

Journal of the Society for American Music

<http://journals.cambridge.org/SAM>

Additional services for *Journal of the Society for American Music*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



“Fun, Yes, but Music?” Steve Reich and the San Francisco Bay Area's Cultural Nexus, 1962–65

ROSS COLE

Journal of the Society for American Music / Volume 6 / Issue 03 / August 2012, pp 315 - 348
DOI: 10.1017/S175219631200020X, Published online:

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S175219631200020X

How to cite this article:

ROSS COLE (2012). “Fun, Yes, but Music?” Steve Reich and the San Francisco Bay Area's Cultural Nexus, 1962–65. *Journal of the Society for American Music*, 6, pp 315-348 doi:10.1017/S175219631200020X

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

“Fun, Yes, but Music?” Steve Reich and the San Francisco Bay Area’s Cultural Nexus, 1962–65

ROSS COLE

Abstract

This article traces Steve Reich through the Bay Area’s cultural nexus during the period 1962–65, exploring intersections with Luciano Berio, Phil Lesh, Terry Riley, Robert Nelson, the San Francisco Mime Troupe, and the San Francisco Tape Music Center. The aim is to present a revised history of this era by drawing on personal interviews with Tom Constanten, R. G. Davis, Jon Gibson, Saul Landau, Pauline Oliveros, and Ramon Sender. In addition, previously unused source materials and contemporaneous newspaper reception are employed to provide a more nuanced contextual framework. Reich’s heterogeneous activities—ranging from “third stream” music and multimedia happenings to incidental scores and tape collage—deserve investigation on their own terms, rather than from within narratives concerned with the stylistic development of “minimalism.” More appropriate and viable aesthetic parallels are drawn between Reich’s work for tape and Californian Funk art.

Long before Steve Reich became known primarily as a New York “minimalist,” he spent a number of years in San Francisco during an idiosyncratic period in the city’s cultural life. This period was the liminal “post-Beat/pre-hip” era of the early 1960s—a cradle for numerous alternative scenes that would eventually come to be labeled a “counterculture.”¹ The established canon that guides Reich’s retrospective CD compilations and *Writings on Music*, however, fails to do justice to the fact that the young composer was bound up in this unique moment in the history of the Bay Area.² These years were formative: after ending academic studies in composition, he set out as a freelance musician, awakened to new possibilities opened up by affordable tape technology and collaboration with practitioners of avant-garde theater and underground film. San Francisco Mime Troupe founder R. G. Davis proposes that such an atmosphere was aided by the city’s location, climate, and general outlook: “good weather, light drugs, a friendly atmosphere, and a bunch of interesting young people.”³ With its complex relationship to the surrounding landscape, frontier history, and diverse population, San Francisco has often bred a unique “volatile rebelliousness,” according to art critic Thomas

A special thank you to the following: Bill Brooks, Tom Constanten, Nick Cook, Ron Davis, Jenny Doctor, Jon Gibson, Sumanth Gopinath, Saul Landau, Bill Maginnis, Pauline Oliveros, Ramon Sender, and the anonymous reviewers for this journal. Steve Reich was “unavailable” for comment.

¹ Ronald G. Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe: The First Ten Years* (Palo Alto, CA: Ramparts Press, 1975), 195. See also Nadya Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope: Musical and Cultural Perspectives on Late Sixties San Francisco* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

² Steve Reich, *Writings on Music, 1965–2000*, ed. Paul Hillier (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Compilations include *Steve Reich: Early Works* (1987); *Steve Reich: Works, 1965–1995* (1997); and *Steve Reich: Phases* (2006).

³ R.G. Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 31 May 2011.

Albright.⁴ David W. Bernstein has also pointed out that its relative insularity on the West Coast had traditionally provided fertile ground for the cultivation of bohemian, nonconformist approaches.⁵

In a wider historical context, the years 1962 to 1965 witnessed momentous political changes, including the unexpected shift from the presidency of John F. Kennedy to that of Lyndon B. Johnson, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the rise of liberal “Great Society” initiatives, increasing tensions between Civil Rights and incipient Black Power movements, and an escalation of the anti-Communist war in Vietnam.⁶ During these four years, the Bay Area itself saw profound cultural and political upheavals representing an interstitial period of transition from the tail end of the San Francisco Renaissance to the “hippies” of Haight Ashbury, as well as from the “silent generation” of the 1950s to radical New Left activism epitomized by the Berkeley Free Speech Movement and Vietnam Day Committee.⁷ In addition, as filmmaker Robert Nelson recalled, “the city was being validated as an art center in a larger context than anybody had felt before.”⁸ Framing Reich’s activities within this multifaceted cultural nexus creates a narrative pathway through the various scenes he encountered, drawing attention to the mercurial nature of collaboration and influence. Moving away from the “deeply etched grooves of legitimacy given by canonization,” this article thus shares in Georgina Born’s concept of a “relational musicology,” concerned as it is with the “complex interrelation and imbrication [of] contiguous . . . systems existing in the same or proximate physical, geographic, historical, or social space.”⁹

Berio in the Backyard

Reich has proposed that his initial decision to move to the West Coast—after a Philosophy degree at Cornell and studies in composition at the Juilliard School—was motivated by “the classic reason that Americans go to California: I was running

⁴ Thomas Albright, *Art in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945–1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), xv.

⁵ David W. Bernstein, “Emerging Art Forms and the American Counterculture, 1961–1966,” in *The San Francisco Tape Music Center: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-Garde*, ed. David W. Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 8.

⁶ See James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945–1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) and Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁷ See Mark Kitchell, *Berkeley in the Sixties* (1990); Michael Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Bret Eynon, “Community in Motion: The Free Speech Movement, Civil Rights, and the Roots of the New Left,” *The Oral History Review* 17/1 (Spring 1989): 39–69; and Gerard J. De Groot, “The Limits of Moral Protest and Participatory Democracy: The Vietnam Day Committee,” *Pacific Historical Review* 64/1 (February 1995): 95–119.

⁸ Scott MacDonald, “We Were Bent on Having a Good Time: An Interview with Robert Nelson,” *Afterimage* 11/1–2 (Summer 1983): 39.

⁹ Georgina Born, “For a Relational Musicology: Music and Interdisciplinarity, Beyond the Practice Turn,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 135/2 (2010): 217, 209.

away from home.”¹⁰ Dropping out of his privileged upper-middle-class existence, Reich’s move foreshadowed the alienation felt by many baby boomers:

My relationship with my father had become nonexistent, and his presence in New York City even in absentia was somewhat uncomfortable. This was also the period when Jack Kerouac was getting well known, and San Francisco was the mecca for leaving the East Coast and the “establishment.” I felt that I had been in New York nearly all my life, and San Francisco seemed incredibly romantic and attractive.¹¹

Having married in 1961, Reich moved ahead of his wife, Joyce Barkett, to San Francisco and began a series of menial jobs while searching for graduate courses; the couple divorced two years later, after losing a baby to postnatal complications.¹² Aware of developments in the European avant-garde, Reich was drawn to Mills College in Oakland for an M.A. with visiting professor Luciano Berio; he eagerly enrolled in early 1962, along with classmates Phil Lesh and Tom Constanten.¹³ Lesh was a volunteer studio engineer at KPFA (the progressive Bay Area radio station) and had access to tapes of the latest European festival performances; Constanten, having just acquired Berio’s work for chamber ensemble and tape, *Différences*, with the help of Lesh, recalled that its composer “appearing virtually in our back yard had an air of the miraculous about it.”¹⁴ According to Constanten, classes consisted of discussions related to Berio’s current interests, “things like orchestral blending and color, structural balance, the significance of gestures, phonology, even the very essence of meaning”; Lesh recalls analyses of twentieth-century compositions such as Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring*.¹⁵

In a 1964 report from the recently established San Francisco Tape Music Center, cofounder Ramon Sender diagnosed a growing awareness that young composers “are not going to find the answers they are looking for in the analysis and composition seminars of the academies.”¹⁶ Although not the case for Constanten and Lesh (who both found the academic experience revelatory), Reich appears to have shared this perception, particularly in relation to dodecaphonic technique: “the experience of writing twelve-tone music was an important and valuable one for me

¹⁰ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 156.

¹¹ K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists* (London: Phaidon, 1996), 55.

¹² Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 156.

¹³ See David Osmond-Smith, “Berio, Luciano,” *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root, www.oxfordmusiconline.com. In the spring of 1962, Berio substituted for Darius Milhaud at Mills College and subsequently agreed to do the same for the following academic year. Other class members were Irene Caballero, Don Cobb, Robert Kuykendall, Robert Moran, Tim Thompson, and Shirley Wong (Tom Constanten, e-mail correspondence with the author, 12 May 2011).

¹⁴ Tom Constanten, *Between Rock & Hard Places: A Musical Autobiodysey* (Eugene, OR: Hulogosi, 1992), 25.

¹⁵ Ross T. Kurzer, “Interview with Tom Constanten” (October 2002), <http://digitalinterviews.com>; Phil Lesh, *Searching for the Sound: My Life With the Grateful Dead* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2006), 26.

¹⁶ Ramon Sender, “The San Francisco Tape Music Center—A Report, 1964,” *The San Francisco Tape Music Center*, 42.

in that it showed me what I had to do—which was to stop writing it.”¹⁷ Reich’s anecdote of Berio’s response to one of his student compositions has become a prominent feature in interviews: “if you want to write tonal music, why don’t you write tonal music?”¹⁸ The story seems to have become part of Reich’s personal mythology, yet Constanten states that “[it] doesn’t sound to me like something that Berio would say.”¹⁹ Reich also considers his brief time studying with Darius Milhaud to have been uninspiring, as the elderly composer would simply “reminisce in your presence.”²⁰ Opinion on Milhaud’s teaching appears divided. On one hand, the veteran avant-gardist had an eclectic pedigree of protégés, including pianist Dave Brubeck, and other students purportedly raved about his teaching.²¹ Morton Subotnick remembers him being “a wonderful person,” desperate to know what was going on in new music.²² Yet Ramon Sender—who had spent two years studying with Milhaud during this time—found him to be less than capable as a pedagogue: “Milhaud was a great composer, but a terrible teacher . . . [his] idea of a form and analysis class was to have someone play through the piano reduction of *Boris Godunov* while [he] translated the libretto into English.”²³

As well as simply being indicators of prestige by association, Reich’s retrospective anecdotes concerning his time at Mills College have been deployed ideologically to legitimize his mature aesthetic. By narrating how he came to reject elitist European music, Reich forges his identity as a vernacular, non-institutional, and distinctly North American composer. His later practice has then tended to be read back through this initial training, emphasizing a seemingly innate attraction to tonality and repetition of material, along with stubborn independence. Reich has since argued that the veneration of serialism within U.S. university music departments was ignorant of indigenous cultural trends: “for some American in 1948 or 1958 or 1968—in the *real* context of tail fins, Chuck Berry, and millions of burgers sold—to *pretend* that instead we’re really going to have the dark-brown angst of Vienna is a *lie*.”²⁴ This antipathy toward what he saw as a culturally dislocated avant-garde was sharpened by the feeling that another form of music spoke more fluently of its era: “while I could respect the *thinking* involved with Berio . . . the *gesture* was all wrong for my time and my place and to what I was drawn to emotionally.”²⁵

¹⁷ Edward Strickland, *American Composers: Dialogues on Contemporary Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 39. Lesh was working on a piece for four orchestras entitled *Foci*; Constanten would later study privately with Berio in Europe.

¹⁸ Steve Reich, “Berio (1997),” *Writings on Music*, 203. See Klaas van der Linden, “Searching for Harmony in All the Wrong Places: Steve Reich’s *Music for String Orchestra* (1961),” M.A. thesis, Utrecht University, 2010, 56–83.

¹⁹ Constanten, e-mail correspondence with the author, 1 May 2011.

²⁰ Geoff Smith, *American Originals: Interviews with 25 Contemporary Composers* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 213.

²¹ Constanten, e-mail correspondence with the author, 12 May 2011.

²² David W. Bernstein and Maggi Payne, “Morton Subotnick Interviewed,” *The San Francisco Tape Music Center*, 132.

²³ Ramon Sender, e-mail correspondence with the author, 24 May 2011.

²⁴ Strickland, *American Composers*, 46. See also Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

²⁵ Henning Lohner, “Steve Reich in Conversation, Stuttgart, 26.2.1986,” *Interface* 17/2 (1988): 117.

That music was jazz. Reich’s keen interest in the potency of improvisation was fueled, he asserts, by regularly seeing John Coltrane perform at San Francisco’s Jazz Workshop.²⁶ In live performance, Coltrane was pursuing an approach in the modal idiom whereby static harmonies provided a foundation on which ornate melodies could be superimposed.²⁷

Reich has frequently viewed his (later) “minimal” palette in relation to Coltrane’s aesthetic on records such as *Africa/Brass* (1961), where “there was a lot of music happening based on very little harmony.”²⁸ Equally important was the perceived contrast between what Reich saw as the “honesty and authenticity” of Coltrane’s playing and the enormously complex “paper music” of his composition classmates: he recalls feeling that it was “almost immoral” not to follow in Coltrane’s direction at the time.²⁹ This obsession with the “authenticity” of black culture is a familiar trope of the New Left—perhaps, Sumanth Gopinath suggests, due to the perception of “an authenticity lacking in their increasingly suburban and de-ethnicized white heritages.”³⁰ Quoting Bob Dylan, Reich corroborates this idea: “people raised in the 1950s and ’60s, like myself, often felt they were ‘without a home, a complete unknown’—there was no ethnic underpinning.”³¹ Robert Nelson, with whom Reich collaborated during this period, has been especially outspoken in this regard, proposing that during his own youth he was “involved in an idealization of blackness.”³²

An element much neglected in the established narrative of Reich’s encounter with serialism is the union he attempted to achieve between Coltrane’s direction and modernist etiquette. During his time at Mills, Reich pursued an idiosyncratic approach manifest in his graduation exercise *Three Pieces for Jazz Quintet* (1963): “basically twelve-tone jazz.”³³ This piece clearly demonstrated an interest in what was known at the time as “third stream” music.³⁴ Gunther Schuller had coined the adjective in the late 1950s to describe an emerging genre of music that fused the basic techniques and elements of jazz—such as “improvisational spontaneity

²⁶ William Duckworth, *Talking Music: Conversations with John Cage, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, and Five Generations of American Experimental Composers* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1999), 294. This venue was situated in the former beatnik area of North Beach and played host to major figures on the contemporary circuit; see Joel Selvin, *San Francisco: The Musical History Tour* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996), 27–28.

²⁷ See Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 305.

²⁸ Duckworth, *Talking Music*, 294.

²⁹ Strickland, *American Composers*, 38; Hillier, “Introduction,” in Reich, *Writings on Music*, 9. Phil Lesh and Terry Riley both shared a similar perception of Coltrane: Lesh, *Searching for the Sound*, 27; Robert Carl, *Terry Riley’s In C* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 23.

³⁰ Sumanth Gopinath, “Contraband Children: The Politics of Race and Liberation in the Music of Steve Reich 1965–1966,” Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2005, 134. See also Howard Brick, *Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the 1960s* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 66–87.

³¹ Jonathan Cott, “Interview with Steve Reich” (1996), www.steverreich.com.

³² MacDonald, “We Were Bent on Having a Good Time,” 40.

³³ Hillier, “Introduction,” in Reich, *Writings on Music*, 10. Personnel involved in performing the pieces at Mills were Steve Reich (keyboard), Jon Gibson (alto saxophone), Einer Anderson (trumpet), Paul Breslin (bass), and John Chowning (drums); Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 159.

³⁴ Constanten, *Between Rock & Hard Places*, 25.

and rhythmic vitality”—with Western avant-garde composition.³⁵ The idea was that both coteries could learn from each other through mutual respect and adjustment to form an innovative synthesis that defied standard categorization. Schuller proposed in 1961 that by writing such music, he was “simply exercising [his] prerogative as a creative artist to draw upon those experiences in [his] life as a musician that have a vital meaning.”³⁶ Reich’s interest in this approach was understandable in context, as Berio’s class had directly encountered both Schuller and Lukas Foss in concerts and lectures, as well as discussion seminars, at the 1962 Ojai Festival in California.³⁷ Among other things, the concerts had featured Foss’s Improvisation Chamber Ensemble and instrumental works by Schuller; Constanten recalls that these performances made a strong impression on the class as examples of new possibilities to explore, and that Reich had a “high estimation” of Schuller at the time.³⁸ Reich has perhaps underplayed this significant ecumenical influence, as third stream music complicates the neat juxtaposition drawn between academia and modal jazz that allows his Berio and Coltrane anecdotes to function as prophetic endorsement of his later style.

Fresh Air and Freewheeling

After leaving Mills College in 1963, Reich was confronted with the question of “how to survive.”³⁹ Not wishing to pursue an academic career, he worked for San Francisco’s Yellow Cab Company and then, in late 1964, moved to the U.S. Post Office. These jobs allowed him freedom “to concentrate on composition,” while earning more than a music professor would.⁴⁰ Around this time, Reich also became involved with the San Francisco Mime Troupe, a group that he recalls having “a wonderful, freewheeling feel” and embodying exactly what he had been searching for: “the audience at the Mime Troupe was other artists, the kind of people whom I’d always wanted to get to.”⁴¹ The troupe evolved from within the San Francisco Actor’s Workshop under the initiative of R. G. Davis, then an assistant director with the company.⁴² Davis, who had studied mime with Etienne Decroux in Paris as

³⁵ Gunther Schuller, “Third Stream” (1961), in Gunther Schuller, *Musings: The Musical Worlds of Gunther Schuller* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1999), 115.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

³⁷ Constanten, *Between Rock & Hard Places*, 25–27 and Lesh, *Searching for the Sound*, 26–27. Berio was composer in residence for the Ojai Festival in 1962; Lukas Foss was musical director. It was at this festival that Reich first heard Schuller mention A. M. Jones’s book *Studies in African Music*. See Duckworth, *Talking Music*, 294.

³⁸ Constanten, e-mail correspondence with the author, 1 May 2011. These concerts also featured Edgard Varèse’s *Density 21.5*; Berio’s *Differences*; Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 25; Constanten’s *Three Pieces for Two Pianos*; and John Cage’s *Winter Music*, *Aria*, and *Fontana Mix*.

³⁹ Steve Reich, “Texture–Space–Survival,” *Perspectives of New Music* 26/2 (Summer 1988): 278.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 58.

⁴² On the Mime Troupe, see Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe*; Ronald G. Davis, “Ecological Aesthetics,” Ph.D. diss., University of California Davis, 2009, 47–80; *The San Francisco Mime Troupe Reader*, ed. Susan V. Mason (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); and Theodore Shank, *Beyond the Boundaries: American Alternative Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 50–74. The troupe was officially founded in 1959.

well as modern dance and method acting, was passionate about the potential of a truly alternative, oppositional theater. A splinter group called the R. G. Davis Mime Troupe had presented a free *11th Hour Mime Show* on Sunday evenings throughout 1960. The following year saw a production of Samuel Beckett’s *Act Without Words II* and another series at the Encore Theatre that included *Event I*, an improvisatory frenzy featuring props by Bay Area artists Robert Hudson and William T. Wiley.⁴³ Alongside avant-garde shows, the troupe experimented with a sixteenth-century form of Italian street theater known as *Commedia dell’arte*. The format appealed to Davis’s political and artistic sensibilities and he embraced its working-class viewpoint, flexibility, stereotyped set of masked characters, and ability to enact contemporary social satire. Outdoor productions in the parks became a staple of the troupe’s activities, highlighting their desire to connect with popular audiences and rely on donations for financial support.

The troupe soon found a permanent studio space in an abandoned church in the Mission District, although 1963 began with a multimedia “happening” held at the San Francisco Tape Music Center on Russian Hill.⁴⁴ During its five-year existence, David Bernstein argues, the Center provided “an ideal environment for a significant interaction between the counterculture and the West Coast avant-garde.”⁴⁵ Gaining its name in summer 1962, the Tape Music Center was an autonomous and unaffiliated collective of artists and technicians including Ramon Sender, Morton Subotnik, Pauline Oliveros, William Maginnis, and Tony Martin. Later in 1963, it moved to 321 Divisadero Street on the eastern end of Haight Ashbury—a building it shared with KPFA and Anna Halprin’s Dancers’ Workshop. The Center consisted of a performance space and studio with basic electronic equipment, establishing an independent alternative to academia and corporate artistic control. *Event II* involved Davis and Judy (Rosenberg) Goldhaft standing naked in a mirrored closet imitating each other’s movements while a voiceover intoned a detailed scatological commentary and performers pushed a large pyramid around the room, which featured a light show by Elias Romero, quotations from a tape recorder, and film projections. Audience members were placed against the walls on boxes, connected by a large black cloth with head holes cut out.⁴⁶

Judging from the available sources, Reich probably began his association with the troupe shortly after this infamous “toilet happening.”⁴⁷ Reich’s first official involvement in a production was as co-composer for *Ruzzante’s Maneuvers*, a *Commedia* scenario by Milton Savage that ran between 15 August and 2 November

⁴³ Judy Collins, who designed the costumes, suggested *Event I*; Wally Hedrick, Lee Breuer, Ruth Mechlovitch, Bill Raymond, and Nata Piaskowski were also involved. Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 31 May 2011.

⁴⁴ *Event II* took place on 11 January 1963. See Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe*, 24–25 and *The San Francisco Tape Music Center*, 15, 63, and 272.

⁴⁵ Bernstein, “Emerging Art Forms and the American Counterculture, 1961–1966,” 9.

⁴⁶ The set was designed by Wiley and Karl Rosenberg.

⁴⁷ Ramon Sender recalled a conversation with Morton Subotnik: “although we loved Ronnie, we were both kind of freaked out by that toilet happening.” *The San Francisco Tape Music Center*, 67. Phil Lesh states that just before Reich joined, the troupe had staged a kind of “happening.” Assuming that Lesh is referring to *Event II* (he is mistaken regarding the nomenclature), Reich probably became involved with the Mime Troupe no earlier than January 1963. Lesh, *Searching for the Sound*, 37.

1963. Reich is credited for the music—most probably songs within the play—along with William Spencer.⁴⁸ During rehearsals, Davis renamed his ensemble The San Francisco Mime Troupe, to destabilize an implied hierarchy, and decided on a motto: “engagement, commitment, and fresh air.”⁴⁹ The first production crediting Reich as sole composer was *Ubu King*, which opened on 11 December 1963 and ran for three weeks at the Capp Street studio.⁵⁰ The play—an adaptation of Alfred Jarry’s 1896 *Ubu Roi*—was billed in the *San Francisco Chronicle* as a “surrealistic farce.”⁵¹ Wiley designed the sets, absurdist costumes, and props, and Robert Nelson provided a short film to be used in conjunction with live sound on stage.⁵² Davis recalls that to add an innovative edge, he had asked Nelson to film the cast on a boat for the final scene; having taken the group to Sausalito, Nelson filmed them in costume performing the text.⁵³ This film was then shown at the end of the play, while the cast “sat on stage and mouthed the dialogue.”⁵⁴ Davis notes that later division of sound and image stemmed from this production—a technique used to great effect in *A Minstrel Show*, where Nelson’s film *Oh Dem Watermelons* was screened in conjunction with Reich’s live soundtrack.⁵⁵

Davis invited local critics to the second night and was conscious that the production had “offended them even before the boredom set in.”⁵⁶ Paine Knickerbocker, theater and film critic of the *Chronicle*, penned a thoroughly unfavorable review after weathering only three of the five acts. He lamented Davis’s theatrical stumble after the success of Commedia productions in the parks: “*Ubu King* comes as a great disappointment from this dedicated young mime who has done so much to brighten the local scene with the spirited offerings of his company.”⁵⁷ According to Knickerbocker, the play was “pretentious, clumsy . . . not only tedious, [but] a constant irritation.”⁵⁸ His main issues were with the handling of dialogue and with Wiley’s costumes, which he thought were “either shoddy . . . or grotesque.”⁵⁹ Reception of the play, however, was not entirely negative. According to Davis, the opening night crowd of friends and local artists “stood up and cheered,” as he nodded to

⁴⁸ Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 18 January 2012. Reich also provided music for a production of *Tartuffe* that ran between July 1964 and March 1965. See Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe*, 199. The troupe’s introductory warm-up music, however, did not involve Reich (Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 31 May 2011).

⁴⁹ Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe*, 18.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁵¹ “Ubu King Opens Tonight,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 11 December 1963, 53.

⁵² For photographs, see Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe*, 27. The film is no longer available and finds no mention in Nelson’s listing on the Canyon Cinema distribution Web site <http://canyoncinema.com>.

⁵³ Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 22 January 2012. The boat belonged to Jane Varda’s father.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe*, 28.

⁵⁷ Paine Knickerbocker, “A Clumsy Ubu King,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 13 December 1963, 49.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

them, kissed his hand, and touched the stage floor.⁶⁰ Robert Nelson recalled it being “a highwater mark” and Lawrence Ferlinghetti of the City Lights Bookstore wrote a letter to the *Chronicle*, arguing that Davis’s direction had “introduced brilliant devices to overcome the script’s worse faults . . . up-dating this old surrealist war-horse as a modern burlesque of all revolution, dictators, and violence.”⁶¹ Davis, too, felt that the result of his direction was “the injection of social implications into avant-garde drama” in a conscious attempt to give voice to his identity as a New Left agitator.⁶²

Knickerbocker’s review branded the show “noisy, untidy, and uncouth”; no doubt equally implicated in this aspect of the production was Reich’s incidental score, featuring a unison melody on clarinet and kazoo (played through an acquired Pacific Gas and Electric traffic cone), accompanied by strummed violin.⁶³ Keith Potter notes that the musicians played this simple tune “several times, then turned about face and left.”⁶⁴ Reich has described his score as “very much a thumbing-your-nose kind of thing,” mirroring the Neo-Dada spirit of the production and perhaps aimed at certain pedagogues from Mills.⁶⁵ Davis recalls “the movement of musicians on stage, not sitting down to the side of the performing area,” with the clarinetist sometimes playing around the actors themselves.⁶⁶ As director, Davis felt that “the intervention was interesting and innovative . . . it fit the production and interpretation [as] we didn’t do the usual music filler stuff, nor background music for boring scenes . . . so the composer added what he thought was important that was not said or shown.”⁶⁷ Although not officially credited, Reich’s Mills classmate Phil Lesh recalls joining the music department of the Mime Troupe during this period: “our function was to provide what little atmospheric music was needed in their bare-bones, no-frills productions,” a job that consisted of taking a tape recorder around the city “to record various sounds for the shows.”⁶⁸

Lesh and Reich also collaborated on *Event III (Coffee Break)*, held on 27 February 1964 at the Capp Street studio.⁶⁹ The evening was divided in half: the first consisted of a one-act play by Kenneth Lash (then chair of the humanities department at the San Francisco Art Institute) entitled *Along Came a Spider*; the second was the free-form *Event III* (continuing in the provocative tradition carved out by the troupe’s previous *Events*). In the *Chronicle*’s Datebook, the show was listed as being “SOLD OUT.”⁷⁰ Davis describes the play in retrospect as “light-weight,

⁶⁰ Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 18 January 2012: “The second night, the reviewers came and saw a muddled production by a bunch of amateurs who had used up all their energy and thought the first night.”

⁶¹ Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 262; Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe*, 28.

⁶² Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe*, 25.

⁶³ Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 161.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 161–62.

⁶⁶ Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 18 January 2012.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Lesh, *Searching for the Sound*, 37.

⁶⁹ Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe*, 198 and *The San Francisco Tape Music Center*, 274.

⁷⁰ “Datebook,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 27 February 1964, 37.

neo-realistic, flat.”⁷¹ A listing in the *Oakland Tribune* described Reich and Lesh’s second half as “a theatrical piece composed of interrelated sound, movement, and light . . . utilizing drums, vibes, trumpet, piano, and tape music.”⁷² Fumi Spencer and Davis provided the movement, simultaneous to liquid light projections (a burgeoning art form in the Bay Area) by Elias Romero.⁷³ Davis recalls climbing up a ladder to read a long list of U.S.-sanctioned invasions in South America from the independent socialist magazine *Monthly Review*.⁷⁴ Lesh paints the scene as follows:

Event III was like a precognitive vision of the [Acid] Tests—broad swathes of colored light sweeping through space; chaotic but hypnotic music (played by Steve, T.C., myself, and a great drummer from Oakland, Whalee Williams); Ronnie Davis in a cop uniform descending from a ladder in grotesque, disjointed moves as I rise from a trapdoor playing “Twinkle Twinkle, Little Star” on trumpet.⁷⁵

Performers also appear to have worn white sweaters with their respective ages written on.⁷⁶ As Lesh suggests, this kind of multilayered, multimedia spectacle featuring anarchic music seems to have prefigured key aspects of the nascent psychedelic aesthetic that found its fullest expression in Ken Kesey’s “Acid Test” parties and the Trips Festival, in which Lesh would play a central role as bassist for the Grateful Dead.

As was usual for the Mime Troupe during this period, the evening was also a benefit event—this time for Civil Rights activists seeking to integrate the workforce of San Francisco’s Sheraton-Palace Hotel. A picket line, sit in, and negotiations eventually led to the hotel’s capitulation to requests for non-discriminatory hiring practices; such protests helped light the touch paper of unrest that led to the Berkeley Free Speech Movement.⁷⁷ Davis remarked that by late 1964 the troupe had “transcended the ‘little theatre’ circle and became involved . . . with the growing Bay Area radical movement.”⁷⁸ This more overtly political position was heavily conditioned by the presence of Saul Landau in the Mime Troupe milieu: Davis admits that before he joined, the troupe’s productions were not as politically engaged.⁷⁹ Landau arrived in San Francisco in September 1961, at a time when the troupe was “more artistically radical than politically so,” and gradually began to contribute skits and song lyrics for Commedia productions and to spur Davis to engage in a critical approach.⁸⁰ Reich appears not to have been particularly vocal about political issues at the time: both Landau and Davis recall him neither having strong opinions on

⁷¹ Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 31 May 2011.

⁷² “Mime Troupe to Open Original Play,” *Oakland Tribune*, 23 February 1964, 11.

⁷³ See Robert R. Riley, “Liquid to Light,” *The San Francisco Tape Music Center*, 21–23.

⁷⁴ Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 31 May 2011.

⁷⁵ Lesh, *Searching for the Sound*, 38. Tom Constanten is often referred to as “T.C.”

⁷⁶ Dennis McNally, *A Long Strange Trip: The Inside History of the Grateful Dead* (London: Corgi, 2003), 109–10. McNally notes that in response to obtuse questions from the audience, Reich and Lesh repeated their performance.

⁷⁷ See Kitchell, *Berkeley in the Sixties*.

⁷⁸ Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe*, 43.

⁷⁹ Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 31 May 2011. Landau had been instrumental in setting up the journal *Studies on the Left*. Other New Leftists associated with the Troupe were Frank Bardacke, Doug Dowd, Todd Gitlin, Mike Miller, Jim O’Connor, Robert Scheer, Anne Weils, and Stanley Weinstein (Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 13 September 2011).

⁸⁰ Landau, e-mail correspondence with the author, 13 June 2011.

contemporary issues nor getting involved in local political organizations.⁸¹ Davis posits that “Reich must have stayed away from the Left events, [and] certainly never went to them with me”; instead, he took Davis to hear performances by Coltrane and Terry Riley.⁸² Nevertheless, to be a member of the troupe was to be a radical by association: Ramon Sender, commenting on the musicians who frequented the Tape Music Center, proposes that “Steve, with his connection to the Mime Troupe, was perhaps the most political of the group.”⁸³

Funk and Surrealist Rondo

Initial impetus for Reich’s involvement in the Mime Troupe’s milieu may well have come via association with Bay Area artist Robert Nelson, now recognized by many as “avant-garde cinema’s most potent comic filmmaker.”⁸⁴ After graduating from college in the mid-1950s, Nelson had taken a course at the San Francisco Art Institute (then called the California School of Fine Arts) and embraced the city’s cultural atmosphere as an aspiring painter and beatnik.⁸⁵ Sometime early in 1963, a group of Mime Troupe affiliates—including Nelson, Davis, William T. Wiley, and Robert Hudson—decided to make a low-budget film together. Davis’s tangential connections to the group can be traced back to 1960, when he was introduced through his wife Judy Collins, an artist who was a friend of various young painters and sculptors from the Art Institute living in Mill Valley.⁸⁶ The project is difficult to date precisely: Davis merely has “1963” in his chronology, Paul Hillier suggests “January 1963,” Edward Strickland has “late 1963,” and Keith Potter has “early in 1964”; Nelson consistently dates the film “1963,” but implies there was a relatively long time between shooting and editing.⁸⁷ The filming probably took place after *Event II* in January (Wiley’s distinctive pyramid featuring prominently in both), but before the short *Ubu King* piece in the fall. Although his soundtrack was evidently composed after filming, it is unclear at what point Reich became involved; this could well have been his first artistic venture within the Mime Troupe’s circle.⁸⁸

⁸¹ The exception seems to have been one evening when Davis, Reich, Landau, and Marc Schleifer “talked into a tape recorder for about 10 hours . . . each giving his high-minded, youthful, spew, talk, chatter about what they thought their art was to do and what grand possibilities there were.” (Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 31 May 2011).

⁸² Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 31 May 2011.

⁸³ Sender, e-mail correspondence with the author, 24 May 2011.

⁸⁴ MacDonald, “We Were Bent on Having a Good Time,” 39. See also *Radical Light: Alternative Film and Video in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945–2000*, ed. Steve Anker, Kathy Geritz, and Steve Seid (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010) and Wheeler W. Dixon, *The Exploding Eye: A Re-visionary History of 1960s American Experimental Cinema* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

⁸⁵ MacDonald, “We Were Bent on Having a Good Time,” 39.

⁸⁶ Davis, email correspondence with the author, 31 May 2011.

⁸⁷ Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe*, 197; Hillier, “Introduction,” in Reich, *Writings on Music*, 10; Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 184; Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 162; MacDonald, “We Were Bent on Having a Good Time,” 43.

⁸⁸ Davis, however, does not remember seeing Reich during shooting of the film (e-mail correspondence with the author, 31 May 2011).

Nelson's only previous experience with the moving image consisted of a short "early sketch" *The Mystery of Amelia Airheart Solved* [sic] and two home movies with his wife Gunvor, recording the building of their house in Muir Beach and their daughter Oona's bath.⁸⁹ For this new collaborative project, however, Nelson was loaned 16mm camera equipment by a neighbor and began with the perception that in such avant-garde films "you could do anything you wanted."⁹⁰ For Nelson, the most important element was "a kind of comradeship" while shooting: "we were bent on having a good time"—an attitude manifest throughout his creative output.⁹¹ Davis notes that there was also a sense of experimentation, and of pushing boundaries: "it seemed that everyone moved beyond their disciplines: painters doing 'happenings' and joining rock and roll bands, forgetting painting and sculpture to become film makers . . . everyone moving 'outside' of the prescribed frames that they had been taught in established institutions."⁹² Nevertheless, Earl Bodien proposed that Nelson's visual approach was still conditioned by his training: "the surface quality is like a hard-edge painting: large areas of black and white and gray space, geometric forms, a well-defined spatial orientation, and a strangely ambiguous atmosphere."⁹³ At the time, Nelson thought of himself "as a painter who was playing with film."⁹⁴ Reich certainly shared in this moment of flux, ostensibly rejecting the disciplined framework he had acquired through years of academic study.

The film's title *Plastic Haircut*, which Nelson credits to Wiley, was intentionally absurdist.⁹⁵ It was shot by Nelson in the studio space of the Mime Troupe's abandoned church and featured surrealistic sets, props, and costumes by Wiley and Hudson. Nelson recalls initially shooting about 2,000 feet of film, consisting mainly of Davis's physical improvisations around the white pyramid (while dressed in a long cape and headgear that resembled a dunce cap) and cameos by Judy Goldhaft and Wiley.⁹⁶ Despite the strength of the individual shots, Nelson recalled it looking "very poor—only because it was so repetitious and long."⁹⁷ He continues: "I struggled with the footage for weeks. No matter what I did, it seemed boring. In desperation I started cutting the shots shorter and shorter, and when I saw the energy that put into the film, I had my first real revelation about cutting."⁹⁸ It was thus during the editing process that *Plastic Haircut* achieved its unconventional form, involving a total

⁸⁹ MacDonald, "We Were Bent on Having a Good Time," 43. See also Brenda Richardson, "Women, Wives, Film-makers: An Interview with Gunvor Nelson and Dorothy Wiley," *Film Quarterly* 25/1 (Autumn 1971): 34.

⁹⁰ MacDonald, "We Were Bent on Having a Good Time," 39. John Collier Jr. loaned the camera equipment to Nelson.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Davis, "Ecological Aesthetics," 73.

⁹³ Earl Bodien, "The Films of Robert Nelson," *Film Quarterly* 20/3 (Spring 1967): 52.

⁹⁴ Steve Anker, "Interview with Robert Nelson," *Radical Light*, 177.

⁹⁵ MacDonald, "We Were Bent on Having a Good Time," 40. Dorothy Wiley recalls spending hours going over lists of potential film titles together "in hilarious laughter" (Richardson, "Women, Wives, Film-makers," 37).

⁹⁶ MacDonald, "We Were Bent on Having a Good Time," 39. Judy Goldhaft, however, was not credited at the end of the film.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

duration of fifteen minutes divided into three distinct parts.⁹⁹ The first section—a silent six-minute montage of overlaid fragments—featured (among other things) Davis cavorting with numerous props, ink appearing to run backwards, naked bodies, fabric and masks, a cartoon eye and mouth, and a recurring triangle motif. The second contained a black screen over which Reich’s three-minute soundtrack was played. The third section was a repetition of the first, plus a voiceover in the form of a mock interview with the filmmaker: Davis questioned Nelson, who had assumed a crude Indian accent, about the film’s imagery and meaning. During this interview, the “Indian” filmmaker claims that no editing had taken place whatsoever (manifestly untrue), that it is not possible to discern any phallic symbolism (when certain props overtly suggest it), that he was heavily influenced by the “Neo-Italian” school, and that the film is about boxing. The dialogue amounts to a comically absurd self-parody of the straight-faced avant-garde and pokes fun at any attempt to discern coherence or intention in the work. Having set up a supposedly serious tone in the opening, this interview provides a highly bathetic subversion; Davis recalls that with Nelson and Wiley “every idea or thought turned into a giggle.”¹⁰⁰

Mirroring Nelson’s frenetic editing of the final film (and foreshadowing the unsubstantiated claim about its athletic subject matter), Reich’s soundtrack was a fast-paced mono collage of sports commentary and ambient crowd noise. He described its conception and realization as follows:

Somebody said he heard a sportscaster trying to narrate the action. So I got hold of a record called *The Greatest Moments in Sport* and made a collage of it in the most primitive of all ways. I’d record a bit, stop the tape, move the needle, and then start taping again . . . Formally it started very simple and turned into noise through overdubbing with loops, rather like a surrealist rondo.¹⁰¹

Certain disjunct phrases follow each other for deliberate satiric effect (“beaten with a baseball bat / a national pastime”), whereas others are selected for their melodic or rhythmic profile and repeated (“still champion” / “a baseball bat” / “in succession” / “should’ve knocked ’em out”); the prominent phrase “the fabulous Swede” perhaps makes reference to Nelson himself.¹⁰² What seems to have interested Reich most were the hazy semantic remains of voices and the unique quality of their individual dialects. He recalls being interested in using unprocessed sounds that “have some kind of emotional resonance [because] we relate to them in various ways. If you bring them into the music, that brings in an emotional, theatrical meaning . . . I always wanted you to hear what the original sounds were.”¹⁰³ Nelson recalls it being the first tape work Reich ever created, and the influence of the filmmaker’s cutting technique can be felt in its striking linguistic juxtapositions. Although Nelson had wanted Reich’s collage to supplement the action of what became the first section,

⁹⁹ The film is available to rent via Canyon Cinema and can also be found online at www.artbabble.org.

¹⁰⁰ Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 22 January 2012.

¹⁰¹ Michael Nyman, “Steve Reich: An Interview,” *Musical Times* 112/1537 (March 1971): 230.

¹⁰² Nelson was born in 1930, in San Francisco, to a family of Swedish immigrants.

¹⁰³ Jason Gross, “Interview with Steve Reich,” *Perfect Sound Forever Online Music Magazine*, April 2000, www.furious.com/perfect/ohm/reich2.html.

the soundtrack ended up on its own due to his insufficient technical knowledge: “at that point I didn’t know how to do a mix once the quarter-inch stuff was transferred. Not being smart enough to know how to seek the solution, I put the film together in a way that put Steve’s track over the black leader, not the image . . . I was a completely untrained filmmaker.”¹⁰⁴ Reich’s soundtrack therefore stands on its own as a kind of unexpected audio intermission, providing a prominent division between the initial silent montage and its reflective replay with comic voiceover. *Plastic Haircut* had its first screening at the Mime Troupe’s Capp Street studio as part of a retrospective show entitled *Mime(s) and Movie* on 25 January 1964.¹⁰⁵

This project was characteristic of a distinctive West Coast aesthetic exhibiting strong aversion to intellectual pretension, commercialization, and institutional affiliation, reveling instead in looseness, parody, and in-jokes—an aesthetic that would lead art critic Hilton Kramer to characterize Wiley’s work as “Dude Ranch Dada.”¹⁰⁶ Features in *Plastic Haircut* attributable to Wiley are the black-and-white striped lengths of fabric and the dunce cap: both became associated with his artistic persona “Mr. Unnatural” [*sic*].¹⁰⁷ With the film, Nelson had adopted an inexpensive, amateur production model echoing that of other Bay Area filmmakers such as Bruce Conner. Nelson recalled that Conner’s approach convinced him “that you could make films in the basement,” as the outcome “looked so easy to make and poetically powerful, so sure footed.”¹⁰⁸ Conner had been a painter and sculptor before becoming interested in experimental cinema; early films such as *A Movie* (1958) and *Cosmic Ray* (1961) consisted of montages featuring playful semiotic engagement with edited black-and-white stock footage.¹⁰⁹ Tracing Conner’s influence, Carlos Kase notes that Nelson would come to produce works that were “wildly anarchic in their defiance of the avant-garde’s valorization of carefully constructed, symbolically layered artworks, and representative of a fresh vision of filmmaking as play.”¹¹⁰ A significant part of this aesthetic was encapsulated in the casual approach to authorship the group fostered during this period: the end of *Plastic Haircut* simply gives a list of names, with no sense of creative hierarchy. Other elements concerned an irreverent disregard for craft and technical expertise, coupled with incorporation of chance, personal pleasure, and light-hearted humor. These proclivities would find their home in the Canyon Cinema cooperative—a distribution network that had

¹⁰⁴ MacDonald, “We Were Bent on Having a Good Time,” 39. Opaque black leader (also called black emulsion leader) was normally used during the negative cutting process. See http://homepage.newschool.edu/~schlemej/film_courses/glossary_of_film_terms/glossary.html.

¹⁰⁵ Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe*, 198. This perhaps explains Potter’s dating of Reich’s contribution to 1964.

¹⁰⁶ See Albright, *Art in the San Francisco Bay Area*, 111–34 and Peter Plagens, *Sunshine Muse: Art on the West Coast 1945–1970* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 74–94 and 168.

¹⁰⁷ See Joann Moser, “The Continuing Adventures of William T. Wiley,” *American Art* 19/2 (Summer 2005): 68–91.

¹⁰⁸ Anker, “Canyon Cinema,” in *Radical Light*, 177.

¹⁰⁹ See William Moritz and Beverly O’Neill, “Fallout: Some Notes on the Films of Bruce Conner,” *Film Quarterly* 31/4 (Summer 1978): 36–42 and Warren Bass, “The Past Restructured: Bruce Conner and Others,” *Journal of the University Film Association* 33/2 (Spring 1981): 15–22.

¹¹⁰ Carlos Kase, “A Cinema of Anxiety: American Experimental Film in the Realm of Art (1965–75),” Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 2009, 257.

grown from what was initially “an itinerant, community experiment in public film exhibition.”¹¹¹

Kase argues that the cultural landscape of the Bay Area “was one that espoused a kind of bohemian willingness to connect disparate sensibilities and media forms.”¹¹² A prominent style at this time was epitomized in the Californian movement that became known as Funk art, with which Wiley, Conner, and Hudson are all now associated. Daniel Wheeler proposes that Funk art, centered mainly in the Bay Area, was dedicated to the rude undermining of everything that the formalist New York scene stood for: “Funk artists . . . cultivated ephemeral as well as cheap materials, sloppy execution, weird eccentricity, and outrageously vulgar fun poked at everything sacred, from religion, patriotism, and pets to art, sex, and politics.”¹¹³ In keeping with *Plastic Haircut*, Albright adds that parody “was Funk art’s most frequent impulse.”¹¹⁴ Combined in this aesthetic were the disruptive tendencies of conceptual art and the more concrete approach of assemblage, both recalling earlier European Dada. Wiley notes that such tendencies arose due to perceived freedom and the lack of critical structure on the West Coast, along with “sheer youthful exuberance.”¹¹⁵ Peter Plagens has added that San Francisco’s climate, architecture, cheap working space, and relative abundance of teaching jobs fostered an independent “bric-a-brac sensibility” among artists and meant that they did not feel the need to rage against an overbearing city environment.¹¹⁶

Given the regional artistic scene Reich was involved in at this point, his tape collage for *Plastic Haircut* can easily be seen to share in Funk art’s aesthetic of assemblage (particularly of unprocessed consumer materials), jocosity, reaction against cultivated forms of expression, and aversion to neatness or artistic pretense. Viewing Reich’s other tape collage works from this period as aural equivalents of Bay Area Funk art—rather than simply progenitors of pulse-pattern minimalism—is illuminating. Participating in the idiosyncratic sensibility behind Conner and Nelson’s films and other “junk” sculptures, Reich’s collages juxtapose “found” fragments using crude technological means in a self-consciously independent manner. Echoing their amateur production model, Reich composed at home rather than relying on external patronage: according to Ramon Sender, Reich was somewhat of a “lone wolf” at the time and only used the Tape Music Center’s facilities a few times to master some tapes.¹¹⁷ Further examples of this approach include another collaboration with Nelson on a 1965 film entitled *Thick Pucker*. In addition to providing a soundtrack for this eleven-minute short, Reich was credited as co-director;

¹¹¹ Ibid., 280. See Scott MacDonald, *Canyon Cinema: The Life and Times of an Independent Film Distributor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). Along with founder Bruce Baillie, Nelson and Conner were both involved in the early organization of Canyon Cinema.

¹¹² Kase, “A Cinema of Anxiety,” 283–84.

¹¹³ Daniel Wheeler, *Art Since Mid-Century: 1945 to the Present* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991), 176. See also “Funk Art,” *The Oxford Dictionary of American Art and Artists*, www.oxfordreference.com.

¹¹⁴ Albright, *Art in the San Francisco Bay Area*, 126.

¹¹⁵ Moser, “The Continuing Adventures of William T. Wiley,” 74.

¹¹⁶ Plagens, *Sunshine Muse*, 94, 41.

¹¹⁷ Reich, “Texture–Space–Survival,” 278; Sender, e-mail correspondence with the author, 24 May 2011.

Nelson recalled, however, that they “were both unhappy with it.”¹¹⁸ Reviewing the piece in 1967, Earl Bodien noted that Reich’s sound montage contained “little bits and pieces of talk, half-statement, [and] much repetition.”¹¹⁹

Perhaps the best example of Reich’s Funk art aesthetic, however, is the piece he assembled from recordings made while driving a taxi around San Francisco.¹²⁰ By 1964, Reich had begun surreptitiously recording his passengers and other noises by hiding a microphone near the interior dome light connected to a portable reel-to-reel tape recorder, so that he could “bug the cab.”¹²¹ Reich edited this mass of urban vernacular material into a 2’45” tape piece entitled *Livelihood*, with a similar result to his sports-commentary collage.¹²² The piece contained fragments of voices from different conversations (“take me up to” / “Saint Francis” / “Chinatown” / “downtown” / “down by the bus station please” / “wasn’t easy” / “oh, delicious” / “goodnight” / “have fun!” / “thank you”), laughter, a siren, door slams, and distorted sounds from the engine. Certain elements morph into noise; others are cut to provide rhythmic interest and to demonstrate different timbral inflections of the same phrase. Throughout the collage, it is possible to detect subtle repetition of material and constant fast-paced switching between stereo channels. Despite being neither acknowledged in his official list of works nor commercially available, *Livelihood* was almost certainly Reich’s first non-student piece to reach both an East and West Coast audience. Alongside a number of appearances at the San Francisco Tape Music Center in 1965, it was played at Judson Hall, Greenwich Village, on 28 August of the same year.¹²³ Reviewing this performance as part of a festival concert of avant-garde electronic works, *New York Times* critic Richard Freed described the piece as “Dada-ish . . . Fun, yes, but music?”¹²⁴ Freed’s comment is apt given the experimental, fluid, and collaborative aesthetic environment in which Reich found himself immersed.

Listening to Terry Riley

Concurrent with exploration into acousmatic tape collage and incidental music for the Mime Troupe, Reich was pursuing improvisation in a manner heavily indebted both to his academic training and to his perception of Coltrane. In 1963, Reich made the decision that he would perform in all his future instrumental pieces, as it seemed that “a healthy musical situation would only result when the functions of

¹¹⁸ MacDonald, “We Were Bent on Having a Good Time,” 43.

¹¹⁹ Bodien, “The Films of Robert Nelson,” 52.

¹²⁰ MacDonald, “We Were Bent on Having a Good Time,” 39.

¹²¹ Hillier, “Introduction,” in Reich, *Writings on Music*, 11. Strickland states that the machine used was an Uher portable (*Minimalism*, 184); Potter, however, asserts that Reich acquired this, along with a Sony 770, at a later stage (*Four Musical Minimalists*, 166).

¹²² An MP3 file of the piece is currently available via <http://www.nakido.com/635BCC87335F3A8884E0C640793BCD7E372B2ECC>.

¹²³ *Livelihood* was presented on 27 January 1965 and then again on 12 and 14 April; see *The San Francisco Tape Music Center*, 277.

¹²⁴ Richard D. Freed, “Avant-Garde Gives Electronic Display,” *New York Times*, 28 August 1965, 12.

composer and performer were united.”¹²⁵ The first step he took in this direction was to form a free improvisation ensemble. Members of a group—including Jon Gibson (clarinet), George Rey (violin), Gwen Watson (cello), Paul Breslin (bass), and Tom Constanten (piano)—met “at least once a week for about six months” to rehearse.¹²⁶ Late in 1963, finding that the ensemble needed some kind of framework in order to grow beyond “spur of the moment reactions,” Reich produced three *Pitch Charts* that functioned as loose harmonic guidelines for group improvisation: “everybody played the same note—free timbre, free attack, free rhythm. Then everybody played two or three notes, basically building up to the full twelve notes.”¹²⁷ Gibson suggests that these pieces were heavily influenced by another group Reich had seen him perform with, the New Music Ensemble, in which members contributed their own “pitch charts” alongside others by Karlheinz Stockhausen and Cornelius Cardew; he remembers Reich being “rather taken by some of the pieces.”¹²⁸ With their “jazz-like chords,” Reich’s guidelines were thus “a rather typical kind of pitch chart piece going around in those days.”¹²⁹

Versions of *Pitch Charts* featured in four “Music Now” concerts held at the Mime Troupe’s abandoned church in late May 1964.¹³⁰ The concerts were advertised in the *San Francisco Chronicle* as consisting of “live, tape, and improvisatory music . . . by Bach, Steve Reich, Phil Lesh, and Tom Constanten”; tickets were \$1.50 and \$1.75 on the door.¹³¹ Among other things, each program included a cello suite by J. S. Bach, an ensemble rendition of *Pitch Charts*, a piece entitled *6 & 7/8 for Bernard Moreno* by Lesh, and *Piano Piece #3* by Constanten.¹³² Perhaps conditioned by his later fame as a rock musician, Lesh describes his piece as “pretentious crap perfectly consonant with all the current avant-garde clichés.”¹³³ Constanten remarks that in the “aleatoric spirit of the times” Lesh shuffled segments of the work before each performance and dealt them out to the ensemble.¹³⁴ *Piano Piece #3* opened the second half and featured live prepared piano accompanied by a stereo tape prerecorded with the help of Reich and a borrowed Sony 777 machine.¹³⁵

It was at one of these concerts that Terry Riley first encountered Reich. As Riley recalls:

¹²⁵ Steve Reich, “Steve Reich and Musicians” (1973), *Writings on Music*, 78.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 79. Sources for personnel are Constanten, *Between Rock & Hard Places*, 54; and Hillier, “Introduction,” in *Writings on Music*, in Reich, 11.

¹²⁷ Duckworth, *Talking Music*, 295. During the interview, Reich claims that *Pitch Charts* was influenced by Berio. A fragment of the score is reproduced in Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 161.

¹²⁸ Jon Gibson, e-mail correspondence with the author, 17 August 2011. Gibson’s ensemble included Richard Swift, Robert Boyle, Stan Lunetta, and several others.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ The four dates were 21, 23, 29, and 30 May; the location of the Mime Troupe’s studio was 3450 Twentieth Street, on the corner of Capp Street in the Mission District. Strickland (*Minimalism*, 185) and Schwarz (*Minimalists*, 59) incorrectly record it as being a single concert in autumn 1964.

¹³¹ “Music Now at Mime Theater,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 21 May 1964, 45.

¹³² Constanten, *Between Rock & Hard Places*, 54. Potter proposes that the program also contained a taped sextet version of *Pitch Charts*, free improvisation, and another work by Reich entitled *Proportional Piece #1* (Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 164).

¹³³ Lesh, *Searching for the Sound*, 37.

¹³⁴ Constanten, *Between Rock & Hard Places*, 54.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

Bill Spencer, a jazz musician, had met Steve and told me Steve's group was performing one night down at the Mime Troupe . . . I went to the first half and left. . . . The thing I heard was improvisation, but very banging around and noisy. The next day at my studio in a garage up on Bernal Heights . . . there was a bang on the door, and it was Steve Reich. The first thing he said was, "why did you walk out on my concert?"¹³⁶

Reich calls the anecdote "a little apocryphal"; whatever the exact details of their initial meeting, however, the two composers began a brief, close friendship.¹³⁷ The accepted narrative then posits that during the summer of 1964, Riley showed an early version of *In C* to Reich, who was so impressed that he decided to help organize players for the premiere.¹³⁸ As well as offering his own services on a Wurlitzer electric piano, Reich brought along his girlfriend Jeannie Brechan on keyboard and Jon Gibson on soprano saxophone. These players, along with Riley himself, formed the core of the ensemble that rehearsed the piece; Reich even credits himself with suggesting an eighth-note pulse on piano in order to keep the group together.¹³⁹ The difference in attitude between the two composers was marked, as Riley recalls: "we had [a rehearsal] which was almost everybody, including a couple of hippies who came in off the street, who tried to blow over it, and Steve threw them out because he was totally intolerant of anything like that."¹⁴⁰ In spite of this incident, Reich has been open in remarking that he "learned a tremendous amount from putting the piece together" and that *In C* had "a very strong influence" on his thinking.¹⁴¹

Without denying the validity of this experience, it is profitable to challenge the notion that *In C* was the only piece of Riley's that had a discernable influence during this period of contact: as Keith Potter has argued, its very notoriety within the established genealogy of early minimalism has served to conceal connections manifest in another medium.¹⁴² Gibson recalls that a week or so after the May 1964 Music Now concerts, Reich had taken him to Riley's house, where they had "listened to some of Terry's tape recordings he had made in Paris" and were both "very impressed."¹⁴³ During the early 1960s, Riley had also been experimenting with the manifold possibilities opened up by the electronic manipulation of "found" sound. He had composed *Music for "The Gift"* while in Paris during 1963 as an incidental work for

¹³⁶ Strickland, *American Composers*, 114. Riley was no stranger to ensemble improvisation, having experimented in the late 1950s with Pauline Oliveros and Loren Rush (see *The San Francisco Tape Music Center*, 206–10). Jon Gibson recalls taking him to a similar performance by the New Music Ensemble, which "he hated too" (Gibson, e-mail correspondence with the author, 18 August 2011).

¹³⁷ Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 60.

¹³⁸ See Carl, *Terry Riley's In C*, 13–55.

¹³⁹ Duckworth, *Talking Music*, 296. Warner Jepson, Sonny Lewis, James Lowe, Pauline Oliveros, Ramon Sender, Stan Shaff, Morton Subotnick, Mel Weitsman, and Phil Winsor later joined this core group; Tony Martin provided a light show.

¹⁴⁰ Carl, *Terry Riley's In C*, 44. As a performer, Reich was also involved in the Tape Music Center's 1964 "Tudorfest" and Pauline Oliveros's *Pieces of Eight* (Oliveros, e-mail correspondence with the author, 25 July 2011).

¹⁴¹ Duckworth, *Talking Music*, 296.

¹⁴² Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 117, 165.

¹⁴³ Gibson, e-mail correspondence with the author, 17 August 2011.

a devised play by Ken Dewey, produced as part of the Théâtre des Nations festival.¹⁴⁴ The piece was made in collaboration with Chet Baker and actor John Graham, and involved a “time-lag accumulator.”¹⁴⁵ Riley recorded individual lines based around Miles Davis’s modal composition “So What?” in order to “make canons out of the trumpet and other parts” and percussive loops of Graham’s voice repeating the words “she moves, she” from the play.¹⁴⁶ Riley describes it as being “when [he] really started understanding what repetition could do for musical form.”¹⁴⁷ As Reich was a relative novice in this medium, it is reasonable to suggest that informal exposure to Riley’s work for tape encouraged an approach that involved delay accumulation, manipulation of overlaid loops, and regular, percussive repetition of spoken fragments. Potter argues that these elements certainly “suggest[ed] effects to him that *In C* itself did not.”¹⁴⁸ This hypothesis is substantiated by Riley’s insistence that Reich changed his musical direction around 1965: before that, he says, what Reich was doing “wasn’t anything like what he did after he met me.”¹⁴⁹ Gibson concurs, noting that “after Reich heard the tapes of Riley he began working that way himself, or in a very similar direction.”¹⁵⁰

Further evidence for this connection can be found in the suppressed subtitle to Reich’s first formally acknowledged work for tape, which began life sometime “late in 1964” after Reich recorded an African American Pentecostal preacher named Brother Walter sermonizing in San Francisco’s Union Square.¹⁵¹ Reich has explained that the recording was made at the instigation of a friend interested in pursuing a related film project: “I had these recordings, which had been made for some film . . . for a guy who’d never made [one] and was thinking he might.”¹⁵² Having abandoned that particular project, Reich decided to use the material for a new tape composition. Riley describes what happened during one of their meetings: “he played me the fragments, and then he started making a piece out of it. The first thing he tried before he heard what I was doing was sort of a collage.”¹⁵³ Allegedly entitled *Brother Walter*, this piece underwent a dramatic transformation during the time Reich became acquainted with Riley.¹⁵⁴ For its premiere at the San Francisco Tape Music Center on 27 January 1965, it carried a more detailed

¹⁴⁴ David W. Bernstein and Maggi Payne, “Terry Riley Interviewed,” *The San Francisco Tape Music Center*, 215–16. The piece was reissued on CD by Elision Fields in 2007.

¹⁴⁵ Strickland, *American Composers*, 113. John Graham was a member of Halprin’s Dancer’s Workshop. See Duckworth, *Talking Music*, 276.

¹⁴⁶ Strickland, *American Composers*, 113.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 165.

¹⁴⁹ Strickland, *American Composers*, 114.

¹⁵⁰ Gibson, e-mail correspondence with the author, 17 August 2011.

¹⁵¹ Reich, *Writings on Music*, 19. Union Square was one of the busy commercial centers of the city; Davis remarks that it was “not my usual haunt” (Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 6 June 2011).

¹⁵² Gabrielle Zuckerman, “An Interview with Steve Reich,” *American Mavericks*, July 2002, http://musicmavericks.publicradio.org/features/interview_reich.html. It is clear that this collaborator was not Robert Nelson, as Reich makes explicit reference to him elsewhere during the interview.

¹⁵³ Strickland, *American Composers*, 114.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

and revealing appellation: *It's Gonna Rain, or, Meet Brother Walter in Union Square after Listening to Terry Riley*.¹⁵⁵ This title bears the marks of a tight-knit scene: the audience may even have found it amusing—a representation of how they heard the world after immersion in Riley's new aesthetic. Ramon Sender proposes that there was “no doubt that all of us were listening to one another and being influenced in various ways.”¹⁵⁶ Gibson, however, remembers that Riley was “upset” and that the experience was “rather shocking” at the time; Riley recalls feeling “ripped off.”¹⁵⁷ The suppression of the piece's subtitle after 1968, especially on Reich's first solo LP for Columbia Masterworks, *Live/Electric Music*, masked this direct and evident connection to Riley's work with tape.¹⁵⁸

Reich claims to have discovered the “phasing” process by accident while playing around with loops of vocal material on two tape recorders, a story that also serves to obscure Riley's influence.¹⁵⁹ Two circumstances suggest themselves for how the effect came about on the basic Wollensak machines he was using.¹⁶⁰ First, the tape recorders may not have been calibrated properly and thus not running at exactly the same speed. Second, the loops may not have been identical, as cutting two tape segments to precisely the same length by hand would have been extremely difficult.¹⁶¹ Both possibilities would have allowed one loop to slide gradually ahead of the other—or one to fall gradually behind, giving the same perceptual result. The phenomenon was not unknown to composers: as John Cage noted in 1957, “it has been impossible with the playing of several separate tapes at once to achieve perfect synchronization.”¹⁶² Combining an inherent consequence of working with rudimentary tape technology with Riley's idea of a form built out of looped modules, Reich cultivated a distinctive approach, Riley notes: “what Steve did, because he's very methodical and clean in his work, was to make the phasing work very gradually and to make a process out of it. I made the tapes go backwards, forwards.”¹⁶³ If Riley used the technique in a free, composerly fashion, Reich's accomplishment was not its discovery, but the realization of its potential as a technique that could provide the basis for an ostensibly systematic compositional methodology.

¹⁵⁵ See *The San Francisco Tape Music Center*, 277.

¹⁵⁶ Sender, e-mail correspondence with the author, 24 May 2011.

¹⁵⁷ Gibson, e-mail correspondence with the author, 17 August 2011; Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 63.

¹⁵⁸ See Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 165.

¹⁵⁹ See Reich, *Writings on Music*, 20–21. Phasing (or “phase shifting”) is a process whereby repeating musical cells are superimposed at slightly different speeds so that they appear to pass across each other, locking into varying positions of synchronicity.

¹⁶⁰ The model Reich most probably used was a 3M Wollensak T-1500, the most popular commercial reel-to-reel tape recorder in the U.S. at that time. Despite not being a precision machine, The T-1500 had a reputation for durability and good sound quality; see www.clydesight.com/wollensak_reel_to_reel_tape_recorder/Wollensak_history.html. Potter adds that Reich also used a “borrowed Ampex.” Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 166.

¹⁶¹ Thanks to Bill Brooks and Bill Maginnis (e-mail correspondence with the author, 24 May 2011) for pointing out these two possibilities from their own experience. See also *The San Francisco Tape Music Center*, 106.

¹⁶² John Cage, “Experimental Music” (1957), in John Cage, *Silence* (London: Marion Boyars, 2006), 11.

¹⁶³ Strickland, *American Composers*, 114.

In spite of its identity as Reich’s first “phasing” piece, *It’s Gonna Rain* still contains clear traces of his interest in Funk collage and is not entirely a work of pure mechanicity. Both parts begin with uninflected documentary images of the urban scene in Union Square. Part I seems to enact Reich’s moment of revelation, as it moves from a collage of fragments to the phasing process itself. Rather than proceeding of its own volition this time, the process was laboriously crafted through manual retarding of the supply reel, systematically slowing one stereo channel against the other. The sampled loop of Part II comes closest to Reich’s original aesthetic, and may even have been part of the initial piece he showed to Riley. Here, the phasing process serves to blur accumulated material multiplied into eight voices; rather than returning the process to unison, the loops are manipulated to achieve an audio simulation of entropic chaos.¹⁶⁴ Only Part I was presented in the Tape Music Center concert entitled “The Music of Steve Reich” in late January 1965; other pieces on the program were *Music for Two or More Pianos or Piano and Tape* and *Livelihood*.¹⁶⁵ Reich describes the former as “chords for a jazz tune in a sense, a little darker.”¹⁶⁶ Part II of *It’s Gonna Rain* was withheld for personal reasons, as it “seemed so paranoid and depressing” to the composer, who recalls “feeling very disturbed” at the time, due to his recent divorce and to the existential instability of the Cold War.¹⁶⁷ It was only later, in New York, that he realized “it was obviously part of the piece,” despite being “a heavy trip” for the listener.¹⁶⁸

The January concert received a generous review by Dean Wallace in the *San Francisco Chronicle*.¹⁶⁹ Wallace began by noting how Reich’s work “combines the tyro’s enthusiasm with a respect for older established ideas,” but was “rather tame, as tape music goes.” Wallace suggested that “despite its unlikely sources, [*Livelihood* had] almost as much musical quality as [the piece] which preceded it,” *Music for Two or More Pianos*. The review failed to mention Part I of *It’s Gonna Rain*, however, dwelling instead on *Livelihood*: “controlled violence, channeled into patterns that jolt, amuse, and titillate.”¹⁷⁰ Wallace highlighted “two signal qualities that raise [Reich’s music] several notches above the mill-run—a sense of humor and a definite feeling of formal balance,” yet—in striking contrast to Alfred Frankenstein’s rave review of Riley’s solo concert in the same series two months before—he tellingly concluded that the music was “notably lacking in that over-rated attribute, originality.”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁴ For more detail on *It’s Gonna Rain*, see Gopinath, “Contraband Children,” 125–93. Gopinath’s work is a useful corrective to the mistakes in Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 168.

¹⁶⁵ Duckworth, *Talking Music*, 297; *The San Francisco Tape Music Center*, 277. For a reproduction of the score for *Music for Two or More Pianos*, see Reich, *Writings on Music*, 12–13. Reich acknowledges the influence of Stockhausen’s *Refrain* on the piece; see Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 162.

¹⁶⁶ Duckworth, *Talking Music*, 295.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 297. See also Reich, *Writings on Music*, 21.

¹⁶⁸ Duckworth, *Talking Music*, 295.

¹⁶⁹ Dean Wallace, “Newcomer to Tape Music,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 29 January 1965, 41.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* See Alfred Frankenstein, “Music Like None Other on Earth,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8 November 1964, 28. Frankenstein argued that Riley had “developed a style like that of no one else on earth, and . . . is bound to make a profound impression with it.” For a reproduction of the programme, see *The San Francisco Tape Music Center*, 27.

Civil Rights in a Cracker Barrel

Reich has indicated that the subject matter of *It's Gonna Rain* was reflective of the political context in the U.S. at its time of conception: "I recorded Brother Walter . . . shortly after the Cuban missile crisis, and I thought we might be going up in so much radioactive smoke. With that hovering in the background and this preacher laying it down about the Flood and Noah, it really had a lot of resonance."¹⁷² In Part II, Reich continues, "the emotional feeling is that you're going through the cataclysm, you're experiencing what it's like to have everything dissolve."¹⁷³ Given Margot A. Henrikson's proposition that in the postwar context atomic weapons served as "the most symbolically appropriate carrier of [the] tropism for disorder," creating a dense fog of seemingly chaotic echoes from the preacher's voice was an apposite response.¹⁷⁴ Reich's claim would thus situate his piece alongside a number of other contemporaneous works concerning nuclear fallout and misguided foreign policy, such as Bob Dylan's "Talking World War III Blues" (1963), the hit "Eve of Destruction" (1965) sung by Barry McGuire, Stanley Kubrick's film *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), and Andy Warhol's silkscreen print *Atomic Bomb* (1965).

Reich's remark that his late 1964 field recording occurred shortly after the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, however, represents only a retrospective nod to generalized Cold War nuclear anxiety. In the wake of what was perceived as a victory for the U.S. against the Soviet Union and the signing of the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1963, threat of imminent nuclear conflict subsided, Todd Gitlin proposes, "to the status of an abstract threat."¹⁷⁵ Eclipsing this on a local level during the latter part of 1964 and through 1965, were two political issues in the Bay Area that members of the Mime Troupe were directly involved in—the Berkeley Free Speech Movement and opposition to the escalating war in Vietnam.¹⁷⁶ A reading of *It's Gonna Rain* that emphasizes looming nuclear apocalypse also neglects significant issues concerning race and representation raised by the choice to portray and manipulate an African American subject.¹⁷⁷ Reich recalls being "extremely impressed with the melodic quality" of Brother Walter's speech; highlighting this quality in the opening fragments, Sumanth Gopinath argues, effectively displayed the preacher's voice as a sign of Otherness, "perhaps recall[ing] the minstrel parody of the black preacher's speech-song."¹⁷⁸ Indeed, Reich transcribed Brother Walter's sermon using what Gopinath calls a "faux-Southern Negro dialect" that mirrored

¹⁷² Reich, *Writings on Music*, 21.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Margot A. Henrikson, *Dr. Strangelove's America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), xxi.

¹⁷⁵ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, (New York: Bantam, 1993), 220. See Tom W. Smith, "The Cuban Missile Crisis and U.S. Public Opinion," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 67/2 (Summer 2003): 265–93.

¹⁷⁶ Both Landau and Davis were actively involved in supporting aspects of the Free Speech Movement (Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 31 May 2011). See Eynon, "Community in Motion" and De Groot, "The Limits of Moral Protest and Participatory Democracy."

¹⁷⁷ See Lloyd Whitesell, "White Noise: Race and Erasure in the Cultural Avant-Garde," *American Music* 19/2 (Summer 2001): 168–89.

¹⁷⁸ Reich, *Writings on Music*, 19; Gopinath, "Contraband Children," 183.

the satiric dialogue being written and rehearsed by Landau and Davis for the Mime Troupe's notorious *A Minstrel Show, or Civil Rights in a Cracker Barrel*.¹⁷⁹

A Minstrel Show opened on 17 June 1965 at the Commedia Theatre, Palo Alto. It was intended to "make stereotypes carry the burden of social satire" and, using an interracial cast of minstrels all in blackface (along with a white interlocutor), to "unnerve [the audience] and fuck up their prejudices."¹⁸⁰ The troupe wanted to confront the issue of repressed racism in U.S. society by unearthing clichés purported to be buried within a collective liberal subconscious. Landau argues that the show had an overtly political purpose: "through satire, parody, slapstick, song and dance and just plain old bad jokes, we hoped to get people to laugh about issues that ordinarily were not funny as a means to thinking critically about them, releasing them from . . . sterile forms of thought."¹⁸¹ This outcome was achieved, Davis proposed, by moving rapidly "from cornball black jokes (minstrel racism) to radical black (radical puncturing) jokes thus transforming a stereotypical image into a radical image."¹⁸² The script featured crossfire dialogue gleaned from old minstrel shows as well as original material devised by Landau, Davis, and members of the cast.¹⁸³ Rather than being a show about integration, the production aimed at challenging tolerance, as Davis noted: "we were not for the suppression of difference; rather, by exaggerating the differences we punctured the cataracts of 'color blind' liberals."¹⁸⁴

The only contribution Reich made to the show was the live soundtrack to a silent color film by Robert Nelson screened during the intermission, entitled *Oh Dem Watermelons*.¹⁸⁵ The film was conceived by Landau, Davis, and Nelson and starred members of the troupe in a surreal narrative about a watermelon, "or thirty ways of doing in or getting done in by a symbol."¹⁸⁶ Although closely associated with *A Minstrel Show*, Nelson apparently intended the film as an independent work from the outset, stating in 1966 that there was no written scenario and that he was responsible for much of the invention.¹⁸⁷ Davis, however, claims that Landau scripted the scenarios and that Nelson deliberately tried to distance the film from the Mime Troupe during this period:

One day about a year or so later I saw an announcement of the film and it had no mention of the SFMT in its promotion or in the credits . . . I called Nelson and asked him to at least give

¹⁷⁹ Gopinath, "Contraband Children," 182. Reich's transcription can be found in Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 168. Although rehearsals took place over a period of nine months, Reich was not directly involved; Davis also notes that Reich was not around during the shooting of *Oh Dem Watermelons* (Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 31 May 2011).

¹⁸⁰ Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe* 32 and 50. See "Mime Troupe's Minstrel Show," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 17 June 1965, 46.

¹⁸¹ Saul Landau, "Commentary," *The San Francisco Mime Troupe Reader*, ed. Mason, 26–27.

¹⁸² Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe*, 57.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁸⁵ See Sumanth Gopinath, "Reich in Blackface: *Oh Dem Watermelons* and Radical Minstrelsy in the 1960s," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 5/2 (May 2011): 139–93. The film is available to rent via Canyon Cinema; it can also be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvso-nPNha8.

¹⁸⁶ Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe*, 62.

¹⁸⁷ "Editor's Notebook: Correction," *Film Quarterly* 19/3 (Spring 1966): 3.

us credit, or note that we were in the film and also that originally it was part of *A Minstrel Show*. He agreed to do something. I think he put it in the notes. This was the kind of thing that occurred in the '60s when contracts were not made, expenses paid but ownership was yours or ours or theirs . . . Nelson I think made thousands of dollars from the film but we never received any money.¹⁸⁸

Oh Dem Watermelons won prizes at the San Francisco and Ann Arbor film festivals; Davis recalls that it went on to define Nelson's identity as an underground filmmaker.¹⁸⁹ After an extended title sequence, the film began with a long static shot of a watermelon in the guise of a football, leading on to a comic montage of sports imagery (rather like a video counterpoint to Reich's soundtrack for *Plastic Haircut*). A single watermelon then falls from the sky and splatters over a road; one is run over by a streetcar and magically reassembles itself. A gang chases another over a bridge and down the hairpin turns of Vermont Street. Other watermelons are trampled on, hit, stabbed, exploded, and shot. One is crushed by the pneumatic arm of a digger; another is sliced apart by a butcher to reveal animal intestines. A "series of exotic scenes" then ensue, some of which include "crudely animated collages."¹⁹⁰ Other watermelons are seen amid balloons, carried by Superman, and found in incongruous political situations beside black delegates. One is birthed and grows a phallic appendage; some are flushed down the toilet; a white girl caresses one, some are eaten, one is excreted by a dog, and yet another is fired into orbit by a cartoon rocket. Finally, the broken pepo reassembles itself and chases the terrified crowd back up Vermont Street, appearing to cast off its burden of oppression in an absurd finale. This ending is all the more potent given the urban "race riots" that erupted around the country in the mid-1960s, as well as tensions between Civil Rights activists and revolutionary groups such as Oakland's Black Panther Party for Self-Defense.

Reich's soundtrack unifies the unfolding of these disparate images, lending teleology and pulse to a narrative sequence that otherwise might seem incoherent. For Nelson, the music was central to the film: "it will hypnotize you. *Oh Dem Watermelons* certainly would not be anything like it is without that."¹⁹¹ The soundtrack consisted of an arrangement of two minstrel songs and an extended canon using elements of the phrase "oh, dat watermelon," sung by the cast with piano during the film. John Seelye's review in *Film Quarterly* proposed that "much of the film's effect" depended on Reich's minstrel chorus.¹⁹² Davis notes that the cast stood in the dark beside the screen in order to hold focus on the stage—a different effect from the version with appended soundtrack.¹⁹³ On this recording, a choir begins by humming Steven Foster's "Massa's in de Cold Ground" (1852) over the title sequence. The song appears again, at a faster tempo, before launching into the chorus of a

¹⁸⁸ Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 17 August 2011.

¹⁸⁹ Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 22 January 2012. See Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe*, 48; and MacDonald, "We Were Bent on Having a Good Time," 40.

¹⁹⁰ Gopinath, "Reich in Blackface," 152.

¹⁹¹ Anker, "Canyon Cinema," *Radical Light*, 177.

¹⁹² John Seelye, "Review: Watermelon," *Film Quarterly* 19/2 (Winter 1965): 54.

¹⁹³ Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 31 May 2011.

much livelier song—Luke Schoolcraft’s “Oh! Dat Watermelon” (1874).¹⁹⁴ A simple harmonic progression follows, supporting a section derived from the Schoolcraft song that leads to the appearance of a more mechanical passage Seelye described as an “Afro-Harlem chant,” in which the word “watermelon” is repeated over a rigidly pulsed piano chord.¹⁹⁵ At this stage, the music appears to halt its linear progression as if it were a tape loop. The voices then construct a five-voice canon before enacting the process in reverse; a final rendition of Schoolcraft’s chorus imparts a strong sense of release.¹⁹⁶ Nelson recalls that he “edited a bit to [Reich’s] music,” implying that a recorded version of the soundtrack preceded and influenced the film’s final form.

Cineaste Amos Vogel has argued that subversive films such as *Oh Dem Watermelons* embraced the essential “artificiality of the film medium—its inevitable ‘de-formation’ of reality, implicit anarchist freedom from all logical restraint, and inherent subjectivity.”¹⁹⁷ In the dark of the cinema, this allowed for the “surfacing of deeper desires and anxieties” in the viewer.¹⁹⁸ Nelson echoed these statements when he proposed that in his opinion the film did not have the same intentional didactic clarity as *A Minstrel Show*.

Because you can’t add all the images together into a conclusive point of view, the film becomes what you project into it. I’d never have chosen to stand up on my own and be a spokesman on racism . . . The only thing I could imagine doing was making something that would be shocking in how it would meet the issue, but fundamentally ambiguous. The film demonstrated the forbidden.¹⁹⁹

It remained in the rapid-cut satirical vein of *Plastic Haircut*, but this time looked outward on society rather than inwardly on itself. In using the watermelon as a racial signifier, the film played overtly on its uncomfortable stereotyped association with African Americans, while providing a symbolic representation of racist brutality. In this sense, *Oh Dem Watermelons*, Reich’s use of offensive minstrel songs, and the show’s intentionally racist façade might all be seen to have shared in a contemporary “hip” sensibility encoded in the phenomena of the “sick joke.” Phil Ford describes this as consisting of “the detonation of a gruesome image within a minimal schoolyard form,” functioning as a kind of hipster test or “mechanism of elite socialization.”²⁰⁰ This attitude allowed the ensemble to “affirm liberal sentiments even as [they] brutally subvert[ed] them,” defying the imagined “square” who “either misses the irony or else is left muttering in shocked tones that some things

¹⁹⁴ The opening titles of the film, however, credit the soundtrack to “Steven Foster and Steve Reich.” Gopinath argues that this was probably due to Schoolcraft’s relative obscurity at the time. For transcriptions, see Gopinath, “Reich in Blackface,” 149–63.

¹⁹⁵ Seelye, “Review.”

¹⁹⁶ Elements of the soundtrack found their way into Reich’s performing repertoire during the latter half of the 1960s through a piece for two pianos entitled *Improvisations on a Watermelon*. See Gopinath, “Reich in Blackface,” 164.

¹⁹⁷ Amos Vogel, *Film as a Subversive Art* (London: C. T. Editions, 2005), 49–50. Vogel categorizes *Oh Dem Watermelons* under the sub-heading “Dada and Pop: Anti-Art?”

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁹⁹ MacDonald, “We Were Bent on Having a Good Time,” 40.

²⁰⁰ Phil Ford, “Hip Sensibility in an Age of Mass Counterculture,” *Jazz Perspectives* 2/2 (November 2008): 141. Davis has described some of his artistic activities during this period as “hip slinging jabber about being ‘political’” (Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 31 May 2011).

are simply not to be joked about.”²⁰¹ Reich’s insistent repetition of provocative elements from “Oh! Dat Watermelon” seems to drive home this sense of multilayered meaning.

Both Reich and Nelson’s work stepped into new and relatively unfamiliar territory with this polemical film. Davis proposes that as the project was initially woven into the context of the Mime Troupe’s radical production, it “created the ambiance for Nelson and Reich to work within a politically sophisticated form,” allowing them to elevate their art into a sphere of social and economic self-awareness.²⁰² Whether this was the case or not is open to question, as has been suggested above in relation to Nelson’s attitude toward the intention of “his” film and its later success as an autonomous entity. Reich also seems to have followed a path away from the troupe’s explicitly leftist ideology, masking his associations with Davis and Landau, and dwelling on issues of nuclear holocaust alongside the mechanical or sonorous elements of *It’s Gonna Rain*, rather than on race and the semantics of his soundtrack for *Oh Dem Watermelons*.²⁰³

A New Ecstatic Frenzy

A Minstrel Show was the last Mime Troupe project Reich was involved in before leaving the West Coast for his native New York in September 1965; he recalls making plans to leave sometime between January and August of the same year.²⁰⁴ Before this move, he cut ties with R. G. Davis’s circle—although he would continue to work with San Francisco associates Jon Gibson, William T. Wiley, and Gunvor Nelson.²⁰⁵ Davis notes that Reich turned down work with the Mime Troupe before he did with Robert Nelson, suggesting that the film *Thick Pucker* may have been made during this period.²⁰⁶ Pauline Oliveros had begun providing integrated sound for the troupe’s productions, beginning with Bertolt Brecht’s *The Exception and the Rule* in May 1965, for which journalist Robert Scheer had given a report on the war in Vietnam as the second act.²⁰⁷ Davis notes that Oliveros’s approach was closer to what the troupe were doing at the time, as she used percussive props via the actors on stage rather than separate musicians and was “in on rehearsals.”²⁰⁸

For their outdoor summer production, the troupe chose Giordano Bruno’s *Il Candelaio*, adapted by Peter Berg—a show the city’s Park and Recreation

²⁰¹ Ford, “Hip Sensibility in an Age of Mass Counterculture,” 141.

²⁰² Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 22 January 2012.

²⁰³ Strickland (*Minimalism*, 190) claims that Reich had a longstanding commitment to the Civil Rights Movement. Reich’s relationship with the Harlem Six case, however, is illuminating in this regard; see Sumanth Gopinath, “The Problem of the Political in Steve Reich’s *Come Out*,” *Sound Commitments: Avant-Garde Music and the Sixties*, ed. Robert Adlington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 121–44.

²⁰⁴ Duckworth, *Talking Music*, 299.

²⁰⁵ Gibson would later join Reich’s performing ensemble, Wiley provided the cover art to his first solo LP, and Reich composed a tape soundtrack for Gunvor Nelson’s 1969 film *My Name is Oona*.

²⁰⁶ Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 31 May 2011.

²⁰⁷ See Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe*, 199–201.

²⁰⁸ Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 4 June 2011.

Commission deemed obscene and offensive.²⁰⁹ After the third performance, a letter was sent to the troupe revoking their permit to perform in open spaces. In response, a performance was mounted in San Francisco’s Lafayette Park on 7 August. The troupe’s new business manager Bill Graham had publicized the event widely and a large crowd turned up to watch; anticipating a spectacle, Davis stepped into the leading role. After some expository dialogue, he announced to the assembled public that the troupe would present “for your enjoyment this afternoon . . . AN ARREST!!!”: he leapt into the air and was dutifully apprehended.²¹⁰ Davis was found guilty of performing in the parks without a permit and in order to cover mounting legal fees, Graham proposed staging a benefit event.²¹¹ An eclectic “Appeal Party” was held at the Mime Troupe’s Howard Street loft on 6 November, featuring (among others) the John Handy Quintet, the Mystery Trend, Jefferson Airplane, the Committee, the Fugs, Sandy Bull, Allen Ginsberg, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti.²¹² Phil Lesh described it as “a breakout event for the nascent subculture.”²¹³ Robert Nelson recalled it as follows:

It turned out to be the first total mob scene I saw in San Francisco . . . packed body to body with people in some kind of strange new ecstatic frenzy . . . Overnight that whole scene was born. . . Old icons were tumbling and floating downstream; other gods were disappearing over the horizon. It was an astounding continual shock, and people came—young people, bigger crowds, still bigger crowds—all dancing in the streets and taking acid and being transformed by it.²¹⁴

Meanwhile, Lesh had been invited to play bass guitar in a fledgling electric blues band called the Warlocks, led by his friend Jerry Garcia.²¹⁵ Lesh jumped at the opportunity and, in early June 1965, moved down to Palo Alto to begin regular rehearsals, playing his first set with the band on 18 June at a club in Hayward. The band then spent time “scuffling through a series of bar gigs,” smoking pot and experimenting with LSD, before changing their name to the Grateful Dead and being booked by Graham for the next Mime Troupe benefit event.²¹⁶ Reich was no stranger to psychoactive elements of the counterculture, as Ramon Sender recounts:

One day, in 1964, Steve Reich came over to my house with a paper bag full of these odd-looking little green dried-up buttons. He asked “Where’s your Waring blender?” I said,

²⁰⁹ See Michael W. Doyle, “Staging the Revolution,” *Imagine Nation: the American Counterculture of the 1960s and ’70s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael W. Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 71–97 and Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe*, 65–70.

²¹⁰ Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe*, 67.

²¹¹ See Bill Graham and Robert Greenfield, *Bill Graham Presents: My Life Inside Rock and Out* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004), 114–26.

²¹² See McNally, *A Long Strange Trip*, 149–50; Gene Sculatti and Davin Seay, *San Francisco Nights: the Psychedelic Music Trip 1965–1968* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1985), 53–55; and Selvin, *San Francisco*, 90.

²¹³ Lesh, *Searching for the Sound*, 66.

²¹⁴ MacDonald, “We Were Bent on Having a Good Time,” 40.

²¹⁵ See McNally, *A Long Strange Trip*, 119–29; and Lesh, *Searching for the Sound*, 45–62.

²¹⁶ McNally, *A Long Strange Trip*, 131.

“Why?” And he said, “I got some of these ‘double O caps’ we’re going to fill up and we’re going to try this.” I guess he’d already had peyote.²¹⁷

The experience was “a game-changer” for Sender, who says that he will be “forever grateful” to Reich for turning him on to psychedelics.²¹⁸ Reich has since stated that the influence of drugs on his music is not “a profitable line of discussion.”²¹⁹ Riley, however, has been quite candid in this regard: “everybody had usually taken at least one trip, if not many, and that was an eye-opener for most people. How we were listening under the experience of mushrooms or LSD was not the way we were listening when not under that spell.”²²⁰ Jon Gibson was also experimenting around this time, but recalls Reich being “turned off by the increasing use of psychedelics.”²²¹ For Sender, who recalls an “air of anticipation” at the time about who had been “turned on,” the experience led to his involvement with Ken Kesey and Stewart Brand on the three-day Trips Festival in January 1966.²²² Like Morton Subotnick (who apparently found the burgeoning drug scene too heavy), Reich did not “drop out” to join the influx of young bohemians flooding into San Francisco’s Haight Ashbury district.²²³ Instead, perhaps feeling uncomfortable with the activist politics of the Mime Troupe (and their run-ins with the law) as well as the turbulent changes to the Bay Area brought about by LSD, Reich decided to move back home to the East Coast, leaving behind the various communities that had nurtured him since leaving Mills College.

Nelson recalls that although Davis and Landau, like other New Left radicals of the early 1960s, “put their bodies on the line . . . not many people were doing that in those days.”²²⁴ Reich’s political views may never have aligned with the revolutionary cadre of radicals associated with the Mime Troupe and may even have been more liberal than leftist—a distinction drawn at the time between those who merely professed beliefs and those who took direct action.²²⁵ Reich recalled that in his younger days he was not as interested in world affairs as he is today, noting that he “sort of shoved it all away” at the time.²²⁶ Davis’s hope that after a few years a member would absorb the atmosphere of political dissent and become a catalyst for change was not always realized: “I used to think if people stayed with us for at least two years, we would have ploughed into their heads . . . and [they] would be difficult if not disruptive in a commercial flat-headed setting. Not entirely

²¹⁷ David W. Bernstein and Maggi Payne, “Ramon Sender and William Maginnis Interviewed,” *The San Francisco Tape Music Center*, 74.

²¹⁸ Sender, e-mail correspondence with the author, 24 May 2011. Sender also credits Reich for introducing him to Hatha Yoga and Pranayama when he visited Manhattan in September 1966.

²¹⁹ Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 170.

²²⁰ Bernstein and Payne, “Terry Riley Interviewed,” *The San Francisco Tape Music Center*, 221.

²²¹ Gibson, e-mail correspondence with the author, 17 August 2011.

²²² Sender, e-mail correspondence with the author, 24 May 2011. See also Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (London: Black Swan, 1989).

²²³ *The San Francisco Tape Music Center*, 75.

²²⁴ Anker, “Canyon Cinema,” *Radical Light*, 178.

²²⁵ This conflict is perhaps most vividly portrayed in Phil Ochs’s contemporaneous satirical song “Love Me, I’m a Liberal.”

²²⁶ Hillier, “‘Some More Lemon?’ A Conversation with Steve Reich,” *Contemporary Music Review* 12/2 (1995): 72.

correct.”²²⁷ Sumanth Gopinath has pointed out that Reich’s ideological evolution since 1965 has involved a move toward “an increasing political conservatism of a religiously inflected sort” that mirrors a broader drift in U.S. politics.²²⁸ For Gopinath, this trajectory concerns Reich’s desire “to more fully establish himself as a professional *composer*, instead of being seen as a fringe experimental *artist*.”²²⁹ Landau echoes this conclusion, asserting that Reich was merely “an avant-gardist who was pursuing his career,” with the troupe providing “a convenient outlet” at the time.²³⁰

A number of interpenetrating factors presumably motivated Reich’s decision to retrace the optimistic Westward steps he had taken in 1961. New York may have offered an escape from the painful circumstances of his recent divorce and the premature death of his firstborn child, as well as distance from friends with whom he no longer felt “on a solid psychic footing”; by this time, he simply recalls not being happy in San Francisco, with his “interior life” resembling *It’s Gonna Rain*.²³¹ Gibson also notes that after the January 1965 concert at the Tape Music Center, “things soured between Reich and Riley.”²³² In addition, Reich had come to find the city’s opportunities somewhat limiting: “basically, the people I was in touch with were about all there was going to be . . . and when Phil Lesh started with the Grateful Dead I wasn’t about to follow him in that direction.”²³³ New York promised a larger pool of freelance musicians and the chance to make new contacts that could further his career. According to Sender, San Francisco was “a very fertile place for a young artist to get started, very open to new ideas,” lacking as it did the intense competition and “staked-out stylistic territories” of larger cities; he notes, however, that “there seemed to come a point when, to move ahead, it was either New York or Los Angeles.”²³⁴ Davis concurs, arguing that as New York was a known center for commercial artistic practice, “the legitimation was out there.”²³⁵

Conclusion

Although initially drawn toward the romantic allure of San Francisco, perhaps Reich always felt New York City was bound up with his own identity—Tom Constanten recalled that “even in the dark green woodsiness of Northern California he marched to a Manhattan tempo.”²³⁶ Reich appears to have harbored an ambivalent stance toward the proto-countercultural elements he witnessed, consciously aligning himself neither with the “politicos” of Berkeley nor the “acid heads” of Haight Ashbury. Perhaps, like Robert Nelson, he felt distanced from the incipient

²²⁷ Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 31 May 2011. On the other end of the spectrum, Peter Coyote and Peter Berg cofounded the anarchist guerrilla theater group the Diggers.

²²⁸ Gopinath, “Reich in Blackface,” 186.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 187.

²³⁰ Landau, e-mail correspondence with the author, 13 June 2011.

²³¹ Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 170; Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 63.

²³² Gibson, e-mail correspondence with the author, 17 August 2011.

²³³ Hillier, “Introduction,” in Reich, *Writings on Music*, 16.

²³⁴ Sender, e-mail correspondence with the author, 24 May 2011.

²³⁵ Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 31 May 2011.

²³⁶ Constanten, *Between Rock & Hard Places*, 55.

youth movements: “many of the people who were already in the art scene, who were just a little bit older, kept some distance. They’d already formed their own alternative lifestyles.”²³⁷ Just as people were gathering in California like “moths to the light bulbs of the ’60s,” Reich left to pursue an existence amid the art galleries of downtown Manhattan.²³⁸ Tracing his activities through the Bay Area’s multifaceted cultural nexus during this period, however, enables a more nuanced picture of the young composer to emerge. It is clear that loose collaborations with Davis, Wiley, Nelson, Riley, and Lesh gave Reich a unique environment in which to experiment, free from the restraints of academic orthodoxy. A decision to support himself by means other than composition also helped sustain a space for investigation into unfamiliar media and techniques—often mirroring Funk art and its celebration of self-consciously crude, humorous, amateur approaches to art making.

Davis feels that Reich’s decision to downplay these formative years in San Francisco has been fueled by two factors: first, to avoid being “tainted” by those he worked with early on, and second, to justify his later career success by creating a “myth of self-uplift,” as if he had emerged “out of his own egg.”²³⁹ Indeed, Reich rarely alludes to his involvement in the Mime Troupe’s milieu, and a certain amount of “anxiety” over the influence of Riley’s approach to tape composition is detectable in his suppression of the telling subtitle to *It’s Gonna Rain*, along with his focus on *In C* as progenitor.²⁴⁰ Working with Davis, however, allowed him access to the vanguard of hip artistic rebellion, and the influence of Nelson and Riley is evident in his earliest tape works. Given these diverse connections, it is now possible to view Reich’s heterogenous West Coast years not merely as prophetic intimation or a footnote in the stylistic development of minimalism, but as part of a broader “web of culture” in which they appear contingent and thus comprehensible.²⁴¹

References

- Adlington, Robert, ed. *Sound Commitments: Avant-Garde Music and the Sixties*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Albright, Thomas. *Art in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945–1980*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.
- Anker, Steve, Kathy Geritz, and Steve Seid, eds. *Radical Light: Alternative Film and Video in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945–2000*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.
- Bass, Warren. “The Past Restructured: Bruce Conner and Others.” *Journal of the University Film Association* 33/2 (Spring 1981): 15–22.

²³⁷ MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema*, 261.

²³⁸ Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 31 May 2011. See Ross Cole, “Illusion/Anti-Illusion: The Music of Steve Reich in Context, 1965–1968,” M.Res. diss., University of York, 2010.

²³⁹ Davis, e-mail correspondence with the author, 31 May 2011.

²⁴⁰ See Richard Taruskin, “Revising Revision,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 46/1 (April 1993): 114–38.

²⁴¹ See Gary Tomlinson, “The Web of Culture: A Context for Musicology,” *19th-Century Music* 7/3 (April 1984): 350–62.

- Bernstein, David W., ed. *The San Francisco Tape Music Center: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-Garde*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.
- Bodien, Earl. "The Films of Robert Nelson." *Film Quarterly* 20/3 (Spring 1967): 50–52.
- Born, Georgina. "For a Relational Musicology: Music and Interdisciplinarity, Beyond the Practice Turn." *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 135/2 (November 2010): 205–43.
- Braunstein, Peter and Michael W. Doyle, eds. *Imagine Nation: the American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Brick, Howard. *Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the 1960s*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Cage, John. *Silence: Lectures and Writings*. 1968; London: Marion Boyars, 2006.
- Carl, Robert. *Terry Riley's In C*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Cole, Ross. "Illusion/Anti-Illusion: The Music of Steve Reich in Context, 1965–1968." M.Res. dissertation, University of York, 2010.
- Constanten, Tom. *Between Rock & Hard Places: A Musical Autobiodysey*. Eugene, OR: Hulogosi, 1992.
- Cook, Nicholas and Anthony Pople, eds. *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Cott, Jonathan. "Interview with Steve Reich." (1996). <http://www.steverreich.com>. "Datebook." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 27 February 1964, 37.
- Davidson, Michael. *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Davis, Ronald G. *The San Francisco Mime Troupe: The First Ten Years*. Palo Alto, CA: Ramparts Press, 1975.
- . "Ecological Aesthetics." Ph.D. dissertation, University of California Davis, 2009.
- De Groot, Gerard J. "The Limits of Moral Protest and Participatory Democracy: The Vietnam Day Committee." *Pacific Historical Review* 64/1 (February 1995): 95–119.
- Dixon, Wheeler W. *The Exploding Eye: A Re-visionary History of 1960s American Experimental Cinema*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.
- Duckworth, William. *Talking Music: Conversations with John Cage, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, and Five Generations of American Experimental Composers*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1999.
- "Editor's Notebook: Correction." *Film Quarterly* 19/3 (Spring 1966): 3.
- Eynon, Bret. "Community in Motion: The Free Speech Movement, Civil Rights, and the Roots of the New Left." *The Oral History Review* 17/1 (Spring 1989): 39–69.
- Fink, Robert. *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- Ford, Phil. "Hip Sensibility in an Age of Mass Counterculture." *Jazz Perspectives* 2/2 (November 2008): 121–63.
- Frankenstein, Alfred. "Music Like None Other on Earth." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8 November 1964, 28.

- Freed, Richard D. "Avant-Garde Gives Electronic Display." *New York Times*, 28 August 1965, 12.
- Gioia, Ted. *The History of Jazz*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Gitlin, Todd. *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, rev. ed. New York: Bantam, 1993.
- Gopinath, Sumanth. "Contraband Children: The Politics of Race and Liberation in the Music of Steve Reich 1965–1966." Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 2005.
- . "Reich in Blackface: *Oh Dem Watermelons* and Radical Minstrelsy in the 1960s." *Journal of the Society for American Music* 5/2 (May 2011): 139–93.
- Graham, Bill and Robert Greenfield. *Bill Graham Presents: My Life Inside Rock and Out*. 1992; Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004.
- Gross, Jason. "Interview with Steve Reich." (April 2000) *Perfect Sound Forever Online Music Magazine*. <http://www.furious.com/perfect>.
- Henrikson, Margot A. *Dr. Strangelove's America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Hillier, Paul. "Some More Lemon? A Conversation with Steve Reich." *Contemporary Music Review* 12/2 (1995): 65–75.
- Isserman, Maurice and Michael Kazin. *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Jones, Arthur M. *Studies in African Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959.
- Kase, Carlos. "A Cinema of Anxiety: American Experimental Film in the Realm of Art (1965–75)." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 2009.
- Knickerbocker, Paine. "A Clumsy Ubu King." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 13 December 1963, 49.
- Kurzer, Ross T. "Interview with Tom Constanten." (October 2002). <http://digitalinterviews.com/digitalinterviews/views/constanten.shtml>.
- Lesh, Phil. *Searching for the Sound: My Life With the Grateful Dead*. New York: Back Bay Books, 2006.
- Linden, Klaas van der. "Searching for Harmony in All the Wrong Places: Steve Reich's *Music for String Orchestra* (1961)." M.A. thesis, Utrecht University, 2010.
- Lohner, Henning. "Steve Reich in Conversation, Stuttgart, 26.2.1986." *Interface* 17/2 (1988): 115–25.
- MacDonald, Scott. "We Were Bent on Having a Good Time: An Interview with Robert Nelson." *Afterimage* 11/1–2 (Summer 1983): 39–43.
- . *A Critical Cinema: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- . *Canyon Cinema: The Life and Times of an Independent Film Distributor*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.
- Mason, Susan V., ed. *The San Francisco Mime Troupe Reader*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.
- McNally, Dennis. *A Long Strange Trip: The Inside History of the Grateful Dead*. London: Corgi, 2003.
- "Mime Troupe's Minstrel Show." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 17 June 1965, 46.
- "Mime Troupe to Open Original Play." *Oakland Tribune*, 23 February 1964, 11.
- Moritz, William and Beverly O'Neill. "Fallout: Some Notes on the Films of Bruce Conner." *Film Quarterly* 31/4 (Summer 1978): 36–42.

- Morgan, Ann L. *The Oxford Dictionary of American Art and Artists*, www.oxfordreference.com.
- Moser, Joann. "The Continuing Adventures of William T. Wiley." *American Art* 19/2 (Summer 2005): 68–91.
- "Music Now at Mime Theater." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 21 May 1964, 45.
- Nyman, Michael. "Steve Reich: An Interview with Michael Nyman." *Musical Times* 112/1537 (March 1971): 229–31.
- Osmond-Smith, David. "Berio, Luciano." *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.
- Patterson, James T. *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945–1974*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Plagens, Peter. *Sunshine Muse: Art on the West Coast 1945–1970*. 1974; New York: Praeger, 1999.
- Potter, Keith. *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Reich, Steve. "Texture–Space–Survival." *Perspectives of New Music* 26/2 (Summer 1988): 272–80.
- . *Writings on Music, 1965–2000*, ed. Paul Hillier. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Richardson, Brenda. "Women, Wives, Film-makers: An Interview with Gunvor Nelson and Dorothy Wiley." *Film Quarterly* 25/1 (Autumn 1971): 34–40.
- Schuller, Gunther. *Musings: The Musical Worlds of Gunther Schuller*. 1986; New York: Da Capo Press, 1999.
- Schwarz, K. Robert. *Minimalists*. London: Phaidon, 1996.
- Sculatti, Gene and Davin Seay. *San Francisco Nights: the Psychedelic Music Trip 1965–1968*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1985.
- Seelye, John. "Review: Watermelon." *Film Quarterly* 19/2 (Winter 1965): 54.
- Selvin, Joel. *San Francisco: The Musical History Tour*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996.
- Shank, Theodore. *Beyond the Boundaries: American Alternative Theatre*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002.
- Smith, Geoff. *American Originals: Interviews with 25 Contemporary Composers*. London: Faber and Faber, 1994.
- Smith, Tom W. "The Cuban Missile Crisis and U.S. Public Opinion." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 67/2 (Summer 2003): 265–93.
- Strickland, Edward. *American Composers: Dialogues on Contemporary Music*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.
- . *Minimalism: Origins*. 1993; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.
- Taruskin, Richard. "Revising Revision." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 46/1 (April 1993): 114–38.
- Tomlinson, Gary. "The Web of Culture: A Context for Musicology." *19th-Century Music* 7/3 (April 1984): 350–62.
- "Ubu King Opens Tonight." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 11 December 1963, 53.
- Vogel, Amos. *Film as a Subversive Art*. 1974; London: C. T. Editions, 2005.
- Wallace, Dean. "Newcomer to Tape Music." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 29 January 1965, 41.

- Wheeler, Daniel. *Art Since Mid-Century: 1945 to the Present*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1991.
- Whitesell, Lloyd. "White Noise: Race and Erasure in the Cultural Avant-Garde." *American Music* 19/2 (Summer 2001): 168–89.
- Wolfe, Tom. *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. 1971; London: Black Swan, 1989.
- Zimmerman, Nadya. *Counterculture Kaleidoscope: Musical and Cultural Perspectives on Late Sixties San Francisco*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008.
- Zuckerman, Gabrielle. "An Interview with Steve Reich." (July 2002). *American Mavericks*. http://musicmavericks.publicradio.org/features/interview_reich.html.

Discography

- Coltrane, John. *Africa/Brass*. Impulse! AS-06, 1961.
- Dylan, Bob. *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. Columbia CL-1986, 1963.
- McGuire, Barry. *Eve of Destruction*. Dunhill D-5003, 1965.
- Ochs, Phil. *Phil Ochs in Concert*. Elektra EKS-7310, 1966.
- Reich, Steve. *Live/Electronic Music*. Columbia Masterworks MS-7265, 1968.
- . *Steve Reich: Early Works*. Elektra Nonesuch 79169-2, 1987.
- . *Steve Reich: Works, 1965–1995*. Nonesuch 79451-2, 1997.
- . *Steve Reich: Phases*. Nonesuch 79962-2, 2006.
- Riley, Terry. *Music for "The Gift"*. Elision Fields EF105, 2007.

Filmography

- Conner, Bruce. *A Movie*. 1958.
- . *Cosmic Ray*. 1961.
- Kitchell, Mark. *Berkeley in the Sixties*. 1990; Liberation Entertainment, 2007.
- Kubrick, Stanley. *Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. 1964; Columbia Tristar, 2003.
- Nelson, Gunvor. *My Name is Oona*. 1969.
- Nelson, Robert. *The Mystery of Amelia Airheart Solved*. 1962
- . *Ubu King*. 1963.
- . *Plastic Haircut*. 1963.
- . *Oh Dem Watermelons*. 1965.
- . *Thick Pucker*. 1965.