

**Harry Partch:**

**A Catalyst for Queer Compositionism**

**William Saunders**

April 2019

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the  
University of Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

with thanks and gratitude to everyone in my family regardless of surname  
and in loving memory of Dr. Rolf Diernberger

\*

for my fiancé Hans - let's keep going outside

## Abstract

My encounter with Harry Partch - mediated through recordings, films, and sleeve photographs - is taken as an interpellative hail (Althusser, 2014) to inquire into his legacy. As a queer musician, I re-articulate Partch's volatility and (apparent) inability to collaborate, positing that he presented his personhood as hybridised with his self-built instruments, precarious home-studios, audio equipment, microtonal systems, published writings, records, sleeve notes, etc. I champion this hybridised personhood as a queer expression of his epistemology of the closet (Sedgwick, 2008), asking whether this notion applies to what I have coined a queer compositionist stance in collaborative performance projects.

Partch collaborated intimately with the human and nonhuman agents (Latour, 2007) that he assembled into his life's work. I see his protectionism of this assemblage not simply as outsiderism, but as a queer utopian message to arm oneself against the inertia (Becker, 1995) of normalising forces. A methodology centred around Bruno Latour supports this notion. In this regard, I follow the lead of Benjamin Piekut's scholarship on musical experimentalism. I ask whether the kind of networked hybridity that Latour has us pay attention to could relate to queer negotiations of the closet. Can a re-articulation of Harry Partch's life's work as a mediation of his personhood foreground ephemeral evidence (Muñoz 1996) of his ambivalent use of outsider labels? How can this speculation be used as a catalyst for a queer orientation of collaborative performance projects?

The queer Partch that emerges from these questions haunts a series of collaborative performance projects that have offered practice-based contexts for an enquiry into my proposed queer compositionist stance. This stance foregrounds a quiet insistence on project-specific musical principles, not based on authorial signature, but on closet-like assemblages of conceptually integrated elements. In my accounts of the project's developments, I have exposed queer compositionism as offering a unique contribution to hauntological approaches to music production.

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## List of Accompanying Material

This thesis supports the practice-based development of a musical stance in collaborative projects. Throughout the text are links to video documentation of four performances, as well as excerpts of video and sound that relate to my contributions to them.

Accompanying hard copies is a USB stick containing three folders. The first folder contains full documentation of four performances. The remaining two folders contain excerpts that are linked to in chapters 3 and 4. The files are ordered as in the text.

### A: Full Performance Documentation

1. Weather.mov
2. CaravanStatic.mov
3. CameraLucida.mov
4. SuitableEstablishment.mp4

### B: Chapter 3 Excerpts

1. VideoStudyA.mov
2. VideoStudyB.mov
3. VideoStudyC.mp4
4. VideoStudyD.mov
5. VideoStudyE.mp4
6. VideoStudyF.mov
7. SoundExampleA.wav
8. SoundExampleB.wav

### C: Chapter 4 Excerpts

- |                              |                                |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. DickieBeauWendyMiller.mov | 10. Langlangist'sher.mp4       |
| 2. DoYouComeHereOften?.mov   | 11. GutenAbend.mp4             |
| 3. LeitmotifOpening.mov      | 12. dubplateside1.wav          |
| 4. LeitmotifRadioJingle.mov  | 13. dubplateside2.wav          |
| 5. LeitmotifSkype.mov        | 14. Suitabledubplatetrack1.mov |
| 6. PianoMeekTune.mov         | 15. Suitabledubplatetrack2.mov |
| 7. PianoTantrum.mov          | 16. Suitabledubplatetrack3.mov |
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| 9. MorphedTracks.wav         |                                |

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## Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been written by myself and that no part has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification. I declare that all documentation of the performances contains my own significant and distinguishable contribution to a co-authored work. The contexts of the projects are the collaborative fields of music-making and experimental theatre, therefore submitting documentation of co-authored performance works is necessary to outline my contributions. This thesis supports my orientation of these projects as a unique contribution to knowledge.

I presented elements of my work around Harry Partch and queer compositionism as a lecture performance with Anna Homler:

*An influence for Harry Partch in Devising Queer Compositionist Approaches to Collaborative Performance Practice.* Sonic Fluidities: Integrative Studies Graduate Conference: Department of Music: University of California; San Diego. March 2-3 2018.

## Hypothesis

This research aims to outline a unique approach to the Californian composer Harry Partch (1901–1974), asking whether his self-built musical world can be articulated as a coded message for queer musical practitioners. Can Partch’s life-long musical project be rearticulated as guidance for queers to obliquely distribute their personhood when orientating collaborative performance projects and assembling their contributions to them?

Approaching Partch in this way has no clear precedent, requiring both a novel methodology and a practice focused on process. This thesis aims at a symbiosis between a uniquely assembled methodology and a practice-based collaborative stance that will emerge through my contributions to four collaborative performance projects: I am calling this stance queer compositionism.

Can the performances documented and addressed in chapters 3 and 4 be seen as the outcomes of my developing queer compositionism’s embrace of personhood as a hybridisation of human and non-human elements? Can these finished works maintain an autonomy as the byproducts of a queer compositionist’s stance throughout the collaborative process that leads to them; a stance that avoids setting out content and form in advance?

Following these broad hypotheses it will help to hold in mind a line of specific questions that will be key to advancing my initial hunch about Harry Partch’s queerness toward a preliminary outline of queer compositionism as a stance within collaborative performance projects. The core aim is to render this stance original, pertinent, and implementable by queer practitioners when orientating and assembling the musical components of such projects.

These specific questions, which I will reflect upon in the conclusions of chapters 3 and 4, as well as in my overall conclusions, are as follows:

Can Benjamin Piekut's recent use of Bruno Latour's ideas within the context of music studies have a traceable empirical effect when orientating and assembling collaborative performance projects? Can the flattening of subjective differences that the Latourian risks be countered by considering a selection of his ideas from a queer perspective; especially in relation to one's knowledge of the closet as an ongoing process of negotiation and renewal? Can my orientation of a series of collaborative performance projects demonstrate how this theoretical move may provide a queer approach to hauntological music-making?

The investigation of this line of questioning offers new knowledge to practice-based research in two ways. The first is to consider the possible impact of Piekut's Latourian reanimation of historic musical experimentalism on approaches to practice-based process in collaborative projects. The second is to question whether the Latourian insistence that the social is made of continuously reassembling networks requiring an analysis of ongoing renewal, cannot be fruitfully juxtaposed with queer theoretical notions of the closet as an ongoing process.

## Introduction

*"Without aspiring to those ambitious ideas expressed by the fashionable words "timeless" and "immortal," we can do much to exert an influence worthy of our obligation to help point a way, and we need not be too despondent. There is a German proverb which denies the proverbial impertinence of proverbs when it says, literally: "What is not can yet become." (Partch, 1974, p63)*

This thesis supports a series of four collaborative performance projects that constitute a practice-based enquiry into how being hailed into confluence with Harry Partch can catalyse the emergence of a strategy I call queer compositionism. My orientation and assemblage of each project's musical principles, in particular through my use of sound-reproduction technologies, amount to a queering of hauntological music practice.<sup>1</sup>

My re-articulation of Partch outlines how queer personhood can be mediated into a collaborative project's development: my concern, therefore, is not to newly define or analyse queerness as a scholarly concept, but to speculate on the importance of one's orientation and assemblage of project-specific musical principles. This speculation resists the assertion or reiteration of a predetermined authorial aesthetic.

I will firstly summarise my core terms: queer compositionism, oblique intervention, and interpellative audition. They are theoretically underpinned in chapter 1, expanded in relation to Harry Partch in chapter 2, and shown to be applied and developed through practice in the accounts of chapters 3 and 4.

Queer compositionism is a stance and strategy that personalises the resistance of a fixed composer-identity that links projects through authorial signature. In

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<sup>1</sup> Supported by Mark Fisher's studies, I will outline hauntological music as a genre and production method in section 1.5.

collaborative settings, a queer composer quietly insists on intervening on their terms, determined through the peripheral specifics of a project. The stance avoids anthropocentrism and attempts to observe and assemble human and nonhuman agency. The word queer refers to a mode in which the composer (dis)orientates their self in a collaborative project by distributing personhood as the quiet insistence of honouring the musical elements they assemble to create a project-specific nuance. Sonic results become a byproduct of the closet-like assemblages of conceptually integrated elements, rather than labelled as compositions. The word composer rejects the distinction between composition and pre-composition. It relates, on the one hand, to Jacques Attali's definition of composition as a putting together of the means to make music (1985, p135). On the other hand, it refers to Bruno Latour's composer manifesto, and his rejection of linear progress in favour of reassessment and reconfiguration (2010, p473).

Oblique intervention is a phrase I use to name the agential capacity of elements to be assembled into projects on their own terms, rather than being assimilated into predetermined codes. It is a principle of assemblage that leads to unexpected formal outcomes in which elements foreground their translation of other aspects of a project, as well as being translated by the project in turn.

Interpellative audition is a term I use to focus my position in a practice-based research that explores a queering of hauntological uses of sound-reproduction technologies. Supported by Rob Stone's concept of aural dust (2015, p24), I will argue that to listen both to and through the way music is assembled, can help inhabit musical worlds to enquire how (and why) they are novelly assembled. Applying interpellative audition helps to recognise uses of audio that resemble

negotiations of the closet, and queers hauntological music's fetishisation of surface noise.

Since 2007, when I acquired a DVD of his film collaborations, Harry Partch has been a touchstone of difference for me. At the time, my music-making happened in post-punk "DIY" subculture in the UK, and I was negotiating how to be gay. Why Harry Partch? The question arrives with assumptions of his specificity: a Californian maverick, rugged individualist, outsider, hobo, closeted homosexual. Some of these labels Partch adopted himself, but with what degree of ambivalence? As a queer artist, I cherish the knowledge acquired through the shifting presentation of personhood that Eve Sedgwick calls the epistemology of the closet (2008). The disjunction between this knowledge and the fixed identity that Partch scholarship generally conjures up has encouraged me to let his author function (Foucault, 1984) haunt my thinking with the aim of emerging a queer compositionist practice in his stead.

Posthumous research around Partch can be broadly split into work that preserves/develops his microtonal system and self-built instruments, and that which follows his polemic to seek uncharted paths. Significantly though, a recent resurgence of scholarship highlights itinerancy as a crucial factor in his practice and the life it subsumed. This notion has cemented my conviction that Partch's lifelong musical assemblage, and the personhood that he inscribed into it, has more to offer musicians and sound artists than a "maverick outsider" legacy.

I have paid attention to the ephemeral evidence (Muñoz, 1996)<sup>2</sup> of Partch's queerness in his written polemic, accounts of his volatile sociability, and the transience he maintained at odds with his cumbersome instruments. I come into

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<sup>2</sup> I will summarise my use of Muñoz's term in section 1.4.



confluence with Partch, rather than upholding his outsiderism as an "influence". His adoptions of outsider labels strike me as ambivalent, and his author function (Foucault, 1984) should be liberated from them. I will re-articulate Partch as a haunting presence, with the aim of generating a catalyst for the emergence of my own strategy for contributing musically to collaborative performance projects. This move reveals a gap in knowledge with regards to Partch's importance for queer musicology, yet my contribution departs from this by way of turning my encounter with him into a practice-based enquiry. How can queer musicians and sound artists mediate their personhood into their assemblage of the musical principles of projects? I argue that the empirical knowledge harboured through negotiations of the closet can be translated into a sensibility applied when assembling conceptually integrated elements into a project.

Chapter 1 summarises the literature that has supported me in reaching a point of departure from Partch into a practice-based enquiry that aims to define queer compositionism as strategy for artists working in collaborative projects with sound-reproduction technologies. I begin by using Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault to open a theoretical terrain in which Partch can be re-articulated in a discursive relationship with my foregrounded queerness. Roland Barthes' formulation of listening helps me suggest how this terrain can be inhabited in a way that mis-recognises Louis Althusser's ideological subject. I relate this mis-recognition to Fred Moten's writing around the black radical tradition's resistance of oppressive subject formulations.

This initial section is a necessary exercise in theory that supports the chapter. The remaining sections follow these questions: Who and what can have a musical effect in a collaborative project? Can Latourian thought help to avoid human

exceptionalism? How does a queer compositionist allow these effects to obliquely intervene in a project's formal development? How can these effects be traced through a hauntological understanding of sound-reproduction technology?

The chapter contextualises my enquiry within a dispersed field of scholarship that supports music-making as an activity of social mediation that assembles human and nonhuman agency. Starting with the expansionist definitions of music-making from Christopher Small and Jacques Attali, I move through a trans-disciplinary assemblage of scholarship in order to translate Benjamin Piekut's use of actor-network theory<sup>3</sup> in music studies into a practice-based enquiry that queers hauntological music practice. Hauntology in music-making foregrounds the surface noise of recording media and certain era-specific sonic remnants, in order to address a contemporary lack of the past's utopian projections for the future. I point to the parallels between this historicity and that of the queer futurism of Jose Estaban Muñoz (2009) and ask whether a queer attention to these surfaces can link their assemblage to queer expressions of the closet.

Chapter 1, then, forms a point of departure for my practice-based enquiry. Harry Partch haunts the chapter; ultimately becoming a catalyst for my orientation of the collaborative performance projects I outline in chapters 3 and 4. As a catalyst, he is dispensable and replaced with a project-by-project queering agent that obliquely intervenes in formal outcomes. In this respect, the accounts of my contributions to the four projects are outlines of empirical observations of oblique intervention in action.

Chapter 2 summarises my journey through Partchean scholarship, adding substance and context to my re-articulation of Partch while avoiding a man-and-

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<sup>3</sup> A methodology widely attributed to Bruno Latour. I summarise my use of Latour in section 1.3.

his-works narrative. This is a unique challenge, and the extent to which the chapter bridges the theoretical assemblages of chapter 1 and the project accounts of chapters 3 and 4 testifies to my meeting it. The chapter points to a gap in Partchean scholarship that could be taken up by queer musicology: Partch's approximate version of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the volatile sociability he used to protect it, form a lens through which ephemeral evidence of his queer utopian negotiations of the closet is rife. It would require another study to explore this thoroughly, and my concern here has been to apply this thought to practice as research. It is this gap in knowledge that I understand as the trigger for my formulation of Harry Partch as a catalyst for queer compositionism.

Chapters 3 and 4 outline my contributions to four collaborative performance projects. They are seen as empirical enquiries into queer compositionism as a collaborative stance and are examples of how a project's assembled elements may obliquely intervene in the emergence of unexpected formal outcomes. The notion of oblique intervention is put in place to counter the assimilation of elements into a predetermined project outline. This relates to Bruno Latour's conviction that innovative research should follow its actors, rather than determining their role and number in advance (2007, p29).

Chapter 3 outlines a project, designed by myself, in which I develop queer compositionism through participation in the practice of two non-idiomatic (Bailey, 1993) musicians. Between February 2012 and June 2017, I worked with Sarah Kenchington and Anna Homler, splitting time spent with each into three week-long stages. Video and sound recordings made at all stages were framed in performances that reflect how the musicians distribute their personhood into the human and nonhuman elements of their practice. My design of these

performances developed through an orientation of the musician's practice that recognised its inseparability from further aspects of their lives. I see Kenchington's instrument building and upkeep of her caravan living as subsumed, and Homler's approach to group improvisation as a part of her curatorial practice.

Kenchington (instrument builder) and Homler (free improviser using sound emitting objects and vocalisations), could be labelled eccentric outsiders, but I embrace my intuition - developed in confluence with Partch - that they mediate their personhoods into idiosyncratic musical assemblage practices.

My contribution to the project was the assemblage of a self-built instrument of my own, used in one-off performances with each musician to amplify and display the audio recordings and video documentation I made of them. The instrument constitutes an unexpected formal outcome that emerged through my resistance to adding form or content not traceable to my encounter with the artists' practices.

Chapter 4 outlines my contributions to two experimental theatre shows, *Camera Lucida* and *Suitable Establishment*, to which I applied queer compositionism. *Camera Lucida* premiered in the autumn of 2014 and was a site-specific show directed by Dickie Beau for the Samuel Beckett Oxford Theatre Trust in the Pit Theatre at the Barbican Centre, London. *Suitable Establishment* premiered in the autumn of 2015 and was a show by the multi-disciplinary collective LampingHuppSaunders, created in co-production with StudiobühneKöln, Cologne, Germany.

In contrast to how my orientation through the Kenchington/Homler project was gradually established, these theatre projects presented time constraints and the potentially conflicting specialisms of a multi-disciplinary field. Therefore, queer compositionism could be explored outside of the laboratory of experimental music, as a stance that emerges project-specific and conceptually integrated

organisational principles for experimental performance projects. The theatre projects also enquire into how a queer compositionist's navigation of sound-reproduction technologies may circumvent the fetishisation of surface noise implicit in hauntological music practice.

## Chapter 1

### Why Harry Partch? Theoretical Supports

*"For those that know [Partch] he has settled somewhere into our collective conscious, a shadowy figure, an accessory part of the American individualist myth who haunts like no other musician of the twentieth century." (Broyles, 2004, p207)*

#### 1.1 The Heterogeneity of an Inheritance, Hauntology, and Interpellative Audition

Jacques Derrida's insistence on the "*heterogeneity of an inheritance*" (1994, p18) supports my framing of Partch, as it calls for pluralist and explorative re-articulations of past figures:

"An inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself. Its presumed unity, if there is one, can consist only in the *injunction to reaffirm by choosing.*" (1994, p18)

Coupling this injunction with Michel Foucault's notion of "author function" (1984) helps to look beyond fixed narratives of influential authors and their works, and also foregrounds the personhood of the inheritor. Foucault states that crediting authors with the inscription of their own absence does not circumvent their authority, as the demarcation of "works" in itself attributes authorship. He calls for exploratory discourses that navigate authors in a way that denies a foundational

subject through a return to author function as the origin of a newly formulated discourse; one that refuses to equate authorship with ownership, and takes shape without the participation of a past pioneer with a fixed identity.

"Why Harry Partch?" The question frames the author's name and can evoke idiosyncrasies and contradictions, yet these specifics are re-articulated in a way anticipated by Harry but for which Partch's participation is not requested. This is my understanding of Foucault's return to an origin.

"The return is not a historical supplement which would be added to the discursivity, or merely an ornament; on the contrary, it constitutes an effective and necessary task of transforming the discursive practice itself." (Foucault, 1984, p116)

The coupling of Derrida and Foucault supports my positioning of Partch in this research. He becomes a queer practitioner and the catalyst for a practice-based enquiry into my notion of queer composition as a stance in collaborative projects. My orientation and assemblage of project-specific musical principles constitute my contribution as a queer compositionist.

My queer Partch foregrounded his personhood as hybridised with his musical practice. His creativity was driven by what Graham Raulerson (2017, p453) calls "Hoboist bricolage", and committed to a life's work that Jake Johnson calls Partch's version of a Gesamtkunstwerk (2015, p170). My queer contribution to these recent and vital ideas around Partch is to champion his volatile sociability, and (apparent) inability to collaborate, as protectionism for a principled resistance of assimilation. The Gesamtkunstwerk that Johnson points to was self-assembled, parodic, imperfect, and the result of what Benjamin Piekut and Jason Stanjek (2010) call a mediation of (Partch's) personhood.

I encounter Partch's Gesamtkunstwerk and the volatile yet reticent sociability that protected it from assimilation, as expressive of queer utopia (Muñoz, 2009). I revisit these factors by addressing the present as a failure to produce Partch's obliquely proposed future. He expressed his queerness through being it; his array of instruments, scales, notations, contradictions, and tantrums, all amount to an oblique display of the fabulous absurdity of the closet. It is too simple to understand his volatility as tyrannical: his inflexibility was not about preserving his legacy, but a sophisticated expression of disorientation. Had he been a willing collaborator, Partch's music would have gained exposure through artists like Kenneth Anger or Martha Graham.<sup>4</sup> Although a form of communality was necessary for Partch - he required assistance and resources - he sabotaged collaborations that would have obscured the traceable mediation of his personhood into a rickety Gesamtkunstwerk.<sup>5</sup>

Partch lived out a liminality in which he flaunted outsider labels, but was never truly outside of institutional support. He created a burdensome version of European concert music (his image of normative hegemony) as a parodic display of the system's incapacity to accommodate difference. He offers a unique sound palette, musical system, and instruments; but not merely for the sake of prestige. Partch displayed his idiosyncrasies for the benefit of universalism based on difference. His cumbersome musical fortress, effectively a barrier against his works smoothly outliving him, constitutes a queer futurist message. The ironic

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<sup>4</sup> See: Bob Gilmore's biography of Partch for more on his near misses with Anger (1998, p226) and Graham (Ibid., p214)

<sup>5</sup> See: Granade (2011) and Gilmore (1995a) for detailed insights into specific collaborations. Granade outlines a collaboration that functioned well as it followed Partch's own principles, whereas Gilmore addresses Partch's volatility through a failed collaboration.

reflections of Western concert music in his anti-establishmentarian assemblage express his disorientation from heteronormative hegemony.

I respond to this message by working in a way that foregrounds my personhood and assembles musical elements in accordance with the critical knowledge gained through my negotiation of the closet. This involves an ongoing orientation of a shifting set of complex assemblages. As a queer compositionist, I explore project-specific outcomes, not based on individualist authorship, but through a queer non-assimilative orientation. The performance projects outlined in chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate how this stance assembles formal outcomes through my principle of oblique intervention.

Harry Partch has haunted my enquiry into the emergent definition of queer compositionism, leading me to focus on the present-absence that haunting implies. This notion is unique, as it links queer futurism, the epistemology of the closet, and hauntological music-making.

Supporting his demand to re-articulate inheritance, Derrida offers the concept of hauntology, positing a need to challenge the present through explorations of the lost futures of the past. I use hauntology to allow Partch's author function to inhabit my enquiry with a present-absence that anticipates a return. Hauntology denounces the conjuring up of ontologies, fused with historical conditions, as this merely exorcises the alternative futures offered by the past.

Hauntology is not nostalgia: it addresses contemporaneity as lacking the past's possible futures. As such, a hauntologist's return to the origin of a possibility is not straightforwardly retrograde: it contemplates multiple ways that the futurism of an origin has failed to play out, and acts out a response. Correctives of history are



replaced by a search for expressions of the *not yet here* and their translation into action. For Derrida, this avoids the exorcism of alternatives as the hauntologist aligns with the ghosts (minorities and past radicals) that are created by the exclusionary forces of hegemony:

" One makes oneself accountable by an engagement that selects, interprets, and orients. In a practical and performative manner, and by a decision that begins by getting caught up... in the snares of an injunction that is already multiple." (1994, p116)

In anticipating a return of the utopian hopes of past figures or outcast contemporaries, a hauntologist circumvents the apparition of preconceived and fixed perceptions. To proceed in confluence with Harry Partch is to sidestep the image of a Californian rugged individualist, as this is an ontological repetition. Hauntological repetitions add change while allowing a concept or figure to inhabit its re-articulation. To use Harry Partch as a catalyst for my orientation of collaborative projects is to re-articulate his sensibility, not as a return to his practice, but in anticipation of how it haunts the unexpected outcomes that a queer compositionist understands as arriving from the future.

Hauntology is linkable to the qualities of sound and audition. Its repetitions require active navigation in the way that sound and audition do: it is only possible to listen to old dusty rooms through one's audible presence and its echoes. Derrida hints at this link through his insistence that observation of spectres, or demands for them to speak, are futile appeals to polarisations such as here/not here or real/unreal. A fixed scholarly position demands the appearance of a fact from either end of these dualisms, whereas hauntology remains open to the multiple ways that a spectre may reappear, and sensitive to the ongoing possibility of its return. In Derrida's text, there is an underlying suggestion that listening is a mode suited

to hauntology and the present-absence of spectres: they must be listened out for; not forced to speak.

If listening is thought of as the mode of address for hauntology, then my queer Partch cannot be an iteration or an intelligible figure manifest from a fixed category such as "outsider maverick". Coming into confluence with Partch is to "go outside" of myself, foreground my queerness, and cause reverberations of a sociability not yet part of the discourse around Partch's author function. This meets Derrida's injunction to focus on the haunting capacity of the disenfranchised, rather than conjuring up fixed identities that reinforce expulsion:

"One should not rush to make of the clandestine immigrant an illegal alien or, what always risks coming down to the same thing, to domesticate him... he is not part of the family, but one should not send him back, once again, him too, to the border." (Ibid., p219)

Listening out for Partch in a hauntological sense is a response to my initial draw to his enigmatic idiosyncrasy. I understand his appeal as an example of interpellation (Althusser, 2014).

Interpellation anticipates an already-there subject and is an ideological entanglement that requires self-reflection to be re-articulated. How does my aim to outline a queer navigation of sound and audition in collaborative practice, dictate my encounter with Partch having already done so? For Althusser, ideology is made up of subjectivities that private and public ideological apparatuses draw individuals toward:

"It 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'" (2014, p264)

Both subject and hail are parts of ideology as simultaneously internal and external to us: an individual's interpellated actions are conduits of ideology as a complex of practices, rituals, state apparatuses, and so on (Ibid., p264).

Harry Partch's sociability within ideology was fraught, and his cumbersome Gesamtkunstwerk obliquely exposed the "power of inertia"<sup>6</sup> (Becker, 1995) on which conventional musical apparatuses rely. It is possible, without conjuring up a mythical figure, to recognise Partch's ambivalent sociability as an objection to the inadequate universalism of Althusser's already-there subject.

Fred Moten (2001) critiques interpellation, focusing on black radical musicians' circumvention of oppressive hailing. He uses Marx's imagined possibility of the commodity that speaks to points to a resistance of Althusser's subject, seen as privileged, inadequate, and non-universal. He celebrates interpolation in the black radical tradition as a counter to interpellation, stating that Althusser's subject is defined in accordance with oppression. Interpolation resists through a knowing presentation of objectification that embraces the shock of the commodity that speaks; John Coltrane, for example, and his restless revisions of the tune *My Favorite Things*. Interpolation takes up an existing form, and performs a resistance of its interpellative demands by phonically lingering in a mode of revision that predates it as an original:

"The Black radical tradition is first manifest in and given as the unimaginable speech of the commodity, in the irreducible phonic substance and the irreducible kinetic materiality that instantiate, accompany, and disrupt that speech and its interpretability. That sound, for instance, is often given as the

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<sup>6</sup> Inertia in Becker's thinking is the resistance of change set up by the efficiency of convention vs the obstacles of innovation. This is how "organizations stay stable—by raising the price of innovation—and how they change—through the activity of people for whom that price is... not prohibitive." (1995, p309)

response to demands for recognition that emerge as interpellative calls." (2001, p120)

Harry Partch rephrased and lingered out of step<sup>7</sup> with the institutional forms that suppressed him, using the outsider labels required to do so. I recognise his paradoxical response to Western concert music - he created a cumbersome version of it - as a manifestation of his demand for music-making to be returned to its proximity with speech, the body, and personhood.

I have outlined my confluence with Partch as a hauntological mode of address that reflects audition. But how does one listen out for ghosts? What can hauntological audition be? Roland Barthes' formulation of listening supports the notion of coming into non-universal intersubjectivity with Partch. For Barthes, listening is a fundamentally interpellative mode:

"The injunction to listen is the total interpellation of one subject by another... the archetypal instrument of modern listening, the telephone, collects the two partners into an ideal... inter-subjectivity, because this instrument has abolished all senses except that of hearing: the order of listening which any telephonic communication inaugurates invites the Other to collect his whole body in his voice and announces that I am collecting all of myself in my ear...interpellation leads to an interlocution in which the listener's silence will be as active as the locutor's speech." (1991, p251)

This interpellative audition need not accept a universal subjectivity. It is not necessary to conjure up concrete explanations of Partch for my intersubjective confluence with his author function to be translated into a queering of my stance in collaborative practice. I inherit his individualism, knowing that my oblique re-articulation of it is anticipated by a reticence displayed both in his volatile

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<sup>7</sup> This juxtaposition of Harry Partch and the black radical tradition is an outcome of my queer learning that embraces the differences in how "others" other. Partch never acknowledged the privileged subjectivity that allowed him to choose transience. I mention Mina Yang's critique of Partch in this respect in section 2.3.

sociability and the problems of access that his life's work presents.<sup>8</sup> I claim this reticence as an expression of the closet that demands a utopian re-articulation, resisting the conjuring up (or outing) of a minoritarian identity. It is an expression - both interpellative and critical of hegemonic universality - that requires an approach resembling Barthes' formulation of listening:

"To listen is to adopt an attitude of decoding what is obscure, blurred, or mute, in order to make available to consciousness the "underside" of meaning." (Ibid., p249)

There is undoubtedly a vast but scattered body of scholarship that investigates sound and audition as interpellative, and assembling it would be a research question in itself. The following three studies are representative of innovative directions in this regard: Rob Stone's *Auditions: Architecture and Aurality* (2015); Barry Blesser and Linda Ruth Salter's *Spaces Speak, Are You Listening?* (2007); and Judith Peraino's *Listening to the Sirens* (2006). Stone points to the auditory nature of interpellation, Blesser and Salter discuss the varying effects of individuals as they contribute to the sonic world as "aural architects". Peraino investigates styles of music as representing the alternative realities that queer subjects point to when they misrecognise interpellation. I will return to each of these works later in this chapter.

My initial draw to Partch was due to an *always-already* sensibility, and I have insisted on lingering enough to circumvent a canonical reiteration of Partch as a gay composer. I allow his reticence to haunt the mediation of my personhood into

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<sup>8</sup> Bob Gilmore addresses these problems of access in his biography of Partch (1998, p4). I discuss this in section 2.2.

queer compositionist strategies. The remaining sections of this chapter assemble theoretical supports that contextualise and support queer compositionism.

## 1.2 Who and What can Have a Musical Effect in Collaborative Projects?

*"When I first began groping for answers to problems of intonation, I was a composer. I am still a composer, and my every musical act has been geared to that premise. Not a ratio of vibrational lengths has been put on paper nor one piece of wood glued to another which did not have as its ultimate objective the creation of music." (Partch, 1974, pxviii)*

Can a queer compositionist assemble the musical principles of a collaborative project through a sensitivity for the capacity of both people and things to obliquely intervene? Can this stance be related to the intuitive but principled negotiations of the closet? Does this lead to unexpected yet project-specific formal outcomes? In contemporary musical experimentation, dualisms such as composer-player or player-listener are largely dissolved. However, the dualism of human and nonhuman agency has proven stubborn. This section expands upon Christopher Small's concept of musicking (1998) and Jacques Attali's definition of composition (1985). Both widened the scope of who and what contribute to music-making. I embrace the separation of agency from human intent but remain wary of frontiersmanship that assimilates any and every element into a fixed authorial audition.<sup>9</sup>

My term oblique intervention will refer to the agential capacity of elements to be assembled into projects on their own terms, rather than assimilated into a predetermined code. Representative texts from free improvisation/jazz studies

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<sup>9</sup> This will be explored further in chapter 2 through a comparison of Partch's sociability with John Cage's deflected yet ubiquitous authorship.

and musicology's study of othering, sexuality, and gender contextualise this concern.

Small's neologism "musicking" addresses the noun music as a false abstraction from a social activity involving a wide array of agents that musick: piano tuners, cleaners, room acoustics, musicians, instruments, conductors, auditorium seats, interval chatter, and so on. His context is symphony halls but it would be mistaken to limit his idea to one ritualised culture.<sup>10</sup> Musicking includes people, rooms, and social rituals as agents, thereby departing from human exceptionalism:

"It takes place in a physical and social setting, and those, too, have to be taken into account." (Ibid., p10)

Small supports his shift from the anthropocentric by using Gregory Bateson's process of mind, summarising it as,

"the ability to give and to respond to information... [Bateson] maintains that it is a characteristic of matter wherever and whenever it is organized into those patterns we call living." (Ibid., p53)

Small never explicates how this idea may frame non-human agency in musicking, but his use of the notion of mind as a series of effects - not only human intent - implies that his thinking leans in this direction.

For Jacques Attali (1985), a society's conditions for music-making herald the future conditions of its political economy. Just as Small switched music from noun to verb, Attali does for composition:

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<sup>10</sup> Tellingly, Small contributed a foreword to *Search and Reflect*, the workshop-guide of the free improviser John Stevens (1985), stating, "... once people become aware that music is in themselves and not only in those who have been selected to become musicians... who knows what else they might insist on reclaiming." (Small, 1985, piv)

"The musician plays primarily for himself, outside any operationality, spectacle, or accumulation of value; when music... emerges as an activity that is an end in itself, that creates its own code at the same time as the work." (1985, p135)

Composition becomes the arrangement of means needed for music-making, rather than the production of works and commodities. Composer-musicians are not exteriorised from their practice, as there is no product to which their labour is oriented:

"Composition thus leads to a staggering conception of history, a history that is open, unstable, in which labor no longer advances accumulation, in which the object is no longer a stockpiling of lack, in which music effects a reappropriation of time and space." (Ibid., p147)

Returning to the carnivalesque, composition subverts the separation of worker and product through creation in a here and now. This supports my notion that a queer compositionist inhabits collaborative projects through interpellative audition and demands to be integrated on terms intuitively assembled from within the project itself. A compositionist puts together the means for musical organisation at the level of a project's shifting assemblages of people, instruments, recording devices, situations, historical artefacts, encounters, concepts, and so on. The dualism of human and nonhuman becomes hybridised. However, an important caveat remains: when shifting from human exceptionalism it is crucial to avoid flattening out inequalities or differences. The following texts contextualise oblique intervention over assimilation, offering perspectives on individual expressions of difference within the communal activity of music-making. In Derek Bailey's work around what he calls "non-idiomatic" group improvisation (1993), he upholds improvisation as a fundament of music-making: free improvisation is a re-articulation of an ageless mode, not the innovation of a contemporary vanguard. He discusses the individual style of players as being



developed through communal situations (1993, p105). His work suggests that individuals maintain their unique traits while also learning from the oblique interventions of other players in constantly shifting combinations.<sup>11</sup>

Bailey includes instruments in his analysis, recognising that interventionist techniques counter their assimilation into fixed appropriations or subservience. He outlines a mix of "pro-instrument" approaches (extended techniques and electronic/mechanical prosthesis) and "anti-instrument" approaches (that foreground the player's idiosyncrasy). (1993, p102)

George E. Lewis distinguishes between Afrological and Eurological perspectives in improvisation (1996), pointing to Bebop as a form outside of high-culture supports. Eurological institutions have appropriated free improvisation and indeterminacy as modes, with no understanding of the African-American condition from which it arose. Lewis compares the approaches of Charlie Parker and John Cage to music-making, pointing out that,

"Bebop's challenge to the dominant culture was not limited to musical concerns; in fact, bebop musicians challenged traditional notions of intra- and extra-musicality." (1996, p95)

Bebop was an expression of a material condition in society, containing upheaval within its sound. A core element of music-making is the materiality of an individual musician's sound and the way it transports corporeal expression and social protest. Lewis points out that John Cage's liberation of indeterminate sound is a denial of protest. To frame music as any sound that a knowing/expectant subject hears is a composer-centric notion that privileges the ears of a discoverer.

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<sup>11</sup> See Peter J. Martin (2006) for more around this dependency on the communal for refined individuality. He expands on Howard Becker, positing that music-making be "understood as a collaborative process involving a network of relationships in which the music derives its meaning from the pattern of social activities in which it is embedded, and *vice versa*." (2006, p63)

Lewis states that Cageian indeterminacy heralded a Eurological perspective on improvisation long anticipated by an Afrological one:

"Bebop's combination of spontaneity, structural radicalism, and uniqueness, antedating by several years the reappearance of improvisation in Eurological music, posed a challenge to that music which needed to be answered in some way. All too often, the space of whiteness provided a convenient platform for a racialized denial of the trenchancy of this challenge." (Ibid., p100)

Spontaneity from a Eurological perspective can only be deemed pioneering through an abandonment of memory that constitutes whiteness.<sup>12</sup> An afrological perspective, expressed through a players' radical phonetic, comes from,

"a legacy of slavery and oppression, [and] cannot countenance the erasure of history." (Ibid., p109)

Fred Moten honours the lingering temporality of this afrological perspective by introducing its sonicity into his writing: a radical sonic materiality, found in both speech and musical expression, that cuts and augments repetitions of inadequate universalities. Moten puts this blues-time sense of repeating - always for the first time - down to a discontinuity that celebrates the evasive locality of queerness:

"What one begins to consider, as a function of the nonlocalizable nature or status of discontinuity, is a special universalization of discontinuity, where discontinuity could be figured as ubiquitous minority, omnipresent queerness." (2003, p69)

For Moten, radical individuals engaged in discontinuity, present a multifaceted queerness that cannot be limited to identities based on a single aspect such as sexual orientation. Describing Cecil Taylor's performance practice, he writes:

"This is that out performance of the outness of subalternity, improvising Blackness and its others, capitalism and its other, homosexuality and its others, in a subalternity without origin and possible everywhere, a subalternity of universality, a subalternity of ensemble." (Ibid., p163)

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<sup>12</sup> For a recent study of the complexity of the condition of blackness in contrast to whiteness as a deluded sense of safety, see Ed Pavlić's work around James Baldwin and improvisation (2016).

This sociability objects to subjectivities anticipated by dominant society's interpellations, and Moten supports the idea that an individual's outness is the acting out of a refusal to be recruited to any subjectivity that would dilute their commitment to ubiquitous alterity.

In two interviews, Moten reinforces the notion that people and things assembled into music-making may protest the frontiersmanship of the avant-garde. With Charles Rowell (2004), Moten unites experimentalism with everyday, vernacular conditions. With James Cahill and Rachel Thompson (2005), he analogises radical repetition as a keloid scar: an image of irregular universality. This idea is important when thinking about idiosyncratic practitioners' strategies of resistance. He helps to understand foregrounded personhood and individuality as a distinct contribution to the never quite here of what he calls the "dynamism of universality", and the refusal of "defective universalities":

"Do we get rid of universality as such? No! But we certainly have it in our power and have it as a part of our duty, so to speak, to rupture, to cut, to make incisions in their universality in the interest of the expansion of this universality." (2005, p63)

It is through this thinking that a queer Harry Partch becomes not simply an outsider, but a one-off who expressed his idiosyncrasies for the benefit others.

John Corbett's (2015) interviews with musicians who contribute unique detours in the history of music form a collection of "encounters with sounds, objects, [and] people" (p1) that he calls "forays into other music." For Corbett "Other" does not mean minor, but a singularity that requires communal equivalence. The category of "other" in record shops, for example, constitutes the equivalence of differences irreducible to mere outsider wackiness:

"One can't explain why or how these musicians fit into the scheme of things, whom they influence, how their music changes the status quo—in short, where

their music goes... They simply start, make something, then stop—like a scenic road to nowhere." (2015, p33)

David Toop (2016) upholds improvisation as a necessary everyday skill that should not be considered an isolated and privileged practice. Focussing on the array of cultural references, instruments, personal politics, etc., that make up the curious baggage of non-idiomatic improvisers, he refutes that the free-improv movement stems from avant-gardism in Western art music. The result is the existence of conflicting agendas within shifting groups of players who fluidly suspend their sense of self.<sup>13</sup> This is also suggestive of an activity in which instruments are not assimilated to any fixed usage. Toop maintains that music-making lies "between" human intuition and the world of things (2016, p92). This should be taken further, as to dichotomise players and things is anthropocentric and limits the possibilities of who and what can be seen to have agency.

Benjamin Piekut<sup>14</sup> expands the notion of the suspension of self in group improvisation (2018). He cites both Moten and Lewis to support his claim that the search for another version of one's self through collective enterprise suggests a form of irregular terrain in which the universal resistance of exclusionary subject formations results in a,

"stepping away from the choice to assert or to disassemble subjectivity." (2018, p87)

Idiosyncrasy within communal music-making can herald social change, as it forms a resistance to exclusionary hegemony. It is also important to consider the nonhuman elements that are assembled into this resistance. There are a growing

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<sup>13</sup> See Andrew Bowie (2007, p409), who has made a case that - due to it not relying on consensus - music performance is a crucial site for philosophy to learn new strategies.

<sup>14</sup> I will return to Piekut with regard to Latourian methodologies and nonhuman agency in musical experimentalism in section 1.3.

number of recent studies that expand the definition of music-making beyond the anthropocentric and even the sonic. The following references are representative of this:

Adam Harper (2011) calls for the inclusion of non-sonic elements as a part of music-making, stating that,

"non-sonic variables... are an important part of the ritual itself and are inextricable from it." (2011, p35)

He offers the term "alien genres" (Ibid., p182) to classify non-sonic variables included in composition. To recognise these acts as music-making reconnects composition with everyday life in a way that the "limited image of music-itself" obstructs (Ibid., p182).

Eldritch Priest (2013) includes failure as a part of music-making; designating outsiderism as revolving,

"around a logic wherein the absolute failure to satisfy an already determined purpose coincides with the success to satisfy an unintentional objective." (2013, p10)

Priest not only foregrounds the personhood of makers but also their unconventional tools and precarious lives. John Cage becomes antithetical to this notion as his authored version of non-intentionality allowed him to,

"shift the act of intentionality from the composer onto the listener in such a way that the composer's ego-culpability would become... scattered in a hall of mirrors." (2013, p59)

Douglas G. Barrett (2016) challenges the specialism of sound art, stating that,

"sound art and new music... reflect absolute music's primary determining feature: sound. Sound art is, essentially, absolute music. (2016, p5)

He champions artists who work musically without sound as a determining feature:

"Through their practices of mobilizing bodies, staging participation, and organizing collectivity... they recognize a broader need to put together and assemble, to construct and compose radical forms of commonality." (Ibid., p6)

He claims conceptual art as indebted to absolute music due to the propositional form of scores. It is important to now recognise this and recuperate composition as an activity that,

"speculates, anticipates, listens, and coordinates... combines and assembles." (Ibid., 2016, p95)

For queer compositionism to assemble hybrid projects, containing both human and nonhuman agency, the stance must avoid assimilating elements through centripetal codes, allowing them instead to intervene in formal developments obliquely. Conflict and friction should be considered, and the following sources represent the depth of debate around this in musicology.

Georgina Born criticises the aesthetics of relational art, stating that it,

"dismisses any engagement with the dynamics of difference, conflict, and antagonism that are in part constitutive of the social." (2017, p35)

For Born, improvised music of the late twentieth-century has engaged with performance as a socially mediated assemblage that is an,

"aggregation of sonic, visual, discursive, social, corporeal, technological, and temporal mediations." (Ibid., p44)

Music-making becomes a socially embedded activity that assembles differences, but the question remains: how do individual elements express their specificity and mediating effects without being rendered other by an assimilative agenda? How can they do their own othering through oblique intervention?

Howard Becker's labelling theory (1963) is helpful. His participatory observations of club musicians - often defined as deviant or outsider - scrutinises minoritising

labels more generally as part of the social construction of marginal groups.

Deviance is not a quality of an individual but a universally known secret that only defines segregated groups during authoritative crackdowns. Becker refutes deviance as a minoritising characteristic by addressing the complex social mediations that lead it to congeal around certain individuals in specific times and places:

"We ought to see it simply as a kind of behavior some disapprove of and others value, studying the processes by which either or both perspectives are built up and maintained." (1963, p176)

Becker rejects outsider labels, stating that expressions of individualism from within minoritarian groups are acts of disassociation from the normative modes that threaten their *insider* codes. He denies the dualism *insider/outsider*, outlining a "drama of deviance" instead. Any challenge to hegemony should start by questioning labels because superordinate groups,

"maintain their power as much by controlling how people define the world, its components, and its possibilities, as by the use of more primitive forms of control." (Ibid., p205)

Paul Gilroy criticises post-modernism as a Eurological shift from grand narratives just as the African diaspora was forming emancipatory narratives of its own, calling for the foregrounding of difference and universal equivalences. He articulates his micro-social condition of being black and British for the benefit of a diaspora made up of hybridised identities that form a "pluralistic ambience" (1993, p32). Gilroy differentiates between a multi-racial society (categorised difference), and a multi-racial nation (grand narratives shifted by anti-essentialism). He offers group improvisation in the black radical tradition as an example of this on a local level that represents pluralistic coherence on a diasporic one. For Gilroy, the

shifting nature of racism demands polyphony in response, rather than pitting one's self against others. He writes of,

"an image of community as composed of those with whom we disagree... the differences we still experience in spite of white supremacy's centripetal effects might be seen as a precious and potentially productive resource." (Ibid., p201)

Ruth Solie's edited volume *Musicology and Difference* (1995) outlines new-musicology's considerations of difference, especially the avoidance of essentialising the identity of authors. Therein, Leo Trietler warns against establishing identities based on "positioning the self against a sharply defined Other" (1995, p30) and also against dualisms such as the "rational and the sensual: that between the Apollonian, which is Nordic, and the Dionysian, which is Near Eastern, that is, Oriental/Semitic." (Ibid., p34). Barbara Engh advocates for acquainting oneself with unfamiliar music, not to classify it but to pay "attention to particularity, to specificity, to idiosyncrasy and detail." (1995, p75). Carolyn Abbate argues that the authorship of opera is mediated through multiple voices and sound recordings. A lip-synced drag act that uses the recording of a performance of an aria shows that,

"a taped voice is the permanent material basis for generating a performance... just as a score of *Orfeo*... constitutes a permanent material basis for any live performance of the opera." (1995, p228)

Philip Brett's analysis of Benjamin Britten seeks to reveal expressions of the composer's closeted sexuality. By exploring the work in this way he challenges a tendency for outing composers, stating that,

"the conditions they worked under may all too easily return, making the knowledge of how they dealt with them doubly valuable." (Ibid., p261)

Krin Gabbard's edited volume *Jazz Among the Discourses* (1995) contemplates the cross-disciplinary impact of jazz studies as it introduced radical musical



expression into the academy.<sup>15</sup> Therein, Nathaniel Mackey focusses on *othering* as something done, rather than *other* as a label: bending notes or breaking tones, is to practice "othering," not to be an "other". Mackey distinguishes between artistic othering and social othering:

"Artistic othering has to do with innovation, invention, and change... Social othering has to do with power, exclusion, and privilege, the centralizing of a norm against which otherness is measured." (1995, p76)

Jed Rasula states that early analysis of jazz history constituted a paradox because recordings were both analysed and dismissed as abstracted representations. For him, this ignores the mediative effect of records as jazz players heard and imitated influential styles, and is an oversight in the canonisation of jazz that subsumes,

"variation, excess, deviance, and singularity into a monolithic tale of progress and destiny... [through which] there can be only "influences," never confluences (not to mention divergences)." (1995, p146)

Robert Walser uses the "mis-fingered" notes of Miles Davis to point to jazz as an expression of collective struggle. To mistake Davis's style as containing "duff" notes exposes score analysis as overlooking the risk in his unorthodox technique. The notes alone cannot explain his music as his technique contained a risk of failure that should be celebrated as an exploration of the trumpet's (and his own) limits. For Walser, analysis of jazz that ignores collectivism - by focussing only on masterworks - overlooks quests for liberation and expressions of struggle:

"It offers no means of accounting for why Miles Davis misses notes, or even of understanding what he is really doing the rest of the time." (1995, p170)

John Corbett outlines the inclusivity of group improvisation and insists that sound-reproduction technologies are included in its experimentalism through its

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<sup>15</sup> Also see Robert O'Meally's *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture* (1998). Therein, James A. Snead (p69) and Arthur Jafa (p267) make relevant appeals to the importance of individualistic tonal expression in the black radical repetition of forms.

appropriation by modes like turntablism (1995, p219). His notion of "paradoxo" defines free improvisation as an assemblage of differing strategies; not as a vanguard rejection of orthodoxy (1995, p236).

Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh's edited volume *Western Music and its Others* (2000) critiques othering in ethnomusicology.<sup>16</sup> In their introduction they argue that absolute musics are exclusionary; othering those that practice "outside" of them. The volumes focus is,

"musical borrowings or appropriations, and the way that music has been used to construct, evoke, or mark alterity of a musical or a sociocultural kind." (2000, p2)

Therein, John Corbett argues that in approaching the difference of others one must avoid frontiersmanship, have no predetermined agenda, and be experimental, in that an experiment is,

"an excellent setting for exploration and discovery... for an encounter with the new, the unforeseen, and the unfamiliar." (2000, p165)

Richard Middleton rejects cultural property-owners in favour of practitioners that "belong to" or are "lost" in music, thus circumventing music as own-able.

However, he points out that "low-others" become assimilated to master discourses, having their possession in music bought, resulting in a constant condition of negotiation:

"Belonging *to* a music (making ourselves at home within its territory) is distinctly possible... however, for low-others this sort of possession normally functions as a kind of tenancy, for they themselves are possessed." (2000, p78)

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<sup>16</sup> See Laurent Aubert's participatory study of Indian classical music for a critique of the West's ethnocentric misconception that traditions oppose change (2016, p22).

### 1.3 A Latourian Methodology

*"Perhaps the essence of almost any momentous trip, hobo or otherwise, is constituted of these things: (1) the exhilaration of moving; (2) relief at leaving the scenes of experience for a new life - a renaissance; (3) a succession of geographical place-names; (4) the persons one meets, their remarks, and stories; (5) wondering what will happen next." (Partch, 1974, p205)*

I have thus far assembled a case for attending to human and nonhuman agency in compositionism as a socially embedded activity. Advocating for artistic othering over assimilation of others helps to approach projects in this way without a denial of inequalities amongst people. I will now outline a methodology of assemblage, centred around Bruno Latour - actor-network theory in particular (hereinafter ANT). My ANT-like approach to musical practice follows the example of Benjamin Piekut's histories of experimentalism in music.

Through ANT, Harry Partch becomes a component part of his life's work as no one element can stand alone without its mediative relations to the others with which it is networked. ANT denies the social as a holistic anthropocentric entity, so Partch's "momentous trip" can be seen to mediate his personhood: Partch is his writings, objects, rooms, instruments, recordings, collaborations, etc.

A Latourian methodology supports my compositionist practice, as projects can be inhabited as human/nonhuman hybridised assemblages, and the way in which one assembles them leads to oblique expressions of one's sociality. This helps remain ambivalent to fixed identities based on single elements of personhood such as sexuality.

I will also cite Manuel DeLanda and Jane Bennett: DeLanda helps outline an empirical approach to practice rather than applying ANT as retrograde analysis of

a purely intuitive approach; Bennett re-injects anthropomorphism into materialist thought which avoids the danger of ANT creating an author-less re-description. Queer compositionism avoids the centripetal force of absolute music through an orientation that focusses on the musical capacities of unexpected elements. For Latour, the object/subject dichotomy is insufficient for reassembling the social. He sees shifting networks of human-nonhuman hybridity, made up of irreducible<sup>17</sup> actants (nothing is essentially isolatable or attributable to a representative abstraction, such as "science" or "music"). Humans, for example, are not isolated from nature or technology but hybridised within networks that subsume both.

Shelley Trower's study of vibration (2012) helps to introduce how ANT relates to compositionism as an approach to music seen as a mediating force (rather than a thing in itself). Vibration is not matter but physical movement: a conduit. Trower argues that the post-industrial era hybridised people and things and agrees with Latour that the modern subject/object divide is false; thus she follows his notion of "quasi-objects".<sup>18</sup>

"Vibration... is neither wholly material nor wholly discursive: it has physical existence but cannot itself be perceived except through its effects." (Trower, 2012, p8)

Georgina Born (2005) outlines music as a mediating conduit embedded in the social that reflects and heralds forms of political economy, including conditions of

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<sup>17</sup> This study is not the place for unpicking this idea, although my practice does uphold its concerns. For a detailed outline of Latour's metaphysics see part 2 of *The Pasteurization of France* (Latour, 1993). Irreduction is a complex idea and its consequence is the impossibility of understanding a matter of concern from a position outside of it. We must assemble agencies knowing that "nothing is by itself ordered or disordered, unique or multiple, homogenous or heterogeneous, fluid or inert, human or inhuman, useful or useless. Nothing by itself, but always by others." (1993, p161) For further thought on Latour's metaphysics see Graham Harman (2009).

<sup>18</sup> Latour acknowledges borrowing the name for his idea from Michel Serres (Latour, 1993, p51).

nation, class, and gender. Born references Latour when outlining her idea of mediation in music-making as the negotiation of differences. She posits that any ontology of new-music should shift from,

"the musical 'I' who, isolated and apart, appropriates and frames musical others within the musical work... to one of the weaving and spinning of musico-social relatedness. This is a music in process, predicated on the suspension of any master discourse—an aesthetics of mutual encounter, of bridging and negotiation, not an aesthetics of appropriation and subsumption of an other." (2005, p30)

The use of Latour in music studies has been applied and speculated upon by Benjamin Piekut.<sup>19</sup> My practice follows his example to a certain extent, and my selected reading of Latour is based on recommendations Piekut made to me in April 2012. He has applied ANT (2011) to a series of musical assemblages, fleshing out the conflicts and equivalences<sup>20</sup> of experimentalism across New York in 1964. For Piekut a network,

"does not describe the shape of the social formations under study but rather the method used to understand them and the movements of translation they effect." (2011, p8)

Following Latour, Piekut does not accept single actants as isolated subjects or objects and pays attention to the way they translate or are translated by others.

The result is accounts of experimentalism that are not,

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<sup>19</sup> Piekut's applications of ANT are exemplary. Other examples are Nick Prior's (2008) analysis of the hybrid nature of *Glitch Music*, although he seems to split humans and non-humans into a paradoxical dichotomy (2008 p313). Isabella von Elferen and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (2016) have used ANT in their study of goth music as a subculture, foregrounding the agencies of disparate times, places, technologies, and ritualistic paraphernalia. They see music as a glue that adheres a network of effects related to the genre (2016, p64).

<sup>20</sup>The translation of differences into equivalences should be thought of as part of ANT's methodology. The terms are not interchangeable, nor can one switch between them as a state of mind. Indeed, for Latour there is no such thing as an equivalent that has not been fabricated. "Nothing is, by itself, the same as or different from anything else. That is, there are no equivalents, only translations." (1993, p162)

"magically coalesced around shared qualities of indeterminacy and rugged individualism [they are fabricated by] composers, critics, scholars, performers, audiences, students, and a host of other elements including texts, scores, articles, curricula, patronage systems, and discourses of race, gender, class and nation." (Ibid., p19)

Piekut's approach is performative: in following unexpected paths, he allows his work to be drawn in multiple directions. This is useful for maintaining Harry Partch as a haunting presence in my thinking and practice. Piekut supports a recognition that past figures are, in part, made up of the scholarly accounts around them. In understanding this, researchers should carefully put together alternative renderings. My confluence with Partch, then, must also re-articulate his significance. For Piekut experimentalism is,

"where the everyday and the otherwise converge in an arena of grounded possibility. Rather than... indeterminacy, open form, and rugged independence, I have been interested in mobility, that certain kind of restlessness that can push us to consider what else experimentalism might have been, and whether it still might be otherwise." (Ibid., p19)

Piekut and others further apply this idea in his edited volume of essays (2014a).

Experimentalism in music is rendered empirically traceable, helping expand music studies from a focus on scores, performances, technique, and aesthetics alone.

Experimentalism is seen in distinctly Latourian terms as,

"made and remade in specific scenarios (concerts, recording sessions, interviews, lectures) and materialities (printed scores and journals, vinyl records, films, magnetic recording tape, compact discs, hard drives.)" (2014a, p2)

Piekut (2014b) has also outlined in detail the significance of ANT and Latour for music studies within the context of Georgina Born's idea of music as assembled social mediation. He helps shift from an essentialist definition of music:

"It clearly relies on many things that are not music, and therefore we should conceive of it as a set of relations among distinct materials and events that have been translated to work together." (2014b, p192)

Piekut outlines ANT's focus on hybrid forms, maintaining the actuality of human individuals and their networky relations while adding layers of complexity to music as a mediating activity in which agency becomes separated from the exceptionalism of human will:

"It is an action or an event—not an intention—that manifests an agency. If something makes a difference then it is an actor." (Ibid., p195)

This applies to practice-based projects that see compositionism as the assemblage of mediating components with the capacity to act on an organisational level.

Piekut's application of ANT, due to its empirical basis, helps to reinforce this. A queer compositionist aims to collaborate while maintaining a sense of the networked and evasive localities of both human and nonhuman agency. However, this does not eradicate human intent; As Piekut points out,

"ANT does not throw out intention or consciousness altogether, but it does suggest that differences get made in other ways, too." (Ibid., p196)

Francis Halsall, Graham Harman, and Antoine Hennion add relevant insight into Latour's thinking. Halsall (2016) sees relational art's construction of ecologies as comparable to ANT. In an interview with Latour (2012), he distinguishes between objects and nonhumans and Latour agrees that art practice can think through this distinction as it constructs realities.

Harman, in *The Prince And The Wolf: Latour and Harman at the LSE* (2011) champions Latour's contribution to metaphysics and has him assert<sup>21</sup> that

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<sup>21</sup> "Actual occasions have no other explanation than actual occasions, and philosophy is not in the business of explaining it." (Latour, 2011, p67)

philosophy needs to be subtle enough to conduct social studies of matters at hand without providing a metalanguage or explanations.

Hennion, a musicologist, has worked closely with Latour and considers musical transmission in ANT terms (2016). Musical performances mediate pre-composed works as a series of interruptions and deviations. Hennion refers to ANT's notion of mediation:

"A passage is not reduced to the transmission of an object; it does something else. It does not refer back to causes; it is a performance, with unforeseeable effects, that are not deducible from the sum total of causal factors." (2016, p294)

I will now summarise Latour's ideas that support my methodology, allowing Partch's haunting to mediate the formal outcomes of my practice-based enquiries. In Latour's outline of ANT (2007), he refutes "the social" as a fixed anthropocentric concern. ANT aims to reassemble approaches to the social, seen as the shifting mediations of networked human and nonhuman actors. ANT researchers,

"follow the actors' own ways and begin our travels by the traces left behind by their activity of forming and dismantling groups." (2007, p29)

An actor is anything that brings about change; therefore human intention becomes only one cause of action. Latour states that action should be,

"felt as a node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled." (Ibid., p44)

ANT rejects intermediary effects, stating that action sets reformulations in motion in which all components mediate all others. This supports innovative research, as unpredictable outcomes are expected.

Latour's ideas emerge clearly through his case studies. For example, in outlining a failed transportation project (1996) for Paris in the 1970/80s he defines research as innovate when,



"the number of actors that have to be taken into account is not given from the outset." (1996, p72)

Latour's focus on the agency of a microprocessor in the development of the transportation system is a clear example of his concept of hybridity: the processor is not essentially human (they inscribe responsibility and delegate to it) nor nonhuman (its effects transcend the properties of its parts) (Ibid., p213). Latour concludes that the project failed through the inertia of a perfectly formed proposition. To love technology, he says, is to remain attentive to ubiquitous mediative capacity, and to compromise and adjust a project's development accordingly. The transportation system failed because,

"nothing changed it. It didn't incorporate any skepticism, any random event. It reaches the moment of death absolutely intact." (Ibid., p282)

Latour outlines his formulation of *circulating reference* (1999) through a case study of various specialists studying soil at the border of forest and desert. He follows the translations of the *actuality* of the site into the abstract but *actually* classifiable representations of it, arguing that innovative research requires traceable links in both directions. He calls this a chain of action in which,

"each stage is matter for what follows and form for what precedes it." (1999, p74)

Maintaining a sense of this chain in creative projects requires a flexible form of rigour, open to unexpected outcomes that emerge from within the terms of the project. A chain of action sets up a relay of form and content that leads to what Latour calls the *amplification* process attributed to *circulations of reference*. This circulation is a chain of transformations in which "reference" refers to the gaps between matter and form at each mediative stage of research. If reference is

traceable in both directions (between actuality and abstraction), then the loss of specificity (reduction) is offset by gains in universality (amplification).

Latour outlines his notion of quasi-objects in his critique of modernity (1991), where he rejects subjectivities that depend on the quarantining of culture, science and nature. His work shifts away from human exceptionalism:

"Here, on the left, are things themselves; there, on the right, is the free society of speaking, thinking subjects, values and of signs. Everything happens in the middle... by way of mediation, translation and networks, but this space does not exist... It is the unthinkable, the unconscious of the moderns." (1993, p37)

He concisely articulates quasi-objects in dialogue with the novelist Richard Powers (1998). They debate the hybridisation of humans and technology, and Latour refutes their separability:

"When you look at a space vessel cruising... it looks like a machine, but if you suddenly hear... "Houston we have a problem!" then it becomes clear that the space vessel is a quasi-machine that never left the umbilical chord (sic) of the huge institution down there on earth." (1998, p182)

Latour also describes singing as a technological process of which we have only partial conscious control, stating that humans are also quasi-machines. This supports uses of his thinking that avoid flattening out differences or inequalities: to understand ourselves as hybridised with technology, thwarts master-slave relations and moves Latour, perhaps, toward an accordance with Fred Moten's dynamism of universality:

"Quasi-machines do not exist apart from humanity; they are humanity in another "state", the way that water, vapor and ice are different states of the same substance." (Ibid., p190)

The accounts of my queer compositionist practice in chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate that Latourian hybridity, quasi-objects, and chains of reference are important notions for maintaining a stance that can orient the oblique intervention of

unexpected elements.<sup>22</sup> The idea of quasi-machines refutes human exceptionalism, and although my collaborators' foreground idiosyncrasy I understand them to exhibit their personhood as hybridised with their material surroundings and assembled practices.

Compositionism, as well as referencing Attali's version of composition, is driven by Latour's compositionist manifesto (2010), where he debunks linear progress in favour of reassessment and reconfiguration.<sup>23</sup> He calls for,

"a subtle but radical transformation... of what it means to progress, that is, to *process* forward and meet new prospects. Not as a war cry for an avant-garde... but rather as a warning, a call to attention, so as to *stop* going further *in the same way* as before toward the future." (2010, p473)

Latour helps to defend the use of the word compositionist when re-orientating the function of a composer. He associates the word with both composing and composting, as both process their fruits through digestion and renewal:

"For a compositionist, nothing is beyond dispute. And yet, closure has to be achieved. But it is achieved only by the slow process of composition and compromise, not by the revelation of the world of beyond." (Ibid., p478)

ANT supports an attentiveness to elements' capacities to obliquely intervene when assembled into projects, and circulation of reference helps keep a compositionist's abstractions traceable to a project's specificity. Latour's compositionism supports my notion of a queer stance in collaborative projects that is open to the unexpected and hybrid outcomes of human and nonhuman effects. To focus on projects as

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<sup>22</sup> Particular clarity in this regard comes through my account of Sarah Kenchington's caravan window obliquely intervening in the formal outcomes of our performance.

<sup>23</sup> This idea contributes to my argument in section 2.6 that upholds Harry Partch's volatile personhood as an antidote to John Cage's ubiquitous authorship of deflected authorship.

hybrids avoids human exceptionalism in music-making and follows the detours of innovation.

Latour's insistence on irreduction makes it difficult to use his ideas pragmatically during the empirical phases of practice. In order to repurpose elements and follow their mediation of others, it is useful to suspend disbelief and recognise pseudo-machines as the "objects" they are commonly understood to be. Manuel DeLanda's *relations of exteriority* (2006) helps here. For DeLanda, assemblages are formed by the shifting activation of the capacities of its components. Relations of exteriority see components interacting differently as they move through forming, morphing and reforming assemblages:

"We can distinguish... the properties defining a given entity from its *capacities to interact* with other entities. While its properties are given and may be denumerable as a closed list, its capacities are not given... and form a potentially open list, since there is no way to tell in advance in what way a given entity may affect or be affected by innumerable other entities." (2006, p10)

As becomes clear in my practice, this outlook supports the assembling of elements for their capacity to affect musical outcomes without obscuring the qualities of their previous use: this is the crux of oblique intervention.

The methodology I have outlined will be applied to Harry Partch and empirically tested through my practice. My queer orientation, and the distribution of my personhood through the oblique intervention of components, is further supported by Jane Bennett. Her concept of "vibrant matter" (2010) reintroduces anthropomorphism into materialist theory, achieving a universalism made up of differences. Citing Latour, Bennett posits humans as made up of (and contained by) matter. Vital matter is a universal concern, and humanity is instilled with a non-anthropocentric sense of subjectivity through which the quarantining of

people and things is replaced by their inseparability. Vital materialism hybridises humans and nonhumans by defining matter as an animate conduit. People are both responsible for it and can assign responsibility to it; thus agency no longer equals intent. Her shift from human exceptionalism can be used to support the notion of compositionism as a mode that reassembles possible futures.

For Bennett, vital materialism is evasive but critical, as when one begins to assemble its effects, components do not fully harmonise. Is this perhaps similar to the ways improvisers assemble? Or that queer universalism converges on non-consensus?

"Precisely because each member-actant maintains an energetic pulse slightly "off" from that of the assemblage, an assemblage is never a stolid block but an open-ended collective." (2010, p24)

This section has supported queer compositionism as the experimental assemblage of musical form, done through my inhabitation and orientation of collaborative projects. The following section assembles queer theory that contextualises these ideas further.

## 1.4 Queer compositionism and Oblique Intervention

*"Love is apt to fluctuate over the whole idea of sex, and beyond, too. I wouldn't give it another thought."* (Partch, 2000a, p19)

My practice, following the present-absence of Harry Partch, distributes my queer personhood through the way collaborative projects are musically assembled. My inhabitation and orientation of projects are achieved by remaining sensitive to the capacity for unexpected elements to obliquely intervene.

How can responding to Partch's hail through interpellative audition, queer my compositionist practice? Why not re-articulate Partch as a queerly distributed personhood, rather than as a closeted homosexual?

Michel Foucault (1978) suggests that society's binding of sexuality to identity coincides with discourse initiated in the Victorian age:

"The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law... enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy." (1978, p3)

A discourse of deviance around sex emerged that obscured, categorised, and suppressed the imprudence of previous ages. This discourse did not silence deviant minorities but instead denied secrecy. The formation of heteronormativity created a minoritising discourse: confession, observation, classification. The homosexual became a "species" within a frictional discursive arena, with an insistence on decency manifesting an explosion of official discourse around sex. Foucault deems minoritarian opposition to norms as reasserting the majoritarian. To counter, he advocated for an individualised ethics of self, celebrating the world-making capabilities of enjoyment of the body and living together. Foucault speaks

of friendship as a way of life (2000a), saying that one need not define one's sex from within oneself but to use sexuality to,

"arrive at a multiplicity of relationships." (2000a, p136)

For Foucault, homosexuality is not a desire but something to be desired. It is not something one is, but an exploration of new ways of living. An individual's oblique position should expose social constructions, not be assimilated as a tolerated irregularity:

"Homosexuality is a historic occasion to reopen affective and relational virtualities, not so much through the intrinsic qualities of the homosexual but because the "slantwise" position of the latter, as it were, the diagonal line he can lay out in the social fabric allow these virtualities to come to light." (Ibid., p138)

Foucault (2000b) stresses the importance of the gay liberation movement, but warns that stabilisation should not mean closure:

"The relationships we have to have with ourselves are not ones of identity, rather, they must be relationships of differentiation, of creation, of innovation." (2000b, p166)

David M. Halperin (2002) expands on Foucault from his own perspective as a historian of classical literature. For Halperin, contemporary definitions of sexual orientation should not be used to understand the taxonomy of sex acts in ancient cultures. Likewise, the latter should not be used to justify contemporary assumptions:

"Those historians of sexuality who redescribe in modern conceptual terms the culturally specific phenomena they observe in the distant historical record... misrecognize the sexual features of the period they study as exotic versions of the already familiar." (2002, p60)

In Ancient Greek culture, male to male sex acts were a part of pedagogy and separated from "gender deviance". There remains much to learn from comparative

studies of the links between ancient attitudes to sex and gender and contemporary formations of sexual identity:

"Many people nowadays, both gay and non-gay, continue to draw a direct connection between gender deviance and homosexuality. Despite the dominance of the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality, active women and passive men, as well as effeminate men and masculine women, are still considered somehow *more homosexual* than other, less flamboyantly deviant, persons who make homosexual object-choices. Here we can discern the force with which earlier, pre-homosexual sexual categories continue to exert their authority within the newer conceptual universe of homo- and heterosexuality." (Ibid., p132)

There is a need to recognise the normalising nature of subsuming individual differences into identity classifications based around object choices of the "same" sex and gender:

"How do we now understand the role that perceived differences in age, gender style, sexual role, body type, social class, ethnicity, race, religion, and/or nationality play in structuring, however partially, the relations of some lesbian and gay male couples?" (Ibid., p136)

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2008) explores the (homo)sexual in the male canon of Western literature, navigating the open secret of the "glass closet" in a way that resists homo/heterosexual categorisation:

"The resistance is not a matter of airily wanting to ignore the "facts of life" in their materiality. If anything, the specificity, materiality, and variety of sexual practices, along with their diverse meanings for individual lives, can be done better justice in a context where the impoverished abstractions that claim to define sexuality can be treated as not authoritative." (2008, pxvi)

Sedgwick offsets the minoritising and universalising forces that reveal incoherences in the identity formation of individuals. Difference celebrated as a universal trait should be translated into equivalence through social contact. She states that same-sex relationships are not based on similarity, any more than cross-sex ones are:



"Yet these are the assumptions that underlie, and are in turn underwritten by, the definitional invention of "homosexuality." (Ibid., p159)

The glass closet requires attention because it is more universally experienced than the liberatory act of "coming out" pays heed. For a few, it has the fluid effect of removing sex from identity, yet it is a much more universally experienced reality that I argue resembles Latour's reassemblage of the social as a continuum of networks:

"Every encounter with a new class full of students, to say nothing of a new boss, social worker, loan officer, landlord, doctor, erects new closets whose fraught and characteristic laws... exact from at least gay people new surveys, new calculations, new draughts and requisitions of secrecy or disclosure." (Ibid., p68)

Jose Esteban Muñoz's ideas are a key reference for this research. His notion of *ephemera as evidence* (1996) supports the importance of obliquely expressed messages in forming new discursive intersubjectivities with past authors. It also relates to interpellative audition, in that one remains sensitive to reverberations of sociability rather than fixed identities or narratives:

"Leaving too much of a trace has often meant that the queer subject has left herself open for attack. Instead of being clearly available as visible evidence, queerness has instead existed as innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, and performances that are meant to be interacted with by those within its epistemological sphere—while evaporating at the touch of those who would eliminate queer possibility." (1996, p6)

Tracing ephemera is based on,

"following traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things." (Ibid., p10)

Muñoz's concept of disidentification (1999) focuses on individuals who perform queer existence inside the public sphere. Their ambivalent presences (on TV for example) become queer futurist portals for others who encounter them through "counterpublicity". Disidentification is a strategy for performing queerness within

hegemonic structures. Muñoz situates disidentificatory subjects as displaying desires that differ from an Althusserian already-there subject; thus they disidentify through interpellation with the dominant. Muñoz calls this a "third mode" that works with and against, resisting the temptations of both assimilation and counteridentification (1999, p97):

"Queers are people who have failed to turn around to the "Hey, you there!" interpellating call of heteronormativity... the simple fact is that we are continuously hailed by various ideological apparatuses that compose the state power apparatus. No one knows this better than queers who are constantly being hailed as "straight" by various institutions." (1999, p33)

This failure is seen as "tactical misrecognition" (1999, p169), and constitutes world-making performativity that Muñoz explains through Latourian hybridity:

"Latour's formulation might also give us further insight into empire's panicked response to the hybrids it continuously produces. Empire's institutions, such as colonial pedagogy, are in no small part responsible for the proliferation of hybrid identities, but it is in colonialism's very nature to delineate clearly between the West and the rest." (1999, p79)

Muñoz's concept of queer utopia (2009) looks to the past for ephemeral evidence of disidentification. He cruises the utopian notion of queerness as a condition that is "not-yet-here", and is about a changing self:

"We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine the future." (2009, p1)

Muñoz equates queerness with being lost in a way comparable to Richard Middleton's aforementioned notion of losing oneself in music:

"Queerness is illegible and therefore lost in relation to the straight mind's mapping of space... To be lost is not to hide in a closet or to perform a simple (ontological) disappearing act; it is to veer away from heterosexuality's path." (Ibid., p73)

Muñoz also advocates for approaching the odd and evasive, rather than searching for exemplars of a minoritarian identity:

"The time has come to turn to failed visionaries, oddballs, and freaks who remind queers that indeed they always live out of step with straight time." (Ibid., p149)

Sara Ahmed and Judith Halberstam represent the diversity of queer theories and their applications. Ahmed's queer phenomenology (2006) challenges whose existence phenomenology has historically served, and asks how it is queered by writers who are othered by its white-male perspective. The obliquity that Ahmed obtains helps consider sexual orientation in spatial terms amongst people and things. Queer sex and lifestyle negotiate differences rather than adhering to an identity formation that involves "same-sex" partners:

"A queer phenomenology, perhaps, might start by redirecting our attention toward different objects, those that are "less proximate" or even those that deviate or are deviant." (2006, p3)

She argues that disorientation as a queer knowledge should be celebrated: it is being out of place in situations where a defined place precedes you. We take detours, are uncertain, indirect, we improvise and remain at odds with straight time. (Ibid., p16)

Ahmed foregrounds futurity, reconsidering the present through glances to the past that reanimate the lost:

"This glance also means an openness to the future, as the imperfect translation of what is behind us." (Ibid., p178)

She points to the queerness of noticing the background; an idea that I will return to in chapter 3 concerning Sarah Kenchington and the equivalence of her caravan living with her instrument building:

"As soon as we notice the background, then objects come to life, which already makes things rather queer." (Ibid., p168)

Ahmed also references Latourian hybridity, helping to avoid a simple division of people and things:

"Agency is not "in" the body or the tool, as if they could act on their own... Agency is a matter, instead, of how bodies come into contact with objects, as a contact that is never simply between two entities (this body and this tool), as each entity is already shaped by contact with others." (Ibid., p188)

Judith Halberstam's work on queer time and place (2005) upholds queer subjects as risking an orientation outside of dominant safety nets:

"The transgender person who risks his life by passing in a small town, the subcultural musicians who risk their livelihoods by immersing themselves in nonlucrative practices... but also those people who live without financial safety nets, without homes, without steady jobs, outside the organizations of time and space that have been established for the purposes of protecting the rich few from everyone else." (2005, p10)

Halberstam posits that queerness is not merely a denial of minoritising labels but an acting out of ways of living. Resistance should not stop at labels as it,

"must produce creative new forms of being by assuming and empowering a marginal positionality." (Ibid., p53)

Halberstam also argues for respectful approaches to the lives of an obscured queer past:

"The error of the willful biographer lies in her refusal to be changed by her encounter with the ghost she chases; the method of the transgender historian must be encounter, confrontation, transformation." (Ibid., p61)

Halberstam's work around failure (2011) questions definitions of success by resisting notions of rigour and seriousness because they assert knowledge based on what is already known and suppress visionary detours (2011, p6). Halberstam calls for,

"An ambulatory journey through the unplanned, the unexpected, the improvised, and the surprising." (Ibid., p16)

Taking detours and failing to avoid distraction, confronts the difference of whom or what we study, allowing the researcher to transform themselves through a fundamentally collective pursuit:

"Practicing failure perhaps prompts us to... get distracted, to take a detour, to find a limit, to lose our way, to forget, to avoid mastery... All losers are the heirs of those who lost before them. Failure loves company." (Ibid., p121)

Queer approaches in musicology either focus on composers' "sexual orientation" or on musical expression as queer in itself. Gay and lesbian practitioners and theorists have challenged the tightly defined canon of Western music.

Philip Brett (1994) states that introducing a queer slant to any discipline infuses multiple, nonsystematic, often conflicting acts of disturbance:

" 'queering the pitch' is, after all, 'to interfere with or spoil the business'. A queer musicology will always need to nurture its unsettling qualities." (1994, p373)

Brett and Elizabeth Wood instituted lesbian and gay musicology (2006). Reading their well-known essay was a refreshing encounter with Harry Partch outside of an oft-repeated list of "experimental" composers. They list him instead, amongst practitioners that have acted out queerly. His "hobo" voices share a sentence with Elton John, The Pet Shop Boys, Pauline Oliveros, and more:

"All these—or yet other aspects of the art and self-presentation of these men and women—might be read as signs of both an accommodation to as well as subversion of the pervasive fact of the closet." (2006, p354)

Brett and Wood also state that the drive to incorporate alternative and exotic musical difference constitutes a queer expression of displacement; not simply orientalism (2006, p371).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See Brett's argument that a draw to musical performance relates to need for obliquely expressed feelings of exclusion (2006, p17).

Judith Peraino (2003) argues for queer theoretical thought around musical practice and theory. She sees identity politics' resistance of fixed assimilation as anticipated in music:

"Music is notoriously resistant to legibility, let alone monolithic signification... it is this resistance to legibility that allows for the use of music as a strategy for configuring queer subjectivity... music demarcates a space and time wherein gender and sexuality lose clear definition." (2003, p434)

Music itself is not being defined as queer, instead musical activity is seen as a Foucauldian technology of the self that enables one to think queerly,

"such that identity becomes undermined and entirely new ways of being suddenly and abruptly come into view." (2003, p457)

## 1.5 Sound-Reproduction Technology and Hauntology

*"Some very drastic remedies are called for in order to bring vitality to a body of theory that rejects investigation and a physical poetry that excludes all but purely metaphysical poets. A period of comparative anarchy, with each composer employing his own instrument, his own scale, his own forms, is very necessary for a way out of this malaise. With his compositions recorded the composer could continue to grow and develop, wasting no time on the preservation of a technique for continuous replaying, and leaving the mark of his efforts in a definite state of completion." (Partch, 2000b, p176)*

My contribution to collaborative projects involves the use of sound-reproduction technologies: recording, sampling, digital audio-editing, amplification. Harry Partch predates the now common activity of self-producing and distributing music. His personhood is not only traceable through the ephemeral evidence of

his sociability, but also as distributed through his precarious studios and compositional techniques that used recording processes.

The following scholarship supports my focus on the historiographic similarity between queer utopia and hauntological strategies in music production. Can hauntological music-making be approached through a personal epistemology of the closet?

Sound recording and distributive media like records, CDs and digital streaming can be understood as part of a chain of creative activity. David Grubbs (2014)<sup>25</sup> and Paul Gilroy (1993) support this line of thought. Grubbs states that recording, sleeve design, and distribution are a part of music-making. Everything from press releases to,

"the handwriting on the cardboard mailer... [are] part of the selfsame artistic project." (2014, pxi)

Grubb's focus is subcultural vinyl-record releases which he links to early experimentation in recording studios that liberated experimentalism from the performance rituals of elite art music. Studio-craft distinguished younger experimentalists - John Cale for example - from ubiquitous figures such as John Cage, subsuming their avant-gardism with popular culture (Ibid., p49).

Whereas Grubbs' focus is predominantly on the production of records, Gilroy sees record releases as tools for communal music-making that subsumes producers, DJs, MCs, and the dancing crowd:

"In Reggae, soul and hip-hop sub-cultures the disc which appears in the dominant culture as a fixed and final product is extended and reconstructed." (1993, p40)

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<sup>25</sup> See also John Corbett's ontology of records as a performance medium (2015, p297)

Recordings can be inherited and re-articulated in creative assemblage, allowing contemporary practitioners to encounter persons of the past and allow them to transform their own work. It is, however, crucial to honour political re-articulations rather than plundering arbitrarily. The following thinkers outline shifts in sound's social function, focussing on the prosthetic relationship between voices and bodies that came about after the invention of sound-reproduction technologies:

For Allen Weiss (2002), sound reproduction created an archival relationship to the dead as it preserved remnants of bodies and voices. The new experience of hearing the dead speak led to new narrative conceits, traceable in literature:

"Literary scenarios... no longer limited by the binary logic of life and death." (2002, p19)

This binary has always been moot; sound recording merely exposed this. Through Weiss' work one can claim that notions of humans as hybridised with technology were anticipated by sound-reproduction's preservation of performances that outlive bodies:

"Human perception [became] inextricably intertwined with artificial prosthetics." (Ibid., p101)

Jonathan Sterne (2003) cites Latour's notion of machines containing human instilled ethics, defining the gramophone as a medium assembled out of multiple technological advancements, intended to infiltrate middle-class homes as a product appealing to the social need for images of the dead (2003, p177).

Sterne analogises sound's material/temporal mediation of voices and bodies as akin to embalmment:

"The chemical transformation of the body was to have its analogue in the physical transformation of sound in the process of its recording." (Ibid., p94)



He supports my notion of interpellative audition by defining recordings as exteriorities of history, inhabited and assembled to create "audible pasts" (Ibid., p19). Recording anticipates future listeners and their appropriation of sound's social function. For Sterne, this means that recording studios - the "organizing principle of sound reproduction" - are also akin to embalment:

"Both transform the interiority of the thing (body, sound performance) in order that it might continue to perform a social function." (Ibid., p297)

Jason Stanjek and Benjamin Piekut (2010) expand on Sterne's analogy with their notion of "intermundane collaboration", in which dead singers duet with the living in a "mutually effective co-laboring" (2010, p14). They outline recording studio sessions as made up of effective elements of human/nonhuman hybrid. Thus, old recordings - including the personhoods they embalm - also have effects:

"being recorded means being enrolled in futures... Crucially, having a future means having an effect." (Ibid., p18)

The authors outline a Latourian ontology of studios, where the personhood of past and present performers are distributed through assemblages of sounds, machines, projects, commodities, rooms, acoustics, and so on. They maintain that these elements do not preexist such assemblages, but had a capacity to be mediated into them, and thus have an effect (Ibid., p18). In this formulation, even ruggedly individualist artists have their personhood distributed and mediated. Therefore, the authors claim that,

"personhood is always collaborative." (Ibid., p18)

Can not queer persons, due perhaps to their negotiations of the closet, be understood to have a consciously futurist leaning when being recorded? No fixed identity is preserved, and the not-yet-here utopias of Muñoz are arguably anticipated. My queer re-articulation of Harry Partch is reached through

interpellative audition, seeking an intersubjective encounter with an inheritance. Piekut and Stanjek's notion of distributed personhood supports this because it suggests a navigable encounter with the past resembling Halberstam's aforementioned call for confrontation and adaptation. Can this constitute a queering of hauntological practice in music? If projects assemble hybridised personhoods - including those of the dead - how can one allow them to intervene in musical principles obliquely? My answer is to apply interpellative audition to hauntological music practice,<sup>26</sup> and the following concepts are helpful in considering this as a process of navigation.

Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter (2007) attend to audition as a democratic notion of participation in architectural and virtual sound space. Their concept of "aural architects" bridges acoustics and social science, claiming a broad scope of actants that can be defined as aural architects, including anything from acousticians to auditorium seats, to the decision to lay a rug with a deadening acoustic effect.

As with ANT, aural architects are not identified through intent, as sonic effects are often unconsciously manifest and aural architects are often not people. The idea is an abstraction that allows an analysis of architectural space based on the effects of a plurality of individual agents (2007., p362). Is it not compositionist in nature to be conscious of orienting projects as an aural architect?

Richard Leppert suggests that listening to quotidian backgrounded music is to also attend to a utopian elsewhere (2005, p95). Background music has been removed from ring-fenced spaces to function as cushioning for the mundanity of

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<sup>26</sup> See chapter 4 for a clear example of this in my practice (the use of a tune from the queer record producer, Joe Meek, as an organisational principle for the musical shape of Dickie Beau's theatre show *Camera Lucida*).

commodity culture. Listening to it in this state transcends commodified individuality and addresses alternatives to hegemony. My re-articulation of Harry Partch pays attention to the background factors that were crucial for the demarcation of a rugged individualist and his works. He protected this image ambivalently to expose the faux-individuality of hegemonic systems and to expose himself as lost for the benefit of other others:

"The artist defines... the most individual of individualities, but in doing so lays claim to a subversiveness that may threaten the well-guarded boundaries of a society of other individuals whose "individuality" in fact is mass produced, and must be mass produced if the dominant ideological matrix is to perform its critically supportive role in the material economy." (Leppert, 2005, p102)

Rob Stone's writing (2015) is an example of aurally inhabiting the past in a way that he compares to Morton Feldman's hope for his durational pieces:

"He liked the idea that those who attend to artworks are the only ones in any kind of position to complete them." (2015, p4)

For Stone, sound was rendered inhabitable when music and architecture were subsumed through the invention of telephony, phonography, radio, talkies, and so on:

"Not only did architecture come to exist in relation to these other, acoustic spatialities, but, in their inhabitable state, these acoustic formations, by turns utopian and quotidian, came to take on the properties of architecture itself." (Ibid., p6)

Inhabiting aural architecture produces historical accounts that follow personal suspicions,

"dubious irresolutions, undecidability, and the utopics of intangibility, imperceptibility." (Ibid., p42).

Stone's audition attends to sound's capacity to delinquently provoke intersubjective readings of cultural artefacts. His writing demonstrates a

performative nature of audition, that responds to interpellation with a fluid orientation of personhood.<sup>27</sup> Stone listens in confluence with what he calls "aural dust":

"This is not a listening to the dust in a way that cherishes it. Nor is it a listening through the dust in a way that exhibits a kind of aural hygiene. Rather, it is a listening that establishes a dialectical, perceptual protocol whereby a subject is created that listens in both ways; producing a questioning at the site of listening to and the listening through the dust that decorates, outlines, and announces aural presence." (Ibid., p24)

As an artist who works collaboratively, using sound-reproduction technologies to assemble project specific musical principles, my intersubjective encounter with Harry Partch, through interpellative audition, has led me to a unique approach to hauntological processes in music-making. The following thinkers help to outline a socio-political terrain for "hauntological music" as a subcultural genre.

Derrida's hauntology has been used to understand and name a genre of music that samples and rearranges sound matter from the musical past. It foregrounds the surface noise of both sound-reproduction technologies and dated sonic signatures. The resulting music challenges contemporary hegemony, and re-articulates past hopes for the future.

Ian Penman was the first to relate Derrida's hauntology to the creative use of technology in music production (1998). In Dub music, he sees artists as foregrounding the audible mediations of technology and utilising recordings as futurist, communal entities:

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<sup>27</sup> Stone explicitly references interpellation as liberatory when one pays specific attention to wayward sound as "a sense of the configuration of space through a sensation of being called or hailed by one's given cultural environment. It is marked by a radical lack of doubt, in those moments of being addressed by a culture, that the culture means *you*. Not someone else; you. Only you." (Stone, 2015, p218)

"Recording was turned inside out for us to hear and exult in; when we had been used to the 're' of recording being suppressed, recessed, as though it really were just a re-presentation of something that already existed." (1998, p360)

Mark Fisher<sup>28</sup> (2014) has unpacked Penman's suggestion and addressed a subculture of practitioners producing "hauntological music" as a genre:

"There is an implicit acknowledgement that the hopes created by postwar electronica or by the euphoric dance music of the 1990s have evaporated—not only has the future not arrived, it no longer seems possible. Yet at the same time, the music constitutes a refusal to give up on the desire for the future." (2014, p21)

The historiographic parallels between this notion and the queer theory I have outlined are inescapable. Hauntological process listens to the past for evidence of anticipated futures, lacking in present hegemony.<sup>29</sup> It then assembles hope for the future out of sonic surfaces. For Fisher, this is no retrograde abandonment of progress but rather,

"a refusal to adjust to what current conditions call 'reality'—even if the cost of that refusal is that you feel like an outcast in your own time." (Ibid., p24)

This refusal relates to my reading of Harry Partch as having protected a futurist message through the creation of a world at odds with his present. Partch's life-work contained more than musical sounds, and Fisher states that factors around

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<sup>28</sup> I will respond to Fisher's contribution. The following writers also address hauntology in music, but none have re-articulated the idea like Fisher. Simon Reynolds sees hauntological practice as uncovering alternative "paths not taken" to dominant narratives (2011, p361). Adam Harper states that it goes beyond "purely sonic interests" and "attests to previously unappreciated musical objects." (2011, p148). Eldritch Priest claims the genre "aims to disfigure without obliterating samples, timbres, and impressions noticeably culled from a musical past that never was." (2013, p158). Isabella von Elferen and Jeffrey A. Weinstock celebrate the hauntological in goth subculture. "The continuously changing assemblage of ghostly actors is an intrinsic part of any sonic network. Absently present whenever music is sung, played, or reproduced, it is a shadow network existing only in the sonic domain." (2016, p61).

<sup>29</sup> See Fisher's *Capitalist Realism* (2009) for an explication of the evasiveness of contemporary hegemony.

hauntological music - fashion and cover art - are also suggestive of other worlds (Ibid., p27).

Fisher links hauntological music to the temporality of Afrofuturism (2013), stating that white culture cannot escape the temporal disjunctions of the Afrodiasporic:

"It's no accident that sonic hauntology begins with the Afrofuturist sonic sciences of dub and hip-hop, for time being out of joint<sup>30</sup> is the defining feature of the Black Atlantic experience." (2013, p50)

He criticises record production that equates authenticity to a recordings "liveness", resulting in the erasure of the condition of recording. He states that this is actively reversed in the afrological mode of dub (Ibid., p44). Dub foregrounds surface noise and studio-craft and Fisher aligns this with Derrida's offering of hauntology as a means for countering postmodernity as an end of history:

"Postmodernity screens out the spectrality, naturalising the uncanniness of the recording apparatuses. Hauntology restores the uncanniness of recording by making the recorded surface audible again." (Ibid., p44)

Equivalent to Stone's aural dust, Fisher terms hauntology's mode of audition the "metaphysics of crackle". He defines hauntological music practice as transcending a retro-fetish regurgitation of the past, and it could be said that it meets a Derridean demand to address a recording surface's injunction to reassert its fate:

"The metaphysics of crackle is about dyschronia and disembodiment. Crackle unsettles the very distinction between surface and depth, between background and foreground. In sonic hauntology, we *hear* that time is out of joint." (Ibid., p48)

We hear a temporal disjunction (recording as revenant) and an ontological one (surface noise as present-absence). Through sampling and assemblage, hauntology becomes a countercultural expression, insisting,

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<sup>30</sup> Fisher is referring here to Derrida's use of Hamlet's exclamation that "the time is out of joint". Hamlet's complaint is not *that* time is unhinged but that *he* has inherited the demand to straighten it. The queerness of this is staggering.

"that there are futures beyond postmodernity's terminal time... we must listen for the relics of the future in the unactivated potentials of the past." (Ibid., p53)

Queer compositionism as a mode of audition and assemblage, hears asynchrony with an ambivalent attitude toward straightening it. Harry Partch is an effective catalyst for this because his legacy resists ubiquity. One can either recreate a portion of his cumbersome world and continue the specifics of his research, or meet his contradictions intersubjectively, find one's strategy for being out of joint with him, and ultimately replace him with a project-specific catalyst.

Another of Fisher's ideas helps reconsider Partch's outsiderism, not as rugged individualism, but as a portal to future possibility. Fisher's descriptions of weirdness (2016), hint at a link between hauntology and the alternative worlds of utopian outsiderism:

"It is the irruption into this world of something from outside which is the marker of the weird." (2016, p21)

Weirdness carries the possibility of egress; thus Partch's lost musicians<sup>31</sup>, then and now, encounter his world as a portal to explore outside of the mundane. His weirdness destabilises hegemony and resists interpellation:

"Louis Althusser, emphasizing the way in which the human being is never merely a biological creature, refers to the virtual cultural infrastructure as ideology, and argues that it is not possible to live outside it." (Ibid., p97)

Weirdness functions like a portal for escaping the inadequate universal subjectivities of interpellation. Harry Partch should not be labelled with the fixed identity "outsider" but encountered as a portal for going outside and making queerness.

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<sup>31</sup> Partch referred to the musicians he worked with as "lost" because they had partly deviated from conventional training in order to arrive at his door.

The following chapter will outline my encounter with Partchean scholarship. Can a hauntological appraisal of his whole life as a musical work render his individuality as a portal for lost musicians? Through a reading based on interpellative audition, it is possible to pay attention to his resisting of normative inertia as an oblique expression of his lifelong negotiation of the closet. Instead of conjuring up fixed images of outsiders, can we not see the glass closet as something to inhabit and engage with for the sake of queer futurist, dynamic universalism?



## Chapter 2

### Harry Partch as Queer Composer

*"[Partch] designed and built an orchestra of... instruments for his own use. The training... of performers, the maintenance and carrying about of his instruments, the persuading of people that so unconventional a project is worth so much effort... not to speak of the theoretical research, the design and building of instruments, and the composing itself—all these constitute a monumental life work... Partch was determined to get this kind of music out of the limbo of theorizing, and he did it." (Johnston, 2006, p112)*

...

*"Partch... forged an independent path, eyeing with suspicion and even paranoia all those belonging to the establishment. He indicted the European concert tradition on socioeconomic, regional, sexual, and aesthetic grounds." (Yang, 2008, p53)*

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines my journey through the scholarship around Harry Partch, in an attempt to translate an encounter with his work into a point of departure for my queer orientation of collaborative performance work. My interpretation of his legacy honours the role of his author function in my approach to practice, without conjuring a man-and-his-works narrative that would undermine a queer sensibility.

Ben Johnston saw Partch's significant contributions to music-making as pre-compositional. Johnston has contributed significantly to the continuation and expansion of Partch's use of just-intonation; yet to fully honour Partch's contributions one must reject the distinction between composing and the pre-compositional.<sup>32</sup> Partch was a composer, and a queer one.

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<sup>32</sup> See Vadim Keylin (2015), who champions Partch as a pioneer of sound sculpture.

I will begin with his posthumous legacy as a maverick pioneer of microtonal music. A queering of this pitch aims to liberate his creative example from a straightforwardly canonical position. It is necessary to trouble the notion that Partch's work merely added tones and instruments in order to rectify the arbitrary limitation of the tempered scale.

Partch lived out a paradox, in that his creation is an idiosyncratic version of the hegemonic institution of Western concert music that he accused of dampening difference. From a queer perspective, with a sensibility for the negotiations of the closet, Partch's paradox can be recognised as a futurist message to create music on your own terms. His practice is not a straight opposition to norms and did not happen entirely outside of the academy. It disidentified (Muñoz 1999) with the dominant through a parodic repetition of the ritual structures of concert music. His repetition added colour, intuition, individuality, foregrounded personhood, communality, transience, volatility, humour, and charm.

No detailed study of Partch's potential queer aesthetic has been undertaken, and my orientation of the existing literature can only speculate on the need of one. I use Philip Blackburn and Mina Yang's suggestions of Partch's queerness, as the lens for my reading of a vital resurgence in Partch scholarship that points to his lifelong itinerancy as a commitment to a grandly assembled musical work.

This recent scholarship supports my conviction that Partch's queer futurity lies in the distribution of his personhood through a life of musical assemblage. It also helps to rearticulate Partch's volatility toward collaborators and competitors as a strategy that preserved his transience and creative output as expressions of the closet. These expressions reflect his misrecognition of the interpellations of

institutionalised music, and his refusal to be assimilated into the inertia of conventional norms.

It can be argued that these expressions were futurist in sentiment and that Partch would be sympathetic to Jose Muñoz's notion of queerness as a condition of not-yet-here subjectivity. This is why this thesis opens with Partch's celebration of the sentiment, "what is not can yet become".

A comparison of Partch's foregrounded sociability with John Cage's evasion of authorship will help support this argument and frame its significance in contrast to Cageian ubiquity.

This chapter has two aims. The first is to attain a balance of the hauntological present-absence of Partch in this research. I will demonstrate a background of rigour in my approach to him, while also denying his participation as a fixed identity or "influence". The second aim is to reach a point of departure from any explicit reference to Partch in my orientation of practice. I recognise queer compositionism in his approach to assembling musical principles that I take as a catalyst for my own.

In each of the projects outlined in chapters 3 and 4, I replace Partch with a queering agent sourced within the project itself. This is how I understand Partch as haunting my orientation of collaboration: he is never conjured as an explicit reference but drives a compositionism that thrives in the intuitive discovery of unexpected chains of form and content (Latour, 1999). Thus, I apply a queer compositionism that assembles the musical principles of each project, based on a sensibility acquired through the shifting and ambivalent negotiations of the closet. It is through my confluence with Partch that I discovered the importance of this notion, and my approach to practice can be seen as an effect of his past creativity.

Benjamin Piekut offers insight into a young Iggy Pop's encounter with Partch that resembles my own. Piekut's anecdote outlines his notion of *drift*; networks of action, in which musical works betray a composer's intentions, by triggering actual effects in the world. Partch's compositionism - and the scattered evidence of it - affects a broad spectrum of experimentalism that need not be attributed to the "influence" of his catalogue of works but coincides with his wish to lead by example:

*"The work is not offered as a basis for a substitute tyranny, the grooving of music and musical theory into another set of conventions. What I do hope for is to stimulate creative work by example... to leave all others to individual if not idiosyncratic choice."* (Partch, 1974, pxviii)

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*"Iggy Pop did not learn from Harry Partch by studying scores with the master; instead, it was a photo of the composer's fantastical cloud-chamber bowls on the back of his *Plectra and Percussion Dances LP* that set the young tinkerer to work on his own new instruments."* (Piekut, 2014b, p200)

## 2.2 Partch's Posthumous Legacy

Much musicological work around Partch adopts his public-relations mythology, whereby he becomes cemented as an outsider "rugged individualist" devoted to an ever-growing, beautifully inspiring, but impenetrable musical fortress.

However, the closer one looks the clearer it becomes that Partch's contradictions and the way his music is inextricably bound to his personhood obstructs the possibility of a fixed identity behind them.

His canonical legacy, until recently, can be split into preservation and departure camps, and those who have followed their own paths are most relevant here.

Kyle Gann supports this, stating that Partch's ideas need not be limited to microtonal music and that his work around corporeality and the re-fusing of music to speech has taken effect elsewhere:

"Robert Ashley and Mikel Rouse wed vernacular phrases to music in ways that I think would have tickled Partch... Laurie Anderson, Meredith Monk, Laetitia de Compiegne Sonami, Brenda Hutchinson... all these women... come closer to the effect Partch was seeking than any of the tuning purists." (2006, p191)

Gann posits that maverick-like mythology is futile given the pluralistic nature of contemporary music-making, arguing that practitioners like Partch heralded this plurality:

"Once we fully acknowledge the pluralism narrative, the maverick myth fades to redundant insignificance." (2008, p155)

A number of Partch's closest collaborators have "followed" him by going it alone.

For example, ten years after Partch's death Ben Johnston stated,

"I will not identify myself with Harry Partch... he paid me a compliment I did not recognize as such. He said I would never be a follower of his... I was too much like him and I would have to find my own way." (1984, p232)

Whereas Johnston explored just intonation with conventional Western instruments, another collaborator, David Dunn, departed further:

"The only way that I could be authentically influenced by him was by making the choice to strike out on my own... so much of what I do today strikes out beyond the boundaries of music per se." (1989, p96)

Dunn works across disciplines, which could be a result of Partch's oblique negotiation of resources within the university system. He was often situated outside of music departments, likely sparking his anti-establishmentarianism.<sup>33</sup>

Dunn states that,

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<sup>33</sup> See Thomas McGeary's introduction to *Bitter Music* for further deliberation on this (2000, pxxiii)

"his work was supported by linguistic departments, engineering departments, et cetera... For the most part, Harry supported himself his entire life doing menial work... So he really didn't have a support system and he really didn't want one if it meant compromising." (Ibid., p96)

Johnston and Dunn both ceased performing Partch's works but experienced his translation of his own personhood into instruments and a musical world. As Philip Blackburn states,

"The instruments and music were (largely-unconsciously) constructed around the model of [Partch's] own body, like his intoning came from his own melodious speaking voice. Anyone learning to play one of the instruments... is therefore taking on his unique physiology." (1997, p463)

Bob Gilmore's biography describes the obstructive demands that present themselves in any preservation or performance of Partch's work:

"The sum total of these demands... is a life's work that presents an enormous problem of access. Rarely has a body of music been so closely bound... to its creator." (1998, p4)

Gilmore writes of the ghostly way in which these obstructions are traceable back to Partch. Examples are instrument construction, maintenance, and negotiation of idiosyncratic tablature:

"Inevitably, attention and interest is drawn to the man behind this phenomenon, whose ghostly presence draws on and compels." (Ibid., p8)

Consequently, Partch is rarely encountered through performances of his work. More often, his presence arrives mediated - as it did for Iggy Pop - through pictures, videos and record sleeves. His personhood is mediated through these elements, and toward future wayward experimentation.

Partch refused to label his works experimental, saying that experimentation only happened in his studio. If most encounters of him are through recordings and photographs of his process, is this not mediated contact with his experimentalism?

Confluence with Partch, like my own or Iggy Pop's, foregrounds the experimentalism of his whole life's work, the intent of which was to transcend the mundanity of his present for the sake of a universality based on differences.

Kenneth Gaburo has posited the significance of change as a constant factor in Partch's creativity:

"His ambiguities are not impossibilities, but *actual* difficulties to be resolved in the light of a desire for change... But from what, and by whom? The 'what' is change from mundane, status-quo existence; the whom is each of us." (2000, p169)

Partch controlled all aspects of his art, and the everyday negotiation of his instruments and work/living spaces can be seen as a part of his compositionist practice; as can his recording processes and self-distribution of his music on record.<sup>34</sup> Michael Broyles, although his upholding of a "maverick tradition" is limiting,<sup>35</sup> defines Partch's work as multi-disciplinary. Stating as a result, that,

"Music is now perceived as part of a broader art, one that fuses the aural and visual and sometimes the verbal so completely that we can no longer speak of each in isolation." (2004, p335)

Partch dedicated his life to a musical practice that refused assimilation to the Eurological (Lewis, 1996) abstraction of music from its fundamental connection to speech and the body. The larger his band of instruments and ensemble of lost musicians became, the more paradoxical his output was: his instruments are cumbersome and heavy; his musical system a labyrinth; and both require

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<sup>34</sup> John Corbett has stated the importance of Partch's DIY record company: "Before the 1950s, artist-owned record companies were unheard of, but Sun Ra pioneered the idea along with... Charles Mingus and Max Roach's Debut label and classical composer Harry Partch's Gate 5." (2015, p157)

<sup>35</sup> Not to reject the study, which often transcends its framing. For an example of limiting Partch to a fixed notion of outsiderism, see Irwin Chusid's *Songs in the key of Z* (2000).

initiation. Partch created one of the most adorned self-constructed prisons in music history.

In Richard Powers' 2014 novel *Orfeo*,<sup>36</sup> his protagonist makes a pilgrimage to find the inscriptions on a roadside barrier that Partch based a piece around.<sup>37</sup> Powers' character concludes that Partch was mistaken in replacing the tempered scale with 43 pitches:

"The man was wrong ... in thinking that forty-three pitches put you any closer to infinity than twelve." (2014, p355)

This as a misconception of Partch's intent, as expansionist, avant-garde frontiersmanship was antithetical to his agenda: Partch did not add to, nor negate any system. The cumbersome nature of his life's work, and its presentation of barriers closely tied to his personhood constitute a demand for creative anarchy in which idiosyncrasy feeds into a universal rejection of arbitrary limitations.<sup>38</sup>

Partch foregrounded his weird personhood as a call to arms.

Powers expands his notion of the mistaken "extra" notes through the analogy of piano keys as prison bars:

"Those twelve repeating black and white prison bars." (Ibid., p368)

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<sup>36</sup> See Ben De Bruyn's Latourian analysis of the novel, that sees listening as a mode that addresses our hybridity with a world of human and nonhuman actants: "By listening more closely, the characters... become newly aware of the ties that bind them to the natural world." (2016, p377)

<sup>37</sup> *Barstow: Eight Hitchhikers' Inscriptions* (1941 / 1954 / 1967). One of a collection of pieces called *The Wayward*, based on Partch's notations of spoken texts, inscriptions, and experiences during his time on the road.

<sup>38</sup> Graham Raulerson states that Partch's stance suggests an absorption of anarcho-syndicalism. I am thankful for his email correspondence and clarification that, "Partch equates anarchy with a dramatic cleansing of the slate, a grand leveling of artificial restrictions and a restoration of art to its primitive, prehistoric state of pure creation. Like the anarcho-syndicalist Wobblies who so heavily influenced hobo culture, Partch is calling for a sort of general strike." (Raulerson 2018, pers. comm., 12 March)



True enough, Partch inscribed barriers against future iterations of his work, but the prison bars are not a pioneer's oversight; they are his version of disidentification. The twelve prison bars of the tempered scale represent interpellation into an inadequate subjectivity, and Partch's parodic version of this is a glaring manifestation of the closet.

How does a queer musician relate to Harry Partch over forty years after his death? Iggy Pop had no access to Partch's tools, scores, or performances of his works; he just tinkered on his own. Did Partch knowingly instigate these barriers to steer future musicians away from him? Are they a subversive reflection of the hegemonic structures that resisted his difference?

Partch's instrumentarium is cumbersome and his micro-tonal system a labyrinth, but this should not be mistaken as a failed attempt at frontiersmanship. From within Partch's musical world, the undertaking of preserving his work is likely fraught with conflict and challenges. Indeed, figure 1 shows the sheer scale of creating productions of his work. I visited a rehearsal of Ensemble Musikfabrik in Cologne - who have a full set of replica instruments - and I had a strong sense of the immense challenge of this.

In contrast, from outside of Partch's world, his barriers are instructive. Was he protecting a futurist message? Was he displaying a provocative disidentification with the hegemony that failed to accommodate him?

Championing Partch's actions as an example for future practitioners, allows his author function to obliquely intervene in their experimentation. In Benjamin Piekut's example, Iggy Pop's tinkering mediates depictions of Partch's glass

chamber bowls. The interpellation of Partch's curious charm implies a demand to



listen out for one's own way.

**Figure 1:** Ensemble Musikfabrik rehearsal in Cologne, Germany. Replica instruments built by Thomas Meixner.

### 2.3 Partch as Queer

Philip Blackburn, a composer who published the Harry Partch archives, proposed that Partch's queerness be taken seriously. I will introduce Blackburn's postulate, and also add Mina Yang's connection of Partch's queerness to his orientalism.<sup>39</sup> Blackburn and Yang's recognition of Partch's queerness frame my approach to a recent "second wave" of Partch scholarship.

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<sup>39</sup> Using Edward Said's definition of orientalism, but categorising Partch within J.J Clarke's notion of oriental enlightenment (1997), where orientalist encounters can undermine Western norms: "orientalism assumes a countercultural, counter-hegemonic role." (Yang, 2008, p35)

Blackburn points to the potential queer motivation behind Partch's years as a transient during the Great Depression:

"Hitchhiking lore is closely associated with Queer culture and it is no stretch of the imagination to see Partch's chosen life on the road as a sexual as well as musical quest for survival... a central metaphor of Partch's life was 'removing the musicians from the orchestra pit', elevating the second-class citizens to the stage, dignifying the down-trodden. Rather than constraining him as a 'gay composer', perhaps we should consider him... a worker for justice who strove for equality among the disciplines." (1997, p459)

Blackburn extends the queerness of Partch's transient years to the whole of his creative output and sociability. Although he suggests that Partch's volatility may have been the result of syphilis, I add the conviction that his cantankerous sociability was part of a protectionism that sought to preserve a portal of queer utopianism. Blackburn hints at this line of thinking, writing that in Partch's world,

"a Queer subtext and sensibility loiters in the shadows. His public rage at the musical and cultural injustices of the Twentieth Century must have been fueled by the knowledge that his private life also removed him from the mainstream." (Ibid., p459)

Mina Yang addresses Partch's queerness in the context of the "Transpacific Gaze". She links Californian orientalist experimentalism with a queer desire for alterity, stating that engaging with racial and cultural difference was suggestive of alternative definitions of self. She outlines Partch's career as an,

"illuminating example of the intersection of Californian exceptionalism, orientalism, and queer identification." (2008, p53)

Yang states that Partch's imagination of the East<sup>40</sup> was more nuanced than merely "the West's other". His sense of displacement from heterosexual hegemony would have led to the attraction of Greek drama and Japanese Noh theatre as,

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<sup>40</sup> See Will Salmon's work on Partch's use of Japanese Noh theatre (1984); also S. Andrew Granade's study of Partch's use of Chinese music (2010).

"alternatives, egresses from the modern Western culture that he felt was so stifling." (Ibid., p56)

Partch made no explicit challenge to the East/West binary, as he merely imagined an orient rather than encountering one. Nevertheless, he created a world that was bewildering to anyone unaccustomed to it, and I understand this as a demand for encounter in itself. However, it is crucial to acknowledge Partch's privilege that meant he could choose a precarious life. Yang states,

"The Californian experimentalists ultimately did not escape the larger contradiction of a society that stood to gain enormously from propagating the myth of cultural pluralism but came up short in actually empowering minority communities or integrating nonwhites." (Ibid., p59)

These two appeals to Partch's queerness need to be taken seriously. They assist my reading of recent scholarship that foregrounds Partch's peripatetic life as symbiotic with his music-making. I recognise the importance of Partch's sociability and how his personhood - rather than merely his ego - is distributed through all aspects of his life's work.

## **2.4 Recent Partch Scholarship**

I understand Partch's uptake of outsider labels as ambivalent. Rather than as mere egocentric mythologising, I imagine that he was isolating a queer futurist message; a portal through which one can re-articulate his vision of a world that, in his lifetime, was not-yet-there.

Andrew Granade's work around Partch as a "Hobo Composer" hints at this. He questions the term maverick, for example, stating that Partch engaged in many institutionalised processes:

"An attempt to secure a Guggenheim grant during the 1930s and 40s produces a slightly different view of the composer, one that threatens to shatter the crystalline image of the Maverick." (2012, p3)

Granade resists a fixed identity for Partch, knowing that he had a choice in how he presented himself. I read Granade as following Derrida's injunction to inherit through confluence, rather than conjuring up reiterations. Recent Partch scholarship is beginning to do this, in that his whole life and the work that shaped it, is being addressed as a kind of Gesamtkunstwerk.

Granade (2014) re-evaluates Partch's work by focussing on the use of hobo-lore in his self-mythologising:

"We may wonder why Partch would wish to ally himself with the hobo, often understood today to be a dirty, poor, good-for-nothing, begging vagrant... But popular mythology and early twentieth century literature portrayed the hobo differently... He was idolized as an idealistic dreamer." (2014, p3)

Granade claims that Partch's use of hobo-lore dispelled the less romanticised, but equally applicable fact, that he was an economic migrant during the Depression:

"In order to win acceptance he purposefully foregrounded an outsider figure, crafting the image that dogged him for the rest of his life." (Ibid., p260)

He argues that Partch's time as a transient cemented his determination to reintegrate music with the intonement of speech. This led to a life's work with what Granade calls a "documentary perspective", in that exotic references shifted his work conceptually rather than decorating it. Through this perspective, Granade contextualises Partch within a cross-disciplinary tradition including Dorothea Lang, Woody Guthrie, and John Steinbeck; thus liberating his legacy from music and Californian experimentalism:

"his music... existed somewhere between speech and song, a transformation that places it firmly within the documentary imagination." (Ibid., p32)

The notion of a documentary perspective can be applied to everything Partch assembled into his work. He never fully assimilated anything, allowing both his overarching ideals and the elements he assembled to translate each other into a radically new form.

Jake Johnson and Graham Raulerson have also significantly reinvigorated the scope of Partch's contemporary relevance. Raulerson challenges the isolation of Partch's "hobo years" as a period of creative inactivity, challenging Bob Gilmore's biographical conclusions in this respect:

"Gilmore's...conclusion that Partch's status as a "hobo composer" is a "misconception" because Partch did very little composing "when he was a hobo" greatly oversimplifies the extent to which hobo culture had a deep and enduring impact on Partch's thinking and fundamentally misunderstands the fluid basis of hobo ontology." (Raulerson, 2011, p95)

Johnson speculates that Partch expressed a bi-locational identity throughout his life as a musical work. The superimposition of ancient Greek modes onto his contemporary America is an example, but the notion also applies directly to his personhood. In an episode late in Partch's life, Stephen Pouliot<sup>41</sup> overheard Partch arguing with himself in the middle of the night using two distinct voices. For Johnson, this opens up,

"a world of wonderment and bewilderment, one demanding explanation beyond the scope of mental health diagnoses." (2015, p164)

Johnson attributes a bi-locality to Partch and his music, through which he superimposed his interpretations of transient, ancient, exotic, and indigenous times and places, onto the hegemonic heteronormativity of his contemporaneous North America. This hints at a queer Partch who assembled disparate times, ideas,

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<sup>41</sup> Pouliot directed a documentary about Partch shortly before the composers' death: *The Dreamer That Remains: A Portrait of Harry Partch* (1973).

forms and materials, in order to express disorientation and disdain for straight time. He was circumventing the oppressions of normative interpellation while foregrounding his personhood as an example for others. Johnson's focus is comparable to Jose Muñoz's (1996) advocacy of ephemera as evidence:

"Partch's sense of bilocation seems but a fanciful continuation of everyday hobo existence. Instead of assembling refuse scraps of cloth, paper, twine, and a myriad of other found material for clothing, Partch donned his own assemblage of disparate times, places, and ancient world views he felt were similarly discarded and equally undervalued by the mainstream musical society." (Johnson, 2015, p169)

Through this lens, Johnson defines Partch's musical world as a,

"mid-twentieth-century version of *Gesamtkunstwerk*." (Ibid., p170)

Johnson's examples of Partch's assembled references include his likely contact with the Yaqui community in his youth and his lifelong obsession with ancient Greek drama. He hints at the fluidity of these sources, which helps to undermine the durability of the outsider labels that Partch adopted during his life.

For Johnson, it is important to note Partch's exposure to Yaqui indigenous people when considering his personhood. Partch was a pluralist, and Johnson points to the fluidity found in the cultures that he was attracted to:

"Specifically, the "two-spirit" tradition of some Native American cultures... recognizes the presence of two competing spirits within certain individuals... [and] the accepted practice of pederasty in ancient Greece also acknowledged... that sexual identity was less a label than an act of sexuality itself." (Ibid., p172)

From my perspective, this observation exposes Partch's *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a portal to a queer utopia of universal differences. I refute the label "closeted homosexual" because it eradicates the possibility that his life's work is an expression of his knowledge of the closet. To come into confluence with Partch is

to encounter this Gesamtkunstwerk as an inhabitable mediation of his personhood; not a catalogue of works through which one can "out" the composer. Partch's whole life was transient, with a period of active hobodom in his 20s and 30s. In his multi-media travel journal *Bitter Music*, sexual acts between men are implied, but this is no cue to assign sexuality. Johnson's notion of Partch's creations as an assembled Gesamtkunstwerk provides the wide lens required to re-articulate Partch's queer personhood that has been obscured behind a narrative of rugged individualism.

Raulerson's work around hobodom focusses on the finer details of how Partch's hobo ethos is mediated into his assemblage practice. He hints at Partch's whole life as a work that makes up the Gesamtkunstwerk suggested by Johnson. Raulerson rallies against the idea that Partch's "hobo years" are isolatable from the creativity they spawned:

"Instead his life can be best viewed from a hobo-centric perspective: his youth comprised proto-hobo wandering that took full shape when he began riding the rails, and his "post-hobo" decades were not a rejection of the hobo lifestyle, but its adaptation to Partch's individual ambitions." (2011, p13)

Raulerson focusses on Partch as a practitioner of hobo bricolage, viewing his entire creative output and approach to life as driven by a hobo ethos. This counters the tendency to isolate the significance of Partch's hobodom to a collection of his works that reference it directly:

"Hoboes tend to locate value in objects and concepts first according to their potential utility... especially in combination with other elements. Hoboist bricolage is typically accomplished with a certain irreverent flair, expressing a contrarian impulse that underlies most hobo activity." (2017, p453)

Hoboes hold onto non-hierarchical notions of time and space, and also take pride in the idiosyncratic assemblage of disparate elements to create physical solutions



for specific needs. This ongoing reassemblage echoes the negotiations of the closet: through bricolage, individual components are not assimilated to fixed arrangements but translated by others in the assemblage. In other words, they retain traces of their commonly understood utility, while also expressing utopian alternatives.

An example of this in Partch's *Gesamtkunstwerk* is the intoning of overheard hobo-speech into his compositions. Partch does not merely assimilate speech into his music, because voices are mediated through his own distinctly melodious and rhythmic voice and scored for the instruments created to reproduce it. The result can be said to be hauntological, as Partch avoids the appearance of a fixed hobo identity by re-articulating his collected voices into an expression of his queer take on them.

My argument here, and Raulerson's work supports this, is that Partch purposefully kept his hobo references evasive. The insider codes of hoboism maintain a loose set of communal rules that protect idiosyncrasies from the normalising of mainstream minoritising categories. Perhaps Partch purposefully mediated his experience of hobodom into an evasive and ghostly element of his compositions, knowing that fixed notions of hobo identity are futile.

John Lennon criticises Partch's composition *U.S. Highball* (1958), claiming that his characterisation of hobo is inauthentic. I disagree, yet am still thankful for the hauntological nature of Lennon's analysis:

"The composition loses the quality of a transcript of authentic hobo life. Instead, an imaginary Hobo appears like a ghost through the musical intonations. Geographic locations start shimmering; the places are somewhat familiar but just slightly off... There is mistiness to the words sung throughout the composition, and, as a listener, it is impossible to separate the snippets of the

hobo conversation that Partch copied down in his notebooks from his artistic manipulation of them." (Lennon, 2014, p173)

The evasiveness that Lennon has experienced, along with Partch's apparent refusal to exorcise the appearance of an authentic other, can be seen as the result of the queer compositionism I am trying to encounter in Partch's *Gesamtkunstwerk*. For Raulerson, hobo bricolage is the adaptation and reassemblage of mainstream society's refuse, and I see this as a compositionist notion:

"Assessing the value of an object or concept focuses on the variety of its possible uses... This root-level pragmatism requires a keen eye for the unnoticed as well as a flexibility of imagination that is relatively rare among societal insiders..." (2011, p26)

Raulerson points out that this notion of bricolage is extendable to the whole of hobo existence, especially through echoes of anarcho-syndicalism adopted from the Industrial Workers of the World movement in early twentieth-century America:

"Power is concentrated at the local level in the hands of workers councils, with higher levels of government coming into existence only temporarily in order to achieve a specific goal. This bricolage-driven form of governance parallels that of the hobo community, which largely avoids investing long-term power in individuals." (2017, p453)

Anarcho-syndicalism counters the possibility of an owner class retaining power through the division of workers across specialisms. The radicalism - and this is what Partch carried into his life and work - is that individual action can express idiosyncrasy in the name of universal difference while formally rejecting hierarchical notions of progress.

Raulerson recognises this politics in Partch's use of bricolage and understands his uptake of rugged individualism as part of his sense of the communal as assembled difference:

"only by pooling human and material resources can a community provide the security from which individuality can be expressed." (2017, p454)

There can be no essentialist definition for a set of vehemently individualistic people who support each other's determinations through the continuous translation of difference into equivalence. The individualist expressions of each person (Partch's idiosyncratic tablature for example) contribute to a potpourri that evades any minoritarian identity.

In this respect, the inner workings of Partch's Gesamtkunstwerk are not to be understood, defined, or attached to any sense of grounded authenticity. In Mark Fisher's terms, Partch's offering can be seen as weird and constitutes a portal to alternative socialities. It haunts from outside customary channels, and we must reorient ourselves to navigate it.

This demand for reorientation is the form of encounter that I claim Partch inscribed into his Gesamtkunstwerk. The barriers he set up to block faithful repetitions of works deeply connected to his personhood, make up a coded message to assemble one's own expressions of estrangement, and it is from this point of departure that I claim Partch as a catalyst for queer compositionism.

"Partch encouraged a loose network of individually determined musical approaches, each remaining faithful to the local conditions and goals of its creation... this bottom-up, anti-hierarchical, anti-progressive version of art is driven by communally minded, radical individualism." (Raulerson, 2011, p142 & 144)

## **2.5 Partch as Queer Compositionist**

No study exists that enquires into Partch's queerness and its translation into his life as a musical work. Granade, Johnson, and Raulerson have opened up the wide lens required to speculate that his whole life-work continuum was a conscious

approximation of a Gesamtkunstwerk, and I wish to speculate further as to whether it obliquely expresses his negotiations of the closet.

Can Partch's sociability be understood as a protection of a queer futurist message that links his estranged personhood to this Gesamtkunstwerk? Any dissipation of this message in his lifetime would have obscured the links between his work and personhood that I claim express a disidentification with hegemonic norms. It follows that Partch's sabotage of collaborations can be understood as part of his protection of this message.<sup>42</sup> This also applies to his behaviour of becoming distinctly volatile and self-deprecating whenever third-party support began to give him stability.

It is tempting to feel anguish for Partch's missed uptake of a host of collaborations and support networks that would have offered "exposure" and "progression" for his works. However, it would be mistaken to reduce Partch's volatility to egocentric inflexibility or neurotic isolationism. Why not embrace his transient cantankerousness? His sociability acted out a spiky evasiveness that camouflaged the preservation of what he privately understood as an assembled Gesamtkunstwerk in which his personhood was subsumed. His short-term living arrangements, makeshift recording studios, polemical writing, shifting cohort of apprentices, cumbersome instruments, etc., form one compositionist whole. His musical fabric<sup>43</sup> is a mediation of his intoned voice and, in turn, his instruments are a physical manifestation of the fabric. And, as Philip Blackburn states, the instruments are also a mediation of his body as the player.

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<sup>42</sup> Although his work risks the flattening out of Partch's contradictions, I acknowledge Brian Harlan's careful bracketing of Partch's life and music within the concept of "one voice". For Harlan, Partch used just intonation to incorporate individual creativity and intuition into his works, in the hope that others would register it and follow his example (2008, p35).

<sup>43</sup> See Bob Gilmore (1995b) for an outline of this metaphor in relation to Partch's microtonal system.

It is also apparent that many rhythmic and melodic refrains in Partch's works for performance are the result of what his instruments offered him through haptic intuition: each instrument has a distinct voice and motifs that he would identify through experimentation and assemble into works.

Partch did not accomplish his aims alone and took on a shifting network of apprentices to maintain and play his instruments. He called these participants "lost musicians", and as with the objects he assembled into his world, their presence obliquely foregrounds their arrival from elsewhere. This contrasts with the Western concert tradition, in which standardised technical perfection eradicates differences and renders all individuals replaceable.

Partch resented collaborators operating outside the territory of his creation, perhaps because it obscured the clarity of the self-contained compositionist assemblage he nurtured. His sabotage of collaborations<sup>44</sup> can be seen as a wish to maintain clarity around how the people and things within his world came into oblique relation with it. Partch filtered out potential disruptions of this clarity, using his volatile sociability to territorialise the specificity of his creation.

Partch's significance for queer orientations of collaborative practice is this refusal to be assimilated to anything other than the idiosyncratic music and life that his cumbersome Gesamtkunstwerk demanded of him.

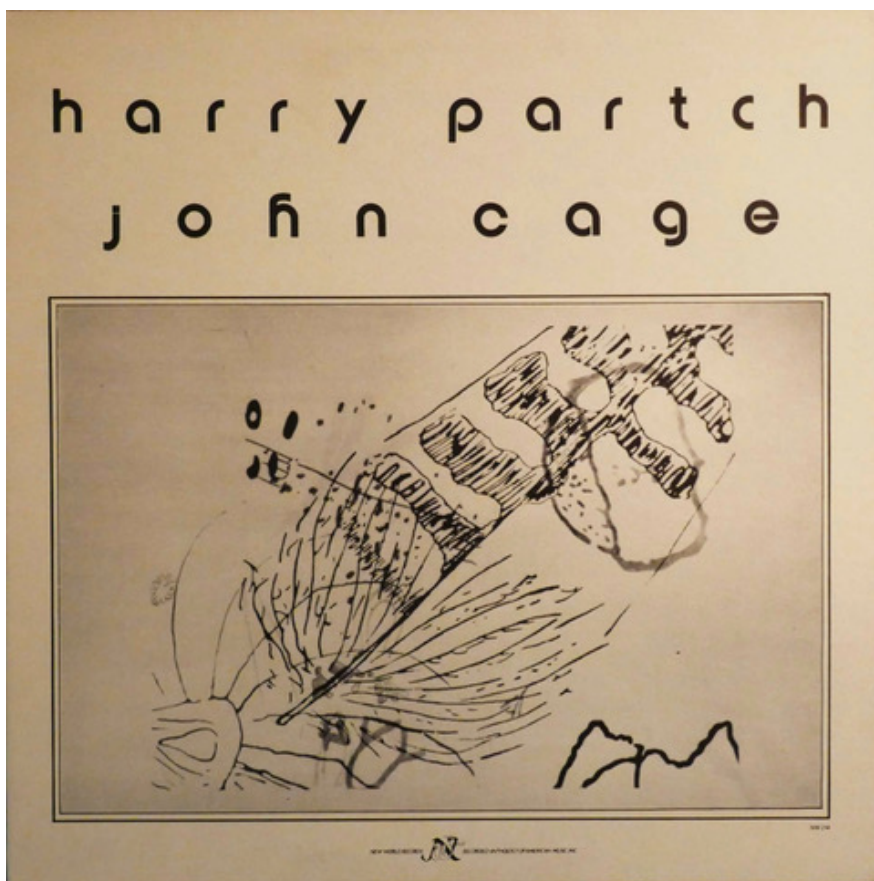
What can be learnt from Partch? In Piekut's example, Iggy Pop embarked upon a phase of experimental tinkering, and there surely exists countless others who have also done so. A correlation between these imagined tinkerers is their subversion of normative inertia, something that Howard Becker (1995, p304) recognised and championed in Partch's output. Partch's obstruction of his influence during his

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<sup>44</sup> Again, See Granade (2011) and Gilmore (1995a) for detailed insights into specific collaborations.

lifetime was carried out through the cumbersomeness of his assemblage, and its dependence on the subsumption of his volatile personhood. His classification of participating musicians as "lost" suggests a celebration of their collective failure to fit convention, and his rugged individualism can be taken as signalling his approximate Gesamtkunstwerk as a site of joint failure. This notion repositions Partch as heralding what Judith Halberstam now calls the queer art of failure (2011).

## 2.6 Harry Partch and John Cage



**Figure 2:** New World Records 1978, cover art by John Cage, designed by Carol Robson.

I have addressed the significance of Partch's personhood as foregrounded through a life seen as a compositionist project. This is my point of departure for a practice-based enquiry into outlining queer compositionism as a collaborative stance.

As outlined in chapter 1, my confluence with Partch is not concerned with the "influence" of a past practitioner over my work. Instead, I am exploring his author function, and the way in which my queerness contributes to its discursivity.

To further signify this contribution, I will now illuminate Partch's sociability by comparing it to the ubiquity of John Cage. Partch becomes my scholarly alibi for the avoidance of Cage's homosexual ego, in which personhood is camouflaged by his function as the author of deflected authorship.

Partch demands a disruption of avant-gardism, expressing this through his protectionist social volatility. In contrast, Cage presents a vanguard approach to sound and music. Juxtaposing Partch and Cage upholds the anarchism of the former as based on an individualist's responsibility to the communal, as opposed to the assimilation of sound and music based on obscured authorial intent. As Ben Johnston said of Partch,

"the personality of the man is very much a part of the art, and if you are a purist, that can really bother you. Partch's art is self-revelatory." (1975, p89)

In Johnston's liner notes to a New World Records Harry Partch/John Cage split 12" vinyl from 1978 he considers the Apollonian/Dionysian qualities of the pair, pointing out that the Apollo/Dionysus divide is a spectrum. Artists cannot be entirely offset against one another as creative practice always contains both abstraction and the corporeal:

"Pedantic art lacks Dionysian juice and gross popular art lacks Apollonian seriousness." (1975, p89)

Cage called for the removal of ego and intent from music creation, presenting an Apollonian soberness that claims anarchy for sounds liberated from a composer's aesthetic. In contrast, Partch translated his Apollonian order into a haptic and intuitive practice that foregrounded Dionysian personhood.<sup>45</sup> This reframes his rugged individualism as a demand for communal difference, rather than as a fixed outsider subjectivity.

My interest in this spectrum is triggered by Partch's haunting of any reappraisal of his life's work. The Dionysian traces in his work form obstructions to anyone aiming to recreate a fully functioning Apollonian system out of it.

Partch's personhood was so concretely subsumed into his creation that his posthumous absence forms a disruptive presence for practitioners attempting to preserve it. I see this as a queering, since Partch's authority lingers in the obstructions of disseminating his work, rather than as a ubiquitous and assimilative code like John Cage's.

The following thinkers add substance to this use of Cage to address the comparative significance of Partch. For Caroline Jones, Cage's deflected authorship was a counter-response to the machismo of the "genius male" figures of abstract expressionist painting. She states, however, that a negation of authorship is not controllable by the individual behind the author function:

"It was the effigy of the Individual Ego that Cage burned in his meteoric rise to avant-garde heaven. It was only an effigy because criticism and the art world

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<sup>45</sup> For closer consideration of this dynamic, especially in Partch's theatre production *Revelation in the Courthouse Park*, see both W. Anthony Sheppard (1996, p478) and Jake Johnson (2015, p175).



both work tirelessly to recuperate, protect, and construct a stable or "real" artistic ego." (1993, p638)

Jonathan Katz states that Cage's removal of intent from his music-making does not constitute a voiceless stance. Closeted homosexuals are generally thought of as adept at blending in. In contrast, Cage's non-intention speaks volumes:

"If the point of Cage's silence was to escape notice, its effect was surely the opposite." (1999, p238)

For Douglas Kahn, Cage's call to forfeit artistic ego maintained a composer-centric model, merely shifting his privilege to the auditory:

"Cageian silence... was dependent from the very beginning on silencing; this alone would run counter to the emancipatory rhetoric with which he is associated... it would entail a silencing of the social and ecological within an ever expanding domain of music." (1999, p159)

In framing silence as the liberation of all sound as possible music, Cage took on a privileged mode of audition. Kahn posits that Cage's claim that silence was sound framed as music meant that Cageian silence was a denial of inaudibility, with the "emancipation" of sounds granted only by Cage's discovery.

Benjamin Piekut challenges Cage's notion that aleatory systems expose the unintentionality of nature, claiming that Cage asserted an overly simplified dichotomy of nature vs culture. Piekut rejects the definition of nature as a site of non-intention, using the Latourian idea of a network of effects to deny that intention is a human exception, quarantined from nature:

"Cage's understanding of nonhuman agency as chance-determined appears both limited and surprisingly anthropocentric. The set of mediations that preceded his encounter with sounds themselves... enfolds many entities in different moments of intention and non-intention, planning and disruption." (2013, p155)

Ryan Dohoney addresses Cage's critique of Julius Eastman's queer performances of his compositions as betraying authorial intent. Eastman foregrounded his gayness and blackness, and Dohoney points to Cage's inability to fully forfeit control and taste from his notion of indeterminacy:

"Eastman and Cage were part of a network of gay and lesbian experimental musicians going back to the 1930s. Each experimented with sound and sexuality in conflicting ways—Cage with so-called homosexual aesthetic and Eastman with a queer experimentalism." (2014, p40)

This discrepancy suggests that queer performance expresses egress from within dominant systems, whereas Cage's obscured ego is a form of escapism in itself:

"More than a Cold War-era model of closeted resistance, Eastman produced experimental assemblages that brought gay subjectivity into relation with formal experimentation, camp resignification, and aural technologies." (Ibid., p54)

Eastman brought his body and those of others into Cage's frameworks to demonstrate the importance of expressed intention in building pluralistic, queer ways of being. Dohoney links this to Foucault's notion of gayness being something done, something,

"based on what can happen when bodies come together in new and surprising ways (not always erotic, often musical)." (Ibid., p55)

## 2.7 Conclusion

Harry Partch cannot be accused of obscuring his authorship. He partook in much self-mythologising through the uptake of labels such as "outsider" and "maverick". Foregrounding his personhood, he inhabited various labels and social positions, both charmingly and cantankerously, but always finitely. A grand network - made up of Partch's pieces, theories, polemical writing, self-built instruments, self-

distributed records, temporary studios, lost musicians, and assembled materials - refutes assimilation to any dogmatic schema.

Being queer, my foregrounding of the personal is crucial: as a queer composer, I respect Cage's significant contributions but worry that within today's pluralistic cultural terrain the Cageian can slip into a masking of power. The Partchean presents a spiky evasiveness in which personhood is mediated into musical forms rather than camouflaged behind the aleatory. Partch foregrounded his difference through a lifelong refusal of assimilation and his life, seen as a musical work, was full of risk and always precarious; it presents a demand for individual transcendence of the mundanities / oppressions / assimilations of the present. Partch also had no fixed group of like-minded collaborators in mind: he foregrounded his sociability as a touchstone for an indeterminate pool of "lost" musicians.

I see Partch's version of Gesamtkunstwerk as a mediation of personhood and an expression of his navigation of the closet. His personhood is not only traceable through the ephemeral evidence of his sociability, but also through the itinerancy evident in the photographs, record sleeves, liner notes, and anecdotal accounts of his precarious studios and sound recording processes.

A significant contribution of Partch's project was his early use of sound-reproduction technology in both his composing and the distribution of his pieces. For example, Philip Blackburn states that his overdubbing technique, in which he composed parts by playing over a prerecorded track on a multi-track tape recorder<sup>46</sup>, led to his compositional technique of double exposure in which,

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<sup>46</sup> This can be observed in the documentary "Harry Partch: Music Studio" (1958), produced by his collaborator, Madeline Tourtelot.

"two sections of music are heard separately and then played simultaneously; A, B, A+B." (1997, p464)

It follows that a lot of the mediation of personhood that made up Partch's queer compositionism took place through sound-reproduction technologies. This is an observation that I have taken up and applied to my approach to the practice-based projects outlined in the following chapters.

Partch publicly displayed a transcendence of his present and foregrounded his personhood. This can be looked back on in search of queer strategies for future forms; especially the collapsing of boundaries between art practice and daily life. My work with Anna Homler and Sarah Kenchington outlined in chapter 3, will apply this notion to the formation of a strategy for performing with them both. My work in experimental theatre discussed in chapter 4, interrogates how my thinking around Partch can be applied to practice with no explicit reference to experimentalism in music; thus widening the scope of taking encounters with sociabilities like Partch's as a catalyst for the application one's queerness in collaborative settings.

As a compositionist, I contribute not as a composer with validated works, but with my queer sense of the creative capacity of disorientation. A knowledge of the closet is applied as a harboured ability to reorient on a project-by-project basis. As queer, I attribute this knowledge to the everyday ambivalence of the glass closet. In seeking to address, but not demarcate, a personal dissatisfaction with the essentialism involved in assimilating to an already-there gay subjectivity, I will now outline my orientation through these projects. My contributions use sound-reproduction technologies to assemble the musical principles of the projects, based

on my orientation of their existing terms. In this respect, the way in which Partch distributed his personhood through both his instrument building and his recording techniques is significant.

The chapters that follow offer a unique contribution to knowledge, in that they outline a queering of hauntological music-making. I offer queer compositionism as a unique and applicable framework for working with sound and audition in collaborative contexts.

## **Chapter 3**

# **Queer Compositionism in Practice: Performing With Idiosyncratic Musicians**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines and reflects upon a practice-based enquiry into queer compositionism as a collaborative stance. The recounting of the project speculates on how my encounter with Partch can be translated into an orientation of collaborative projects as a queer compositionist. Through participation in two non-idiomatic musicians' practices, I have aimed to maintain a stance that foregrounds personhood as hybridised with assembled human and nonhuman elements. To avoid equating idiosyncrasy with outsider individualism, the project empirically

applied the interpellative audition used in my confluence with Harry Partch's author function. The two musicians, Sarah Kenchington (an instrument builder) and Anna Homler (a free improviser using sound emitting objects and idiosyncratic vocalisations), could both be labelled eccentric outsiders. Instead, this project embraced their weirdness as portals, through which I acted out an encounter.

The musician's practices include the assemblage of materials to create a unique aesthetic and sound palette, and both resemble elements of Partch's world, but he has influenced neither explicitly. They display the haptic intuition I have recognised in Partch's queer compositionism, and in participating in their work I have experienced their personhood as hybridised with the human and nonhuman elements of music as a networked activity. They celebrate the alternative capacities of everyday things, have followed unique and non-idiomatic paths into music-making, and create cumbersome tools for performance to which their lives are entwined.

Working with just two musicians was a decision that I arrived at some way into the project. The attention and trust required to participate in their practice took precedence over any possible project design with more musicians, as my focus is not limited to experimentalism in music as an isolated specialism. The project's actors, unknown in advance, are not merely people but a whole host of actants that congeal around the artist's hybridised personhoods. The project investigated my orientation as a queer compositionist, seeking to perform with the musicians in a way that my personhood became similarly hybridised.

How does queer compositionism move beyond reference to Harry Partch and become an applicable collaborative stance?

## Project Outline

From February 2012 to June 2017 I worked with Kenchington and Homler separately, splitting time spent with each artist into three week-long stages:

- I. Documentation of a one-off performance with no audience, aiming to expose unexpected extra-musical elements of their practice.
- II. An interview with the artist, relating their music-making to further elements of their creativity.
- III. The preparation and delivery of a collaborative performance. Video and sound recordings made at all stages were to be framed in the performance that reflects the musician's distributed personhood and obliquely displays my orientation of the inseparability of their music practice from further elements of their creativity.

Sufficient time between stages was taken to reflect and prepare. Throughout stages 1 and 2, I used video and sound-recording devices to document peripheral elements seen to have agency in the artists' music-making. This helped to foreground elements of their creative lives that affect the conditions of their music-making but are not ordinarily implied when they perform. I slowly assembled a practical solution for performing with the musicians in a way that allowed some of these elements to obliquely intervene in the development of the performances' form and content.

## Collaborators: Anna Homler and Sarah Kenchington

Anna Homler is a free improviser and performance artist. In group improvisation, she sings using a system of idiosyncratic vocalisations and plays a collection of

sound emitting toys, domestic tools, lo-fi electronics, and more. She arrived at music through her background in anthropology and performance art. For example, Anna's creation of her character "Breadwoman" in the early 1980s, coincided with her making music with Steve Moshier.<sup>47</sup> Moshier constructed tracks around an evolving collection of vocalisations Homler was recording to cassette tape while intuitively singing in her car.

The result is "Bread Language" and can be defined as a form of extended vocal technique that uses a polyglot arrangement of vowel and consonant sounds. Dragana Stonjanovic (2015) writes of the subversive potential of Bread Language but claims it's outsidersness inadvertently affirms the strength of logic in phallogocentric uses of language. However, this fails to account for the quiet resistance that Homler's melodic/poetic aesthetic presents within the male-dominated subculture of free improvisation. Anna addresses this in an interview with Chris Tonelli (2015), conducted for his forthcoming book:

CT: Is there a politics to your art?

AH: I think just because I'm a woman it's political. Because when you look at festivals it's mostly men, or when you look at the reviews in *Wire*. And then there's always the issue of the Other.

CT: How does that play in?

AH: Because I'm not singing in English.

CT: And so you become representative of the Other?

Homler: Yes, because I'm singing in an unconscious language. And I think I'm an Other because I'm a woman and the improvised music world is male-dominated.

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<sup>47</sup> Moshier, who sadly passed away in 2016, was a composer, performer and Professor of Music based in Los Angeles.



Sarah Kenchington builds instruments using obsolete Western instruments, hauled copper/plastic piping, bicycle parts, cutlery, inner tubes, and more. She usually plays the instruments alone, and their waywardness often dictates the musical result. During performances, she contributes by introducing mechanical movement, pedal power, pressured air, and water.

Kenchington arrived at music-making through her studies in sculpture. She lives in a caravan on farmland in rural Scotland, and our work together took place there. Her life is isolated, as she discusses in a written supplement to her performance *Euphonium at Sea*:

"One of the good things about being geographically remote, for me, is about having limited choices, having to be resourceful... It is a shift in perspective, it is not necessarily a place that is organised for our convenience, it's not all about us, I like that. It's a thing I have struggled with as a music performer, how to make it not about me and what I can do. It is central to the reason that I adapt and build my own instruments." (Kenchington, 2015, p102)

## Video Documentation of Performances

*Caravan Static*. A live audio-visual, improvised performance with Sarah Kenchington. (Camera: Hans Diernberger, 2017)

<https://vimeo.com/221871380>

*Weather*. A live audio-visual, improvised performance with Anna Homler. (Camera: Hans Diernberger, 2017)

<https://vimeo.com/216484464>

The two performances occurred before an audience and were stand-alone works: the video documentation forms an epilogue to the following accounts of their development. Although this study does not consider audience perception, I decided to have a public performance as a defined objective, as it afforded Anna

and Sarah a frame for our collaboration that was important for maintaining a dynamic of purpose and trust.

Throughout this account, examples of oblique intervention are given, and a sense of my orientation as a queer compositionist is outlined. The accounts are chronological, which helps show how the project translated the artist's differences into equivalences. At each stage, I will list key intentions, recount observations and happenings, and evaluate questions raised. Links to photographs, video excerpts, and sound recordings that assist the reader in inhabiting the processes and sites of the project, are embedded into the text.

### **3.2 Stages of Research and Development**

Sarah Kenchington: Stage 1: February 2012.

Sarah's home: Claylands Farm, Balfron, Scotland.

#### Key Intentions

- I. Emerge unexpected background elements, not explicit in Kenchington's performances but which affect her music-making.
- II. Set up an initial oblique intervention that foregrounds Kenchington's personhood as hybridised with her assembled instruments.
- III. Gather audio recordings and video content to be fed back into the project's formal development.

#### Observations and Happenings

Sarah's instruments are cumbersome but designed to be transportable, and on my first visit, I hoped to expose links between the intuitiveness of her lifestyle and her

instrument building. My initial oblique intervention into her practice was to queerly orient my participation, resisting both a focus on her music in isolation and the relegation of the agency of background, domestic effects.

I requested that Sarah set up her instruments in a space not intended for maintenance, rehearsal, or performance. She chose a small caravan adjacent to the static caravan where she lives and cut down her larger instruments to fit them in through a window. The instruments were reassembled in situ, and the interior presented a tight squeeze. I spent some days documenting this assemblage, asking Sarah to demonstrate sounds from specific parts of her instruments. Video study A is a single-shot excerpt of her playing inside the caravan:

Video Study A: <https://vimeo.com/44011718>

The cramped situation meant that the caravan, both visually and sonically, included itself in the musical assemblage. I consider this an example of constructing a temporary instrument of primary and secondary resonant enclosures (Blessner and Salter, 2007, p136).

Sarah was sympathetic and responded to my request, and I see the result as the outcome of queer compositionism, as my intervention avoided adding content or distinct authority.

Video study B is a sketch I made after the encounter to contemplate what it exposed as content for the form of the following stage:

Video Study B: <http://vimeo.com/117279387>

The video foregrounds the isolated condition of Sarah's live/work situation and how the windows and walls of a caravan bring her domesticity into a porous relationship with rural surroundings. The sound of the video contemplates the

array of sounds that her ensemble makes and exposed the significance of the sonic presence of a stream that runs adjacent to the caravans.



**Figure 3:** Sarah Kenchington from above.



**Figure 4:** Video still: Sarah Kenchington with her instruments.

## Evaluation

The unplanned merging of Sarah's instruments with the physical and sonic porosity of the caravan's containment opened up a detour to explore the equivalence of her instrument building to the haptic intuition required in keeping a static caravan as a working home. This became the focus of my interview with her in stage 2.

Sarah cut up parts of her creation to partake in a seemingly pointless performance. Understood through my queer knowledge of the closet, I deem this as demonstrative of a drive for change and reassemblage in her musical practice. The precariousness of her instruments foregrounds both them and herself as part of a quasi-machine: Sarah revels in this and actively inscribes into her creations the need for addition, maintenance, adjustment, and repair. The tendency for her instruments to fail and become difficult to control dictates her negotiation of waywardness and her performance of the role of a tinkerer.

This notion was taken into stages 2 and 3 as an obliquely intervening component, justifying my speculative stance and conscious drive to remain open to as yet indistinct ways of orienting myself into confluence with her practice.

Anna Homler: Stage 1: May 2012.

Various locations in West Hollywood, Los Angeles, USA.

## Key Intentions

- I. Emerge unexpected background elements, not explicit in Homler's performances, but that affect her music-making.

- II. Set up an initial oblique intervention that foregrounds her personhood as hybridised with her assembled sound emitting objects and idiosyncratic vocalisations.
- III. Gather audio recordings and video content to be fed back into the project's formal development.

## Observations and Happenings

Anna arranged two performances: one at her local hair salon in West Hollywood; and another close by in the backyard of an S&M gallery, Antebellum. She invited Jorge Martin<sup>48</sup>, to process her voice and instruments using digital FX pedals and other sound processors. This was a surprise for me, but Anna explained that she never plays alone. Video study C is a single-shot documentation of their performance in the hair salon. As with Sarah, these happenings were not works in isolation but part of a chain of interventions that negotiated my orientation within her music-making:

Video Study C: <https://vimeo.com/118805548>

Homler participated in the arrangement of happenings with no normalised<sup>49</sup> or monetary aims. In these fleeting performances, her personhood was exposed as hybridised with her toys and sound emitting devices, Jorge Martin's digital processing, and the sonic agency of a space not ordinarily associated with music-making.

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<sup>48</sup> A medical researcher and experimental sound artist based in Long Beach, LA. Martin is an avid collaborator and one half of the 90s noise duo Spastic Colon.

<sup>49</sup> Although I acknowledge the validation of an academic frame like PhD research.



**Figure 5:** Anna Homler in a West Hollywood hair salon.

In the hair salon, there was a clear sense of Homler and her objects being contained within a functionless logic. Why negotiate playing time in a hair salon in order to be videoed playing toys on a chair in front of a mirror intended for the ritual of hair cutting and small talk? The answer is that the kind of musical experimentation Anna is involved in is often played to small audiences in spaces negotiated similarly. The specificity here is that Anna could set the spatiotemporal containment without having to accommodate an audience and their sociability.

## Evaluation

In the interim between stage 1 and 2, I contemplated the hair salon as a container and my intervention - asking Anna to negotiate it's use - as instigating an orientation of urban space as a series of cabinets for her curious music-making. I became distracted by a hunch that Homler's music-making need not be quarantined from her ongoing visual art project, Pharmacia Poetica, in which she bottles quotidian things in coloured liquids to magnify their capacity to invite a lyrical viewpoint over a literal one. Through email correspondence, I found out more about Pharmacia Poetica and established that it would be possible to subsume a part of it into our collaboration. Anna has a working base in Cologne, Germany and some of her bottles were stored there, by Georg Dietzler<sup>50</sup>.

Anna Homler: Stage 2: October 2015.

Various locations in Cologne, Germany.

## Key Intentions

- I. Retrieve the bottles out of storage.
- II. Interview Anna about the possible links between her bottling and music practices.
- III. Record the interview in high fidelity with the tentative intention of reintroducing her voice into our performance together.

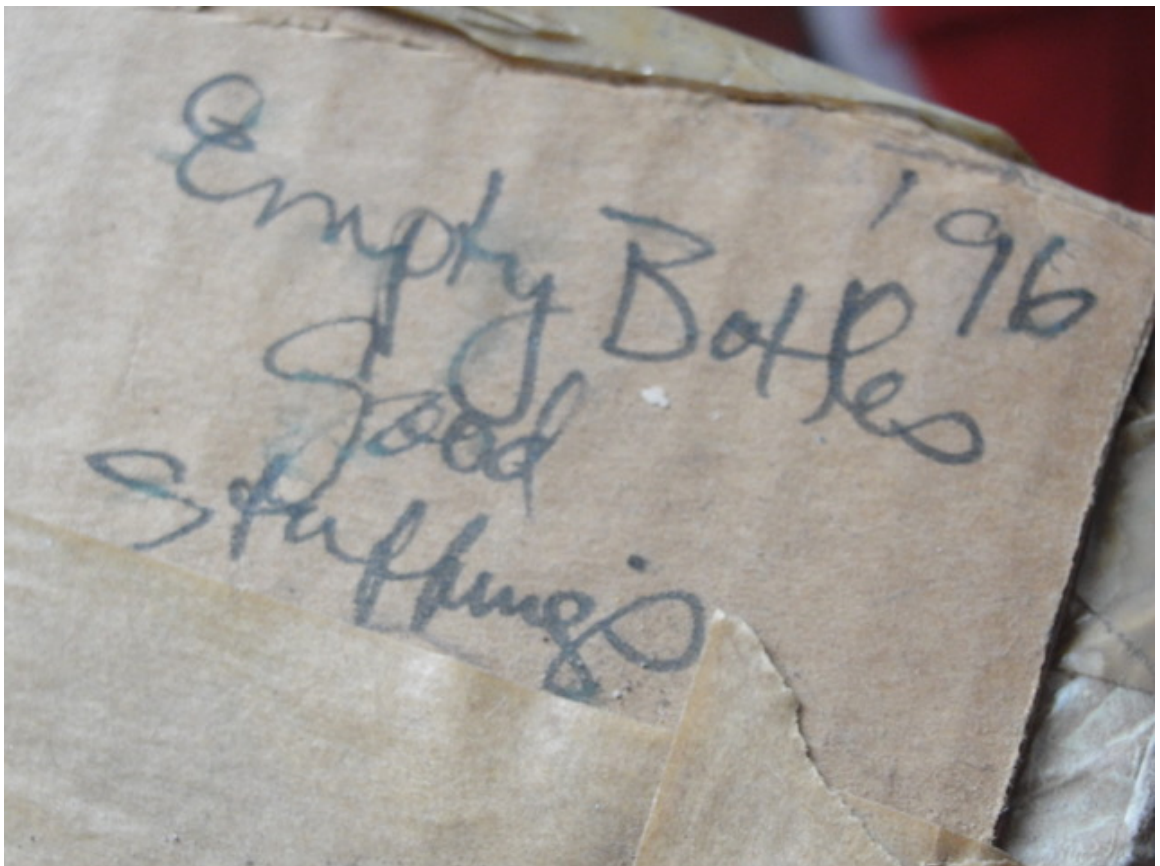
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<sup>50</sup> Dietzler is artist and curator of sound arts based in Cologne.



## Observations and Happenings

The bottles were retrieved and unpacked, and their newspaper wrapping put the last storage date at 1996. Anna recognised all of the bottles as friends and had also packed surplus objects and empty bottles suggestive of work in progress. There was a similarity between her engagement with the bottles and the way she had unpacked and arranged her sound emitting objects in LA. For me, this suggested a shared drive of collection: the bottles contain the lyricism of quotidian objects, and her collection of toys and other sound emitting objects all contain a distinct voice.



**Figure 6:** Date inscription on Pharmacia Poetica storage box.

In our interview, Anna stated that she had seen her music and visual art as connected since Pharmacia Poetica's inception:

"What came to me was that I was... like a curator of sounds and images and songs. The Pharmacia just emerged as a platform or a vehicle to contain it all." (Homler 2015, pers. comm., 18 October)

I wondered whether Pharmacia Poetica was only in her bottling process or whether it also framed her vocalisations and collection of instruments. There is an equivalence between objects collected for their capacity to contain sounds and the lyricism of quotidian objects contained within bottles.

I asked Anna what people should see in the bottles:

"They see colour, they see familiar things that they know, that are melting or dissolving or covered with mould, you know, they see weather." (Homler 2015, pers. comm., 18 October)

I posited that the idea of containing weather - something shifting yet fundamental - is linkable to Anna's ongoing experience of rooms hosting singular performances of free improvised music: she releases sounds into these rooms and weather into her bottles. Anna could accommodate this link through her notion that the sounds and objects she collects are connected through the,

"power of the one thing, the singularity. Just hearing the sound of a squeaky toy and then exploring that or finding a song in... a metal pipe that has overtones. You know, these very ordinary things." (Homler 2015, pers. comm., 18 October)

Homler spoke of singularity as being amplified by juxtaposition. This thought helped me to begin translating my queer compositionist stance from Partch and toward a project-specific assemblage. As I have seen in Partch's practice, it is not isolated individualism itself that formed his creative output but the way in which it congeals a shaky gesamtkunstwerk made up of a whole host of allies:

"It is thrilling to find the voice of an object. I guess this is the connection with the pharmacy. In relation to each other you can see a bottle's uniqueness as standing out, and with objects and sounds... it is just translating to another medium. A sound on its own is one thing, but you really hear more by contrast." (Homler 2015, pers. comm., 18 October)

Anna also made an analogy that helps shed light on queer compositionism as a negotiation and assemblage of surfaces and containers:

"Music is like perfume. Music and perfume and film are all ruled by Neptune, so they all have that quality of being like a dream... a CD would be like a bottle... Whatever captures the music, MP3 or whatever, is like a perfume bottle." (Homler 2015, pers. comm., 18 October)



Figure 7: A selection of Anna Homler's sound emitting devices.



Figure 8: Anna Homler unpacking items for bottling.

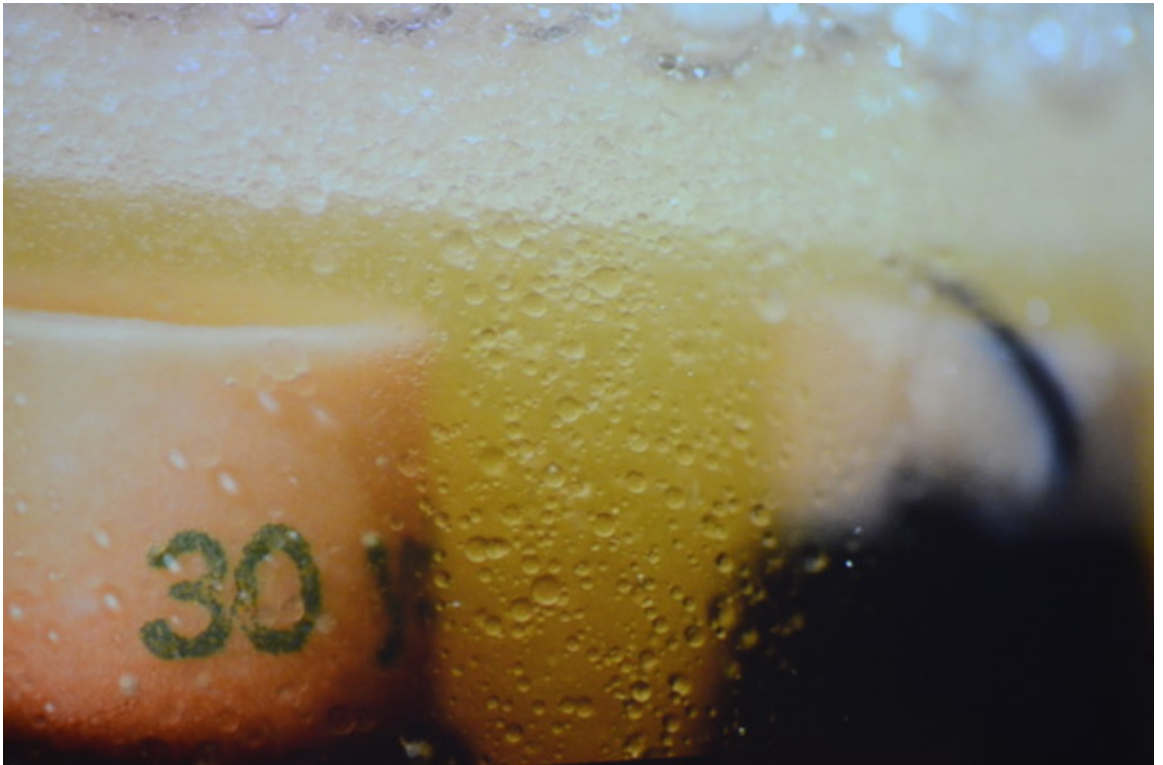


Figure 9: Video still from my explorations in capturing "weather".



## Evaluation

Anna's bottling practice was adopted to obliquely intervene in my encounter with her music-making. My orientation began to reassemble a version of her curatorial practice, in which the bottling of everyday objects for their lyricism parallels the use of contained sounds in playing freely improvised music in venues seen as vitrines.

I produced video material of the bottles, contemplating Anna's notion that they contain weather and how this relates to the voices contained within Anna's collection of instruments. I told her that I wished to do this and suggested we develop a performance that subsumes her bottling and music practices. Anna allowed me to adopt the bottles, and in preparation for stage 3, I created video material as potential content for our performance. Video study D is a panned shot of an arrangement of the bottles on a mirrored black surface:

Video Study D: <https://vimeo.com/183285298>

Video study E is a selection of improvised macro-lens shots of "weather" inside the bottles. By disturbing the bottles slightly, it was possible to capture bubbles, separation of liquids, floating particles, mould, and the movement of objects:

Video Study E: <https://vimeo.com/237075661>

Sarah Kenchington: Stage 2: February 2016.

Sarah's home: Claylands Farm, Balfron, Scotland.

### Key Intentions

- I. Collect clips of video to be used in the performance at the end of stage 3, that capture a sense of Sarah's home, its rural surroundings, and the instruments in storage.
- II. Interview Sarah about the possible links between her relationship to materials in both the upkeep of caravan living and her musical practice.
- III. Record the interview in high fidelity with the tentative intention of reintroducing her voice into our performance together.



**Figure 10:** Condensation on Sarah Kenchington's caravan window.

## Observations and Happenings

There had been a significant shift in Sarah's thinking and practice since stage 1. I linked this to her renovation of a stone cottage adjacent to her caravan that was to become her home. She discussed an advancement in her practice where she had removed the sound capability of one of her contraptions, creating a device for conducting musicians. This struck me as an intervention that gained control and thwarted failure. This had an equivalence in Sarah's engagement with a solid stone structure after being accustomed to the haptic intuition applied to the upkeep of a caravan.

Our interview, focused on the connection between music-making and caravan living, happened at Sarah's dining table in her caravan. We also discussed the link just outlined. Some key considerations were raised that would inform stage 3 and our performance.

Sarah confirmed that her new concentration on producing live scores had exposed a collaborative drive behind the apparent isolationism of her instruments. When playing solo, she said,

"I was trying to break out of this world of the virtuoso musician, not wanting to be on stage going "look at me and what I can do." It was all about the machines and "look what the machines can do." I didn't really want to detach myself from it, but when I stopped the machines from making any noise, it meant I then had to use other people. I needed musicians... who could read the colours on this machine. That meant it was still about the machine and it wasn't about me anymore." (Kenchington 2016, pers. comm., 29 February)

As well as creating live scores Sarah had been building instruments to be played by groups of people. She described an instrument made out of organ pipes that needed several people to play it effectively:

"I really liked that transition from me playing lots of instruments to lots of people playing one... [the organ] somehow just flipped that over." (Kenchington 2016, pers. comm., 29 February)

I asked Sarah about how instrument building relates to caravan living. She recognised a shared concern for the capacity of ill-functioning things to offer alternative uses:

"I've got a brass band section on my machine and brass instruments get to a certain point where they're not really worth fixing... I'm not too worried about soldering on other bits to them or whatever... Maybe [a trumpet] can't do clear notes anymore, or it's got something about it which I'm perfectly happy to accommodate. I think a caravan is a bit like that: it's not an inherently valuable thing. It doesn't actually function that well as a building in a lot of respects... you're sort of entering into something that is only just about good enough and I suppose the adaptations are trying to make it function." (Kenchington 2016, pers. comm., 29 February)

Sarah elaborated on her hoarding of materials and how it liberates components from their labelled use. Her domestic situation results from prioritising time over the security of a regular income, resulting in resourcefulness for acquiring materials and intuitiveness in putting them to practical use:

"I think as humans we do this thing... we find something that a material, or an object, is particularly good at, and we go "that does that" and we forget about all the other things it might do. Everything has a range of possibilities." (Kenchington 2016, pers. comm., 29 February)

She also spoke of elements of her instruments in a way relatable to ANT's insistence that elements translate each other's capacities into hybridised forms:

"I play trumpets using a balloon and with a sort of pedal-powered pump... you can play much higher notes with that, and hold really long notes, and low notes. Humans wouldn't be able to do some of those things, but the trumpet can. I like these kinds of obsolete things... [A typewriter] has amazing engineering, and just because the one thing that it used to do is defunct... well, the machine is still good, you just have to give it something else to do." (Kenchington 2016, pers. comm., 29 February)





Figure 11: Stone walls and pavings under renovation.

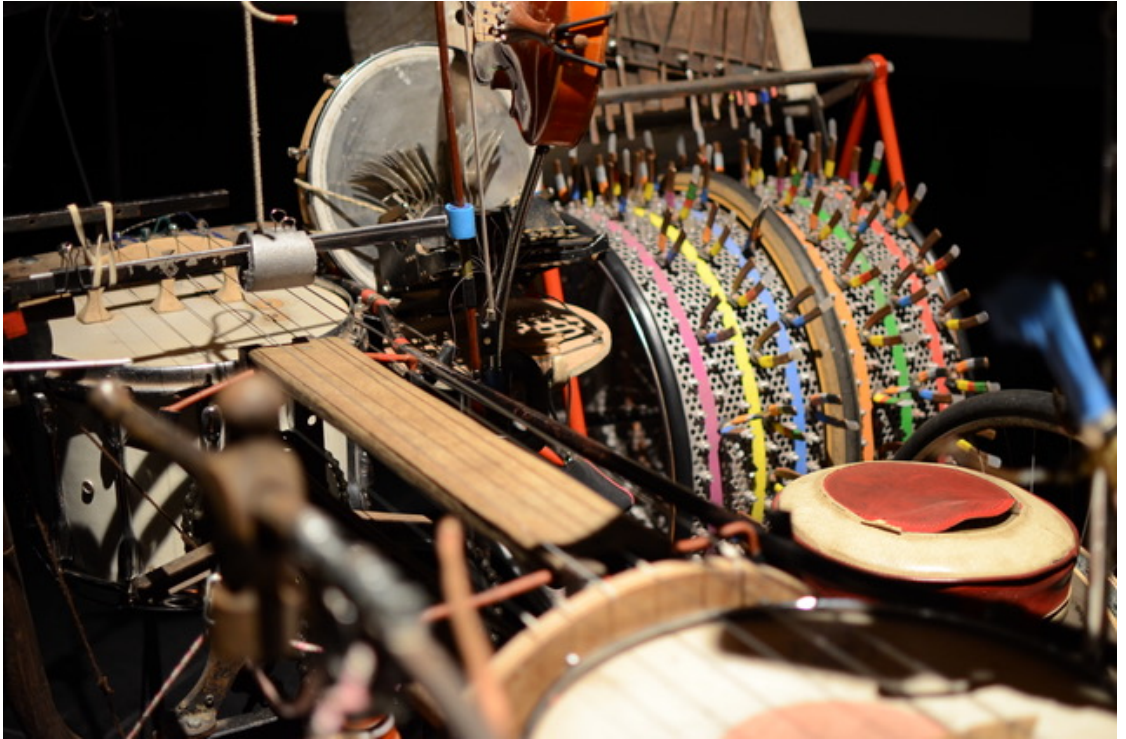


Figure 12: Sarah Kenchington's instruments.

Queer compositionism is concerned with assembling the musical principles of projects based on the compositionist's orientation within it. The sonic results become almost a byproduct rather than labelled as a composition. Likewise, Sarah's primary motivation is not musical output: as with Homler, perhaps, she is more concerned with finding the voice of a material:

"I wouldn't say I was entirely motivated by music or sound. I like sound because it is something that sometimes is hidden inside a thing and you can get it out. It is like giving materials a voice that is so characteristic of the different things you use. I could get just as excited about anything else; usually very practical things. Finding a good way of keeping a gate shut would make me just as happy." (Kenchington 2016, pers. comm., 29 February)

I asked about her self-constructed wood-fired central heating system, as it struck me as similar to her instruments:

"There is no discernible difference between plumbing that in and making a musical instrument: same material, similar concerns. This is a gravity fed machine, and I am always very strict in my instruments. I would never put electric motors onto anything: everything is always gravity or human powered. I was very particular that I didn't want to put an electric pump onto the heating system, so it all had to be gravity because it's magic then." (Kenchington 2016, pers. comm., 29 February)

This brought us onto the renovation of the stone cottage; a change in Sarah's living situation that had coincided with her shifting relationship to her band of instruments:

"Well, it's like being given a grand piano that somebody has covered in sticky tape and plaster. So it's more about trying to sort of find the thing inside that was a good thing... The actual fabric of the building is something that I feel very proud of in a funny way. The way that the stone has been cut; I just imagine some little guy chipping away at it, he knows exactly how to cut the stone to make it have corners and all the rest, and all the tool marks are in the right direction... whoever has made it has had to have a real affinity with the materials they're using, and I can see that. I'm really respectful of it and very

reluctant to treat it in any other way than the way it was built." (Kenchington 2016, pers. comm., 29 February)

This could be mistaken as a preference for natural, resistant properties, but Sarah has a sensibility for the inherent qualities of all materials. Moving from a caravan to a house should not mean having to sacrifice the desired properties of the former. Moving from haptic intuition to architectural plans does not necessarily constitute forward progress: through Sarah, it is possible to contemplate the move as reorientation and inhabitation based on the fluidity of adapting:

"There are caravan type properties that I would like to take over to the cottage, and that is that you're very aware of the outside: you're much closer to the outside so you feel the wind and you hear the rain and if its cold outside its cold inside. I actually quite like that, even though it can be uncomfortable and you wake up and you don't want to get up because there is ice on the windows. You're more attached to the weather aren't you." (Kenchington 2016, pers. comm., 29 February)

## Evaluation

To evaluate the unexpected changes in Sarah's situation, I produced video documentation of details of her inscribed adaptations of the materiality of her caravan, instruments, and the gutted stone cottage. Video study F is made up of the resulting video snippets: the sound is a collaged sketch of recordings from stage 1 and edited interview material. The video is an integral part of my process and demonstrates the content I was expecting to include in our performance:

Video Study F (Additional camera: Hans Diernberger, 2016):

<https://vimeo.com/164081555> (password: sarah)

After this stage, I began thinking about the importance of the window we had sat next to during our interview. At my request, Sarah emailed me some photos of it, its dimensions, and its backstory. It had come out of a bus that had operated on the Isle of Skye. Sarah had cut a hole in the caravan with a jigsaw, stuck the window into it, and can now look out into the garden. The arrival of this window into the project is an example of the oblique intervention of unexpected elements that a queer compositionist seeks. I drew it into the project for its capacity to translate the notion of containment emerging through my orientation of Anna Homler's practice into an equivalent in Sarah's.



**Figure 13:** Sarah Kenchington's dining room window.

Anna Homler: Stage 3: April 2017.

Various locations in Cologne, Germany.

### Key Intentions

- I. Create a technical solution to improvise with Anna using the audio-visual material gathered in stages 1 and 2.
- II. The solution should reflect the notion of containment that sees both bottling and music-making as elements of Anna's curatorial practice.
- III. Record a catalogue of Anna's sounds to be used to create soundscapes that support her being able to improvise in a musical world derived from her objects.
- IV. Spend a week rehearsing and discussing the implications of us playing together.
- V. Perform a 40-minute improvisation with Anna at a predetermined venue in front of an audience.

### Observations and Happenings

Prior to the week of work, I put together a pseudo-instrument that would allow me to play back audio and visual material in a way that reflected the theme of containment I had recognised in Anna's curatorial practice. The creation is also a translation of my orientation in the project, and an assemblage of elements based on their alternative capacities.

The pseudo-instrument is a projection screen/loudspeaker hybrid that uses small sound resonators attached to glass. The screen is a bespoke double-glazed window, uniquely produced using two sheets of hand-blown glass. One sheet is white opaque and can be projected onto; the other is transparent with waves,



bubbles, and other imperfections.<sup>51</sup> I mounted this into a self-built resonant plywood box. Two sound resonators - one on the window, one on the box - amplify sound by vibrating the glass and wood. Video can be projected onto the opaque glass, meaning that image and sound are contained by the same material. This is a translation of the containment I had recognised in Homler's curatorial practice and also references my orientation of Sarah's practice, as the dimensions of the screen match the aforementioned bus window.



**Figure 14:** Resonant-window in its first formation, mounted in a self-built resonant box.

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<sup>51</sup> For thought on hand-blown glass and its expression of craftsmanship and alterity since the machine age, see Richard Sennett: "Only by understanding how something might be done perfectly is it possible to sense [an] alternative, an object possessing specificity and character." (2009, p104)

I demonstrated the instrument (hereinafter resonant-window) to Anna, and we discussed how her music practice might be performed as part of a staged version of *Pharmacia Poetica*. I decided not to use any of the sound recordings from stage 1 or 2. This honoured Anna's insistence that to use explanatory speech would counter her lyricism. She stated that we had to "be" what we were doing, not "explain it".

Not using the recordings also allowed the resonant quality of the glass and its wooden casing to obliquely intervene in the processing of sounds amplified through them. Playing back recordings of voice, or recordings with a dominant room acoustic, rendered the resonant-window a poor substitute for a conventional speaker. It is most effective with close-mic recordings with little room acoustic; thus, I recorded a selection of Homler's sounds, creating a catalogue to be digitally edited into loop-able soundscapes. Sound example A is an excerpt of Anna singing into a red plastic toy megaphone followed by a soundscape I produced using the recording:

Sound example A: <https://soundcloud.com/suanders/homlerprocessed>

I edited these soundscapes while listening to the effects of my work through the resonant-window. I responded to its resonant effects, making full use of its agential capacities and allowing it to mediate the outcomes of my process. Certain frequencies resonate more than others, and I worked with these qualities, attending to the voice of the resonant-window in a way equivalent to Anna and Sarah's approach to the voices of material and things.

We rehearsed using my soundscapes to form a shifting musical world in which Anna was effectively improvising with a mediated version of herself. This subtly

refers back to her inviting Jorge Martin to process her performances in LA; the difference being my use of digital audio-processing to translate the voices of Anna's objects through a resonant surface that was conceptually integrated with her practice. My negotiation of the resonant-window resembles my recognition of Anna's personhood as hybridised with both human and nonhuman elements. It was decided for the performance - which took place in a small cinema - that the improvised videos of "weather" inside the bottles would be projected onto the screen behind us. My video showing an arrangement of the bottles would be front projected onto the resonant-window.

## Evaluation

This stage can be evaluated by focussing on the outcomes of the resulting performance. The presentation was titled *Weather* and took place on Tuesday 25 April 2017 in the Alte Feuerwache Kinoraum, Cologne, Germany.

The performance demonstrated how time with Homler led to a performance strategy that illuminated a connection of containment between the sounds and vocalisations within her music practice and the lyricism of everyday items in her bottles. My intervention was to assemble a performance that subsumed these things into an improvised audio-visual performance.

Anna performs with a PA system and two microphones to regulate the volume of her voice with those of her sound emitters. The volume of the resonant-window is too low to compete with a PA, so I amplified it using a small instrument mic. To demonstrate that the resonant-window was mediating of all my musical contributions, we agreed to have some moments in the performance when the PA speakers were muted and only audio amplified through the resonant-window was





**Figure 15:** Anna Homler and William Saunders "Weather", Tuesday 25 April 2017 in the Alte Feuerwache Kinoraum, Cologne, Germany.

heard. Although this helped to frame it acoustically, its visual framing could have been improved. It resembled a monitor because of its mounting in the box, making it unclear that it was being used as a projection surface. Front projecting onto the glass failed to take advantage of how hand-blown glass reflects light. Whereas the resonant-window's sonic mediation had been well explored, the visual mediative effects of the glass had been unintentionally sidelined.

This was rectified in advance of stage 3 with Sarah Kenchington. The use of the dimensions from Sarah's window justified using the same pseudo-instrument for my performance with her; thus the resonant-window reflects an equivalent orientation within the work of both artists. This outcome suggests that queer compositionism not only assembles project-specific elements into translations of

one another: the stance is also sensitive to the ways in which projects can translate elements of other projects. This is distinctly different from an individual composer's aesthetic being carried from one project to the next with no shift in (dis)orientation.

Sarah Kenchington: Stage 3: May 2017

Sarah's home: Claylands Farm, Balfron, Scotland.

### Key Intentions

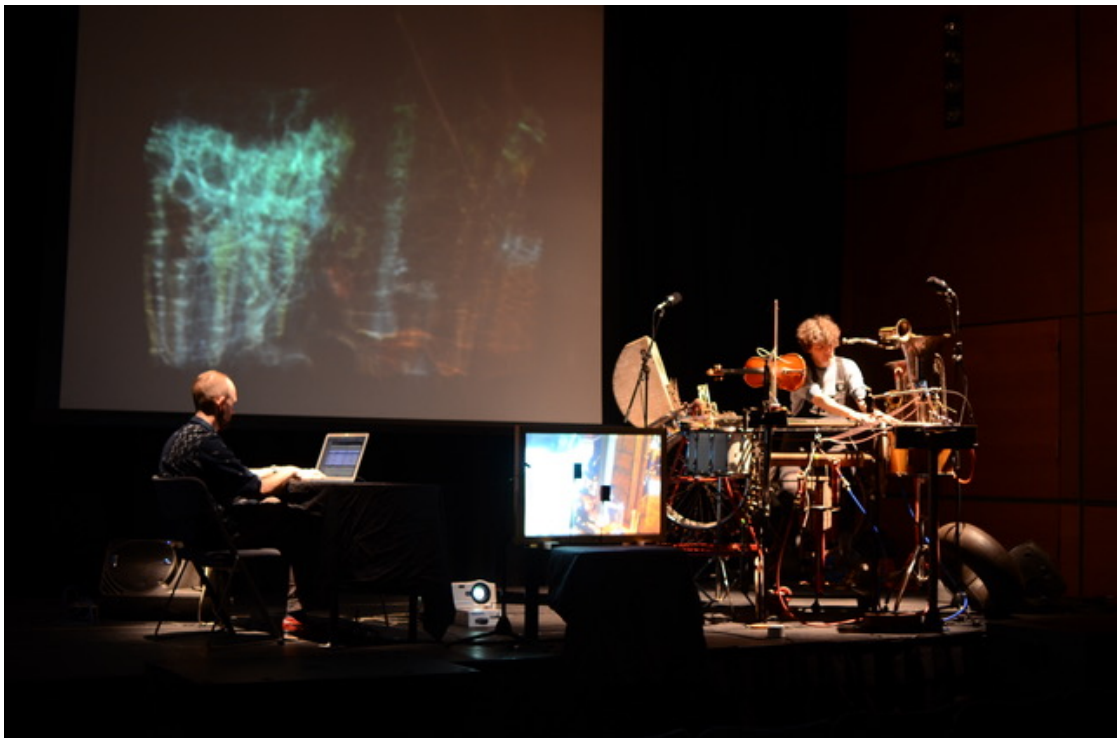
- I. Demonstrate the glass resonator to Sarah and explain its relevance to my participation in her practice.
- II. Record a catalogue of Sarah's sounds to be used to create soundscapes that support her being able to improvise in a musical world derived from her instruments.
- III. Spend a week rehearsing and discussing the implications of us playing together.
- IV. Perform a 40 minute improvisation with Sarah at a predetermined venue in front of an audience.

### Observations and Happenings

Prior to the week, I improved the resonant-window, exposing both sheets of glass by removing it from the wooden box that had previously hidden the opaque sheet. I had the screen framed in wood, making it visually suggestive of both a window and an acoustic instrument.



**Figure 16:** Final version of resonant-window.



**Figure 17:** Performance shot showing the back-projection setup of the resonant-window.

Exposing both sides of the resonant-window meant I could back-project my videos through the transparent glass and onto the opaque white. The advantage is that when set up downstage of a large screen the wavy glass sheet reflects an enlarged and rippled version of the video material projected onto the opaque white.

I explained to Sarah that my pseudo-instrument was based on her window and that my strategy for using it had been developed with Anna Homler. We agreed that the video footage from stage 2 should be projected as part of the performance, and I explained my intention to use reflection.

We discussed the performance as being the outcome of my observations around the confluence of her instrument building and caravan living. It rained heavily when we were recording, and I included the sounds of this in my catalogue of recordings. Rain and an adjacent stream form a constant sonic backdrop to Sarah's home life.

Rather than recording the rhythmic/melodic motifs of Sarah's instruments, I recorded the secondary mechanical sounds the machines make. This attended to Sarah's role as a component in her hybrid assemblage, and subtly affirmed that the musical refrains produced by the instruments are not her primary goal. I made recordings of these secondary sounds and edited them into loop-able soundscapes that I equalised to match the resonant qualities of the glass.

Sound example B is an excerpt of a recording of Sarah vibrating one bass guitar string against a rotating wooden disc, followed by a soundscape I produced using the recording:

Sound example B: <https://soundcloud.com/suanders/kenchingtonprocessed>

## Evaluation

The processes of the week can be evaluated through the resulting performance.

The presentation was titled *Caravan Static* and took place on Sunday 4 June 2017 in the theatre of the Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow, Scotland. The performance showed that time with Sarah led to me being able to perform with her in a way that illuminated connections between her instrument building and the haptic intuition applied to her remote and self-assembled life.

Sarah's solo performances expose her instruments as an assemblage of wayward elements, slightly out of her control; therefore my contribution to our collaboration had a different effect than with Anna Homler. For Anna, my soundscapes formed a backdrop for her to improvise with individual sounds: with Sarah, the soundscapes were made up out of sounds that operate underneath the most prominent and lyrical motifs of her instruments.

The effect was that Sarah wasn't always sure whether sounds came from her or through the resonant-window. This is a phenomenon that often occurs in group improvisation and is evidence that my queer compositionist stance succeeded in assembling a mode of performance made up of elements encountered through my participation in Sarah's creativity. This ultimately allowed her to improvise with a mediated version of her personhood.

### 3.3 Conclusion

I participated in Kenchington and Homler's practices, aiming to assemble strategies to perform with them that reflect the inseparability of their music-making from other creative activities.

Kenchington's instrument building and maintenance of caravan living were subsumed, and Homler's approach to group improvisation was considered a portion of the theme of containment in her curatorial practice.

It is significant that both musicians eschewed anthropocentric thinking through separate comments about material elements having alternative capacities to their given function.

My assemblage of the resonant-window, through which audio recordings and video documentation of the artists was mediated, is a unique gesture that resisted the addition of form or content not traceable to my encounters with the artists' practices. The resonant-window is an example of the unexpected formal outcomes that queer compositionism aims for, by allowing both human and nonhuman factors to obliquely intervene in a project's development.

In this case, the objective was to perform my interpretations of the musicians' practices in duet with them. Throughout the process of emerging the organising principles of the performances, peripheral elements obliquely intervened - a window, bottles, hand blown glass, and resonators, for example.

The project has allowed me to empirically investigate queer compositionism as a distribution of personhood as hybridised with nonhuman elements, and I have been able to inquire into my hypothesis that Harry Partch be a catalyst for this approach. Both artists present their personhoods as hybridised with their instruments and gathered materials, and just as I applied interpellative audition in re-articulating Partch theoretically, my work with Homler and Kenchington has allowed me to distribute my queer personhood by assembling a re-articulation of their practices.

The project develops queer compositionism as a flexible authorial orientation that actively seeks hybridisation with the uniquely networked elements of innovative projects. A surprising outcome was that these specifics also translated differences between two parallel enquiries into equivalences that formed a networked holistic response. My orientation took on a liminality, as the solution to performing with both artists emerged as singular and spanned both collaborations. This begins to define queer compositionism as the negotiation of specific projects on their terms while maintaining a sensibility for how different projects may also mediate each other. This personalised resistance of the hierarchical notion of a composer linking projects through their authorial signature is what a queer compositionist does: they quietly insist on intervening on their terms, but those terms are determined through the specifics of a project.

Can this resistance be extended to how audio recordings and video documentation are created and utilised? In this project, they were extracted from and fed back into the musicians' performance practice; honouring the creative agencies of such technology in a way that transcends the functional dualism of capture and repeat. The practitioner becomes hybridised with the technology, meaning it is not reduced to the role of documenting and representing the anthropocentric image of an artist and their tools.

The question remains whether this approach can outline a contribution to hauntological practice in music. Can it be queered by avoiding the fetishisation of sonic surfaces? Can one attend to the mediation of sound-reproduction technologies by listening to and through their audible traces? Can this reach ephemeral evidence of the queer personhoods that these surfaces might be protecting?

In assembling a way of inhabiting this project, through a practice-based application of interpellative audition, I have applied a personal epistemology of the closet.

Reflecting on the specific questions from my hypothesis, I can say that Benjamin Piekut's use of Bruno Latour's ideas, and my theoretical exploration of this as summarised in section 1.3, have had significant effects on my orientation and assemblage of these two collaborative performance projects. Without flattening out the differences between Anna and Sarah, which could be a danger when disregarding the dichotomy of subjects and objects, I have been able to allow unexpected elements to translate the artists' differences into hybridised equivalences. The resonant-window is an example of a formal outcome that foregrounds the personhood of both artists as hybridised with nonhuman elements. This can be attributed to my queer compositionism, as the notion of the closet as an ongoing process of negotiation and renewal has been a driving concern. The epistemology of the closet offers an outlook through which mundane objects and situations must be renegotiated and redefined always and every time. An ongoing attention to the ephemeral and the assemblage of easily ignored elements reflects this important but fragile knowledge. This chapter has outlined how the resonant-window has different effects in my approach to both Anna and Sarah, while also being traceable as a mediation of both of their personhoods. With regard to the contribution of queer compositionism to hauntological music-making, this is only beginning to emerge, and can be more clearly addressed through the experimental theatre shows discussed in the following chapter.



After my reading around Harry Partch, it was possible to dispense with the composer to investigate how what I have seen in his practice could be empirically investigated through participation in the work of Anna Homler and Sarah Kenchington.

The application of these ideas to my contribution to two experimental theatre projects - with no direct reference to musical experimentalism - makes a step toward refining queer compositionism as a collaborative stance, untethered to the author function of Harry Partch.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Queer Compositionism in Practice: Experimental Theatre**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the development of two experimental theatre shows, *Camera Lucida* and *Suitable Establishment*, to which I applied queer compositionism. In contrast to how my orientation was gradually established and refined through the Kenchington/Homler project, these theatre projects presented demanding time constraints and the potentially conflicting specialisms of a multi-disciplinary field. The projects offered the opportunity to scrutinise queer compositionism, when applied outside of the laboratory of experimental music, as a stance that emerges

project-specific and conceptually integrated organisational principles for performance projects.

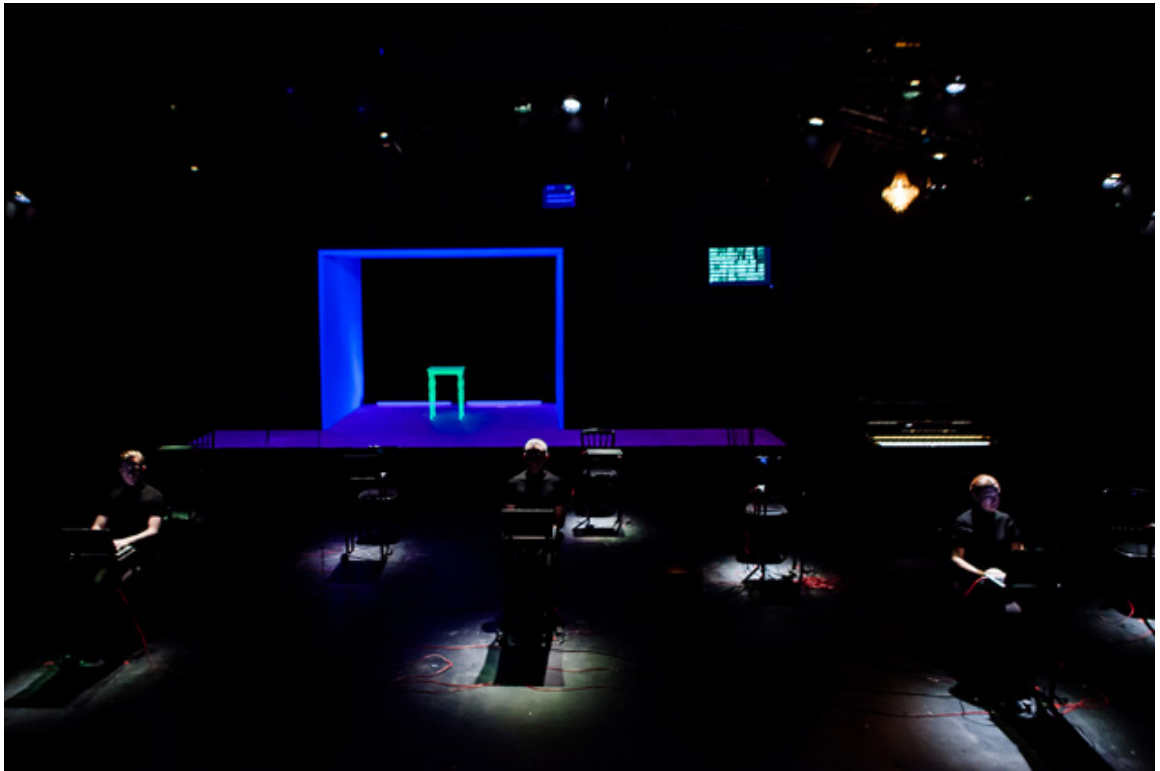
The projects also function as further explorations into how a queer compositionist's navigation of sound-reproduction technology may circumvent the fetishisation of surface noise implicit in hauntological music practice. They outline the application of a personal form of interpellative audition that applies knowledge of the closet to the hauntological.

Links to full video documentation of each performance work are embedded at the relevant point in the text. In further passages, I include links to video excerpts that draw attention to specific contributions and points of interest. The documented performances of each show - and my contributions to them - stand alone. The following accounts speculate on the projects' contributions to the enquiry at hand. My account of *Camera Lucida* alternates between outlining my contribution to the show and statements quoted from reflective interviews with key collaborators: I interviewed Simon Vincenzi and Dickie Beau in London on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> December 2016 respectively. My briefer account of *Suitable Establishment* is intended to demonstrate queer compositionism as a collaborative stance applicable to projects regardless of theme and content.

#### **4.2 Dickie Beau's *Camera Lucida***

Full video documentation: <https://vimeo.com/161282118> (Password: meek)

*Camera and editing by Lukas Demgenski, 2014: full credits for the show run at the end of the video.*



**Figure 18:** Wide shot of the staging for *Camera Lucida*.

## The Project and Collaborators

*Camera Lucida* was a site-specific theatre show directed by Dickie Beau for the Samuel Beckett Oxford Theatre Trust in the Pit Theatre at the Barbican Centre, London. The show premiered in the autumn of 2014.

Dickie's performance practice is audio based and arguably hauntological. He is a London based theatre-maker and actor, well known for his uncanny lip-syncing in which he breathes new life into recordings of voices from the past. His solo shows stage performances of these voices edited into what he terms "digital scripts".

My collaborative role in *Camera Lucida*, with the challenge of creating a musical container for one of these scripts, was a good context for applying queer

compositionism. I had collaborated with Dickie on previous projects and trusted a sense of autonomy in which I would be able to pursue this inquiry.

The show's stage designer Simon Vincenzi is a theatre director who has also designed extensively for theatre, opera, dance, and performance art. I had previously collaborated with Simon on his own work that prioritised the integration of sound.

### The Collaborative Dynamic of the Project and My Queer Compositionist Aims

At the time of developing *Camera Lucida*, Dickie Beau had been considering his solo lip-sync performances as the embodied playback of recorded speech.

Referencing Hans Belting's conception of images,<sup>52</sup> Dickie was defining his function within these performances as a material carrier of voice. In our interview, Dickie outlined Belting's assertion that an artistic medium (such as paint) is the material carrier of an image and not the image itself. Dickie connected this notion of media to a critic's claim that his performances are comparable to a seance medium:

"I am a bit like a medium, and I realised that... not only is it the same word; it is the same thing. I am the material carrier of an image, and that image becomes the voice; that is the thing that people catch. You cannot see it, but it is nevertheless an image according to Belting's definition." (Boyce 2016, pers. comm., 4 December)

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<sup>52</sup> Belting returns to the origin of images as the human creation of socially active representations of the dead, that replaced the shock of the corpse as the fleeting carrier of a persons image after death: "Through images and their use, the social realm was now expanded to include the realm of the dead. And as the social realm acquired this new dimension, the realm of the living became less precarious." (Belting, 2011, p87) In this respect, it would be reasonable to define recorded voices as images, in Jonathan Sterne's conception of them.

*Camera Lucida* presented a fascinating project in which to queer hauntology because Dickie was vacating the stage to direct three performers. They were to lip-sync to various voice recordings, including William Burroughs, Virginia Woolf and Terrance McKenna.

To the credit of Dickie's solo work, his directorial role presented the challenge of managing the extent to which the group's performances would emulate trademarks of his honed craft. A key concern would be attending to an implicit presence of Dickie Beau's absence on stage: the show would run under his name, and this would set up an audience expectation that could be nurtured and challenged. In our interview, Simon Vincenzi offered his analogy of this dynamic:

"In my head, the performers could be replaced by anyone. It wasn't important that they were characters being particular people; it wasn't about them. The power and structure were coming from somewhere else. The space was the inside of a computer somehow... Dickie Beau was outside the computer and [the performers] were processors." (Vincenzi 2016, pers. comm., 3 December)

From a hauntological perspective, Dickie's performer/director role was embedded within the conceptual frame of the show. In its final form, he opted to include a Dickie Beau performance, but with his presence mediated through video playback on a flat-screen monitor hung above the stage. He lip-synced the voice of Wendy Miller: a living British woman who had been attracting media attention for taking charge of burying her mother, independently and privately, and speaking out on the right to do so. The following link shows this performance:

<https://vimeo.com/281311896> (Password: wendy)

Dickie recorded Miller when interviewing her on Skype, and through technical oversight, failed to record his own voice. This act inadvertently muted his

statements of intent with regards to the project and his inclusion of her story within it:

"When I skyped with Wendy... my voice was not recorded and rendered missing. That we kept in the show; that is fabulous." (Boyce 2016, pers. comm., 4 December)

Dickie's performance of Miller's voice made comic use of this absence of his voice. The audience would have "got it" that Dickie performed Miller's comprehension of his own (now silenced) explanations of a show that they were simultaneously experiencing as distinctly *unexplained*. Significantly for my queer compositionist stance, the silences in this performance mark the absence of Dickie Beau's *actual* voice. A fundamental enigma of Dickie's solo performances is the perception of a present-absence of Dickie Beau. When he lip-syncs a recorded voice, it is as if he subsumes himself in the recording in order to reanimate the voice and direct a form of collective listening. His decision to both perform in and direct *Camera Lucida* translates this perfected subsumption into the dissipated persona of Dickie Beau as a haunting author of the work.



**Figure 19:** Dickie Beau as Wendy Miller in *Camera Lucida*.

Let us consider Dickie's on-screen appearance as a mistake, not to critique the performance or its inclusion, but as a way to reveal *Camera Lucida* as a hauntological project to which queer compositionism offered some oblique interventions. What formal outcomes emerge when a queer compositionist takes the stance of honouring a haunting authorship that resists being undermined by apparition? Did Dickie's appearance undermine the present-absence of Dickie Beau's persona, so well foregrounded by his being technologically silenced? Did his appearance shift attention to this same present-absence of Dickie Beau in the shows on-stage performers? Did this expose their mediation of the trademarks of his craft? Did this block the performers from being subsumed in recordings themselves? These are questions that arise from the *Camera Lucida* project and Dickie's bold position within it.

Simon Vincenzi initiated these questions in our interview, suggesting that Dickie's Miller performance instilled a focus on the performers that hindered what I have already outlined as Dickie's ability to direct collective listening:

"His presence set up a tension between the other characters. They were matching him." (Vincenzi 2016, pers. comm., 3 December)

Vincenzi - within the context of my questioning - attributed this to a failure to fully honour the recorded voices:

"There was something about the performance that meant the text was not given the importance it should have been given. People were looking at a performance rather than listening to the text: the words. I had friends who hated the sound of Terence McKenna, which was a shame because what he was saying was really interesting. I liked that, partly because it was so incredibly dense. You had to concentrate." (Vincenzi 2016, pers. comm., 3 December)

*Camera Lucida* presented a challenge for Dickie Beau to haunt his own show: it was likely in the DNA of the project that his desired performance technique would betray authorial haunting through its apparitions. This conundrum and its implications for the collaborative dynamic of the project is to the credit of Dickie Beau's solo work that preceded it. Queer compositionism could be applied to the project, and its advancement as a strategy has benefited hugely. The following account will outline my contributions to the show's development.

## Stage 1

### The Containment of Voices

During initial discussions, Dickie played me a collection of recorded voices he was referencing. We focussed on the source of these recordings as being the proliferation of digitisation, and how this forms both their container and outlet. Digitised recordings distance voices from their bodily origin as they are mediated



into data, stored and recalled through the networked complexity of cyberspace. The recordings used in the show would appear with their historical origin and logic of selection obscured, and my musical organisation of the show would need to reflect this. Dickie's final script would not be aleatory: its logic, humour, and cultural context would be precisely constructed. However, he stated a wish to retain a perception of accidental association as voices were channelled into the show.

I wished to assemble a response where musical elements would form a plausible container for these voices and also reflect the present-absence of Dickie's authorial position. Present-absence became an underpinning concept for my approach to the project, and in our interview, Dickie shared my interpretation of the show as a host of evasive elements. For him the presence of death around a body or a recorded voice had been a fundamental concern:

"Say your mother died and you are suddenly faced with her body, which is really an image of her; the body makes present the idea of the person but at the same time makes present her absence. I love that idea, and of course, Roland Barthes talks about that in *Camera Lucida*<sup>53</sup> which is why I called the show that." (Boyce 2016, pers. comm., 4 December)

As well as listening to voices in our initial discussions, Dickie referenced sources of audio online: ASMR videos, Electronic Voice Phenomenon (EVP) recordings,<sup>54</sup> and the similarity between the sounds of telecommunication hardware and insects. Subsequently, I created a catalogue of sampled audio that extended these references. This was the first phase of my queer compositionist approach, and the

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<sup>53</sup> See part two of *Camera Lucida: Reflections On Photography*. "The Photograph does not necessarily say *what is no longer*, but only and for certain *what has been*." (Barthes, 1981, p85)

<sup>54</sup> See Joe Banks (2012), who expansively defines EVP as a belief system that makes use of psycho-acoustic phenomena.

samples would later form a part of the soundscape into which Dickie's voice recordings would be contained.

Recording a voice eternalises a present-absent body, embalming it in vinyl crackle, tape hiss, digital noise, audible compression, poor laptop speakers, and so on. The voices in Dickie's script were remnants of the analogue age, salvaged from their containment in a vast network of digitally mediated versions of slowly decaying physical artefacts.

Seen through Latour's circulation of reference, digitisation is a process that amplifies the universalism of its source through a chain of abstraction. Recorded voices residing in analogue storage media, already fused with traces of absent bodies, now have the present-absence of a physical medium added to them. This is an absence that can be eerily present in digital files as an audible, crackling, obscuring, transducing, condensing container.

A fusion of the alluring sonic signatures of analogue technology with a recorded voice is preserved within the (often audible) veneer of digital files. To record a voice always means the person behind it has submitted to unknown futures, and this includes the shifting networks of technological mediation (Stanjek & Piekut 2010).

## Stage 2

### Joe Meek as Queer Composer

I searched for a musical element that could haunt the show's development and replace Harry Partch as queer compositionism's interpellative agent. I wanted to recruit a sonic signature for the show that shared the same digitised origin as the voices. Dickie was doing an archaeology of voices, and I began searching through

the detritus in which they were buried. By happenstance, I encountered the B-side track of The Tornados' final record with Joe Meek, *Do You Come Here Often?*

(Released 12<sup>th</sup> August 1966):

<https://vimeo.com/182551437>

Had I unearthed evidence of a past queer burying voices for this possible future? With no predetermined aesthetic as to what the burial matter may sound like, I had been able to encounter this track, listen to and through it, and recognise an expression of the closet. This is an example of how I, as a queer composer, apply interpellative audition to hauntological music practice.

Music journalist Jon Savage has shed light on *Do You Come Here Often?*, noting its singularity amongst multiple Meek records through which he obliquely addressed the closet. For example,

"Meek pulled off a huge coup with the success of the Honeycomb's 'Have I The Right?', #1 in the UK in August 1964 and an oblique comment on his own blocked right to emotional fulfillment." (Savage, 2016, p294)

Meek buried an explicit homage to queer counterculture in *Do You Come Here Often?*, in what Savage hails as,

"the first record on a UK major label... to deliver a slice of homosexual life so accurate that it's possible to hear its cut-and-thrust in any gay bar today." (Savage, 2016, p290)

The release date for the record was only a few months before Meek's death to suicide, which in turn occurred just months before the passing of the Sexual Offences Act that legalised sex in private between two men aged 21 or over in England and Wales.

Halfway through the track, two members of The Tornados - Dave Watts and Robb Huxley - put on camp voices and perform a spontaneously scripted scenario crafted together with Meek in his studio: Meek would have been the only accomplice revelling in the queerness of it all. Watts and Huxley unwittingly play the roles of two queens in Soho conversing cuttingly in innuendos and closing with a reference to the "dilly", which was code for Piccadilly Circus; a site for male prostitution and illicit sex. Savage affirms my notion that Meek buried these voices as the track,

"begins as an organ-drenched instrumental...and stays that way over two minutes. By that time, most people would have switched off. Had they persisted they would have heard two sibilant, camp voices bitching" (Savage, 2016, p288)

As a queer compositionist, I recognise Meek's delinquent move here. He made use of his studio-craft and savviness as a producer to assemble an audio-technological containment for his message that only a dab hand at the glass closet could muster. The closet is not something that should be erased by a normative appropriation of gay liberation struggles. There is knowledge behind it that is undermined by mistaking "coming out" to others as synonymous with coming to terms with oneself, and indeed, the latter is a lifelong cruise. Savage writes that,

"Meek's scenario highlights the heart-stopping instant, that high-wire walk between acceptance and rejection that every gay man knows." (Savage, 2016, p290)

Perhaps this is precisely the stance that a queer compositionist is striving to achieve? To cruise through a project, utilising an epistemology of the closet to keep present-absence fabulous.

Meek, seen as a queer compositionist in this instance, assembled the capacities of a throw-away tune, the B-side of a record, and his downturn in the UK charts, to bury a queer message for a desired future.

It is reasonable to claim that Meek was consciously bottling this message up.

Savage notes Meek's media savviness in relation to the design of the A-side to *Do You Come Here Often?* titled *Is That A Ship I Hear?*. He assembled it with the aim of seducing pirate radio DJ's, broadcasting from offshore ships and disused sea forts. These "pirates" were influencing record sales at the time, and the track opens with the sounds of waves and seagulls:

"Meek hoped that the title and the ocean effects would convince the DJs... to put his new record on heavy rotation." (Savage, 2016, p287)

He sent his disc seaward, knowing his camp voices remained safely stowed inside its B-side. It was the bottle, not the note, that contained all the utopian hope of being beached into sympathetic hands.

Meek would have been aware of the contemporaneous experimentalism that went into B-Sides: the "flip-sides" of Phil Spector are the most celebrated example. The "flip" was subservient to a single due to the direct correlation of radio plays to unit sales. Therefore, Spector created obscure tracks that ensured DJs broadcast the single and never the flip. However, the production time dedicated to flips was not wasted and functioned as a space for musical and studio-craft experimentation; often of a sub-cultural bent.

The use of a record release as containment that Meek's delinquent act constitutes, fits my approach to *Camera Lucida* as a containment of voices within the noisy mediative effects of sound-reproduction. I extracted the tune of *Do You Come Here Often?* and put it to work in its capacity to obliquely intervene in the project's

development. I understood Meek's act as navigating audio-production as queers do the closet. Appropriating the tune honours not merely what he contained but how the containment was done: I attended to the bottle as a message.

The selection of Meek's tune as an organising principle for the development of *Camera Lucida* constitutes the application of the interpellative listening I have outlined in relation to Harry Partch. The mediation of sound-reproduction technologies forms a containment that can present evidence of past queers utilising it in a way that expresses their negotiations of the glass closet. This idea is where queer compositionism begins to contribute to hauntological music practice in which samples are used to evoke melancholy for lost utopias.

A queer compositionist is directed by a suspicion of the sentiment that surface noises or sonic signatures are merely residues of a coveted era. This sentiment is queered when one listens not only *to* these things but also *through* them as aural dust (Stone 2015). Alternative worlds are hinted at by the way audio is put together to demarcate the open secret of queer, fabulous lives fluidly. To circumvent the stagnant nostalgia that fetishising surface noise brings about, one can apply interpellative audition to recognise uses of audio that become evidence of queer utopian negotiations of the closet.

Dickie Beau stated his understanding of Joe Meek in the context of the project, as based on Meek's relationship to death:

"There was a ghost of Joe Meek in the show. We had the various other ghosts in there, and each of the people I chose had a strange relationship to death, so it was significant that Meek killed himself. Virginia Woolf killed herself, Terrance McKenna had a great mind, a visionary who died of a brain tumour. William Burroughs, of course, killed his wife, and that hung around him his whole life." (Boyce 2016, pers. comm., 4 December)

Simon Vincenzi reminded me of Meek's relationship to clairvoyance, which was unknown to me when I first encountered *Do You Come Here Often?*. Jon savage attributes this to Meek's deteriorating mental health, which I am inclined to dispute:

"He was spooky: obsessed with other worlds, with graveyards, with spiritualism and the occult." (Savage, 2016, p294)

There remains an open question around Meek's obsession with clairvoyance and how it may connect his sound-engineering to a general perception of gays being ultra-sensitive. I see Dickie and Simon's interpretations of Meek as their way of framing his presence as a haunting principle in the formation of the show. For me, Meek's delinquent act in the studio is an example of the assemblage of the capacities of human and nonhuman actants to obliquely intervene in a creative project, and this is the crux of queer compositionism.

### Stage 3

#### The Ghost of Joe Meek as Organising Principle

I sampled and manipulated the melody from *Do You Come Here Often?* into a playful leitmotif that recurred throughout the show; a sonic spectre always threatening to re-appear. All other elements that I assembled into the project honoured this tune and the present-absence of Joe Meek. Maintaining a traceable chain of reference to Meek liberated me from the hierarchical and specialist role of sound designer, allowing me to justify a determined refusal of its possible demands. I did not withdraw my personhood from the project but distributed it queerly, and the melody became a musical thread that determined the dynamic of

the sonic containment I created for Dickie's voices. The following video links show various occurrences of the leitmotif:

- I. An immersive walk-in drone, suggestive of a sombre organ recital. The tune was played through an unseen speaker upstage of the glowing arch and table seen at the back of the stage. As the show began, the auditorium sound faded to isolate the tune upstage briefly. Throughout the rest of the show, there was a tonal drone from beyond the glowing arch so that a remnant of the tune was always present: <https://vimeo.com/182551439>
- II. At various points, Dickie included extracts from *The Lifeboat Hour*, an occultist American 1970s radio chat show. I appropriated Meek's original version as the show's theme music: <https://vimeo.com/182551438>
- III. Dickie Beau's Wendy Miller performance appears as a pseudo-Skype call. I created a version of Skype's incoming-call tone using the tune: <https://vimeo.com/182551440>

Few audience members will have recognised these occurrences as versions of the same tune, but honouring it as an audible element dictated the sonic dynamic and structure of the show and resulted in unexpected formal outcomes. The tune established the aesthetic of the show's sound palate, and my use of it was supported by a visual signifier of the present-absence of Joe Meek.

I suggested a MIDI controlled player-piano be included in the stage design that could playback pre-recorded performances; this includes the uncanny reproduction of the player's movement of the keys. The piano played the Meek tune at a specific moment in the show and - to lend it further character - it was decided that the piano would have an isolated moment of its own. I invited pianist Steve Beresford to play in the parts the show required. As a free improviser, Beresford has a developed sensitivity and humour that lent itself to the task.

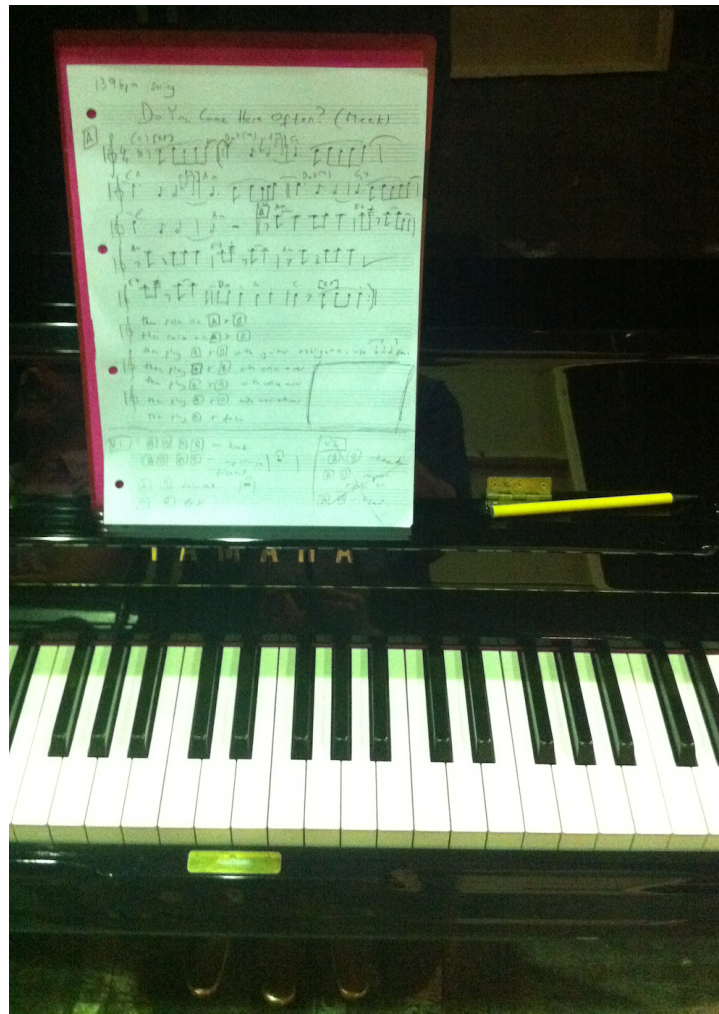




Figure 20: Player-piano in *Camera Lucida*.



Figure 21: Miranda Floy reacts to the player-piano's tantrum in *Camera Lucida*.



**Figure 22:** Steve Beresford's arrangements for "Do You Come Here Often?".

Beresford arranged a version of the Meek tune and also contributed 3 minutes of free improvisation. My brief for this was "the piano needs to have a tantrum." The following links show the piano playing itself: the present-absence of Beresford is clear:

Meek tune: <https://vimeo.com/182551447>

Tantrum: <https://vimeo.com/182551441>

The piano had a significant impact on the staging, leading to me working closely with Simon Vincenzi. This shifted my collaborative stance toward a staging that

evolved around the notion of the performers being material carriers of voices; not characters in a narrative. I asked Vincenzi what the piano had meant for him, and he discussed it in terms of absence:

"These voices in the internet are not there; they are just coming from a screen. In the same way, there is no-one at the piano; it is just replicating a presence of someone who has been there. So those people at the laptops - for me - were not there. That was the important thing: they themselves were the screen of the voice that was coming from the laptop. In the same way, the player-piano was this structure that allowed the presence of someone who was no longer there." (Vincenzi 2016, pers. comm., 4 December)

Vincenzi's stage design included black laptops on metal legs in front of chairs, forming workstations from which the performers channelled voices. All of the laptop stations were seemingly networked with a mass of red cable that scattered the floor, making the black box of the theatre very present. I felt there should be a further sound element that connected to this, and suggested a series of open-top wooden black boxes be arranged on the stage floor, so they partly mirrored the layout of the laptop stations.

I saw these floor boxes as resembling a pressure valve or trash function for the computer network the staging represented. The boxes were fitted with resonating speakers, allowing me to amplify sounds through the wood, giving a sense of the performance space being contained in the same aural detritus as the audience. The placement of sounds became difficult to discern as they subtly merged with one another around the theatre space. The box sounds occurred intermittently throughout the show, but at one moment they were intensified, as the network was seen to be shutting down:

<https://vimeo.com/182558990>



**Figure 23:** Matthew Floyd Jones with floor box in *Camera Lucida*.

Installed in the ceiling of the performance space was another present-absence; a 6-metre long speaker we referred to as the infra-sound pipe. It was built using sewer pipe into which I installed a 10-inch low-frequency speaker. The pipe was cut to a specific length and used to create a standing wave at 18.9Hz, an infra-sound frequency just below the hearing range of humans. 18.9Hz was physically present in the room, but the majority of people would not have registered this, so it was introduced as a talking point around the show.

The frequency is thought to have both emotional and physiological effects on some people in certain circumstances, including a tingling sensation on the fingers and the back of the head, feelings of unease, and even nausea. NASA define it as the resonant frequency of the eyeball, which has been cited as a cause for ghost

sightings. Dickie Beau had become interested in this phenomenon through Vic Tandy's article, *The Ghost In The Machine* (1998).

**Theatre** Camera Lucida: a truly spine-tingling experience

With Victorian theatrics, disembodied voices and an low-frequency generating infrasound device, Dickie Beau's multimedia seance will be felt as much as heard

---

**John O'Mahony**

Tuesday 28 October 2014 12:36 GMT

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Matthew Floyd Jones in Camera Lucida by Dickie Beau. Photograph: Tristram Kenton

**R**ight at the back of the Barbican's Pit theatre, a glowing green fluorescent table seems to magically float in the velvety purple darkness. Downstage, three actors - two male, one female - sit in the eerie reflected glow, twitching, gurning, flailing, as if possessed.

But by far the most ghostly and troubling element of [Camera Lucida](#) - a radical multimedia seance that opens on 28 October and will channel the voices of the dead into the Pit over Halloween - lurks unseen, right above the audience. Looking like a corrugated cruise missile and operating at an audio frequency 18.9 hertz, this is what is known as an infrasound device.

**Figure 24:** Screen shot of John O'Mahony's preview of *Camera Lucida* for The Guardian.

The presence of this frequency conveyed sound's tactile relationship with the human body and how we are contained within it. During rehearsals cast members and technicians felt the tingling effects of the frequency's presence, and I even provided a specific paragraph for a risk assessment form because the theatre had health and safety concerns.

The frequency was undoubtedly present in the space. However, we also had a collective feeling that some of the unease was akin to the amplified sensitivity evoked when telling ghost stories. Therefore, we made some subtle interventions so that the frequency became a talking point for audience members. Several people said to me after the shows that they had felt the effects of the frequency and I have no doubt that it will have affected the experience of the show for anyone who was aware of its presence. For me, its subliminal presence was rendered most apparent when I took it away at specific moments.

The frequency's presence was supported in three main ways:

- I. The Barbican Centre provided pseudo-signs, warning of the frequency's use. Their insignia provided an official, institutional validity.
- II. I placed sub-woofers under the seating bank and introduced audible bass frequencies that were higher harmonics of 18.9Hz. The room was filled with an ominous sonic presence that was perceptible to the ear and representative of the elusive presence of infra-sound. As with the leitmotif of *Do You Come Here Often?*, these frequencies were a factor that stipulated the dynamic of the show. I maintained relative quiet throughout to allow for all the sonic elements to form a cohesive containment.

III. A journalist for The Guardian (O'Mahony, 2014) anchored an article around the infrasound pipe as a point of curiosity for the show. This article would have been read by enough of the audience for it to have had agency in our hope for the infrasound pipe to be a talking point.

One final consideration in the show's development was the sonic content used to complete the containment of audience, performance, and the recorded voices. I remained attentive to my assemblage of musical elements by not introducing further content arbitrarily. The room was immersed in a kind of bin of sound detritus with loudspeakers arranged in a surround sound formation, giving a further elusiveness to the location of each sound.

It was logical to make use of the sound material sampled during my initial online search around ASMR videos, Electronic Voice Phenomenon, and so on. I created hybrid sounds by morphing the samples together using an audio software plug-in. This created the desired sense of sonic detritus and the content through which I had become oriented with the show was fed back into it. They represented the containment from which individual sounds and voices were excavated. An example of how these morphed tracks sounded can be heard at,

<https://soundcloud.com/suanders/cameralucidamorphedsounds>

## Conclusions

*Camera Lucida* allowed me to pragmatically explore the formal outcomes of a queer compositionist approach within the collaborative context of experimental theatre. Queer compositionism does not offer a predetermined aesthetic; instead, it



manifests a project-specific nuance. It is a stance that celebrates the unexpected outcomes one encounters when the oblique intervention of human and nonhuman agency is sought and assembled.

Joe Meek's act of embedding forbidden queer voices into a container of obscure pop music in 1966 was taken up as a historic act of queer compositionism and a catalyst for the formation of the show's musical form. As with Stanjek and Piekut's idea of inter-mundane collaboration, Meek preserved a gesture on a recording medium with no control over its possible future. My contribution to *Camera Lucida* was to open the bottle, free the message, and make use of the glass. All subsequent formal development, with regard to a musical dynamic for the show, was traceable to this action.

The assemblage of elements I have outlined, supported my subversion of the prescriptive nature of professionally defined roles such as sound designer or composer. The musical contribution was conceptually integrated, impacted on an organisational level, and was creatively provocative within the collaborative development of the project's outcomes.

An emergent outcome of queer compositionism is the establishment of project specific organisational principles that allow for a Partch-like spiky evasiveness to foreground the personhood of the compositionist. This is analogous to negotiations of the closet because - in every new situation - the rules are set based on an intuitive but strictly principled understanding of which elements of a not-yet-here world should be expressed, how, and for whom. Simon Vincenzi's comment on working alongside me on this project testifies to this:

"When I was listening to what you were doing with sound during the show there was just something free and - for me - you are able to do that because you knew what the rules were." (Vincenzi 2016, pers. comm., 4 December)



### 4.3 Suitable Establishment

Full documentation of the show can be seen at:

<https://vimeo.com/164451948> (password: harmonica)

*Camera and editing by Hanna Fischer, 2015.*

#### The Project and Collaborators

*Suitable Establishment* was a theatre show by the multi-disciplinary collective LampingHuppSaunders, created in co-production with Studiobühne Köln, Cologne, Germany. The show premiered in the autumn of 2015.

Theatre-maker and educator Gwendolin Lamping, dancer and performance artist Theresa Hupp, and I collaborated with a commitment to moulding our practices into the form of the show. I was able to apply my findings from *Camera Lucida*, with the aim of demonstrating queer compositionism as a stance that produces project-specific outcomes, non-reliant on particular content or themes. In this respect, my account of the show functions as a brief but essential supplement to my observations around *Camera Lucida*.

#### The Collaborative Dynamic of the Project and My Queer Compositionist Aims

Collectively devised, *Suitable Establishment* staged and supported Gwendolin Lamping's portrayal of her mother, who lives with dementia. We discussed dementia as presenting a double exposure of presence and absence in the domesticity of the family home. Gwendolin's mother is surrounded by the arrangements that she once put together, but she now rarely instigates any action

that these arrangements anticipate. She eats, drinks tea, speaks very little, flits between agitation and contentment, listens to music occasionally, sleeps. The structure and dynamic of the show avoided any event that would betray this present-absence: not a lot happened and nor could it have been expected too. The project provoked a captivating invitation to inhabit the touching gestural details within a quotidian domesticity in which all elements are potentially perplexing. Theresa's suggestion was to link this perplexity to the unorthodox arrangement of words in *Tender Buttons* by Gertrude Stein. This proved a fruitful way of contemplating the succession of happenings that one could imagine *might* constitute the condition of dementia, and provided a mutual reference point for the three of us to collaborate.



**Figure 25:** Gwendolin Lamping, William Saunders and Theresa Hupp in *Suitable Establishment*.

My queer compositionist approach followed on from *Camera Lucida*, with all the elements I assembled stemming from an enquiry into the mother's relationship to music. Gwendolin made two videos of her mother playing the harmonica and one of her seemingly listening intently to records. As with the tune from Joe Meek in *Camera Lucida*, the capacity of these videos to obliquely intervene in the development of the project was honoured.

The mother's ability to recall and play tunes from her past on the harmonica, and her apparent recognition of the pop songs playing from records, became factors that determined formal decisions in the show's development and led to unexpected outcomes. In the two videos in which Lamping hands her mother a harmonica, she quickly remembers and masters specific tunes. I ascertained which songs she was emulating, the most prominent versions of which can be heard at:

<https://vimeo.com/182693184>

<https://vimeo.com/182693069>

The staging of *Suitable Establishment* was a simple living room arrangement suggestive of a conventional drama play: a sofa, a table, a rug, a window, and other everyday odds and ends. My queer compositionist move was to follow the oblique intervention that harmonicas and the tunes that Gwendolin's mother had played could have on the formal outcomes of the theatre piece.

I am not a harmonica player, so my use of the instrument was limited to intuitive exploration. I saw it as containing the capacity to point to a space of recollection that the mother accesses through playing. She did not voice the possible memories behind these tunes, so the sound of the harmonica contained them, making audible their inaccessibility. This is a further example of my understanding of

aural dust (Stone 2015). Listening both *to* and *through* the harmonica's sound as a surface, I began to contemplate how we could stage an expression of the bodily presence of an absent subject that can be observed in someone living with dementia.<sup>55</sup>

The tunes that Lamping's mother had played appeared in the show in various ways. I decided that the sound source of the tunes should be seen on stage and that the conventional use of a theatre PA to add musical elements over and above the performance space should be minimised. I used a wood-cased record player from the 1970s, which suited the domestic setting being portrayed.<sup>56</sup> When music was to be played in the show, a record was put on by either myself or Theresa. We put together a small record collection based on the videos Gwendolin had made: two of the records contained versions of the tunes played on the harmonica, and the rest were records that Lamping's mother listened to at home.

I decided to contain my sound design contribution within this record collection. One intuition that we had of dementia is that it presents an other-worldly, timeless state in which past actions or memories seem not to be re-visitible. Lamping also observed that her mother's behaviour had become mischievous. For these reasons, it felt important to stage a sense of the domestic that could be disorientated and amplified in an Alice-In-Wonderland type way. To transcend the apparent mundanity of our staging, then, I had a one-off dubplate vinyl record pressed with my own versions of three tunes that Gwendolin's mother had played on her harmonica.

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<sup>55</sup> For a vital study of the "look" of absenting subjects, see Catherine Malabou's essay on *destructive plasticity*: "there's no thundering, shimmering metamorphosis like in the myths. No, they are exactly the same as before, just with added indifference." (Malabou, 2012, p72)

<sup>56</sup> As Jonathan Sterne outlines, the history of marketing record players is more in line with furniture than musical instruments (Sterne, 2003, p195).

My versions are made up of manipulated samples from the commercial records we had sourced and my attempts to recall the tunes I was newly acquainted with, and play them on the harmonica. Digital versions of the two sides of the record can be heard at:

<https://soundcloud.com/suanders/suitableestablishmentdubplateside1>

<https://soundcloud.com/suanders/suitableestablishmentdubplateside2>



**Figure 25:** Record collection, including dubplate for *Suitable Establishment*.



**Figure 26:** Dubplate with fruit in *Suitable Establishment*.



**Figure 27:** Record player as furniture in *Suitable Establishment*.

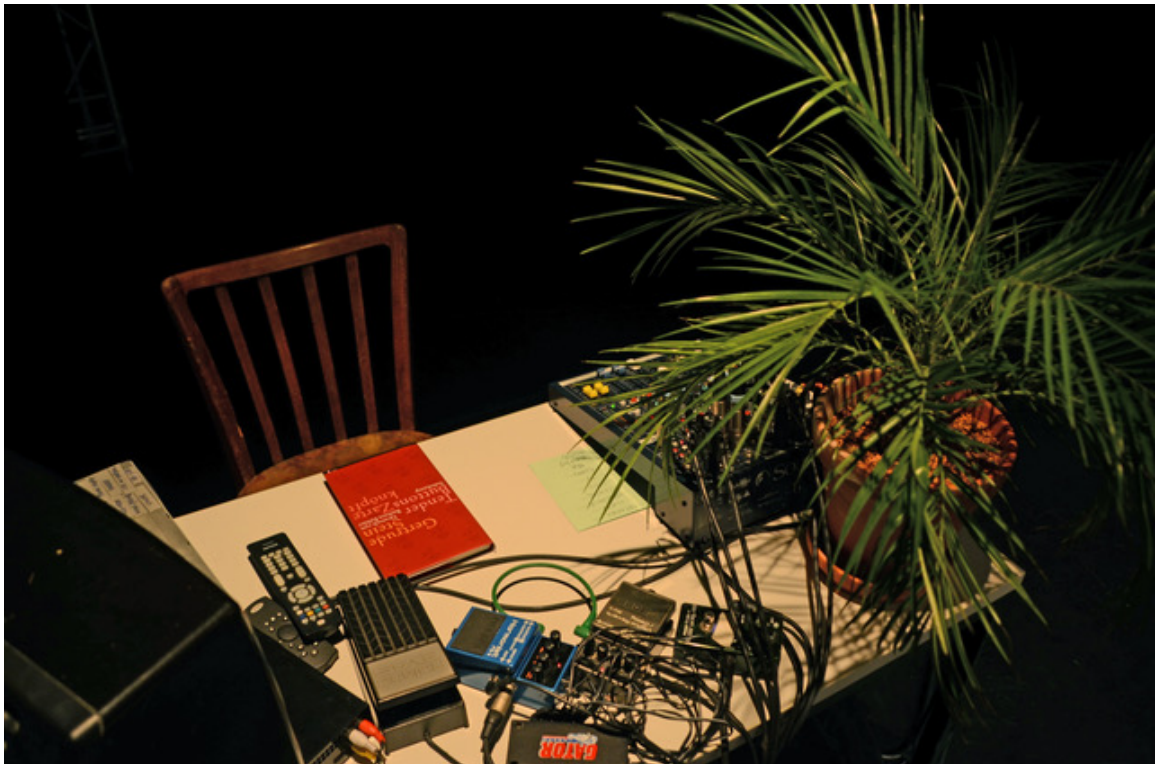


The record player was connected to domestic speakers so that the sound remained locatable to the stage. I also maintained the possibility of amplifying the signal further through a PA and onstage subwoofer. This was a useful dynamic tool for shifting the show between dry domestic mundanity and a sense of sensorial overload and childlike dream-state. We negotiated a structure in which the three tracks of the record were all played once in full throughout the piece, thus utilising their capacity to effect formal outcomes. The tracks' uses can be seen in the following video excerpts:

<https://vimeo.com/282116718> (Password: dubplate1)

<https://vimeo.com/282116951> (Password: dubplate2)

<https://vimeo.com/282117399> (Password: dubplate3)



**Figure 28:** My onstage sound operation table for *Suitable Establishment*.

There were three other simple sound elements in the piece. I hung one microphone above the sofa and a second in front of me at a table on stage. This allowed me to illustrate, through amplification and controlled feedback, the sense of perplexity we were portraying. It also allowed me to bridge the opposing dynamics of dry mundanity and otherworldly sensory overload.

On my onstage table was a television on which I played back one of the harmonica videos. The TV faced upstage, meaning the audience could not see the face of Gwendolin's mother: only the tune and a snippet of her laughter was heard. The playback of the video was a rare moment in the piece in which Gwendolin, who was playing her mother naturalistically, emotively acknowledged a formal element of her surrounding. She left the sofa, on which she sat for the majority of the show, to watch the video in which her mother is playing the tune *Lang Lang Ist Her*. Once the listening attention of both Gwendolin and the audience was established, I played the commercial record of the same tune on the record player. Gwendolin at that moment almost danced, suggesting a sense of nostalgic memory for which the record was a portal to which, perhaps, only the individual living with dementia has access. I understood this as a sonic barrier to a suggested private past.

Another element was the recording of Gertrude Stein's *Rooms*, read by Anna Homler and directed by myself. We approached the words as independent objects with no servitude to any creation of sense within formal sentences. Rather than manipulate the reading, or force connections between the words and the domestic things on stage, the reading was allowed to flow of its own accord, commenting on the show's proceedings and offering accidental points of cohesion.



Anna's voice was amplified from upstage and took on the character of an almost randomised narrator. I found that the presence of the words made clear that the mundane domesticity presented on stage could not be taken for granted. Instead, the singularity of every domestic item assembled could take on a perplexing agency beyond normative function. Just as with the assemblage of items the audience could see, any attempt to understand the words heard, based on pre-determined codes of sense-making, would undermine Stein's intent. It would also miss the ambiguous connections between Homler's reading of the words and our performed portrayal of the foregrounded perplexity of self-assembled domesticity, observed in someone living with dementia.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The emergence of queer compositionism through my work with Kenchington and Homler was driven by the maintenance of Harry Partch as a spectre within the process: an evasive principle that steered the assemblage of the project and its development. The use of sounds or images from Partch's actual work was never considered: firstly because the musicians provided this material; secondly, because my enquiry was not focussed on Partch's works but the queerness of my interpellation with mediated fragments of his personhood. In conclusion, I suggested that Partch is a dispensable example of a queering agent: my navigation of his author function initiated the emergence of queer compositionism, but the aim has been to expose the notion as a strategy for assembling project-specific musical principles for collaborative performance projects.

My role as a queer compositionist is the assertion, on a project by project basis, of what sonic element will be recruited in Partch's place as the queering agent that

determines the assemblage of a project's shape. What working strategy is revealed when queer compositionism dispenses with Partch? And to what mode of practice can this strategy be contextualised and contribute? Queer compositionism offers a distinct contribution to hauntological music practice.

The Kenchington/Homler project utilised sound-reproduction technologies to reassemble audio-visual material that the musicians were already producing. In contrast, the invitation to contribute to theatre projects contains an implicit request to provide musical material not yet present. In these situations, a queer compositionist must identify a conceptually integrated source of sound material and maintain its presence as a haunting principle in the work's formal development. This catalysing source replaces Harry Partch, to the extent that it obliquely intervenes and determines the chain of elements assembled into a project for their capacity to effect conceptually integrated change.

Reflecting on the specific questions from my hypothesis, I can say that Benjamin Piekut's use of Latourian ideas can be seen here to have had an effect on my assembling of the theatre projects. This is particularly prevalent in the way that the audible past may be scoured in search of expressions of the closet. The melodies extracted are used in a way that honours the elements of a personhood that remain throughout the mediation of sound reproduction technologies and formats. These two theatre projects demonstrate how queer compositionism relates to the notion of the closet as an ongoing process of negotiation and renewal, in that they show how each project must be put together through integrated elements, rather than depending on an authorial aesthetic being added to them. The two projects go further than the Kenchington/Homler project in demonstrating how relating hybridised personhood to the epistemology of the closet offers a queering of

hauntological music-making. This comes from the notion of searching the past for a project-specific musical element that is utilised to set off a chain of oblique intervention, leading to the formal outcomes of the performance. In contrast to hauntological music that uses surface noise as an aesthetically binding sonic quality, queer compositionism has been seen to look back into sound reproduction as a closet-like assemblage of surfaces that can be articulated anew. Thinking very specifically about how a sound has been aurally packaged, adds a significance to its extraction from the past to make use of its mediating properties in a new queer context. This gives the queer compositionist a responsibility to honour the present-absence of personhoods mediated through sound-reproduction technology, rather than sifting through an infinite supply of sounds in order to support a fixed and nostalgic authorial aesthetic.

## Overall Conclusion

The inception of this research was triggered by a hail from Harry Partch's enigmatic outsider identity. I could not have known that my confluence with his author function would lead to a queering of hauntological music-making, yet this is a key contribution to knowledge that has emerged. Through a balance of innovative practice and the assemblage of literature from diverse sources, my initial query and its outcomes became radically different but unopposed.

At times, Partch's presence was overbearing, and the rigorous yet obliquely orientated search for traces of his queerness seemed insubstantial in contrast to the narrative of a pioneering rugged individualist that clings to his authorial standing. What has transpired is the speculative outline of queer compositionism as a strategy for assembling the musical principles of collaborative projects. My

practice has always taken place in collaborative settings, and in retrospect, Partch's initial hail could well have been appealing to my fear of obscurity and want of an individualised aesthetic within these contexts. However, having investigated the ambivalent nature of Partch's individualism, I have ascertained that it is precisely this "being lost" (in music) that can produce significant effects in projects, by (mis)aligning one's contributions with a queering self.

I arrived at the notion of queerness through my disorientation with gay subjectivity, coupled with a hunch about Harry Partch's sexual orientation. Importantly though, if queer compositionism is to be meaningfully applied outside of my personal epistemology of the closet, it must circumvent queer liberalism. The strategy, primarily concerned with assembling project-specific musical principles in collaborative settings, works by applying a methodology based on Latourian ideas, in order to approach projects in a way that resembles the closet-like negotiations required when one's personhood mis-recognises minoritising subjectivities. This should not be confined to sexual orientation, and certainly not white (gay) males. A further study is required to test and analyse the approach as practicable by different artists wishing to work queerly and mediate their fluid personhood through the assemblage of projects. Queerness embraces universal differences, inclusive of disability, race, gender, class, and nation. This research is a humble contribution to queer practice, and further study is needed to thoroughly embed my contributions into the cross-disciplinary, intersectional discipline of queer studies. The thinking of Ahmad, Foucault, Halberstam, Muñoz, and Sedgwick has had a profound impact on my attempt to work in confluence with Harry Partch's author function. The realisation that an inter-subjective approach can rigorously challenge fixed perceptions and modes of

knowledge, was vital for forming a frame of research in which theory and practice support each other, without being wholly in the service of each other. Although the term queer compositionism stems from this research's juxtaposition of Latourian compositionism and the queer knowledge of the closet as an ongoing process of renewal, it is affirming to conclude that the term has been arrived at elsewhere. Although her stance differs somewhat to my own and has not been a necessary consideration in exploring my hypothesis, in my future exploration of the queer compositionism I am keen to investigate how my use of the term may (or may not) be framed within Jamie Skye Bianco's call (2015) for practice-based artistic research that responds to what she has broadly coined "Queer Creative Critical Compositionism". Bianco's article does not challenge the uniqueness of my own; on the contrary, it presents an exciting and uncanny parallel. Also bringing together Eve Sedgwick's queering and Bruno Latour's compositioning, Bianco identifies as a para-academic DJ; remixing things and claiming that "we have analyzed to bits. Now we must take up the bits in non-reproductive futurities, in capacious makings" (2015, 470).

I have been able to offer a speculative introduction to the central concepts of queer compositionism as it has emerged through this research. This, at the very least, is a significant contribution to the newly reinvigorated thinking around Harry Partch's relevance for creative practice and authorship. It is a unique strategy that I hope can be taken up and refined by further practitioners wishing to apply knowledge of their closet to how they orientate collaborative projects. As with negotiations of the closet, the queerness of my compositionism reveals in obliquely intervening on

its own terms, and those terms are set anew - every time - by assembling the dormant alternatives that peripheral elements of a project have to offer.

At the latter stages of the Homler and Kenchington projects, as they began to merge, a critical equivalence between all four of my projects became clear to me.

This is that my queerness was mediating itself into arguably self-assembling, and always unexpected formal outcomes. This occurred through a quiet but effective insistence on allowing the musical principles of a project to be assembled through the capacities of various unexpected elements to obliquely intervene. The clarity of this in my collaborative stance in practice is symbiotic with my recognition of Harry Partch's mediation of his personhood into a musical practice. I have understood this to be a manifestation of his negotiations of the closet.

This balance of practice and scholarly re-articulation has been supported by recent research around Partch's transience, to which my work offers a practice-based contribution. In surfacing the queerness of Partch, I have discovered that the key to clarifying the applicability of queer compositionism is a foregrounding of my own knowledge of the closet. As abstract as this notion may seem, in practice it constitutes an intuitive yet doggedly principled approach to collaboration. Queer compositionism offers a distinct and applicable strategy for circumventing the temptation (or demand) to develop a fixed authorial "aesthetic" that exists over and above projects: a queer composer arrives early at the table and offers a sensibility for project-specific dormant alternatives.

The four performances and my contributions to them have tested and outlined the effectiveness of this notion, especially in the two theatre shows where queer compositionism has provided project-integrated results in which sound and music

obliquely intervene without becoming foregrounded as the territory of an isolated discipline.

One avenue of investigation that I have consciously ruled out of this study is the question of audience reception. The aim of emerging a speculative definition of queer compositionism, as a strategy within collaboration that remains traceable to Partchean personhood, has required an exclusively process-based inquiry.

It is arguably paradoxical to have created four "finished" stand-alone performance works that were presented to the public. The reasons for this, though, were considered and are pragmatic. In the case of the theatre shows, an audience simply comes with the territory. My primary concern was the testing of queer compositionism within a creative field made up of a plurality of specialisms. For my participation in the practices of Anna Homler and Sarah Kenchington, the premise of working toward a public performance set up a frame of trust and purpose for our working together, and for my interventions.

It would be of significant interest to conduct research in which the audience perception of queer compositionist outcomes may be tested and scrutinised. This could, for example, be arranged as a series of concerts in which musicians perform first in their "usual" way, and then in duet with a queer compositionist who has spent time closely participating in, and assembling oblique interventions around their practice.

Throughout the emergence of queer compositionism, several other contributions to knowledge and recommendations for further study have surfaced. A unique re-articulation of Harry Partch's author function has been offered that situates itself within a recent resurgence of scholarship around his transience. This "second wave" of work has shifted away from fixed labels based on Partch's canonical

status as a maverick innovator and pioneer of microtonal music. Set up as a scholarly alibi for avoiding John Cage's authorship of deflected authorship, Partch has been read as queerly foregrounding his personhood. It can be argued that his work is an injunction for others to transcend hegemony and contribute their differences to an anarchic universalism.

This reading has revealed a gap in Partch scholarship that warrants further work around the composer's queerness. There would be a lot to gain from a queer criticality in the area of biography, where there looms a subtle yet ominous tendency to name Partch's sexuality. This confines his creativity and sociability to a reductive ontology of the closet. The aim of my queering of Partch has been to form a catalyst for a practice-based orientation of collaborative projects. A queer Partch also exposes terrain for a scholarly narrative based on the ephemeral evidence of his outwardly expressed negotiations of the glass closet. A detailed study of this would be expansive, exhilarating, and a vital contribution to queer musicology.

Reflecting again on the specific questions from my hypothesis, I can say that investigating how Benjamin Piekut's adoption of Latourian thought in music studies may contribute to practice-based research has proven to emerge a project-oriented outlook that avoids human exceptionalism when considering what or who may have the capacity to effect change and formal outcomes: Joe Meek's ghost in chapter 3, or Sarah Kenchington's caravan window in chapter 4, are examples. The conscious assemblage of human and nonhuman agency has also led to a foregrounding of the way in which sonic surfaces and sound-reproduction technologies are assembled into a project. The queerness of this strategy celebrates a personal politics related to a knowledge acquired through negotiations of the



closet. This notion emerged as a consequence of applying Rob Stone's concept of listening to and through "aural dust" as a way of queering hauntological music's fetishisation of surface noise. This way of thinking has a significant impact on how queers approach the audible past; an impact that will benefit from a more forensic approach that puts together an archive of deviant uses of audio-production, of which Joe Meek's *Do You Come Here Often?* is an exemplary example. This approach is where I wish to continue to explore the impact of rendering Harry Partch as a catalyst for queer compositionism.

The notion of oblique intervention is a unique contribution to assemblage-based approaches to practice. It drives a queer stance that assembles human and nonhuman agency without assimilating elements to a preconceived, centripetal system. This leads to unexpected formal outcomes in which assembled elements foreground their translation of other elements of a project, as well as being translated by them in turn. A way of inhabiting this idea is to think of the use of blown glass in my resonant-window instrument. The glass foregrounds its decorative properties and the craftsmanship behind it, while simultaneously translating both Anna Homler's bottling practice and Kenchington's caravan living into an equivalence of their musical practices. Oblique intervention, then, is a useful term for naming the principle through which a queer compositionist assembles single elements.

This study has unwittingly outlined a strategy for practice-led research into the materialist sensibilities of non-idiomatic musicians. Idiosyncratic musical experimentation provided me with a laboratory from which the stance of queer compositionism has been nurtured. I participated in the practice of Anna Homler and Sarah Kenchington using sound-reproduction technologies, to design a

performance in which collected audio-visual footage was used as content to play a concert with them. A conjoining of their practices and related "extra-musical" aspects occurred, and this strand of my research could be applied to an extensive network of musicians in a comparative study. This could, for example, include the mediation of architectural aspects into music-making, seen as the appropriation of urban sprawl as a series of possible cabinets of musical curiosity.

A practicable strategy for queering the musical outcomes of experimental theatre projects has been explored and outlined. My orientation as a queer composer broke down specialisms and hierarchical organisation, and also commandeered unexpected formal outcomes. This suggests questions for further studies, such as whether all members of a collective could apply queer compositionism. A study of this would potentially expand the concept from a steering mechanism of one individual, toward oblique intervention as a thoroughly interdisciplinary organisational principle. My suggested framing of this inquiry would be whether such a notion could foreground both conflict and the detours of compromise as fruitful creative factors. This direction of study would appeal to Harry Partch's pluralism and advocacy for the merging of disciplines. Therefore, I would recommend a frame of research that remains traceable to the vital relevance of Partch's scattered authorial effects.

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