

PART TWO

Drawing Maps: Connecting the Dots through Appropriation, Exploration, and Integration

You have brains in your head.
You have feet in your shoes.
You can steer yourself
any direction you choose.
You're on your own. And you know what you know.
And YOU are the guy who'll decide where to go.

— Dr. Seuss, *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*

Taken as a metaphor for creativity, these instructions from the always inspiring Dr. Seuss suggest that each individual is in complete control of where their creative process can take them. Yet it is difficult to know where to go when one is unaware of what is possible. It is useful then, to have a map.

Maps tell us what is around us and how we can get there. Maps tell us where we are. Writer Peter Turchi suggests that “we organize information on maps in order to see our knowledge in a new way. As a result, maps suggest explanations; and while explanations reassure us, they also inspire us to ask more questions, consider other possibilities.”¹ Maps then, can offer a means of analyzing our own individual thought processes and, through that analysis, allow us to develop new connections between the information contained within. As Kim Vincs writes, “a map is not a representation of some prior, unifying idea, but rather something that connects elements.”² The elements

1. Peter Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2004), 11.

2. Kim Vincs, “Rhizome/Myzone: A Case Study in Studio-Based Dance Research,” in *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, ed. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 105.

which make up my own personal landscape are wide ranging and perhaps seemingly unconnected—yet the act of placing them in relation to one another gives them connection. Vincs continues, stating that “the map is not time-dependent. It doesn’t tell you what to read first, or in what order to put things together. It is an instrument for someone to use as they will.”³ It is my intention for this essay to be read like map of my own personal influences, experiences, and associations. With Vincs’s comments in mind, rather than address the questions which have been presented to me in a linear manner, I will organize this essay in three sections (appropriation, exploration, and integration), creating an overall framework in which to discuss individual topics.

The question, in its totality, that makes up part two of this examination seems to bear certain connections to the questions posed in part one and three; it functions as a bridge between them. In thinking of this essay as a map, both myself and the reader will be able to make connections between the various aspects of my musical persona as well as between the subject matter it presents and their relation to the first and third parts of this exam.

Appropriation

1.

The manner in which I conceptualize appropriation has been developing in my studies over the last several years. The beginning of this interest can be traced back to my work at The University of Michigan and my introduction to the concept of

3. Vincs, “Rhizome/Myzone,” 104.

plunderphonics.⁴ The term “plunderphonics” is not an easy one to define. It first appeared in the title of a lecture given by composer John Oswald in 1985 at the Wired Society Electro-Acoustic Conference; shortly thereafter it was published as an essay.⁵ The essay however never explicitly defines the term. The term was used again shortly thereafter as “plunderphonic,” the title to Oswald’s 1988 four song EP. *Plunderphonics*, as defined by Greg Kot, is a term for “any music made completely out of existing audio recordings, including copyrighted material, and then altered in some way to create a new composition.”⁶ Although correct, this is a very broad definition which doesn’t even begin to suggest all the difficulties that come with the term. In a 2003 interview, Oswald, when asked for his own definition of the term, stated: “‘Plunderphonics’ is a term I’ve coined to cover the counter-covert world of converted sound and retrofitted music where collective melodic memories of the familiar are minced and rehabilitated to a new life.”⁷ Clearly, “plunderphonics” is a difficult term to define.

Although my introduction to the term plunderphonics came about while in Michigan, there was one previous experience which planted the seed for my interest. This took place in 2002, while studying at Arizona State University. In a seminar on the analysis of electronic music, I was introduced to the composition *Ommagio a Jerry Lee Lewis* by composer Richard Trythall. The entire work was created through the manipulation of a recording of Jerry Lee Lewis’s “Whole Lotta Shakin’ Goin’ On.” The

4. The situation surrounding this introduction was presented in part one.

5. John Oswald, “Plunderphonics, or Audio Piracy as a Compositional Prerogative,” *Musicworks* 34 (Spring 1986): 5-8.

6. Greg Kot, *Ripped: How the Wired Generation Revolutionized Music* (New York: Scribner, 2009), 164.

7. Paul Steenhuisen, *Sonic Mosaics: Conversations with Composers* (Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: University of Alberta Press, 2009), 128.

piece itself, was written in 1975 for stereo tape and although the composer seems to contextualize the work in relation “music concrete,” this piece is a clear display of plunderphonic technique (despite the fact that the term had not yet been coined by Oswald at this time). According to Trythall, the work was

created solely through tape manipulations applied to a pre-recorded work. This central source material was first cut into thematic and motivic units of various types and sizes – words, phrases, notes, chords, musical fragments, etc. These were then subjected to a wide variety of “musique concrete” procedures (speech change, filtering, head echo, reverberation, looping, signal interruption through erasure and excerpt loops, compression, expansion, phasing, panning, multiple readings, tape passes, editing, remixing, etc.) These results were then reassembled, mixed, and re-mixed, until a new composition emerged.⁸

It was this work, rather than all the others that I had been presented with, that I chose to analyze for my final project in the seminar. Based on this experience, it is clear that there is something inherent in the concept of appropriation that fascinates me, although I am still uncertain as to what that is. The writing of this essay is, in part, a means of trying to answer that question.

The case for appropriation in music goes back hundreds of years. Parody masses from the 16th century are one of the earliest examples of this activity. This eventually evolved into the concept of “quotation,” which has been, and is still frequently utilized. Composers such as Stravinsky (who is frequently quoted as saying “Good composers don’t borrow, they steal!”) and Bartok freely synthesized folk music traditions into their own work. More recent cases include the work of Charles Ives, whose work frequently quoted from popular songs of his time, and Luciano Berio, whose *Sinfonia* is still one of the best examples musical collage. However, none of

8. Richard Trythall, *Omaggio a Jerry Lee Lewis*, CRI, New York, 1975, 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ rpm, liner notes.

these works seem to have been created through the use of recorded sound.⁹ This would soon change. Some of the first examples of compositional works created with the use of sound recording came from Pierre Schaeffer, in a style he referred to as “musique concrete.” When introducing this new term, Schaeffer explained that

this determination to compose with materials taken from an existing collection of experimental sounds, I name *musique concrete*, to mark well the place in which we find ourselves, no longer dependent upon preconceived sound abstractions, but now using fragments of sound existing concretely and considered as sound objects defined and whole...¹⁰

Through very primitive techniques, Schaeffer used multiple record players and recordings of sounds from the everyday world to create sound collage pieces.

Jacques Poullin, who built many of the record looping machines used by Schaeffer, said that “possibly one of the most surprising results of acoustic recording technique has been to make us conscious of the objective value of the normally fleeting musical raw material.”¹¹ The ability to capture this “raw material” radically transformed the way that composers could now deal with appropriated materials. John Cage is perhaps the first to fully embrace this development. In *Williams Mix* from 1952, Cage took a range of recorded sounds, divided them in to six distinct categories (city sounds, country sounds, electronic sounds, manually-produced sounds, wind-produced sounds, and small sounds requiring amplification), and then, in typical “Cageian style,” cut, spliced,

9. This is a debatable statement in the instances of Bartok and Berio, whose work may very well have utilized recorded sound as a means of developing their works; however it is conceivable that their works could have developed along the same lines without the use of recording technology.

10. Joel Chadabe, *Electric Sound The Past and Promise of Electronic Music*, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1997), 26-27.

11. Jacques Poullin, *The application of recording techniques to the production of new musical materials and forms. Applications to “musique concrete”*, (Ottawa: National Research Council of Canada, 1957), 3.

and rearranged the recordings based on chance procedures.¹² It took less than ten years from Cage's *Williams Mix*, for James Tenney to compose *Collage No. 1* ("*Blue Suede*"), which is cited by Chris Cutler as being the first "unequivocal exposition of plunderphonic techniques."¹³ A clear line can be drawn from this early work of Tenney's to the first "plunderphonic" works of Oswald.¹⁴ While these early examples were pioneers of the form, the rise of appropriation through the use of recorded sound was hindered by the painstaking amount of time it took to cut and splice each edit by hand. The dawn of digital technology removed this difficulty, and created an acceleration in the development of sound appropriation, allowing cutting, pasting, and manipulating to be executed with the push of a button.

My personal interest in musical appropriation has developed as a response to the ways digital media has allowed musical composition to develop. While plunderphonics was conceptualized in the age of analog recording, it wasn't until the age of digital recording that it really got interesting. John Oswald's *Plexure* is perhaps the best display of this. *Plexure* is comprised of material sampled from (mostly) pop recordings created between 1982 and 1992. It is one 20 minute piece within which the overall tempo of the songs sampled steadily increases from beginning to end. According to the sample "score" provided in the liner notes (which is essentially a spreadsheet of the sequence of samples used and their timings), the first two minutes of the piece contains over five hundred samples, with some taking as little time as a

12. Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 48.

13. Chris Cutler, "Plunderphonia" in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner, (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), 145.

14. It should also be noted that Oswald was a student of Tenney.

tenth of a second.¹⁵ A work such as this simply could not have been created without the aid of digital technology; the ability to cut and edit such small samples would have been physically impossible with the medium of tape. Part of Oswald's requirement for a plunderphonic work to be effective is the ability to recognize the source from which the sample was taken. Oswald's use of "micro-samples" in *Plexure* allow the work to be viewed as a study in the threshold of recognition.¹⁶ My interest in this threshold is related to my relationship with Naked City and the notion of the memory of the experience being longer than the experience itself.¹⁷ Of additional interest and influence, is this notion of recognizing the source from which the sample was taken. This is one of the key elements to have developed since the development of digital music. Once music became a series of zeros and ones, rather than a physical record or tape, its availability expanded greatly. This, in combination with the internet, changed everything. One no longer had to search record stores to find what they were looking for. Recordings ceased to be rare. Suddenly, everything was available. With this new ability to "find" anything, the range of influence on musicians increased considerably and the way composers used appropriated materials began to shift. The result was that appropriative music began to act as a form of commentary in itself—it created a means though which artists could display the influences which inspired them. Plunderphonics already had a head start on this. Oswald had always been concerned with the idea of musical quotation and in some ways, plunderphonics

15. John Oswald, *Plexure*, Avant, Avant 016, 1993, compact disc, liner notes.

16. John Oswald, *69 Plunderphonics 96*, Seeland 515, 2001, compact disc, liner notes.

17. This was previously discussed in part one.

functions as a musical form of an academic paper—musical “sources” are places in the context of one another to create a new statement. Oswald states:

Musical language has an extensive repertoire of punctuation devices but nothing equivalent to literature’s “ ” quotation marks. Jazz musicians do not wiggle two fingers of each hand in the air, as lecturers often do, when cross referencing during their extemporizations, because on most instruments this would present some technical difficulties – plummeting trumpets and such. Without a quotation system, well-intended correspondences cannot be distinguished from plagiarism and fraud.¹⁸

Issues of plagiarism and fraud aside, it is clear that Oswald is interested in creating a commentary based on the way he appropriates materials. From my perspective, I find that artists—such as Oswald and those who have followed in his footsteps¹⁹—create maps of influences through the recordings they choose to sample.

2.

What then is the relationship between appropriation and my own work? Despite the fact that I am extremely interested in (and thus influenced by) plunderphonics, I would not consider myself a “plunderphonic artist.” However, I have been raised as part of a generation where the borrowing of materials from other sources is relatively common, and becoming progressively more so. I appropriate because it is what I have learned through observation. Had I been born a hundred years ago, this would not have been possible—the technology simply didn’t exist. I appropriate ideas, sonic identities, melodies, rhythms, and even recorded sound. Appropriation is the way I think. It is the way I relate everything to everything.

18. John Oswald. “Plunderphonics, or Audio Piracy as a Compositional Prerogative,” in *Fair Use: The Story of the Letter U and the Numeral 2*, Negativland, (Concord: Seeland-Negativland, 1995), 215.

19. Such as Beck and Girl Talk.

Several examples of appropriation in my own works have been discussed in part one of this exam, but it is perhaps worth bringing them up for additional commentary. My arrangement of Schubert's "An die Musik" was created almost entirely out of appropriated materials. The very act of arranging a work is, in and of itself, an act of appropriation. I took this to its limits by utilizing several other works to create the whole. This compositional technique itself was appropriated from what is frequently referred to as a "mash-up." Musical copyright scholar Kembrew McLeod has defined a mash-up as an artist "layering a vocal melody line from one song on top of an instrumental melody from another song."²⁰ I find this definition to be a bit simplistic—mash-ups might utilize more than two songs, omit melody all together, combine melodies to create a new "meta-melody," or use many other variations of these techniques—but it is correct in essence. McLeod traces the earliest example of a mash-up to 1968 when Alan Copeland placed the melody of the Beatles' "Norwegian Wood" over the theme from *Mission: Impossible*.²¹ However, this is an instance where Copeland recorded his own arrangement of the two works together, rather than using digital technology to layer the actual original recordings together, as is usually the case with mash-ups today. It is the use of the actual recording which frequently creates legal issues over copyright. While it has been the work of current mash-up artists that has mostly inspired me, my arrangement of "An die Musik" is actually not that dissimilar, at least on a conceptual level, from Copeland's.

20. Kembrew McLeod, *Creative License: The Law and Culture of Digital Sampling*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 173.

21. Ibid.

not a place to build monuments or cathedrals (also discussed in part one) utilizes what I refer to as “sonic appropriation.” Sonic appropriation, for me, is the appropriation of a specific sound identifier. It is the borrowing of a sound world, rather than a specific sound itself. For example, His Name is Alive’s “Universal Frequencies,” (from their 1996 album *Stars on E.S.P.*) is a tribute to the sonic characteristics of the Beach Boys’ “Good Vibrations.” The song doesn’t quote any material from “Good Vibrations” directly, but its influence is immediately apparent. The song’s instrumentation, tempo, musical feel, structure, and most importantly, sonic impression, all convey influence from the Beach Boys’ song. To further expand upon the point, the Beach Boys’ *Pet Sounds* album (which immediately preceded “Good Vibrations”) owes much of the inspiration in its sonic character to Phil Spector’s “wall of sound” recording technique (which Brian Wilson openly claimed to imitate). For *not a place to build monuments or cathedrals*, I was attempting to recreate the sonic characteristics of the guitar work frequently employed by the band Sonic Youth. Sonic Youth is known to frequently use strange, alternate tunings of their own device. For this reason, I created my own unique tunings for the two solo guitars. Additionally, for a portion of the piece, the guitar soloists are instructed to use metal screwdrivers against the guitar strings (as a substitute for a pick), a technique I discovered while seeing Sonic Youth perform live over the years. I knew the sound that I wanted to the guitars to portray—it was in my head—and I stole it.

More recently, I have used appropriation for music performed by touchy-feely. touchy-feely is my current ensemble/project which I have been developing. I will discuss the ensemble itself more in depth later on in this essay, but for the moment, I

would like to discuss two particular works that were written for the group. The first is titled *sensitive adjustment within a world of constraint*. To begin, the title itself was appropriated from Roger Reynolds. It was during my preparations for this exam that I came across the phrase in Reynolds's book, *Form and Method*. I had just recently completed the work which bears the title, and felt that Reynolds's phrase, while to the listener might seem to suggest the exact opposite of what the piece seems to embody, was actually rather descriptive of what takes place within the work. Musically, the work is loud, harsh, and aggressive, and is based on the conceptual appropriation of composer Matthew Wright's *Totem for Den Hagg*. Wright's work begins with a piano playing a slow, pounding, repetitive rhythm. One by one, new instruments enter, each one playing in what is perceived as a completely different rhythm and tempo, creating a series of seemingly unconnected layers on top of one another. This was enough for me. It was the starting point for which I based all of *sensitive adjustment*. My work and Wright's don't really sound anything alike. To begin with, all the pitches in my work are completely improvised, as are the durations of sections. But the impetus for the work came straight out of my experience of listening to Wright's work. The second touchy-feely work worth discussing is *you have to start somewhere...might as well be here*. The work is an improvisation on an improvisation, and is an example of self-appropriation. The work places two previously recorded improvisations, both of myself playing violin, in juxtaposition with one another. These initial recordings were made with the intention of trying to make the violin sound as un-violinistic as possible, rather, they were an attempt to make an acoustic instrument sound like an electronic instrument. These two recordings, I feel, can stand alone as individual improvised "works" without

anything further. However, in *you have to start somewhere*, I subject them to improvised electronic manipulation through the use of a computer. The combination of these two individual works creates a single new work, with a radically different structure in every performance. What was initially an ephemeral moment in time, was fixed in recorded sound, and is now made ephemeral again in the moment of performance.

Currently, I am in the process of developing a “response concerto” to Roger Reynold’s *Aspiration*. An in-depth analysis of the relationship between *Aspiration* and my own work is detailed at length in part three of my response to this exam, however, it is still worth discussing here how I view my concerto in relation to appropriation. Given that the work is still in development, it is uncertain how much of a role appropriation will play in the final product, yet it is clear that my own work owes its inspiration to *Aspiration*. It is not my intention to write a work that mimics *Aspiration* in terms of harmony or melody (it is debatable if the Reynolds even contains melody), but rather, to absorb the work in its totality and see what can be developed in relation to it. What seems important to me for the purposes of this discussion, is how I might have arrived at this concept in the first place. Up until I began working on *Aspiration*, my music has had no connection to the music of Roger Reynolds. Even today, I’m not sure that there is a much of a connection between Reynolds’s music and my own. The attachment to *Aspiration* came, partially through the piece, and partially through the experience of playing the piece. Perhaps more than anything, what I’m trying to appropriate is the mental state which the work provided. It has nothing to do with how I hear the work, but everything to do with how I think about it. This desire to build upon the intellectualism of the work comes directly out of my previous studies in appropriation.

An artist's use of appropriation enables us to follow the path of connections that allowed them to arrive at their destination—it is a map of that which has preceded them. As Turchi explains, “for a very long time, mapmakers have not started at the beginning. Rather they have started with other maps, sometimes doing as little as adding their own titles and decorations....We refer to the written work of the past to see what has been done and how it has been done. Reading like cartographers, as opposed to mere map users, we focus on the maker's methods and assumptions. We find tools and ways to use them.²² There is a clear line that can be drawn from Cage to Tenney to Oswald to myself, each artist building off the work of those that came before them. Reynolds, in his introduction to *Form and Method*, writes, “my thoughts arise out of and find what validity they have in my work over thirty years as a composer of musical experiences.”²³ Borrowing from the past is a method of learning, even if it means borrowing from yourself.

Exploration

1.

In the late summer of 2010, I was asked by performer-composer Arthur Jarvinen to join his newly conceived ensemble, TempWerks. He described the group as such:

TempWerks is composer Arthur Jarvinen's latest ensemble, created for the performance of his most recent musical compositions. Much of Jarvinen's current work is in the realm of live electronics. The music of TempWerks is mostly electronic, using "non-musical" devices such as Geiger counters, short wave radios, amplified strobe lights, and field recordings as sound sources, often subjected to digital signal processing.

22. Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination*, 220.

23. Reynolds, *Form and Method*, 1.

Jarvinen's choice of sound sources is based in part on their aesthetic interest, but especially on their unpredictability. In marked contrast to many of his instrumental chamber works, Jarvinen's TempWerks pieces employ no loops or grooves. The scores are organized along time lines, according to internal proportions and statistical distribution of events. This is indicative of the composer's interest in finding ways to create and articulate musical forms, structure the flow and unfolding of material, and develop new kinds of musical architecture, without recourse to repetition and variation.

Just a few months after asking me to join the group, Jarvinen passed away. Jarvinen had put TempWerks together specifically for a performance at the Festival of New American Music in Sacramento. It was decided between myself and the other members of the ensemble that we should still give the performance as planned.²⁴ While the passing of Jarvinen affected me in many ways, what I would like to discuss here is the opportunity for exploration and resulting influence that TempWerks (as an ensemble) gave me, as well the role that the specific works have played in my compositional development.

Jarvinen was careful in the way that he chose members of the ensemble. It is my belief that I was the first person he asked to join, which resulted in the two of us discussing who else might be appropriate to play in the group. Of great importance to Jarvinen was that all the members of the ensemble be performer-composers; this was part of Jarvinen's original conception for the ensemble. All of the pieces Jarvinen wrote for TempWerks necessitate that the performers to make compositional decisions in their realization. For example, in the performances notes for "3 Field Guides (Plus 1)," Jarvinen requires that "each performer provides his/her own field recording, which may be of anything whatsoever, provided that he or she personally made the recording.

24. The ensemble is comprised of myself, Scott Cazan, Isaac Schankler, and Casey Anderson, who the rest of us decided to ask to step in after Jarvinen's passing.

That is to say, each performer brings and audio document of personal listening experience to the performance.”²⁵ Jarvinen is specifically looking for the individuality of each performer, rather than the individuality of the recording. It becomes personal, specific to each member of the ensemble. Jarvinen states later on in the score:

It is of no concern what combination and types of recorded materials are used to realize *3 Field Guides*. However, consideration should be given to the fact that at least three, possibly four layers are all part of the mix. Therefore, a recording of all-out war might make inclusion of a recording of ice melting a meaningless juxtaposition of materials. Apropos the possibility of such a mix, a sound check/rehearsal should be done so as to determine a reasonable balance/mix for the various recordings. The nature of the recorded material may mean that, by definition, one track is always going to be over or under balanced in relation to others. However, it is advisable to make some level of adjustment, such that a relative balance is achieved, without any given track being entirely lost or completely dominating. This will be a matter of musical/aesthetic judgment, in part determined by the nature of the recorded materials. But it is desirable that all recorded material have their moment to be heard, whether alone, or in some relation to other layers.²⁶

It seems as if Jarvinen is less concerned with the aural result of the piece than he is with the intention and effort made to create it. Jarvinen is asking the performers to act as composers and to make a “musical/aesthetic judgment” as to what the final result of what any single realization of the piece might be. The actual score itself is nothing more than four separate graphs; each gives indications to the player as to when to play (or not), how to begin and, how loud their recording should be. Individually, each graph is a series of instructions along a timeline, yet taken together collectively, they represent the totality of the structure of the piece—it is a map of the work.

Another example of the role of the members of the ensemble on the composition itself is Jarvinen’s work “Slide Show.” The piece is exactly 8 minutes long and has four

25. Arthur Jarvinen, “3 Field Guides (Plus 1),” score, 2009, private collection.

26. Ibid.

parts, divided into five second segments and charted along a grid. There are only two options within each segment: play or do not play. What is played in that time is a “slide.” Jarvinen explains that “each player should prepare ahead of time forty-eight ‘slides’, i.e. audio files for playback in performance. Each slide should be exactly 5 seconds in duration. Any sort of sounds may be used, for example, field recordings, electronically generated sounds, samples, etc.”²⁷ The option then of what can be played in that 5 seconds of time is quite open to the individual performers. Personally, I felt the need to approach the selection of my “slides” from the perspective of a composer. I made the decision to pull only from pop recordings,²⁸ and very consciously selected specific portions of songs. Curiously, all four of us in the ensemble decided to pull our “slides” from pre-existing recordings of pieces (mostly pop and classical recordings). This resulted in two things. First, each performer’s catalog of slides was in essence a short “mixtape,” incredibly unique to each person’s individual personalities and interests. From this perspective, the piece can be seen to function not only as a concert hall work, but also like four personally curated “sound exhibitions.” Second, due to the extreme use of popular music, the piece took on the role of a plunderphonic work. The best moments of the piece occurred when the unlikeliest of sounds were played in combination through pure chance, creating a texture one could never have accomplished through their own compositional decisions.

There are a few things about TempWerks, as an ensemble, that I found notable. As was already mentioned, all the members of the ensemble are performer-composers,

27. Arthur Jarvinen, “Slide Show,” score, 2010, private collection.

28. With the exception of 6 slides which I reserved to play pure sine tones.

but more importantly, we all functioned as multi-instrumentalists. We were asked to play strobe lights, Geiger counters, shortwave radios, “samples”—these were all things that none of us had any experience working with—but as composers, we were able to work with them in a musical way. Additionally, no one member of the ensemble was more important than the other. The pieces were written to work with four players who would all share an equal role. I believe that TempWerks is a model for the ensemble of the future. Part new music ensemble, part rock band, part improvisation collective – it is difficult to define what TempWerks is. However, what is clear is that it is an open framework which allows for a wealth of exploration. This opportunity for exploration that is inherent in the model of TempWerks inspired me to create my own ensemble/project, touchy-feely, that would allow me to continue down this path.

2.

touchy-feely was developed as a way to allow me to explore and experiment with different methods of composition, the use of different instruments, and the combination of musical styles. Having gone through many years of education in several academic institutions, I feel that there is a burden of expectation placed on students in terms of what they should be pursuing in their studies. This was somewhat discussed in part one (regarding my struggle to transition from the role of a performer to that of a performer-composer), but the same general feeling carries over into other aspects of my education. CalArts is admittedly far less restrictive towards what is permissible as part of a course of study, but years of habit preceding my arrival at CalArts has made it

difficult to break free from the established mindset. The aim of touchy-feely is, in part, an attempt to break away from this.

As Jarvinen intended with TempWerks, touchy-feely utilizes a rotating line-up of musicians, yet at its core, touchy-feely consists of only myself.²⁹ Without a consistent line-up, there can be no expectation as to what might result from the group. It is a way to avoid the expectations that might be associated with my own name. If I write a “piece” for trumpet, drums, piano, and bassoon,³⁰ there is an expectation of tradition as to how that work might function. With a label like “touch-feely,” no one can be certain if we are an ensemble, a collective, a rock group, improvisors, or a noise band. The name allows for the maximum amount of flexibility. It becomes perfectly acceptable for me to begin a piece on violin and end up playing drums by the end. If I want to write a simple song and sing it, that’s ok too. If I want to play feedback for twenty minutes, I may alienate the audience, but it’s still an option. Because the limits of the ensemble are undefined, so are its possible outcomes. This scenario is incredibly liberating.

In its first iteration, the ensemble consisted of Richard Valitutto on piano and keyboards; Archie Carey on bassoon, electric bassoon, and electronics; Chris Kallmyer on trumpet, electric guitar, and electronics; and myself doubling on violin, drums, electric guitar, and electronics. I picked these performers for several reasons. First, I had an established relationship with all of them as both friends and musicians. It’s

29. Jarvinen’s intention to have rotating members of TempWerks was discussed in one of our initial meetings regarding the group.

30. This was the basic instrumentation for touchy-feely’s first performance, although as with TempWerks, all the members were multi-instrumentalists.

always better to play with people you like. Second, they are all just as able to read from a traditionally notated score as they are to deal with graphic notation or improvisation. I felt as if I could ask most anything of them and they would be able to accommodate me. Third, I was planning our first performance to occur as part of my recital. This meant that advance planning was required to carry off my goals with the ensemble. I knew that I could get these players to commit to the amount of time and energy required to allow the music to evolve naturally.

The structure upon which I built the ensemble and picked the players allowed me to approach the composition of the touchy-feely works from a completely different perspective than which I normally worked. Just as TempWerks had demanded that the performers contribute on a compositional level, so does touchy-feely, although there is less required in advance (unlike TempWerks) beyond comprehension of how the piece is constructed. Many of the works are completely free in terms of their structure, functioning more as a map for where then ensemble could go rather than suggesting a road that must be taken (see fig. 1). This allows each player, as well as the collective group, to explore the possibilities that a piece has to offer. I was always very clear to the players that they should feel free to deviate from the score (head off the map) if they saw that opportunity. The scores were designed to take us somewhere, rather than tell us where we should be. The rehearsal process became integral to the development of the works. For example, with one of the works I gave the players nothing more than a single line melody in three parts. The intention was for us to play it in unison and improvise between the sections. The melody contained no meter, no tempo, and only vague rhythms; the intent being that we would all attempt to play together, but would

broad generalization of this phenomenon, I would suggest that I approach the drums like a violin, the violin like a guitar, and the guitar like the drums. The relationship between them all is, of course, more complex than this, but this is at least an idea towards how I have approached them. For example, there is a clear relationship between the sounds and stylistic conventions with which I play the guitar and the development of certain extended techniques on the violin. More simply, my interest in “noise,” which grew out of both playing and listening to the electric guitar, has carried over into my violin technique and my compositional sensibility. While *not a place to build monuments or cathedrals* was the first “piece” in which I used guitars in this way, I have been borrowing from the stylistic trademarks used in that piece in other projects for years. The way I play guitar has slowly been working its way into the way I play violin for nearly a decade now. Perhaps the most obvious display of this is in my work *Brutal Music No. 1* for solo amplified violin. The piece almost completely removes any specific pitch content and instead relies on various uses of noise for its musical content. Notationally, the work utilizes conventional rhythms yet replaces many of the note heads with visual representations of sound; arrows, exes, large filled in blocks, are all used to represent noise elements (see fig. 2). This kind of playing has come directly out of my use of the guitar. Additionally, the formal structure of *Brutal Music No. 1* is related to the concept of “looping.” Looping is a technique frequently used by guitarists through the aid of guitar effect pedals. The intention of my work was to create the sensation of an additive looping process without the aid of electronics.³¹ Again, the

31. The use of amplification in the piece is to create an increase in volume, intensity, and the perception of “close instrument sounds” (which cannot be heard without the aid of amplification); it is not used to process the sound in any way beyond volume.

Figure 2. Example of notation in *Brutal Music No. 1*.



inception of this technique is related to my work with guitars.

My relationship with these instruments has played an important part on my compositional development. This has been made clear though my work with touchy-feely, but it extends beyond that as well. My work, *corpus callosum*, features drum set as a prominent part of the ensemble; the piano and drums act as the central force which ties the ensemble together. Knowing how to play the drums made a huge difference in how I composed the piece. I knew what was possible with the instrument, how it would feel to play it, and the challenges that it would pose to the player. The very decision to include drums as part of the ensemble is certainly based upon the place the instrument plays in my own life as a musician. It was an exploration in merging these parts of my life. Another example of this can be seen with my work *hitting things won't solve your problems (but it might make you feel better)*. The work was commissioned by pianist Danny Holt as part of his piano/percussion project in which he takes on the challenge of performing both roles simultaneously. At the beginning of the project, Holt sent me a schematic diagram of what instruments he had available

and where they would be placed; the possibilities were extensive. I was aware that many composers would approach Holt's set up with the intention of making use of everything, yet what I was really interested in working with was essentially a stripped down drum set plus piano. I decided to work with just snare drum, kick drum, and hi-hat, and approached the composition from the perspective of how I would personally play those instruments. The rhythms and playing techniques used were borrowed from my own experience playing the instrument.

The use of multi-instrumentalism is something I am still exploring. Just as I have used the label of touchy-feely to avoid expectations, I have perhaps avoided making my use of other instruments known for the same reason. I don't want to be told how to do it or what I should be doing with it; I want to keep it on my terms. Yet it has proven to influence the way I play, and in the manner in which I compose. It will certainly have a profound impact on the composition of my response concerto to Reynolds's *Aspiration*. Exactly how it will be evidenced is still unclear, but there are possibilities. I am still in the process of determining what the final instrumentation for my own work will be. It will, of course, be based on what Reynolds has used for his work, but it will certainly be manipulated to some degree. There is the possibility of adding electric guitar to the ensemble—I feel that it could be used effectively to parallel the material in the solo violin line. The difficulty however is finding a player to execute the part (which I imagine would need to use a non-traditional form of notation), and the fear that the inclusion of electric guitar will prevent the work from being programmed in the future by other ensembles. In the end, I would like to think that I will make this decision based on what the piece requires, rather than logistics, but it is still something to consider. The

treatment of the percussion within the work will be heavily influenced by my own work as a drummer. I have still yet to make a determination as to whether an actual drum set will be used, but regardless, the make-up of the percussion's gestural vocabulary will be based in the way I relate to the drum set as an instrument. Additionally, I am still exploring the possibility of the inclusion of the use of recordings within the work. This is detailed further in part three, but I feel that the idea for this possibility is directly related to the "electronic" work I have explored in both TempWerks and touchy-feely.

Integration

1.

In order for a map to be useful, it must omit information. Turchi relates the following story:

One of the great breakthroughs of urban mapping was the work of Henry Beck, who in 1933 invented the Way Finder for the London Underground. Until then, the map of the underground was "accurate"—it preserved the direction and the distance of the train lines, listing the stops and intermediate neighborhoods. The problem was, the density of information made it almost impossible to read. Beck understood that what riders wanted to know was which trains stopped where, in what order. He color coded the lines and drew them at neat angles, ignoring precise distances and directions, omitting virtually everything except for the names of the stations. The Way Finder, which has been adopted by transportation systems around the world, is a demonstration of the usefulness of leaving maps blank, as well as evidence that the most accurate map, and the most detailed map, is not necessarily the best map.³²

Whenever one begins to create a map, decisions have to be made as to it will become.

We essentially start with a blank page, with "a world of possibility" within which "we must gauge what to leave blank, and why."³³ The same is true when beginning a new

32. Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination*, 43-44.

33. *Ibid.*, 28, 44.

composition. A piece of music can't do everything all at once; in order for it to be cohesive, it has to be selective in what material it uses. This is of prime concern to me in the creation of my "response" to Reynolds's *Aspiration*. While the possibility of integrating multi-instrumentalism, open forms, improvisation, and genre diversity is certainly present, I feel that these options should only be utilized in ways that are appropriate for the intentions of the piece. This means that certain things must be omitted. This is perhaps one of the few connections to Reynolds that I actually seem to share. He substantiates my argument, stating that

no genre, whether popular and utilitarian or esoteric and obscure is necessarily rejected. No insurmountable restrictions are thought to exist so far as combining musics of different periods or cultures or theoretical persuasions. And in each of these instances of musical behavior, one could fasten upon characteristic fragments with which to begin, or choose to probe for what Xenakis would call their "out of time" antecedents: the privileged groupings, hierarchies or patterns of relationship that precede specific instantiations. Any sound whether by habit of thought, musical or not, is entertained. So, too, the entirely algorithmic generation of musical elements or textures unmediated by the composer's ear...

Nevertheless, as I assume now and will argue later, unless there is a thoroughgoing and coherent network of connectivity between the chosen material and its designated form, the resulting work is of necessity flawed, less than it could, less than it *should* be.³⁴

Because my concerto was conceived as a response to *Aspiration*, the two works are inherently linked. Again, Reynolds argues that "integrity and coherence arise from the persuasiveness of the sense of belonging one has in the presence of the work's elements, large and small."³⁵ He continues,

if the "sense of belonging" is to be considered deeply enough in its relation both to wholeness and to *completeness* on objective as well as subjective grounds, then such consideration will not only result in the possibility of *excluding the*

34. Roger Reynolds, *Form and Method: Composing Music, The Rothschild Essays*, ed. by Stephen McAdams (New York: Routledge, 2002), 6.

35. *Ibid.*, 3.

somehow inappropriate but also in *detecting crucial absences* in an evolving musical scenario.³⁶

It is this “sense of belonging” that concerns me. In order for my work to maintain its integrity and coherence to both itself and the Reynolds, it must omit, at least in part, my own stylistic elements that might ordinarily occur. If I was simply writing “a violin concerto,” devoid of any preconceived inspiration or association other than itself, the possibility for stylistic expression would be limitless. Yet, the very act of determining what that piece should or could become would necessarily impose limits upon it. Since the intention of my “response concerto” is to create a work with its identity inseparably tied to the Reynolds, many of the factors that will determine what it becomes have been predetermined by the of the principals of its existence.

2.

In my life as a musician, I play violin, guitar, drums, and whatever else suits my needs for musical expression; I work as a soloist interpreting others works, as a composer writing for others, as a hired hand playing for film scores and pop records, as a member of a string quartet specializing in new music, as a member of another string quartet which primarily works in an educational context, as a rock musician, as an orchestral musician, as an improviser, as a teacher, and of course, as a “performer-composer.” Some of these elements work well together and some don’t, but regardless of the *perceived* relationship between them, they are all highly connected to one another. However, the question has been posed as to how I might achieve a total integration of all these elements.

36. Ibid., 6.

touchy-feely is a step forward in terms integrating the various aspects of my musical persona into a method of performance and composition. Yet this is in part because it is what the ensemble demands—touchy-feely was established specifically for this purpose. What touchy-feely tends to exclude in its model is the traditional “concert hall” experience. Despite the fact that touchy-feely’s first performance was in a concert hall, it does not feel like the proper setting for such a group. A more fitting atmosphere would be a club, bar, museum, street corner...essentially anywhere other than a concert hall. But a concert hall is what was provided. This brings us one of the essential issues of total integration—environment. In a recent lecture, performer-composer David Byrne (of the band Talking Heads) proposes that the stylistic development of music has evolved based on the context in which it was meant to be listened to. Byrne states, “if this is a model for creation, if we make music, primarily the form at least, to fit these contexts, and if we make art to fit gallery walls or museum walls, and if we write software to fit existing operating systems, is that how it works? Yeah. I think it's evolutionary. It's adaptive.”³⁷ Performer-composer Chris Kallmyer seems to second Byrne’s notion, suggesting that

without the thick, impermeable walls of the concert hall, our contemporary music would not exist in its current form. We have developed a private, silent, concentrated listening space that has enabled the music of Beethoven, Mahler, Feldman, and beyond....There are many things that have influenced the development of music in different cultures, but architecture and context are essential factors in the formation of a music.³⁸

37. David Byrne, “How Architecture Helped Music Evolve” (lecture, TED2010, February, 2010), TED video, 16:00, posted June 2010, http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/david_byrne_how_architecture_helped_music_evolve.html.

38. Chris Kallmyer, “Place, Space, and Music: Experiments in Context,” *New Music Box*, February 23rd, 2011, accessed September 1st, 2011, <http://www.newmusicbox.org/articles/Place-Space-and-Music-Experiments-in-Context/>.

I am specifically writing my response concerto for a concert hall. This immediately places limitations on how the piece can operate. The same can be said for touchy-feely. It was for this reason that I tried to treat my most recent recital as three short, separate concerts. touchy-feely would have felt completely out of place as a second half of a recital (and was admittedly somewhat strange as a third concert). In order for a total integration to occur in my music, the proper environment must be available. The closest such environment that I have discovered thus far is the recording studio. Works such as *music for sleeping* (which is discussed at length in part one) and other recent “studio compositions,”³⁹ have utilized the range of my instrumental skills while developing compositional methods that cannot be achieved with pen and paper. Right now, this seems like the only way I could possibly achieve a total integration of my musical styles. It is not dependent on location or other musicians. It enables me to explore without judgement. It gives me the ability to have complete control over all the elements involved. Why then haven’t I been exploring this option? I don’t have the available resources. Recording, particularly when one uses the studio as a compositional tool, is a time consuming process. It’s also expensive. While I do have access to the CalArts recording studio, it is simply not possible to utilize it to the extent that I would like due to my own personal time constraints and the availability of the studio. It is however a method I plan on utilizing in the future.

3.

Regardless of the ability to fully integrate my musical styles, I’m not sure that I

39. Please see the track titled “the luxury of things falling apart” in the “audio materials” for an example.

should. Again, Turchi offers that “there is no end to the information we can use. A ‘good’ map provides the information we need for a particular purpose—or the information the mapmaker wants us to have.”⁴⁰ The question at hand is what information do I want the listener to have? So far, I haven’t felt the need to fully integrate my styles—I’m not entirely sure that it would improve upon things. Turchi continues,

To guide us, a map’s designers must consider more than content and projection; any single map involves hundreds of decisions about presentation. There is the issue of color (which ones to use, and how); there is the size of the map, which will affect its scale and depends on whether it will be used by armchair explorers or campers, which helps to determine the amount of information included, which involves consideration of font sizes and types. Will the names of towns be in uppercase letters? Will they always be above, or below, or to one side of the dots (or squares, or iconic skyscrapers) representing the places they name? What should be done when two places are so close together that their names don’t fit? Which features should be included both graphically and by name? These decisions are crucial to a map’s effectiveness.⁴¹

“Effectiveness” is what it ultimately comes down to; I believe that it has to be handled on a case by case basis. The musical elements that are used to create a piece must be appropriate for the intentions of the piece itself. To sum up my the matter, I offer one last argument from Reynolds himself: “One must also remember that there is no obligation to accept an invitation just because it is extended.”⁴²

The Places I Will Go

Just as a map must be selective in the information it provides, so must any form of writing—this essay is no different. There are certainly things that have been omitted; one cannot include everything. But I hope that what I *have* included has served to

40. Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination*, 79.

41. *Ibid.*, 79-82.

42. Reynolds, *Form and Method*, 21.

draw a line of connection between the many different elements that make up my musical persona.

As Turchi explains, “if we attempt to map the world of a story before we explore it, we are likely either to (a) prematurely limit our exploration, so as to reduce the amount of material we need to consider, or (b) explore at length but, recognizing the impossibility of taking note of everything, and having no sound basis for choosing what to include, arbitrarily omit entire realms of information. The opportunities are overwhelming.”⁴³ This is, unfortunately, exactly how I feel about the process of this examination. I have been put in a position where I am forced to map my story (my responses) before I feel I have had the opportunity to explore the material (the questions). For this reason it is difficult to know what should be included and how to organize my thoughts. This is indicative of a larger problem within the CalArts DMA program; it has not allowed me the opportunity to explore my potential as a performer or a composer. Turchi continues, beginning by quoting Stephen Dobyns:

“The writer... must discover his or her intention, must discover the meaning of the work. Only after that discovery can the work be properly structured, can the selection and organization of the significant moments of time take place. The writer must know what piece of information to put first and why, what to put second and why, so that the whole work is governed by intention” This is a logical and persuasive argument. We cannot create a structure without understanding its purpose, any more than we would pick up a hammer to make some undetermined building out of nails and wood.⁴⁴

Even now as I am writing my responses to this exam, I am still unsure of the purpose of the task. I feel as if I am writing without intention, which results in the sensation that my arguments and comments are illogical and poorly constructed. I have the impression

43. Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination*, 14.

44. *Ibid.*, 15.

that the examination process itself, is meant to act as a form of exploration—perhaps it will in the end. Sometimes it is difficult to know where you are until after you have arrived. But if the exam is truly meant to be an exploration (what is research if not a search for knowledge?), of which the goal is intended to be the construction of several essays, I feel it will always fail for the act of writing is part of the exploration process. The question now is what can result from this process of exploration that I have experienced. I have the hope that I will be able to emerge from this examination process and finally allow my exploration to truly begin. This should be the purpose of a DMA. In other words, “it isn’t where you go, it’s the getting there.”⁴⁵

45. *Ibid.*, 22.

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