. This is what Graham, in a statement similar to what we have seen from Cardew and Eno, speaks to when theorizing that professionalism stifles a form of musical creativity. Artists such as the Talking Heads, in shifting their focus away from the conceptual or performance art strata of their musical approach, became more recognizable (and thus, organizable) within a proper rock context or network. In a situation such as the artist shifting to proper musician, we can start to see how boundaries are formed. Although musical performance without training shared a place in both vanguard and pop worlds, there were limits: at some point, at least to Graham, Talking Heads stopped being an art project and simply became a band, and with that came a new set of expectations, behavior, and approach.⁴⁶

The creative problem of actually (or accidentally) learning the instruments that these artists were playing was something at least a few of the New York bands were aware of.

Glenn Branca reflected in the 1980s: "The real danger for me is getting too involved in

(John Cage in Conversation with Wim Mertens, "So That Each Person is In Charge of Himself," on *Chicago '82: A Dip in the Lake*, Les Disques Du Crêpescule, 1983)

Branca stated later that "I think if Cage had known that what he heard was virtually an homage to him, his reaction would have been very different." Branca in liner notes to *Indeterminate Activity for Resultant Masses*, Atavistic, 2007. It's difficult not to read a little bit of hurt at the perceived misunderstanding by Cage in Branca's words. Yet, as the *Dip in the Lake* festival lineup suggests, lots of activity was born from the permissiveness that Cage seemed to give a generation of adventurous musicians, and much of it – particularly jazz and rock music – he had little to no interest in. For a longer debate on the Branca/Cage rift see: Rick Moody and Tim Ramick, "Swinging Modern Sounds #16: Indeterminate Activity," *The Rumpus*, October 12th, 2009 <https://therumpus.net/2009/10/swinging-modern-sounds-16-indeterminate-activity/>

⁴⁶ Talking Heads are a strange example for Graham to discuss as they (particularly in collaboration with Eno) consistently seemed to lean into their artier indulgences such as using Hugo Ball poetry as lyrics on "I Zimbra," (*Fear of Music*, 1979), David Byrne's preacher like sermonizing on "Once in a Lifetime," and the numerous flourishes – a giant sport coat, a dancing lamp – on their *Stop Making Sense* tour, immortalized by Jonathan Demme in a 1983 film. On the other hand, there is no mistaking the Talking Heads for a performance art group, and this is exactly the point Graham is making. The Talking Heads might have been translating tenets of performance art or Dada into their music and stage show, but they are entirely absent from any canonical histories of either, showing that although pop can influence art and vice versa, some borderline cases are simply not strong enough to crossover.

music theory and 19th century classical technique. I don't want to get too far away from this intuitive feeling I have about the music. I don't want it to get too cerebral and I don't want to get too involved with craft."⁴⁷ Ut's Jacqui Ham spoke of the liberatory quality of not-knowing how to play, saying "None of us had been programmed in rock licks or the correct way of doing things...so we didn't think or act with any sense of restraint."⁴⁸ Arto Lindsay expressed a similar sentiment in a 2004 interview, stating, "I deliberately didn't learn how to play the guitar – I still can't play chords – because I wanted to deal with the instrument as rhythmic and sonic instrument. If I didn't know how to play it, I wouldn't play anything by rote."⁴⁹ For Branca and Lindsay, the haptic possibilities in remaining unskilled at the guitar, as well as avoiding music education precedents, was crucial to their creative musical processes.

Other No Wave artists didn't even attempt to think of their musical playing outside of their own respective art practices. DNA's Robin Crutchfield, a performance artist and occasional collaborator with New York Correspondence School impresario Ray Johnson, claims that he "approached the keyboard sculpturally and geometrically," particularly on his own composition, "Not Moving": "The song was a simple sculptural observation of the expanse and boundaries of the layout of black and white piano keys from extreme left to extreme right; finding the center and playing the black keys against the white ones."⁵⁰ The

⁴⁷ Glenn Branca in Masters, *No Wave*, 129-130.

⁴⁸ Jacqui Ham unpublished interview with Bruce Russell, 1997-2003.

⁴⁹ Arto Lindsay in David Fricke, "Freedom Now!", *Mojo*, January 2004. In 1975, Terry Ork started a punk label, the appropriately named Ork Records, that debuted bands like Television, Richard Hell, The Feelies, and Alex Chilton. The label folded in 1979.

⁵⁰ Robin Crutchfield in Masters, 56. At least one New York Correspondence School meeting lead by Johnson and Crutchfield in 1975 had a musical component, with all female punk band The Erasers (Susan Springfield, Jody Beach, and Jane Fire) performing. Springfield recalls the rationale behind starting a band: "Fine art as I was doing it – you know, making paintings – you spend so much time on them that you can't just sell them cheaply, and so at the end of the day I felt like if I continued to pursue [an] art career, I would only be able to sell it to rich people, because I would have to get enough money to support myself. Music, on the other hand – you can make that available – it was more immediate, and at that time the shows were, like, two bucks." Fire puts it in more explicitly artistic terms: "[the band was] the dematerialization of art in the extreme," a

Contortions' Adele Bertei took a similar conceptual approach to the organ and keyboard, recalling that she "played it like it was an extension of my nervous system...sometimes I'd just beat [the keyboard] with my fists or elbows...once I jumped up on [them] and I kinda danced on them."⁵¹

Considering the performance of music as an extension of visual practice came in handy for Lindsay and Crutchfield in terms of communicating ideas to DNA drummer Ikue Mori, who, at that time, could speak very little English. Devising "abstract solutions," such as dancing (an Eno strategy to his performers as well), hand gestures, and visual diagrams – "a fat man falling down the stairs" or "a rat caught inside a computer."⁵² "The concepts of [DNA] were more artistic than technical," Mori says, "I could have fun with them regardless of my poor English."⁵³ Others, such as Mars' Connie Burg, turned a lack of musical education into an aesthetic. Rather than slowly learn guitar chords, Burg took to the guitar slide, preferring its "natural atonality, using it to make noise rather than notes."⁵⁴ Burg's approach to guitar playing became particularly influential to Contortions guitarist Pat Place, who recalls, "it took me a year to learn how to tune the guitar, but in the meantime what I was doing was working rhythmically...it added an element of necessary chaos."⁵⁵

sentiment reminiscent to Keith Rowe's comment of music as an artform that can escape material commodification (see Chapter Two). See: Jody Berman, "The Forgotten Women of Punk: CBGB Vets the Eraser's on Their Radically Populist Art Punk," *Flavorwire*, Jan. 13, 2016 <https://www.flavorwire.com/555685/the-forgotten-women-of-punk-cbgb-vets-the-erasers-on-their-radically-populist-art-punk> The Erasers put out one single on Ork Records, "Funny/I Won't Give Up," rereleased on *Ork Records: New York, New York*, Numero, 2015.

⁵¹ Adele Bertei in Lisa Genet, "Adele Bertei Interviewed," *East Village Eye*, February 1980.

⁵² Robin Crutchfield in Masters, 53. Arto Lindsay had some experience with visual communication to breakdown the language barrier while growing up bilingual in Brazil.

⁵³ Ikue Mori in Masters, 53. In collaborations today, Mori still often works this way: "Basically I get to do my own thing, because you can't really write a classically notated score for me. Sometimes there are graphic scores which specify very basic requests, like a really low sound at one point or a 'monster coming' kind of sound. But most mainly just say when I should come in and out. So as long as the exact in and out [points] are set, I can do whatever I want, whatever I feel [during the performance]." Ikue Mori in Frank J. Oteri, "Ikue Mori: At Home in Strange Lands," *New Music Box*, August 1, 2009. <https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/ikue-mori-at-home-in-strange-lands/>

⁵⁴ Masters, 44.

⁵⁵ Pat Place in Masters, 90.

None of these musicians outwardly called themselves “non-musicians” in the way that Eno did, perhaps because by 1978, the term seemed redundant given the ubiquity of musical amateurism in punk. Nonetheless, they shared an emphasis on circumventing training or professionalism to avoid disrupting their musical innocence and advocated for the intuitive play of music as something to consider as an artistic medium. With this shared emphasis towards musical playing among a good number of No Wave performers, which critic Roy Trakin called a “very visual web of music,” it’s important to remember that while they shared conceptual symmetry, their connection was truly at the level of community or scene rather than any explicitly stated goal.⁵⁶ A handful of these bands shared a practice space, shared bills (but mostly played together at Lohn’s loft space), and even shared members.

Such cross-pollination certainly accounts for how music and ideas were shared among bands, but this does not mean they had similar ambitions. “No Wave [was] invented by editors at the *Soho Weekly News*,” Lindsay says in 2004, suggesting that the name was devised by writers and critics to organize these difficult to classify groups into something more coherent.⁵⁷ The No Wave groups were not experimental enough to be classified by geographic markers such as The Kitchen, weren’t directly artful enough to be performance art, but, on the other hand, were too artful to be lumped in with punk. Thus, as Graham notes, working outside of fixed boundary lines can be liberating, but the slightest change of focus can lead to entering into an entirely different network of activity. This is well illustrated by an early event in the brief life of Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, when bassist Gordon Stevenson called the group an “art project” to the press. Teenage Jesus frontwoman, Lydia Lunch, quickly fired him for this transgression, stating “that is not the right attitude.”⁵⁸ James Chance put it even more succinctly in a 1979 interview: “I want

⁵⁶ Roy Trakin, “Avant Kindergarten (Sturm und Drone),” *Soho Weekly News*, February 8, 1979.

⁵⁷ Lindsay in Fricke, “Freedom Now!”

⁵⁸ Lydia Lunch in Masters, 80.

nothing to do with that art bullshit! Whenever I see those art-types is when I get the most violent.”⁵⁹

Whatever personal sentiments Chance and Lunch had towards the relationship between art and music, it didn't prevent them from playing alongside their more art sympathetic peers at an art gallery for *Bands*. Zwack, Chatham, and Longo settled on ten acts: The Communists, Terminal, The Gynecologists, Theoretical Girls, Daily Life, Tone Death, Contortions, DNA, Mars, and Teenage Jesus and the Jerks.⁶⁰ Although much has been made about downtown/uptown rifts among these performers, many of them had played together before in some capacity (four of them - Contortions, DNA, Theoretical Girls, Terminal had shared a bill at the *X Magazine* benefit a month prior, and Daily Life would have played were it not for Paul McMahon's leaving the group), and the *Bands* lineup was more than likely chosen on account of associations rather than any overarching aesthetic or conceptual concerns.⁶¹

⁵⁹ James Chance in Roy Trakin, "Q: Why Interview James Chance? A: Because he's There," *New York Rocker*, January 1979.

⁶⁰ Artist (and future influential house DJ) Johnny Dynell, who briefly played bass with DNA, fronted Terminal, a group with a "punk, downtown avant-garde sensibility" with former Contortions performer Ann De Leon; Glenn Branca played guitar in a duo group, Theoretical Girls, with Jeffrey Lohn, as well as Daily Life with Artists Space organizer and artist Paul McMahon, filmmaker and photographer Barbara Ess, and painter Christine Hahn; Chatham and Canal's own Gynecologists performed as did the debut of his all guitar project, Tone Death, featuring Appleton, Canal, and Love of Life Orchestra's Peter Gordon; The Contortions featured Cleveland musician Adele Bertei, James Chance (James White), Don Christenson, Jody Harris, artist Pat Place, George Scott III; DNA was performance artist Robin Lee Crutchfield, Arto Lindsay, and Ikue Mori; Mars was sculptor Nancy Arlen, China Burg, future art historian Sumner Crane, and musician Mark Cunningham; Teenage Jesus and the Jerks consisted of another Cleveland transplant Bradley Field, Lydia Lunch, and Gordon Stevenson; lost in the ether is Iosta Black, Gerry Hovagimian, and Bob Mason's Communists, who have been entirely absent from any records of this event or elsewhere. Ironically, a photograph by Glenda Hydlar of Communists performing is what is used to illustrate *Bands* in the Artists Space anthology, *500 Artists Return to Artists Space*. Johnny Dynell interview with Bill Brewster, October 1998. <https://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2018/01/johnny-dynell-interview>. Accessed April 15th, 2020.

⁶¹ In April 1978 alone The Gynecologists played with Daily Life and Terminal's Charlie Nash in his other band, Arsenal (of which Chatham was a member) as well as a loft apartment show where the Contortions' Adele Bertei and Pat Place played with Tone Death. On Daily Life at the X Magazine Benefit, Paul McMahon writes: "The first time I left [New York City] was in the spring to visit L.A. [Daily Life] begged me to stay. The X Magazine Benefit was coming up and it would have been our biggest gig to date. I'm afraid I wasn't committed enough." Paul McMahon, "Daily Life," <http://paulmcmahon.tv/daily-life/>. Accessed April 15th, 2020. McMahon was an exhibiting artist and Assistant Director at Artists Space from 1975-77, spending his formative years among artists in and adjacent to Douglas Crimp's infamous and art scene defining *Pictures* exhibition with Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, David Salle, Jack Goldstein, Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince, among others. At Longo's invitation, McMahon created a nightclub performance act, "I'm With Stupid" at the Kitchen: "I tried unsuccessfully to write enough jokes for a standup routine but couldn't and ended up writing songs." McMahon was very influenced by the Modern Lovers, and the switch from standup comedian (sample: "Why did the conceptual art start painting? Because it was a good idea") to troubadour seemed to be fruitful, as his song "Are You Fearless?" prompted Barbara Ess to ask McMahon to join Daily Life. McMahon officially quit Daily Life in June 1978, leaving the trio of Branca, Ess, and Hahn to reform as The Static, while

Perhaps following the logic of a curated art exhibition, of which, in theoretical terms, *Bands* at Artists Space could be considered, this concert series was an introductory survey of the types of musical activity that seemed to be of interest in the moment to artists. None of the groups performing had any consensus with what they were doing (almost all of them would barely last another year, as we shall see), and what seemed to occur was bound by musical experimentation, exploration, and if we believe later critical interpretations a lot of anger. The type of musical activity at *Bands* had yet to be branded as “No Wave,” but the “no” has subsequently been a consistent signifier of refusal that marks the performers of *Bands*, with Marc Masters’ introducing his survey on No Wave: “The key to how such a brief moment could create a lasting impression lies in a single word: ‘No.’”⁶²

There exists only one commercially released recording from *Bands* – a poorly recorded double set by Mars – but the live music from this week of performances remains either non-existent, or under lock and key by the artists themselves.⁶³ What we have to go on in evaluating *Bands* is the music that came later, or occasional photographs, such as the sparse gathered crowd for Tone Death, sitting on the floor, faces wincing, almost all covering their ears (while Barbara Ess, in the thick of this kind of noise at this time, peeks unaffected through an open door).

The recorded music from these groups, as well as magazine and newspapers reviews, and testaments from the artists themselves, are unified in the sentiment that the performers at *Bands* all replaced conventional song structure with a din of barely structured noise, “dark” lyrics sung through strained and wailing vocals and shrieks, a gnarled mirror of their decrepit new home that surely elicited antipathy. Yet, through all the posturing and

McMahon and Nancy Chunn’s loft at 135 Grand Street became a space for No Wave and art pop music the following year (including McMahon’s new group, A Band with Wharton Tiers). See: *135 Grand Street*, dir. Ericka Beckman, 1979.

⁶² Masters, 15.

⁶³ *Mars Live at Artists Space* was released on Feeding Tube Records (Byron Coley and Thurston Moore’s imprint) in 2011. Marc Masters reviews it here: <https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/16166-live-at-artists-space/>. Stanley Elsen reviews it on Weasel Walter’s “ugEXPLODE” website here: <http://weaselwalter.blogspot.com/2011/12/guest-record-review-mars-live-at.html>. Accessed April 15th, 2020.

seriousness of the presentation, the transgressive attitudes and manic stage energy, there is a kind of joy that can, as we have seen with the Sinfonia, be expressed when one gives themselves – or a group in the case of a band – permission to simply play, regardless of social pressures of capability. “The depiction of No Wave as nihilistic came from the outside,” Lindsay recalls, “From the inside it was free music, like ‘60s jazz of Albert Ayler. People assumed it was made out of agony. It was actually ecstasy.”⁶⁴

Visual art had long been the domain of such unfettered playing, and despite the porousness of the rules in art making, these New York City artists felt that world had no place for them as it stood. Rather than make a critique of the institution, these artists started their own, declared themselves an institution, albeit one that would inevitably collapse under the weight of its directionless character. This is why, when organized at Artists Space, there was no overarching theme, or even an attempt to tie their activities to something larger (although the press release claims “new wave rock” there most certainly would be no confusing any of these groups for Blondie or The Talking Heads). The event was simply titled, literally, “Bands,” and within this contradiction of vague literalism, was exactly what these groups were, but also an endless array of possibilities.

Scaling or translating experimentalism or visual art into groups was seeming more like a given than a surprise, and it is within this burgeoning condition that we can start to understand its appeal, both to visual artists at this time, and to Eno. Starting a band or a musical act could simply be an extension of what an artist already did, which accounts for the diversity of endeavors into this type of activity from everyone from Martin Kippenberger to Martha Wilson to Kathryn Bigelow to Al Hansen. Even Joseph Beuys eventually cut a new wave single, *Sonne Statt Reagan* (1982), with an accompanying music video featuring the artist swinging his microphone like a helicopter blade over his famous fedora, more Mick Jagger in this moment than the pedagogue he had spent decades cultivating.

⁶⁴ Arto Lindsay in Fricke, “Freedom Now!”

We could claim, that at this moment, Brecht's Event Scores, Warhol's Pop permissiveness, and even Eno's conceptual methodologies and experiments masked as pop albums, finally trickled down to a generation that was almost preternaturally willing to engage with a type of art making that wasn't bashful about engaging with the commercial. This was "The Pictures Generation" in New York City after all, and Robert Longo, who started a band with Richard Prince called Menthol Wars, summarizes this moment well: "It was amazing to hear music that sounded like your art looked."⁶⁵ Among the mass locals of New York City, many who came from somewhere else, bands and musical activity allowed for the sharing of ideas and cross-pollination that gave shape to their new homes, that provided ad-hoc communities tethered by a willingness to play, regardless of commercial or artistic dividends. On the other hand, this could lead to an artistic diffidence, in which the potency, and particularly the longevity, of these groups could be interpreted as fickle activity, a trendy lark, or at worst, blurry postmodernism that simply fragmented art as an exercise in self-indulgence.

Eno didn't see it this way, but he did seem to be attuned to the relative ephemerality of this artist/music/band impulse at the time, and the need to document a perceived fleeting scene. The ramifications of this endeavor close out this chapter, but it should be noted that, like the new New Yorkers that surrounded him – which included almost every performer on *No New York* – Eno was also embracing the assemblage of a community, a difficult task given his fame and horizontal position among young artists and musicians. Beyond this, there was clearly something about these groups' musical output that resonated with Eno, a sonic disturbance that sundered them from their adventurous, but nonetheless more stable, peers (and even the punks, hence their appearances at art venues). It is perhaps in their art leaning

⁶⁵ Robert Longo in <https://boot-boyz.biz/products/menthol-wars>. Accessed April 15th, 2020. Menthol Wars was Jeffrey Glenn, Joe Hannan, David Linton, Robert Longo, and Richard Prince. Longo had been a staple of the music scene since the mid-1970s, but largely in a visual art capacity, providing his drawings and images most notably as projected sets for Rhys Chatham's performances. According to Douglas Eklund, Longo's "Men in the Cities" drawings were inspired by the "violent contortions of performers such as James Chance and Glenn Branca." (Douglas Eklund, *The Pictures Generation 1974-1984*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009, 236) Longo founded, sang, and fronted Menthol Wars in late 1979, and they lasted long enough to record one song, "Even Lower Manhattan," on the compilation, *Cleveland Confidential* (Terminal Records, 1982).

non-musicality, full of missed accents, slide guitars, and palmed piano keys, that Eno was spotting heirs to a set of new traditions he himself established.

V The Studio as Compositional Tool

At the same time the mass locals of New York City were finding ways to put conceptual art practices and experimental attitudes into vernacular forms, Eno, the consummate non-musician, was finally discovering an instrument he could play well: the studio. If the front end of the 1970s found Eno searching for ways to recalibrate the relationship between art and pop music, the back half found him investigating what there was for him to do now that others were catching on to this impulse. One answer for Eno, was to replace the construction of musical identity with the construction of musical forms, which is to say, composition, albeit a type that was still unconventional. By the mid-to-late 1970s, Eno was finally accepting musicianship in the form of the studio as instrument, realizing that the near infinite possibilities of playing the studio negated any need for such metrics of pop or experimental, stating in 1979, “I don’t really have a musical identity outside of studios.”⁶⁶

Eno was creatively using the studio as early as 1973, particularly in terms of the in-studio musical experiments in attempted anachronistic performer pairings, usage of *Oblique Strategies* cards, and a more general proclivity for using technology to edit and play with sound combinations. This reached its apex on the occasion of Eno’s third solo record, *Another Green World*, a departure from the everything-but-the-kitchen-sink approach of his previous solo work. Rather than enter the studio with any conception of what he might be doing, he came to craft *Another Green World*’s song organically, using the studio and performers he had on hand.

“The specific purpose of the experiment was to put together this group which would work together in a way which would be impossible to predict,” Eno explained during his

⁶⁶ Brian Eno, “The Studio as Compositional Tool Part 2,” *Downbeat*, August 1983, 51.

lecture tour of colleges in 1975, “I fed in enough information to get something to happen, and the chemical equation of interaction between the various styles of the musicians involved - who were intelligent enough not to retreat from a situation which was musically strange - took us somewhere that we would have been unable to design.”⁶⁷ The resulting experiments, as much a product of conceptual and editing intervention by Eno as musical performance, were often quiet and atmospheric, musical miniatures that seemed to evoke the very unknown places that occurred in the music’s creation. This becomes further evident in the song titles: “Over Fire Island,” “In Dark Trees,” “The Big Ship,” “Everything Merges with the Night,” and the album’s title track.

That so much of *Another Green World* was created in the studio, that the songs came out of semi-structured experiments and musical improvisations, which is to say nothing of the rich evocations of space that emerged from this process, led Eno to begin to formulate his role as a studio composer. In many ways, *Another Green World* follows a musical tradition of using sound as a means to evoke a sense of place, à la Maurice Ravel’s *The Seasons*, or even the “travel” LPs that flooded the market in the late 1950s-60s, such as the Les Baxter’s exotica albums, or the Hawaiian music LPs that popped up after Hawaii’s official statehood in 1959. Where *Another Green World* diverges crucially, is in Eno’s using the studio as a means to create a composition, not simply capture one.⁶⁸

By 1979, Eno had formulated a working thesis on the potentials of crafting music in the studio, and presented a lecture entitled “The Studio as a Compositional Tool” at The Kitchen for their ten-day festival, “New Music New York.” Major themes of Eno’s lecture were to do with considering the studio as a musical instrument, the cultural shift from literate (notation) to post-literate composing (studio), and the spatio-temporal potentials in recording in general. “The effect of recording is that it takes music out of the time dimension and puts it in the space dimension,” Eno writes,

⁶⁷ Eno in “Eno: Class of ’75,” *Melody Maker*, November 29, 1975. See Chapter One for more on this lecture tour.

⁶⁸ See Geeta Dayal’s *Another Green World* for a book-length survey on Eno’s processes and methods making this album.

As soon as you record something, you make it available for any situation that has a record player. You take it out of the ambience and locale in which it was made, and it can be transposed into any situation. This morning I was listening to a Thai lady singing; I can hear the sound of the St. Sophia Church in Belgrade or Max's Kansas City in my own apartment, and I can listen with a fair degree of conviction about what these sounds mean. As Marshall McLuhan said, it makes all music present. So not only is the whole history of our music with us now, in some sense, on record, but the whole global musical culture is also available. That means that a composer is really in the position, if he listens to records a lot, of having a culture unbounded, both temporally and geographically, and therefore it's not at all surprising that composers should have ceased writing in a European classical tradition, and have branched out into all sorts of other experiments.⁶⁹

Eno called this the “detachable aspect” of recording, and the “degree of conviction” in which the LP makes music (or sound) present was precisely what Eno was playing with in his own compositions that conjured up faraway places and spatial atmospheres such as those on *Another Green World*. Space could be played with, as could a sense of time in recording. Although Eno does explicitly mention it in “The Studio as Compositional Tool,” the use of fades and segueing is a common motif on Eno’s solo records, most explicitly on longer works, such as the two tracks that made up *No Pussyfooting* (1973) – “The Heavenly Music Corporation” and “Swastika Girls” – both long enough that they would reappear on a later Eno single in a different form under the title “Later On,” suggesting these compositions are still going on somewhere else.⁷⁰ Compositions such as those from *No Pussyfooting* or “Discreet Music” sound as if they could go on infinitely, and as they are composed via automatic systems such as tape loops and recall programs, they theoretically could (at least until the machines inevitably break down). In this case the material form of the actual LP – the amount of sound that could go on it – was a restriction and made such an endeavor impossible.

The material form of the LP affected Eno’s approach to composition, which is perhaps one reason why there are so many simple musical miniatures by Eno that fade in

⁶⁹ Brian Eno, “The Studio as Compositional Tool,” *Pro-Session: The Studio as Compositional Tool Part 1*, *Downbeat*, July 1983, 57.

⁷⁰ “Later On” is the B-Side to Eno’s single “Seven Deadly Finns” (1974).

and fade out.⁷¹ *The Big Ship*, one of a suite of six instrumentals entirely performed by Eno on *Another Green World*, fades in to repeating overlapping synthesizer lines that carry on for a little under three minutes before the song fades out again. There are slight variables in the sound of the note changes, the synthesizer sounding almost like the high end of an electric guitar at one point. Very little happens musically on *The Big Ship*, but the fades, note changes, and synthesizer treatments amount to what sounds like *Canon in D* as a slow-moving Doppler effect. Tying this song to its title, it feels as if one, perhaps watching from a smaller ship, had come in contact with the big ship, in the distance, up close, and receding back into the expanse of the ocean.

The Big Ship is just one example - of many after 1975 - of what Eno termed “vertical music” in his compositions. In 1975, Eno theorized to Frank Rose that

We are no longer concerned with making horizontal music, by which I mean music that starts at Point A, develops through Point B and ends at Point C in a kind of logical or semi-logical progression. What’s more interesting is constructing music that is a solid block of interactions...one thing about vertical music is that you can enter it at any point, you don’t have to be in at the beginning.⁷²

What Eno, and many of his late 1970s compositions, advocate for is a type of compositional accumulation, in which music was static, detachable, potentially endless, without hooks or hints of a beginning or end. Vertical music is a type of composition that desires to push against the limits of space and time, a fragment of the journey rather than the entire thing.

Another tenet of composing music vertically was its recyclability. If a composition was crafted without an adherence to sequence – point A to B to C – it could theoretically be used again and again in a number of ways. The radicality of considering the studio as an instrument also came at the level of its offering near infinite possibilities in this regard, and further, a capability for a composition to be forever in flux. In “The Studio as a

⁷¹ Eno has been looking for a way to create variables in a work so that it would go on forever since the 1980s. His video work, *77 Million Paintings* (2006) technically does this, as does his app *Bloom* (2018) in which it is impossible to see the same thing twice. The desire to create works such as these seem to come from a fascination with creating a sense of the eternal or infinite.

⁷² Eno in Rose, “Scaramouche of the Synthesizer.”

Compositional Tool,” Eno discusses the potentials of music’s capability to be reborn, both at the level of practice and in terms of material experience. In his own musical practice, Eno presents examples of how one snippet of his own recorded music had very different lives:

There are two pieces of mine, “Skysaw” from *Another Green World*, and “A Major Groove,” from *Music for Films*, which are exactly the same track, mixed differently, slowed down, and fiddled about with a bit. I also gave it to [new wave band] Ultravox for one of the songs on their first album. It’s been a long way, this backing track. Listen to all three, and you hear what kind of range of difference usage is possible. “M386” on *Music for Films* is another one that’s had four different lives. This is actually quite similar to what reggae producers have been doing for a while. Once you’re on tape, there are so many variations you can make that you don’t really need to spend all that money hiring musicians; you can do a great deal with one piece of work. So, when you buy a reggae record, there’s a 90 percent chance the drummer is Sly Dunbar. You get the impression that Sly Dunbar is chained to a studio seat somewhere in Jamaica, but in fact what happens is that his drum tracks are so interesting, they get used again and again.⁷³

What Eno seems to be embracing in the studio, both in theory and practice, is the capability to make music that was unquantifiable, could be reborn, while at the same time visually expressive and spatially evocative.

Given the ubiquity of recording technology today (included on iPhones), it is perhaps difficult to express the radicality of embracing the studio over live performance in the late 1970s. Author Tim Lawrence, in his book on Arthur Russell, *Hold On To Your Dreams*, positions Eno’s “Studio as Compositional Tool” lecture occurring at around the same moment that Russell and other New York composers and musicians were beginning “to acknowledge that the recording process could generate sound that existed independently of a score.”⁷⁴ New York musician and composer Peter Gordon elaborates that “This approach was something that was in the air, and it was radical.”⁷⁵ Eno had put into words the shift

⁷³ Eno, “The Studio as Compositional Tool,” 57. Eno did some in-studio assistance on Ultravox’s 1976 debut record, *Ultravox!* In a 2014 review of the record, writer Dave Thompson attributes the “grandeur” of the album to Eno’s production. <http://www.allmusic.com/album/ultravox%21-mw0000383872>. Accessed April 15th, 2020.

⁷⁴ Tim Lawrence, *Hold on to Your Dreams*, 163.

⁷⁵ Ibid. Lawrence writes that Russell had a similar feeling, that “music was capable of rebirthing itself constantly.” He continues,

Notes could be linked in an infinite array of combinations, while a multitude of words, rhythms, and textural effects could contribute to the innate complexity of every choice in the music-making process. The pressures of commodity culture limited the extent to which this immanent democracy of sound could flourish, because artists had to discard all but one variation of a piece of music if they hoped to

from visual to aural in composition, a type of post-literate composition that was coming from a generation experiencing music via recordings. The central thesis was that recordings, and particularly the LP, had become a major site for artistic activity, and was more and more supplanting live performance. *Village Voice* writer Tom Johnson notes in a 1979 review of “New Music New York” that “It would have been difficult for any composer attending...not to concede that, as Eno points out, the phonograph record, rather than the public concert, is the major means of musical communication today.”⁷⁶

Eno’s insights into his theoretical, experimental, and practical usage of the studio in “The Studio as a Compositional Tool,” demystified somewhat his rather complex approach to composing and recording. In the years of 1977-80, Eno was extremely prolific, and much of his solo recording output falls under a rubric of theoretical or practical activity discussed in “The Studio as a Compositional Tool.”⁷⁷ *Before and After Science* (1977) Eno’s fifth solo record, was a clear product of his own artistic transition, with one side dedicated to the more pop inclined experimentation of *Warm Jets* or *Tiger Mountain*, while the other was an extension of ideas stemming from *Another Green World*. The two competing sides of Eno were made manifest on *Before and After Science* and such a maneuver had found him questioning this impasse: “I don’t know how pleased I am with what I’ve done,” Eno remarked to *NME*’s Ian McDonald in 1977, “Robert Wyatt said to me once that you commit yourself to what you’re left with – you know that this is the only thing left that you can do.”⁷⁸

On the back sleeve of *Before and After Science* Eno calls these compositions “fourteen pictures.” This descriptor gives a sense of Eno’s own artistic sentiments of the visual

make some money from selling it. Yet, music’s will to freedom was hard to contain, and each recording was capable of being reborn – played differently and experienced differently – in an unquantifiable range of settings. (189-90)

⁷⁶ Tom Johnson, “New Music, New York, New Institution,” *The Village Voice*, July 2nd, 1979.

⁷⁷ *Before and After Science* (1977), Eno’s fourth solo record, was, like his David Bowie collaborations of the same year (*Low* and *Heroes*), divided into two sides. Side A is something of a return to *Warm Jets* and *Tiger Mountain* territory. Side B is a slower more atmospheric affair, akin to *Another Green World*.

⁷⁸ Eno in Ian McDonald, “Another False World Part 2: How to Make a Modern Record,” *New Musical Express*, December 3rd, 1977.

qualities of his music on the album, but he also aligns these compositions with the four actual pictures that were included with *Before and After Science*. Four offset prints of watercolors by *Oblique Strategies* co-author and artist, Peter Schmidt accompanied the first pressing of *Before and After Science* – *Four Years*, *The Other House*, *The Road to the Crater*, and *Look at September Look at October*.

Each print is a depiction of isolation, three taking place indoors, and the odd angles seem to suggest that these landscapes are being seen through the viewer's eyes, particularly *Look at September Look at October*, in which the view is the backside of a canvas on a desk, in front of a window looking out at a large tree among neighborhood houses. Rather than evoking loneliness, these four prints seem to put us right at the precipice of mobility, an ominously large staircase, two inviting windows outside, and a mountain towards an endless expanse on account of atmospheric perspective. Although in different mediums, this is a thematic collaboration between Eno and Schmidt, as, again, we are brought into the middle of something, a world in which we find ourselves unsure of how we got there or what happens next. Lester Bangs caught on to Eno's scenic musical proclivities in a 1978 article for *The Village Voice*, writing of *Before and After Science* that "all of this is music you can almost literally see...Peter Schmidt[']s paintings...parallel the music in portraying little (usually interior worlds, lonely and haunted, where often the only human presence seems to be the passive eye of the beholder)."79

An interest in composing spatially, or visual music, continued in Eno's next two records: *Music for Films* (1978), a collection of short compositions designed to accompany non-existent movies; the first of his "Ambient" series, *Ambient 1: Music for Airports*, a realization of his long percolating interest in Muzak and functional recordings for behavioral purposes. In May of 1978, Eno told *Billboard's* Roman Kozak of his current plan to create "mood music records designed for various functions," with the airport being the first site in this new project, on account that "The stuff that is presently played at airports

79 Lester Bangs, "Eno Sings with the Fishes," *The Village Voice*, April 3rd, 1978.

changes your consciousness in quite the wrong way...it is not relaxing at all...I try to make something elegant, beautiful and grand, that makes you think how wonderful it is to be up in the air floating on clouds.”⁸⁰

Like *Discreet Music*, *Music for Airports* was done through an attempt at “interfering as little as possible,” and given the somewhat mechanical process of the album’s conceptual – tape loops running at random, recording in different rooms – it is a surprisingly accessible listen. There are synthesizer washes over Robert Wyatt vocals, slight accents over sustained pianos, and the four pieces that make up *Music for Airports* could, conceivably, go on forever in their looped nature and simplicity. As far as background music goes, it’s surprising in how simultaneously ignorable and interesting it is, something that Lester Bangs picks up on as he notes *Music for Airports* is “mesmerizing even as you only half listen to it.”⁸¹

Music for Films is “the detachable aspect” writ large, while *Music for Airports* is a tacit acknowledgement of the material locus of listening to the LP. It is highly unlikely that, in 1978, one would bring their record player to an airport to listen to this music, and thus it is difficult to parse out, at least in the time, what actual function this record had to a listener (at least until the album was inevitably piped into actual airports) outside of the campiness of its premise, being as Eno described it, “music to resign yourself to the possibility of death.”⁸² Nonetheless, these two records – alongside the prior year’s *Before and After Science* – present a triptych of Eno seriously considering the material nature of recording, its spatial, temporal, social, and artistic value.

It is with all of these concerns in mind that Eno enters New York City, becomes enchanted with a burgeoning scene of artists making music, and decides to put them on record. *No New York* represented the fruits of this desire, and although it sounds absolutely nothing like anything Eno had done before or would ever do again, it has a great deal in

⁸⁰ Eno in Roman Kozak, “Math Qualities of Music Interest Eno,” *Billboard*, May 13, 1978.

⁸¹ Lester Bangs, “Eno,” *Musician*, November 1979. For a book length survey on *Music for Airports* see: John Lysaker, *Brian Eno’s Ambient 1: Music for Airports*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

⁸² Eno in Cynthia Rose, “Oblique Strategies,” *Harpers & Queen*, January 1979.

common with the concepts behind his own work, a fact that accounts for the inevitable tension that would arise in its production, reception, and legacy.

VI Eno as Producer

Eno had limited experience as a producer proper in 1978, his only credits being his contentious role with the Portsmouth Sinfonia LPs (see Chapter 3), John Cale's *Fear*, a solo album by Hawkwind's Robert Calvert, and the bulk of the material released on his *Obscure* label, but his role as an artistic enlightening collaborator had been most prominently (and publicly) showcased with his two albums with David Bowie in 1977, *Low* and *Heroes*. By 1978, Eno was slowly inching his way to working with "new wave" acts, and came to New York and *Bands* from Nassau, where he was producing the Talking Heads' second full length LP, *More Songs About Buildings and Food*.⁸³

As with the musicians who played on his other records, Eno approached his producer role as

trying to construct a situation where people are forced to work creatively, not repetitively. It's trying to set up a situation where people feel positively encouraged to experiment, where they will want to try things out and see how they will work, even if it turns out absurd.⁸⁴

For *More Songs*, recalling his treatment days in Roxy, Eno hooked the Talking Heads directly into the synthesizer at his control desk, his own interventions spurring "new ideas about the way [the group] could approach what it was doing."⁸⁵ Such a hands on approach meant that Eno was seldom a passive presence in the recording studio, only refraining from creative interventions on the artist's desire, as was the case with Devo's *Q: Are We Not Men A: We are Devo*, a recording session Eno called "a waste of time" and "a nightmare."⁸⁶ Eno elaborates further:

⁸³ Eno first encountered the Talking Heads on their London tour in 1977.

⁸⁴ Eno in Roman Kozak, "Math Qualities of Music Interest Eno," *Billboard*, May 13, 1978.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Robert Calvert's *Lucky Leif and the Longships* credits arrangements to the *Oblique Strategies*, giving a sense of what kind of activity was occurring with Eno as producer.

When they turned up to do this record in Germany, they brought a big chest of recordings they'd already done of these same songs. We'd be sitting there working and suddenly [Devo's] Mark Mothersbaugh would be in the chest to retrieve some three-year-old tape, put it on say, 'Right, we want the snare drum to sound like that.' I hate that kind of work... [this way of working] seemed impossible, foolish and stupid. Stupid in that it was a waste of time: here we are in another situation, another time, another place, why not do something for this situation?⁸⁷

What is crucial in Eno's lamenting Devo's reluctance to experiment in the studio is their adherence to a pre-recorded ideal. The recording studio, for Eno, was a space to take advantage of "another situation, another time, another place," and with this in mind we can begin to understand his approach to producing *No New York*, that was, according to James Chance: "...like anti-production."⁸⁸

VII

No New York in a Sound Booth with a *New York Times*

Most histories on the making of *No New York* posit *Bands* as its genesis. The reality was that Eno had seen a number of these musicians prior to *Bands*, at venues intimate – Jeffrey Lohn's loft – and more public – Max's Kansas City, and, according to Mars' Mark Cunningham, had "pretty much made decisions about [recording and compiling *No New York*] before those shows."⁸⁹ Cunningham continues,

The story that's commonly told is that he came to see all the bands in that [five-night performance] series and then decided immediately to do *No New York*; it wasn't like that at all. He had regular contact with all the bands before that.⁹⁰

Cunningham's story is somewhat corroborated by both Adele Bertei – Eno's personal assistant at the time – and Nina Canal, who claim they took Eno to gigs around New York City before *Bands*. Bertei says,

I ran errands for him, bought him French voile socks and porn mags of women with bald head and enormous breasts. Honestly! What I loved about Brian was his spontaneity. He'd make music constantly, play a percussive

⁸⁷ Eno in Gill, "The Oblique Strategist."

⁸⁸ James Chance in Coley and Moore, 74.

⁸⁹ Mark Cunningham in Jordan N. Manone, "How Mark Cunningham Blitzed the Bowery with No Wave Icons Mars," *Observer*, January 19th, 2017. <https://observer.com/2017/01/mark-cunningham-blitzed-bowery-with-no-wave-icons-mars/>. Accessed April 15th, 2020.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

melody on household objects, and he was the first person I'd met who made his own ginger carrot soup and did yoga, which seemed incredibly exotic at the time. He had heard about the downtown bands and asked me to introduce him to people like Arto Lindsay of DNA and James Chance, so I took him around to the gigs.⁹¹

And Canal recalls,

I met Brian when he first came to New York through Robert Fripp's girlfriend, whom I'd met and was doing fashion stuff with. They introduced me to Brian, and we basically hung out a little bit together. I took him around to some alternative concerts and short concert pieces. At that time, some people, like the Theoretical Girls' Jeffrey Lohn -- Jeffrey was a composer -- he had a loft space and every now and again he'd put on these short piece events, and he'd invite all his friends to come and do a three or seven minute piece, or whatever. So, all these people, like Glenn Branca and Rhys and myself and Barbara Ess and a lot of other people from those early days, like Robin, or Arto, or whoever it was, would be invited to do a piece. So, a lot of these people were doing other projects. Most of them were involved in many projects, not just their own band. There were always other things going on. And then the Kitchen Center -- at the time, Rhys ran music at Kitchen -- had short piece evenings, so it was this multifaceted sort of scene. I took Brian around, and we met a lot of people that were in the bands that way. So, I introduced him.⁹²

More than likely, the reason that *Bands* was considered the catalyst for *No New York* is the proximity of which the event happened to Eno's pitching of the recording to Island Records in 1978. Eno recalls,

...I went to Island and said, 'How about putting together what was in effect an archive of stuff by this scene? It's not going to last long; I guarantee that in three months all these bands will be broken up.' You could tell it was a little moment in history. In 1913, in Russia, there were hundreds of tiny art movements, where just a few people would do something together and it would light a spark that stayed around and informed people for a long time. But these things only inform people if they do stay around, so I felt I was in some way performing a small service to history by catching these bands.⁹³

One certainty is that this is the first recording Eno did upon calling New York City his home, a fact that undoubtedly played into his impulse to record *No New York*.⁹⁴

⁹¹ In Zora Van Burden, *Women of the Underground: Music: Cultural Innovators Speak for Themselves*, San Francisco: Manic D Press, 2010,

⁹² Canal in Tuma.

⁹³ Eno in Gill, "The Oblique Strategist."

⁹⁴ In a review of *Bands*, critic Roy Trakin writes that "One would have to say the week-long festival of New Wave bands held at Soho's Artists Space was pretty successful. Among the positive results: Brian Eno, an interested observer on each of the five nights, has become actively involved on the scene as the producer of an Island financed anthology album, including the four primary participants, Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, the Contortions, DNA, and Mars." Trakin, "Nobody Waved Goodbye: *Bands* at Artists Space," July/August 1978 *New York Rocker*, 18. Given the turnaround time between *Bands* and the recording of *No New York*, we could consider that *Bands* was potentially the galvanizing force for Eno's decision to record a compilation, although

Eno's pitching the No Wave groups as tenuous and unstable, and thus of paramount historical importance to document has some resonance with his own *Obscure* record label in terms of its market value being supplanted by its potential for cultural research and development. Yet, *No New York* was distinct from any *Obscure* releases in that it was conceived explicitly as an "archive" recording, more in the mold of the field recordings of songs by Alan Lomax or other ethnographic driven recording endeavors. Although coming from somewhat different aims in terms of historical preservation, there is a corollary between Lomax's act of preserving and fetishizing the seemingly untouched, and Eno's "catching" of these No Wave bands.⁹⁵ In 1990, Alan Lomax reflected on his ethnographic work to National Public Radio host Terry Gross:

For a long time I was a media bug because I saw that the job of a folklorist was to make a bridge between people who had no voice and the big world of communication. That's what I did for the first half of my life, was simply run with a recording machine and record — in the West Indies, in Spain, in Great Britain — and to publish the results because this was the way people could learn that other folks were out there, just as interesting as they were.⁹⁶

we can't rule out the possibility that Trakin's words were enough to set this historical interpretation in motion. David Sheppard writes: "Many [No Wave] groups attracted audiences comprised entirely of the downtown art crowd and so the no wave scene's version of CBGB's was, inevitably, an art gallery — the Artists Space...A clutch of key no wave bands played there during a benefit week in May, and Brian Eno was an audience member at all of them, having been tipped off by [future James Chance manager and partner] Anya Phillips and the *New York Times* music critic John Rockwell." Sheppard, *On Some Faraway Beach*, 290. In Martin James' essay on Eno and *No New York*, "Documenting No Wave: Brian Eno as Urban Ethnographer," he writes, "Eno [explored] his own ethnographic research in the form of a compilation album of the No Wave bands he would witness at the Artists Space in Tribeca...When Brian Eno walked into the Artists' Space festival on Friday night, he witnessed music's boundaries being stretched and redefined as a challenging soundscape to the brutal downtown environment...[and] witnessed a creative maelstrom of interchangeable musicians and artists exploring similar themes as multidisciplinary producers." In Albiez and Pattie, 257, 261. Marc Masters, writing in one, of two published surveys of No Wave, begins the section of his book, "The Origins of No Wave," with *Bands*, writing that "those in attendance were Roy Trakin of *New York Rocker*, John Rockwell of *The New York Times*, Robert Christgau of *The Village Voice*, and most significantly, Brian Eno." Masters, 13. *Bands* isn't mentioned until page 75 of Thurston Moore and Byron Coley's *No Wave Post Punk Underground New York 1976-1980*, who note that an "important factor revolving around this Artists Space series was the presence of Brian Eno...[who] was often seen out and about and there was a lot of chatter about his peregrinations." Coley and Moore continue: "It seems likely that he'd been already exposed to some of these bands during earlier trips to New York...and perhaps he felt there was something special in the air." Moore and Coley, 75.

⁹⁵ The ethnographer James Clifford calls this practice of fetishizing the apparently unknown in culture "pure product," a term borrowed from the William Carlos Williams' poem, *To Elsie* (1923). James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.

⁹⁶ National Public Radio, *Fresh Air*, "Folklorist Alan Lomax: Everyone Has a Story," January 7, 2011. Originally broadcast July 9th, 1990. <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/132733850>. Accessed September 20th, 2020.

Both Eno and Lomax used their respective positions to bring a discreet (or not clearly defined by genre) subset of a given musical culture into a more publicly visible arena. However, as with any anthropological project (particularly on commercial recordings) there can be questions regarding the impulses, motives, and ramifications behind the individual who performs such a preservation act.

Lomax often neglected to get the names of the people who graced his recordings. This omission led to the reception from scholars, music journalists, and historians that he, not the performers on his recordings, was the progenitor of 1950s-60s cultural trends like the folk music revival or rock and roll music. In the case of Eno and *No New York*, a similar situation occurred in that Eno operated on a sincere impulse to use his cache to document an interesting musical phenomenon (as he had done with *Obscure*), but also was acting to fabricate a history that he was at the forefront of (both the lineage of the non-musician, and literally as producer of *No New York*). As writer Martin James astutely notes, Eno's desire for *No New York* to be a documentary exercise was a critically flawed proposition from the start:

Effectively [Eno] placed himself as a figurehead for the scene, his very presence altering the structure of the event he was attempting to document and any pretensions to ethnographic capture was rendered a failure through this. As a document, *No New York* exists less as a representation of 'scenius' [Eno's term for a collective hive mind] than a product of the individual artist's vision; indeed, it can be viewed as an anti-scenius document.⁹⁷

In James' observation of *No New York* as "anti-scenius," we can understand Eno as less documentary-minded, and perhaps more "ethnographer as author."⁹⁸ With *No New York*, Eno could both brand himself beyond its context as "in the know," and tie himself as progenitor of this particular historical moment in New York. James Chance perhaps summarizes the situation most directly:

[Eno] came down promising bands loads. He was going to record us all and make us sound amazing. But he came in like a tourist and picked out a few things which started all this bitching from the other bands.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ James in Albiez and Pattie, 265. James' assertion that Eno ethnographic

⁹⁸ I am borrowing this term from Nicole Polier and William Roseberry's critique of Postmodern ethnography in "Tristes Tropes: Postmodern Anthropologists Encounter the Other and Discover Themselves," *Economy and Society*, 18:2, 1989, 246.

⁹⁹ James Chance in Ibid. 264.

No New York positioned Eno as a kind of cultural tourist, deciding on recording a subset of a scene as a preservation act built upon assumption. While Eno was prescient in his own prediction that many of these bands would flame out quickly – all but DNA broke up in the year following *No New York* – he did not account for his own role in the demise of these groups. When Glenn Branca claims that, “I don’t think it was his fault...but what [Eno] did destroyed No Wave,” he is talking about the sharp divisions that Eno created by placing an already precarious experimental premise – playing music badly in public as a form of expression and artistic protest – into a form of material scrutiny, which is to say nothing of the animosity *No New York* generated between the groups.¹⁰⁰

Island, who time and time again seemed unable to resist Eno’s business acumen – or as David Sheppard writes, his role as “seasoned arbiter of vanguard taste” – agreed to the recording under extremely limited circumstances: four evenings total of recording and a limited pressing of one record that would be distributed via Island’s ancillary outpost label, Antilles.¹⁰¹ Such an agreement meant turnaround time would be tight, and these conditions lead to a number of controversial aspects of the recording, christened *No New York* by Lydia Lunch. The first was to do with who would be on the record. If we think of *Bands* as representative of a microcosm of this scene – although it was certainly larger than this event – then there was at least some effort on Eno’s part to choose groups on account of quality over historical accuracy.¹⁰²

Of the ten bands who performed at *Bands* only four were selected for *No New York*: The Contortions, DNA, Mars, and Teenage Jesus and the Jerks. Arto Lindsay claims he and the East Village bands, alongside future Contortions manager and James Chance paramour

¹⁰⁰ Branca in Coley and Moore, 78.

¹⁰¹ Sheppard, 291-92.

¹⁰² Glenn Branca, who was not included on *No New York*, had strong feelings on *No New York* as representative of the scene: “One of the most important bands was the Gynecologists, which was Nina Canal’s band. And if you wanna find a band that truly exemplified the No Wave sound, it was the Gynecologists not DNA. And then there was Rudolph Grey’s fantastic band from Brooklyn, Red Transistor. And there was Alan Vega’s girlfriend, who had a really interesting band called Terminal...But no one knows about these bands. It was all about the four bands that were on *No New York*.” Branca in Moore/Coley, 78.

Anya Phillips, staged a coup to leave off the Soho contingents, in an effort that could have been just as motivated by geographic ideologies as it was an effort to get a few more songs on the record.¹⁰³ Theoretical Girls' Jeffrey Lohn says he was asked to be on *No New York*, but didn't want to be involved, a recollection Eno supports: "[I told the bands that *No New York*] is...this idea of making a catalog of what's going on. As I recall, Theoretical Girls weren't that happy with that and didn't do it."¹⁰⁴ Chatham remembers being asked to participate, but oversleeping the proceedings, a near miss that almost happened with James Chance as well, were it not for a last-minute visit from fellow Contortions Pat Place and Adele Bertei. The other bands at *Bands*, Terminal, Communists, and Daily Life were apparently never considered. Daily Life's Christine Hahn remembers that "Daily Life broke up right after the Artists Space showcase" following a particularly brutal review from Roy Trakin in *Soho Weekly News* that claimed the band "represented the all the worst aspects of the Soho groups. As one would be critic put it, 'They were failed painters, now they're failed musicians.'"¹⁰⁵

With an already skewed approach to a "catalog of what's going on," Eno nonetheless went into New York City's Big Apple Studios in June to start recording each band, many of which had never been in a recording studio before. "Arto Lindsay was incredibly emotional about this chance to get something recorded and was playing in a very emotional and intense manner," Eno recalls, "When he finished, he walked back into the control room and there I was, feet up on the console, reading a magazine! He was absolutely heartbroken that

¹⁰³ : '[Eno] said, 'What about the other bands?' We said, 'There are no other bands.' The Theoretical Girls would have been an obvious choice, but we had a meeting where we said, 'Hey, it would be a much better record if we had a few tracks each.'" Arto Lindsay in Moore and Coley, 77. Lydia Lunch admits to similar sentiments but lays no claim to active thwarting of other bands: "It's been said that I had some influence over keeping the project's perspective narrowed to the most extreme bands of that period. Compilations with just one song from each band are lame, they tell you *nothing*. All of these groups, if you heard one song you hear 'em all, but you might as well get a fat dose. But I wasn't the dictator on the project, I suggested the title, and that was all." Lunch in Stevie Chick, *Psychic Confusion: The Sonic Youth Story*, London: Omnibus Press, 2009, 27. Mars' Mark Cunningham adds: The problem was more that, as there was some effort [from the musicians] to get as much space as possible on the album, there were interests in keeping down the number of bands included. I really didn't participate much in that, so I can't say more about it. It came down to who had more influence with Eno." Cunningham in Manone.

¹⁰⁴ Eno in Moore and Coley, 81.

¹⁰⁵ Christine Hahn in Moore and Coley, 76. Roy Trakin, "Punkclubbing," *Soho Weekly News*, May 11, 1978.

my life had not been changed by what they did.”¹⁰⁶ Lindsay remembers this event vividly: “...we were playing our hearts out, and Eno was sitting there, reading a magazine. I remember challenging him: What are you doing? This is our life.”¹⁰⁷ What Eno seemed to be doing during each band’s recording session was very little. Lunch recalls a similar laissez faire attitude from Eno when Teenage Jesus entered the studio (this time Eno was reading a *New York Times*) and aside from some brief punctuations of activity – encouraging The Contortions to record their warm up cover of James Brown’s “I Can’t Stand Myself” and convincing Mars to add effects to one of their songs – the recording of *No New York* was a relatively straightforward production.¹⁰⁸

Critics seemed to be split on what they heard of Eno’s involvement musically on *No New York*. The *New York Times*’ John Rockwell noted that Eno was “the sort of record producer who hardly contents himself with sitting facelessly in the background, capturing a live band’s sound” – something he literally did while recording The Contortions – but that there was no “false polishing” of any of the bands on *No New York*.¹⁰⁹ *Slash*’s Gorilla Rose writes that “The four cuts from each group are loaded with Eno trademarks,” and that Eno was “easily the Phil Spector of the 70s;” *New York Rocker*’s Roy Trakin called *No New York* a “disappointingly desultory production by Eno,” a sentiment echoed by *Rolling Stone*’s Tom Carson who remarks that “While Eno initiated [*No New York*], he doesn’t seem to have put much energy into it: his production is unusually restrained...he appears more taken with the idea than the actual substance of the music.”¹¹⁰

The music on *No New York* is a patchwork of surprising musical ideas, and despite each band’s allegiance to dissonance, the amateur quality of the playing creates a type of

¹⁰⁶ Eno in Gill, “The Oblique Strategist.”

¹⁰⁷ Lindsay in Fricke, “Freedom Now!”

¹⁰⁸ Simon Reynolds writes: “Only Mars saw any of Eno’s legendary studio wizardry. ‘He was totally hands-on, using the board as an instrument,’ says [Mars] Mark Cunningham. ‘We were actually more conservative than Eno, feeling that the music’s radicalism didn’t need to be saturated in special effects.’” In *Rip it Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-1984*, 147.

¹⁰⁹ John Rockwell, “Eno’s *No New York* Has No Future,” *New York Times*, January 19th, 1978

¹¹⁰ Gorilla Rose, “No New York,” *Slash*, January 1979. Tom Carson, “No New York,” *Rolling Stone*, April 5, 1979.

rock music that was unprecedented, even with punk in the mire of the times. In the playing by these musicians on *No New York*, you can hear the body above all – the fingers scraping the guitar strings, the breath through the saxophone, the pounding of piano keys and rums, and perhaps most affectively, larynxes pushed to their maximum capacity in vocal deliveries. This is corporeal music, and for all the critics hemming of the nasty, subhuman character of this music, the communion between muscle and musical instrument comes together in an anxious marriage of true expressiveness. *No New York* is bleak to be sure, but there is no discounting the joy that these groups clearly had in playing this music.

Eno had little to nothing to do with the shape of these songs on *No New York*, and one reason for this was his clear ambition to catalog and document the groups as a microcosm of mass localization, which is to say, a scene. These were “research bands,” according to Eno, who goes on to compare their work to “fence-posts, the real edges of a territory,” and that their “rarified research...generates a vocabulary that people like me can use.”¹¹¹ For *No New York* to be an art historical document and a pool of ideas for reference and influence for people like Eno, it required him to remove himself as much as possible from the recording process. David Sheppard writes: “[*No New York*] was a documentary exercise after all, and sometimes, even for Eno, the studio wasn’t so much a musical instrument than a deluxe Dictaphone.”¹¹²

A question that arises in Sheppard’s summation is just exactly what other times, or what other occasions, does Eno treat the studio like a deluxe Dictaphone? To some extent this was the case with Eno’s production on the two Portsmouth Sinfonia records, but in that circumstance, as we have seen in Chapter Three, Eno’s role was, according to Martin Lewis, “more editing text than pushing buttons.”¹¹³ This is the one occasion in which Eno brought performers into the studio and, with the exception of the musical-treatment-resistant Mars, just let the tape roll. “I intended to document, as much as possible, rather than a creative

¹¹¹ Eno in John Rockwell, “The Odyssey of Two British Rockers,” *The New York Times*, July 23rd, 1978.

¹¹² Sheppard, *On Some Faraway Beach*, 293.

¹¹³ Personal correspondence with Martin Lewis.

use of the studio just to make something new,” Eno says, and this decision raises a question relative to what he found so disheartening about recording with Devo: if the studio was a space to creatively make music with “another situation, another time, another place,” what made *No New York* an exception to this rule?

VIII Three Skylines

Around the same time as *No New York*, Eno began filming the New York City skyline from his apartment window. Resting the portable video camera on its side on the windowsill, Eno would record for variable lengths of time, capturing indeterminate moments of nothing happening. There is a clear parallel between Eno’s approach to filmmaking here and some of his ‘systems’ works, particularly *Discreet Music*, in which the piece was composed with as little intervention as possible. However, *Discreet Music* was simultaneously a compositional debt to Cagean ego surrender and the Ascottian shedding of identity through engaging with systems, and these almost mournful depictions of a distant city skyline taken from the point of view of a new home read as something close to biographical.

Eno conceptualized these skyline films, the first titled *2 Fifth Avenue* (1979) and the second, *Mistaken Memories of Mediaeval [sic] Manhattan* (1980) in familiar terms. In print, Eno discussed the possibilities of using the video camera to make films when done by non-experts, as well as theorizing the films as an extension of his idea of vertical music: dropping the viewer into the middle of an ongoing scene and, to a literal point, displaying *Mediaeval Memories* on televisions placed vertically to accommodate the frame of the film.¹¹⁴ These

¹¹⁴ “I feel that the big step that video must take towards its own identity will draw on the energy, playfulness, and alertness of dilettantes rather than the starchy pomposities of video art.” Eno, in Press Release for “Mistaken Memories from Mediaeval [sic] Manhattan (for one monitor),” La Foret Museum, Akasaka, Tokyo, Japan, July August, 1983. Christopher Scoates writes that “necessity dictated he reposition the camera from the conventional landscape orientation to a portrait format, turning it on its side to capture in real time the living image of the city. A technical problem caused by damage to the tube that converts the optical image to an electrical signal lent the works an unexpected impressionistic tone, compounded by rain and clouds moving across the skyline.” Scoates, *Visual Music*, 119.

films, like their most logical precedent, Andy Warhol's *Empire* (1964), dispose of narrative for the sake of capture, and act as much as furniture art as they do films.¹¹⁵ On the other hand, Eno's decision to play with the color contrast and lighting, add his own ambient soundtrack, and most notably use these films in site-specific installations at airports (accompanied, of course, to *Music for Airports*) is a far different artistic move than Warhol's desire to capture the movement of time through a stationary city symbol.

Where these films ended up and how they were represented, while very important, is not what I would like to focus on, but rather Eno's act of capture in the first place. There is a direct relationship between Eno's documenting the New York City skyline from his new home and "archiving" New York City music in his new city. The studio of *No New York* served a similar function as his video camera would in filming the New York skyline – passive observer simply documenting what was happening in the moment. Both of these documentary exercises, although coming from entirely different disciplinary (and literal) spaces, share an emphasis by Eno on avoiding the beginnings and ends of things: an unchanging skyline, oft overlooked by its residents, and an underground music scene that Eno entered like a "tourist" and immortalized on record. Both are, like the music and prints of *Before and After Science*, snapshots of moments from a fleeting point of view.

Compare the handling of New York skylines in *2 Fifth Avenue* or *Mediaeval Memories* to those found in a No Wave affiliated film by Vivienne Dick, another European émigré to New York City just a year prior to Eno's own arrival. A scene from Dick's *Guérillère Talks* (1978) a loose series of vignettes profiling members of the feminist art salon, Les Guérillères, the director films Ikue Mori on a New York City rooftop.¹¹⁶ Mori smokes cigarettes, smiles for the camera, and playfully tries to avoid Dick's camera, running out of frame and hiding behind various rooftop debris. Shot on Super 8 film and having all the hallmarks of an

¹¹⁵ Warhol would screen *Empire* as a backdrop to the music and dancing of his Exploding Plastic Inevitable concerts.

¹¹⁶ The salon was named after Monique Wittig's 1969 feminist novel, *Les Guérillères*. Members included Adele Bertei, Vivienne Dick, Sara Driver, Nan Goldin, Lydia Lunch, Ikue Mori, Pat Place,

intimate home movie, this scene with Mori is frantic with camera cuts, the city skyline behind the rooftop chopped into fragments and different disorienting angles by this camera work.

Dick's eye of the Super 8 camera shows the New York City skyline in short bursts, and although the subject of this scene is Mori – who points an analogue still camera back at the director in a mirroring gesture not atypical of video during this period – the scene seems as much about place as it is profile. Mori had come to New York City in 1977 from Tokyo on a lark, accompanying a musician friend – brief Contortions performer, Reck – with no real plan other than to “see what was going on” having been “just out of school.”¹¹⁷ Finding friendship and community in the city, particularly over music that “wasn't really about playing and technique” but the concept of “picking up an instrument and [trying] to do something with it,” Mori settled into an East Village apartment indefinitely.¹¹⁸ The relationship to the city in the scene by these two fresh- to-the-city expats – Dick from Ireland and Mori from Japan – is backdrop and foreground, a love letter to friendship and the place they both found it.

The New York City skyline is muse in both Eno and Dick's film, but while the camera eye of the former swallows and savors the city, using long takes to turn the urban landscape into a living still, the quick cuts of the latter treat it blinkingly, almost as familiarly as Mori. One is not “showing” more of New York City than the other, but the long takes in *2 Fifth Avenue* and *Mediaeval Memories* seem to suggest deep engagement, a camera eye dedicated to fully taking in a section of Eno's new home for as long as possible.¹¹⁹ Like Warhol's *Empire*, these films illustrate the passage of time through the minutiae of looking, but the entropy takes a different resonance in coming from Eno's new sense of carving his place out in the city and his deep interest in capturing (or evoking)

¹¹⁷ Mori in Oteri.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. Mori has lived in this same East Village Apartment for the entirety of her time in the USA.

¹¹⁹ It is unlikely, given his attention span in the *No New York* recording booth, that Eno sat with the camera for the entirety of filming.

fleeting moments of travel. Eno remarks to Tom Carson in a *New York Rocker* interview in 1978,

What's happened in the last six weeks I've been in [New York City] is that I've really been trying to find out everything that's going on, so I've been going out every night, virtually, and meeting people, and seeing – I've seen hundreds of bands since I've been here, not only bands but all kinds of music. I just want to thoroughly acquaint myself with what's happening, and I find I now know more about what's happening than most New Yorkers, because they haven't made such a deliberate effort to sample it all, you know. So, I really do have a quite a comprehensive view of what's going on in this city culturally – 'comprehensive' in the sense that it covers painting, sculpture, and writing, and so on and so on...It covers quite a broad spectrum. Now, I did that deliberately because I just wanted to see what there was around to tap, and get interested in, and having now done that, I don't need to carry on doing it. There are certain areas that immediately engaged my attention, and those are the ones I shall pursue.¹²⁰

Going out every night for six weeks, immediately starting an "art historical" recording of scenes that are, by Eno's admission, "very, very tight, [and] don't have any connection with the rest of the world," and filming long takes of the city outside his window, amounts to an intensive engagement with place.¹²¹ Unlike recent city additions such as Dick and Mori, who seem to play in the rubble of the city, Eno seemed intent on "sampling it all," in a voracious manner. In an art and music scene so intensely localized as to be only half-jokingly considered as a sovereign state by Glenn O'Brien, it would seem only fitting that Eno absorb as much as humanly possible.

Unsurprisingly, the fruits of all this activity compelled Eno to produce work centered on a feeling of flux – the precarity of a music scene, skylines from roving new city residencies, and music for airport travel. This feeling is also evident in Eno's cover shoot for *No New York*.

I went with photographer Marcia Resnick and all her gear and a few of the musicians over to the World Trade Center and whilst in there I took that picture using her camera. It was very poor lighting and I did everything wrong with the camera, but I was sort of intrigued with this image that came out. How ephemeral it looked. I don't remember if the figures were someone in our group or not. It had the feeling that I thought this record would have, of something that was momentary and probably was going to disappear. Which

¹²⁰ Tom Carson, "Brian Eno in New York," *New York Rocker*, Vol.1, No. 13, July/August 1978.

¹²¹ Ibid.

was actually true of the World Trade Center, of course. I was very pleased with that cover.¹²²

No New York's cover photograph is one of the few details Eno seems to remember quite clearly about the making of the album, and it's difficult to not consider this photo-shoot – a journey to an international site and symbol of commerce with a ragtag group of artist musicians barely surviving the husk of the city they lived in – as anything but an intended ironic statement.

The making of *No New York*'s cover has never been discussed by any of the bands on *No New York*. Featuring a couple of the musicians on the album cover would have been a strangely redundant choice given that their faces all adorned *No New York*'s backside in submitted individual portraits, a choice made to avoid a group portrait idea in the first place: says Eno, "Oh god a photo session with all those people, what a nightmare."¹²³ That Eno's photo was a blurry shot of non-descript figures, the lighting obscuring any sense of familiar place or even space, can't help but feel like a brief record of anonymity, giving credence to his own sense of the photograph's ephemerality. To this end, *No New York*, straight from the cover, is New York City from an obscure perspective, a product of finding oneself in the middle of something strange and new.

Clearly, *No New York* was as much about Eno's artistic and personal transition as it was about the nascent ephemerality of art and music scenes. For it to be either of these things, however, is for it to be Eno's rather than the bands' the record documents. To set up an ethnographic recording in the first place was, like his use of Marcia Resnick's camera, a snapshot from an outsider, a quick representation of someone else's life. This was always going to be controversial in a scene run on mass localization, but even more so when introducing the element of a famous art rock icon into the mix. How could Eno objectively document these groups without making them his own?

¹²² Eno in Moore and Coley, 83. Eno quote ca. 2007.

¹²³ Eno in Moore and Coley, 82.

Rather than act simply as a time capsule, *No New York* creates a boundary line, organizes a porous concept such as translating rock music through artistic methodologies into a set of conventions. This was the danger with someone of Eno's cultural cache – and even conceptual artistic similarities – getting involved: historians would pick up on what Eno was doing in New York in 1978 before they would anyone else involved on *No New York*, and this is the crucial flaw that James speaks to when he calls the record an “anti-scenius document.”

While it is disingenuous to fault Eno for his archival impulse – and indeed, every band member interviewed about *No New York* is quick to follow their criticism of the album with praise for him otherwise. It is nonetheless surprising that Eno, a consummate designer of faux names and aliases for himself and performers on his records, didn't consider the weight his own name would have on such a documentary exercise. Arto Lindsay puts it more bluntly: “Eno came to New York and I think he wanted to be associated with us because he wanted to be *the* avant-gardist. You know, the guy who represented the avant-garde to the rest of the world”¹²⁴ Lindsay's statement suggests that Eno wanted to associate his name with the No Wave groups. Yet, these groups have little to no historical representation in histories of avant-garde music (and even more sparse is any material conversation on their roles as performers or artists) despite being championed by a foremost English experimental emissary.

If the No Wave groups are indeed within a vanguard tradition, and this was their appeal to Eno, we must ask why they are absent from vanguard histories. One answer is that they were not “avant-garde,” that they were artists coming from a deconstructive impulse working in a vernacular form. The loose boundaries around what constituted rock music coupled with the proud amateurism of punk made deconstruction a fertile ground for playing with form. As indulging in the porousness of form does not immediately equate to

¹²⁴ Arto Lindsay in David Nerattini, “Arto Lindsay,” *Red Bull Academy*, 2004.
www.redbullmusicacademy.com/lectures/arto-lindsay-no-wave-tropicalia. Accessed April 15th, 2020.

vanguardism, it would be more sensible to say that No Wave was a brief transmission of experimentation and hybridization.

A more complicated and interesting answer is that this musical activity by the mass locals during this time – branded by critics and organized by a cult figure rock intellectual – was translated into something concrete before there was any time for these groups to make sense of what they were doing. Translating a nascent scene through one's own ideas of what they were doing is exactly Glenn Branca's point when he claims Eno's decision to produce *No New York* was a "terrible thing" for a "very young and very new" network of activity, as it effectively gives this network shape through foreign associations. The groups on *No New York* shared a laissez faire attitude towards musical professionalism like Cardew, a penchant towards extreme volume like Cage, and a violent approach to playing musical instruments in the vein of forebearers like Nam June Paik's *One for Violin* (1962) or Phillip Corner's *Piano Activities* (1962). They were connected and associated with composers like Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff, La Monte Young, and DNA even shared a bill with Paik in the early 1980s. Pat Place of the Contortions' sentiment that these bands were coming from an orientation that "was saying, 'You don't really have to know how to play, but if you do something interesting, that's the important thing,'" is a literal echo of the Scratch Orchestra and Portsmouth Sinfonia's Michael Parson's reflecting that the Scratch "made me realize that music is always something that involves people doing things together, and that's just as important an aspect of the music as the structure and the abstract aspects."¹²⁵ Yet, all of these associations were not strong enough to bring them into a canon of experimental art, and Eno's usage of his name to attempt to rectify this, was largely unsuccessful in that it tethered them to Eno, to the point where his name appears in the obituary of Mars' Nancy Arlen.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Pat Place in Masters, 22. Parsons in Jennie Gottschalk, *Experimental Music Since 1970* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016) 190.

¹²⁶ "Nancy Arlen 1942-2006," *Artnet*, October 10th, 2006.
<http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/news/artnetnews/artnetnews10-10-06.asp>. Accessed April 16th, 2020.

Although he did little to no work on the record, *No New York* is a translation of the groups – if not the city itself – through Eno. It had little illocutionary force as a document of experimentalism, but its legacy carries on as a controversial node in Eno’s production library. Of course, No Wave, which was always just a method of organizing a loose network of mostly artist musicians by critics anyway, wasn’t “killed” by Eno, as plenty of this type of activity continued on to the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s. The Static, Paul McMahon’s A Band, Ut, and others played often at McMahon’s loft on 135 Grand St (immortalized in film in Ericka Beckman’s documentary of the same name), while Branca and Chatham got more conceptual and ambitious with their own compositions, the latter adding one hundred guitar orchestras to live performances by the 1990s. Many of the No Wave performers settled into more firm (if not still uncommercial) musical territory, with James Chance replacing his aggressive persona with a kitschy lounge funk act and Lydia Lunch recording a bravado (and gender-swapped) cover of Dusty Springfield’s “Spooky” in 1980. Ikue Mori and Jody Harris have remained firm staples of the experimental downtown New York City milieu, while others such as Nancy Arlen returned to the institutional art world (see: Appendix C).

IX 1980-81: “I Don’t Say it Much Anymore”

In 1981, Barbara Ess released the fifth issue of her DIY artist publication, *Just Another Asshole*, with this edition taking the shape of a vinyl record. On this LP recording are 84 artists, musicians, poets, and writers, each given a little under one minute to do whatever they’d like.¹²⁷ The record is a wildly inconsistent listen, an anthology of a scene

¹²⁷ Artists and musicians included: Larry Simon, Dara Birnbaum, Carla Liss, Bobby G, Wharton Tiers, Carol Parkinson, Nina Canal, Lee Renaldo, Jenny Holzer, Annea Lockwood, Michael Smith, Chris Nelson, Willie Klein, Mitch Corber, Mark Abbott, Dan Graham, Michael Shamberger, Anna DeMarinis, Thurston Moore, Andy Blink, Don Hunerberg, Vikky Alexander, John Howell, Salvatore Principato, Nigel Rollings, Peggy Katz, Eric Bogosian, Herr Lugus, Amy Taubin, Remka Scha, Susan Russell, Bill Buchem, Verge Piersol, David Hofstra, Lynn Tillman, D. Brown, Sandra Seymour, Phill Niblock, Barbara Kruger, John Rehberger, Paul McMahon, Nancy Radloff, Bruce Tovsky, Martha Wilson, Ned Sublette, Glenn Branca, Gail Vachon, B. Conan Piersol, Gregory Sandow, Stephan Wischerth, Bob George, Judy Rifka, David Garland, Mark Bingham, Michael Byron, Glenda Hydler, Susan Fisher, Laurie Spiegel, Barbara Ess, Kiki Smith, Shelly Hirsch, Peter Gordon, Arleen Schloss, Ted Jorgensen, David Rosenbloom, Doug Snyder, Jon Rubin, Thomas Lawson, Harry

summarizing their various practices and concerns together into short audio bursts for the sake of documenting their community moment. This record lacks the focus of *No New York* which is the point: these New York City artists and musicians of the late 1970s and early 80s were bound, as writer Julie Ault puts it, by “shared concerns and overlapping agendas...social configurations as well as communication and degrees of collaboration between individuals – one thing leading to another, migration of ideas and models, generative social processes.”¹²⁸

These “social configurations” and “generative social processes” by New York’s mass locals, motivated via a fervent desire to play with media, identity, expectations, and network boundaries, took the shape of amateur films, recordings, public access television shows, loft and gallery exhibitions and parties, and, of course, bands. All of these things were, as we have seen through the last four chapters of this dissertation, Eno’s domain, and what *No New York* reveals most of all is the deep anxiety Eno seemed to have had existing among a culture that he himself had a hand in forging.

In a late 1979 profile on Eno by Lester Bangs, the author inquires of Eno’s claim as a “non-musician.” Almost with a sigh, writes Bangs, Eno responds: “it was a case of taking a position deliberately in opposition to another one. I don’t say it much anymore, but I said it when I said it because there was such an implicit and tacit belief that virtuosity was the sine-qua-non of music and there was no other way of approaching it...I thought it was well worth saying, ‘Whatever I’m doing it’s not that,’ and I thought the best way to say that was to say, ‘Look I’m a non-musician, if you like what I do, it stands in defiance to that.’”¹²⁹ By 1980 there was still certainly a tacit belief in the virtuosity of musical playing, but at the same time the tide had shifted, with the ripples of punk and the burgeoning potentials of

Spitz, Rhys Chatham, Isa Genzken, Daile Kaplan, Kim Gordon, Sally A. White, Joseph Nechvatal, Steven Harvey, Sammy Marshall Harvey, Brian Doherty, Rudolph Grey, Richard Morrison, Z’Ev.

¹²⁸ Julie Ault, *Alternative Art New York, 1965-1985*, New York: The Drawing Center, 2002, 4.

¹²⁹ Eno in Lester Bangs, “Eno,” *Musician*, November 1979.

hip hop suggesting that there were both artistic and commercial potentials in circumventing the necessity of musical craft.

No New York could be read as Eno's last gasp as the non-musician, as he never worked on a record with such musically de-skilled performers again. Eno had closed out the decade by coming to an end of a way of working which just so happened to dovetail with many picking up on Eno's earliest and simplest idea: defy the expectations of craft in the making of music. Having found an instrument he could duly play – the studio – he had come to a new way of thinking about non-musicianship that had nothing to do with instrumental proficiency: "Tape makes music into a plastic material, which is why someone like me can make music," he says. "Once it's on tape, I can rearrange things, and I can make sounds that aren't available from any instrument."¹³⁰

The worlds of rock and experimentalism began sharing ideas and bills less covertly by the early 1980s, and Eno was a part of the massive *New York/New Wave* (1981) exhibition at PS1 organized by No Wave filmmaker (and in-studio witness to *No New York*) Diego Cortez.¹³¹ *New York/New Wave* featured almost 100 artists, ranging from Lydia Lunch to Andy Warhol, but missing from this exhibition is nearly everyone – save Lindsay, Robin Crutchfield, and Lunch – that was present on *No New York*. Of all the groups on the record the only one still performing was DNA, who would split by 1982. The *No Wave, New York*

¹³⁰ Brian Eno in Arthur Lubow, "Brian Eno," *People*, October 11th, 1982.

¹³¹ Artists for *New York/New Wave* included: Daniel Abraham, Ira Abramovitz, Kathy Acker, Ali, David Armstrong, Edie Baskin, Roberta Bayley, John Benton, Patty Ann Blau, Dominique Blondeau, Victor Bockris, *Bomb* Magazine, Steven Brown, William Burroughs, David Byrne, Bruce Carleton, Henry Chalfont, Sarah Charlesworth, Shirley Chisholm, Larry Clark, Bob Colacello, Archie Connelly, Diego Cortez, Costa, William Coupon, Crash, Robin Lee Crutchfield, Ronnie Cutrone, DNA, M. Demuro, Brett DePalma, Jimmy Desana, Dondi, Edo, Brian Eno, Fab Five Freddie, Peter Fend, Robert Fripp, Futura 2000, Jedd Garrett, Dana Garrett, David Godlis, Nan Goldin, Gray, Cewzan Grayson, Bobby Grossman, Bob Gruen, Duncan Hannah, Kirsten Hawthorne, Keith Haring, John Holmstrom, Curt Hoppe, Robert Juarez, Ray Johnson, Kate Kennedy, William Komoski, Joseph Kosuth, Steve Kramer, Geer Lankton, Melissa Latty, Marcus Leatherdale, Arto Lindsay, Judy Linn, Margaret Lippert, Lydia Lunch, John Lurie, Ann Magnuson, Christopher Makos, Robert Mapplethorpe, Maripol, Elaine Mayes, Michael McClard, Richard McGuire, Frank Moore, Gerry Morehead, Daniel Mularoni, Dakota Murray, Martin Nagy, Michael Norton, Glenn O'Brien, Lann Payne, Giordano Pozzi, Nina Pozzi, *Punk* magazine, Quick, Marcia Resnick, Rene Ricard, Sy Ross, Jon Rudo, SAMO (Michel Basquiat), Marion Scemama, Kenny Scharf, Leslie Schiff, *Screw* magazine, Seen, Terrence Sellers, John Sex, Thomas Shannon, Jo Shane, Barry Shils, Kate Simon, Duncan Smith, Gib Smith, Greg Smith, Steven Sprouse, Walter Stedding, Charles Stockly, Drew Straub, Alan Suicide, Allan Tannenbaum, Bruno Testore, Ken Tisa, Harvey Wang, Andy Warhol, Lawrence Weiner, Larry Williams, Robin Winters, Bruce Wright. Events for *New York/New Wave* were coordinated by Arto Lindsay and occurred throughout the February and March every Sunday at the PS1 auditorium.

exhibition, mingling established artists with more subterranean ones, in the far safer PS1 alternative space, would mark the beginnings of what Bernard Gendron would note as a firm cementing of the switch from 1960s pop into art to 1980s art into pop.¹³²

By 1982 “punk” and “new wave” would be supplanted by “neo pop” and “neo expressionism,” certain underground figures would become art market fixtures (Longo, Basquiat), while artists like Sol LeWitt and Warhol would make installations and sets for dance venues. Writer Bernard Gendron remarks of this time as “the last of the great engagements between pop music and the avant-garde,” but perhaps Branca reflects the situation more aptly: “You go so far in something and then it goes back to zero again – it always happens like that.”¹³³

Eno, never content to conforming idly, would have to reconfigure his own artistic position among this cultural shift. The first two years in New York City represented Eno at the beginning of this transition, and his remaining time in the city would be marked by more solitary endeavors. During this extended stay in the city Eno became, according to Eric Tamm, “disillusioned by the proliferation of self-indulgent conceptual debris being passed off as art, and with a much clearer – and perhaps more traditional – conception of what is involved in making a piece of music, Eno had come to the position that there were definite limits to the interest that could be sustained by an artist’s dwelling on process as a sort of artistic process in its own right.”¹³⁴ Eno himself would comment in 1982:

I was taught in art school that process is everything, which is another way of saying that having an idea is enough. Since I’m basically lazy, I liked that idea, but I no longer think it’s true. The structure or process that I used in *Discreet Music* is almost identical to the structure of Reich’s *It’s Gonna Rain*, for example, but the sound of the two pieces is very different. The process is supposed to be interesting in itself. I don’t go for that. I think if something doesn’t jolt your senses, forget it. It’s got to be seductive.¹³⁵

¹³² Gendron, 315.

¹³³ Gendron, 315. Branca quoted in Gendron, 311.

¹³⁴ Tamm, 42-43.

¹³⁵ Steven Grant, “Brian Eno Against Interpretation,” *Trouser Press* 9 (Aug. 1982), 28.

This somewhat astounding remark from Eno, coupled with the fates of those he worked with, produced, commented on, and proselytized publicly gives us a sense of just how much changed by 1981. How Eno took up musicianship through the remainder of his career is the basis for another study, but what we are left with is the legacy and the limits of the non-musician. The non-musician could be a paean to the joyful liberation that can come from playing together without professional scrutiny or a means to empathize and galvanize to say, “I want to do that.” It could also be fickle, politically disingenuous, and “self-indulgent debris,” a way to intellectualize around effort, as Eno admits with his comments on his own laziness.

Yet, returning to Nick Kent’s question that opened this dissertation, about how non-musician activity took hold in the 1970s, the legacy and answer could be something more optimistic. In every case presented in this dissertation, the non-musician was almost a pretense for an intensely social desire. Playing music freely gave these communities of wayward artists and composers, not so much any real direction, but a means to be together and share ideas and influence. This was perhaps one of Eno’s greatest accomplishment in advocating for the non-musician as a way of creating, in that it gave disaffected artists or thinkers permission to work outside fortified boundaries. This may have had mixed degrees of artistic or political success, but its rich social premise is one long lost to the increasingly fixed parameters of cultural demands for feigning expertise. Non-musicianship was about being publicly willing to make mistakes as a group, to see what those mistakes generated and to learn from them. One lesson was that the story can constantly be changed, that artistic attempts at freedom, however small, could have potency. To think that such an idea could come out of the simple act of picking up an instrument among friends to see what could happen is an incredible thing and leaves us to wonder what other minor gestures might hold major power.

Conclusion: 1981-Present

On October 28th, 1980, The Portsmouth Sinfonia played their final concert in Paris, with a return to classical music after a brief flirtation with playing covers of pop songs. The Sinfonia worked with local musicians, and despite the language barrier, this final concert was, according to Robin Mortimore, “a fitting end” in that “it embodied the true spirit and ethos” of the ensemble.¹

A little over a year later, in the early morning of December 13th, Cornelius Cardew was killed in a suspicious hit and run accident, while walking home on an icy street.² By this time, Cardew had alienated many with his orthodox politics and the public tributes were less than kind on account of this. That said, he received a warm obituary from *Worker's Weekly*, the party organ of the British communist party, who wrote that Cardew's life and work was a “great and everlasting contribution to the cause of the British working class and people.”³ Despite his music and art world dissidence, two memorial concerts were held in 1982, one in London and one in New York City. Both featured a wide range of musicians from many different backgrounds performing the different peaks and valleys of his oeuvre. John Rockwell remarked in a review of the New York concert, that the performances “failed invariably to suggest that Mr. Cardew, ever had much to say as an artist,” and as impertinent as this comment feels given its context, Rockwell is somewhat correct; Cardew's legacy lay less in his musical compositions, than in what they allowed for, permission to seek liberation, artistically or political.⁴

¹ Robin Mortimore in Reeves and Walker, eds. *The World's Worst*, 52.

² “At the inquest, none of the assembled experts were able to explain these peculiarly violent wounds, nor how a supposed hit-and-run had managed to impact both legs and head alike. Still, a verdict of accidental death was registered. The police investigation had been perfunctory to the point of willful negligence. Signs erected at the crime scene got the color of the car wrong. A newspaper ad appealing for witnesses even misidentified the victim.” In Robert Barry, “Starting from Scratch: Cornelius Cardew and the Orchestra as Insurgency,” *Red Bull Music Academy*, February 12th, 2015. <https://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2015/02/cornelius-cardew-feature>. Accessed April 14th, 2020

³ “The Life and Work of Cornelius Cardew,” *Worker's World*, Vol. 8, No. 51, December 19, 1981, cover.

⁴ John Rockwell, “Music: Cardew Benefit,” *The New York Times*, May 30th, 1982, 46.

A mere month after Cardew's benefit concerts, DNA (the only group featured on *No New York* that was still performing) disbanded. The band ended their tenure with a three-night set at CBGB, going through the entirety of their robust catalogue and ending their final encore with a barely legible cover of Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love." While assuredly ironic, DNA's choice of Led Zeppelin's FM radio staple acknowledged the limits of their appeal, a winking gesture towards any pretenses that their brand of musical enlightenment would ever have any popular appeal.

True to his 1979 statement to Lester Bangs, Eno no longer adhered to an identity as a non-musician by 1980. This personal shift indicates that culture had caught up to the idea. The two solo records he released in the 1980s, *Ambient 4: On Land* (1982) and *Thursday Afternoon* (1987) were in-studio driven instrumental and ambient works, conceptually composed and collaborative, but also polished, nowhere near the ramshackle liveliness of most of his 1970s solo output. If ever there was a sign that Eno had come to the end of his former non-musician musical approach, it was in what wasn't heard on his records; Eno continued to do plenty of interviews, but despite the ubiquity of his words his own records no longer featured his voice.

Following 1977's *Before and After*, Eno didn't sing on a solo recording until 2005's *Another Day on Earth*.¹ The twenty-seven-year gap between these records represents a long formal break, a signifier of a move away from a necessary pop and rock ingredient: vocals. Although his voice was largely absent on his records, he still sang weekly in an acapella group he co-founded in the early 2000s. "When you sing with a group of people," Eno says in a 2008 interview for National Public Radio,

you learn how to subsume yourself into a group consciousness because acapella singing is all about the immersion of the self into the community. That's one of the great feelings – to stop being me for a little while to become us. That way lies empathy, the great social virtue.²

¹ A spatial shift from the lush imagination of *Another Green World*.

² Brian Eno in "Singing the Key to a Long Life," *National Public Radio*, November 23rd, 2008.

Eno's sentiments on replacing the "me" with "us" through these private acapella gatherings, which are not insistent on musical experience, gives a sense of where his priorities might be today in regards to the benefits of the unskilled or untrained.³ The intimate quality of these gatherings, singing for the joy of commune, is a stark shift from the very public displays of unskilled musical activity that marked Eno's 1970s work and collaborations. Perhaps part of this shift, outside of Eno's artistic and personal maturation, has to do with the extreme ubiquity of the unskilled and untrained in public life, dominant, as I've stated in this dissertation's introduction, in culture, behavior, and, in contemporary politics, to calamitous results.

Near the eve of England's final vote on Brexit in 2019, Eno and his acapella group released a scathingly satirical original, "Everything's on the Up with the Tories."⁴ The song is a faux celebration of the socially, ecologically, and economically disastrous policies and goals of England's conservative party, with Brexit, a divorce from the European Union, predicated on isolationist and nationalist ideologies, being an apex of these politics. The boom of individualism over collectivism that marks Brexit – finally voted as a passing resolution not long after "Everything's On the Up with the Tories" – represents a strand of

³ While the acapella group remains an intimate affair, it has been brought to the public occasionally. Eno has shared a list of the acapella group's favorite songs and he led the morning choir at the Copenhagen Main Library in Denmark in 2016. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17qoZh3KOe4>. Accessed April 16th, 2020

⁴ Sample lyrics:

Everything's on the up with the Tories
The gap between the richies and the poories
The porky pies and fabricated stories
Yes, everything's on the up with the Tories

Everything's on the up with the Tories
With unemployed across all categories
There's Johnson, Gove, Patel
It's a government from hell
And a few more years of Brexit purgatory

Lyrics on Brian Eno, "Everything's on the Up with the Tories," YouTube video, 2:02, December 9th, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPYorW6Paqo>

thinking that became prevalent midway through the second-decade of the Aughts, spurred by “outsider” politics that hailed intuition over thoughtfulness, unskilled workers over actual expertise.

This populist brand of proud incompetence, exemplified most spectacularly in Donald Trump’s world of alternative facts, fake news, and pseudo-authoritarian demands (encouraged by a sycophantic Republican party), is one of the unfortunate effects of the socio-cultural move towards do-it-yourself activities and personal liberation so prominent in the 1960s and 70s. It is not hard to find a corollary between the kind of experimental collective endeavors that aimed to reveal the “pettiness of goals,” alternative forms of education that proceeded in a learn by doing orientation, or the redesigning of tenets of expertise – the non-musician – to create more flexible models of practice that are found in this dissertation and this political climate of daily deconstructions of forms of knowledge we see today.

Further, most of the ambitions, jokes, in-fighting, recalibrations, thoughtful searching, embracing of mistakes for edification, and constant inquest towards collaborative innovations that are discussed in the stories contained here were predicated on some form of populism. Be it through the open memberships of the Scratch and the Sinfonia, the do-it-yourself ethos of the No Wave groups, and, of course, the “anyone can be a musician” proselytizing of Eno, a grand ambition was to bring forms of art making or experimental activity into the lives and hands of “ordinary people.” In this way, we could read these groups’ forgoing markers of competence for the sake of access as harbingers of the kind of prevalent government populism that values intuition over expertise, today.

There is a common tendency to consider failure through not-knowing as a mode of success in its own right, something that the branding of “The World’s Worst Orchestra” makes explicit. This conception has been historically inaccurate, particularly when considering vanguard art. The goal was not to celebrate failure, to revel in mistakes, but to learn from it, to perform this research and see what new ideas came out of it. Considering

failure as an end in itself doesn't necessarily lead to new and great things, but more often to more failure.

Failure is only a virtue if one can learn from it, if one can use mistakes to gain more clarity towards understanding. This was the working methodology of Eno, the Sinfonia, the Scratch, and even the No Wave groups (the latter being quite prolific with their activity despite their consistent critical appraisals as “nihilistic”). Of course, each of these groups, filled with non-musicians after all, were shambolic and messy, conceptualizing their inabilities as loaded with potential, and could (and did) get lost in the novelty of their own premises. Yet, none of them refused to admit that what they were doing was culturally distinct, none pretended that their reorganizing tenets of art and music making were ordinary. This is the difference between failure as method and failure as virtue: Donald Trump and Boris Johnson, although operating as outsiders in a political rubric, don't wish to learn anything from the consequences of their policies or behaviors, as they see nothing aberrant in them.

This dissertation seeks to consider not just what the historic or theoretical implications might have been for so many artists turning to music making during the 1970s, but also what might still be left to mine from this decision, and the material residue these endeavors left behind. What Eno seems to have discovered recently, is something that many groups of non-musicians he associated with in the 1970s knew all along: playing music badly in public was an egalitarian means to be together, to share in an effort to reach that final, likely fluffed, note as a group, a means of unbridled joy and catharsis. Their challenges to professionalism were demonstrably secondary to the primary goal of playing together, of envisioning ways to ingratiate the social to move away from “me” towards “us.”

This extremely social desire on the part of the non-musician, educators, artists, musicians, and audiences speaks to the difficulties in historically appraising the cultural effects of the non-musician. The non-musician was a conceptual means towards a more utopian social order, and, like all utopian endeavors, a consensus on its efficacy is difficult to

reach, the goal difficult to attain. What I hope has been expressed through *Playing Music Badly in Public* is that although the concept may be thorny, this central tenet of the non-musician remains, waiting for us to pick up its example, and inspire us to consider forms of art making that steer towards inclusion.

Eno, recalling his love of singing from childhood, remarks, “The experience of music I liked most, which was singing in church, was done by a group of people who weren’t skilled. Just a group of people.”⁵ Find a “group of people” and sing, play music, and engage in “any activity whatsoever,” skilled or not, and see what radical permutations of the social arise from such an endeavor. What new or unconsidered feelings and ideas might appear from the simple act of engaging with people?

⁵ Eno in BBC4, *Arena*, *Brian Eno: Another Green World*. Originally broadcast May 9th, 2015.

Appendix A

George Brecht and the Scratch Orchestra Move an Iceberg

Anna Dezeuze writes in the essay “Brecht for Beginners,” that “In 1965, John Cage is said to have spent a whole evening trying to convince George Brecht not to leave the United States. As it turned out, Brecht did not heed Cage’s arguments, and his move to Europe would turn out to be permanent...Whatever Brecht’s reasons, his move very probably contributed to his progressive marginalization [in the art world].”¹ Of course, anonymity has always been a part of Brecht’s project, from his Event Scores, authored but performable by most anyone, to his cryptic Solitaire card decks, to his faux research institution Brecht & MacDiarmid and Associates. Despite the covert nature of both Brecht’s work and Brecht the person, he nonetheless cut an influential character among a contingent of influential experimental composers and musicians in England, a fact that, despite renewed interest by scholars on Brecht in recent years, has gone largely unremarked. In a larger conversation about the role of non-musicians in musical performance and composition Brecht is crucial to understanding its development.

The connection between English experimental musicians and Fluxus, of which Brecht was one of the most prominently connected and best known, had been well established before Brecht’s left the United States. Fluxus was an international group, and their performances often took place in European festivals, particularly in Paris, Copenhagen, Cologne, and London. *The Little Festival of Misfits* (1962) at London’s Gallery One featured two weeks of Fluxus events by Emmett Williams, Ben Vautier, Benjamin Patterson, and Robert Filliou, and promised “music that may fit poetry.”² Cornelius Cardew had encountered Patterson – prolific on the cello, contrabass, and violin – as early as 1960,

¹ Anna Dezeuze, “Brecht for Beginners,” *Papers of Surrealism*, 4 (2005), 2.

² Festival of Misfits gallery promotion one sheet:
<https://www.fondazionebonotto.org/it/collection/fluxus/collectivefluxus/2431.html>.

making him conductor of his piece *Autumn 60* (we must consider that Patterson left the United States on account of racism not allowing him a place in a standard orchestra). In that same year, Cardew also encountered Nam June Paik's infamous *Etude for Piano* (1960) at Mary Baumeister's atelier (a site for many early experimental performance and music activities of the time), in which Paik took scissors to an unsuspecting John Cage's necktie.

Cardew himself organized a Fluxus Concert at Goldsmiths College in 1963 (as part of the *Little Festival of Music*) featuring works by Brecht, Robin Page, Paik, Williams, and La Monte Young. During this concert, Cardew performed Brecht's *Incidental Music* (1961), a series of proposed piano activities written in 1961, that largely denies any actual playing of the piano, i.e. "the piano seat is suitably arranged, and the performer seats himself" (1961). Cardew's visual score for his piece *Memories of You* (1964), which calls for sounds made in proximity to a set of grand pianos, bears a visual similarity to Cage's *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* (1958) (which Cardew would have known) but also a striking conceptual similarity to *Incidental Music*.

Brecht's Event Scores, a "course of study," as Cardew called them, (see the Introduction to this dissertation) are exercises in the distinctions and relationship between language and object (conceptual art), but perhaps more generatively they provoke the reader to consider limitations in order to better understand how to stray, which is to say, learning ("a teaching instrument"). The Event Scores are puzzles that dismiss (or enhance) the standard rational language of puzzles – a reasonable outcome – in favor of both acknowledging and giving license to a respective interpreter/performer's aim at "solving" as a productive exercise. How might Bach result in an entity like Brazil? Is it word play to be reflecting in front of a reflecting mirror or is the proposal for a mirror to simply reflect simply a reflection? These are the types of conundrums that *Water Yam* provokes and their (seemingly) open instructions are found as influences formally and conceptually in late 1960s works by Cardew and Gavin Bryars (see: Cardew's *Treatise*, *Memories of You* and *Schooltime*

Compositions, and Gavin Bryars' many verbal scores) and particularly the Scratch Orchestra (*Scratch Anthology* and *Scratch Music*).

Upon his arrival to England, Brecht took up a variety of teaching jobs in various art departments. Perhaps most prominent among them was Leeds College of Art which was undergoing a radical reinvention in its pedagogical methodologies. Brecht worked alongside Fluxus affiliate Robin Page, who recalls of his former colleague, "George was George, hermetic, quiet, obscure George. He was very happy [teaching] then he'd disappear until the next time, but what he was doing with those students I have no idea. He would be the last man to teach anybody anything. I don't know how you could make an academic assessment of George Brecht. That's a complete non-starter."³

At Leeds, Brecht taught a course called "New Dimensions in Art," a theory and studio course investigating intermedia. Using Dick Higgins' term as a springboard, Brecht himself defined intermedia as "an awareness that the boundaries aren't any longer there, that you can move anywhere along a continuous line, in a continuous field – a continuum. And what comes out can't be analyzed into its component parts: it's continuously variable within a field."⁴ In his notebook from 1968, Brecht makes a diagrammatic illustration of intermedia, creating a pathway from dance to a chimney, pushing intermedia's "continuous line" into precarious and intriguing territories.⁵ The crossing of borderlines, as taught by Brecht, who dedicated equal time in his course curricula to nuclear physics, jokes, and wood working, became a major attribute of student life at Leeds. Brecht wrote to former head of painting at Leeds, Harry Thubron, who had used a Bauhaus model to exponentially change the pedagogical nature of the school, that "Leeds college of art is a misnomer, or at least an incipient one. I come from outside (outside of England and half outside the world of art...)

³ Robin Page quoted in James Charnley, *Creative License: From Leeds College of Art to Leeds Polytechnic*, Cambridge: United Kingdom, The Lutterworth Press, 2015, 6.

⁴ Michael Nyman, "George Brecht: Interview," *Studio International*, Vol. 192, No. 984, November/December 1976, 264.

⁵ George Brecht notebook, 1968, 50. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Archives, V.B.1.160. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

...what do I find the students doing here? One is investigating new electron circuitry.... another has considered sensory deprivation...a group of students has invented their own theatre...”⁶

According to James Charley, former Leeds art student, the school had become by 1969, with the boundary slippages between art and seemingly anything else, “an ongoing experiment, one that had abandoned any discernible methodology...clustering around the notion that greater freedom will inevitably produce greater creativity.”⁷ Just exactly how much influence Brecht had in Leeds’ being heralded by *The Guardian* as “the most influential art school in Europe since the Bauhaus,” is open to conjecture, but given his particular intermedial sentiments, he no doubt was a contributor to the school’s (and the decade’s) investment in de-territorializing art’s boundary lines.⁸

On the other hand, Brecht’s appearances at Portsmouth School of Art in 1970 would seem to be met with some reluctance. Painting professor and Portsmouth Sinfonia member Jeffrey Steele writes in his essay “Collaborative Work at Portsmouth,” that

The inherently authoritarian structure of the international avant-garde, its reliance on fundamentally occult philosophical justification, its confusion of conscious with unconscious perception, its total disregard of the real working circumstances of the majority of people, these aspects of avant-garde art negate its pretensions to revolutionary significance. The preposterous nature of John Cage’s theories, now so transparently obvious, only percolated slowly through our consciousness then. Suspicion was first aroused when George Brecht visited the department in November, 1970...his unrelieved emphasis on the spontaneous creativity of a small group of privileged individuals, alienated a section of the audience.⁹

By 1975, an undercurrent of anti-capitalist revolutionary politics among students, percolating since at least 1968, had become a full-blown phenomenon. Brecht’s work, occasionally obtuse and concerned with the unremarkable, could be considered relatively limited in its political potential. As a counter to this, we could consider that Brecht’s formal

⁶ George Brecht notebook, June 1968–October 1968, 137. Silverman Fluxus Archives, V.B.1.160. MoMA Archives, NY.

⁷ Charnley, *Creative License: Leeds College of Art to Leeds Polytechnic*, 3.

⁸ Patrick Heron, “Murder of the Art Schools,” *The Guardian*, Tuesday, October 12th, 1971.

⁹ Jeffrey Steele, “Collaborative Work at Portsmouth,” *Studio International*, Vol. 192, No. 984, November/December 1976, 299.

written invitations and proposals, with their explicit call for engagement with the everyday, provoke the assumption that the everyday world might look, sound, or behave a certain way, but can also be considered otherwise, a determinant that was not up to Brecht (the artist) but to everyday people. Such a sentiment might be naïve, or wistful nostalgia for a vision of the readymade (Brecht's Event Scores essentially use the act of living as a readymade) in which facilitating experience (perhaps even assigning real change as the task of others) might be enough to stimulate potential change. Yet, as Cardew could attest through his classroom use of *Water Yam* for non-musicians in the 1960s, Brecht's proposals could influence and inspire creative thought and action to a more open populace (at least in a liberal arts school) than, for example, the opaque, musically dense works of Cage, something that would be proven with The Scratch Orchestra.

Gavin Bryars states that "artist-musicians" like Brecht "were essentially the kind of people that Cardew needed for *The Great Learning* and The Scratch Orchestra probably came about for that reason."¹⁰ Although Brecht was not a member of the Scratch proper, his "Comb Music," was a consistently performed number in the repertoire throughout the Scratch's existence, the score even adorning the first page of the early Scratch composition collection, *Scratch Anthology* (1972) and a comb adorned the Scratch Orchestra logo. Brecht was a vital part of the first realization of The Scratch Orchestra's "Research Project" component. From Cardew's "A Scratch Orchestra Draft Constitution":

"Research Project: A fifth repertory category may be evolved through the Research Project, an activity obligatory for all members of the Scratch Orchestra, to ensure its cultural expansion.

The Research Project.

The universe is regarded from the viewpoint of travel. This means that an infinite number of research vectors are regarded as hypothetically travelable. Travels may be undertaken in many dimensions, e.g. temporal, spatial, intellectual, spiritual, emotional. I imagine any vector will be found to impinge on all these dimensions at some point or other. For instance, if your research vector is the Tiger, you could be involved in time (since the tiger represents an evolving species), space (a trip to the

¹⁰ (Gavin Bryars, "Forward corrected," November 30th, 2009.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20190220005412/http://www.gavinbryars.com/work/writing/occasional-writings/gavin-bryars-foreword-corrected>

zoo), intellect (the tiger's biology), spirit (the symbolic values acquired by the tiger) and emotion (your subjective relation to the animal). The above is an intellectual structure, so for a start let's make the research vector a word or group of words rather than an object or an impression etc. A record of research is kept in the Scratchbook and this record may be made available to all. From time to time a journey will be proposed (Journey to Mars, Journey to the Court of Wu Ti, Journey to the Unconscious, Journey to West Ham, etc.). A discussion will suffice to provide a rough itinerary (e.g. embarkation at Cape Kennedy, type of vehicle to be used, number of hours in space, choice of a landing site, return to earth or not, etc.). Members whose vectors are relevant to this journey can pursue the relevance and consider the musical application of their research; members whose vectors are irrelevant (research on rocket fuels won't help with a journey to the Court of Wu Ti) can put themselves at the disposal of the others for the musical realization of their research. A Date will be fixed for the journey which will take the form of a performance.

Conduct of research.

Research should be through direct experience rather than academic: neglect no channels. The aim is: by direct contact, imagination, identification and study to get as close as possible to the object of your research. Avoid the mechanical accumulation of data; be constantly awake to the possibility of inventing new research techniques. The record in the Scratchbook should be a record of your activity rather than an accumulation of data. That means: the results of your research are in you, not in the book.¹¹

On November 15, 1969, Scratch members gathered to Chelsea Town Hall to perform "Journey of the Isle of Wight Westwards by Iceberg to Tokyo Bay." The performance was inspired by Brecht's (working under the pseudonym of Brecht & MacDiarmid Research Associates, MacDiarmid being his real last name) proposal to translocate land masses via icebergs. Brecht's notebooks ca. 1969-1970 feature a number of landmass translocation proposals, including floating the Eiffel Tower on a "land square" to Barcelona in order to support the façade of the Sagrada Familia, as well as fancifully political suggestions: "Solution to the German problem – unify Germany, but distribute its states all over the world."¹² The Isle of Wight translocation was proposed with the justification that "Since England might well profit from a warmer climate, and in any case is sinking into the North Sea, due to movements of the Earth's crust, we have chosen the movement of England as

¹¹ Cornelius Cardew, "A Scratch Orchestra Draft Constitution," *The Musical Times*, Vol. 110, No. 1516, 125th Anniversary Issue (Jun. 1969), 619.

¹² George Brecht notebook, Feb. 1970-Sept. 1970, np. Brecht revamps this project in a different form in 1976, proposing to "sew up Europe." Notebook June 1976-August 1977, Silverman Fluxus Archives, V.B.1.160. MoMA Archives, NY.

our initial project.” The 1969 press release, complete with “Brecht & MacDiarmid & Associates” letterhead, continues “Translocation of the Isle of Wight is a preliminary or ‘pilot’ study aimed at determining which factors are most relevant to the larger project.”¹³

The contents of Brecht’s lecture on the translocation of the Isle of Wight remain lost, save for a characteristically simple and cheeky schematic drawn on a world map, and a note in his notebook to “make diagrams of how [sic] Isle of Wight could be moved.”¹⁴ An unofficial audio recording exists of the Scratch Orchestra’s accompanying sounds for Brecht’s proposed journey and the resultant cacophony is representative of their respective responses to the journey. Michael Parson’s description of the performance as “a dense texture of divergent strands of aural and visual activity,” is evident in snippets of chimes, dense percussion, woodwinds, and a distant polyphony of voices and murmurs that aptly create an aural environment, conjuring the creaking and groaning of Earth’s crust being shifted westward on an equally exciting and terrifying trip on an unstable ocean.¹⁵ Preceding Gavin Bryars’ similarly attuned – though unaffiliated – research project on the Titanic’s sinking, *The Sinking of the Titanic* (1969–1972), the collection of disparate sounds show how anarchic musical activity of the Scratch Orchestra could come together under a unified commitment. Reading Brynn Harris and Parson’s recollections that “Christopher Hobbs tolled a deep bell at regular intervals to warn of the islands progress,” and “There was joyous celebration when the equator was crossed” get to the notion of the benefits of play, an often neglected attribute of both The Scratch Orchestra and Brecht’s work.¹⁶

Many public Scratch performances featured the realization of Improvisation Rites, defined in the *Draft Constitution* as “not a musical composition; it does not attempt to influence the music that will be played; at most it may establish a community of feeling, or a

¹³ George Brecht/Brecht & MacDiarmid Research Associates, London, “Land Mass Translocation Project. Pilot Project: Isle of Wight > Azores,” 1969.

<https://www.fondazionebonotto.org/en/collection/fluxus/brechtgeorge/edition/443.html>

¹⁴ George Brecht notebook, Jun. 1968–Oct. 1968. Silverman Fluxus Archives, V.B.1.160. MoMA Archives, NY.

¹⁵ Michael Parsons, “The Scratch Orchestra and Visual Arts,” *Leonardo Music Journal* 11 (2001): 7.

¹⁶ Michael Parsons, “The Scratch Orchestra and Visual Arts,” 7; Bryn Harris quoted in John Tilbury, *A Life Unfinished*, 391.

communal starting point, through ritual.”¹⁷ John Tilbury notes that despite Cardew’s instructions, Improvisation Rites – often verbal instructions for a proposed activity – “in performance invariably overlapped and merged.”¹⁸ That these rituals could be vitalized by play in a performance such as “Journey of the Isle of Wight Westwards...” links to Situationist artist Asger Jorn’s notion that “...if play is continued among adults in accordance with their natural life force – i.e., in retaining its creative spontaneity than it is the *content* of ritual, its humanity and life, which remains the primary factor, and the form changes uninterrupted, therefore with this living content.”¹⁹

Brecht’s landmass translocation project facilitated an opportunity to creatively engage with mythmaking, something that Jorn sees as a ritual that helps aid in the creation of community, and a general goal of The Scratch Orchestra with its favoring an admixture of many different artistic identities. In his mid-1960s notebooks, Brecht makes numerous mentions of the sociologist Roger Caillois, who, like Jorn’s contemporary, the Situationist Constant Nieuwenhuys, built upon the theories of play outlined in Johan Huizinga’s 1938 book, *Homo Ludens* (man as player). In a note in his class preparations for a “Games and Puzzles” and “Play” lecture at Leeds, Brecht’s notes indicate Caillois’ “definition on page 42” of *Man, Play, and Games*. It is unclear just exactly which definition Brecht sought, but Huizinga’s definition of play and games on page 42 in the 1949 edition of *Homo Ludens* seems particularly apt for “Journey to the Isle of Wight...”:

Making music bears at the outset all the formal characteristics of play proper : the activity begins and ends within strict limits of time and place, is repeatable, consists essentially in order, rhythm, alternation, transports audience and performers alike out of "ordinary" life into a sphere of gladness and serenity, which makes even sad music a lofty pleasure. In other words, it "enchants" and "enraptures" them. In itself it would be perfectly understandable, therefore, to comprise all music under the heading of play. Yet we know that play is something different, standing on its own.²⁰

¹⁷ Cardew, “Scratch Orchestra Draft Constitution,” 619.

¹⁸ Tilbury, *A Life Unfinished*, 383

¹⁹ Asger Jorn, quoted from *Magic and the Fine Arts* (Copenhagen: Borgens Forlag, 1971) in Peter Wollen, *On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Moment in Time: The Situationist International 1957-1972*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989, 46.

²⁰ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949, 42.

The confluence of improvisational, scored, and thematic research-based activities that make up The Scratch Orchestra, both in “Journey to the Isle of Wight...” and in general, speak to the contradictory place of Huzinga’s definition of play in music. Playing music is a “lofty pleasure,” but to play *with* music, as The Scratch was wont to do, is something distinct, a kind of ritual, as Jorn notes, spotlighting the joyfulness of the act of living.

Appendix B

Other Student Orchestras

There were two notable spin-off ensembles of the Sinfonia, both of them sharing the same members, but distinctly performing their own compositions. These ensembles took the same approach as the Sinfonia towards musical playing, discounting virtuosic skill as unnecessary in terms of musical expression (which shared a corollary with rock and much more directly later, punk). As the political winds in England shifted toward a sympathy with Maoism ca. 1970, so too did the activities within British art schools. In 1972, the Portsmouth (now Polytechnic) film studies class abandoned showing Surrealist and New Wave films for loaned 16mm copies of Maoist Republic of China Films, and in the same year students occupied the campus to protest a proposed closing of the social work program. 1972 seemed to be a year of questioning the efficacy of art to politics, and, while few took the measures that someone like Cornelius Cardew did (see: Chapter 2), the broader impulse to serve a community with one's creative practice was of clear concern.

One such group that put their politics front and center was the Ross and Cromarty Orchestra, an ensemble of artists and musical novices founded by Ivan Hume Carter (who also co-founded the Portsmouth Sinfonia) in 1970.¹ As their name suggests, the RCO was dedicated to music celebrating and inspired by Gaelic culture, and this direction was largely dictated by Hume Carter, who was beginning to explore his Scottish ancestry at this time. RCO bassoon player Ian Southwood recalls that Hume Carter saw “some slightly tenuous links between ...between Scotland and China...bagpipes and the similar appearance of yaks and highland cattle.”²

¹ The RCO shared Ivan Hume Carter Jeffrey Steele, Suzette Worden, Robin Mortimore, Ian Southwood, Ann Shrosbee, James Lampard, and David Saunders with the Sinfonia.

² Personal Correspondence with Ian Southwood, 2017.

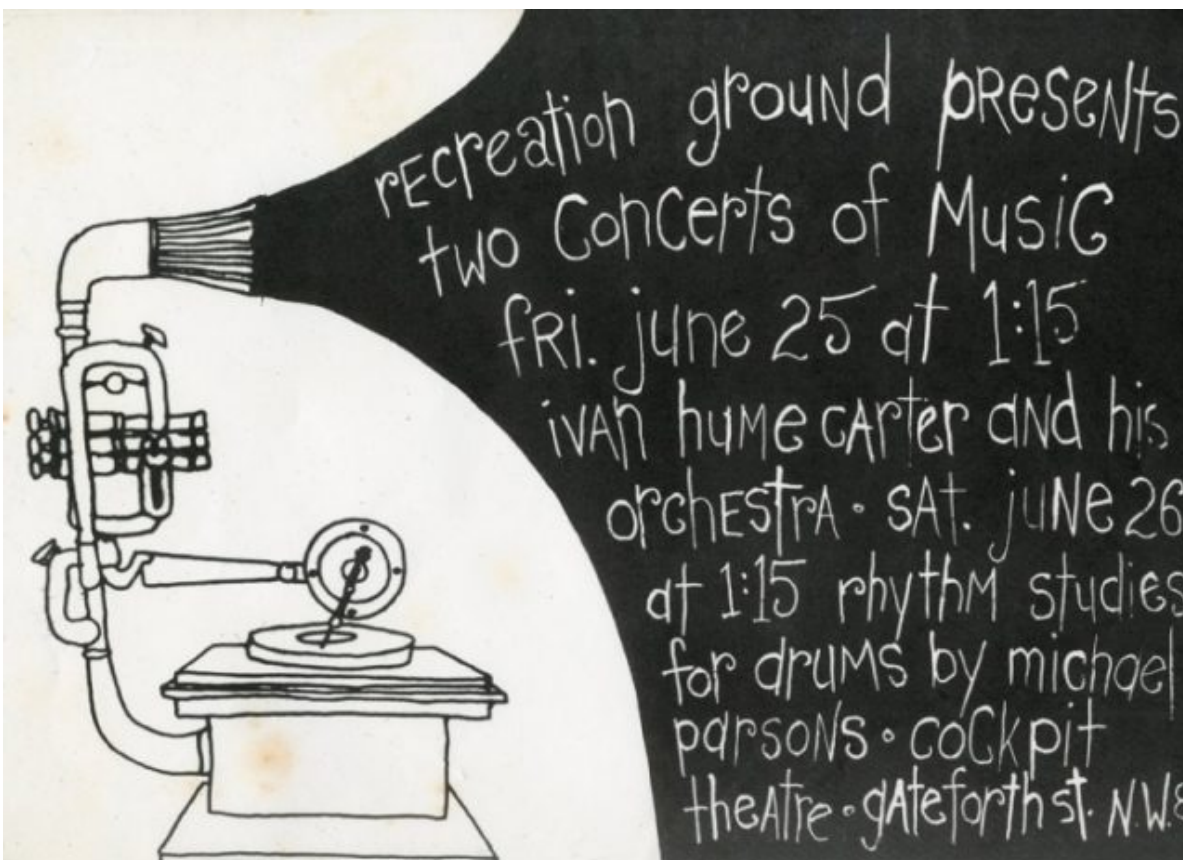


Fig. B.1: Poster for Ivan Hume Carter and His Orchestra, June 25th-26th, 1971.

A proto – Ross and Cromarty Orchestra performance at the very first concert of Recreation Ground Theatre Company. In its first year of operation the RGTC held mostly political themed unknown or forgotten short plays in a lunchtime theatre format. Their policy was: “As a socialist company, we were very clear that the issue of Class was primary for us: the marginalization of the working class and the absence of a theatre/arts network to serve those audiences was crucial to our thinking. We were an active part of the current debates as to whether or not Class and Gender politics went hand in hand or whether Gender politics stood on its own platform. In terms of ethnicity, our work demanded an integrated company. We did small scale touring. We worked to take challenging and thought provoking social and political theatre out into a range of communities, to people (of all ages, ethnicities) who did not normally go to the theatre; to develop new writing and collaborative work exploring the personal and the affective in the political; to create new audiences and to set up new venues in local and community situations largely avoiding, on principle, established or mainstream theatres; to achieve working collectively under good Equity contracts. To employ multi-cultural companies.” (<http://www.unfinishedhistories.com/history/companies/recreation-ground/>) Examples of Michael Parson’s “Rhythm Studies for Drums” can be found in the Experimental Music Catalogue’s “Rhythmic Anthology” (1972).

Hume Carter represented the Highlands of Ross and Cromarty in a series of notated waltzes, with “Ross and Cromarty Waltz No. 1” (1971) gradually introducing each member of the orchestra, based on instrument pitch, through measure repetition. In a truly imaginative written introduction to the piece, Hume Carter remarks

Imagine that Scotland had won at Culloden in 1746. The Gaelic culture of the Highlands would have remained in-tact, safe from the repression that followed Culloden and the imposition of an alien culture. Any musical influences other than from within the culture itself, would have come directly from Scandanavia [sic] or Central Europe. However, such influences would have been few and introduced over a long period of time. The first waltz of truly Highland spirit may not have been composed until 1971, when a new enlightened form of music may have developed a relationship with Gaelic music.³

The “new enlightened form of music” was in reference to the emphasis at Portsmouth (see Suzette Worden’s “Concert of Six Pieces” in chapter two) put on the validity of elementary musical technique and discounting learned technique as a requisite for public performance. Although requiring musical literacy, works such as the “Ross and Cromarty Waltz No. 1” were simple works for beginning or rudimentary musical performers. In *Experimental Music: John Cage and Beyond*, Michael Nyman quotes a written statement from Hume Carter, stating that “the simple, tonal music of the orchestra was accessible to all.”⁴

On the other end of the spectrum was Hume-Carter’s simply composed, but ambitious to realize “Endless Gaelic Music,” (1971) which had two variations, one with and without accidentals. Five instrumentalists, with optional singers and percussionists, were instructed to play a Gaelic pentatonic scale, “two hundred times.... remaining constant throughout.”⁵ In a filmed exchange from early 1972, RCO trombonist Jeffrey Steele (and

³ Ivan Hume Carter, “The Ross and Cromarty Waltz,” in Alvin Lucier, ed. *The Source No. 10*, 1971, 80.

⁴ Ivan Hume Carter quoted in Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: John Cage and Beyond*, 1974/1999, 170.

⁵ Ivan Hume-Carter, “Endless Gaelic Music,” *The Source No. 10*, 80. Hume Carter’s notion of Scottish history as European based is one that he has apparently carried with him since 1971, as stated in an abstract for his 2016 talk, “Early History and Recent Events in Scotland within the Context of European Culture and Politics: Possible Perspectives for East Asia”: “Mr. Ivan Hume-Carter shares with the audience his understanding of the early history of Scotland viewed from languages and music, followed by a comparison with recent events in Scotland. He presents Scotland not, as conventionally, in a British context (as Pope Martin V said: “The Scots... are an antidote to the English”), but in a European context. It is as Caledonia - Scotland’s formation as a European nation - that Scottish culture is European culture and Scottish history is European history. Unfortunately, the failure of the political class and self-interest of the elite resulted in the loss of independence.”

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/researchAndExpertise/units/TaiwanProgramme/Events/Seminars/ComparativePerspectives/autumn20162.aspx>



Fig. B.2: Ian Southwood, "Ross and Cromarty Orchestra, 1971-72. Oil on canvas.

Ian Southwood notes of this painting: "Although it was a commission from Ivan, I didn't get paid. He told me I was doing it for 'the people' and that was reward enough. To be honest, it is not a good painting, kind of photorealist, but looking at it now, it probably should not have got past quality control. Ivan gave me a lot of separate photos of individual musicians who had played (or sung) with the RCO on various occasions. My job was to put it all together - like a collage - as though they were all there, at a (concocted) concert performance. The painting was in monochrome black and white, except for a red carpet on the floor and the individual small red flags attached to each of the keys - or rather in the place of the hammers of the red flag piano." Personal correspondence with Ian Southwood, 2017.

head painting instructor to many of his orchestra mates at Portsmouth) asks James Lampard a crucial question regarding this piece: “What are accidentals?”⁶ Other, perhaps less demanding compositions for the performers themselves, included “The Highway Railway Symphonic Movement,” in which, as one reviewer put it, “the orchestra played against the background soundtrack of an elderly shunting engine, producing excruciating contrapuntalism,” and “The Foolish Old Man Who Removed Mountains,” a short Maoist opera.⁷

Although the RCO was deeply serious in terms of its politics, there was an element of playfulness to their performances, perhaps most notable with the inclusion of Portsmouth art student Alan Sandham’s “red flag piano.” Sandham, a sculpture student at Portsmouth, removed the strings from the piano and affixed small red flags to the piano key hammers. “When the pianist followed the score and played the appropriate keys,” Southwood recalls, “then the attached red flag would wave. I remember we particularly enjoyed the occasional red flag piano solo.”⁸ This addition to the ensemble was one of the more straightforwardly conceptual works for any of the Portsmouth orchestras, silencing a musical instrument to be subservient to the gesture of (literal) political flag waving.⁹ A dedicated Trotskyite, Sandham often hit ideological loggerheads with Maoist Hume Carter,

⁶ Jeffrey Steele quoted in David Gale, “Symphonic Socialism,” *Time Out London*, August 4-10, 1972. “Endless Gaelic Music” was performed at least once after the RCO disbanded. In an announcement for The Toronto Free Theatre in University of Toronto’s student journal, *The Erindalian*: “Ivan Hume Carter’s *Endless Gaelic Music 1 Without Accidentals*, will be a featured composition in two forthcoming environmental workshops in the TFT’s Tuning of the World series...a series of workshops which investigate the musical possibilities inherent in the chance meeting of musicians and audiences...” April 10, 1973, Volume 5, Issue 21. <https://university-toronto.quartexcollections.com/Documents/Detail/volume-05-issue-22-the-erindalian-april-10-1973/237>

⁷ Anthony Troon, “The Ross and Cromarty Orchestra at Celtic Lodge, Lawnmarket,” *The Scotsman*, Tuesday August 29th, 1972. Ian Southwood remembers a refrain from “The Foolish Old Man Who Removed a Mountains” vividly: “The highland deer runs, so it cannot be caught/Not so are the ideas, found in Mao-Tse-Tung thought.” This line also proved memorable to a reviewer in *Edinburgh Evening News*: “The highlight of [The RCO’s performance] is a short opera with an innocent Maoist message called ‘The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains,’ and the performance ends with a few rousing choruses of ‘Mao Tse-Tung thought.’” In “Home-Spun Thoughts on Rhythm and Harmony,” *Edinburgh Evening News*, Wednesday August 30th, 1972.

⁸ Personal correspondence with Ian Southwood, 2017.

⁹ Michael Parsons notes that there was a short-lived group at Portsmouth called the Visual Research Ensemble, which “performed (mainly) silent pieces.” Michael Parsons, “The Scratch Orchestra and Visual Arts,” *Leonardo Music Journal*, Vol. 11, ‘Not Necessarily English Music’: Britain’s Second Golden Age (2001), 11. A quick note on pianos: the use of pianos as a visual medium was a phenomenon that occurred quite frequently in 1960s performance and experimental art making. Notable examples include Raphael Ortiz’s *Piano Destructions* (1964-current), the Fluxus group’s performances of Phillip Corner’s *Piano Activities* (1962), Al



Fig. B.3: Alan Sandham playing his red flag piano with the Ross and Cromarty Orchestra in 1972.
Photographer Unknown.



Fig. B.4: The Ross and Cromarty Orchestra at Perth Station at the start of their Highland Tour, September 1972.

Hansen's *Yoko Ono Piano Drop* (1945/62) and Annea Lockwood's *Piano Burning* (1968 – current). Of *Piano Burning*, Lockwood remembers, “An English choreographer, Richard Alston, and I were thinking of cooking up a dance work called “Heat,” in which we would warm up the auditorium or performance space. I needed to record fire, so I had experimented with my fireplace, and with a bonfire in a courtyard, but none of it quite worked. It didn't sound hot enough. Then it occurred to me that there was a piano graveyard in London where the garbage disposal people would dump decrepit pianos that people didn't want anymore. And I thought, “Well, let's burn a piano.” (Rebecca Lentjes, “An Interview with Annea Lockwood,” July 27, 2017. <https://van-us.atavist.com/surreal-conjunctions>). Writer Anthony Marshall seconds Lockwood's account of piano “graveyards” across Europe: “Because television had arrived. The piano in the front parlor in most houses became suddenly redundant. And there was little or no demand for secondhand pianos. So all around the country, at school fêtes and country fairs, an orgy of piano smashing broke out. On village greens, on football pitches, teams of men with sledgehammers, axes, hacksaws and crowbars attacked upright pianos and reduced them to debris.” (Anthony Marshall, “Still Life with Goanna,” 2010, <https://www.booksourcemagazine.com/story.php?sid=100>). Given the abundance of discarded, no longer functional pianos, their use in these (often destructive) activities of the 1960s could have been as pragmatic as they were ideological.

and on account of this (or perhaps because he didn't want to lug the piano with him) he left the RCO before their short 1972 Scottish Highland tour.

The RCO's Highland tour took place over the course of the first week of September, promising "waltzes, flings, overtures," at venues in Dingwall, Halkirk, Brora, Ullapool, and Inverness.¹⁰ The tour was, according to Southwood, "cold, grey, wet, depressing," and by the end of their seven days on the road James Lampard had crashed his car, and Hume-Carter experienced a full emotional break, calling his bandmates "running dogs" and "bourgeois hypocrites," and immediately heading back to London.¹¹ This brief trip to the country that birthed the working concept behind the RCO was its ultimate end, and led to Hume Carter abandoning the RCO and the Portsmouth Sinfonia.¹²

The RCO, like the Scratch Orchestra, laid bare the difficulties in merging creative freedom with political freedom, and highlights a noble, but flawed, attempt at recalibrating vanguard activity to do more than it was designed for. In the same statement of which Hume Carter claimed RCO music was "accessible to all," he adds a caveat that "there is no future for a music that is not people's music."¹³ "Art music" was, by its privilege of production, a capitalist imperative, and melodic simplicity and open membership orchestras could only confront such imperatives at the level of the poetic. On the other hand, to discount the poetic level does a disservice to the galvanizing power of art and music, of its propensity to mobilize for feeling, joy, and considering things otherwise. The potency of the RCO's structure to compel activity was, to some extent, James Lampard's rationale for reinstating the RCO under a new name: The Majorca Orchestra.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ross and Cromarty Orchestra flyer announcing, "Festival Appearances and Highland Tour," 1972. See fig

¹¹ Personal Correspondence with Ian Southwood, 2017.

¹² Hume Carter went on to play traditional Scottish contemporary music and study Korean folk music.

¹³ Hume Carter quoted in Nyman, *Experimental Music*, 170.

¹⁴ Says Ian Southwood: "[Majorca Orchestra] just sounded so much more warm, sunny, and cheerful after Ivan and the RCO." Personal Correspondence, 2018.

MAJORCA ORCHESTRA



The Majorca Orchestra is a chamber ensemble that plays compositions and arrangements by its members. The music is simple because of the limited capabilities of both performers and composers. All its members play with the Portsmouth Sinfonia or used to play with the Ross and Cromarty Orchestra. These groups attempt to make popular, music not dependent on technical ability and professional ease.

Robin Mortimore, John Farley, Sue Astle violins.

Brian Watterson, Ann Shrosbree, flutes.

James Lampard, glockenspiel and clarinet.

Ted Brum, flugelhorn. David Saunders, tenor horn.

Ian Southwood, double bass. Jenni Adams, percussion.

Pieces include:

Ross & Cromarty Waltz No. 5	(by Suzette Worden)
The Darkies	(by Ezra Read arr. Majorca Orchestra)
The Great March	Two Tune March
Sea Air in G	Maryland Tunes
The Caterpillar	Butterfly Waltz
A Sharp Waltz	Pizza Round
Pot-pourri one	Mediterranean Waltzes
March Air	Sonatina
Ode to a Toad	Amplexus Variations No.1
Copris Lunaris	Waltz No.1
Mountain Air;	Easter Holiday Tune
Theme and Variations	

for information contact:

Majorca Orchestra, 228 Elmhurst Mansions,
Elmhurst Street, London, S.W.4. Tel: 01-622-7945.

June, 1973.

Fig. B.5: Majorca Orchestra Press Sheet, 1973.
Note the appearance of Suzette Worden's *Ross & Cromarty Waltz No. 5*.

Unlike the Sinfonia, and to a lesser extent the RCO, the Majorca Orchestra's personnel remained mostly fixed, playing one another's original compositions and occasionally popular classics. One 1975 live recording of the Majorca Orchestra at London's Air Gallery features the ensemble falling apart midway through Ezra Read's "Venice by Moonlight." The ensemble attempts to pick it back up only to fail again, and Lampard finally throws in the towel, telling the laughing audience self-effacingly, "and for our next trick we'll cut it all up and put it back together in a different order." The attempting, and failing, to play a popular classic puts the Majorca Orchestra on very similar territory as the Sinfonia, but the difference lies in the scale.

In the Majorca Orchestra's first year of performing they were commissioned by choreographer Richard Alston's first dance company, Strider for a performance at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, but mostly performed small art galleries and intimate music venues.¹⁵ Jeffrey Steele recalls that the Majorca Orchestra "gave several concerts in the Lucy Milton Gallery where the music began to approach in sobriety, simplicity, and clarity the works of exhibitions of works by Dutch and English constructivists to [whom] the gallery was committed. Indeed, on one such occasion James Lampard could announce, "The next piece the orchestra will play is "Mountain Air," composed by our tenor horn player, David Saunders, whose exhibition this is."¹⁶

¹⁵The performance with Richard Alston's Strider, who often paired his dance company with experimentally minded musicians such as Annea Lockwood (*Tiger Balm*, 1972) began with the Ross and Cromarty Orchestra in 1972. As the RCO disbanded, the Majorca Orchestra stepped in. The piece, *The Average Leap Forward* (1973), featured the Majorca Orchestra playing accompanying music to dancers in Strider doing Tai Chi. There is little to no information on this work but based on its title and dance movements – Tai Chi – *The Average Leap Forward* seems to have been some sort of comment on Mao Zedong's "The Great Leap Forward" plan (1958-61) to instate people's communes in the country. During this time, as well as during the cultural revolution, Tai Chi was, for the most part, discouraged as part of the move away from agrarian Chinese practices. While this is all a conjecture read, the political implications of an amateur orchestra accompanying dancers performing Tai Chi seem to be either a recognition of a lack of art's political efficacy – an "average" leap forward after all – or a critique of the promises of the Cultural Revolution – personal liberation meant playing bad music and choosing your own exercise regimen. It is difficult to know just what the aim of this work was, particularly as it started with the Maoist leaning RCO. On at least one performance of *The Average Leap Forward*, the sculptor Barry Flanagan, who occasionally played with the Sinfonia, accompanied Strider and the Majorca Orchestra, by digging in a sand pit, which adds another layer of confounding activity to this work.

¹⁶Jeffrey Steele, "Collaborative Work at Portsmouth," *Studio International*, November/December 1976.

Handwritten musical score for "Mountain Air" by David Saunders, ca. 1973-74. The score is written on ten systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4. The title "MOUNTAIN AIR" is written at the top left, and "REVISED" is written at the top right. The score concludes with the instruction "Da Capo" and the signature "David Saunders 19".




Fig. B.6: David Saunders, Score to "Mountain Air," ca. 1973-74.

The Majorca Orchestra was also the basis for a course taught by James Lampard at an adult education school in 1973-74. "The class provides a good atmosphere for beginners (with orchestral instruments) and accomplished musicians to gain greater knowledge into the beautiful mysteries of music," Lampard writes in a May, 1974 announcement for the course, "At the classes we play simple chamber music composed by members of the class and arrangements of light-weight Victorian compositions by Ezra Read and Crawshaw Crabtree..."¹⁷ At the request of Lambeth's mayor, this iteration of the Majorca Orchestra was asked to play the town's *Grand Variety Concert*, alongside the Clapham Old People's Choir, Sidney Powsey's Accordions, and a demonstration of "Keep Fit for Retired People," at the *Grand Variety Concert* in Lambeth.¹⁸

Lampard's course was a model for Michael Nyman in his own pedagogical efforts gathering trained and untrained musicians in his courses, but it also presents a type of barely legible reframing of experimental activity.¹⁹ Teaching retirees to form amateur musical ensembles is a long way from the aleatory music of Cage, or even the "people processes" of Cardew, and presents the blurriness of what was actually experimental about this activity. What was the distinction between performer variables in musical performing in experimentalism and simply being an amateur orchestra?²⁰ Howard Skempton states the experiment, particularly when amateur musicians play popular classics, is in the discrepancy between "presenting people with something they think they know" and the effect being

¹⁷ Noted in an announcement letter from James Lampard on the Majorca Orchestra evening class at the Clapham and Belham Adult Education Institution, May 1974.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "Lampard's earliest music for the Majorca, following a procedure developed by another Portsmouth student, Ivan Hume-Carter, in his long-since defunct Ross and Cromarty Orchestra, gently re-emphasizes, from a very innocent standpoint, the division of harmonic music into melody and accompaniment. These pieces of Lampard's I found very useful when I started Foster's Social Orchestra in the Fine Art Department of Trent Polytechnic in 1974, since they allowed me to divide the roles of the student players initially into more expert (tunes) and less expert (accompaniments)." Michael Nyman, 'Music,' in ed. Pwyll Ap Sion, *Michael Nyman: Collected Writings*, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2013, 263.

²⁰ The Experimental Music Catalogue announced the publication of the *Majorca Orchestra Anthology* in the mid-1970s, although, like the similarly scheduled *Portsmouth Anthology*, it does not appear to have come to fruition. Compositions included: *The Butterfly Waltz*, *The Caterpillar*, *The Darkies*, *The Two Tune March* (James Lampard) *Marylands Tune No. 3*, *Mediterranean Waltz No. 1*, *Pot-Pourri One* (Robin Mortimore) *Mountain Air* (David Saunders) *Sea Air*, *Sonatina* (Ian Southwood) *Amplexus Variations no. 1*, *Copris Lunaris*, *Ode to a Toad*, *Pizza Round*, *A Sharp Waltz* (Brian Watterson).

“quite different.”²¹ On the other hand, if the Majorca Orchestra was about making “popular, music not dependent on technical ability,” then they represent, more than their counterparts in the Sinfonia, a vernacular mode of music making that, while not popular in an orchestral setting, was quite popular with pop and rock and roll (see Chapter Four for more on this corollary).

By 1978, the Majorca Orchestra was billing themselves as performing “original marches, waltzes, descriptive fantasies, Edwardian disco, and Scottish reggae.”²² While there is no known recorded musical evidence of this genre cross-pollination suggests that the conceit, although not the concept, was changing, and it was not long after their performance at David Toop’s Festival of Environmental Music and Performance in that same year, that the Majorca Orchestra decided to call it a day. By 1978, the lessons the Majorca Orchestra performers learned from Bryars nearly a decade earlier had, to some extent, both failed to catch on in any general orchestral conventions, but also had carved out a niche of possibility among a younger generation of composers, artists, and musicians who did not subscribe to a prevailing sentiment that experimental music should be challenging to listen to or be condemned for its simplicity or melody.

Throughout the 1970s, a number of amateur orchestras popped up throughout England and the United States, many of them, much like the Majorca Orchestra or the RCO, remembered as small trifles, if they are remembered at all. In Dekalb, Illinois there was the Greater Dekalb Scratch Orchestra, a “light hearted spoof of ‘profound’ music by musicians who perform on instruments other than those on which they are the most technically proficient”; Washington DC’s Market Five Gallery hosted the Shoestring Orchestra, made up of “Amateur and semi-professionals players rehears[ing] established repertoire works on an irregular basis, sometimes striving to fill all the section chairs come concert time”; in England there was Foster’s Social Orchestra, the People’s Orchestra

²¹ Howard Skempton in “Christian Wolff, John Tilbury, Howard Skempton, Robert Worby,” <http://www.paristransatlantic.com/magazine/interviews/wolff.html>

²² Clive Bell, “A History of the LMC,” <https://www.theculture.net/radio/resonance-a-history/>

Music, the Promenade Theatre Orchestra, and, according to David Saunders, there were “art school grouplets in Liverpool and Nottingham.”²³ Brian Eno called these similarly premised ensembles of conceptual music making “very important in England for a while and nowhere else,” but it seems clear that something about this activity caught on with musicians and artists all over, for any number of reasons.²⁴

Perhaps all of these short-lived orchestras were simply a more social means to play and goof off together, or to mask one’s incompetence as something useful, compensating for lack of training by out-smarting the circumstances, a way to say, “I will do that” that isn’t hampered by pesky hierarchies of knowledge. Whatever the motivation might have been, there is no question that they (with the exception of the Portsmouth Sinfonia) often operated at the margins of artistic activity, and their innovations were perhaps best understood through what artist Gregory Sholette calls “dark matter.”

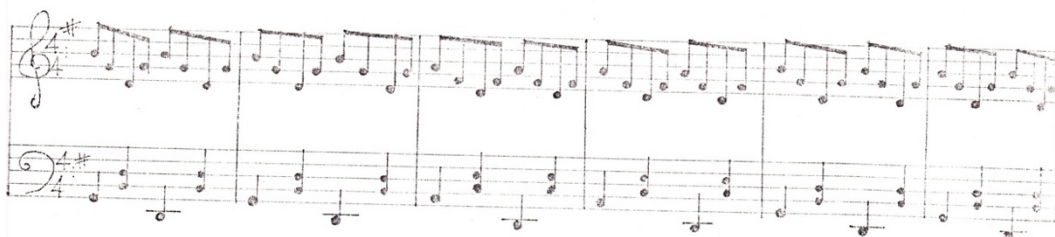
Sholette theorizes that “Dark matter productivity,” is “the structural excess of artists over the available spaces in the art system,” and these orchestra’s performing, teaching, and celebrating a form of non-specific knowledge production certainly reads as unmanageable in a conventional arts system.²⁵ Although such groups have limited visibility or immediate legible historical importance, their examples show a participatory means to confront the task of creating bit tactical, fickle, inspiring, utopian, or experimental. All of these attributes were, and still are, means of confronting the task of making in undesirable conditions.

Figs. B.7-B.9: Scores to Ian Southwood, “Sea Air in G” (1972), Robin Mortimore, “Marylands Tune No. 3” (1972), and James Lampard, “The Great March” (1972).

²³ DeKalb Orchestra: “Group for New Music Concert: ‘Scratch’ Orchestra to Premiere,” *Daily Chronicle*, October 14, 1972. Shoestring Orchestra: Charles McCardell, “New Music Orchestra,” *The Washington Post*, May 25, 1983. David Saunders quoted in Paul Du Noyer, *Deaf School: The Non-Stop Art Punk Rock Party*, Liverpool University Press, 2013, 40.

²⁴ Brian Eno quoted in Lester Bangs, “A Sandbox in Alphaville,” 1979/2003 <https://www.furious.com/perfect/bangseno2.html>.

²⁵ Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, Chicago: Pluto Press, 2011, 45.

Sea Air in G

'MARYLANDS' TUNE No 3. R. Mortimore 72.

Sect 1.

Sect 2.

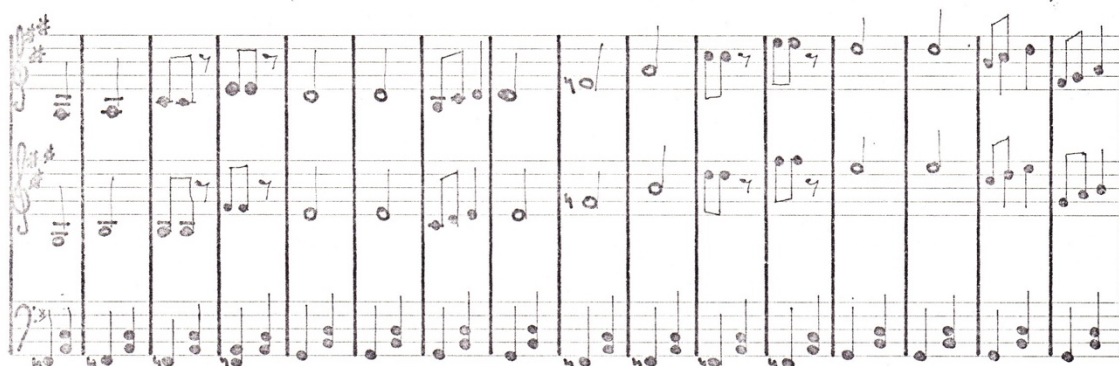
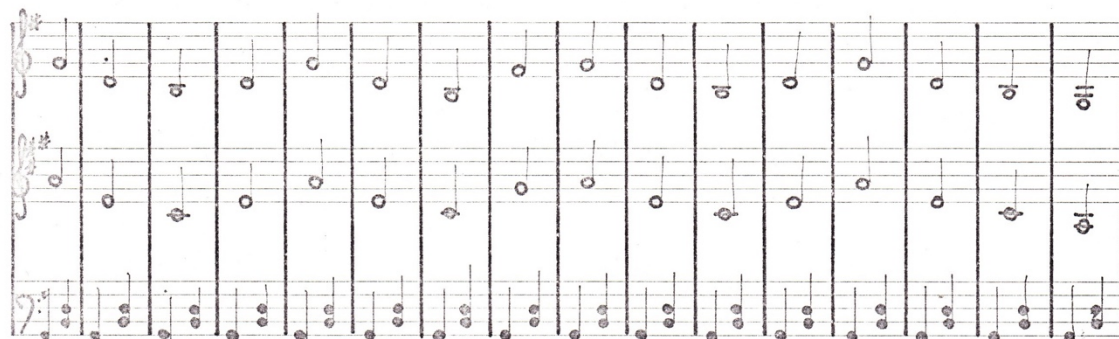
Sect 3.



© R.P.M. March 73

THE GREAT MARCH

JAMES LAMPARD.



© 1973 J.K.L.



Appendix C

Visual 'No'

The following is a small sampling of artwork by a select few No Wave musicians. Hopefully one day there will be more done on the strange sonic readymade of Boris Policeband (a band with a police radio scanner as lead vocalist) or the gestural potentials in the music of Von LMO, who would perform by putting a chainsaw through a plugged in electric guitar.¹ I have also purposefully left out most No Wave film, such as that by James Nares, Diego Cortez, Ericka Beckman, Amos Poe, and Vivienne Dick. Most, if not all, of the No Wave performers appeared in at least one film during this time, and these films, like their musical counterparts, were often amateurish and experimental by virtue of embracing limitations. Ample information on these films can be found in the two major surveys of No Wave: Marc Masters' *No Wave* and Thurston Moore and Byron Coley's *No Wave Post Punk Underground New York 1976-1980*.

Nancy Arlen (Mars, Dark Day)

Prior to performing in Mars, Nancy Arlen (then Nancy Godfrey) was a sculptor, who was perhaps most (in)famous for her scene in Dušan Makavejev's film *W.R.: Mysteries of the Organism* (1971) in which she makes a plaster mold of *Screw* Magazine founder Jim Buckley's erect penis. The film was already testing the limits of the Yugoslav censors with its themes of revolutionary sexual politics and its celebrating the controversial work of Wilhelm Reich. The plaster casting sequence proved to be the final straw for the censors, effectively getting the film banned in Yugoslavia (and simultaneously illustrating the very efficacy of the power of sexual politics in its State censorship).²

¹ See: *Future Language: The Dimensions of Von LMO*, 2018. Dir. Lori Felker.

² Film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum notes of the film: "To cite a suggestive formula proposed by the late Raymond Durnat, Makavejev's vision is that of a tragic Rabelaisian Marxist — an artist so dialectical in spirit that he can juxtapose his politically incorrect celebration of Nancy Godfrey in New York sculpting a plaster-cast replica of *Screw* editor Jim Buckley's erect penis with a satirical song by Tuli Kupferberg about the destructive links between sex and capitalist ownership: "I'm gonna kill myself over your dead body if you fuck anybody but me." <https://www.jonathanrosenbaum.net/2019/10/wr-sex-and-the-art-of-radical-juxtaposition/>

The practice of plaster casting penises began with Cynthia Albritton in the late 1960s, who, inspired by the “summer of love” took to casting the genitalia of famous musicians. Albritton, who goes by Cynthia Plaster Caster today, initially started the practice “to get laid,” but some came to think of these casts in a Warholian tradition of repetition. Somewhat surprisingly given the notoriety of *Mysteries of the Organism*, Arlen never discussed this film in print, nor did her work continue in any explicit (in both sense of the word) continuation of this type of making. It’s more than likely that this type of activity was of its moment, representing a strand of artistic empowerment that by the end of the end of the 1970s, might have had different reverberations in regard to its potentials. Nonetheless, there is some poetic synergy between this early work by Arlen and capturing corporeal impressions in her later sculptural work (and to some extent, her musical work in pushing the limits of the body).

Following the disbanding of Mars, Arlen seems to have turned her attention solely back to sculptural work. Calling her works, “air colors,” Arlen’s abstract sculptures, made from polyester and resin, took on novel formal bends and turns, and her casting process captures the colors as if they been frozen in space and time, indeed materialized, almost as if discovering a new earth element.³ This sculptural process was described by *Artforum*’s Ronny H. Cohen as a transformation of “liquid polyester and various coloring materials (resins, glitters, Mylar, pigments) into a new category of dynamic palpable, thoroughly contemporary art objects.”⁴ Indeed, the dynamism of these sculptures were their major appeal and by the mid-1980s, Arlen’s work had grown from small to large scale fragmented installations that cut and punctured the viewing space through their rhizomatic branches and forms.

For the first half of the 1980s, Arlen’s work seemed to pop up everywhere, in a number of high profile art exhibitions and New York City galleries, and was theorized –

³ Nancy Arlen quoted in Scott Cook, “Art for the Eighties,” Venezuela: Galeria Durbán Caracas, 1980, 13.

⁴ Ronny H. Cohen, “Nancy Arlen,” *Artforum*, 1982, 89.

alongside works by Jeff Koons, Tom Rankin, and Takao Saito - as indicative of a new movement, the short-lived “Energism.”⁵ Despite this attention, Arlen quit both the art and music worlds, retiring for unknown reasons. While there is nothing immediately to connect Arlen’s sculptural work and her musical performance, I cannot help but read the immediate viewing sensations of these strange sculptural squiggles, bursting with color and motion, as a distinct, but nonetheless distant echo of the sharp, but never virtuoso, thuds and pounds of her drumming in Mars.⁶ The drummer’s role, for the most part, is to hold the musical activity of the group together, which requires a rigor of timing, a clarity in sound, and a surplus of energy, which is to say, a carefully measured strike. Arlen’s sculptures, as formal objects, strike, not necessarily violently like percussion, but loudly, garishly, and playfully.

Sumner Crane (Mars, “John Gavanti”)

Sumner Crane had studied painting at the New York Studio School (1964-66) under the abstract expressionist painter Milton Resnick. Although what little visual work there is ca. 1975-80 is highly figurative, there are small painterly flourishes that reflect a training in abstraction. The globs of blue, white, and gray oil paint that represent a filthy windshield and the atmospheric chunks of colors and shapes depicting a receding background in *Untitled (After Raymond Chandler)*; the heavy fabric accent strokes on an invisible person’s jacket on a flyer for a Don King performance at CBGB; the scribbled shadow under the chin of a figure on a poster for Mars, DNA, The Blue Humans at Max’s. Later in his life he became an art historian, and published at least one article, on the destruction of Edward Simmons’ *The Carpenter’s Son* (1888-89).⁷ In his biographical notes for this article he makes no mention of his musical history.

⁵ See: Ronny H. Cohen, “Energism: An Attitude,” in *Artforum*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (September 1980), 16-23.

⁶ Robin Crutchfield, who invited Nancy Arlen to play in his group, Dark Day, perhaps summarized her playing best: “energetic, acrobatic, tom tom tumbling.” Crutchfield in “Robin’s Notes on ‘Hands in the Dark.’” *Dark Entries*, 2013.

⁷ See: Sumner Crane and Susan Lehman, “In Memorium: Simmons’s *The Carpenter’s Son* (1888-1996), *American Art* Vol. 14, No. 2 (Summer, 2000), pp. 76-89.

Robin Crutchfield (DNA, Dark Day)

A fervent admirer of Fluxus and particularly Yoko Ono, Robin Crutchfield moved to New York City from Newtown, Pennsylvania in 1975 to attempt his hand at performance art. By September of that year, Crutchfield was on the roster for Charlotte Moorman's 12th Annual Avant-Garde Festival, performing a work called "The Death of Sparrow Hart." In this early piece, Crutchfield draw a chalk box outline around himself – and a few objects such as a toy piano and blanket - on the Floyd Bennet airfield, creating a self-imposed barrier. Hiding under the blanket and playing the toy piano, Crutchfield took on the persona of a self-exiled hermit, and the piece was an overall well received meditation on creating in moments of unwelcome loneliness.⁸

On January 29th, 1976, Crutchfield performed his solo show at Stefan Eins' The Mercer Street Store. Says Crutchfield,

It was a gender-bending, exercise in self-confrontation entitled *Mommy, Me, Bandage*, with garish makeup, and props like beveled mirrors and apron strings, and scissors, and a cutout of a 1950's illustration of a stereotypical nurse, and dozens of miniature sexless plastic baby dolls which encrusted my body, attached by adhesive tape. The apron strings were cut, the nurse's head snipped off and taped to the mirror, then the dolls were removed, one by one, to cover and conceal my reflection in the mirror. All this was done to a tape I had made from an old found-sound phono booth record, on which two young girls sang and giggled their way through a song, which stuck and repeated and skipped and droned in various speeds, the maniacal tune "Tell Me Why I Love You So" giving the whole tableau an unnerving "dark theater" psychodrama edge.⁹

Crutchfield's aggressively psychoanalytical *Mommy, Me, Bandage* was a queering of the conventional personal chrysalis narrative: a mutilated nurse watches a continuous gender fluid rebirthing annihilate self-reflection/the reflection of the self. Lacanian notions of the mirror stage turn to mirror staging, with human development being theatrically performed quite literally through the sticking of infants to a beveled mirror. On a less interpretive side,

⁸ Robin Crutchfield notes seeing the piece while it was occurring at René Block Gallery expresses his admiration for this work in a 2011 conversation with Nina Canal.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDrNak4hYAE>.

⁹ Robin Crutchfield, "Dark Days as I Recall Them," 2001.
https://nowave.pairsite.com/no_wave/dark_history.html

Crutchfield's gestures in this performance speak somewhat to his later propensity for accumulation and repetition in musical performance, the "sculptural approach" to the keyboard while in DNA (see chapter four) and the use of multi-tracking synthesizer and voice on his post-DNA project with Nancy Arlen and Nina Canal, *Dark Day*.

Crutchfield's friend Susan Springfield, who performed with the Erasers (see chapter four) took a photograph of Crutchfield during *Mommy, Me, Bandage* that was widely circulated. The photograph, featuring Crutchfield with a grid of knockoff kewpie doll figurines taped to his arms, neck, and torso was reprinted in newspapers such as *Soho Weekly News* and published as a postcard in Toronto art collective General Idea's *File Magazine*. The legend goes that Arto Lindsay saw this photograph and was so intrigued, he asked Crutchfield to join what would become DNA. "I read years later that Arto was inspired by that photo to want to work with me," says Crutchfield, "but to my memory, that never came up in any of our early conversations about working together."¹⁰

Barbara Ess (Daily Life, The Static, Glenn Branca, Y Pants)

Out of all of the No Wave affiliated performers, it is perhaps Barbara Ess (Schwartz) that has had the most varied art career. Ess had an early affiliation with the London Filmmakers Co-op, joining the loose collective of filmmakers of all stripes founded by the poet Bob Cobbing and filmmaker Stephen Dwoskin in 1969. Alongside others who would carve out their own particular niche in the art and film worlds such as Fred Drummond, Malcolm Le Grice, Sally Potter, and Carolee Schneemann, Ess screened her home movies that focused on "particulars rather than generalities."¹¹ Ess had come to London from Ann

¹⁰ Simon Reynolds writes: "Crutchfield was a performance artist recruited by Lindsay not for any musical ability but rather because of a widely circulated photograph of one of his theater pieces." In Simon Reynolds, "Ono, Eno, Arto: Non-Musicians and the Emergence of Concept Rock," in ed. Dominic Molon, *Sympathy for the Devil: Art and Rock and Roll Since 1967*, Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 2008, 84. Crutchfield's dispute: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDrNak4hYAE>.

¹¹ Barbara Ess/Schwartz in Verina Glassner, "Interviews with Three Filmmakers," *Time Out London*, March 17-23, 1972, 46.

Arbor, and galvanized, like so many others during this time, by the Ann Arbor Film Festival, she decided to attend the London School of Film Technique in 1971.

None of Ess' films from this period seem to have survived, but there is ample description of them from others. In a "Directory of U.K. Independent Filmmakers" published in *Cinema Rising*, an alternative filmmaker broadsheet, Ess' films are described at length by critic and filmmaker Peter Gidal:

'Home' movies of the best sort. Movies from the home, movies that are precise in their absorption of daily life and action: bathing, drinking tea, looking in the mirror (and through the mirror at other things), looking over the city, taking a train (high speed), making love, playing music, etc. These 8mm movies deal with subject matter purely subjectively and poetically. The idiosyncratic personality of the filmmaker is here the make of gestures. And Barbara Schwartz's film-gestures are not simple linear statements (poetic or otherwise) but rather a whole set of juxtapositions (in the Eisenstein sense), wherein each cluster, fragment, of film adds to a total crystal-like image, then the next, then the next. Only one never knows where one stops and the 'next' begins. This is her strength, and subtlety. She evokes moods, she represents feelings through action: moving across a room, blowing bubbles, smiling 'candid camera style.' There's a deep element of nostalgia, because the images' reverberations, in all their lightness have a sense of passing about them, a sense of reality as already phantasized. They seem to be conjured up clearly, concisely, carefully. It is as if the editing care bestowed on such 'everyday scenes' automatically transforms the vision to one from the past: the spontaneity of the present has been beautifully included in the content. In the form of the film it has been beautifully avoided. And with it the temptation to tell some 'objective' truth. These films are poetry, a poetry of total illumination, personal illumination: Proust's 'involuntary memory' finely constructed into movies.¹²

Gidal's noting of Ess' filmic emphasis on daily rituals, ephemerality, and asynchronous nostalgia is a thread that is carried through her visual and musical work, from (the very literal nomenclature of) *Daily Life*, her band with Glenn Branca, Christine Hahn, and Paul McMahon, her songs about food with her later music group, Y Pants, and her later pinhole camera photography.¹³ Ess' emphasis on minor gestures manifested itself during a

¹² Peter Gidal, "Directory of U.K. Independent Film-Makers: Barbara Schwartz," *Cinema Rising*, April 1972.

¹³ Y Pants was Barbara Ess, visual artist Virginia Piersol, and filmmaker Gail Vachon. The group's performing with lo-fi instrumentation – Casio keyboards, toy drum sets and pianos, and ukulele – endeared them both to art galleries and music venues. They released two records: an EP, *Little Music* (1980) produced by Glenn Branca for the art record label 99 Records and *Beat it Down* (1982) produced by no wave stalwart Wharton Tiers. The group disbanded in late 1982.

memorable screening of her home movies at London's New Arts Lab, as recalled by LPMC programmer and filmmaker Annabel Nicolson:

She [Ess] showed several of her films and then handed out round jars of bubbles and asked people to blow them. You could see the bubbles rising in the projector beam and the circles on the screen. Her work always had a beautiful quality of informality. Watching her films in the cinema was like watching them upstairs in the flat where she lives, images of her friends and people she was close to.¹⁴

The ephemeral nature of daily events, and the temporal play involved with catching them, also take shape in Ess' numerous artist books done during the 1970s. *This Happened Yesterday* (1976) is a collection of ten small dated booklets documenting daily activities and sights, created on a xerox machine and presented in a Ziplock bag; *Grammar Play* (1976) is a 30 page book with "pictures and text from found children's grammar books, eclectically rearranged";¹⁵ a one sheet included by Ess with the catalogue for the performance exhibition, *Public Arts International/Free Speech*, includes a xerox of a filmstrip of the artist and Carla Liss performing *Seesaw*, described as "2 Women on a Seesaw; From Light to Dark" (1979). Using Joanna Drucker's useful definition of artists books as a "book which integrates the formal means of its realization and production with its thematic or aesthetic issues," Ess' self-produced and cheaply published books can be read as material manifestations of her work and interests in the ephemerality of her daily life.¹⁶

In the early 1980s, Ess took part in Charlotte Moorman's 15th (and last) Annual Avant Garde Festival (1980) and co-organized, alongside Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon, an art exhibition to coincide with a nine-day concert, "Noise Fest," at White Columns in New York City (June 16th, 1981). The press release for this "Noise Fest" adjacent art exhibition reads, "This work somehow parallels or derives its energy from current movements in music (punk, new wave, Energist, retro-chic). The artists in the exhibition at White Columns are

¹⁴ Annabel Nicolson, "Annabel Nicolson at the Co-op," *Light Years: A Twenty-Year Celebration of the LPMC*, October/November 1986, 41.

¹⁵ *Speaking Volumes* at A.I.R. Gallery, May 19, 1980, Press Release, 3.

¹⁶ Joanna Drucker, *A Century of Artists' Books*, New York: Granary Books, 1995, 2.

all musicians – whether or not the work has any relationship to music remains open.”¹⁷ The quixotic relationship between visual art and music making among such a large roster of people seemed to be a concept in its own right, and Ess would continue to organize and include a massive amount of artists working at the edges of mediums in her publishing project, *Just Another Asshole*.

Just Another Asshole began as a zine in 1978, and the first two issues were Ess’ own, a collection of collaged newspaper and magazine imagery alongside drawings and texts that created cryptic, and occasionally disturbing, juxtapositions. Ess, working with the artist Jane Sherry, opened the third issue to contributors, and the publication featured work from over one hundred contributors, including now-art-world-luminaries such as Jenny Holzer, Jeff Koons, and Barbara Kruger. The fourth issue appeared as a spread in the February, 1980 issue of *Artforum*, perhaps confusing Ess’ own description of *JAA* as “a *real* art forum.”¹⁸ Issues 5 and 6, co-edited with Ess’ then-partner Glenn Branca, continued the massive anthology format of issue 3, with *JAA* #5 (1981) featuring eighty-four contributors to a recorded LP (see Chapter Four) and *JAA* #6, a 186 page mass-market paperback, featuring sixty-one. Aside from being a time capsule of the trove of artistic activity occurring in early 1980s New York City, issues #5 and #6 act as flippant challenges to medium specificity: what might a Richard Prince work look like under the constraint of a paperback book and how would a Kiki Smith piece sound on an LP?

The final, seventh issue of *JAA* (1987) took the form of a glossy photobook featuring 119 contributors. Contributor Gary Indiana recalls, “[Ess] asked a large number of people to give her special photos. They chose, for the most part, very quirky things, pictures that were, more than most pictures, windows into their brains. One was just a crooked smile

¹⁷ White Columns press release for “Noise Fest,” 1981. Artists exhibited included: Jules Baptiste, Andy Blinx, Glenn Branca, Nina Canal, Soody Cisco, Sumner Crane, Robin Crutchfield, Ann Demarinis, Barbara Ess, Martha Fishken, Kim Gordon, Rudolph Grey, Sue Hanel, Nancy Heidel, Kurt Hoffman, John King, Billy Komoski, Jeffrey Lohn, Robert Longo, Randy Ludecer, Jeff McGovern, Richard McGuire, Miranda Stanton, Ikue Mori, Linda Pitt, Lee Ranaldo, John Rehberger, David Rosenbloom, Gail Vachon, Fritz van Orden, Alan Vega, Dan Witz.

¹⁸ Barbra Ess quoted in Cornelia Butler, Alexandra Schwartz, eds. *Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010, 450.

drawn on a foggy out of focus photo.”¹⁹ This focus on photography that was “more than just pictures” in this final issue of *JAA* coincided with the beginnings of Ess’ career success with the medium. Often using a pinhole camera, Ess’ career-long interest in the minutiae of everyday life and its relation to time collide in this time based medium.

Ess’ anachronistic choice of using a pinhole camera is at the service of both concept and aesthetic. The limitations of the pinhole camera creates photographic images that seem both out of time and, due to its lack of a focusing mechanism, distorted. The blurriness of everyday objects in Ess’ pinhole photographs make them appear unstable and uncanny; a feeling exacerbated by her use of unusual angles of photographic capture. One can read the uncertainty in the act of capturing time through Ess’ photographic images, a fitfulness that seems less to do with anxiety and more to do with responsibility. Although there is a distinction between her music, films, and photographs, particularly in terms of the temporal (making time vs. capturing time), Ess’ work seems to question over and over again how the artist should best capture life – its joys along with its overlooked ephemerality. Thus, while Ess’ simultaneous work in disparate medias coincides with the more pluralistic postmodern post-media turn by art and artists of the late 1970s and 1980s, the work is less a celebration of freedom of choice as it is a means to understand how that choice intersects with the act of living.

In *JAA* #7: *Thought Objects*, the photograph of the “crooked smile drawn on a foggy out of focus photo” that Gary Indiana mentions above is by Ess’ former bandmate (Daily Life), Paul McMahon (see Chapter Four). Titled *Have a Nice Day* (1977), McMahon’s photo is exactly as Indiana describes it, and its title, a nod to the ubiquitous expression – often accompanied by a smiley face – found on buttons and t-shirts everywhere in the 1970s. The photo seems to ask: have a nice a day at the expense of what? Thirty-seven years later, Ess exhibited a photo entitled *Peek-A-Boo* (2014), an out of focus self-portrait with two drawn

¹⁹ Gary Indiana, “Barbara Ess is a Character in a Novel I Am Writing,” in Barbara Ess, *Photography, Installation, and Books, 1978-1991*, 9.

Xs marking out her eyes. In both *Have a Nice Day* and *Peek-A-Boo*, the bold, cartoonish lines on top of the two blurry faces imply big consequences in their foregrounded composition: ruminations of losing the self either in the pursuit of happiness or in death. Profound sentiments born out of simple gestures and actions are the crux of Ess' work, as is capturing the chance meetings between life and art, and time and space. On account of this, it seemed appropriate to mention this likely inadvertent conversation between two photographs, by two former bandmates and friends, that occurred over time and space and theoretically will go on forever.

Pat Place (The Contortions, Bush Tetras)

Chicago-born Pat Place's first published work were two drawings in a 1973 issue of the University of Chicago literary journal, *Chicago Review*. Still an art student at Northern Illinois University at the time, Place described her work at the time as "influenced by the Hairy Who school and Kitsch currents."²⁰ The two drawings featured in *Chicago Review* explicitly speak to these influences, particularly the dense, cartoonish, busyness of the Hairy Who (the group of Chicago artists Jim Falconer, Art Green, Gladys Nilsson, Jim Nutt, Suellen Rocca, and Karl Wirsum who exhibited together from 1966-1970). Drawing for the Hairy Who was, as Mark Pascale writes, central to their output, "an engine for exploration...a tool for planning finished work...essential to their aesthetic."²¹ The prioritizing of heavy lines to accentuate their abject and profane imagery – particularly in the work of Nutt and Falconer – is evident in Place's drawings, with the repeating abstract shape and palm tree borders, the motion lines that indicate the cutting in half of a pig, and the crisp cartoonish fish set in a hand-drawn, rock-patterned frame.

These drawings also blur, as the Hairy Who did with their own self-published books (exhibition catalogs that took the form of comic books), the lines between the mass-produced comic book/strip and fine art. In the first drawing for the *Chicago Review*, Place

²⁰ Pat Place in *Chicago Review*, Vol. 25, No.4 (1973), back cover.

²¹ Mark Pascale, "Drawing toward a 'Barbaric Yelp' on Canvas," in Thea Nichols, Mark Pascale, and Ann Goldstein, eds., *Hairy Who? 1966-1969*, Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2018, 192.

presents a series of sequences: a squirrel's head pops off during a mid-day walk over five panels; the aforementioned pig is inexplicably split apart over three panels; a martini glass empties itself over four panels; in one long panel at the bottom snails march along into the edge of an also paneled border (filled with palm trees, abstract squiggles, and a solitary flamingo). The sequences here, all showing (literal) casualties of time, speak well to young artists at the time drawing on the vocabulary of popular source material, indicating that by 1973, Pop was still a fortified site for art students to mine.

Place finished her art schooling at NIU via a remote for-credit summer art program at New York's Skidmore College, which landed her in New York City around 1975. One of her next, and highest profile exhibitions, was at Washington DC's *Punk Art Exhibition* in 1978, organized by Alice Denney, Marc H. Miller, and Bettie Ringma at the Washington Project for the Arts. The exhibition promised "animals, cartoons, fashion, film, photography, sculpture, and video," featured dozens of works by punk adjacent musicians working on the fringes of music and art. Its catalogue contained a comment from Andy Warhol: "I think the punk artists would be those people who were the graffiti people in the subways. So, what else can I say about punk?"²²

Place had turned her attention to photography following art school, and the photographs she exhibited at the *Punk Art Exhibition* and into the 1980s carried on her love of kitsch and dense composition. Place wrote of her work in the exhibition catalogue:

I started doing these photographs when I started playing the guitar... My photography has to do with Sci-Fi and all those films that are coming out, like Star Wars. I want my pictures to look spacey. I think that's related to the whole Punk thing. It's the most modern thing going on today. It's the future. It's plugging yourself in... and electricity. My pictures show these weird slimy little animals. All of a sudden, they come together and there is this big war, a battle of the lizards... It's off the wall. It's sort of "what is it?" Why would you want to see a photograph of that? I like reaching the point of vagueness... confusion... why this? I think Punk deals with that too. It's just kind of crazy. It doesn't make sense. It's sort of pushing something to its limits.²³

²² Andy Warhol in Marc H. Miller, Bettie Ringma, eds, *Punk Art Catalogue*, 1978. <https://98bowery.com/punk-years/punk-art-catalogue-section-one>. Accessed April 3rd, 2020.

²³ Pat Place in *Punk Art Catalogue*, 1978. <https://98bowery.com/punk-years/punk-art-catalogue-section-four>. Accessed September 24th, 2020.

Place had only been playing guitar for “about three weeks,” when she began playing with the Contortions in 1977, and that these photographs – tableaux of low-budget sci-fi movies recreated with cheap toys and objects – began around the same time is telling of her own methodology in both music and art making at the time. Place’s photos of a toy lizard attacking an empty film cannister, or a troll doll seized by army men were taking the often laughably low budget produced sci-fi B-movies of the 1950s, full of exposed seams on monster costumes and visible puppet strings on UFOs, into even cheaper territory, and in doing so boil them down to their essences: playing with toys on a budget. Distilling culture down to its essentials was precisely how Place conceptually approached playing the guitar in the Contortions, forgoing chords for the sound of a slide on the strings, bucking the conventions of the instrument in rock music for its most basic sounds. In her photographs and music work of the late 1970s-1980s, Place took to simple compositions, not just for the sake of ease, but to reveal certain fundamentals of both.

Place had her first solo show in 1983 at Tin Pan Alley, a bar near Times Square. In a review for *Artforum*, Glenn O’Brien writes, “It was an appropriate setting for the work, an artists’ and musicians’ hangout where every once in a while some of the local color drifts in and a few patrons might have thought that the photos—tableaux of toy monsters, souvenir objects, and other exotic items (there may even be a pink elephant in there somewhere)—were a hallucination.”²⁴ Artists exhibiting their work in clubs or bars was not atypical of this moment in the early 1980s, with even an established art world figure such as Sol LeWitt turning his attention to the interiors of music clubs. The shift from the gallery to the bar during this moment has an obvious corollary with the attention given to vernacular music making by artists in the late 1970s – 1980s, in that sites of mass culture could be theoretically underpinned with high art and intellectual pursuits. This was a fleeting moment, both indicative of the origins of the 1980s market exploiting the fruits of this

²⁴ Glenn O’Brien, “Pat Place: Tin Pan Alley,” *Artforum*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (December 1983), 79.

tendency – selling art in galleries and in mass markets was good business – but also the earnest attempts to bring high art ideas into sites of everyday life.

In 1981, Place began work on a life-long pursuit: capturing photographs of end titles from movies on her television set. In 2009, Place exhibited her collection of over 1,000 of these end titles, creating a grid of endless variations on “The End.” Of course, an end title is an oxymoron, as time freezes on such a static object (as it does in a photograph). Thus, “The End,” goes on forever, and over thousands of variations all amount to the same sentiment of deferred finality. Such a poetic of simplicity is a fitting pursuit in terms of Place’s larger body of work, suggesting that things don’t really come to a close, they just change often over a long period of time.

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