

Learning In and Through Noise: Exploring the Learning Ecologies of Experimental Music

By

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## Abstract

Over the past decade, a growing number of music education researchers have advocated for the educative benefits of experimental music curricula (see Sordahl, 20013; Tinkle, 2015) with a particular emphasis on free improvisation as a learning technology (see Hickey, 2009; Niknafs, 2013; Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010). However, the scope of this ongoing project remains narrowly focused on a handful of experimental music subgenres, overlooking a wealth of related artistic traditions (e.g. noise music, Fluxus, musique concrete, no wave, etc.) that could both build a broad understanding of experimental music pedagogies or provide unique pedagogical spaces in their own right. Moreover, the vast majority of these studies focus on implementing these musical forms within formalized learning environments despite practitioners within these traditions learning primarily through informal channels (see Thomson, 2007). Transforming these musical forms into formalized curricula also runs the risk of undermining the educative potential of these genres through a process Popkewitz (2010) defines as alchemy, a detrimental shift verified within several music education studies (Lange, 2011; Mantie 2007).

In response to these critiques, I use this dissertation to explore the informal learning ecologies of noise music, an abrasive and caustic subgenre of experimental music that draws influence from industrial, punk, free jazz, and electronic music (Bailey, 2009) and remains absent from music education research. After defining noise music (and noise as a musical gesture) through Kristeva (1982) and Bataille's (1970) notion of the abject, I present findings from a comparative case study (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016) of the Milwaukee noise scene. In doing so, I frame both noise music and noise more broadly as liberatory educational technologies and construct a model for developing one's knowledge of and artistic practice within noise music. However, this case study also uncovers how the noise scene undermines this liberatory potential

and reinscribes gendered forms of oppression. To ground these findings within the cultural space of noise music, I connect these findings to influential noise artists via analyses of performances and albums in a series of three addenda. Taken as a whole, this dissertation provides an initial step into understanding the potential value and existing problematics within contemporary noise scenes, framing noise music as both a powerful and oppressive learning ecology within the experimental music landscape.

## Acknowledgments

Although my name might be the one on the cover of this dissertation, I am by no means the only person who worked on this project. I therefore feel compelled to acknowledge the incredible group of people who made this dissertation a reality.

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those that participated in this study and gave their time to make this work possible. Although their words may appear directly in these pages, the wisdom and knowledges I gathered from my time touring the country and spending time with this community exists within every word of this dissertation. Thank you for your support, both here and in my other endeavors, and thank you for making artistic work worth celebrating, exploring, critiquing, and thinking through. I hope to do all of these for years to come.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview

### **Introduction**

This dissertation begins with four frustrating years spent as a high school math teacher. I entered the profession with the hopes of using education to enact a more just future, helping students develop a sense of agency and empathy that extended into the social, cultural, and political worlds beyond the classroom. While I believe that I managed to achieve this goal in certain isolated incidents, I mostly feel like I spent those four years unsuccessfully fighting against an institution dedicated to reconstructing the same oppressive world I wanted to counteract. Even at the small charter school I taught at, one that prided itself on creative and innovative approaches to community-centric education, the looming presence of standardized testing, budgets, and universal learning outcomes often forced the hand of my fellow teachers. Despite my best intentions, I found myself contributing to what Bowles & Gintis (1976) define as the primary outcome of the American education system: social stratification and reproduction. As a teacher, I wanted to break this oppressive cycle through education. But a growing pit in my stomach told me that I was primarily contributing to that cycle.

At the same time, I started to notice that I was unintentionally achieving this goal through my work as a musician, venue organizer, and concert promoter. Since I was seventeen, I have played in multiple bands, released albums, and toured the country within and through a globally dispersed and informal network of musicians and fans known as the do-it-yourself (DIY) music scene. This aesthetically diverse but ideologically aligned (for the most part) community provides an infrastructure where non-professional musicians can perform for and share their work with individuals from around the world without having to deal with the barriers of entry produced by commercial music institutions. More importantly, the DIY music scene

unintentionally produced the model of education I tried to create as a classroom teacher. To use Tucker's (2012) words, I saw that the "punk places" (DIY venues, infoshops, zine libraries, punk houses, etc.) that I visited both at home in Milwaukee and across the US during numerous tours produced "heterotopias of resistance that function as sites of subject-constituting knowledges and practices; not as firm structures outside dominant power, but as ad hoc shelters in which members of a subculture can experience some semblance of freedom" (p. 210). This was the foundation of an educational model I wanted (and failed) to bring to the classroom. And DIY music was making it happen almost accidentally.

This dissertation, therefore, emerges from my attempts to bridge this divide: to understand how DIY music functions as a learning ecology and how individuals and groups acting with the intentionality of an educator can capitalize on DIY music's pedagogical affordances. Although scholars have investigated the educative affordances of DIY music cultures and ideologies for nearly thirty years (see Smith et al., 2018), I expand on this extant literature by exploring an undertheorized musical genre within DIY: noise music. Despite noise music emerging through the same DIY channels that housed every iteration of punk and its various subgenres (including hardcore and post-punk) (Bailey, 2009), literature on DIY rarely acknowledges the existence of noise (and vice versa). Expanding the scope of this project even further, education research as a whole has largely overlooked the pedagogical nature of noise. Since noise music draws influence from a number of subgenres within what Gilmore (2014) defines as an ideological definition of experimental music, it would follow that research into experimental music education would include some investigations into noise. Yet despite the growing body of education research into related fields such as mid-century experimental composition processes (see Sordahl, 2013; Tinkle, 2015) and the free improvisation practices

born out of free jazz (Hickey, 2009; Niknafs, 2013; Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010), noise music remains largely absent.

In response to this oversight, I situate this dissertation within the intersection of experimental music education research and cultural studies scholarship on DIY music by mapping one small portion of the learning ecologies that encapsulate noise music. In a series of three articles, I argue that noise (as both a musical gesture and an educational technology) holds the potential to enact liberatory pedagogies; that noise musicians develop their musical practice and knowledges through their interactions with a distributed matrix of actors spread across DIY music scenes; and that the social infrastructure of DIY music venues often undermines the educative promise of noise. Read as one interconnected piece, this dissertation positions noise music and its associated scenes as a rich site for future education research in a number of subfields (music education, the learning sciences, curriculum studies, and maker education research) despite the illustrated need for deep, critical examination. As Lange (2011) asserts, the liberatory potential of many experimental music forms often collapses in the face of dominant and oppressive institutions. Taking this cautionary finding to heart, I use this dissertation to not only amplify the liberatory practices inherent to both noise and noise music but also uncover the ways in which the realities of noise fail aspirational conceptions of the genre.

Throughout the rest of this chapter, I provide a structural overview of this dissertation. I have chosen to use a three-article format, meaning that each chapter stands on its own as an independent work and, subsequently, each chapter has its own theoretical framework, methodology, and structure. I have also included an addendum to each chapter to further explore the themes of each article within a cultural or visual studies context. But this dissertation also exists as a cohesive work, one that produces an initial map of noise music pedagogies that

includes theoretical formulations of noise, empirical research into noise scenes, and analyses of noise music albums and performances. To situate these articles within a singular, cohesive reading, I will now turn towards a brief overview of the driving theoretical framework, the data collection and analysis methods used in the empirically oriented articles, a brief overview of each chapter and addendum, and the contributions this dissertation holds for various intersecting fields.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Noise and Noise Music**

While the interdisciplinary nature of this dissertation draws influence from a wide range of literatures and disciplines, three main areas of focus extend throughout this work: theoretical conceptualizations of both noise and noise music, situated learning theory, and punk pedagogy. Starting with theorizations of noise as a cultural technology, I situate this dissertation within the growing (and often times contradictory) body of literature concerned with defining this concept. At different moments, scholars have defined noise as a natural but inevitable disturbance in communication (Shannon, 1945), a non-musical sound (Von Helmholtz, 1863), a disruptive force in industrial reproduction (Attali, 1985) and musical history (Hegarty, 2007), a byproduct of cultural circulation (Novak, 2013), and an uncontrollable artistic gesture (Hainge, 2013). As a means towards unifying (or, at least, finding overlap between) this multitude of conceptualizations, I rely heavily on Thompson's (2017) affective definition of noise. Rather than defining noise concretely through anthropocentric terminology, Thompson's definition draws from Deleuze's (1978) reading of Spinoza and defines noise as an affective relationship that reorients the expected or usual set of interactions between two bodies (referring here to human, non-human, and even intangible entities). In doing so, Thompson (2017) shifts the focus

away from defining what noise is and instead foregrounds an investigation of what noise does. The host of definitions mentioned above seem to result from a similar (if not always intentional) set of investigations, asking how noise acts on the listener, speaker, music producer/musician, broader culture, or artistic context. In turn, I respond to a similar provocation: how does noise affect the learner and notions of learning as a whole?

To further situate this work, I also ground my investigations within noise music, a musical subgenre that draws influence from industrial, punk, free jazz, and experimental music (Bailey, 2009). Historically, the contemporary noise music scene grew out of two distinct communities from the late 1970s and early 1980s: the Japanese harsh noise scene (Novak, 2013) and the European power electronics scene (Taylor, P., 2016). Influences from artists within these communities then quickly traveled to the United States and Canada as early North American noise artists created work at the intersection of these two approaches starting around the mid-80s (Candey, 2016). Yet, as Novak (2013) contends, any concise historical lineage of noise falls apart due to the multitude of entry points to noise that exist within all other musical forms. The dissonant sonic explorations of musicians and groups like John Cage, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, Sun Ra, Pauline Oliveros, and Steve Reich, for example, would all fit comfortably within contemporary noise music despite preceding this genre by upwards of three decades.

In response, Atton (2011) forwards a discursive definition of noise music, one in which musicians and fans constantly reimagine and reproduce the borders of noise through interpersonal and intramusical discourses. In doing so, Atton (2011) found that most practitioners within the genre position noise as an anti-genre at the very edge of music itself: “It is as if the exhaustion of musical expression—together with a striving to go beyond that expression—has led to a critical discourse that promotes an absolutist ideology for the uniqueness of noise music”

(p. 331). Although this formation of noise can and should be thoroughly critiqued, it provides a means towards connecting noise music's many conflicting aesthetics. While a four-minute live performance containing nothing more than overwhelmingly loud static and two-hour long recordings of meditative sub-frequency oscillations may not aesthetically align, they both count as noise music because of the (supposed) challenge they pose to music. Returning to Thompson's (2017) affective definition of noise, these two examples also (potentially) enact an affective form of noise by reorienting the listener's relationship to the body that is musical expression. Noise music, as a genre, takes shape through a shared belief in challenging what counts as music and, subsequently, how listeners understand their own relationship to musical forms. Building on this assertion, I use this dissertation to consider whether this challenge extends into the curriculum and pedagogy of noise.

### **Situated Learning Theory**

Returning to my original question of how noise acts on the learner, this project in part focuses on how noise musicians develop musical knowledges and how noise as a cultural and pedagogical technology acts on that practice. To further connect this space to extant education literature, I rely on situated learning theory to contextualize these knowledge formations. Starting with Brown et al.'s (1989) original assertion that "knowledge is situated, being in part a product of the activity, context, and culture in which it is developed and used" (p. 32), I rely on situated learning theory because of the context specific nature of musical knowledge. For instance, what counts as both music and musical knowledge in the canon of Western classical music is extremely different than traditional African music: the dominance of pitch relations and atomized rhythmic forms described by Small (1996) provide a means for understanding, performing, and composing the former while proving almost meaningless in the context of the latter. Because

knowledge (and especially musical knowledge) exists as a context-specific construction, producing and acquiring that knowledge also exist as situated processes (Brown et al., 1989). Research into noise music pedagogies therefore entails a process of unearthing the context specific knowledges and learning practices of that cultural space.

By invoking the notion of situated learning theory within the context of the noise scene, I also rely on the concept of communities of practice as described by Lave & Wenger (1991) throughout. This theory reframes the notion of learning to consider how communities form and, in turn, contextually define knowledge. Starting with what Lave & Wenger (1991) define as “legitimate peripheral participants,” individuals first engage less complicated and nonessential (but still legitimate) actions within a given community. Through this process, community members can slowly take on more responsibilities over time as they develop a more robust understanding of the inner workings of that community. Eventually, community members find themselves in a space where they are not only fully engaged in the actions of the community but also acting as gate keepers who form the boundaries of that space. This conception of learning as a process of involving oneself in and shaping a community of practice creates space for experimental music education researchers to utilize music scenes as the unit of analysis (see Thomson, 2007) and consider how engaging in those music scenes as a sociocultural event engenders learning (see Perry, 2011). It also follows that noise in particular provides unique insight into this practice because of the genre’s ever-present inclination towards redefinition (see Atton, 2011).

### **DIY Music and Punk Pedagogy**

Finally, as a means towards expanding this research beyond the confines of noise music, I rely on extant literature about DIY music production and its associated practices of teaching and

learning, or what other scholars have deemed punk pedagogies. In this dissertation, I define DIY music as the decentralized network of musicians, fans, venues, record labels, and other actors and sites of cultural production that create, support, and circulate music outside of official or professional channels. Rather than relying on major labels, booking agents, formal music venues, or major music publications, DIY musicians create the infrastructure for sharing music by releasing their own albums, setting up ad-hoc venues in places like the basements of people's houses or the back of record stores, and writing their own reviews in homemade zines (Makagon, 2015). Rather than conceptualizing this network as a professional environment or a means towards making money and building a career, many within this broad music community reject any attempts to capitalize on their music. Instead, these participants understand DIY as an ideology, one in which participants reassert their agency and autonomy in the face of dominant, capitalistic forces by creating music as an end in itself (Blush, 2010; Wehr, 2013). This leads to a political understanding of DIY production, one that foregrounds the "insistence that participants become active, in whatever way possible, in challenging dominant social structures and enacting positive change in their local communities" (Perry, 2011, p. 77-78).

Although noise music has always existed within DIY music's cultural circles, most associate DIY music scenes with punk music and its various subgenres (especially hardcore and post-punk) because of the genre's foundational role in codifying a DIY ethos (Reynolds, 2005). In turn, the majority of research into the teaching and learning practices of DIY music exist under the banner of punk pedagogy, a body of scholarship that investigates the intersection of education, punk music, and DIY culture. Focusing on those writings that foreground DIY production specifically, researchers have argued that the formation and maintenance of DIY music scenes (here understood as a specific type of community of practice) exists as a

pedagogical act in itself (Perry, 2011). In doing so, DIY music scenes act as a space to develop not only musical knowledge but political ideologies and worldviews outside of dominant discourses (Haworth, 2010; Niknafs, 2018). Similarly, DIY venues, even in their most ephemeral states, serve as spaces for popular and subversive forms of knowledge to not only form but circulate between individuals (Tucker, 2012). Thinking through noise music in particular, DIY venues therefore serve as highly valuable spaces in building musical knowledges precisely because noise artists can voice counterintuitive and unrecognized understandings of music within their performances. While most established venues (bars, music halls, etc.) rely on established artists and forms of musical expression, DIY venues create space for the experimentalism necessary for noise music to exist. Although some of the learning practices within DIY may not prove very efficient (see Makagon, 2015), DIY venues still provide a much-needed home for noise pedagogies to emerge.

### **Methodology**

To ground this project in empirical data, I conducted a year-long comparative case study (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016) into the Milwaukee noise scene. This approach to case study research addresses the issues that emerge from traditional approaches to bounding cases: the conflation of context and phenomenon, the lack of generalizability, and the narrow conception of comparison that leads to limited understandings of data. Instead, Bartlett & Vavrus (2016) present three axes of comparison to consider when engaging in case study research: a horizontal axis that connects various sites, a vertical axes that considers larger institutions that contain the horizontal axis, and a temporal axis that looks for influence and difference over time. In this study, I used two related but distinct experimental music workshop and concert series based out of Milwaukee, WI to construct the horizontal axis. I then utilized writings about noise, experimental music, and DIY

culture to form the temporal axis. Although historical research into these scenes and traditions would prove extremely helpful, this approach falls outside the scope of this project. Relying on extant literature, however, will still provide immense insight into the historical context of Milwaukee's noise scene.

Defining the last axis, the vertical axis that roots cases within a broader contemporary context, presents a more complicated set of considerations. Because of the nature of this project, a number of vertical axes could frame this project in different ways. The overarching Milwaukee music scene, informal education structures, or non-profit arts infrastructures could all direct this project towards different ends. In order to root this project in experimental music education and noise music, I engaged a different formation: the contemporary and international noise scene. This dissertation incorporated this axis in two ways. First, because the series invited nationally renowned artists from across the country, I interviewed individuals from other scenes who contribute to the broader noise and DIY music community. Second, I utilized methods derived from visual cultures to analyze recent recordings and performances from well-known noise acts in each addendum. Since these artists have influenced many performers both in and outside of Milwaukee, analyses of works from international and established noise artists contextualize the observations and interviews conducted at local sites.

## **Research Site**

**Site Description.** Through observations, interviews, and the collection of artifacts (such as performance scores and video recordings), I observed a number of individuals as they engaged in the creation and consumption of noise and experimental music along with the sociocultural practices that lay at the foundation of the international noise scene and the localized Milwaukee community it contained. Specifically, I observed and interviewed people associated with two

different music series: The Experimental Education Series (EES) and The Noise Knowledge Consortium (NKC) (see Table 1). I chose these two series because of my direct involvement in their creation and organization: in my musical life outside of academia, I organized, curated, and promoted both the EES and NKC leading up to and throughout my research process.

**Table 1**

*Description of Sites*

<i>Series Name</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Featured Artists</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Concert Component</i>
Experimental Education Series	Jazz Gallery Center for the Arts (Community Arts Organization)	National and international women musicians	Quarterly (Full Year)	Featured artist performs with three local artists
Noise Knowledge Consortium	Brinn Labs (Makerspace)	Local and national musicians	Monthly (Full Year)	Featured artist performs with one local artist

The Experimental Education Series (EES) followed a simple format: featured artists (all of whom are noise musicians or experimental musicians who overlap with noise music in some way) facilitated an hour-long workshop followed by a concert featuring these artists and other local performers. Artists chose what to teach and developed the workshop on their own with two simple guiding tenants: orient the workshop towards people unfamiliar with noise or experimental music and teach something valuable to understanding or making this type of music. Because of this level of freedom, workshops varied greatly in terms of content and pedagogy.

These events included lectures about the artist's body of work, experimental vocal technique workshops, cassette tape loop building sessions, and workshops where audience members composed and performed pieces. By design, the EES only featured women artists. This design choice came from my previous research into DIY music venues, which found that organizers often created inclusive spaces for people of all backgrounds and identities but failed to actually reach out to members from those communities (Woods, 2017). In booking women artists, I specifically responded to the narrative of experimental music existing as a male dominated space by amplifying female voices. All events were open to the public, free, and took place at the Jazz Gallery Center for the Arts (JGCA). The JGCA is an arts-forward, non-profit community space in the Riverwest neighborhood that hosts a wide array of programs ranging from hip hop and jazz concerts to community planning events and visual arts shows. A number of these programs have an educational initiative behind them, including Freespace, which specifically reaches out to local high school students to teach them the ins and outs of hip-hop culture and production, and the OWL program, an arts enrichment event for older community members. It is also worth noting that I was the chair of the music committee for the JGCA and on their executive board at the time.

The Noise Knowledge Consortium (NKC), the second series in this study followed a similar format: hour long workshops and associated concerts. A few things differentiated this series from the Experimental Education Series. First, it met on a monthly basis rather than quarterly. The NKC also met during the afternoon as an attempt to create a more laid back and informal atmosphere for workshops and concerts to occur. Second, rather than focusing on women performers, I invited local and some regional performers to act as featured artists as a means towards building the Milwaukee noise music community. Finally, the NKC took place at

Brinn Labs, an off shoot of the Betty Brinn Children's Museum that was located in the Bayview neighborhood but recently closed its doors. Brinn Labs, the home for Betty Brinn's maker initiative, was filled with large open workspaces, tools, electronics, and a whole host of home-built artifacts. Programming was mostly designed for adolescents, ranging from concrete casting and Arduino programming basics to e-textiles and Sonic Pi workshops. Brinn Labs also hosted a few events for adults including the Teacher Studio, which provided space for professional educators to consider ways of implementing maker practices into their classrooms or learning spaces. As these examples show, the programming at Brinn Labs was decidedly eclectic, partly by design: directors actively experimented with different events through the run of the space to see what did and did not work.

**Participant description.** Within both of these sites, I worked with two distinct populations. Representing one population is the group of seventeen teaching artists who led the sixteen events (see appendix A) and the other consisted of various audience participants at the workshops (see Appendix B). While the population of teaching artists was pre-determined (I included all of the teaching artists from both series), I recruited audience participants who self-defined as having little to no experience with making or listening to noise music but were interested in doing both. Initially, eight individuals signed up to participate but three dropped out early on in the study. The five remaining participants attended between six and twelve workshops throughout. Once the series had ended, I also invited three more audience participants who had attended multiple events but did not respond to my initial request for participation to share their experience of the workshops and concerts.

### **Data Collection**

**Field Observations.** During each workshop and concert throughout the course of the year (four EES and twelve NKC events), I served as a participant observer. This involved listening to teaching artists, engaging in any hands-on activities during the workshops, watching the concerts as an audience member, and providing needed help with the logistics of these events (i.e. running sound, stage managing, etc.). I followed the process described by Emerson et al. (2011) in which I used jottings to document regularly occurring practices within these spaces during the observations and expanded those comments into full ethnographic field notes soon after every observation. These field observations were then used not only as data itself, but as a means for contextualizing interviews and providing material for interview questions. I also collected video recordings of the workshops and performances which I used during the interviews as well.

**Interviews with Teaching Artists.** Data collection also involved a number of semi-structured interviews with both populations (see appendix C for all interview protocols). While the field observations provided a number of insights into how individuals engaged with experimental music education, the interviews revealed a deeper understanding of participant behavior by allowing individuals to describe and make meaning of their actions in their own words (Seidman, 2005). I used a semi-structured approach to address potential power asymmetries between interviewer and interviewee. Similarly, this open-ended approach to asking questions reinscribed a sense of agency within the participant to discuss what they understood, noticed, and valued (Creswell, 2012).

Because teaching artists and participants represented such distinct populations within this study, I engaged two separate approaches to interviews. For teaching artists, I conducted pre- and post-workshop interviews. Pre-workshop interviews allowed artists to describe their thinking

when designing the workshop and their creative process while preparing for the associated performance. Post-workshop interviews allowed space for them to reflect on their experience. Beyond asking the participants questions, I utilized methods devised by Jordan & Henderson (1995) in which participants watched video of both the performance and the workshop and commented on the recordings.

**Interviews with Audience Participants.** For the five audience participants I recruited before the study began, I utilized the three-interview series for phenomenological research described by Seidman (2005). This approach allowed for a deep investigation into how participants experienced experimental music as an artistic form, community, and pedagogical practice. Using Seidman's (2005) description as a foundation, the first interview investigated the context surrounding the participant, creating space for the interviewee to discuss their existing relationship with and understanding of noise music. This occurred before they attended the first workshop. The second interview, which usually occurred after the participant had attended three events, focused on the details of the experience thus far. Because of the number of workshops taking place and the length of time between events, I conducted two forms of this interview over the course of the project with four of the participants. Finally, the last interview encouraged participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience and consider the ways in which their understandings of noise and experimental music had changed. These interviews occurred after the final workshops and concerts took place. For the three interview participants that joined after the series ended, I still relied on Seidman's (2005) three part model by investigating their relationship with noise and experimental music before their involvement in the series, the details of their experiences at the workshops and concerts, and their reflections on the series as a whole.

Since only one interview occurred, I tried to address all these topics within that single conversation.

### **Data Analysis**

**Descriptive and Thematic Coding.** In analyzing both interviews and field notes, I utilized two specific coding techniques to better understand the instructional models used within these spaces. I started with a descriptive coding process (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2015) in which I looked for evidence of pedagogical moments or instructional models in both data sources. Next, I engaged theoretical coding (Saldaña, 2015) to further analyze the pedagogical practices of participants within these spaces and throughout their personal histories. Through this process, I forwarded what Glaser & Strauss (1967) define as a substantive theory of teaching and learning within noise music.

**Bidirectional Artifact Analysis.** Moreover, to understand what audience participants learned through their engagement with the EES and NKC, I utilized bidirectional artifact analysis (Halverson & Magnifico, 2013) with the one participant who composed and performed a piece of noise music during the run of the series. Utilizing a number of scores the participant developed through the composition process and the video of the final performance, I asked this participant to describe their artistic practice and creative choices. I encouraged them to connect these choices to their past experiences with various workshops as a way to recreate the processes behind crafting this performance, in essence moving backwards and forwards temporally through the production process. I then connected specific aspects of these formative artifacts to moments from both the interviews and videos of the workshops and concerts to illuminate ways in which this participant recognized and redeployed their experiences within the series, experimental music, and noise more broadly.

### **Positionality Statement**

Because of my involvement in the creation and organization of these series, it is important to acknowledge my positionality within these sites of research. I also feel compelled to acknowledge my role in the Milwaukee music community. As the founder of the annual Milwaukee Noise Fest, the promoter behind a good portion of the noise shows that occur in town, and a regular performer, my name has become somewhat synonymous with noise in Milwaukee. This has often led to me receiving credit for Milwaukee noise happenings (both good and bad) whether or not I am involved in those events at all. I have also acted as a gatekeeper for the Milwaukee noise scene in several ways. First, I have utilized my record label to promote select musicians on both a national and international level. Second, I have also organized multiple venues that have acted as convening spaces for this community. Since these venues often host touring acts, they also act as conduits between the local and national scene and increase the level of control I have within both: not only do I have power over which local artists get to perform in front of established national acts, but I also partly decide which national acts get to step into the local community. Additionally, both the local and national scenes double as two of my closest social circles. More than just colleagues, I consider a lot of these artists and participants to be my closest (and oldest) friends and spend time with many of them outside of musical contexts.

Although my experiences within this community provide me with a deep understanding of this music as well as significant access, my choice to research within my “own backyard” produces multiple complications as well (see Malone, 2010). Most prominently, the choice to interview people close to me can generate bias throughout the research and writing process. By observing a community I am deeply embedded in, I also run the risk of overlooking those actions

or statements that individuals outside of the noise scene may find interesting, unique, or valuable. While this bias and perspective will never truly go away, I have included audience participants in this study to partially counteract that bias. I invited people I did not know who were new to the genre to act as audience participants in both series, providing an avenue for “outsider” insights. While I have become closer with all of these participants through this research process, our initial unfamiliarity and their novel perspective provided a means to check my own biases and make sure I did not overlook important details that have become commonplace (and, essentially, invisible) to me over the years.

Regarding my own biases as a researcher, my continued involvement with this community (artistically, professionally, and socially) means that presenting this work in the best light possible would greatly benefit me. While I use this dissertation to reveal the ways in which experimental music can empower individuals and communities (an assertion that I strongly believe), I also believe that a critical stance holds just as much importance in this process. Without questioning the ways that even the best-intentioned sociocultural practices also oppress groups and individuals, liberation is not possible. This notion sits at the center of my research philosophy and guides all aspects of my work. Hopefully, readers will see this dedication to critical investigation emerge throughout this dissertation and especially in Chapter 4 and Addenda 1 and 3. I also believe my previous work speaks to my ability to critically analyze these communities I value so highly (see Woods, 2017, 2018, 2019).

### **Overview of Chapters**

Each of the chapters in this dissertation engages a different pedagogical aspect of noise music (see Table 2). Chapter 2 takes a theoretical approach, investigating how noise as a musical or artistic gesture acts as an educational technology with its own unique pedagogical formations.

Chapter 3 presents what I define as a process model of artistic practice within noise music, one that explores how the teaching artists and one participant developed their musical knowledge related to noise over time. Finally, Chapter 4 explores how DIY venues shape the pedagogies of noise music by reinscribing patriarchal understandings of music technology within this musical space. Taken together, these three chapters provide deep insight into how noise music scenes and practices double as educational spaces towards both liberatory and (unintentionally) oppressive ends.

**Table 2**

*Overview of Chapter Contents*

	Chapter 2: Engaging the Abject as Educational Technology Through Noise	Chapter 3: Learning How to Make Noise: Towards a Process Model of Artistic Practice Within Informal Music Communities	Chapter 4: The Pedagogy of Gear Touchers: Unearthing Modes of Teaching Within DIY Spaces
Research Questions	How does the abject via noise operate as an educational technology?	How do noise musicians develop their artistic practice within informal music communities?	How do DIY music venues shape the informal pedagogical practices of DIY noise music scenes?  Do those pedagogies align with the ideological and ethical aims of DIY cultures?
Theoretical Foundations	Abjection (Bataille, 1970; Kristeva, 1982)  Parasitic noise (Serres, 2007)  Codifications (Freire, 1973)	Situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991)  Scene as classroom (Thomson, 2007)  Conceptual Metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980)	Punk pedagogy (Miklistch, 1994)  Critical pedagogies of place (Gruenewald, 2003)  Maker education (Halverson & Sheridan, 2014)

	Regime of the sensible (Rancière, 2009)		
Analysis Methods	Theoretical analysis	Descriptive and thematic coding  Bidirectional artifact analysis (Halverson & Magnifico, 2013)	Descriptive and thematic coding
Major Findings or Implications	Noise holds the potential to enact liberatory pedagogies via codifications and through the abject.  In doing so, noise-via-the abject can potentially reimagine the boundaries of the regime of the sensible.	By interacting with a matrix of human and non-human actors, noise musicians develop their artistic practice outside of traditional mentorship models.  This occurs through three iterative steps: the “blown mind moment”, an exploration phase, and the presentation of finished works.	DIY venues facilitate music education pedagogies by removing the barrier between audience and performer.  Assumptions of masculinity behind technology and artistic production reinscribe patriarchal formations within DIY music scenes.

## Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, “Engaging the Abject as Educational Technology Through Noise,” I respond to Zembylas’ (2016) provocation to critically examine the historical construction of appropriateness in relation to the use or recognition of emotion and affect in education. In response, I take on the adjacent but related project of investigating overlooked forms of affect within processes of learning, focusing on the abject in particular. According to Kristeva (1982), the abject represents the affective response to that which sits outside of the symbolic order yet challenges the wholeness or purity of various social structures (the individual, identity, unified society, etc.). From this definition, I position the use of noise within a musical context (what I define as “noise as gesture”) as the reclamation and redeployment of abjected sound, or those

types of sounds and sounding bodies that have been abjected from musical and social discourse. Drawing on Bataille's (1970) sociocultural definition of abjection, I then argue that noise can act as a pedagogical tool via the abject by challenging extant social formations and creating space for new ways of knowing and being to emerge. To use Rancière's (2009) terminology, noise can challenge the regime of the sensible by allowing marginalized and abjected voices to contribute to the process of constructing new knowledges. In turn, this chapter positions both noise and the abject as potentially valuable tools in the liberatory praxis defined by theorists like Freire (1970, 1973), even if abjection still produces significant problematics (see Tyler, 2009).

In the associated addendum, I expand on this argument by considering Foster's (1996) distinction between "the operation *to abject* and the condition *to be abject*" (p. 114). Within this critique, Foster challenges forms of visual art that engage the abject by questioning whether artists further the oppressive practice of abjecting certain bodies or allowing those abjected and marginalized individuals to speak. To position Foster's distinction within the context of both noise music and noise as gesture, I use these two formations to analyze two albums: Con-Dom's *How Welcome Is Death To I Who Have Nothing More To Do But Die* (Dando, 2016) and Moor Mother's *Fetish Bones* (Ayewa, 2016). In both cases, the albums center around forms of abjection. Since Kristeva (1982) deems the corpse to be the ultimate source of abjection, the sonic and visual reproduction of the corpse of the artist's mother on *How Welcome is Death...* inextricably connects the work to the abject. For Moor Mother, the connection to abjection aligns much more closely to Bataille's (1970) sociocultural formation, rooting the work in the artist's identity as a black trans woman. Consistent references to the body of the artist (and even the future iteration of the corpse) grounds the work in a liberatory, Afrofuturist stance that only emerges from the abject. In turn, these two albums provide examples of the operation to abject

and the condition to be abject, highlighting how noise as gesture can engage a liberatory praxis while also furthering the oppressive process of abjection.

### **Chapter 3**

Shifting from a theoretical methodology to an empirical approach, I introduce data from my case study research in Chapter 3, “Learning How to Make Noise: Towards a Process Model of Artistic Practice Within Informal Music Communities,” as a way to explore how noise musicians develop their artistic practice. Using the interrelated formations of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and scene as classroom (Thomson, 2007) to frame this investigation, I use analyses of interview data from the featured artists to produce a process model of artistic practice in noise music. This model indicates that noise musicians construct their musical knowledge through three iterative steps. First, an initial moment of interaction I deem the “blown mind moment” adjusts the conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) that shapes the musician’s understanding of themselves as musicians or music itself. Second, the musician enters an extended period of exploration where they explore the musical affordances of this reformed identity and/or conception of music. Finally, after thoroughly developing their musical knowledge through this exploration, the artist produces a finished artifact in the form of a composition, performance, or recording. As artists develop their knowledges over long periods of time, they move between all three of these steps and constantly reimagine their identity, practice as artists, and conceptions of music. Put into conversation with extant literature on popular music education (see Green, 2002), this model challenges previous understandings of informal music pedagogies by omitting previously understood foundational practices such as copying other artists and relying on mentors to develop one’s craft.

In this chapter, I primarily focus on Thomson's (2007) formation of scene as classroom wherein the author positions the interconnected matrix of actors and spaces that constitute a music scene as a site of learning in itself. In doing so, I largely ignore the complementary notion of performance as classroom that reimagines the moment of performance as another valuable learning space. To further explore the performance as classroom, I use the addendum to Chapter 3 to analyze a live performance by US noise artist Crank Sturgeon (Bellerue, 2007). In the video of this performance, Crank Sturgeon improvises his way through a live set by responding to his breaking gear and the audience as they join in on making sound. In doing so, Crank Sturgeon encounters two separate blown mind moments and acts on both by exploring the musical affordances these unexpected sonic encounters produce. The analysis of this video therefore temporally collapses the process model of artistic practice forwarded in the previous chapter: both the blown mind moment and the exploration phase exist entirely within the finished (or, more accurately, finishing) performance as Crank Sturgeon develops his craft and associated knowledge in real time.

#### **Chapter 4**

To conclude this dissertation, Chapter 4, "The Pedagogy of Gear Touchers: Unearthing Modes of Teaching Within DIY Spaces" foregrounds the concept of DIY music culture to explore whether or not the liberatory potential of noise established in Chapter 2 exists in practice and within the process model described in Chapter 3. I ground this final analysis within Gruenewald's (2003) conception of critical pedagogies of space, examining how DIY venues both restrict and produce certain types of pedagogy within noise music culture. To further ground this study within extant literature, I build on Hollett & Vivoni's (2020) assertion that DIY cultures provide deep insight into making as a sociopolitical process by drawing parallels

between the pedagogies of DIY venues and makerspaces. Through the analysis of my fieldnotes, I contend that the “gear toucher conversation,” or that moment of interaction between a DIY musician and an audience member that occurs immediately after the performer has finished their set, provides a crucial moment in developing as a noise or DIY musician. I further argue that DIY venues facilitate gear toucher conversations by removing the physical and metaphorical barrier of the stage (Makagon, 2015; Verbuc, 2014) and allowing audience members to engage musicians in conversation immediately after they finish performing (sometimes starting conversations seconds after the audience stops applauding). Yet despite this seemingly open and accessible pedagogical structure, overtly masculine understandings of technology (see Britton, 2015) dissuade women from approaching male performers (who also happen to make up the majority of the noise scene). This leads to a reinscription of noise music as a male dominated musical form and undermines the potentially liberatory praxis of noise.

As a way to engage a form of marginalization absent from my empirical data (due to the fact that all of the featured artists and seven of the eight audience participants identify as White), I use the addendum for this chapter to explore the intersections of noise music and race with a focus on Whiteness. Mirroring the findings from the previous chapter, the reality that noise music largely exists as a White musical form (Dietrich, 2016) indicates that the liberatory potential of noise does not always exist in the lived reality of noise music. To further complicate the relationship between noise and whiteness that I have previously explored (Woods, 2018), I investigate the album *Lebanon for Lebanese* by power electronics artist Koufar (Chami, 2015). Although the album strongly trades in symbology associated with white supremacy and fascism (a black triskelion adorns the front cover, field recordings of military technologies exist throughout the album), the artist’s identity as a first generation Lebanese American whose father

was forced out of Lebanon due to the civil war undermines this simplistic reading. In response, I argue that the album produces two simultaneous yet conflicting readings. In one possible listening, Chami uses the album to explore his Lebanese heritage through what Lewis (2017) describes as an aesthetic thickening that demands a listening of the album outside of Whiteness. Yet the album also trades in the symbology of Whiteness and White supremacy which results in the social funding of race (Ladson-Billings, 2018). This situates the album as a simultaneously liberatory and oppressive cultural artifact, one in which both results equally rely on the other.

### **Contributions to the Field**

Considered through the lens of education research, I contend that this dissertation positions both noise and noise music as highly valuable sites of research. While scholars have previously investigated informal music education (Bamberger, 1991; Green, 2002), formalized experimental music pedagogies (Sordahl, 2013, Tinkle, 2015) the pedagogies of DIY music scenes (Niknafs, 2018; Thomson, 2007), maker education practices (Halverson & Sheridan, 2014), the development of abstract arts making practices (Okada et al., 2009), and the role of affect in learning (Jaber & Hamer, 2016a; 2016b), my research into noise music scenes intersects with, builds on, and challenges previous studies in all of these spaces. More specifically, the conceptualization of noise as both a disruptive cultural technology (Attali, 1985; Hegarty, 2007) and an affective force that reorients existing relationships (Serres, 2007; Thompson, 2017) creates an opportunity for practitioners in the genre to reimagine musical and sociocultural knowledge along with the pedagogical process associated with constructing that knowledge. Returning to Atton's (2011) discursive formation of the noise music genre, however, the tension between conceiving of noise as a new space and the lived reality of noise music replicating older forms of teaching, learning, and knowledge emerge through this dissertation as well. While noise

music does produce a window into a reimagined and unique informal education context, what this window shows may end up being more of the same. Hopefully, other researchers extend what I have started with this dissertation and continue to map this space.

Additionally, the tension between liberatory praxis and dominant narratives within noise music also contribute to current understandings of both experimental music and education as sociopolitical technologies. Although scholars have correctly and thoroughly positioned both experimental music and education as potential spaces to empower marginalized individuals, theorizations within all education research often hide as much as they reveal. For example, while Freire (1970) may have set the stage for education's turn towards a liberatory praxis, the mechanisms for engaging that praxis often rely on deficit assumptions. As Lewis (2014) argues, the dialogic model described by Freire (1973) assumes that marginalized students begin in an oppressed state while the teacher has already acquired some set of liberating knowledge that students need to work towards. Regarding experimental music, Attali (1985) may have found that noise contains the potential to challenge or avoid the capitalistic and industrialized practices behind contemporary music, but the independent marketplace of noise music records and merchandise (one rife with commodity fetishism) undermines that potential (Novak, 2013). Through this dissertation, I argue that noise and informal education practices, in conversation, can both enact and undermine liberatory praxes, sometimes simultaneously. This positions noise music (and noise more broadly) as a lens to critically investigate informal education spaces. Stated differently, this dissertation raises the following questions: in what ways do the pedagogies of noise and DIY music amplify marginalized voices or further the process of abjection? And in what ways do informal learning spaces embrace or reject abjected bodies or

materials (sonic or otherwise)? This dissertation provides one example of how to engage these questions.

Finally, I hope this dissertation helps in some small part to convince people of the value of noise music. Over the past seventeen years, I have gone to a lot of shows, listened to a lot of tapes, played a lot of sets, and met a lot of other musicians. Some of the most powerful moments of my life have been at those shows, both on stage and in the audience. I have heard records that have left me speechless and truly changed my worldview. And most importantly, I have met some of the best people in the world through DIY music. Noise made all of this happen. And while noise is far from unproblematic, the discourse surrounding noise music so often flattens the genre into untalented gear fetishism at best and violently oppressive fascism at worst.

Although I have seen and experienced both of these realities firsthand, I have also seen noise become so much more. In this dissertation, I reveal one small aspect of what noise is and can be. As a frustrated teacher, I clung to that potential as a lifeline, knowing that DIY music (and noise especially) provided one possible means towards a more equitable world. I hope the chapters that follow help others, in some small way, find their own path as well.

## Chapter 2: Engaging the Abject as Educational Technology Through Noise

### Introduction

Beginning in the mid-1990's, the "affective turn" has provided a highly valuable site of exploration within the humanities and the social sciences to better understand the notion of embodiment within a wide range of fields. Education provides no exception. Tracing the body of research that investigates the role that affect plays in the process of learning, the foundational work of Pintrich and his colleagues that focused on the role of motivation within science education (see Pintrich, 1999; Pintrich & de Groot, 1990; Pintrich, Marx, & Boyle, 1993) leveraged space for researchers to consider the influence of affect on student performance within the classroom. More recently, studies by Jaber & Hammer (2016a; 2016b) have not only articulated the role that affect plays within the process of learning but have extended this connection to include the role that affect plays in disciplinary knowledge itself (again, focusing on affect within the science classroom). Researchers such as Gupta, Danielak, & Elby (2010) have shown how affect can act as both a context specific bridge and instigator of movement between multiple epistemic formulations. Together, these studies and countless others paint a complicated and highly valuable picture of how affect intertwines itself within the process of both acquiring and developing new knowledge.

While this growing body of research provides valuable insight into the role that affect plays within learning (insights that hold significant implications for educators), this work fails to consider the ways that affect and the control thereof acts as a political technology in the regulation of bodies within the classroom. To enact this control, institutional and historical forces often reinforce the false dichotomy between reason and affect in order to regulate the appropriateness of different forms of affect (and, simultaneously, emotion) while simultaneously

defining both categories in historically situated ways (Zembylas, 2011). This critical take on the role of affect within education leads Zembylas (2016) to assert that “affect and emotion create new types of subjects and new relations and encounters between those subjects” (p. 545), a social project that holds the potential to both liberate and oppress students, teachers, and others.

Although Zembylas (2016) utilizes this critical stance as a means to call for critical investigations of the historical forces that construct affect and emotion as sites of control within education, I contend that a parallel project which interrogates the connection between neglected forms of affect and their potential within the context of learning environments needs to occur as well. By thoroughly understanding the ways that unconsidered forms of affect engage forms of pedagogy and learning, researchers and educators can challenge existing borders of appropriateness that currently enact control within education.

In this chapter, I consider a largely overlooked form of affect within education literature: abjection. More specifically, I further the ongoing legacy of the abject, a theoretical concept first popularized by Kristeva (1982), by considering the ways in which the abject acts as an educational technology. In doing so, I intentionally consider what Foster (1990) defines as the distinction between “the operation *to abject* and the condition *to be abject*” (p. 114). By analyzing abjection, this chapter not only considers the affective state of abjection (“to be abject”) but also the sociohistorical process of abjecting the other (“to abject”) that constructed the paradigm in which this affective state can exist at all. Placing the abject within the context of education, the intertwined notions “to abject” and “to be abject” point to the ways in which the abject exists as a social technology that enacts control over all bodies (including those of the student) by acting on and contributing to processes of identity formation and social development (see Kristeva, 1982). Abjection, therefore, exists as a rich site for education research when

considering the critical histories that exist in and construct spaces of learning (and, subsequently, the students that inhabit them).

In order to engage the abject as an educational technology (and, more specifically, a tool within music education), I will begin this chapter by reviewing extant literature on abjection with a particular focus on the use of the abject within writings on the visual arts. While I also consider the socio-cultural formation of the abject proposed by Bataille and the feminist theorists who enriched Kristeva's formulation of the abject, I focus on the operationalization of abjection within visual art theory because it provides a means for engaging the abject as a sociocultural tool. Next, I will place theories of abjection in the visual arts into conversation with music literature. In particular, I consider various definitions of noise and how those definitions intersect with theorizations of the abject. In doing so, I consider both "noise-as-genre" (the relatively new musical tradition and subculture often referred to as noise music) and "noise-as-gesture" (the intentional deployment of noise within musical composition or performance that stretches across a number of traditions) in relation to the abject. Moreover, I engage this connection between noise and abjection to, in part, define noise-as-gesture as the reclamation and redeployment of abjected sound within new musical forms. Finally, I end this chapter by considering pedagogical theories that create space for the abject-via-noise within educational contexts. To do so, I place the writings of Freire and Rancière in conversation to define an aesthetic pedagogy of noise music that invites audience members to engage the educational potential of the abject. Through this analysis, I show that the abject-via-noise can allow for a liberatory pedagogy due to the abject's inherent ability to challenge social norms and reconfigure social boundaries (boundaries which have excluded abjected bodies and communities). While this assertion does not absolve the abject of its problematic aspects, seeing as the process of abjection led to these problematic

boundaries in the first place, this chapter provides a first step towards harnessing the abject as an educational technology within a liberatory praxis.

### **The Pedagogical Potential of the Abject**

Before mapping how the abject may exist as a pedagogical tool within music education, however, it helps to define the broader category of affect that contains abjection. Although multiple definitions of affect exist within and across disciplines, I rely here on the theorization of affect proposed by Deleuze in his analysis of Spinoza. In his reading of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Jewish-Dutch philosopher, Deleuze (1978) proposes two key terms: *affectus* and *affectio*. *Affectus* refers to “a body’s capacity to act or be acted on- its power to affect or be affected” (Thompson, 2017, p. 46) whereas *affectio* represents “a mixture of two bodies, one body which is said to act on another, and the other receives the trace of the first” (Deleuze, 1978). Deleuze therefore uses Spinoza to propose a relational definition of affect, one in which affect arises from the interaction between two bodies and exists within the nexus of this interaction (as opposed to belonging to one body or another). Similarly, the body that acts on another does not solely define affect since (if we return to the term *affectus*) bodies also have different capacities in bearing the trace of affection.

To illustrate this point, Deleuze (1978) proposed the following example:

“The sun melts wax and hardens clay.” These points are not nothing. They're ideas of *affectio*. I see the wax which flows, and right beside it I see the clay which hardens; this is an affection of the wax and an affection of the clay, and I have an idea of these affections.

Here, the process of affection exists as a simple interaction between two bodies: the sun as the affecting body and the clay or the wax as the affected body. The sun leaves a trace on these two

bodies in the form of either melting or hardening. Importantly, this affect changes because of the body's capacity to be acted on: both the wax and the clay are affected, but in highly divergent ways because of their individual capacities for affection. This points to the need to interrogate affect through not only the interaction between bodies, but through the affected and affecting bodies themselves. Moreover, this example illustrates that "Spinoza's affecting and affected body is not restricted to the transformative encounters and experiences of the human body-as-subject" (Thompson, 2017, p. 47). Instead, Spinoza proposes a non-anthropocentric body constitutive of two parts: first, its capacity to affect and be affected and, second, its relation to a larger milieu. Regarding this second contention, Spinoza (1996) argues that "bodies are distinguished from one another in respect of motion and rest, quickness and slowness, and not by reason of substance" (p. 41). This understanding of the body continues to push Spinoza (and, subsequently, Deleuze) further away from a humanist understanding of the body and, instead, considers the term through a purely relational lens. A body exists in its interactions and comparisons between other bodies and across given contexts, a notion that broadens affect beyond a strictly anthropocentric understanding of the term. Any investigations into affect must therefore include an investigation of affected and affecting bodies, and vice versa.

### **A Brief History of the Abject**

Subsequently, the definition of affect provided by Spinoza-via-Deleuze creates a lens to think through Kristeva's (1982) original conception of the abject as well. According to the author, the abject represents that which sits outside of the symbolic order and challenges existing social structures (and notions of the individual formed within said structure) by its very existence (Kristeva, 1982). While Kristeva relies heavily on the psychoanalytic theory of Freud to develop her conception of abjection, the author

theorizes abjection in distinctly phenomenological terms, associating the abject with all that is repulsive and fascinating about bodies and, in particular, those aspects of bodily experience which unsettle singular bodily integrity: death, decay, fluids, orifices, sex, defecation, vomiting, illness, menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth. (Tyler, 2009, p. 79-80).

This affective response, one that simultaneously involves disgust and fascination, in turn questions the wholeness or purity of the individual as formed through the machinations of society (Grosz, 1989). The intertwined feelings of both repulsion and intrigue inspired by the viewing of a corpse provides one of the strongest examples of abjection for Kristeva (1982), a reaction that goes beyond feelings of mere disgust: “The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life... It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order” (p. 4). To then interpret the abject through the definition of affect proposed by Spinoza-via-Deleuze is to simply map out the relationship through which this affect arises: a body of organic matter (a corpse, excrement, etc.) acts on an individual/their identity and leaves a trace in the form of a broken (or, at the very least, challenged) border between the self and the other. The abject, therefore, does not exist as an object but as a specific moment of interaction between two bodies (along with a specific kind of trace left by said interaction). To use Spinoza’s terminology, the abject is therefore a particular moment of affectio, one that results in a specific type of affective trace.

Building on this definition, Kristeva goes on to link the notion of abjection to social formations beyond the individual as physical or material entity. This process begins early, as infants abject the mother in the development of their own identity (Kristeva, 1982). Without abjecting the mother, a socially constructed category of person, the infant cannot assert itself as

an individual. In another example, Kristeva highlights the abject within the antisemitic writings of Louis-Ferdinand Céline. For Céline, “The Jew becomes... the border where exact limits [form] between same and other, subject and object, and even beyond these, between inside and outside, and disappearing—hence an Object of fear and fascination. *Abjection itself*” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 184). In doing so, Kristeva enacts a previous understanding of abjection proposed by Bataille (1970), one that roots abjection in the socio-political and not the psychoanalytical (see Arya, 2014). Bataille’s definition of abjection is simple, defining the term simply as “merely the inability to assume with sufficient strength the imperative act of excluding abject things (and that act establishes the foundations of collective existence)” (as cited in Kristeva, 1982, p. 56). It is in this simplicity that notions of abjection spread to all forms of marginalization: people of color, women, and members of the queer and transgender community all exist within these abjected states. Regarding Kristeva’s use of Bataille’s definition, this leads to a theoretical slippage, one noted by Foster (1990):

A crucial ambiguity in Kristeva is the slippage between the operation *to abject* and the condition *to be abject*. For her the operation to abject is fundamental to the maintenance of subjectivity and society, while the condition to be abject is subversive of both formations. (p. 114)

But Bataille (1970) also roots abjection in the inability to cast off these bodies, meaning that larger social formations never truly sever their relationship with abjected entities. While both society and the individual constantly engage in the process of casting off abjected materials, bodies, and identities, the abject remains an ever-present threat to the symbolic order and, in part, defines the identities and social formations it inevitably challenges.

Shifting now towards a reading of Bataille's notion of abjection through the lens of Spinoza-via-Deleuze, a relational understanding of affect applies to the abject if the affecting and affected subjects in question do not need to be human bodies. This fits quite easily within Spinoza's theory, since the philosopher asserted that a "body can be anything: it can be an animal, a body of sounds, a mind or an idea; it can be a linguistic corpus, a social body, [or] a collectivity" (Deleuze, 1988, p. 127), just so long as that body has the capacity to affect and be affected. In reframing all social formations as bodies, mapping an affective relationship within Bataille's abject becomes possible: a powerful body in the form of an institution (i.e. the state, dominant culture, etc.) acts on the now marginalized body (both as a collective and as an individual) by redefining that body's identity outside of its own. Through abjection, groups and individuals become abjected in relation to the social order. The affecting body (the institution) leaves its trace on the affected body (the abjected group or individual) through the border work inherent to constructing a social order in the first place.

The continued existence of abjected bodies, however, generates its own affect by challenging the boundaries of social identity formed, in part, by the abjecting process. This specific form of affect, where abjected bodies act on abjecting entities, represents the core of Kristeva's (1982) definition of the abject. Moreover, it produces a constant cycle of identity negotiation. To use Foster's (1990) terms, powerful social bodies enact the operation to abject on less powerful social and human bodies who now bear the traces of the condition to be abject. In turn, those bodies that bear these traces produce their own affective interaction, leaving a trace on the body that instigated that initial abjection. The socio-cultural reading of the abject proposed here implies that both the abjecting and abjected bodies hold the capacity to both act and be acted upon, an assertion that sits at the heart of what Spinoza defines as *affectus* and,

thusly, affect. This socio-cultural understanding also exists within Kristeva's (1982) theorization when she claims that "abjection, when all is said and done, is the other facet of religious, moral, and ideological codes on which rest the sleep of individuals and the breathing spells of societies" (p. 209). To understand the abject, in its full form, then inherently involves mapping the full set of relations between Spinozan bodies, including both the individual and the larger social bodies that abject and are abjected.

Within these initial formulations proposed by Bataille and Kristeva, the role of the abject within education begins to emerge along two distinct tracks. First, since the abject poses an ever-present threat to both individual and social identity, understanding abjection and how it operates proves crucial to the maintenance of these boundaries. While this does not necessarily position the abject as a pedagogical tool, it does affirm the importance of abjection within the context of learning. Second, for those boundaries that individuals hope to challenge (i.e. the boundaries that define marginalized identities such as race and gender), the abject (via Bataille) can break down those barriers and allow space to recreate boundaries in a more equitable fashion. This positions the abject as a potential tool in the process of liberation through decolonial, anti-racist, feminist and other forms of activism and education. The abject (as a form of affect) holds the potential to reconfigure social identities and leave a trace in the form of a more just understanding of humanity and social inclusion. From a cognitive perspective, this process mirrors Piaget's (1952) notion of disequilibrium. According to the author, learning occurs in part when new information uproots an existing schema individuals use to understand the world. This new challenge creates a sense of disequilibrium that individuals need to address through accommodation and assimilation, leading to the development of new, more thorough schema. Since the abject both subverts and maintains the boundaries of the individual and society, it follows that the abject

would do so through a process of disequilibrium: the abject challenges an individual or social identity, the individual or community then rebuilds or reframes that identity in response to this challenge, and the abject once again presents a new challenge as the cycle continues. This allows those engaging the abject to not only better understand their current identity but provide an opportunity to reform and rebuild that identity in new ways.

### **Abjection in Feminist Studies**

However, this understanding of abjection as an educational technology (and the abject more broadly) holds its own set of problematics that may potentially undermine a liberatory praxis before it can take shape (see Arya, 2014; Tyler, 2009). Feminist scholars in particular have challenged Kristeva's positioning of the mother as the initial source of abjection in the process of forming one's identity (see Grosz, 1989). According to Kristeva (1982), becoming an individual fundamentally involves breaking the unified identity formed between mother and child during pregnancy and in the earliest days of childhood. This occurs through the process of abjection as the mother is defined outside of one's own identity. Feminist scholars have gone on to challenge the universality of these claims since notions of the maternal and the body are socially and historically constructed (see Tyler, 2009). For theorists such as Creed (1986), this understanding of the feminine-as-abject "is constructed as such within a patriarchal discourse" (p. 70) and not an ontological part of humanity. To this end, Tyler (2009) proposes the use of Bataille's definition that positions abjection as a wholly social force (as opposed to Kristeva's psychoanalytical formation) in which dominant forces exclude certain bodies, identities, or groups of people from the social fabric. In her words, "abjection should be understood as a concept that describes the violent exclusionary forces operating within modern states: forces that strip people of their human dignity and reproduce them as dehumanized waste, the dregs and

refuse of social life” (Tyler, 2009, p. 87). Within this framing, understanding the abject within a liberatory praxis becomes impossible.

However, this understanding of abjection as a form of violence rests on the assumption that abjection only occurs through the machinations of the nation state, marginalizing individuals and communities through a dehumanizing process. While this theorization does represent one particularly powerful form of abjection, it does not represent abjection as a whole since both individuals and communities utilize their own processes of abjection when defining an identity. Similarly, while the process of abjection routinely leads to the oppression and marginalization of the other, abjected individuals or groups also pose a challenge towards existing social orders which could, in turn, engender a liberatory praxis through that abjected status. Examining this process involves differentiating between the various linguistic forms of the abject referenced throughout this chapter: rather than engaging or reinscribing the operation “to abject,” a liberatory practice would engage those bodies/identities that have existed under the condition “to be abject” and utilize the abject as an affective relation between two bodies to reimagine the border that defines those bodies in the first place. In a similar sentiment, Wilderson (2020) contends that “the first step towards... destruction is to assume one’s position (*assume, not celebrate or disavow*), and then burn the ship or the plantation, in its past and present incarnations, from the inside out” (p. 103). Here, Wilderson denounces the celebration of abjection-via-Blackness but acknowledges the important role that the abject plays in upending the racialized social order. The abjected Black body cannot destroy the ongoing/abjecting legacy of slavery without first acknowledging its abjected status. The ship burning is the abject incarnate. Thinking beyond formations of race, the abject constantly poses a threat towards all

social orders that confer the status of abjection in the first place (Kristeva, 1982). Harnessing this challenge could potentially reframe the social order and produce more just boundaries.

### **Abject Art**

In another line of influence, visual artists and art historians have also taken up the abject as both inspiration for new works and as a lens through which scholars analyze certain artifacts. While Kristeva (1982) herself made the case for the use of abjection within modern literature, interest in the abject within the visual arts grew during the late 80s and early 90s before garnering broad attention from the influential 1993 exhibit at the Whitney museum entitled *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art* (Arya & Chare, 2016). This exhibit highlighted a number of works (both new and from the collection) that engaged abjection, largely focusing on the use of bodily fluids and other discarded or lowly forms of matter, what Bataille (1985) describes as “base materials,” within the medium (Arya, 2014). Beyond this initial wave of interest in abject art, the use of abjection as a theoretical lens has taken on a number of forms including the use of the abject in exploring portrayals of feminine bodies (Creed, 1986), animal symbology (Creed & Hoorn, 2016), and even subversive types of parody (Covino, 2000).

Despite these varying approaches, artists of all types (visual, literary, or otherwise) have used abjection to challenge problematic social norms (Arya & Chare, 2016). For Lechte (2016), this inherently happens through the affective response generated by the work and not the work itself, since the abject (in its initial formulation) does not represent an object but rather an unknowable and ever-present challenge to existing symbolic and social orders. As Kristeva (1982) notes, the abject “has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I” (p. 1). By articulating this opposition through an affective response, the viewer can then reimagine what

defines the I and begin to reimagine the self within this process. This, in part, involves negotiating a double self that includes the I that has defined itself as separate from the other and its opposite, a process that materializes through an acknowledgment of (or encounter with) the ever present abject that poses a threat to that definition. Kristeva's (1982) formation of the abject, as a form of affect, arises from interactions with an abjected other that already exists within the self (bodily fluids and excrement, for example, fill the human body but engender the abject when viewed outside of this boundary), implying that identity development at both the individual and social level, in part, involves the process of abjecting parts of the self to create a border. In dealing with the inherent challenge posed through the abject, social processes of ritual purification (religious rites, artistic production, etc.) traditionally separate the I from the abjected other (Kristeva, 1982). But, as Arya (2014) contends, abject art engages a different process in which this boundary between the I and its opposite collapse: "we become abject through contamination of what we have seen and experienced and need to go through a process of catharsis or collapse of meaning before meaning and identity can be reconfigured" (p. 108). This assertion lays the groundwork for the abject to act as a subversive technology within the arts (and, subsequently, education), potentially challenging problematic borders within the self (via Kristeva) and the socio-political regime (via Bataille).

However, the use of abjection within artistic works, similar to the use of the abject within feminist studies, has generated its own set of critiques. Kristeva herself brought a number of challenges to light when discussing abjection in the context of modern literature. According to her, the abject in literature invokes "not an ultimate resistance to but an unveiling of the abject: an elaboration, a discharge, and a hollowing out of abjection through the Crisis of the Word" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 208). In doing so, authors do not necessarily engage or challenge the abject.

Instead, they absolve themselves and others, defining the abject outside of themselves through a process that mimics the ritual purifying process inherent to many religions (Kristeva, 1982).

Looking to the use of the abject within visual art, Foster (1990) questions the ability of abject art to challenge the status quo, claiming that the affect of abjection that comes from visual art often results in merely reaffirming the abjected status of the subject without garnering serious criticism of the social order that led to this status. Similarly, Tyler (2009) raises questions about the use of abjected feminine bodies within film and visual arts as a form of parody or critique, claiming that this form of parody inherently reproduces the abjected status of women because of its reinscription of horrific, violent, and pornographic imagery within the cultural landscape. These issues, combined with the abject's ability to severely challenge and reconfigure one's identity in often unpredictable ways, leads Arya (2014) to pose an inherent ethical question: should artists engage the abject at all?

### **The Abject as Educational Technology**

Despite the validity of the critiques posed by these authors, I see the use of the abject within the arts (and, subsequently, education) as potentially valuable largely because the abject remains an essential part of social formation and identity. The process of casting off helps define the individual or community through a negative process: I am this, in part, because I am not that. But, as critical scholars within feminist studies and art history have attested to, this process often acts as a means for exclusion, marginalization, and oppression. However, in breaking down and rebuilding social boundaries and identities, the abject can also potentially engender more just social formations and community members. To this end, it becomes crucial to understand how to deploy the abject as an educational tool without reproducing the harmful effects described by those critical of abjection as a social technology, especially when considering a liberatory

educational praxis à la Freire (1970). Reframing this contention within the language of Spinoza and Deleuze, the question shifts to understanding how to engender the abject as an affective relation between two bodies (with an abjected body acting on another) in such a way that the traces left produces a more just social order when the symbolic order reforms. In other words, how can educators produce “an encounter that enhances or preserves the power of the body to act (thus having a positive effect)” (Thompson, 2017, p. 116)?

While education research could pose a fertile space for exploring this practice, the existing body of literature has largely ignored the use of the abject as a pedagogical tool. Still, in the few instances where researchers have considered connections between the abject and learning, themes of individual and communal empowerment exist: Lewkowich (2015) utilizes the abjection that emerges from the presence of sweat as a means for breaking down socially enforced barriers between teacher and student while Fortner (2005) draws on shared experiences of abjection as a means for introspection and collectively understanding the self. While both of these examples provide insight into how the abject fits within the process of education and heightens that process by challenging harmful boundaries (as opposed to reaffirming them), they do not speak to how individuals and communities might purposefully engage the abject within their pedagogy. Achieving this end, however, also involves understanding the nuances of how the abject operates within particular contexts. To engage the abject within the context of music education, for example, it becomes crucial to understand how abjection might exist within musical contexts, especially considering that the overtly visual nature of the abject (Arya, 2014) runs counter to an almost entirely aural art form. To phrase this assertion as a question, how does the abject materialize in music? In response, I propose that noise as both a category of sound and musical tradition provides a fruitful site of research because of its ample (albeit problematic)

connection to abjection. Theorizing this connection between noise and abjection within the context of music education, as I do in the next section, therefore provides one example of how the abject can act as a pedagogical tool.

### **Reclaiming Sonic Objects Through Noise**

Theorizing the connection between the abject and noise, however, proves deceptively challenging because, as Jones (2016) notes, an inherent difficulty exists in writing and talking about noise as both a musical form and sonic material because of its reliance on affect. Focusing on the musical tradition of noise music, another difficulty emerges from the discursive practices uncovered by Atton (2011) in his attempts to map out the contemporary noise scene: since noise does not define itself through a shared set of aesthetic markers (leading to a wildly diverse set of music making practices), listeners and artists instead rely on a (inherently flawed) discourse of extremity that posits noise as the “extreme end of music” that pushes all musical elements (dynamics, structure, harmony, duration, etc.) to their limit. This becomes further complicated when considering the seemingly endless number of entryways into noise, entryways that stem from a perceived need to challenge preexisting and socialized definitions of music across all musical genres (Novak, 2013). This leads to a highly amorphous musical tradition, one loosely connected by the use of unconventional or non-musical sound to create unstructured (or alternately structured) improvisations or compositions, that generates various points of intersection with multiple genres. Writing about noise in a cohesive way is therefore complex. To help simplify this discussion, I will analyze two different aspects of noise within this section: noise-as-gesture, or the purposeful introduction of noise within a musical context that occurs throughout numerous genres, and noise-as-genre, which specifically refers to the noise music genre that emerged in the 1980s. In doing so, I connect both aspects of noise back to conceptions

of the object which, in turn, creates a theoretical space to consider the ways in which music education (both formally and informally) might engage the object as an educational technology.

### **Noise-as-Gesture**

Starting with noise-as-gesture, multiple theorists have posited different (and somewhat conflicting) definitions of noise and its relationship to music. Most pertinent to this writing, Thompson (2017) specifically theorizes noise through the lens of Spinozan affect, claiming that noise is simply “an affective relation” (p. 51). She reaches this understanding not only through Spinoza-via-Deleuze but through Serres’ (2007) notion of the parasite, a relational entity existing between subject and object that disturbs or interrupts the normal or expected relationship between these objects. Relying on the polysemic understanding of the term in French, Serres’ (2007) parasite trades in three separate social spheres: “the biological feeder; the social scapegoat or uninvited guest; and the noise of communication” (Thompson, 2017, p. 58) in the form of static or some other kind of interference. In doing so, Serres positions the parasite as a generative and productive force that alters or transforms the relations it interrupts. Moreover, Thompson also engages Serres’ (2007) notion of the milieu as a context or middle “that necessarily stands between sender and receiver, and any other relation between seemingly free and discrete entities” (Thompson, 2017, p. 61). This milieu is necessary for any sort of relation, whether that exists in the biological, social, or communicative realm of the parasite. Without this medium, no interaction between bodies can occur. However, this relation does not exist as a neutral entity. Instead, the milieu produces its own sort of affect by not only allowing for this relation to exist but by acting on that relation (Serres, 2007).

Building on Serres’ understandings of the parasite and the milieu, Thompson (2017) connects these notions when she writes, “rather than being a secondary and unnecessary

nuisance, or a disruption of a pre-existing calm, the parasitic noise, occupying the third position, is an ineradicable and constitutive element of any communicative process, and of relations more broadly” (p. 62). Specifically in reference to music, Thompson (2017) argues that understanding noise as a musical gesture does not exist as an additive practice but one of “exposure,” a revealing of the noise that has always existed within the techno-musical milieu. The ontology of noise therefore does not rest in any specific sonic characteristic but, instead, within the affective relationship it enables. For example, the purposeful inclusion of pops and crackles from a vinyl record on a recording or the use of guitar feedback is noisy because it reveals the medium of communication (the material record, the amplifier) that often goes unnoticed. This acts as a form of affect because it reorients the relationship between the listener and the techno-musical system, or maybe the broader body of music itself. Thompson (2017) makes a clear distinction between this understanding of noise and the more familiar binary logic of signal versus noise, where noise exists in the negative by solely hindering the ability of a signal to travel from sender to receiver. Instead, noise exists as a crucial part of the musical milieu, one that allows music as a communicative act to exist in the first place (the technologies of vinyl records and amplifiers allow music to be heard). A Thompsonian understanding of noise-as-gesture, therefore, merely involves pointing to and revealing the milieu that normally goes unseen or, more accurately, unheard.

Utilizing this definition of noise-via-affect as a foundation, other writers have proposed their own definitions of noise that fit comfortably within this formation. In most cases, authors merely generate new definitions of noise by proposing different affecting and affected bodies. In one example, Novak (2013) forwards the theory that noise “can only exist in circulation” (p. 6), a theory that relies on a definition of noise that comes from communication theory (paraphrased as

any extraneous or meaningless signal in the transmission of information between two entities). This assertion posits noise-as-gesture as a moving ontological target, one in which the noisiness of a sound, art form, idea, or communication comes from the process of translation between various contexts. Novak (2013) also utilizes this theory to describe noise music, or the amorphous collection of artists that form what I also refer to as noise-as-genre and discuss in the next section:

The Noise I describe here did not emerge through its pure distinctions from music but in the overlapping and repetitive feedback between “noise” and “music,” “local” and “global,” “old” and “new” that generates new modes of musical and social experience. (p. 232)

Within the context of circulation, noise constantly reinvents itself, retaining a perennial sense of newness as novel forms of noise emerge and listeners constantly rediscover older forms as well (Novak, 2013). While Thompson (2017) formulates her definition of noise in opposition to these types of binaries, Novak’s use of circulation as a guiding metaphor provides a bridge between the two scholars by situating noise within the connective medium between two relating (and affecting) bodies. If noise comes from this circulation, then it must emerge from that affective milieu.

While both Novak and Thompson leave the relational bodies of noise intentionally open ended, most other scholars who have provided their own definitions focus on the noise that forms from the circulation of cultural artifacts through two different musical milieu’s: one loop forms between artist and established musical tradition (via a socialized audience) and the other situates itself between the site of musical production and the larger social context surrounding this process. Starting with noise as an inter-musical relation, Hegarty (2007) defines noise as the

disruption of accepted norms within a given musical tradition through the introduction of musical elements that read as senseless, unmeaningful, or unmusical within that context. This definition positions noise as a compositional or performative gesture and not as an aesthetic element of a material sound. It also situates noise within the circulation between the composer, performer, or specific musical work and a given musical tradition via an audience. These listeners hold a specific, socialized understanding of what constitutes music (or, at least, a specific kind of music) that noise-as-gesture inherently challenges. Russo & Warner (2004) mirror this notion when they say “noise is not, as information theorists would have it, a signal that we do not want to hear. It is a signal that *someone* does not want to hear” (p. 53). To that end, noise-as-gesture can only make noise if the context allows. Although Thompson (2017) challenges any claims to universality behind this definition, arguing that a reliance on the listener in defining noise sits in opposition to the non-anthropocentric body proposed by Spinoza, it still positions noise as a form of affect in which sound acts on the listening subject.

Similarly, Hainge (2013) challenges Hegarty’s conception of noise as musical disruption, claiming that it does not fully encapsulate noise in its ontological form. Through the process of incorporating noise into specific compositions or performance techniques, Hainge (2013) contends that this process inherently alters the nature of these noises by transforming them into musical sounds. This undermines Hegarty’s (2007) notion of disruption because the process of controlling noise for musical purposes embeds these sounds with contextual meaning and allows them to become part of the musical tradition they hope to challenge. To this end, noise implies a certain level of uncontrollability beyond the hand of the composer or performer (Hainge, 2013; Whitehead, 2013). Novak (2013) illuminates this understanding of noise-as-gesture when describing an approach to instrumentation taken by “noisicians”, or musicians who play noise

music: “Noisicians deliberately attempt to keep themselves from naturalizing this instrumental self-expression. To perform their own loss of control as authoritative human subjects, they cannot fully learn the system” (p. 159). This approach leads to a highly unpredictable style of performance, one that creates inherently unrepeatable works of music and creates space for disruptive or “meaningless” sounds to exist. Or, to use Thompson’s (2017) terminology, it highlights the uncontrolled sounds of the milieu deemed “unmusical.” The uncontrollability of noise also acts on the relationship between listeners and musical traditions by challenging the humanism at the center of most musical forms, questioning the role of the performer or composer in the creation of new works and the meaning behind them.

Turning towards a formulation of noise-as-gesture that engages a broader and non-musical space, Attali proposes a type of noise that defines the affective relationship between musical performance and the larger social context. Here, Attali (1985) defines noise as a set of creative gestures that exist separate from (or remain meaningless in) the grammar of musical expressions formed through capitalist modes of production and other dominant social institutions. Through this critical understanding of music, Attali (1985) claims that “every code of music is rooted in the ideologies and technologies of its age, and at the same time produces them” (p. 19). Music, then, exists as a form of social control: “music localizes and specifies power, because it marks and regiments the rare noises that cultures, in their normalization of behavior, see fit to authorize. Music accounts for them. It makes them audible” (Attali, 1985, p. 19-20). Music emerges as a modern social force because capital forms of production normalize dominant and oppressive ideologies while “music and the musician essentially become either objects of consumption like everything else, recuperators of subversion, or meaningless noise” (Attali, 1985, p. 8). The solution, according to Attali (1985), lies in the process of “inventing new

codes [and] inventing the message at the same time as language” (p. 134) through noise. This happens as musicians move beyond those forms of music deemed acceptable under modernist regimes and capitalism and engage noise-as-gesture, creating new messages, languages, and musical forms simultaneously. The use of this gesture also allows new communities to form, as “any noise, when two people decide to invest their imaginary and their desire in it, becomes a potential relationship, future order” (Attali, 1985, p. 143).

Put into conversation, the definitions proposed by Thompson, Novak, Hegarty, Hainge, and Attali do not contradict each other but rather coalesce into a rich but noisy understanding of noise-as-gesture. As an example, Cassidy (2013) illuminates and enacts all these conceptions of noise in his discussion of experimental vocal techniques. For the author, noise in the human voice (and specifically during musical performances) emerges as vocalized sounds circulate (à la Novak, 2013) between those “linguistic ciphers” (Cassidy, 2013, p. 46) that give speech and vocalizations meaning and towards a physically extreme and alien approach to sounding through the human body. Once those socially constructed (and controlling) linguistic ciphers have been removed, “all that is left is ‘grain,’ a pure, vocal materiality” (Cassidy, 2013, p. 37), revealing what Thompson (2017) would define as the medium of the human voice. Reading this through Hagerty’s (2007) notion of disruption, the performer creates noise by challenging the monopolized use of the voice as a vehicle for lyrics and melodies and moving towards wordless, extended vocal techniques. The uncontrollability at the root of Hainge’s (2013) definition also exists as performers push their lungs, vocal cords, and other body parts to their extreme limits, finding spaces in which they can no longer control the material sound of their own voice and the body takes over (Cassidy, 2013). This acts as noise à la Attali (1985) since vocal noise comes from a corporeal body that acts in opposition to the social practices that give the human voice

meaning (i.e. spoken language, sung melodies, etc.). Finally, through this embodiment of otherness that gives rise to the noisiness of this performative practice, vocal noise challenges socialized hearings of the human voice and creates noise within multiple settings simultaneously.

Rather than choose one correct reading, I want to suggest that noise-as-gesture circulates between these conceptions, only taking on the identity of noise when context allows a sound to become noisy. To put this into Spinozan terms, noise as a form of affect can only exist if the bodies in relation have the capacity to affect and be affected. The noisiness of these gestures fluctuates as these noisy bodies circulate through new milieus. Noise-as-gesture, therefore, can create noise under multiple conceptions of the term simultaneously. This designation as noise, or as a specific type of noise which engenders a specific form of affect, may change as the affected body shifts as well. Yet despite these competing and fluctuating definitions, all the theories discussed above conceive of noise as a challenge. At different moments, noise challenges affective relations to standing musical traditions, conceptions of composition and performance, what qualifies as musical or meaningful sound, and what counts as socially valuable. I also contend that this challenge happens through a sonic reclamation of the abject, with noise-as-gesture engaging those materials and identities (ones defined as other by social structures and institutions) that undermine the borders formed by the symbolic order. Noise can only emerge after some sort of social order abjects a sound from the collected body of musical communication, relegating it to the background of the sonic milieu. A noise is then produced when that sound reveals itself within the milieu and visibly/audibly acts on the symbolic order of music. Noise-as-gesture, therefore, is the reclamation and redeployment of abjected sonics and sound sources, including abjected bodies and identities, within a musical context.

Looking more closely at the extant theories of noise described here, a clear connection exists between abjection and Novak's definition of noise as cultural circulation since that circulation constantly travels between "meaningless" sound and the socialized regime of meaningful music. The abject also engenders notions of disruption proposed by Attali and Hegarty by challenging existing social and symbolic orders through sound. Finally, Hainge's conception of noise through uncontrollability also finds a home within the abject as the mechanisms of control over sound come from socially constructed definitions of music making (and, similarly, composer and performer). The uncontrolled noise, in a sense, then crosses the border between outside sound into the composition or performance without the aid of those making music. It then follows that the abject of music would include those sounds or gestures deemed meaningless, unusable, or inaudible to what Stoever (2016) calls the listening ear, or the form of listening that emerges through a process of discipline enacted by an interconnected web of social institutions and cultural norms. Noise forms as sounds and gestures circulate through the musical and social spaces that abjected them in the first place. Moreover, the abjection of sound created by people of color (Stoever, 2016), queer bodies (Daniel, 2011) and women (see Thompson, 2016) point to the socio-political connection between the bodies that produce sound and how sounds coming from abjected bodies prove inherently noisy. In turn, the redeployment of abjected sound through noise-as-gesture challenges these institutions to hear them as meaningful.

However, Thompson (2017) very directly challenges definitions of noise that engender a connection to the abject. According to the author, "I would assert that we do not yet know what noise can do- what affects and effects it may serve to generate" (p. 179). While I do agree with the author on this point (a vast multitude of affects may emerge from noisy relations), my

theorizing of noise-as-gesture purposefully narrows the scope of this pursuit to better understand the ways in which noise might operate within particular socio-political, musical, and educational contexts. This occurs through the separation of noise and noise-as-gesture, the former being an affective relation and the latter being an intentional and purposeful engagement of that relation within music. This inherently limits the scope of (intended) affects that might emerge as a result of this gesture because of music's status as a social construct: musicians and composers who make music (and the audience members who listen) enter into a set of predetermined roles defined by that specific musical tradition, a set of roles which they can then follow or act against (see Attali, 1985; Small, 1998). Returning to Serres (2007), the noise within this relational, musical system comes from the bodies and gestures that disrupt this system from within. The musical examples provided by Thompson (2017) (the feedback laden squall of Merzbow, the focus on room sounds and within-instrument glitches of Onkyô artists, the raw vocals of Diamanda Galas, etc.) in her extended meditation on noise all focus on the gesture of uncovering the milieu within a techno-musical system, but this can only exist as a novel gesture when social forces relegate those aspects of the milieu to the background. This implies an a priori process of abjection, one that relegates certain bodies (both as material sounds and as sound-making bodies or identities) outside the symbolic order. Noise-as-gesture can then reveal those already existent bodies as present, allow them to speak within a given social system, and engage the noisy, parasitic, and affective relation of the abject to emerge and, hopefully, reorient the symbolic order.

### **Noise-as-genre**

To further explore the connection between the abject and noise-as-gesture, it proves helpful to consider a musical tradition that has fully embraced noise throughout its history: noise

music, or what I also call noise-as-genre within this chapter. While some authors have proposed a seemingly ahistorical definition of contemporary noise music (see Atton, 2011; Novak, 2013), current music making practices within the noise scene emerge from two key historical moments: the harsh noise scene in Japan and the European power electronics scene, both of which came into fruition during the 1980s (see Bailey, 2009; Taylor, P., 2016). Although tracing noise-as-genre in its entirety back to these two historical markers proves problematic (a whole host of other artistic traditions including Italian futurism, mid-century experimental music, Dada sound art, and punk have also influenced the genre in significant ways), the common music making practice and thematics of the genre pull significant influence from both of these scenes. Rather than fully engage a historical overview of the genre, I will touch on a few key areas of abjection present within these scenes: the use of electronic instrumentation and the reoccurring themes of death, sexuality, and racially oriented fascism within the genre.

Regarding common instrumentation within noise-as-genre, artists from both the Japanese harsh noise scene and the English power electronics scene utilized electronic instrumentation to create aggressive and caustic sounds by purposefully overdriving their own gear. Members of the band Whitehouse (widely considered the founders of the power electronics sub-genre and the subsequent scene it inspired in Europe during the 80s) created their music by maxing out all of the various levels and controls of their EDP Wasp synthesizers (Taylor, P., 2016). This approach created a “noise of ear-splittingly high frequencies” that they “combined... with indecipherable vocal tirades” (Taylor, P., 2016, p. 13). These screamed tirades mirror the process of overdriving synthesizers within the human voice by pushing lead vocalist William Bennet’s vocal cords far beyond common usage. Similarly, Japanese harsh noise artists such as Merzbow often relied on the use of interconnected systems of effects pedals and other electronic devices to create chaotic

and internal feedback loops within these instrumentation systems. This shifts the focus of the performance away from the artist and to the normally unwanted collection of sounds generated by this largely uncontrollable system (Novak, 2013). In both cases, artists within these scenes utilize abjected electronic (and, at times, bodily) sound as a primary source of musical expression: both feedback and the extraneous sound coming from synthesizers have largely been abjected from the sonic landscape that has been socialized as meaningful or musical and forced into the background of the musical milieu. This positions noise-as-genre within the abject at a purely technical level, engaging noise-as-gesture within the context of sound production.

Beyond this technical definition, noise-as-genre also engages abjection through its various common thematics. Returning to Kristeva's assertion of the corpse as the ultimate abject, Potts (2015) finds a similar obsession with death in the Japanese noise scene, going so far as to state that "death becomes an active part of what [noise] is" (p. 380). Wallis (2016) draws a similar parallel within the visual aesthetics of power electronics, noting that artists routinely engage scenes of death within their album art and merchandise. Moving beyond the corpse, noise-as-genre also engages themes of sexuality that mirror the extended discussion of *jouissance* and sexual fluids within Kristeva's (1982) work. In particular, the use of pornography as a visual element within Merzbow's early work fully engages the abject nature of this photographic genre, one that represents a lowly or, to use Bataille's term, base form of sexuality that challenges common social norms and identities through its unending replication (Bailey, 2009). Finally, the ambiguous use of transgressive imagery, including the use of fascist and racist iconography and images of sexual violence (Stevenson, 2016), enacts a social definition of abjection that redeploys abject bodies of all kinds within this music. Kristeva (1982) considered this aspect of abjection through an extended analysis of Celine, a writer whose approach to transgressive

material mirrors that of many power electronics artists (see Stevenson, 2016). Beyond the sonic objects that come from engaging noise-as-gesture, noise-as-genre remains committed to abjection through these thematic strands and, when put into conversation with my analysis of the abject as educational technology, sets the stage for reimagining this musical form within the context of education.

### **Towards a Liberatory Praxis of Noise**

While all of the thematics of noise-as-genre remain inherently problematic (see Woods, 2018), invoking both the ethical question raised by Arya (2014) and the critiques posed by Tyler (2009) without providing a proper answer for either, they still point to the ways in which noise as both genre and gesture engage the abject. This connection then allows for music educators and musicians alike to consider how noise-via-the abject can act as an educational technology, one that allows for the reimagining of individual identities and social boundaries. Providing another point of contention, Thompson (2017) warns against “uncritically associating noise with an emancipatory politics” (p. 176), claiming that scholars routinely overlook the shortcomings of using noise as a tool for radical political change by failing to consider the ways in which late-stage capitalist institutions have embraced noise as a technology for extending and emboldening their own means of control. Yet Thompson (2017) also contends that noise holds its own politics, one the author describes in her own writing as “an ethico-affective approach [that] looks to provide a specific understanding of noise that also embraces noise’s variability and multiplicity” (p. 179). In this sense, the politics of noise connects to the ethical dimension of the affective encounter: an ethically “good” encounter increases or maintains the affected body’s ability to act and an ethically “bad” encounter does the opposite. Thompson, in her argument against an uncritical assumption of noise’s liberatory politics, leaves the ethics of noise (ontologically

speaking) open and instead asserts that the ethics of noise rely on the outcome of specific and contextualized affective interactions. While I agree with this assessment of the inherent politics of noise, this critique does not negate the possibility of liberatory enactments. To this end, it becomes crucial to unveil how noise-as-gesture could potentially enact a liberatory politics (even if noise does not guarantee that result). I do so by considering noise-as-gesture as a particular and bounded form of interaction with noise, an encounter that can potentially increase one's ability to act.

Although this framing of noise-via-the abject provides a means towards conceptualizing both noise and the abject within the context of education, it does not reveal how educators or artists can intentionally deploy the abject as a pedagogical tool. With this contention in mind, I finish this chapter with an exploration of Freire and Rancière's aesthetic theories as a means towards intentionally engaging the abject within educational contexts. In doing so, I further expand on the connections between noise and the abject by producing what I call an aesthetic pedagogy of noise. Through this pedagogical formation, I also provide an avenue for engaging noise within a liberatory pedagogy, harnessing the affective power of noise towards an emancipatory end despite the politics of noise remaining far from determined. While this analysis will not fully address the problematic use of abjection mentioned, it does provide one avenue towards reimagining both noise-as-genre and noise-as-gesture as meaningful pedagogical tools within informal and formal arts/music education contexts.

### **Noise as Freirean Codification**

While most scholars associate Freire with his political work, the scholar has dedicated a significant portion of his writings to the aesthetics of education. Freire does so to emphasize the

importance of aesthetics within the learning process, claiming that aesthetics act as one of three foundational elements:

education is simultaneously a certain theory of knowledge going into practice, a political and aesthetic act. These three dimensions are always together, simultaneous moments of theory and practice, art and politics, the act of knowing at once creating and recreating objects while it forms the students who are knowing. (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 31)

From this understanding, Freire (1973) developed a specific process utilizing creative artifacts, or “codifications,” to engage students and teachers in his dialogical method. Educators start by embedding situated understandings of the world into new codifications, creating a visual “representation of the typical existential situations of the group with which one is working” (Freire, 1973, p. 45). The learning community would then decode the relationships embedded within the codification and imagine how their current condition connects to these relationships. The group of educators and students then recodify an ideal and emancipated world into the image, reimagining the original relationships and altering these artifacts to reflect this new reality. This aesthetically inclined philosophy of education opens the door for artists to intentionally engage others in dialogical learning through their own creative practice (Boal and the Theatre of the Oppressed providing a clear example). Instead of educational and artistic spaces existing as mutually exclusively entities, they become reflections of each other when cultural artifacts form through the process of dialogic learning and, in turn, serve as the corner stone of future pedagogical moments.

Based on this conceptualization, noise music exists as a relatively potent art form for this type of learning. According to Freire (1970), a

fundamental requirement for the preparation of the codifications is that their thematic nucleus be neither overly explicit nor overly enigmatic. The former may degenerate into mere propaganda, with no real decoding to be done beyond stating the obviously predetermined content. The latter runs the risk of appearing to be a puzzle or a guessing game (p. 114–115).

Specifically thinking through power electronics, Stevenson (2016) argues that this transgressive noise subgenre utilizes the abject in a way that mirrors the codification process. Instead of crafting musical works with a specific message, power electronics forces audiences to contend with a very real and troubling reality without presenting prescribed reactions or solutions to these issues (Stevenson, 2016). This gesture reads as a reaction to the literal approach taken by genres such as punk and hardcore that supposedly “degenerate[s] into mere propaganda” (Freire, 1970, p. 114). However, this Freirean reading of power electronics also leads to critiques of how the genre operates as well. Artists working in isolation (outside the context of the learning community) will only embed their personal perspectives into the work and, as Dietrich (2016) notes, this perspective has historically been a White and male one. Similarly, the bars and DIY spaces that house power electronics often reproduce the atmosphere of a rock concert (Wilson, 2016) or create an isolating effect through the sheer volume of the performance (Novak, 2013), both of which greatly limit opportunities for dialogue and recodification. The beliefs and knowledges held by the (mainly White male) artists and audience subsequently remain unchallenged (see Woods, 2018).

This critique of power electronics as a Freirean practice also raises questions about codifications more broadly. According to Lewis (2014), the original process of codifying the world into these images (a task completed by educators) undermines the liberatory potential of

this practice because it presents the knowledge of the educator as the foundation from which all other understandings of the world emerge. Instead of learning communities developing new knowledges of the social world together, learning starts with the assumption that students know less than educators and the process of de/recodification merely allows students to catch up to the teacher (Lewis, 2014). I read this critique at the level of practice: if students can challenge the original codification and recodify the work as a community, this assumption of inequality seems trivial. Within noise, the polysemic and, to use Deleuze & Guattari's (1987) terminology, rhizomatic formation of thematics and artistic gestures also points to artists framing noise music as a space to explore rather than a bridge to a specific destination (see Woods, P., 2019a). Still, Lewis (2014) uses this criticism to reimagine the role that art should serve in educational processes: "art has a specific function in the educational community: the sensorial destabilization of any correspondence theory between intention and representation that opens up the space for curiosity" (p. 153). Instead of unearthing ideas or worldviews within a codification, Lewis (2014) contends that aesthetic experiences actively create discursive landscapes through which communities can reimagine the social world by providing space for dissensus, subjectivization, and the development of new knowledges, a process that remains inherent to the object as it constantly challenges the borders of self and society (see Kristeva, 1982; Arya, 2014). This reconfiguration of the art object within education demands a new theory of aesthetics and education, one presented by Rancière.

### **Noise Versus the Regime of the Sensible**

Like Freire, Rancière finds an inherent connection between education, politics, and aesthetics in reframing the process of emancipation. Regarding aesthetics, Rancière (2009) argues that "aesthetics, as a regime for identifying art, carries a politics, or metapolitics, within

it” (p. 15). The aesthetic regime allows for certain objects to exist as art while others cannot be seen under this categorization. This understanding of politics rests on what the author defines as “the distribution of the sensible,” or “the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it” (Rancière, 2013, p. 12). Through the distribution of the sensible, politics exists as a means of controlling the aesthetic world. Politics, for Rancière (2009), inscribe and create a set of social norms (often enforced through institutions) that define what can and cannot be seen, what can and cannot be said about those visible objects/bodies/actions, and who holds the ability to speak at all. Applying this theory to sound, Stoeber (2016) would describe this as the sonic color line, or a constellation of racialized practices that act in ways to police bodies and the sounds they create. The sonic color line subsequently codes certain sounds as White or othered, speakable or not, audible or inaudible, accepted or abjected. Aesthetic regimes created through the development and normalization of dominant artistic traditions, such as the western music canon (see Attali, 1985; Small & Walser, 1996), reinforce these politics by deeming some cultural artifacts as meaningful and others as noise.

To challenge the oppressive artistic traditions that form the current regime of the sensible, Rancière reimagines the aesthetic experience of viewing art or hearing music by engaging with relational aesthetics. Developed first by Bourriaud (1998), relational aesthetics defines the aesthetic experience as a sociocultural event in which the artistic object itself reconfigures the social relationships between artists, audiences, and everyone else included in this experience. In other words, aesthetic experiences act as a redistribution of the sensible within the micro-community of individuals experiencing that artistic work. This process exists “to create and re-

recreate bonds between individuals, to give rise to new modes of confrontation and participation” (Rancière, 2013, p. 21). Contrasting with Freirean notions of emancipation that emphasize freedom, Rancière centers equality (especially in an individual’s claim to visibility and speech) in his aesthetic theory (Lewis, 2014). Creating works of art under a Rancierian understanding of equality, therefore, doubles as a political act and holds the potential for emancipation when the artist utilizes noise-as-gesture:

Politics consist in reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible which defines the common of a community, to introduce into it new subjects and objects, to render visible what had not been, and to make heard as speakers those who had been perceived as mere noisy animals. (Rancière, 2009, p. 25).

Since politics exists as a distribution of the sensible, one which categorizes specific bodies as visible and forms of speech as audible (or not), the creation of noise within an artistic work through the redeployment of abjected bodies, individuals, and sounds acts as a means for reforming social relationships (and challenging old ones) to include the abjected. Noise-as-gesture recognizes those bodies (both human and otherwise) relegated to the outskirts of the social and musical milieu, allowing these bodies to speak within current regimes and reengage the abject as affective relationship. Especially when considering the socio-cultural definition of the abject proposed by Bataille-via-Tyler (2009), a liberatory potential emerges.

Applying this aesthetic lens to education, Rancière flips the liberatory process developed by Freire: instead of equality existing as an end to which people and communities should strive, a tactic that “reproduces an approach that confirms present inequality in the name of an equality to come” (Rancière, 2010, p. 11), the assumption of equality needs to exist as a point of departure that allows students to build knowledge through their own exploration. According to

Bingham & Biesta (2010), this theory redefines the role of the teacher in a similar way to Freire. Under this emancipatory process, both teacher and student begin as equals and students learn because of their own explorations of and actions in the world. Learning does not occur because someone else intervenes and guides the student towards some understanding. The teacher therefore encourages an already existent intelligence to reveal itself to the student from within by interrogating what the student knows and verifying that knowledge is constructed in a purposeful and attentive manner (Bingham & Biesta, 2010). Rancière (2010) therefore proposes that students can learn just as much on their own (and often do), but educators help guide that learning along the way. This approach reinforces the contention that emancipation is not an end goal but a generative assumption that allows individuals to learn: “Emancipation is not about learning. Emancipation is about using one’s intelligence under the assumption of the equality of intelligence” (Bingham & Biesta, 2010, p. 43). This notion of emancipation connects to the process of challenging aesthetic regimes, pushing educators to initiate their practice within an equitable distribution of the sensible that allows all students to speak and be heard.

### **The Aesthetic Pedagogy of Noise**

This aesthetic theory, much like Freire’s, also reconfigures noise-as-gesture (and the abject more broadly) as an educational technology. Following the logic of Small (1996), the aesthetic regime developed through the reification of the western canon and the normalization of western musical traditions operates under the assumption of inequality. Western music constructs knowledge within a web of power relations, with composers imbuing their knowledge into a given composition and audiences passively receiving this knowledge through the conduits of the composer and the performers. Small (1998) challenges this power structure by redefining music as a performative act that artists and audiences both actively participate in, what the author calls

musicking. This concept undermines the theory that music exists as a static artifact infused with the knowledge of the conductor. Connecting Small and Rancière, a truly emancipatory form of musicking demands the use of noise to engage audiences in the construction of meaning. If musicians rely on preexisting borders formed through definitions of music and musical vocabularies to create meaning, then these performances start from a position of inequality with some knowing more about how and what those traditions communicate. Noise-as-gesture, on the other hand, starts from a position of equality because it redeploys sonic “base material” (Bataille, 1985) pulled from the techno-musical milieu that challenges social hierarchies and regimes of meaningful sound, asking audiences and artists to develop both the language and meaning of this noise together (see Attali, 1985). Only under these conditions can the relational aesthetics valued by Rancière exist outside of socially defined power relations as new knowledges emerge.

If this view of noise and relational aesthetics seems overly romantic, that is because it is. Completely severing artistic practices from the influence of larger social forces cannot happen because music can only exist in and come from an intersection of micro- and macro-social relationships (Born, 2017). This means that “music engenders certain kinds of socialities, yet it also refracts or transforms existing social formations” (Born, 2017, p. 33) by reinscribing dominant social relationships and narratives, a process that mirrors Foster’s (1990) critique of abject art. Still, the critiques developed by Born (2017), like those Lewis (2014) directed at Freire, remain at the level of implementation: while no performance can ever exist without the influence of some dominant set of power relations (which, in turn, distributes the sensible in oppressive ways), noise-as-gesture provides a more equitable foundation from which performers and listeners can learn. This happens specifically because of noise-as-gesture’s relationship with the abject, one that reclaims and redeploys abjected sonics (and, thusly, identities) within the

regime of the sensible which, in turn, challenges the boundaries of that regime. Noise also provides a means of enacting Freirean liberation through Rancière: if artists utilize noise as the material through which they work, it allows for the assumption of equality to exist as both artists and audience use this material to recodify the world in the act of musicking. Noise gains meaning through the development of this new language (and, more importantly, new affective relationships) in the performative act. By accepting the challenge noise-as-gesture posits to the social and musical world, noise allows for the creation of new knowledges through the creative acts of both performing and listening and an opportunity to reconsider borders formed through abjection.

### **Conclusion**

Returning to the writings of Jaber & Hamer (2016a, 2016b), I want to draw a parallel between the role of affect within science and noise. In both cases, affect exists as an inherent part of the discipline. While “moments of insight and clarity, and longer-term periods of perseverance and passion, are linked together under a larger goal guiding the trajectory of the scientist” (Jaber & Hamer, 2016b, p. 160), abjection as a form of affect within noise music remains crucial to the evolution of the genre and the interaction between artist and performer. By arguing for an aesthetic pedagogy within noise, this chapter forwards the use of the abject as an educational tool, one located within noise-as-gesture and employed frequently (and, at times, problematically) within noise-as-genre. The question then returns to the critiques raised by both Arya (2016) and Foster (1990): can the abject, through noise or otherwise, be used to do anything other than provoke trauma and reinforce existing boundaries? By thinking intentionally about the ways that the abject can reconfigure the oppressive boundaries created through socialized regimes of truth, ones challenged by Freirean pedagogy and relational aesthetics, I

contend that artists and music educators alike can harness the abject towards a liberatory end. However, doing so invokes an immense responsibility for artists, audiences, teachers, and students. The ambiguous use of abjected imagery described by Stevenson (2016) would imply that noise music often ignores this responsibility and instead plays into the reinscription of oppressive abjection described by Tyler (2009). Still, this chapter lays out a framework for ways of engaging the abject in a much more intentional and, hopefully, liberatory way, one that allows for the recodifying of the world towards a better end.

## Addendum 1: Abject Sonics in the Work of Con-Dom and Moor Mother

### Introduction

Building on the definition of noise-as-gesture as the reclamation and redeployment of abjected sound, this addendum shifts from the use of noise within learning processes back to the cultural space of noise music itself. Understanding the relationship between noise-as-genre and abjection (beyond the connection formed through noise-as-gesture) plays a crucial role in understanding the ethics of the genre. Since dominant social forces have mapped noise onto black (Stoever, 2016), feminine (Thompson, 2016), and queer (Daniel, 2011) bodies, the appropriation of abjected sonic elements within this historically white and male scene (see Dietrich, 2016) could potentially result in further enactments of cultural imperialism and dominance (see Roger, 2006). In doing so, noise artists would double down on the harmful process of abjection initially enacted through abjecting identities-via-sonic mechanisms in the first place. Moreover, the appropriation of noise within white cultural spaces could further reinscribe whiteness as the status quo through the process of defining the other. As Hartman and Wilderson (2003) assert, the border work inherent to constructing whiteness involves defining certain bodies and cultural objects as othered because “whites gain their coherence by knowing what they are not” (p. 187). In other words, whiteness forms through abjection. Therefore, it becomes imperative to understand whether noise music furthers or challenges this harmful process.

To this end, the ethics of noise music seem to lie along the challenge posed by Foster (1996) when he distinguishes between “the operation *to abject* and the condition *to be abject*” (p. 114). If noise music enacts the operation of abjecting the other then the genre contributes to the larger project of oppression through cultural production. On the other hand, if noise music

engages the condition to be abject by creating space for abjected bodies and sounds within the regime of the sensible (Rancière, 2004) to be heard, then the genre can subvert and challenge dominant social formations. Because of the diversity of approaches within noise music and shifting demographics within the noise scene, defining all of noise as engaging in one or the other proves impossible. Instead, I contend that different artifacts (albums, performances, technologies, etc.) relate to abjection differently, with some furthering the process (“to abject”) while others subvert these formations (“to be abject”). To exemplify this distinction, I will examine two different albums that represent highly contrasting relationships with abjection: Con-Dom’s *How Welcome Is Death to I Who Have Nothing More to Do but Die* (Dando, 2016) and Moor Mother’s *Fetish Bones* (Ayewa, 2016). While the former utilizes visual, sonic, and textual elements to define the artist outside of the abjected subject, the latter speaks to and about the abject as a historically situated phenomenon through the language of noise music. In doing so, *Fetish Bones* challenges the listener to redefine the borders surrounding the regime of the sensible.

### **To Abject: Con-Dom and the Abjecting Practices of Power Electronics**

Considered one of the pioneers of the power electronics subgenre, Mike Dando has performed under the moniker Con-Dom since 1983 and has almost exclusively explored themes of power and oppression through this work (Taylor, P., 2016). As Dando himself notes, “Con-Dom generates brutality, pain, fear, hate (the instrument of control) so that the existence of the forces of control may be acutely felt, experienced, and recognised... It addresses the institutions and mechanisms which perpetrate their dual grip” (Dando, 2014). Dando engages these themes through all aspects of his work, utilizing sound, visuals, and performance to create musical environments in which the relationship between the artist and the audience simulates larger

power relations. Even the project name, a contraction of the words control and domination, points to these issues. Dando explains his process of enacting these themes in a brief documentary about his performance at the 1995 Art Demolition Festival, describing how he used music, video projections, and his own body (in the form of public nudity and violent confrontations with the audience) as a means to push audience members towards a state of submission or the preferred (according to Dando) state of violent retaliation (Mingchuan, 1995). In doing so, Dando positions himself as the embodiment of an oppressive (and affective) social body and challenges the audience (as the affected body) to respond.

In examining these foundational thematics, a connection between the abject and Dando's work reveals itself (while early albums that specifically focus on racial violence further clarify this connection). Relying on a common approach to fascist and racist imagery within power electronics, one described by Stevenson (2016) in his analysis of the group Genocide Organ, Dando utilizes an ambiguous deployment of these images that challenges audiences to confront extant troubling realities. Albums such as *Calling All Aryans* (Dando, 1984) and *Even More Racial Hatred* (Dando, 1986) exemplify this thematic practice by pairing lyrics about racial violence with dissonant electronic sound in order to generate an affective response à la the abject within the listener. However, as I have noted elsewhere, this approach to transgressive and problematic themes often does more to reinscribe damaging ideologies than actually challenge them due to a lack of infrastructure to act on or analyze the violent reality embodied within this work (Woods, 2018). Relying on Foster's (1996) critique of abject art, I contend that Dando engages the operation to abject, reinforcing the abjected state of marginalized groups by reintroducing harmful discourses (and their subsequent sonic, visual, and spoken vocabularies) into the performance space. Dando's work utilizes the abject "in order to provoke its operation-

to catch abjection in the act, to make it reflexive, even repellent in its own right. The danger, of course, is that this mimesis may confirm a given abjection” (Foster, 1996, p. 116). For these albums to have their intended effect (or affect, as it were), the repulsive act that engenders the abject needs to exist in the first place. By replicating that process, Dando’s work both reinforces and relies on the abjected status of racialized bodies. Further analysis of Con-Dom’s thematics by those in the audience (most likely in dialog with the artist) might produce some valuable critiques of racialized violence. However, without a means to engage this work beyond the temporal space of the performance, Dando merely reinforces the fact that racialized violence exists while redeploying dangerous symbology within the cultural space of power electronics.

### **The Corpse in Con-Dom’s *How Welcome Is Death...***

Moving beyond these early examples, the latest album from Con-Dom, *How Welcome Is Death to I Who Have Nothing More to Do but Die* (Dando, 2016), represents a far more balanced and nuanced approach to abjection. Through both the recorded material and the artwork on the record, Dando recounts the drawn-out death of his mother as she slowly succumbed to Progressive Supranuclear Palsy (PSP), an illness similar to Parkinson’s disease and dementia that results in the deterioration of brain cells that control both bodily movement and reasoning. A cure for PSP does not exist, with treatment only managing the symptoms that result from the slow corrosion of the patient’s brain. As Dando’s mother succumbed to this disease, slowly losing her grip on reality before finally passing away, Dando chronicled this process through photographs and audio recordings and then used this collection of artifacts as the foundation of the album. For the album’s packaging, Dando created a full color booklet filled with pictures of his mother’s face, each one looking less healthy than the last until the final picture depicts her on her death bed after having passed away. Dando also chronicles this decline through the album’s

audio by filling the tracks with recordings of his mother describing her illness and present condition, screaming in agony, and making various vocal noises that sound as if she cannot swallow or breath. Underneath these audio recordings lies Con-Dom's usual wall of distortion, feedback, and synthesizers, paired at times with Dando's own voice in the form of spoken texts and shouted vocals that he manipulated with audio effects. Through these collected elements, the album recreates the same types of affect present in Dando's previous albums. However, the sense of abjection, terror, and oppression comes not from broad forms of institutionalized violence but instead from within the corporeal body. Themes of control and domination remain, but who holds that control shifts to his mother's disease.

By focusing on death, and specifically the relationship Dando has to death in this particularly trying and devastating moment, *How Welcome is Death...* clearly trades in a visceral and tangible form of abjection. Both the audio and visual aspects of the album clearly and unmistakably chronicle Dando's mother as she crosses the border from life to death but remains focused on that in-between moment when the border starts to dissolve. The album (and Dando's mother's condition) then challenges the fixed border of mortality that sits as the hallmark of Kristeva's (1982) formulation of abjection: "it is not this lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order" (p. 4). Dando utilizes photographs of his mother's corpse, that organic object that Kristeva (1982) defines as the ultimate source of abjection, as a means for chronicling the disruption of identity. While Dando's mother may be alive in these recordings, the pained vocal sounds and descriptions of feeling trapped in a decaying body make the status of being alive seem like nothing more than a technicality. Her heart may still be beating and she may still be breathing, but Dando's mother exists as a living corpse on this album. The etching on the B-side of the second LP, one that reads "control and

domination are etched on the face of humanity just as surely as the creases in an old woman's skin," push this album past the point of self-reflection towards the world view of the listener. In doing so, Dando challenges the listener to face the abject and the challenge it presents to any number of borders of identity, both individual and social.

By tangibly rooting the abjection associated with death within the affective relationship between Dando and the corpse of his mother, *How Welcome is Death...* also manages to challenge the dissociated approach to death prevalent within both power electronics and harsh noise more generally. As Potts (2015) contends in his analysis of early Japanese harsh noise, death as a theme within noise remains at the level of fantasy. "This notion of fantasy is key for the reason that one's own death cannot be had as an actuality; the actuality of death would mark the end of the ontological specificity of the subject" (Potts, 2015, p. 380). Similarly, the work of power electronics pioneer Maurizio Bianchi takes a similar approach in the (completely instrumental) album *Symphony for a Genocide*, naming all of the tracks after Nazi concentration camps without ever acknowledging a single individual (or their corpse) in the album (Cooke, 2016). The common fascination with serial killers and images of violence and death within power electronics (see Taylor, P., 2016; Wallis, 2016) continues this distancing process, only addressing those forms of death unconnected to one's own life. Dando seems to intentionally act against this trend in *How Welcome is Death...*, focusing on one decidedly intimate moment of death while resolutely grounding this work in the (at times living) corpse of his mother. This refusal to engage death as a dissociated phenomenon and, instead, relating to a physical corpse proves crucial in engaging the abject within this work. As Tyler (2009) notes, Kristeva's abject only exists in the phenomenological response to organic matter. Without the corpse of his

mother, Dando's abjection could only exist in the abstract which would subsequently strip this album of its affective power.

However, I contend that the album still replicates Foster's (1996) formulation of abjection as an operation, one that (in this case) abjects Dando's mother while simultaneously absolving Dando, to use Kristeva's (1982) term, of that abjection. This abjecting practice occurs primarily through the inclusion of Dando's vocals. At times, Dando repeats the words of his mother, as on "Living Death" where he recites his mother's words over the original recordings of his mother. This approach also includes the recitation of a suicide note on "Chocolates," one written by someone suffering from PSP that may or may not be his mother (the album does not attribute the text to anyone). Abandoning the perspective of his mother entirely, Dando focuses on his own viewpoint in the track "Just Fuckin' Die," screaming through his own sense of loss, frustration, and abjection over a throbbing noise sample. In doing so, Dando separates himself from his mother and reminds the listener that authorship of this album rests entirely on his shoulders. Although Dando includes recordings and photographs of his mother throughout the album, these artifacts still passed through Dando's hands. The thematics on the album therefore only tangentially relate to the experience of Dando's mother. Rather, the album represents Dando's own experience of his mother's death, one in which Dando processes and responds to the harrowing inevitability and painful reality of watching his mother slowly slip away. To deal with this tragedy, the album in part proposes two distinct borders: between Dando and his mother and also between the living memory of his mother and the living corpse present in the recordings. By abjecting his mother, Dando completes the thematics on the album, recreating this affective state for audiences to explore. While this approach may not hold the same problematics

as his earlier work, it still relies on the operation to abject and reinscribes the abjected state of the diseased and suffering.

### **To Be Abject: Moor Mother and the Noise of the Black Body**

If engaging the abject through noise-via-power electronics often results in further abjection (as is the case with Con-Dom), this analysis raises the question of whether or not noise can speak to the state of abjection without this problematic reinscription at all. In other words, how can artists shift from performing the operation of abjection to exploring the condition of being abject? How can noise allow the abject to speak? Returning again to Foster (1996), achieving this goal necessitates that artists no longer lay claim to the position of being separate from the symbolic order but instead acknowledge their relationship with that order so they can fracture and reformulate that regime. The goal is therefore “not to break with the symbolic order absolutely... but to expose it in crisis, to register its points not only of breakdown but of breakthrough, the new possibilities that such a crisis opens up” (Foster, 1996, p. 115).

Returning to the notion of noise, James (2016) contends that music (specifically, music that hopes to achieve an anti-racist aim) needs to utilize an “epistemological noise” that disorients the listener (and artist) by challenging worldviews reliant on privilege and power. This cannot occur through processes that further the operation of abjection because, as Tyler (2009) contends, abjection must be understood as a dehumanizing and oppressive socio-political process and not just as an affective state engaged by individuals. Instead, the abject (in the form of abjected bodies and individuals) can speak through noise, utilizing abjected sonics to speak truths unsayable through the codified language of the western canon. If the mechanisms of institutionalized racism “codif[y] sound linked to racialized bodies- such as music and the ambient sounds of everyday living- as ‘noise,’ sound’s loud and unruly ‘Other,’” (Stoever, 2016,

p. 12), then acknowledging and listening to the noise of the abject within the context of music allows the other to exist and be seen within the regime of the sensible.

*Fetish Bones*, an album recorded by Camae Ayewa (2016) under the stage name Moor Mother, provides one example of using noise to challenge abjection. While the album as a whole purposefully transcends genre boundaries, the constant use of dissonant and arrhythmic synthesizers, field recordings, and shouted vocals aesthetically align *Fetish Bones* with noise music. Moor Mother further heightens the noisiness of the album by employing a discordant use of samples from and allusions to a wide range of Black American musical forms including jazz, R&B, and hip hop along with traditional African drumming. Sonically, this gesture combines all of these sound sources into an overdriven blur over which Ayewa shouts, reads, sings, and raps throughout. In doing so, Ayewa creates noise through the accumulation of tradition within the history Black American music's sonic milieu, or what Lewis (2017) describes as an "aesthetic thickening." The track "Parallel Nightmares" exemplifies this approach, pairing what sounds like a heavy drum solo and overdriven piano recordings with spoken word and a play on the gospel song "Soon and Very Soon" in which Ayewa (2016) claims that "we are going to kill the king." Rather than augment these musical forms to make them meaningful for a white audience by adopting aspects of white music and assimilating to dominant musical forms, a process that resembles the common activist practice of aligning certain groups with whiteness for political gain at the detriment of others (see Bassichis & Spade, 2014), Ayewa allows this noise to exist as a powerful statement in itself. Moor Mother therefore creates space for the abject to speak, not through the dominant language but through its own intrinsic vocabulary.

The historical approach embedded within the sonics of the album also plays out within the lyrics, connecting past injustices to contemporary issues of race in a way that challenges

white audiences to acknowledge their role in the process of abjection. On “Creation Myth,” Ayewa draws a line from 1866 (the year congress passed the first Civil Rights Act) to now, chronicling the unending violence enacted on black bodies by listing the names of victims of racial violence alongside instances of lynching and mass murder. The track ends with the lyrics

See that's how I got over/How I got over here/The same place I was in in 1866/A  
bleeding black body blowing in the wind/Tripping an ironic thickness of things never  
changing/Time is a balancing act that encompasses all things/Suspended in illusions,  
(Ayewa, 2016)

reaffirming that the abjected status of blackness has remained constant throughout the history of the United States despite the legal status change that occurred with the Civil Rights Act.

However, as mentioned in the previous section, acknowledging this state of abjection without challenging those forces to reimagine the borders of social formations is not enough. On “Deadbeat Protest,” Ayewa accomplishes this goal by challenging activists unwilling to take the often self-reflective and self-critical steps necessary for racial equality to emerge. Lyrics such as “Trying to save my black life/By fetishizing my dead life” and “You can see my dead body at the protest” (Ayewa, 2016), a line that gets repeated multiple time in succession, challenges the practice of only acknowledging black lives after death without supporting those still living. *Fetish Bones* challenges the mechanisms that view the black individual as a living corpse, calling for the kind of social change that pushes blackness beyond perpetual death and dying. In Ayewa’s (2016) words, she is challenging a “death that has always been lingering here/With you since the day you were born.”

Rather than assume the position that blackness needs salvation from abjection, however, the album takes an Afrofuturist stance that advocates for a resilience through abjection, noise,

and blackness towards a better future. The unrelenting noise of the album, one that only rarely makes space for silence, finally lets up on the nearly (but not quite) melodic closer “Time Float.” Over the simple synthesizer line that provides the back bone of the song, Ayewa (2016) manipulates her own voice as she sings “Use my dead body as a raft/To survive the flooding that’s coming/Do you have my back?/ Use my dead body as a raft/Because time’s still floating/And they’re always turning back.” Here, the abjection present throughout the album transforms into a tool for survival, one in which the corpse (both a form of abjection and representative of the abjected black body) becomes the tool through which abjected individuals, communities, and cultures not only survive but hopefully break from the overpowering current of history. Salvation from the flood does not come from outside of the current but instead comes from a body constructed through abjection and a person that continues to assert herself despite her abjected status.

It is within this future oriented stance that Moor Mother moves past the critiques of Foster (1996) by exposing the crisis of the current condition and “register[ing] its points not only of breakdown but of breakthrough, the new possibilities that such a crisis opens up” (p. 115). Through noise, one reliant on the abjected sonics of Black American history, Ayewa asserts her humanity and challenges the privileged status of those who reinforce her own abjection. Rather than further the operation of abjection, *Fetish Bones* maps a history of becoming fully human from the condition of abjection, even if that history only exists as a proposed future for the time being.

## Chapter 3: Learning How to Make Noise: Towards a Process Model of Artistic Practice Within Informal Music Communities

### **Introduction**

At first glance, the question of how one learns to make noise may seem absurd: within most definitions of the term, noise is not purposefully created but produced either organically or unintentionally. For example, children often enter the world making noise in the form of cries or screams, positioning this category of sound as an inherent part of human nature. Hegarty (2007) alternately defines noise as the result of industrialization, a sonic byproduct of the factories and machines that populate the modern landscape. Narrowing the focus of this inquiry to social formations of noise within the context of music, the question only gains slightly more traction. Relying here on Von Helmholtz's (1875) foundational definition of noise as non-musical sound, it would follow that noise represents a category of sonic production that happens naturally (or, at least, haphazardly) and learning how to play music would therefore involve the development of technique that avoids these noises. In all of these definitions, the process of learning in relation to noise does not involve learning how to make noise but, instead, involves learning how to suppress this sonic material.

However, the assumption that noise merely represents an inherent byproduct of other biological or social practices relies on what Thompson (2017) defines as a conservative politics of silence. In doing so, theorists and scholars construct noise through a series of binary logics (noise is inherently bad/unnatural and silence is ideal/natural, noise is meaningless and musical sound is meaningful, etc.), a process that reinscribes the abjection for marginalized bodies deemed noisy (see Stoeber, 2016) and ignores the cultural mechanisms enacted by encounters with noise as a social technology (see Serres, 2007). Moreover, a wide range of musical

traditions outside of the western canon (and even some within) embrace noise as an intentional part of music to be celebrated. Experimental music, here defined as an amorphous collection of musical traditions (e.g. noise music, free jazz, musique concrete) that intentionally break from or never engage common tenets of the western musical canon (e.g. rhythm, melody, repetitive structure) (see Gilmore, 2014),<sup>1</sup> represents one such tradition. The embrace of noise as a valuable aspect of the musical milieu by musicians and composers within experimental music traditions challenges the conservative politics of silence by incorporating, redeploying, and purposefully allowing space for noise within musical artifacts such as performances, recordings, and compositions (see Gottschalk, 2016; Hainge, 2013; Nyman, 1974). Applying this broadened understanding of noise as a musical technology to music education and learning science research, the question of how musicians learn to make noise suddenly holds more weight.

In order to narrow the scope of this broad inquiry, a potential first step for researchers would involve locating and exploring sites of research that embrace this expanded understanding of noise. To this end, I contend that noise music, a subgenre of experimental music that has in part formed through the appropriation of noise within musical performances and compositions, provides one such site. Emerging from underground music scenes located in Japan and England during the late 70s and early 80s (see Novak, 2013; Taylor, P., 2016), this caustic offshoot of experimental music combines influences from industrial, punk, avant-garde jazz, and modernist electronic music to create an aesthetically diverse genre that often relies on dissonant, arrhythmic, and overwhelmingly loud forms of electronic noise as the foundational sonic element of music (Bailey, 2009). Although Thompson (2017) and Atton (2011) would challenge

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<sup>1</sup> While numerous definitions of experimental music have emerged throughout the literature surrounding this musical tradition, I rely on Gilmore's (2014) ideological definition of the term as a way to both acknowledge and challenge the ongoing problematics of genre work within experimental music, a process that codifies racialized and gendered understandings of the genre (see Lewis, 2004; Gilmore, 2014).

this definition of the genre, instead focusing on the theoretical and discursive practices of musicians to enact this form of genre work, both would agree with the seeming truism that intentionally making noise sits at the foundation of noise music.

Operating under the assumption that making noise music (or making noise in the context of music) is not merely a free-for-all of sound production where “anything goes,” a contention that multiple experimental music scholars have argued against (see Attali, 1985; Fischlin, Heble, & Lipsitz, 2013; Lindau, 2014), I utilize this chapter to address the following research question: how do noise musicians develop their artistic practice within informal music communities? I specifically position this study within the context of informal music communities (and, subsequently, informal music education contexts) for two reasons: first, noise music has historically developed through alternative music channels outside of dedicated and formal education spaces (see Bailey, 2009; Novak 2013) and, second, the vast majority of extant literature on experimental music education has investigated formal education processes exclusively. This proves problematic because “the classroom itself changes and complicates musical meanings” (Green, 2006, p. 101), with the shift from informal to formal environment undermining the musical and sociocultural tenets of the genre (Lange, 2011). Studying experimental music outside of formal education settings therefore contributes to a holistic understanding of experimental music pedagogies.

In response to my research question, I present findings from case study research into two intertwined music series that focus on noise music: The Experimental Education Series and The Noise Knowledge Consortium. Through the analysis of interviews with seventeen veteran artists, I construct a process model of artistic practice within noise, one that considers and reveals the informal pedagogies of the noise scene. I then use this model to track the development of one

novice performer as they travel from first hearing the genre to performing their first show. In turn, I position noise music as a highly valuable site for educational research, one that provides a window into the informal learning practices of creative communities more broadly.

### **Theoretical Context**

#### **Experimental Music in Formal Education Settings**

Although few studies focusing on the informal teaching and learning practices of noise musicians exist (see Niknafs, 2018; Woods, P., 2019b), a growing body of literature has begun to explore the educative potential of experimental music within the context of formal education spaces. From a cognitive perspective, experimental music and its subgenres (including noise) provide a crucial site for research because, as Bamberger (1991) notes, the socialized forms of musical knowledge at the heart of the western canon sit at odds with the natural ways most people understand music. Teaching more traditional musical forms therefore entails a process of explicitly teaching socially constructed musical norms instead of creating space for individuals to construct their own musical knowledges. These norms, in turn, discipline what people can and cannot hear in and through music (Bamberger, 2013).

To this end, recent scholarship on experimental music education has investigated the kinds of knowledge students construct when engaging experimental music. For Tinkle (2015), the use of graphic notation (or individualized and invented forms of visually scoring music outside of the “dots and lines” of standard music notation) allow music education to reach young students and novices. Since graphic notation removes the obstacle associated with learning how to read and compose in standard notation, experimental music expands notions of agency beyond those individuals with extensive music experience to allow all students to begin composing immediately. Although students can still enact their own agency within western music education

curricula, teachers often have to work against the tenets of this tradition while the cultural space of experimental music naturally engages these agentic forms of learning (see Mantie, 2007; Tinkle, 2015). Shifting the focus from composition to performance, a number of recent studies have explored the use of free-improvisation, or the spontaneous coconstruction of music that sits at the heart of experimental music subgenres such as free jazz and noise (Fischlin, Heble, & Lipsitz, 2013), within formal music education settings. Researchers have subsequently found the inclusion of free improvisation to improve confidence (Hickey et al., 2016), reduce anxiety (Allen, 2010) and help develop both technical performance abilities and positive dispositions towards fellow performers and music more broadly (Hickey, 2015).

Beyond the benefits found for the individual, experimental music pedagogies have also been shown to positively reimagine the cultural space of the classroom. For example, Sordahl (2013) asserts that experimental music engages an environmental approach to education that enacts Deweyian ideals within learning environments. Researchers have also found that experimental music education programs often enact and encourage democratic pedagogies that challenge assumptions of the teacher as the only expert in the room and create space for student voices to be heard (Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010; Kanellopoulos, 2012). From a theoretical perspective, scholars have asserted that experimental music holds a liberatory potential because these musical forms amplify ways of knowing outside of dominant ideologies (i.e. whiteness, masculinity) (Oliveros 2004; Lewis 2017) and produce an enacted form of human rights through the construction of new knowledges (Fischlin, Heble, & Lipsitz, 2013). Moreover, Attali (1985) connects the creation of noise in particular to the cultural practice of knowledge production. To use his terminology, noise enacts a process of “inventing new codes, inventing the message at the same time as language” (Attali, 1985, p. 134). To this end, music education researchers have

embraced the act of making experimental music (again, focusing on free improvisation practices in particular) as a liberatory educational praxis and advocated for its inclusion in schools (see Hickey, 2009; Niknafs, 2013; Hickey et al., 2016). In short, learning through the process of making experimental music holds value for individual students and broader learning communities.

### **Informal Approaches to Experimental Music Education**

However, critical scholars have challenged the overt focus on formal education spaces within experimental music education literature. In Lange's (2011) study of an after-school music program, the author found that a reliance on formal education structures (such as the assertion of authority by an adult teacher over younger students) undermined the democratic values of free improvisation mentioned above. This practice thusly inhibits the musical and sociocultural development of students promised within the theoretically oriented literature on experimental music. Moreover, Mantie's (2007) study of Canadian jazz programs showed that the translation of musical genres into formal curricula, a process that Popkewitz (2010) defines as alchemy, results in the complete transformation of these musical traditions altogether. Specifically, formal music curricula stripped jazz of its foundational practice of improvisation and reimagined the genre as something entirely different. Broadening past the boundaries of dedicated education programs, any research that tries to explore how students learn through engaging musical traditions that exist primarily (or, in the case of noise, entirely) within informal spaces will inevitably fall short because people inherently learn through different mechanisms within informal learning contexts (Green, 2002). For example, Green (2006) contends that the informal learning process associated with popular music relies on "an integration of listening, performing, improvising and composing, with an emphasis on creativity. Within the formal realm, there is

more of a separation of skills and an emphasis on reproduction” (p. 106). For experimental musical forms like noise that intrinsically rely on the construction of new knowledges as an aspect of composing or performing music (Gottschalk, 2016), engaging informal practices of learning that focus on creative production becomes crucial.

Although very few empirical studies of the informal teaching and learning practices of experimental music communities exist, a small number of publications provide some insight into this musical space. In my previous research (Woods, P., 2019b), I found that noise musicians reframed the notion of teaching in two key ways. First, musicians redefined the role of the teacher by distributing the act of teaching across multiple actors within the surrounding music scene that included musicians, audience members, instruments, and extant cultural artifacts such as recordings or performances. In doing so, noise musicians challenge humanist definitions of the teacher and conceptualize what Bogost (2012) might define as an object oriented ontology in which all actors (both human and non-human) hold the potential to teach and do so through posthuman collaborative processes (see Woods, in press). Second, noise musicians in this study also positioned the process of shaping their immediate music community as an aspect of teaching. In doing so, participants engage a situated definition of learning, ala Lave & Wenger (1991), that reimagines teaching as a process of investing in and developing a surrounding community. Teaching, in this sense, becomes synonymous with shaping the community in which one learns. Niknafs (2018) builds on this theorization of scene construction as pedagogical model in her study of “Anarcho-Impro” communities in Iran. According to her, the process of contributing to and constructing a music scene not only contributes to the formation of a community of musicians but acts as a form of collective identity development with radical and anarchist ideologies emerging through the countercultural act of making non-normative (and, in

this case, illegal) music (Niknafs, 2018). Although these texts barely scratch the surface of learning within noise music scenes, they position noise music as a unique and potentially rich site of research.

### **Informal Music Education (And What it Says About Learning to Make Noise)**

As a means towards bridging this gap in the literature, extant research on informal music education and informal learning processes more broadly provide some insight into how individuals could potentially learn within experimental music communities. Providing one set of insights into the praxes of informal music education, Green's (2002) foundational analysis of the pedagogical practices of popular musicians offers a valuable set of mechanisms through which rock musicians (and artists from its various subgenres) develop their musical knowledges and skills outside of intentionally defined learning environments. In her wide-ranging, interview-based study, Green (2002) finds that popular musicians often develop their technique by intensively listening to music with which they identify and copying what they heard on these records in isolation. This process of knowledge building then extends into communal spaces as musicians watch more experienced performers, participate in explicit moments of teaching between peers, and engage group learning practices in which musicians learn together in the absence of a distinct teacher. Although Green (2002) describes a number of easily recognizable and explicit pedagogical moments, the process of group learning, which "occurs both in the form of casual encounters and during group interaction in band rehearsals, is unlikely to be recognized as a learning activity at all" (p. 83). For the most part, this process of group learning occurs through "endless talk about scales and harmony, techniques, rhythms, metres, styles, approaches to performance, music history, instruments and equipment" (Green, 2002, p. 83) as both budding musicians and veterans share their knowledge.

Within a more general population, Bamberger (1991) asserts that all people (and not just musicians) learn about music and its associated knowledges through everyday encounters with recorded and live music, a process that mirrors the unintentionality behind Green's (2002) definition of group learning. According to Bamberger (1991), individuals learn about aspects of music theory such as rhythm, melody, and structure by merely hearing and listening to the music that constantly surrounds the everyday encounters of individuals. In doing so, she asserts that the social technologies of music (such as standard notation) sit at odds with the ways students naturally learn about music: as individuals learn more about western music and the tools used to create it, students inherently have to grapple with "aspects of musical structure that are often hidden in the underlying assumptions of our notational conventions and our theory, leading to problematic issues in teaching as well" (Bamberger, 2013, p. 219). In other words, standard notation does not align with how individuals understand or learn music but instead emerges from the social institutions (and their subsequent values) that surround music. Learning music, according to Bamberger (1991, 2013), represents a deeply divided process in which individuals develop a rich understanding of music through their everyday musical encounters while simultaneously having to grapple with cultural technologies that contradict those very understandings.

Although insightful, both Bamberger and Green situate their work within the western canon, focusing on musical knowledges that noise (and experimental music more broadly) contest on a number of levels. For instance, Small (1996) argues that "it is the pitch relationships and their occurrence in time (that is, rhythm) that are the basic material" (p. 25) of most western musical forms. Developing an understanding of and ability to manipulate this basic material also provides a fundamental form of musical knowledge for both Bamberger and Green, situating

their research explicitly within the western canon. But according to Nyman (1974), experimental music defines itself as a musical tradition that intentionally breaks from the tenets of western composition by embracing new ways of structuring or framing music. Rather than utilize rhythm and pitch to define a piece of music, experimental musicians and composers create “situation[s] in which sounds may occur, a process of generating action (sounding or otherwise), a field delineated by certain compositional ‘rules’” (Nyman, 1974, p. 4). To a certain extent, experimental music differentiates itself from traditional western musical forms by utilizing what Lakoff & Johnson (2003) would define as a different structuring metaphor. Rather than thinking about music through the structuring metaphor of written communication (the song as a full text, musical phrases as sentences, notes as words), experimental musician’s challenge this metaphor in a variety of ways to redefine what music means and how it is created.

Because of this conceptual (and, essentially, cognitive) shift between traditional western and experimental music, it follows that the mechanisms for constructing knowledge within these settings would also shift. This occurs because the introduction of new structuring metaphors not only provide a new means for understanding experiences but these metaphors also act on existing social and culture systems and alter them in significant, meaningful ways (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). For example, noise thoroughly complicates the notion of copying as an essential practice in learning musical technique, a crucial finding in Green’s (2002) study of popular musicians, in often contradictory ways. This shift occurs because

the performer’s perspective of a musical instrument is... effectively changed from a traditional role of being a predetermined thing that realizes a musical language outside or indifferent to its self, to being an act that explores an object for its inherent sonic qualities (Keep, 2009, p. 113)

in experimental music. Noise music in particular relies on a highly convoluted relationship with copying. On one hand, Novak (2013) contends that noise artists frown upon any noticeable form of replication, including the use of the same instrumentation, between artists. Yet on the other hand, the harsh noise wall subgenre, one in which all artists create largely static musical compositions by heavily distorting various sound sources (i.e. guitars, field recordings, other musical recordings, audio from movies, etc.), is constructed entirely out of one shared and replicated musical gesture (Henry, 2016). Yet in both of these divergent examples, Green's (2002) understanding of copying as a means towards a developed artistic practice does not apply: noise artists either reject copying entirely or embrace copying as an artistic practice in itself.

All told, the (at times contradictory) foundation of musical knowledge at the core of noise and the acquisition thereof exists in opposition to western musical knowledge (and its foundational metaphors) by design. While Bamberger and Green provide helpful insight into the mechanisms through which all individuals, and musicians in particular, develop musical knowledge through informal praxes, their focus on traditional western musical forms may limit their ability to recognize the full breadth of informal pedagogies that individuals engage when learning about music (traditional western, experimental, or otherwise) and how to make it. Subsequent research into informal music education therefore needs to unearth the points of divergence and convergence between western and non-western music pedagogies (such as the pedagogies associated with noise scenes) to develop a more holistic understanding of learning music within informal contexts.

### **Defining the Bounds of Noise Pedagogies Through Situated Learning Theory**

However, investigating informal music education practices outside of defined learning contexts proves difficult because the pedagogies of informal music communities often go

unrecognized or present themselves as something other than mechanisms for learning (Green, 2002). I therefore frame this study within situated learning theory as a means towards uncovering overlooked pedagogies and other underrecognized aspects of knowledge production. First established by Lave & Wenger (1991), situated learning theory reimagines the act of learning as a process of constructing a community of practice, or a group “of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2011, p. 1). Individuals do this by, first, engaging legitimate peripheral participation, contributing to the community of practice in small but meaningful ways. In the context of music, this may involve going to shows, hanging out at record and music stores, or posting in online forums (Perry, 2011). Over time, community members may eventually become “old timers,” contributing to the maintenance and reproduction of the community while also producing artifacts of greater significance. Again turning to music scenes, old timers would include veteran musicians, label heads, and concert organizers that define music scenes through cultural production (Perry, 2011). Within this framing, the acquisition or construction of a creative process within any artistic tradition needs to draw a connection between the social context and the individual, exploring both how artists develop as creators but also engaging how other actors within the surrounding community contribute to the construction of new artifacts and knowledges (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Cultural production therefore extends into the production of the community itself, a community defined by a unique set of situated knowledges.

Expanding situated learning theory into the context of experimental music, Thomson (2007) proposes two interlocked pedagogical sites within music scenes that contextualize these communities of practice. In one formation, the actual site of performance acts as the space for learning. The notion of “performance as classroom” highlights the learning processes that both

musicians and audiences engage when playing or listening to music. Learning within this space becomes a collaborative act as musicians both develop their own practice and construct meaning in collaboration with the audience. In another formation, Thomson (2007) also proposes a definition of “scene as classroom.” Here, participants both shape the kinds of learning that occur within the community and also construct certain situated knowledges outside of the temporal space of the performance. Through the distribution of music, the organizing and promotion of concerts or festivals, the creation of merchandise, and other non-performance-based activities that happen in a music scene, a whole other pedagogical site emerges alongside performance as classroom. Through these two spaces, both old timers and legitimate peripheral participants can engage a wide range of knowledges and pedagogical practices through cultural production. Thomson (2007) therefore defines the bounds for research, presenting a frame through which researchers can explore the pedagogies of experimental music. It then falls on researchers to identify the actual mechanisms for constructing and sharing knowledge within these classrooms.

### **Site of Research and Study Overview**

To begin exploring the mechanisms of learning within noise music and its associated scenes, I present findings from one portion of a yearlong comparative case study of the noise scene in Milwaukee, WI. As defined by Bartlett & Vavrus (2011; 2016), comparative case studies expand beyond the boundaries of traditional case study research by considering three different axes within which the bounded (but permeable) case resides. First, the horizontal axis allows researchers to consider various bounded sites to unearth points of convergence and divergence between them. In this study, I investigated two intersecting music series: The Experimental Education Series (EES) and the Noise Knowledge Consortium (NKC), both of which I founded and organized throughout their respective runs. For three years, the EES hosted

experimental musicians and performance artists from across the country at the Jazz Gallery Center for the Arts, a community-based arts organization in the Riverwest neighborhood of Milwaukee. Based on findings from my previous research into do-it-yourself venue spaces (Woods, 2017), the EES only featured women artists as a means to combat the narrative of experimental music and noise existing as male dominated spaces (see Dietrich, 2016; Rodgers, 2010). Each event in the series included a workshop (designed and facilitated by the featured artist) and a concert. The NKC followed a similar format but featured primarily local artists of all genders and occurred at Brinn Labs, a maker-centric offshoot of the local children's museum. Both series were free and open to the public.

The other two axes in Bartlett & Vavrus' (2011; 2016) comparative case study methodology contextualize cases within a contemporary and historical frame. The horizontal axis situates the case within larger social structures, inviting scholars to conduct research into the surrounding organizational bodies that inform and connect cases along the horizontal axis. For this study, I situate both the EES and NKC within the North American noise scene, a decentralized collection of artists, fans, and organizers who create and share music across various geographically defined scenes through both touring and digital distribution infrastructures (Novak, 2013; Verbuc, 2014). To engage the North American scene, I invited multiple artists from outside of Milwaukee to participate in these series, thereby expanding the breadth of perspectives on noise music within this study beyond a localized context. A number of local performers in the study tour nationally as well, further allowing aspects of the broader social context to exist within the data. While the temporal axis, the third and final axis proposed by Bartlett & Vavrus (2011; 2016), does not play a direct role in this study, I have been historically contextualizing these findings by conducting object analyses of various albums and

performances from veteran noise artists. This allows me to situate empirical findings within the history of the genre. Results of these analyses can be found in the addenda.

When curating these series, I also purposefully chose musicians with a wide array of backgrounds in experimental music. While the majority of participants explicitly consider themselves to be noise musicians, some participants frame their work within a broader practice that includes noise music (i.e. a different type of experimental musician who sometimes plays noise) while others define their practice in distinctly non-noise terms, focusing on free-improvisation as their preferred musical tradition. I have chosen to include these musicians in this study for multiple reasons. First, as Atton (2011) notes, the borders that define noise music as a genre exist in a perpetual state of redefinition as the discourse produced by fans and musicians alike constantly include and exclude musical artifacts and practices as part of noise. The same applies to the musicians in this study who often find themselves performing under the guise of noise despite identifying with other music traditions. For example, Hal Rammel (one of the participants in this study) has performed at multiple noise festivals and alongside formative noise acts, such as the infamous Nihilist Spasm Band, despite aligning his work with the European free-improvisation tradition. Second, despite not defining themselves as noise musicians, these participants often explore the use of noise as a musical gesture, technology, or theoretical space within their work. In turn, this aligns all participants at the level of artistic practice to a certain degree. Finally, by incorporating a broad range of participants, I have provided a means for extending the findings of this study beyond one specific niche genre. Through this analysis, I explicitly propose a process model of artistic practice in noise but implicitly extend this model to other informal, creative, and artistic traditions. Or, at the very least, propose the use of this model in future inquiries outside of noise.

### **Study 1: Developing a Process Model of Artistic Practice in Noise**

To further explore the question “how do noise musicians develop their artistic practice within informal music communities?” I conduct two separate analyses on data generated from this study. The first focuses on analyzing interviews conducted with the teaching artists of both series (see Appendix A for information on participants) and the second presents findings from a single case study of one novice performer as they develop their practice. In doing so, I use the first study to produce a model for learning in noise and then engage the second study to verify and explore this model in practice. With this distinction in mind, I now turn to data collected from the teaching artists of the EES and NKC.

#### **Methods**

To collect data for Study 1, I conducted pre and post interviews with each of the seventeen featured artists of both series. These interviews utilized a semi-structured approach that centered on how participants conceptualized their own process of developing their artistic practice. The first interview focused on (a) the participants history with experimental music and noise, both as a performer and listener, and (b) their intentions with the workshop and performance. The second interview focused on their reactions to the event as a whole. I also took inspiration from Jordan & Henderson (1995), recording all of the events on a video camera and inviting participants to respond to specific moments during the workshop and performance. By asking participants to explore their own histories in noise and experimental music, this study creates space for interviewees to describe their own conceptions of learning within informal education praxes, including what Green (2002) describes as unrecognized pedagogical practices. The introduction of the workshop into the series also provided a sense of focus for the interviews. By asking participants to plan a workshop of their own design, the interviews did not

have to solely focus on their memories of learning about and through experimental music. Instead, I used the opportunity to investigate their intentions behind and reflections on a recent event as a means for uncovering embodied understandings of teaching and learning. I then fully transcribed all of the interviews and utilized an open and iterative approach to both descriptive and thematic coding techniques (see Saldaña, 2015). This approach allows me to produce what Glaser & Strauss (1967) define as a substantive theory of learning within informal experimental music communities.

## Findings

Through this analysis, I produced four larger categories related to how noise musicians developed their artistic practice: an initial blown mind moment, an extended exploration phase, the influence other artistic traditions, and a finalized practice. Within the first three categories, participants discussed five interrelated musical components: musical artifacts such as recordings, compositions, or performances (coded here as “music”); the surrounding music scene or community; both performance and composition techniques; musical technologies in the form of instruments, recording devices, or other sound making tools (guitar effects pedals, found objects, etc.); and dispositions related to making, listening to, and theorizing music (see Table 1 for brief examples of each). In this section, I discuss each of these themes individually as a means towards producing a process model of artistic practice in noise shared by the participants.

**Table 1**

*Coding Examples from Teaching Artists*

Musical Component	Blown Mind Moment	Exploration Phase	Influence from Other Arts Traditions
Music	I remember that first listen. It's a very vivid memory of being like,	I had a job as a shipping clerk for a phonograph record	-

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	"what? Music can do this?" I didn't even know. By the third, listen, I was like, "I love it." (Peterson)	distributor. I would frequently be chastised for spending too much time reading the album covers and I spent most of my money buying records. (Ollman)	
Scene	I just drove up to providence and played my first out of state show. And seeing what was going on with Providence just blew my mind. (Schauwitzer)	I was going to a lot of shows. I was involved in that scene, just kind of absorbing and figuring out what appealed to me (Bertucci)	The support that I have seen in a lot of noise communities, I see the same thing in Candomblé as this alternative community and structure and almost like chosen family. (Sordahl)
Technique	Kaija Saariaho: discovering her music and her practice of solo acoustic instrument with computer and processing electronics was like "that's what I want to do." (Elert)	We would go into a practice room and just set up pedals and experiment and see what kind of settings would give me shivers, basically. (Bertucci)	It was taking the collage techniques I did and then turning that into sound. It was a lot of the same things that I learned with visual art that I wanted to do with sound. (Rissiek)
Technology	I hadn't heard sounds like this before. The instruments were from around the world. It just blew my mind. (Beverlin)	I would come home from school and I would get different tools out of the kitchen and bathroom-droppers, spray bottles, buckets, glasses, blenders. And I would experiment with the sounds. (Schwartz)	Getting into set building and costuming in particular, that did push the instrument building into another sort of realm. (Kennedy)
Disposition	I had the realization that I was way more interested in all the sounds the effects pedals could make. I remember having the distinct feeling that I don't care about playing guitar, I care about these effects and	It was definitely me sitting alone in a room with a recording device, just experimenting and seeing what I could work with. I was really interested in the idea of using the recording studio as the	Around the same time I got into experimental music, I started discovering Fluxus. What fascinated me about that was I could take these same ideas and apply them to noise. Music expanded

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these cool sounds.  
(Traeger)

instrument and trying  
to learn what that  
meant. (Elert)

into the idea of visual  
art or anti-music.  
(Taggart)

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**The Blown Mind Moment.** As a first step into becoming an artist and developing one's practice, the participants routinely discussed what I define as a blown mind moment, named after a common phrase ("my mind was blown") used by participants during the interviews. For these artists, the blown mind moment involves either a single encounter with noise or experimental music making techniques, a wider moment in time in which participants regularly came into contact with noise and its associated practices, or a sudden realization of their own inclination towards noise or experimental music. In all these cases, this encounter radically transformed the artist's perception of music or their own identity as a burgeoning musician. In a number of cases, participants used the metaphor of a light switch, that something in them "clicked" or the encounter "flipped a switch." Beyond an initial encounter, artists also described multiple blown mind moments throughout the process of developing as an artist, redirecting or altering their practice along the way. While responses from the participants as a whole identified blown mind moments focused on each of the five musical components present in this study (music, scene, technique, technology, and disposition), each individual only needed one encounter involving one of these components to begin the process of developing their practice. Additionally, different musical components often overlapped. For example, when someone goes to a show and watches a performance, they could potentially encounter all five components simultaneously. For the purposes of this analysis, I focus on those examples from the data that more clearly align with one musical component over the others.

In a clear example of a blown mind moment related to music, Hal Rammel shared his first experience hearing free jazz at a music festival in Chicago:

I went really not knowing anybody who was on the bill and [then John] Coltrane came out. It was all stratospheric. It was all upper register, overblowing the horns for the entire set except for a piano solo and a bass solo. That was my introduction to what was really happening, not having the grasp of what they were doing but connecting on an emotional and intellectual level in other ways. I knew that this was something I would be listening to my entire life, which has been true.

This quote exemplifies two key aspects of the blown mind moment. First, the experience very clearly reorients Rammel towards experimental music. Before the event, he did not know what he was going to hear and, afterwards, he knew this would be a part of his life moving forward. Second, a blown mind moment does not have to come from the tradition one eventually embraces. Although John Coltrane's work as a free jazz musician very much fits within a broad or ideological definition of experimental music (see Gilmore, 2014), Rammel did not end up pursuing that specific subgenre. According to Rammel himself, "I'm not a jazz musician, but there are things that are close to me that are part of what I do that come out of that tradition." Still, Rammel frames this experience as a highly influential and informative one that eventually led to his work as an experimental musician.

Beyond merely piquing the participants' interest in noise or experimental music, blown mind moments also affect the identity of musicians both in terms of deciding to play music and reorienting current musical practices. Turning towards a blown mind moment related to technology, Jon Mueller experienced this moment as a young child playing with his first instrument:

I had the guitar laying on the ground and I just let it start feeding back. To me, that was magic. It added this whole other layer to the instrument that I didn't get from listening to records, where this instrument lives on its own. I really felt like that was a turning point for me to understand instruments and music in a different way.

In this response, Mueller also aligns the blown mind moment with Lakoff & Johnson's (2003) notion of a structuring metaphor. After witnessing his guitar feeding back, Mueller shifted from thinking of guitars merely as tools to manipulate but instead saw them as "living on their own." This framing inherently involves the embrace of a new metaphor through which Mueller conceptualized how to make music. In an example removed from modern noise or experimental music, Shannon Kennedy shifted away from classical music technique after hearing traditional Asian string music:

Getting into music from other cultures, I started hearing sounds that were non-western.

It's like, "why aren't those sounds in the music that I'm learning how to make?" I started feeling like I wasn't learning how to make these other types of sounds that I wanted to explore. So I think, mentally, that is kind of the click.

Again, these quotes exemplify the sudden shift in identity or metaphor associated with the blown mind moment. Because of their experiences with new sounds and sounding approaches, both Mueller and Kennedy "clicked" into a different set of knowledges they wanted to explore.

**Exploration Phase.** After experiencing an initial blown mind moment, participants entered the next part of the process: the exploration phase. Here, artists explore the affordances of their new discovery, expanding the borders of their practice as musicians and experience as listeners. During this phase, artists dive heavily into noise music and its surrounding scene while simultaneously tinkering with techniques, technologies, and dispositions without a defined end

goal in mind. To extend a common metaphor used by participants, if the blown mind moment is the flipping of a light switch in a dark room then the exploration phase involves examining and interacting with all of the now visible objects in that space. Put differently, Lakoff & Johnson (2003) might argue that the blown mind moment exists as an interaction with a previously unknown metaphor, an interaction that produces “a kind of reverberation down through the network of entailments that awakens and connects our memories of our past... experiences and serves as a possible guide for future ones” (p. 140). The exploration phase then represents a period of time during which individuals utilize this newly acquired guide to accrue novel experiences and ideas.

Regarding the five musical components described in this model (music, scene, technique, technology, and disposition), the artists in this study connected all five of those themes to the exploration phase as well. Notably, they did so with far more breadth than when they described their blown mind moments: while each participant may have connected their blown mind moments to one or a few of these musical categories, every single participant described some amount of exploration in all five. The artists further described moving between these categories, sometimes through another blown mind moment and at other times without any sort of intermediary. This assertion positions a single blown mind moment as a strong enough catalyst to inspire participants to begin developing their practice through the exploration of all five musical categories. A blown mind moment related to music, for example, can lead to the exploration of techniques, scenes, dispositions, and technologies. Moreover, the fact that every participant described exploring all five categories before producing a finished artifact suggests that artists would not have a fully formed practice without engaging this entire space, a notion I return to at the end of this section.

Focusing first on the exploration of music, participants explored the affordances of the blown mind moment by consuming as much music as possible. Bryce Beverlin II describes this process vividly when he tells the story of first hearing influential industrial/proto-noise act Einstürzende Neubauten:

I pull out a CD from the 80s that is them beating on pieces of metal. And it sounds incredible. I'm like "this is my music!" And then I'm like, "well, what else do they have?" I just start consuming and eating all of that stuff up. It was just a time of incredible maw opening. Just like, "pour it in my gullet. I will eat it all."

In this quote, Beverlin connects an initial blown mind moment with the ensuing exploration phase. An identity shift occurs after hearing this band, as exemplified by the phrase "this is my music," which is then followed by an extended period of musical consumption. This process of exploration does not have a specific direction or sense of linearity. Instead, Beverlin just tries to hear as much music within or related to noise as possible.

This lack of a specific direction extends into the exploration of techniques, as some participants intentionally engaged instruments and technologies they knew nothing about as a means towards embodying this exploratory mindset. Lea Bertucci explains this approach when she says "I didn't know how to use any of the things that I had. So the idea of misusing it- I didn't know how to do that. The process was actually exploring it and intuiting what I felt was working." Rammel takes a similar approach, but instead of exploring multiple pieces of gear, he deeply explored the sounds he could create with a singing saw:

As I was learning to play, there was a particular record by Derek Bailey and Anthony Braxton that was very sparse. I played along with that and other records that I had and

found a way to make the sustained lines of the saw really work. There's no rulebook.

What saw players am I going to be compared to here? It was a completely blank page. Interestingly, this process mirrors Green's (2002) finding that popular musicians listen to and play along with recorded music as they develop their own technique. However, in Rammel's case, he did not want to copy the records (as shown by the fact that the record didn't include a singing saw). Instead, he used the records as sonic inspiration to find new techniques and develop his own unique approach to the instrument.

Returning to the community of practice framing established by Lave & Wenger (1991) and refined for a musical context by Thomson (2007), the participants in this study produced a significant moment of divergence with this framing by conceptualizing the exploration phase (a crucial part of developing situated bodies of knowledge and their identity as noise artists) before gaining an awareness of the noise scene. Nicholas Elert exemplifies this realignment when discussing an early music project: "I can't think of the decision that made Mysterious Notes entirely experimental improv because I don't think anybody in that band actually knew what experimental improv was at the time, but we were doing it anyway." In this quote, Elert describes an early set of explorations within a novel disposition ("experimental improv" as a way to conceptualize performance or composition) outside of an awareness of the role this approach to music making plays in experimental music. Yet Elert situates this exploration as a crucial part of his development as a noise musician. Turning towards the category of technique, Mike Schauwitzer used a common phrase from multiple interviews to describe his own explorations outside of the context of noise music:

My first exposure to [noise] would have been the noisier stuff that Sonic Youth was doing, even the weirder stuff that Beck was doing. The bonus tracks on his CDs were a

lot of sound collage and stuff like that. My brother and I would try to do that. We had a boom box and we would just layer sounds. We were drawn to that part of the music and figured "why can't we do that?" So I didn't even know noise was a thing.

Despite hearing examples of tape collage techniques, Schauwitzer still understands this aspect of his development as something disconnected from noise music and its surrounding scene because he "didn't know noise was a thing." For both Elert and Schauwitzer, exploring the scene and its associated musical artifacts would come later in their development.

**Influence of Other Art Practices.** Contributing to the exploration phase, the participants in this study also extensively discussed the influence of practices from other cultural traditions on their own development as artists. While some described the influence they drew from other musical traditions (western classical music, jazz, rock, punk, etc.), participants also drew from a wide range of non-musical traditions including visual art, theatre, dance, sculpture, and film. Cultural practices outside of what commonly gets defined as the arts (such as meditation and video games) also played a role in this process. For instance, Gabriella Schwartz notes that she found a musical disposition in her career outside of music: "What I've derived the most influence from is the mundane nature of manufacturing. Watching people that operate machinery, feeding steel bar stock into screw machines or stamping lathes, I think that that repetitive nature has certainly influenced me." Although participants did not discuss the categories of music and scene (probably due to the fact that these remain intractably linked to noise and experimental music in a number of ways) outside of Shanna Sordahl's mention of Candomblé (see Table 1), they did draw on technologies, techniques, and dispositions from other artistic and cultural traditions.

When discussing techniques drawn from other traditions, interviewees often focused on how they could employ traditional western approaches within a noise context to create novel

forms of experimental music. Amanda Schoofs articulates this when she says, “I use counterpoint every time I improvise. I think about it all the time. I create counterpoint in what I’m doing in noise. I think it makes it really strong, actually.” In the context of western classical music and its related traditions, counterpoint often refers to the technique of playing two separate melodies at the same time. But because noise music primarily remains atonal, counterpoint normally would not hold contextual meaning. However, Schoofs has found a process through which she can reimagine counterpoint to develop her own practice as a noise artist. Outside of musical traditions, artists also found ways of incorporating techniques from other art forms. William Mueller describes this practice in relation to theatre: “My mother was a theater major, so she had me read a lot of books about theater and about things like abstract theatrical concepts... I had read these books and I was thinking about things like breaking the fourth wall.” Mueller subsequently pulled the technique of breaking the fourth wall and incorporated it into his live performances.

In another act of appropriation, the participants also discussed ways in which they utilized technologies from non-musical art practices. Rammel illustrates this point when discussing the evolution of his instrument building process, referring specifically to the amplified palette (see Rammel, 2016). In designing the instrument, Rammel decided to use a painter’s palette for a simple reason: “It was obvious that the wooden artist palette is already sort of ergonomically designed to be held.” Rammel then attached wooden and metal rods to this device which he could play with a bow and various other objects. This example illustrates how the participants engaged the affordances of the technologies produced by other traditions (in this case, the handheld design of the painter’s palette) and reimaged those affordances within the context of music. For others, the technologies they pulled from other arts traditions came from

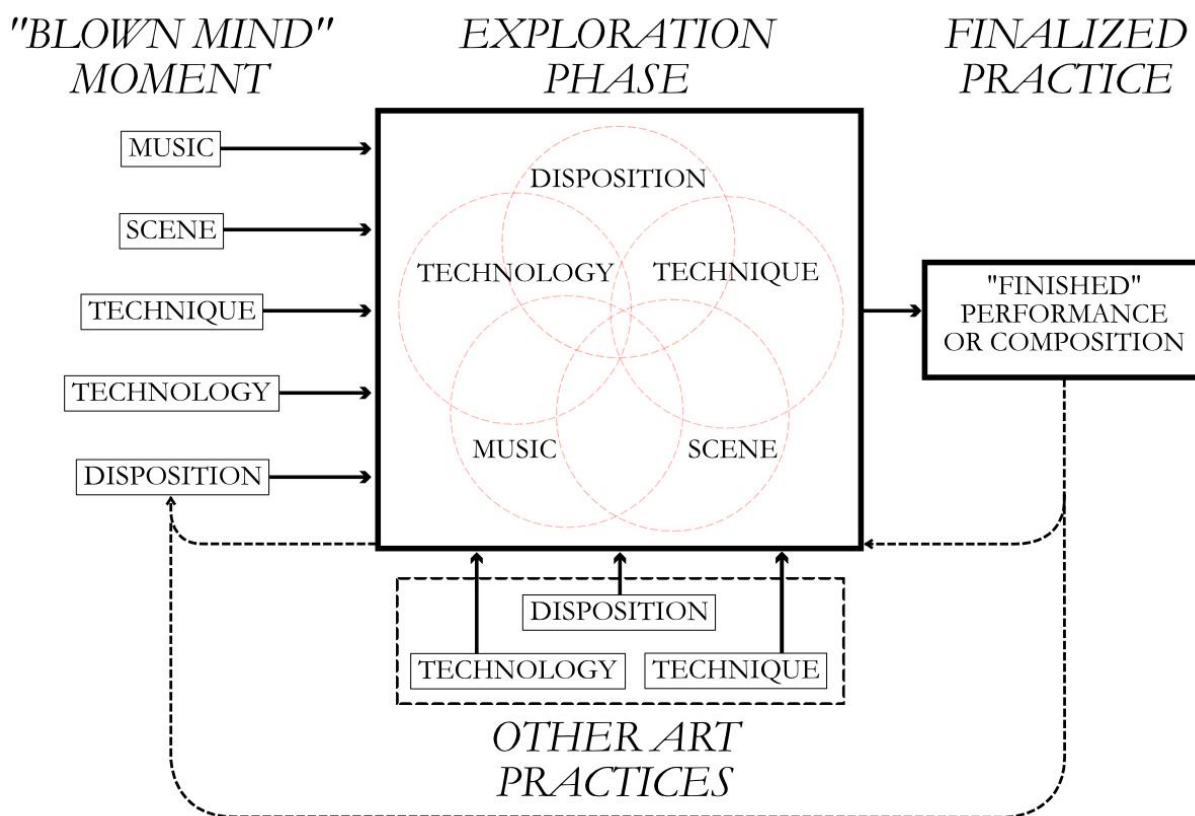
their own work in those disciplines. Schauwitzer discovered how to make tape loops because of his experience working on an installation art piece:

The first tape loop I actually built; it was not for the purpose of noise at all. I strung up some Christmas lights in a room in my apartment and I cut a loop out of a Beatles tape. It's the line where he says he didn't notice that the light had changed. I just looped that phrase over and over with the Christmas lights.

Although he initially discovers the process of making tape loops within another field, Schauwitzer soon realized how this technology could apply in a musical setting. Now, Schauwitzer almost exclusively performs with these devices.

**Figure 1**

*Process Model of Artistic Practice in Noise*



**Towards a Model of Artistic Practice.** After the blown mind moment and a thorough exploration of the music, scene, techniques, technologies, and dispositions that contribute to one's practice (along with the influence of non-noise cultural spaces), the participants finally develop a finalized practice embodied in either a public performance, composition, recording, or some other musical artifact. Taken as a whole, this produces what I define as a process model of artistic practice in noise (see Figure 1), one that describes how artists develop their musical knowledge over time within the situated context of experimental music à la Lave & Wenger (1991). However, as I mentioned previously, this process does not occur in a linear fashion. The participants often described how they transitioned back and forth between not only the exploration phase and blown mind moments, but also from a finalized practice to the other two. August Traeger illustrates the iterative nature of this process when explaining how he recorded a recent album: "A lot of it came from improvisations that were recorded while I was developing the live set that I played. It's kind of like some early bits of the live set that I was playing." In this instance, the finalized practice embodied in the album was not the projected end point for Traeger. Instead, it represented one step along the way towards a live performance, documenting one moment or benchmark within an extended exploration phase. In doing so, Traeger (along with others in the study) challenge the finality of a finalized practice, instead conceptualizing this part of the model as an element of a cyclical process.

Despite the iterative nature of this process, the participants in this study did consider the importance of exploring all five musical categories in order to create valuable or meaningful work. William Mueller, for example, described what happened when he performed before fully exploring all five categories:

I saw Noise Fest and was amazed. I thought it was the most amazing thing I've ever seen. And I didn't even really know what noise was. When I played at Noise Fest, I played for a full 40 minutes.<sup>2</sup> I had never really played anything outside of a coffee shop. I didn't know the rules in which these spaces conducted their work. Also, I didn't know that there were genre tropes that applied to noise. It was falling flat.

At this point in his development, Mueller had thoroughly explored and developed his own approach to technique, technology, and disposition, enough to the point where he could perform in front of a live audience. However, he had not fully explored the cultural context of the noise scene (i.e. the space where he would find “the rules” of the community) or the music itself (through the notion of genre tropes). Because of this, the performance “fell flat” for Mueller.

**Developing an Artistic Practice Outside of the Scene as Classroom.** In developing this model, I have largely relied on Thomson's (2007) concept of scene as classroom with little regard to performance as classroom (going so far as to include performances as part of an artist's finalized practice). In considering performance as its own unique learning context, the participants who incorporate free improvisation into their work seemingly challenge the separation of the exploration phase and finalized practice. Instead, participants conceptualized live performances as another context in which they could explore and develop their own practice. Beverlin exemplifies this approach when he describes how he develops his technique working with found objects:

What I do is, I pick up that piece of metal or trash. I might clunk it for a couple seconds to just be like "what category is this?" and throw it in the bag. And then when it comes time to play and perform, it's getting performed with for the first time.

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that, in my experience, most noise sets rarely last more than 20 minutes.

Yet despite this assertion, Beverlin also discusses the importance of practicing outside of the context of live performances:

What's important is putting in the work, sitting down and dedicating your attention and your time to that activity. And whatever comes of it in that particular session is whatever comes of it and it's fine. But the practice of it is what will inform the performance.

Taken together, Beverlin's comments do not necessarily conflate the exploration phase and finalized practice into one process, but rather position these two practices as happening simultaneously in the performance. The finalized practice emerges as individuals tinker with the various components that contribute to the cultural space of noise music. Or, to use Attali's (1985) terminology, musicians are often "inventing the message at the same time as language" (p. 134) when making noise.

In another shift of context, some of the participants who had formal music education backgrounds conceptualized the development of their practice outside of the model presented in this study. Christopher Burns, who received a doctorate in composition, clearly states this difference when he says:

I had the advantage of being in a place where coursework was explicitly about how you write code to build sound synthesizers and how you do algorithmic composition. There was a lot of opportunity for formal study and mentoring. I got interested in recreating classic electronic works, so I did a bunch of realizations of John Cage's music and Alvin Lucier's music and Karlheinz Stockhausen's music.

Not only did Burns receive directed, formal instruction and mentorship in the development of his artistic practice, he also learned through recreating other works of experimental music. Both assertions sit in opposition to the process model and other findings presented here.

However, when discussing his development as a guitarist outside of this formal context, the model once again becomes applicable:

I was at [my bandmate] Thomas' house and he was like, "I dare you to play guitar at our next show." And I said sure without having any plan for what I was going to do. I quickly decided not to use the fret board in the traditional way, because I couldn't plausibly navigate that, [and I started] thinking of it as an amplified percussion instrument, [which] felt like a useful creative structure. I did that show with Thomas and that really got me started.

Despite his previous formal training, Burns develops as a guitarist through the process model presented in this study: he starts with a blown mind moment (the dare shifts his identity as a guitarist, or at least his relationship to the instrument); he develops his craft within an exploration phase (exploring the disposition associated with framing the guitar as an amplified percussion instrument); and presents a finished product (the show) before returning to the exploration phase (the performance only "got him started"). These two competing processes point to the ways in which informal music traditions (like noise music) exist as unique learning ecologies with distinct learning and knowledge construction mechanisms, even within the experimental music umbrella.

### **Study 2- How Novices Learn to Make Noise**

Although this model provides significant insight into how artists develop their practice within informal settings, these findings only represent the viewpoint of established and veteran practitioners. Additionally, the reliance on autobiographical interviews could potentially produce a model disconnected from the actual daily practices or lived experiences of noise musicians. In

response, I now turn to interviews with one regular participant in both series to explore the validity and nuances of this model with developing artists.

## **Methods**

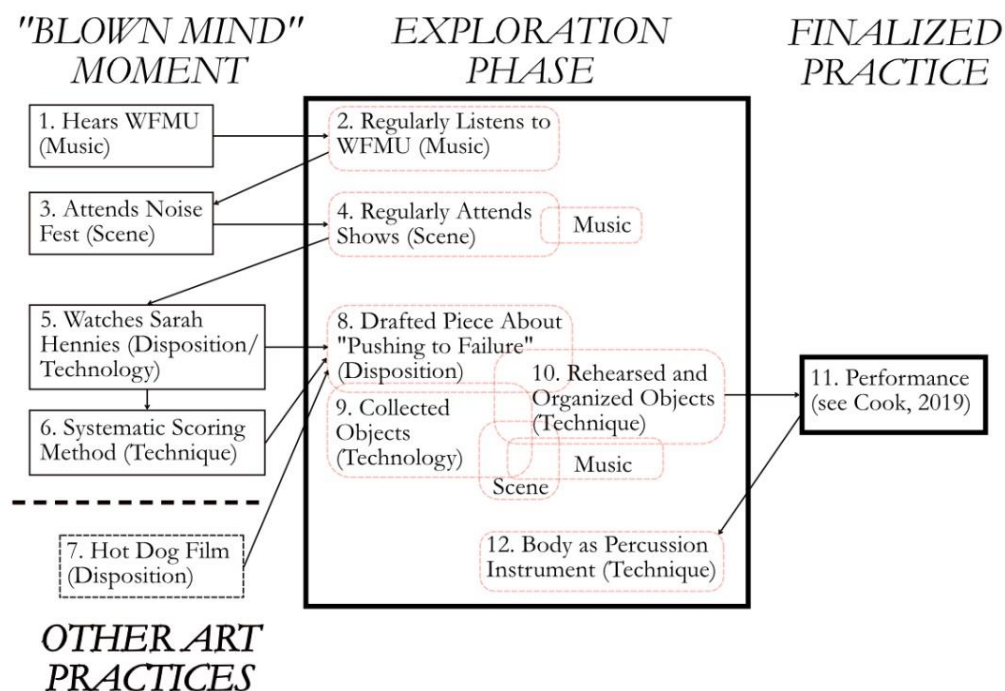
Beyond the interviews conducted with teaching artists, I also interviewed a group of audience members who attended the majority of the workshops and performances. While some of them had experience making noise music, all of them self-identified as novices who had an interest in learning about noise and the practices of these musicians. To organize these interviews, I built on Seidman's (2005) three interview structure as a way to deeply investigate how participants experienced the workshops and concerts. The first interview investigated the context surrounding the participants, creating space for the interviewees to discuss their existing relationship with and understanding of noise. This occurred before they attended the first workshop. The next set of interviews occurred during the run of the series and focused on the details of their experience thus far. Because of the number of workshops taking place and the length of time between events, I conducted two iterations of this interview with some of the participants. Finally, the last interview encouraged participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience and consider the ways in which their understandings of experimental music changed. These interviews occurred after the final workshops and concerts took place. Again, I utilized a semi-structured interview approach, fully transcribed all of the interviews, and then utilized an open and iterative approach to descriptive and thematic coding (see Saldaña, 2015).

For this particular study, I focus on one participant, Jack Hietpas, in particular. I chose to use Hietpas as an individual case study because of the complete nature of his participation in the series. At the beginning of the study, Hietpas had already done some experimenting with creating noise music but had never performed in front of others or created a "finished" artifact. During

the last event he attended, Hietpas opened for the featured artist as shown in the video by Cook (2019). This arc positions Hietpas as a valuable case to consider, allowing me to map the process model of developing an artistic practice onto Hietpas' experience. In turn, this reveals potential areas of alignment and divergence between Hietpas' development and the one described by the veteran artists. To conduct this analysis, I relied on Halverson & Magnifico's (2013) bidirectional artifact analysis methodology to trace the development of Hietpas' final performance across time. I conducted the interviews described above while also collecting artifacts produced by Hietpas as he developed the piece. I then utilized techniques inspired by photo elicitation methods (see Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, & Baruchel, 2006), asking Hietpas to respond to those artifacts in the interviews. This allowed me to construct a narrative that mapped how Hietpas developed this piece and, in turn, his own artistic practice (See Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Mapping Hietpas' Development onto the Process Model of Artistic Practice in Noise*



## Findings

**Blown Mind Moments and Explorations.** In discussing how he first became interested in noise music, Hietpas nominates a single origin point: “The big discovery was- I started listening to WFMU, specifically this one show called ‘Blurred and Obscured.’ He would play psychedelic and experimental electronic and free jazz.” For Hietpas, this becomes the blown mind moment as he suddenly gains awareness of experimental music. This then translates into an exploration of noise music through the same radio program: “They would broadcast from three to six AM. I would set an alarm so I could wake up and listen.” In doing so, Hietpas consumes a wide array of noise and experimental music. Hietpas’ interest in the genre then leads him to attend his first noise concert:

The first experimental music show that I would have gone to was the Milwaukee Noise Fest at the Borg Ward. I remember that I met Alex of Climax Denial. I remember talking to Dan. I remember talking to Amanda Schoofs. I just discovered all those people at that event.

Importantly, Hietpas does not just discover the music being made by people in his local scene but he discovers the people themselves. This situates the experience as another blown mind moment, this time focusing on the scene as opposed to the music. Experiencing the fest then leads into another extended period of exploration as he attends more shows, albeit after a small break: “There was a while, a couple of years, that I didn't go to any shows. I don't think there was much going on anyways. But then I started going to shows more regularly.” Although exploring the scene is delayed in this instance, it happens because of a dip in activity from the scene itself. Once more shows start happening, Hietpas begins to explore the local noise scene and connect with people in this community.

It is worth noting that, at this point in his process, Hietpas has not started performing. Instead, he only engages the scene as classroom (Thomson, 2007) through what Lave & Wenger (1991) describe as peripheral participation, attending shows and acting as an audience member. However, he did aspire to perform: “Even from my first experience at the noise fest, I was like, ‘I should totally get a setup together.’ But I didn’t have the equipment that I needed or I thought I needed. I didn’t know where to start.” This quote points to the importance of thoroughly exploring all five of the musical categories nominated in this chapter. Although Hietpas wanted to assemble a “setup,” here meaning a collection of electronic music making devices similar to the interconnected systems described by Novak (2013), he did not have the opportunity to explore these technologies in part because he “didn’t know where to start.” Hietpas expands on this when he discusses some later experiments with tape loops: “I couldn’t figure out a way to make it my own. There’s so many people that are doing really cool stuff with tape loops, even just in Milwaukee, that I didn’t know what I could really add to it. And that’s what kept me from getting together a set up for a long time.” Again, Hietpas reveals the importance of exploration in partial opposition to Green’s (2002) focus on copying others. Although he may have copied some techniques or used similar technologies, Hietpas still did not feel as though he had an artistic practice because he had not found his own approach to making this music.

**From Legitimate Peripheral Participation to Cultural Production.** However, Hietpas rapidly develops his craft after attending an early event in the Noise Knowledge Consortium. During this event, Hietpas has another blown mind moment, this time centered on dispositions and technologies while watching a video of experimental/noise musician Sarah Hennies performing her piece *Falsetto* (see Herting, 2017): “seeing that video was really awe inspiring. Just the idea of taking something to failure, a performance that goes to the point of failure.” In

watching this video, Hietpas connects to the disposition of “taking something to failure,” which Hennies embodies in her performance by trying to repeatedly perform a simple percussion motif while constantly ringing multiple handbells (making it impossible to do either). In connecting with this disposition, Hietpas also draws from his experience in experimental film:

the film I just made is a reimagining of an older film called "Degrees of Limitation" from 1918 where this film maker, Scott Stark, took a hand cranked Bolex Camera you have to wind up. He shot on this hill in San Francisco. He'd wind it one crank and then try and run to the top of the hill. And then wind it two cranks, so it gets longer each time. And so he's trying to reach the top of the hill before the 100-foot roll of film is used up. I remade that film but with eating hot dogs instead of running up the hill. I do think there is some similarities: a repeated gesture, there's an element of failure or physical challenge.

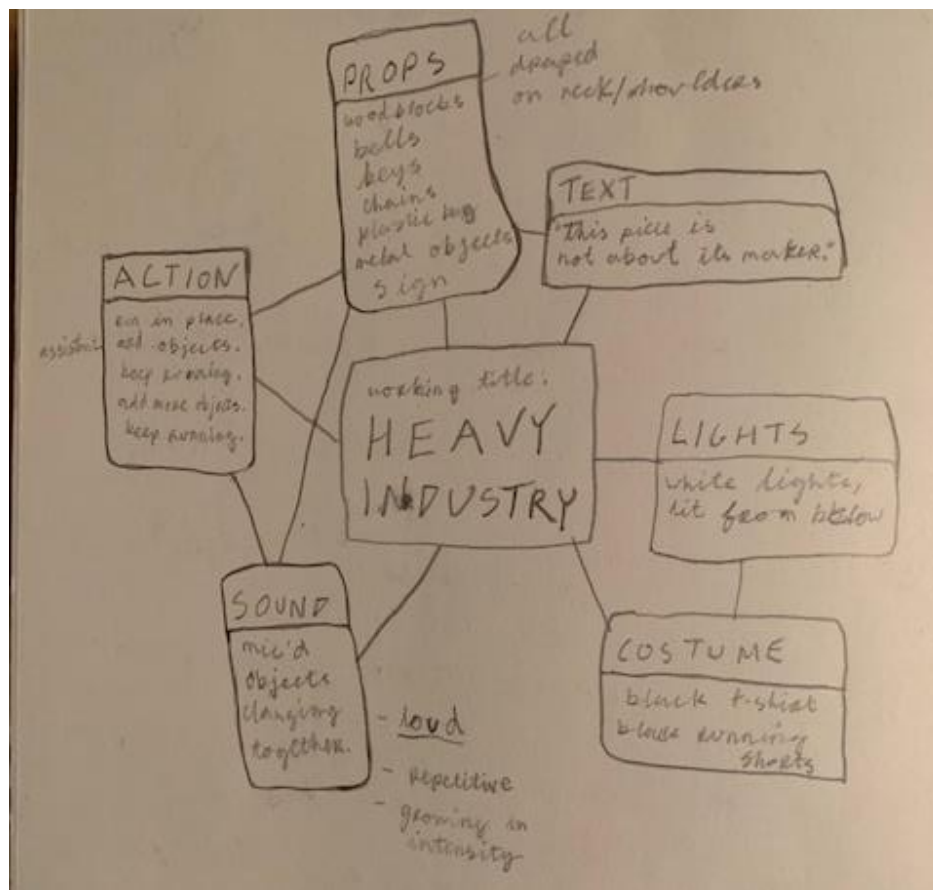
In discussing this work, Hietpas draws a connection between his practice as a filmmaker and his burgeoning work as a musician, engaging in this disposition through two different contexts.

Additionally, Hietpas extends the blown mind moment from the workshop to include two pieces of technology. The first comes from the video of Hennies: “The other thing that inspired me about her piece was that it's entirely acoustic. It's very repetitive, but all the sounds were being made at the moment. It's never exactly repeating the same sound because it is human operated.” Notably, this contrasts with Hietpas’ previous framing of technology when discussing setups by expanding from solely electronic instruments to acoustic ones. This opens up an entire new realm of instrumentation to explore. Finally, Hietpas also found inspiration in the Systematic Scoring Method, a tool I designed for scoring live noise performances (see Woods, 2016a): “I really was inspired by the Systematic Scoring Method. That was something that I found really useful as a tool for thinking about any work of art.” In this quote, Hietpas draws a

bridge between the blown mind moment and the exploration phase, nominating this tool as a means to think about (and eventually compose) new performance pieces, intrinsically engaging an exploratory process moving forward.

**Figure 3**

*Hietpas' Initial Score*



**The Final Product and Beyond.** After this experience, Hietpas begins working on his first performance almost immediately: “I literally went home after the workshop and I think it was the same night that I wrote that score.” This score (see Figure 3) is the first iteration of what becomes the final performance, collecting a number of ideas Hietpas goes on to explore. One of them was the instrumentation he eventually used:

I found a bunch of those cookie tins on the side of the road. A couple of bells were from thrift stores and then I ordered a bunch from eBay. So that was the long term lead up to the piece. These are just the objects, a lot of them, that were in my immediate environment.

As Hietpas begins to collect the array of instruments, he does so by exploring available objects in his immediate surroundings. In essence, he curates a collection of devices that together form a desired sound. This finally leads into an exploration of his performance technique:

I didn't know what order I wanted the objects to be in, exactly. I had a general sense of a progression: I wanted to start with the small bells and get towards the louder and larger objects. But then I also wanted to space things out. I didn't want all of the bells to go on next to each other. I wanted there to be some space in-between them. Once I figured that out, I just made a diagram, a little score.

Hietpas then spends time rehearsing the performance, trying out different combinations of objects until he lands on a progression of objects that becomes the finalized means through which he interacts with his instrument. Furthermore, Hietpas abandons the use of the Systematic Scoring Method in favor of his own invented score (see Figure 4). In doing so, Hietpas illustrates the exploratory nature of this work: he used one technology as he was developing ideas for the piece, tried something else in the process, and left the original technology behind after making the switch.

**Figure 4***Hietpas' Updated Score*

After exploring all five of the musical categories leading up to this performance, Hietpas finally lands on a finalized practice. Yet leading up to this final performance, Hietpas still does not know exactly what the performance will entail: “I really don't know what it's going to sound like. I have an idea, but that's what's exciting about working on this- I'm excited to hear what it's going to be.” Again, this points towards the parallel nature of finalized practices and exploration within the performance as classroom (Thomson, 2007) that defines the genre. To a certain extent,

Hietpas continues to explore both the technique and technology associated with the performance as the performance happens. When the performance does happen (see Cook, 2019), Hietpas feels proud of the final product but acknowledges the importance of the years long exploration that led up to it:

This was the first thing I really had confidence in. I thought it was something that I had never seen before. If I had started earlier, it probably wouldn't have been as good or as different or as interesting as this performance was to me. It took a while for me to process [these influences].

Reiterating the importance of this exploratory process, Hietpas had already begun to think about ways of exploring technique a few weeks after his debut performance: “I think there are ways to build off of it, having objects hanging off of me and using the motion of my body. I think there is more to explore that doesn't necessarily mean doing the same thing.” In doing so, Hietpas acknowledges the iterative nature of developing one’s artistic practice in noise. Rather than performing the same piece again, Hietpas builds on this performance by exploring similar or related techniques in the development of a future performance.

## **Discussion**

### **Experimental Music’s Informal Pedagogies**

Placing the model constructed in this chapter in conversation with extant literature, this study expands on previous research in a variety of ways. Beginning with previous studies of experimental music education, this project provides valuable insight into how experimental musicians develop their artistic practice outside of the confines of formal education structures. In doing so, the findings from this study expand on Thomson’s (2007) framing of scene as classroom by identifying specific pedagogies within the informal learning context of the noise

scene. Although multiple distinctions exist between the model of learning presented in this chapter and the traditional approach employed within most formal education environments, the self-directed nature of this process (one that occurs without the guidance of a teacher or mentor) seems especially striking. Although mentors were not completely absent from the lives of these artists, many of the participants intentionally developed their practice by exploring musical components on their own. Rammel illustrates this when he talks about how he developed his singing saw technique: “I want to learn from the saw. I want the saw to teach me things.” In other words, Rammel does not want to learn how to play music from someone. He wants to learn from something, specifically his instrument. This immediately differentiates the informal context of noise music from formal music education ecologies by abandoning the socially defined roles of student and teacher. Beverlin connects to this flattened hierarchy when he describes “that freedom to be like ‘Well, tonight a person who has played free improvisation for 50 years is going to play with someone who just started playing last week.’” And there's interesting things that can happen there.” Rather than one person teaching another, both learn by contributing to the musical performance equally and without a specific role.

In doing so, Rammel, Beverlin, and the other participants align their understanding of artistic development with Sordahl’s (2013) contention that experimental music (and, subsequently, noise) evokes the experiential pedagogies promoted by Dewey and others. And since noise and experimental music remain intrinsically reliant on learning through the process of making new compositions, instruments, and recordings (Gottschalk, 2016), it follows that noise musicians would inherently engage this experiential pedagogy outside the purview of a teacher or mentor at some point in the development of their work. The vast majority of previous research into experimental music education, a body of literature that almost exclusively explored

experimental music making practices within formal learning environments (and their subsequent relationships), therefore sits at odds with the pedagogies described by the participants in this study. Even when scholars uncovered democratic modes of learning when students and teachers engaged experimental music curricula (see Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010; Kanellopoulos, 2012), the socialized role of the student and the teacher remained. This finding invokes the notion of alchemy defined by Popkewitz (2010), seeing as the construction of a formal experimental music curriculum forces this musical tradition to adopt dominant education structures (such as defined cultural roles like student and teacher), inherently altering the ways in which experimental music communities operate.

### **Noise Pedagogies (and What They Say About Informal Education)**

Additionally, the findings in this study distinguish between the informal music processes of traditional western and noise music. Although certain subgenres within noise, such as the harsh noise wall genre described by Henry (2016), inevitably complicate this notion, the participants in this study all conceptualize learning to make noise as something other than developing the ability to recreate pre-existing musical artifacts (i.e. interpreting and performing pre-written music) or even learning how to replicate and creatively deploy the techniques of established artists, as described by Green (2002). Instead, experimental musicians develop extended techniques or “instrumentalize” found objects (see Keep, 2009) in isolation rather than learn the techniques of others by playing along with recordings (Green, 2002). Schoofs explains this distinction with the following metaphor:

There is “getting out a coloring book and coloring what is on the page.” And then there's the whole idea of coloring by just taking whatever materials are in your pocket and exploring whatever surfaces are near you and coloring the world around you. I think

those are really very different ways of interacting with materials and I'm more interested in the second way.

Using Bamberger's (1991) terminology, this description distinguishes between the socialized forms of knowledge used to construct traditional forms of western music and the genres within the experimental music umbrella. Since the knowledges that comprise noise prove inherently different than those of most other western musical forms, it follows that the processes through which people construct that knowledge would also differ.

Despite this divergence, this study still provides significant insight into informal music education research more broadly. Specifically, the importance of metaphor à la Lakoff & Johnson (2003) within the process of developing an artistic practice in noise music seamlessly expands to include traditional western music as well. Although experimental music genres often define themselves through metaphorical realignments (see Nyman, 1974), the informal pedagogies of western musical forms also utilize structuring metaphor as an educational technology. Bamberger's (2013) studies of standard musical notation exemplify this.

Metaphorically defining music through the lens of written text, a definition at the heart of standard musical notation, has "subtle implications for how we speak of musical experience, and this perhaps influences how we experience music as well" (p. 212). However, young children also develop an environmental understanding of music before encountering notated compositions (Bamberger, 1991). When individuals do finally develop an awareness and understanding of standard musical notation, and its subsequent structuring metaphor, it inherently changes their understanding of both music and their identity in relation to music and music making (are they or can they become "musicians," do they "understand music," etc.). Phrased differently, they learn music and develop their musical identity by exploring this newly discovered structuring

metaphor and their place within it. It follows that learning music is largely a process of embracing novel structuring metaphors and finding one's place within or relation to that system. A difference in metaphor therefore distinguishes the informal music pedagogies of experimental and traditional western music: while traditional western music invites participants to map their experience into a predefined "experiential gestalt" (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 81), experimental music challenges individuals to find an entirely new structuring metaphor through which they can create music.

### **Towards a Noisier Situated Learning Theory**

In considering situated learning theory as a frame for this project, the findings from this study also build on Lave & Wenger's (1991) initial formulation of communities of practice. Specifically, the findings from this study challenge the overt humanism of situated learning theory, and subsequently Thomson's (2007) concept of scene as classroom, by raising questions about what constitutes a community member and who (or what) acts as a teacher or mentor in this process. While Lave & Wenger's (1991) original model centers the pedagogies that form between old timers and newcomers, the artists in this study often challenge this by discussing educative interactions with instruments and other musical artifacts (i.e. how Rammel wanted to "learn from the saw"). In doing so, the participants expand the border of the community surrounding noise to also include non-human technologies that exist in that community. Put into conversation with informal music education research, this study then raises questions of how to define communities of practice via music scenes or traditions. Thomson's (2007) framing of scene as classroom, for example, would need to contend with far more than just the people in the scene but also the technologies, spaces, and objects that contribute to the construction of that community. The technologies of a given scene therefore act as community members themselves,

hinting towards the posthuman framing of noise music I have previously asserted (Woods, in press). Broadening the scope of this critique, the findings from this study hold implications for all informal education research that utilizes situated learning theory. The findings challenge researchers to identify the technological members of a given community of practice and grapple with how those technologies contribute to both community and knowledge construction.

Similarly, findings from this study also complicate theories of legitimate peripheral participation by blurring the border of the noise scene. For example, Schauwitzer conceptualizes his practice as a noise musician years before being aware of noise music as a genre: “We started messing around in the basement probably around ‘95, ‘94 maybe. It probably wasn't until ‘96, ‘97 until I realized there were other people doing it.” This mirrors a number of other participants who described their engagement with the exploration phase before they “knew noise was a thing.” In doing so, Schauwitzer and the others provide a porous understanding of the noise scene, one in which people develop the practices of making this music (which, in turn, contributes to the community) before engaging in legitimate peripheral participation or becoming a community member at all.

In part, this complication emerges precisely because of the open ended and polysemic definition of noise forwarded by scholars such as Novak (2013) and Atton (2011). If people constantly engage noise from a multitude of musical traditions while members of the noise scene constantly redefine what counts as noise, it follows that understanding noise through the lens of communities of practice would prove just as complicated. Future research into experimental music pedagogies should explore and further define this framing while informal education research more broadly must contend with the implications of this finding, especially when the community serving as a site of a research does not rely on formal membership processes or

rituals. To phrase this challenge in the form of a question: when does someone become a member of a (loosely defined) community? And when will their actions become a part of (and help construct) that community? Rather than answer this question, this study productively muddies the water and provide scholars a means to reimagining the borders of communities of practice.

### **Conclusion**

Although this study intentionally focuses on the process of developing one's artistic practice in the context of noise music (a tradition that fits under the broader umbrella of experimental music), I contend that the process model of artistic practice constructed through this analysis holds resonance beyond the narrow confines of the genre. Replacing "scene" with "community" and "music" with "cultural artifacts," this model could potentially describe not only the learning practices of informal arts communities but any sort of socialized tradition in which people learn informally through creative production. This model becomes especially valuable when exploring those cultural spaces that do not rely on (or, as is often the case with noise music, actively reject) formal education processes because it allows space for individuals to learn through alternate pedagogical models. Hopefully, future research will not only utilize this model to understand informal and situated learning practices but modify, expand, and iterate on the model itself as well. While I strongly believe that noise music provides a rich and nuanced site of research for education scholars to explore (an assertion exemplified by the findings in this chapter), any number of other informal contexts with their own unique ways of knowing could potentially build on this model or produce their own model for developing creative practices and constructing knowledge. In doing so, researchers will better understand how people learn in all

contexts or, at the very least, better understand how differences in context influence teaching and learning practices across communities.

## Addendum 2: Blown Mind Moments and Exploration with Crank Sturgeon

### **Introduction**

As noted in the previous chapter, the process model of artistic practice within noise developed through my analysis largely focused on what Thomson (2007) defines as scene as classroom. This concept positions geographically defined music scenes (albeit scenes that intersect with other, internationally dispersed communities) as a space for learning in which community members teach and learn from each other through informal and social interactions. By focusing on scene as classroom, I largely ignore the other half of Thomson's (2007) pedagogical framing of free improvisation communities: performance as classroom. Here, Thomson (2007) uncovers how musicians (with a focus on those who engage free improvisation) learn in the moment of performance, developing new ways of making sound and interacting as social actors. Taking this oversight into consideration, I use this addendum to consider the ways in which the process model from the previous chapter intersects with the performance as classroom. While I have already asserted that performance as classroom allows for the parallel invocation of both the exploration phase and a finalized practice, I will extend this argument to consider how noise music and free improvisation practices also create space for blown mind moments to occur within the moment of performance. This formulation then allows for the full cycle within the process model of artistic practice to exist within a given performance. Moreover, I also argue that experimental music traditions create space for listeners to engage in this work by challenging the distinction between performer and audience member, expanding the border of who learns/constructs knowledge beyond the theoretical boundary of the stage.

Although attempting to map the process model onto all performances within the noise genre remains far outside the scope of this addendum, I use this brief text to explore one

example: a video of longstanding US noise artist Crank Sturgeon performing at the Sorority House venue in Portland, OR (Bellerue, 2007). I have chosen this video for two key reasons. First, with over 150 albums and nearly 30 years of experience (Bruyninckx, 2017), Crank Sturgeon has performed throughout almost the entire history of noise music in the US. In doing so, Crank Sturgeon has become a highly influential member of the US noise scene. Second, the approach taken by Crank Sturgeon combines “improvisation with drawing, assemblage, and electronic media” (Space, 2012), positioning his work within the intersection of free improvisation and more composed approaches to noise music. Crank Sturgeon therefore provides an example that moves beyond Thomson’s (2007) framing of performance as classroom as a product of free improvisation exclusively to include composed works

### **Noise, Free Improvisation, and Creative Production Within the Performance as Classroom**

Before analyzing the video of Crank Sturgeon, however, it helps to ground the performance as classroom concept within a broader theoretical context. To start with Thomson’s (2007) initial formulation, performance as classroom within free improvisation provides a space for musicians to not only develop musical techniques but develop socio-cultural skills and interpersonal relationships as well. In his words, “improvisers emerge, not ‘out of nowhere,’ but from the social, pedagogical framework of improvisation itself.... [as] ‘musical’ methods give way to ‘social’ ones in a piecemeal pedagogical moment” (Thomson, 2007, p. 7). Thomson (2007) also asserts that the spontaneous nature of free improvisation requires a non-hierarchical and communal approach to pedagogy during which “musical authority circulates” (p. 4). Instead of one person acting as teacher or leading the group, performers follow and lead each other at various moments throughout the performance. Since performers construct these roles in the moment without verbal communication, the construction of musical knowledge inherently

emerges from a communal process of meaning (and music) making with individual developments of personal technique following suit.

Through this formation, Thomson specifically defines the enactment of performance as classroom as a communal endeavor, one in which people learn by interacting with other people. In doing so, he reinforces the widely accepted assumption that free improvisation inherently emerges from an ensemble of performers rather than a single individual (or, at the very least, is best undertaken as a group). Fischlin, Heble, & Lipsitz (2013) reinforce this notion by defining free improvisation as a spontaneous form of cocreation in which artists construct musical forms or languages through the act of performing. Although the boundary of who contributes to this collective process of creation can extend outwards to include the audience, à la Attali (1985), Fischlin, Heble, & Lipsitz (2013) almost exclusively discuss free improvisation as a collective activity distributed across performers. This becomes especially clear when the authors discuss the “the ethics of collective free improvisation” (Fischlin, Heble, & Lipsitz, 2013, p. 19), reframing free improvisation as an enacted form of human rights precisely because of the negotiation that happens between musicians onstage. Bailey (2004) extends this argument by critiquing free improvisation within solo settings, claiming that solo improvisations lose a certain amount of unpredictability as musicians rely on pre-determined vocabularies while jettisoning exploration or discovery. In turn, this furthers the assertion that performance as classroom exists as a communal space, one in which the classroom must form around a group of performers and not a soloist.

This distinction between the pedagogical possibilities of collective and solo improvisation becomes vitally important within the context of noise music for a very simple reason: a lot of noise artists perform solo. If Thomson and the other theorists’ assertion that the

performance as classroom relies on collective forms of improvisation, than a good portion of noise performances would not count as pedagogical experiences. However, I contend that formations that assert the importance of communal free improvisation rely on a limited and overly humanist view of creativity. Although the link may not be intentional, the emphasis on the collaborative nature of free improvisation aligns itself with the related notion of distributed creativity developed by Sawyer & DeZutter (2009). Under this notion, the locus of creativity rests not in the individual but in the interactions, responses, and relationships between them. However, a broadened definition of distributed creativity proposed by Glăveanu (2014) addresses this challenge. Instead of distributing creativity between individuals, this expanded definition distributes creativity between artists, audiences, and artifacts/technologies (i.e. instruments) and across a temporal dimension as musicians slowly develop their craft over time. This allows space for collaboration to occur despite the individualistic nature of noise music specifically because it challenges the humanist assumptions at the heart of the original definition.

Moreover, the accusation made by Bailey (2004) that solo improvisations lack the spontaneity of group improvisations relies on a specific understanding of the relationship between a performer and an instrument as well. Within traditional western approaches to performance, musicians develop techniques in which they enact full control over an instrument by reproducing predicted sounds during the performance. In other words, a skilled musician knows what sounds an instrument can make and how to make them (while avoiding unwanted sounds in the process). During the performance, the skilled musician makes the instrument produce the sounds they want. While Keep (2009) expands on this concept within the context of experimental music, shifting towards a model of “instrumentalizing” in which a musician’s perspective of their instrument transforms into “an act that explores an object for its inherent

sonic qualities” (p. 113), he still relies on notions of skill defined by control. Although indeterminacy does exist within this new model, a musician’s skill rests in their ability to shift from indeterminant sounds back to controlled techniques and vice versa. Noise music, however, produces a different type of relationship. According to Novak (2013), “noisicians [aka noise musicians] deliberately attempt to keep themselves from naturalizing... instrumental self-expression. To perform their own loss of control as authoritative human subjects, they cannot fully learn the system” (p. 159) of electronic devices that form their instrumentation. In doing so, noise musicians produce a different relationship to their instruments, one in which the actual gear they use provides a constantly evolving and spontaneous set of sounds and gestures against which the human performer has to respond. This relationship aligns with Glăveanu’s (2014) notion that distributed creativity can emerge through the interaction between artist and artifact and challenges Bailey’s (2004) assertion that solo free improvisation loses the spontaneity of ensemble performances. While traditional approaches to instrument technique may limit the spontaneity of some improvisations, a non-anthropocentric framing of music making reintroduces unexpected sonic prompts.

Building on this distributed understanding of music making, noise musicians often extend the notions of authorship beyond that of the performer to include the audience and the larger social context as well. Again turning to Novak’s (2013) ethnographic study of the Japanese harsh noise scene, the author asserts that noise music “can be deeply evocative of personal emotion, but noise is not ‘my sound,’ or even ‘this sound I make,’ but ‘a noise that surrounds me and becomes my world’” (p. 159-160). Without sole authorship existing within the performer, the audience suddenly holds as much agency in interpreting the noises being made as the person on stage. This aligns noise music, at least on a theoretical level, with Glăveanu’s (2014) assertion

that distributed creativity can also emerge through the interaction between audience and artist. At a more practical level, noise music evokes the longstanding tradition within experimental music of challenging the hierarchical divide between performer and audience (Small, 1998). As Nyman (1974) notes, mid-century experimental composers often utilized indeterminacy as a means towards including audience members in the performance. They did so by allowing those in attendance to contribute sonically to the performance through audience participation (in the form of audience members making sound in some way) and reimagining performance structures that removed the agency of the audience (such as dispersing musicians throughout a physical environment and inviting audiences to move freely around the space). In doing so, experimental music not only allows audiences to contribute to a collective performance but also gives creative agency to audiences as they craft their own individualized listening experience.

All told, this collection of texts expands on Thomson's (2007) original formulation of performance as classroom in two directions. First, the classroom no longer solely consists of an ensemble of performers but can include the solo performer as well (especially when they perform with unpredictable instruments). Second, audience members can join the classroom through the cultural practices of experimental and noise music. To further explore both extensions, I now turn to the work of US noise artist Crank Sturgeon as one example of how noise conceives of performance as classroom in situ.

### **The Pedagogy of Crank Sturgeon**

Performing since 1992, Crank Sturgeon has become one of the most influential and prolific noise artists within the US noise scene (Bruyninckx, 2017; DeRaadt, 2015). Through this nearly 30-year run, Crank Sturgeon has developed into a highly unique project by

incorporating elements of improvisational comedy, homemade electronics, and jarring junk noise. Positioned in a unique space within the American underground, his artistic practice encompasses elements of Dadaist sound poetry, Viennese Actionist confrontation of art/non-art boundaries, and good old-fashioned screaming noise dysfunction. (DeRaadt, 2015).

In doing so, Crank Sturgeon has developed a practice that sits at the intersection of free improvisation and composition (or, at the very least, pre-determined musical gesture). As Crank Sturgeon explains, “when I’m doing a live show it’s kind of operating on trusted elements. The big unknown is what’s going to happen in the show and how it responds to the audience or whatever circumstances are at the venue” (as cited in DeRaadt, 2015). Combined with the fact that “all of [Crank Sturgeon’s] work tends to combine improvisation with drawing, assemblage, and electronic media” (Space, 2012), Crank Sturgeon as an ongoing performance project emerge within a matrix of improvised gestures, predetermined performative elements, agentic technologies (in the form of instruments, costumes, etc.), and influential spaces and audiences. Although Crank Sturgeon exists as a solo project, the artist still engages creative collaboration across all of the elements described by Glăveanu (2014) and produces a unique enactment of performance as classroom through noise music.

### **Crank Sturgeon as Learner and Performer**

To further explore the specifics of the pedagogical space produced by Crank Sturgeon, I focus here on one performance in particular: the 2007 set at the Sorority House venue in Portland, OR (Bellerue, 2007). This video provides a great example to analyze because the artist includes multiple standard performance techniques (for Crank Sturgeon, anyways) within the set. The performance starts with a brief moment of absurdist spoken word/sound poetry, as Crank

Sturgeon repeats the phrase “get your fish eyeballs here” multiple times before quickly transitioning into a wall of distorted static and head banging violently enough to throw his fish mask off of his head. In doing so, Crank Sturgeon reveals his main instrument for the performance: a plastic helmet with two amplified tuna cans attached, one in the liner of the helmet and the other dangling off the top by a spring. Crank Sturgeon then plays the instrument by spinning the can around his head and distorting the electrical signal generated by an attached contact microphone with various broken EQ pedals. Although quieter passages emerge when Crank Sturgeon turns off the effects pedals, allowing the listener to hear the non-stop vocal tirades over the noise, the performance mostly continues at full volume as the artist switches between a few different auxiliary instruments (a guitar, various metal objects with contact microphones attached, an unplugged guitar cable, and what looks like a circuit bent effects pedal).

Thinking about how this performance might provide space for an educational praxis à la performance as classroom, the insistence by Crank Sturgeon that he primarily relies on trusted or known elements during live shows restricts the pedagogical possibilities of his performances: if he already knows what he will do and how his instrumentation will respond, he does not leave a lot of space to explore unknown ideas or respond to new sounds. However, about one minute and forty seconds into the video, the sound from Crank Sturgeon’s equipment suddenly cuts and he audibly shouts “what the fuck” multiple times. This sudden dynamic shift and surprisingly lucid commentary leads to what I consider a fairly safe assumption: a piece of equipment suddenly and unexpectedly broke. Although this may have merely been a performative gesture, pretending something went wrong for comic effect, Crank Sturgeon often finds himself running into these accidents: “My shit is so riddled with accidents that perhaps what you might interpret as tension

is actually me improvising my way out of something that isn't working!" (as cited in Bruyninckx, 2017)

Considered through a pedagogical frame, this moment aligns itself with the process model of artistic practice quite well. First, Crank Sturgeon experiences a (admittedly mild) blown mind moment where his gear suddenly operates in a different way. This alters his understanding of not only his equipment but the structure of the current performance. Second, he takes this opportunity to immediately shift into an exploratory process, using the broken gear (and his attempts to fix it) as a new means towards making music. Structurally, this shift produces a quieter passage, filled with buzzes and synth-like squeals intermingled with sound poetry before returning to full volume. Although the knowledge of how to work with his malfunctioning gear may only prove helpful as a temporary measure, this moment of problem solving still produces new musical knowledge in that moment through a highly truncated version of the process model.

### **Engaging the Audience as Learner and Performer**

Within the video, one other clear moment of educational praxis exists and expands on the previous example by inviting the audience into the performance as classroom. Around the seven-minute mark, the performance takes a dramatic shift away from electronic instrumentation as Crank Sturgeon introduces a new instrument: a roll of plastic wrap. The performer instructs the audience to, first, grab on as he unravels a continuous piece of plastic for everyone in attendance to use and, second, blow on it in a specific way to make a high-pitched squeaking sound. For those audience members who cannot reach the plastic wrap, Crank Sturgeon instructs them to "ohm" or hum within his familiar improvised sound poetry. As he unravels the roll of plastic, the audience immediately begins to make sounds (both vocally and with the new instrument). Crank

Sturgeon wrangles them back in swiftly, inviting them to join in on a call-and-response section. Although the audience tries to follow along, the structure falls apart rather quickly and Crank Sturgeon starts laughing. He quickly regains his composure, looks at one audience member in particular and says, “that’s pretty good.” He then brings a contact mic over to the audience member and amplifies his portion of the plastic wrap before moving on to another audience member. The video cuts off at this point, despite the performance continuing beyond what the viewer sees in the video.

In this moment, the performance as classroom expands to include not only Crank Sturgeon but the audience as well. The performance does so by once again reinscribing the process model within the performative moment. This expansion begins with the initial blown mind moment as the audience sees the plastic wrap. Although some people in attendance may have seen plastic wrap being used as an instrument before, I believe it is safe to assume that some have never considered the sonic affordances of this specific material. Moreover, the audience also must suddenly navigate a shift in identity away from a passive audience member to a more active performer (possibly landing somewhere between these two poles). The audience then immediately builds on this moment by exploring the possibilities of their new instrument, their own voice, and their position as a performer. Returning to Crank Sturgeon’s perspective, a separate pedagogical praxis emerges for him in this process. For him, the blown mind moment comes from the technique used by an audience member, as illustrated by his use of the phrase “that’s pretty good” after hearing a particular sound coming from the plastic wrap. Crank Sturgeon seems familiar with this material (considering that he instructs the audience on how to use it), but for whatever reason this audience member sonically stands out to him. Crank Sturgeon then takes this opportunity to explore this audience member’s approach, combining the

technologies of the contact mic with the plastic wrap and creating a new, electronic sound. As he moves on to the next performer, Crank Sturgeon solidifies this collaborative approach and commits to embracing the amplified plastic sheet as an extended part of his performance. In doing so, he touches on all three phases of the process model within a few short seconds.

### **Conclusion**

By examining the process model of artistic practice presented in the last chapter through the lens of performance as classroom, this analysis not only builds on the communal framing of free improvisation from extant literature but also reimagines the temporal assumptions within my model. Although the two-dimensional nature of the original figure reinforces a progression (albeit an iterative one) from one moment to another across time, the performance as classroom collapses these moments within a finalized practice. Turning back to the example explored in this addendum, Crank Sturgeon facilitates a process of both identity and musical development for the audience within the moment of performance while simultaneously creating space for his own development as a performer. This produces a highly complicated and entangled pedagogical practice that remains both fully contained within the performance in one sense and far more expansive in another. On one hand, the identity of the audience as participant ends as soon as the set does. On the other, Crank Sturgeon and the audience can easily replicate the new techniques developed in the performance at a later time. The cultural specificity of knowledge within noise music therefore remains situated not only within the context of this musical tradition but within a specific performance context as well. In turn, future research into experimental music pedagogies (and music education more broadly) should consider how these shifting contexts not only reimagine pedagogical practices but musical knowledge itself.

## Chapter 4: The Pedagogy of Gear Touchers: Unearthing Modes of Teaching Within and Through DIY Venues

### **Introduction**

In describing Old Mount Happy, a music venue specializing in punk music located in a basement on Chicago's lower west side, Makagon (2015) depicts a space that some might describe as the polar opposite of a conducive learning environment (much less a functional venue):

This basement is a bit of a mess. There is a steady flow of dust coming from somewhere (enough that when I get home and hop into the shower, black snot flows from my nose). Metal pipes are strewn about on the floor along the western wall... Then the lights go out. The basement is pitch black. Someone screeches. The lights come back on. A guy is messing with the power box, which is partially dislodged from the eastern wall... [A band named] The Stasi aren't getting any sound from their instruments or the PA, and the lights at that end of the basement are not working... The Chicago punks who should know how to solve this problem seem more interested in smoking cigarettes, choking on weed, and running their beer table. (p. 129-130)

Although this example paints a rather extreme and chaotic picture of do-it-yourself (DIY) music venues, the description provided by Makagon does not exist far outside of the norm. Punk scenes (and other associated DIY scenes) have often emerged out of ephemeral and non-traditional music venues including houses, operating businesses after they have closed for the evening, abandoned buildings, VFW halls, and more (Blush, 2010; Verbuc, 2014). The fleeting and precarious nature of these spaces results in a rotating door approach to DIY venues, promoters, and organizers, with new groups of participants repeating the same mistakes over and over again

that lead to the disorganized scene described above (Makagon, 2015). In other words: new punks do not learn from the experiences of veterans because DIY venues generally make for bad classrooms.

Yet despite this assertion, Tucker (2013) contends that DIY venues “facilitate what Foucault calls popular knowledges, those particular, local, disqualified knowledges (whether progressive or reactionary) that may stand in opposition to dominant generalizable discourses and claims on universal truths” (p. 211). In this quote, Tucker contends that a link between the knowledges embedded within DIY scenes and the spaces that house these communities exists. To this end, a “punk pedagogy,” a term first coined by Miklitsch (1994), must exist within these venues despite their supposed disfunction. However, researchers have given little attention to the role of material space within these pedagogies, focusing instead on the translation of punk ideologies into formal classrooms (Torrez, 2013) or the transfer of knowledge between individuals within the music scene via interpersonal relationships or the circulation of musical artifacts (Dines, 2015). However, as Gruenewald (2003) notes, the pedagogy embedded within any community emerges in conversation with the material space that surround that community. Extending this argument towards critical education practices (a stance that seamlessly aligns with the countercultural ideologies of most DIY music scenes), McLaren & Giroux (1990) assert that “at the most general level... a critical pedagogy must be a pedagogy of place” (p. 163). To this end, it becomes imperative for researchers investigating punk pedagogies to also examine the pedagogies of “punk places” such as DIY music venues, unearthing the practices of learning facilitated by the material spaces of interaction that engender DIY as a cultural movement.

In response to this oversight, I use this chapter to address the following research questions: how do DIY music venues shape the informal pedagogical practices of DIY music

scenes? And in what ways do those pedagogies align with the ideological and ethical aims of DIY cultures? By focusing on DIY venues broadly (as opposed to punk venues), I expand the borders of this project to consider multiple forms of DIY production outside of the context of punk music and subsequently provide insight into the mechanisms through which multiple individuals and communities learn. I also explore how the spaces surrounding DIY practices influence, shape, and enact those pedagogies. To approach these research questions, I begin by presenting an overview of DIY cultural production literature with a dual emphasis on educational research into DIY music and the maker movement. I include the maker movement within this literature review because of this community's commitment to DIY modes of production and its strong presence within recent education literature (see Halverson & Pepler, 2018), creating a bridge towards deeper investigations of punk pedagogies and DIY venues as informal education spaces. I then turn towards new empirical research into two concert series housed within DIY music venues. By analyzing findings that emerge from this case study, I propose a unique set of informal pedagogical practices enacted by DIY venues themselves. In identifying and analyzing the pedagogies of DIY venues, I also problematize these practices and illustrate how uncritical pedagogies within DIY cultures lead to the reinscription of dominant and oppressive forces (focusing specifically on issues of gender) within these spaces. In doing so, I contribute to the ongoing project of defining and analyzing modes of teaching and learning within DIY cultures, musical or otherwise.

### **Theoretical Context**

Although Wehr (2013) defines DIY simply as “when ordinary people build or repair the things in their daily lives without the aid of experts” (p. 1), the vast array of approaches to DIY production that exist across cultural contexts produce multiple competing understandings of and

ideologies within the umbrella of DIY. Wehr (2013) expands on this notion, claiming that “people engage in DIY behaviors on a continuum from the personal to political, individualist to collectivist, religious to secular” (p. 40). To this end, I use this section to consider two interrelated understandings of DIY that emerge from distinct cultural traditions: DIY music and the maker movement. By comparing these two communities, I propose a broader theory of learning through DIY modes of production outside of a single cultural tradition and further consider the role of space within these informal learning ecologies.

I have chosen to frame this study by bridging these two cultural contexts for two reasons. First, since both of these cultural spaces emerge from a dedication to DIY production (see Blush, 2010; Hatch, 2013), I contend that significant pedagogical overlap exists between these two communities. The usual practices of making and sharing music (via recordings and live performances) within DIY scenes aligns this music community with the maker movement’s use of Papert’s (1980) theory of constructionism as a guide (see Halverson & Sheridan 2014; Martinez & Stager, 2013), positioning maker education scholarship as a tool for contextualizing and further investigating the learning practices of DIY music. The reverse also holds true, with DIY literature providing critical insight into maker education initiatives as well. As Hollett & Vivoni (2020) argue, DIY cultures outside of traditional maker discourses provide a means towards reframing making as a sociopolitical practice that counters neoliberal and technocentric conceptions of this practice (see Vossoughi et al., 2016; Vossoughi & Vakil, 2018). Research into maker education and DIY music pedagogies can therefore support, expand on, and challenge each other. This chapter provides an initial step into this broader project.

### **Towards an Ideological Conception of DIY Through Punk and Beyond**

Although multiple artistic communities based in DIY practices have populated the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond, ranging from science fiction “fan mags” to early recordings from skiffle musicians and beatniks (Oakes, 2009; Spencer, 2005; Triggs, 2006), the emergence of punk music in the late 1960s and early 1970s brought about a distinct take on the DIY ethos that infused this form of cultural production with a political or ideological take on the practice. (Blush, 2010; Spencer, 2005; Triggs, 2006; Verbuc, 2014). Beyond creating an international and decentralized cultural ecology within which musicians could release their own music, run their own venues, and book their own tours, musicians within punk-oriented DIY music scenes conceptualize DIY practices as a means for enacting a personal politics in response to larger, oppressive social forces (Blush, 2010; Reynolds, 2005). Perry (2011) succinctly defines this ideological take on DIY as an “insistence that participants become active, in whatever way possible, in challenging dominant social structures and enacting positive change in their local communities” (p. 77-78). In turn, these assertions produce not only a DIY ethos but a DIY ethics, one that asserts “the principal foundations of building community and acting with agency, along with the less defined consideration of personalizing politics” (Woods, 2017, p. 66). Although this embrace of a DIY ethos proves far from universal (see Bestley, 2018; Gordon, 2014; O’Connor, 2008), the ethics of DIY still frame musical traditions as cultural spaces where music plays a role but only as a means towards an egalitarian social politics (Makagon, 2015).

Tracing contemporary DIY music culture outside of its punk origins, the evolution of DIY music scenes after the first wave of punk (and especially during the 1990s) expanded far beyond the narrow confines of a single genre to include a wide array of musical traditions and cultural production (Makagon, 2015; Verbuc, 2014). Oakes (2009) describes this process within the emergence of Olympia, WA’s highly influential indie rock scene: “punk’s anger and

frustration...was being supplanted by sounds and lyrics that were low-fi, apolitical, and lackadaisical. Punk still existed, but it spun off into its own scene, with its own sounds and rules” (p. 138). This quote points to the evolving nature of DIY music beyond punk, as interrelated but distinct scenes formed or grew alongside each other. But this interrelation between DIY music scenes has existed to some extent throughout the history of punk. The emergence of industrial music in the 1970s and the noise/power electronics genre in the 1980s in England, for example, occurred within the same venues and used the same cassette tape trading channels as early punk and post-punk musicians (Bailey, 2009; Taylor, P., 2016). Although these early experimental-oriented musicians may not have embraced the ideology behind a DIY ethos in the same way, future generations of DIY experimental and noise musicians have embodied this ethos (Novak, 2013; Perry, 2011). While punk may have foregrounded its identity as a DIY music culture more visibly than other genres, DIY has never been just a punk space.

Returning to the notion of a DIY ethics, critical examinations of DIY music communities reveal that the egalitarian aims of DIY scenes do not always materialize. In particular, DIY scenes have historically been homogenous communities consisting mostly of white men that exclude people of marginalized gender identities and people of color (Eversley, 2014; Dietrich, 2016; Griffin, 2012; Haenfler, 2006; Moore, 2004). While this homogenization of DIY culture has existed throughout punk’s history (O’Connor, 2008), the practices of DIY scenes continually reproduce this cultural exclusivity despite outward commitments to an egalitarian cultural politics (Woods, 2017). As Dale (2008) contends,

anyone can do it, they said; but in practice, indie/punk/DIY cultures have been uniformly hermetic, sealed cultures because, at a guess, not everyone wants to do it. Anyone

became ‘us’, in other words, hence the common complaint that indie scenes are elitist. (p. 176)

Focusing on issues of gender disparity, this unintentional reinscription of patriarchal norms leads to a gendered difference in participation with men often taking on the role of cultural producer or gate keeper (musician, venue organizer, label head, etc.) and women only existing as audience members who even become spatially marginalized at the edge of the crowd (O’Hara, 1999). In response, women throughout DIY’s history have challenged this marginalization by visibly and audibly staking a claim to their place within these scenes (Oakes, 2009). Yet despite high-profile movements to amplify women’s voices within DIY (e.g. Riot Grrrl) and a growing sense of diversity in recent years (Makagon, 2015), the scene has historically remained a boy’s club.

**Reframing DIY Music as Learning Ecology.** By reframing the cultural production at the heart of DIY music through a pedagogical lens, scholars can approach the development and maintenance of DIY scenes as a product of education (Perry, 2011). Yet despite the assertion that DIY music scenes exist as rich pedagogical spaces, the vast majority of research into “punk pedagogies” has largely focused on the ways that punk ideologies transfer into more formal learning environments and higher education in particular (see Miklitsch, 1994; Khan-Egan, 1998; Sirc, 1997; Torrez, 2012). For those studies that do investigate how DIY community members teach and learn within the informal spaces of music scenes and venues, the focus has largely split between how musicians learn to play music and the development of DIY and punk-oriented ideologies.

In terms of how DIY musicians learn to play music, Green (2002) contends that popular musicians (including those playing punk and other forms of DIY oriented indie rock) develop their technique through a combination of formal lessons, mentoring from peers, copying other

musicians (either via recordings or live performances), and by constantly discussing music and generally interacting with other community members at shows, band practices, and other social events. These findings foreground the interpersonal interactions that happen within DIY music communities (Tucker, 2012; Verbuc, 2014), highlighting how a transfer and development of knowledge largely occurs through social interaction. My own research into the teaching practices of DIY experimental musicians builds on this assertion by distributing the act of teaching across a number of human and non-human actors (including instruments, musical artifacts, and performances) (Woods, P., 2019b). Perry (2011) extends this line of thought by drawing out the ways that experimental musicians in the Boone, NC DIY scene combined a practice of intensive listening and looking alongside a process of navigating their own Appalachian identities to develop unique forms of musical expression. DIY musicians therefore learn by engaging in all aspects of the scene (and even some aspects of culture outside of their musical world) beyond direct forms of mentorship, which proves especially vital considering DIY music's tenuous relationship with the mentoring process (Makagon, 2015).

Beyond developing musical ability, education research into DIY scenes has also uncovered the ways in which individuals and communities develop ideological stances associated with DIY. As Dines' (2015) notes, "punk itself can function as a space where individuals can experiment, create and interrogate" (p. 24) ideologies with community members, developing a worldview through the engagement of the artifacts and spaces produced within DIY cultural production. Niknafs (2018) and Tucker (2012) also contend that the construction of these ideologies emerges through the production of DIY scenes themselves. In taking a stance of resistance against both mainstream cultural production practices and broader political ideologies, DIY communities create "heterotopias of resistance that function as sites of subject-constituting

knowledges and practices; not as firm structures outside dominant power, but as ad hoc shelters in which members of a subculture can experience some semblance of freedom” (Tucker, 2012, p. 210). Similar to the decentralized nature of DIY music, Haworth (2010) also contends that practices of knowledge sharing and construction do not necessarily remain anchored to a specific physical space. Instead, the same channels of distribution used to share music (i.e. touring and the somewhat recent development of social media and online forums) have been used to share ideological theory and methods of cultural production internationally. This positions the DIY scene as a rich space to develop the ideological framework (both as an individual and as a community) that DIY holds at its foundation.

Despite the value of these findings, a question of pedagogy remains. While Green (2002) provides one set of insights into the development of musical technique and knowledge, her findings remain linked to a set of musical traditions that do not represent the entirety of DIY musical production. Noise music, for example, challenges the western musical canon on which Green (2002) relies by framing music outside of structuring elements such as rhythm or melody and discursively positioning this form of music as the disruptive, extreme edge of sonic expression (Atton, 2011). Novak (2013) in particular challenges the importance of copying other musicians when learning technique (a key component of Green’s model) in his ethnographic study of the Japanese noise scene, claiming that musicians actively reject any attempts at replicating other musicians (even to the point of refusing to recreate the instrumentation others have used). Additionally, the framing of DIY scenes as a space to develop ideologies associated with punk and DIY music more broadly only locates the cultural spaces in which people develop those ideologies and does not contend with the mechanisms through which those ideologies

form. By turning towards new empirical research, I use this chapter as one way of approaching this oversight.

### **Investigating the Intersection of DIY Music and the Maker Movement**

Outside of the DIY music scene, an array of creative communities has developed and embraced their own distinct conceptualizations of DIY cultural production (Wehr, 2013).

Although distinctions between how these different communities conceive of DIY processes and ideologies may lead to unique pedagogical formations, education research that investigates what individuals learn through DIY production can greatly benefit from drawing connections between these spaces. For example, Hollett & Vivoni (2020) argue that the DIY practices within skateboarding culture provide a means towards critically refuting neoliberal formations of STEM narratives within the maker movement while maker education research simultaneously provides insight into what and how skaters learn while building unauthorized skate parks. Building on Hollett & Vivoni's (2020) work, I end this section by drawing comparisons between DIY music scenes and the maker movement. In doing so, I propose a reciprocal relationship between punk pedagogies and maker education, one in which DIY music scholarship can both draw insight from and provide insight into maker education research.

**A Brief History of the Maker Movement.** Broadly speaking, the maker movement refers to “the growing number of people who are engaged in the creative production of artifacts in their daily lives and who find physical and digital forums to share their processes and products with others” (Halverson & Sheridan, 2014, p. 496). While makers, educators, and scholars have taken efforts to broaden the scope of making, the movement has often reproduced a technocentric focus on using high end and cutting edge technologies to make new artifacts that mirrors its geographic and historical roots in Silicon Valley tech culture (Anderson, 2012; Hatch,

2013). Makerspaces, the physical homes of the maker movement and the localized communities that emerge within this cultural space (Halverson & Sheridan, 2014), often reinforce this conception of making by providing a wide range of technological tools (such as 3D printers and laser cutters) for members to use (Anderson, 2012; Hatch, 2013). In doing so, makerspaces provide access to costly production tools that would otherwise remain completely out of reach for most people while simultaneously providing a space for communities of interested makers to bond and work together (Hatch, 2013). In the wake of the maker movement's growing popularity, researchers have explored the educational affordances of DIY production via the maker movement with a particular focus on STEM education initiatives (see Barton et al, 2016; Martin, 2015; Taylor, B., 2016), leading to an entire subfield of maker education initiatives and research.

Even within this brief overview of the maker movement, a number of overlapping themes within DIY music begin to emerge. A commitment to a DIY ethos, a centering of agentic forms of creative and cultural production, and a deep commitment to community serve as foundational guidelines within both spaces. It therefore follows that a certain alignment between the pedagogical practices of these two communities would emerge as well. The community oriented, hands on approach to learning popular music described by Green (2002), one in which budding musicians learn how to play in rock and punk bands by learning directly from other musicians in their local scene and begin forming bands before truly mastering their instrument, strongly aligns with the maker movement's commitment to constructionist (Papert, 1980) models of education (see Halverson & Sheridan, 2014; Martinez & Stager, 2013). Participants learn by doing within both contexts, a byproduct of cultural production that only occurs because of DIY music and the maker movement's shared commitment to a DIY ethos. Punk pedagogy research can therefore

draw on maker education literature (and vice versa) to both contextualize and deeply explore how individuals learn within DIY scenes and makerspaces.

**Foregrounding the Role of Space in DIY Education.** To provide one example of how the parallels between DIY music and the maker movement can inform education theorizations across both subcultures, I propose the importance of physical space in the pedagogical formation of both communities as a fruitful site of exploration. This proves vital because, as Grunewald (2003) argues, understanding pedagogies of place is “needed so that the education of citizens might have some direct bearing on the wellbeing of the social and ecological places people actually inhabit” (p. 3). In other words, the wellbeing of communities such as DIY music scenes and makerspaces rests on understanding of how space enacts forms of learning. The broader cultural importance of material space within the maker movement and DIY music also underscores the potential influence pedagogies of space have on both movements. Makagon (2015) summarizes this notion succinctly when he says, “Space Matters. Construction choices influence social uses, which combine to affect social relationships among... punks who attend shows... and bands that play in” these venues (p. 117). Alternately, makerspaces also foster community building by encouraging new forms of collaboration through accessible design and a communal approach to tools and technology (Halverson et al., 2018; Hatch, 2013; Sheridan et al., 2014). The recent interest in new materialist approaches to maker education research also points to the importance of physical space within maker pedagogies (see Keune & Peppler, 2019; Sheridan et al., 2020; Wohlwend et al., 2017). While communities surrounding making do occasionally coalesce through physically and geographically decentralized online spaces (see Brennan et al., 2010; Reas, 2006), the maker movement’s dedication to hands on production precludes that approach to some extent.

But what makes a music venue a DIY venue? For Makagon (2015), a major difference between a DIY and a more traditional venue involves a reframing of the economic model behind not only the architectural space but music production as a whole. This alternate economic model produces an egalitarian cultural politics in which all members of a music scene band together to support the cultural production of individual community members. Rather than organize a venue or, alternately, start a band to make money, DIY musicians approach these types of social activities with the mindset that making and sharing music exists as the end and not a means towards another monetary goal. In turn, this economic reframing produces various subsequent cultural practices related to both material space and the social practice of producing and maintaining venues. For starters, the breadth of what DIY musicians consider a venue expands far beyond the usual bars, clubs, and concert halls that normally host public facing music events: basements, empty warehouses, businesses after they have closed for the night, community centers, and sometimes even public outdoor spaces (e.g. underneath a bridge) all serve as hosts for DIY concerts (Grazian, 2013; Tucker, 2013; Verbuc, 2014). This process of reframing physical space extends beyond the sometimes temporary walls of the venue space as well, as DIY scenes often reimagine whole cities through the lens of cultural production (Grazian, 2013) and radical politics (Woods, M., 2019). DIY musicians and the audiences who attend their shows therefore interact within a physical environment that proves significantly different than traditional venues, especially at house or basement shows.

Focusing on one example of how the physical nature of DIY venues enact unique social interactions, the lack of a stage or backstage area that physically separates the band from the audience produces an increased sense of intimacy and higher level of social interaction between the musicians and the audience (Tucker, 2012; Verbuc, 2014). In turn, this architectural feature

creates a different (and largely flattened) set of social arrangements held between all members of DIY scenes. Evidence of this flattened social hierarchy exists in what I refer to here as the “gear toucher conversation.” Named after a common descriptor for a particular category of music technology obsessed participants within DIY scenes (see Leyva, 2018), the gear toucher conversation refers to specific moment of interaction where an audience member walks on stage immediately after a performance has finished (sometimes within seconds) and begins asking the performer about their set or, more often than not, music gear. Although little writing about this moment exists in academic DIY scholarship, publications such as *The Hard Times*, a satirical blog similar to *The Onion* that satirizes DIY music, have written about this interaction (see Woods, 2016b), indicating a widespread recognition across DIY scenes. Importantly, this interaction cannot occur in more traditional rock concert venues: architectural features such as a large stage and a green room or backstage area physically separate the audience from the artist on stage. The physically open nature of DIY venues subsequently leads to a socially open environment where interactions such as the gear toucher conversation can occur.

Mirroring the egalitarian cultural politics at the heart of DIY spaces and scenes, the maker movement also embodies a communal approach to cultural production within physical space. As discussed previously, makerspaces play a crucial role within the maker movement because they facilitate knowledge sharing and allow for a communal set of tools that engender cultural production (Hatch, 2013; Sheridan et al., 2014). The interpersonal interactions enacted by and within these physical spaces then allow for communities to form and produce their own unique learning processes and forms of cultural production (Halverson & Sheridan, 2014; Sheridan et al., 2014). Education researchers have subsequently investigated the intersection between physical space and maker centered learning. For Keune & Pepler (2019), this research

challenges maker educators to transform their understanding of materials within makerspaces (and the spaces themselves) from “materials that have been purposefully selected to guide the internalization of particular ideas... to making room for materials to act over longer periods of time” (p. 291). Combined with Sheridan & Konopansky’s (2014) focus on design flexibility, the makerspace theoretically becomes a pedagogical actor in itself. Well-designed makerspaces not only facilitate interactions with certain types of materials but also engender certain types of interactions (Sheridan et al., 2020), encouraging participants to work through problems and obstacles in a very tangible way as they build understanding and meaning over time (Keune & Pepler, 2019). Similarly, the open nature of makerspaces, one in which participants can move around the space and observe others, facilitates forms of interpersonal learning and collaboration that may not happen in more physically restricting spaces (Halverson et al., 2018). This assertion not only frames makerspaces as a pedagogical actor but as a unique space in which maker pedagogies emerge.

Because of this shared approach to valuing physical space, it follows that similar research into DIY venues as pedagogical actors would provide valuable insight into punk pedagogies and the educative practices of DIY music scenes. This proves especially true considering how the physical and architectural features of DIY venues enact certain forms of social interaction. However, DIY music scholars have yet to conduct research into how the material affordances of DIY venues affect the pedagogical nature of this music community. Using research into the physical/pedagogical nature of makerspaces as a guide, I use this chapter to provide one set of insights into this larger project.

**Critical Voices in Making and DIY.** Finally, parallel critiques into the maker movement and DIY music also provide a window into how these cultural spaces function as learning

ecologies. Starting with the maker movement, critical education scholars have challenged the technocentrism of the maker movement (and STEM education more generally) in an attempt to broaden understandings of learning through making. As Britton (2015) notes, DIY traditions such as craft movements and the arts often overlap with definitions of making but rarely enter the discourse of the maker movement. This exclusion leads to multiple problematics when considering the ethics of the maker movement. According to Blikstein & Worsley (2016), exclusionary processes result in researchers and educators taking “the efficacy of ‘making’ for granted without challenging how [the movement’s] historical origins influence those engaging in makerspaces and activities” (p. 68). The practices that fit within dominant economic structures and discourses surrounding technological innovation and entrepreneurship then “count” as making under this definition while DIY practices associated with marginalized communities do not (Vossoughi et al., 2016). The same issues that plague DIY music communities therefore exist within the maker movement as well, as people of marginalized gender identities and people of color often get shut out of maker spaces and separated from recognized forms of making because of the assumptions behind who makers are and what they look like (Holbert, 2016).

Although some researchers have considered ways to address issues of racial marginalization and white supremacy within maker centered learning (see Barton & Tan, 2018; Fields et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2018; Ryoo et al., 2016), the majority of research into amplifying marginalized voices in maker education initiatives has focused on engaging women within these spaces. This focus has emerged in large part because practitioners often unintentionally rely on “assumptions that masculine use of technology is normative and women need an invitation and an incentive or special ‘female’ reason to engage in this masculine space” (Britton, 2015). In large part, the reinscription of makerspaces as a male space occurs because of

the gendered nature of the technologies commonly associated with making and the maker movement (Buchholz et al., 2014; Ensmenger, 2010). Working with circuits, creating via programming or “high” technologies, and working with heavy machinery, for example, have all been gendered as male activities within larger cultural spheres and dominated conceptions of making.

In response, scholars have challenged what counts as making while simultaneously bringing in new technologies that undermine these assumptions. In particular, the use of e-textiles as a way to teach circuitry design has garnered a lot of attention within equity-minded maker education research (see Buechley & Hill, 2010; Kafai et al., 2014; Searle et al., 2016). In doing so, educators respond to Pepler & Glossoff’s (2013) call

to rethink the scope of what tools for scientific inquiry are included in the classroom so as to best support the diverse interests and experiences of youth, especially those in populations that science education in the United States has traditionally failed to engage—namely, women and students of color. (p. 762)

A reconfiguration of the technologies within makerspaces subsequently provides one means for addressing these disparities while simultaneously providing a map for DIY music practitioners to address gender disparities as well. This connection exists because music technologies (in the form of instruments or “gear”) often get characterized as masculine artifacts (Kelly, 2009; Rodgers, 2010), an issue that exacerbates the gender divide within DIY music. However, as I have previously argued, equity minded research into informal education spaces like the maker movement can unintentionally reinscribe dominant narratives and forms of oppression (Woods, 2020). It therefore follows that research into both maker education and punk pedagogies need to deeply and critically examine the cultural norms surrounding technology that lead to gendered

and racialized understandings within these cultural spaces before proposing pedagogical solutions. A failure to do so can lead to a reinforcement of oppressive forces that researchers and practitioners hope to address.

Although analogous research into empowering marginalized individuals through making and the importance of makerspaces as a pedagogical actor provide some insight into DIY music culture, empirical research into the pedagogies of DIY scenes and music venues needs to occur to verify and further develop these insights. To this end, I will now turn towards new empirical data to approach the following research questions: 1) How do DIY music venues shape the informal pedagogical practices of DIY music scenes? 2) In what ways do those pedagogies align with the ideological and ethical aims of DIY cultures? This second question holds particular importance because of the egalitarian framing of DIY culture (Makagon, 2015). However, as noted by multiple scholars, these egalitarian ideals often fall short in practice as scenes reproduce the same dominant narratives that DIY musicians hope to counteract (Dale, 2008; Griffin, 2013; O'Connor, 2008). I therefore use this chapter to not only unveil the pedagogies of DIY places but how those pedagogies work with or against the egalitarian cultural politics of the broader DIY scene.

## **Methods**

### **Sites of Research**

The findings from this study come from a comparative case study (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016) investigating two intertwined music series in Milwaukee, WI: The Experimental Education Series (EES) and the Noise Knowledge Consortium (NKC). The EES occurs quarterly at a DIY space called the Jazz Gallery Center for the Arts. The Jazz Gallery, a dedicated community arts venue, plays host to a number of different musical genres ranging from jazz and

folk music to noise and hip hop. Breaking the widely held assumption that DIY music always has ties to punk music and culture, the venue has a policy to not host punk, metal, or rock shows. In terms of the layout of the space, the Jazz Gallery largely exists as one large open room with a roughly 5-inch raised platform in one corner that serves as the stage. This layout produces the flexibility called for by Sheridan & Konopasky (2014) when discussing makerspaces, allowing for community members to use the venue in a variety of ways. Subsequently, artists also use the venue to curate visual arts shows while other neighborhood residents host community meetings.

The NKC, on the other hand, is hosted at Brinn Labs, a makerspace run by the local children's museum. Brinn Labs represents a more liminal space along the spectrum of DIY venues (see Makagon, 2015), as the venue has another life as a makerspace and office outside of hosting shows. When shows do happen, they occur at night or on weekends when Brinn Labs would normally be closed. Since Brinn Labs normally functions as a makerspace, the layout of the venue is open and suited to host concerts (but some amount of large furniture usually needs to be moved before and after events). During some performances, musicians have had to set up around partially built museum exhibits, conference tables, and piles of office or maker supplies. In terms of the types of music Brinn Labs hosts, the venue has only hosted noise shows. However, this specialization has not occurred intentionally: I am just the only person who has asked to do shows there and I almost exclusively book noise or experimental music acts.

I have chosen to focus on these series because both occur in DIY spaces and enact multiple forms of informal pedagogies. Both series follow a similar format: a one-hour workshop facilitated by a different featured artist each time (see Appendix A for detailed information on the artists) followed by a concert from the featured artist and other local musicians. This allows for a multifaceted approach to researching the pedagogical practices of DIY music scenes,

creating space for intentional and unintentional practices of teaching and learning to coexist. Both series also focused on noise music,<sup>3</sup> rooting these events in a musical genre that has always existed within and emerged through DIY music channels (see Bailey, 2009; Candey, 2016; Novak, 2013; Taylor, P., 2016). Similarly, the venues that house noise music scenes also exist within a spectrum of DIY venues commonly associated punk and its associated offshoots (Wilson, 2016). And depending on the specifics of a given geographically located scene, noise scenes and punk scenes share venues, sometimes on the same night (Bailey, 2009; Eversley, 2014). In response to my own research into the ways that DIY scenes reproduce themselves as homogenous (white, masculine) social spaces (Woods, 2017), the EES specifically featured all women artists as a means to address issues of gender disparity in DIY music (see Griffin, 2013; O'Hara, 2001) and noise in particular (see Dietrich, 2016; Klett & Gerber, 2014). Featured artists for the EES also came from various places around the United States and Canada. While the NKC did not have the same focus on touring women artists, four of the twelve artists came from outside of Milwaukee and three were women.

Taken as a whole, the EES and NKC provide sites for research that foreground learning and teaching within DIY communities and between community members, both through the contextually unusual inclusion of workshops and the more common sharing of music and social bonding that occurs at DIY shows. The fact that women ran seven of the sixteen workshops also creates an opportunity to deeply investigate issues of gender within DIY pedagogies and scenes. For this particular study, I will focus on events within the concert portion of the series to root my

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<sup>3</sup> While not every featured artist from the series identified as a noise musician (Hal Rammel and Rick Ollman, for example, identify as free-improvisers), all of the performers intersected with noise music and performed alongside noise musicians on a regular basis. In doing so, many of the artists in this study engage the constantly reforming and shifting border around noise music described by Atton (2011) that define the genre, sometimes fitting in as noise musicians and sometimes not.

findings in the usual practices of DIY scenes (i.e. organizing, playing, and attending shows) as opposed to the more unusual workshop setting. In doing so, I am centering this study on the usual space of interaction within DIY communities. In turn, I hope to unearth the ways in which concerts act as pedagogical spaces despite participants often failing to acknowledge that affordance.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

In applying Bartlett & Vavrus' (2016) comparative case study methodology, I conceptualize the broader research project containing this study along three separate axes. First, a horizontal axis engages multiple related but separate sites of research or cases (rather than bounding the case to one specific geographic or social space). To this end, the EES and NKC provide two separate spaces to investigate. Second, a vertical axis considers larger structures that contain and contextualize the sites of research along the horizontal axis. In this study, I engage the broader DIY experimental music scene within the US and Canada. I engage this aspect of the project by inviting featured artists from scenes outside of Milwaukee to participate in this study (see Appendix A). Finally, a temporal axis historicizes both the vertical and horizontal axes and further contextualizes findings from case study research. Although I do not include insights from investigations into this axis in this chapter, I have been analyzing albums and performances from seminal artists in the noise scene through a pedagogical lens alongside my empirical research. This aspect of the project appears in the addenda.

In collecting data for this study, I relied on three major sources: interviews with participants, interviews with featured artists, and participant observations of concerts. First, I recruited five participants (i.e. people who attended the workshops and audience members for the concerts) who self-identified as interested in learning more about noise music but did not have a

noise music practice of their own (see Appendix B). Participants attended between six and twelve workshops and concerts throughout the year. When interviewing participants, I used Seidman's (2005) three-interview series for phenomenological research. The first interview, which occurred before the first workshop, investigated the context surrounding the participant by creating space for the interviewee to discuss their existing relationship and understanding of DIY scenes and noise music. The second interview, which took place partway through the year, focused on the details of their experience thus far. Because of the number of workshops taking place and the length of time between events, I conducted multiple forms of this interview with most participants. Finally, the last interview encouraged participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience and consider the ways in which their understandings of noise music and the surrounding DIY scene had changed. These interviews occurred after the series concluded. Additionally, I also interviewed three other audience participants after the series had ended. I invited these participants into the study because they had attended most of the workshops and performances but had not responded to my original recruitment efforts. I only conducted one interview with these participants but modeled that interview after Seidman's (2005) three-part approach, covering all aspects of his model over a single two-hour interview.

Second, I conducted pre- and post-interviews with the 17 teaching artists from the EES and NKC (see Appendix A). Pre-interviews focused on the artists' conceptions of developing their individual artistic practice and learning within both formal and informal music education spaces. Additionally, I talked to these artists about developing the workshop and the intentions behind their plans. Post-interviews centered on their experiences teaching and performing during the series. During these post-interviews, I drew inspiration from Jordan & Henderson (1995) by asking the artists to respond to and reflect on video recordings of the workshops and concerts. In

doing so, I allow participants to provide insight into the intentions and motivations behind their interactions during the series. For both the interviews with the participants and the artists, I used a semi-structured approach (see Appendix C for interview protocols). I recorded and fully transcribed all interviews. To analyze these transcripts, I employed an open and iterative coding scheme that relied on descriptive and thematic coding techniques (see Saldaña, 2015). This approach allowed me to produce what Glaser & Strauss (1967) define as a substantive theory of learning within DIY noise scenes.

Finally, I produced and analyzed field notes during the series by, first, engaging all workshops and concerts as a participant observer. Although I often had to attend to organizational matters (e.g. running sound, collecting donations, finding materials, etc.), I spent as much time as possible listening to teaching artists, engaging in hands-on activities, and watching the performances as an audience member. I then followed the process described by Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (2011) in which I used jottings to document regularly occurring practices during the series and expanded those comments into full ethnographic field notes soon after every observation. I used these field notes not only as data in itself, but as a means for contextualizing interviews and providing material for interview questions. Once written, I used the same open and iterative approach to descriptive and thematic coding (Saldaña, 2015) described above.

## **Findings**

### **Reframing the Gear Toucher Conversation as a Pedagogical Moment**

In analyzing my field notes and paying particular attention to the types of interaction that occurred between audience members and performers, I recognized a strong (albeit unsurprising) number of gear toucher conversations (as described in the theoretical context above) at these

concerts. Across the sixteen events in the series, twelve of the events included audience members approaching the teaching artists individually and engaging them in conversation, often within minutes (and sometimes even second), after they had finished performing (see Table 1).<sup>4</sup>

Regarding the four exceptions, the structure of the events very clearly blocked gear toucher conversations from occurring. In two of these cases, the conversations did not happen because the featured artists (Taralie Peterson and Matt Taggart) decided not to perform and only conducted the workshop, thereby making these conversations impossible. In the other two events, the featured artists (Jon Mueller and the duo of Rick Ollman and Hal Rammel) immediately followed their performances with directed, whole group conversations. Rather than engaging in gear toucher conversations, audience members had the opportunity to ask questions or share their thoughts as part of a group discussion.

**Table 1**

*Details of Gear Toucher Conversations During Both Series*

Teaching Artist	Evidence of Gear Toucher Conversation	Gender of Artist	Gender of Audience Members who Initiated Conversation	Observed Topics of Conversation During Series
Lea Bertucci	Yes	Woman	Men Women	Congratulations on performance Mutual acquaintances Upcoming shows Workshop
Bryce Beverlin II	Yes	Man	Men	Gear
Christopher Burns	Yes	Man	Men	Gear

<sup>4</sup> Although most of these conversations happened immediately after the performance finished, I have included the event featuring Chris Burns in this category despite the extended time and varying types of interaction that occurred between the performance and the conversation. At this event, Burns decided to perform first and hold the workshop second with one leading directly into the other. However, an audience member approached Chris as he was putting his gear away at the end of the entire event, which was the first moment where audience members had the opportunity to engage Burns in a one-on-one conversation. Because of this, I decided to label this interaction as a gear toucher conversation.

Nicholas Elert	Yes	Man	Men	Composition Gear
Shannon Kennedy	Yes	Woman	Men Women	Gear Merchandise
William Mueller	Yes	Man	Men	Composition Upcoming shows
Jon Mueller	No (initiated full group conversation)	Man	-	-
Rick Ollman/Hal Rammel	No (initiated full group conversation)	Men	-	-
Taralie Peterson	No (did not perform)	Woman	-	-
Kate Rissiek	Yes	Woman	Men Women	Gear Video component of performance
Mike Schauwitzer	Yes	Man	Men	Gear
Amanda Schoofs	Yes	Woman	Men Women	Gear Congratulations on performance
Gabriella Schwartz	Yes	Woman	Men Women	Costuming Gear Non-music interests Romantic advance
Shanna Sordahl	Yes	Woman	Men	Composition
Matt Taggart	No (did not perform)	Man	-	-
August Traeger	Yes	Man	Men	Gear Merchandise Congratulations on performance

In discussing gear toucher conversations with both the artist and audience participants in this study, interviewees framed these interactions as holding not only a cultural importance but a pedagogical significance. Mike Schauwitzer credits one of these conversations as the moment when he first realized that a DIY noise scene existed: “I saw one of [noise musician] John Olson's early side projects and I remember talking to him and his then wife about the gear they were using. That's when I realized there were other people doing it.” Similarly, audience

participant Jack Hietpas learned about the local noise scene when attending his first show: “I remember that I met Alex of Climax Denial. I remember talking to Dan [of Dan of Earth]. I remember talking to Amanda Schoofs. I just discovered all those people at that event.” Lea Bertucci builds on this in her own conception of interactions at DIY shows,

I can attest from personal experience that so much learning on my part has been done in that context, in that conversational context. That social space where you're just talking to somebody about something at a show and they bring up a film or a record or even non-art and music related stuff that is very interesting. That can really serve as the basis of new work or new ideas about art.

In framing these conversations as a pedagogical affordance of shows, Bertucci positions these interactions as a way to not only learn about music but a broad range of cultural production that intersects with DIY music scenes.

Although some counterexamples do exist in the data, my observations of the series indicate that labeling these interactions as gear toucher conversations proves accurate: in the twelve instances where I observed audience members individually engaging performers in conversation after they performed, nine of the conversations included or focused on discussing the performer’s gear (see Table 1). The most any other shared topic of conversation occurred was three times (a tie between congratulating the artist on a good performance and discussing the composition of the music). Despite the overwhelming focus on gear as the topic of discussion, my observations did not always provide insight into the intention behind these conversations. Through my interviews with participants, however, two themes emerged: discussing gear to learn about the gear itself and using these discussions to learn about the performance, artist, or broader

DIY scene through a conversation about music gear. These differing approaches indicate the existence of multiple pedagogies.

**Learning about Gear.** In describing the conversations he had after his performance during the series, Schauwitzer describes gear toucher conversations focused on learning about his gear:

I think all the questions that they were asking were about the specific delay pedal that I was using. I don't know why people like that delay pedal so much. They're not usually asking how I'm using it. It's more about what it is.

This quote emphasizes an important aspect of the gear toucher conversation that focuses on gear: more often than not, the conversation centers around learning what the gear is and not how the musician uses it. For Bryce Beverlin II, this process of learning about someone's gear extends beyond a verbal conversation into a non-verbal space: "They're very curious about the instruments and a lot of times people will just come and gawk. They won't actually talk to me. They'll just come up and they'll just look at the stuff." Because these audience members completely avoid conversations with Beverlin and merely observe his instruments, this emphasizes that audience members want to learn about what a person used on stage during gear toucher conversations and not necessarily the techniques behind the performance.

What audience members hope to do with the information about the performer's gear, however, varies. In some cases, participants asked about a performer's gear to build their own artistic practice. Chris Momsen (a frequent conversation starter at these events), explains this goal as follows:

Not that I want to mimic what they're doing, but there's a part of it that's like, if I could get that one sound, I would really love to glean that. Because if you love the

performance, you might want to borrow or learn- mimic, whatever- and bring some of that into your own thing. Not necessarily rip them off, but glean something

In this quote, Momsen aligns his process of learning within the DIY scene with Green's (2002) assertion that popular musicians often learn by copying the techniques, sounds, or approaches of more established musicians. However, when Momsen says, "not that I want to mimic what they're doing," he partially negates that assertion through this framing. Andy de Junco further distances gear toucher conversations from the act of copying other performers when reflecting on a conversation he had with Schauwitzer about tape loops: "I think I would like to take that same idea and apply it to something else, but I wouldn't want to do it where it's completely derivative of what he did." Momsen and de Junco<sup>5</sup> therefore conceptualize the outcome of these conversations as an act of appropriating or recontextualizing the use of this gear within their own practice as opposed to trying to outright recreate a performance or musical piece (e.g. playing a cover version of a song written by someone else).

Although gear toucher conversations help some audience members further develop their own artistic practice, the responses from the featured artists to conversations that only focused on gear ranged from neutral to overtly negative. Jon Mueller exemplified this latter hostility when describing a previous concert where someone jumped on stage to ask him how his drums were tuned immediately after performing:

because of what I was experiencing at that time, based on what I had just done, I was almost like explosive with anger. My reaction to that was just- I mean, I am almost

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<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that both Momsen and de Junco have built on the knowledge gained from these types of experiences and used it to inform their own practice as noise musicians. Recordings of Momsen's music (under the stage name Mommy) can be found at <https://soundcloud.com/chris-momsen-315201878> and de Junco's music (under the name The End, I Love You) is available at <https://theendiloveyou.bandcamp.com/>.

getting upset just thinking about it now. It was just such a contradiction to what I was experiencing. Like, that's what you're thinking about? That is so irrelevant to everything that I'm experiencing right now.

Amanda Schoofs shares a similar sentiment about the technocentric nature of gear toucher conversations when she says, “that's not interesting. There's a lot more interesting things to talk about. I hate those arbitrary gear things because it's a dumb thing to talk about after you had just experienced somebody performing art live.” This points to a shared preference among the artists in this study for discussions about composition or performance technique over conversations focused solely on gear.

Similarly, Shannon Kennedy also reveals her disdain for replicating another artist's instrumentation, a practice Momsen and de Junco allude to, in this extreme example of a gear toucher conversation related to her duo Pedestrian Deposit:

One of our pet peeves is when people photograph our gear. And both of us have had people outright copy our instruments. With him it's different pedal chains. With me, I've had people outright replicate different instruments I've made. And that's really flattering but come up with your own stuff.

While neither Momsen nor de Junco imply that they would go to that extreme, Novak (2013) discusses a similar issue related to copying instrumentation in his own ethnographic study of noise scenes. Regardless of the subsequent actions taken by audience members, Kennedy, Mueller, and Schoof's remarks point to the contentious place gear toucher conversations hold in DIY communities in spite of their pedagogical value and near institutional status.

**Learning through gear.** Despite a common interest in learning about the performer's equipment, participants in this study did not always engage gear toucher conversations as a way

to further their own practice. De Junco emphasizes this point when describing his own anxiety when talking to performers:

For me, it's very hard to ask academic questions or questions regarding their practice because, usually, [their music is] something I've never seen or heard before. It's hard for me to come up with those [questions] immediately because that's not how I make music. So usually the first thing I feel like I can relate to is, "what kind of gear do you have?" and then seeing where that tangents to.

Within this conception of the gear toucher conversation, the goal is not necessarily learning about a performer's music gear but instead using that gear as a way to open a conversation that builds into a discussion of their practice as an artist. Chris Burns shared a similar framing of gear toucher conversations:

Opening up those questions, I would like to hope, gets us past talking about "What are those knobs" and gets us into talking about "What is that music," which is a harder conversation to have. It's difficult for us to talk about music. But my hope is to invite that level of conversation and that, yes, [my practice is] embodied in a certain set of equipment and a certain set of software but, really, it's the practices that live inside of that that are the interesting thing to talk about.

Burns and De Junco's understanding of the gear toucher conversation therefore shifts away from just learning about a specific piece of equipment and embodies the second theme that I produced through this analysis: learning through gear.

During the process of learning through gear audience members still focus on gear, but they used that focus on instrumentation to better understand the performance or the performer's artistic process. Lonán Kestrel exemplified this approach when discussing their own intentions

behind engaging gear toucher conversations: “I'm interested in your technique. I'm interested in your thought process. But if there's [a piece of gear] that I don't know, I'm going to check it out.”

While Kestrel does connect this conversation back to learning about gear, they foreground process and technique. Bill Pariso applied a similar lens when having his own gear toucher conversation with Momsen:

I never really saw his gear and I'm like, "what the heck is this stuff?" And he started to explain to me some of his process and he's like, "I sometimes just try to incorporate things and instruments that really don't belong on the table." So then it sort of started to make more sense. That helped inform me while watching him perform.

In this instance, Pariso clearly delineates the intention (or, at least, the outcome) of the gear toucher conversation: Pariso used this conversation to learn about someone’s gear with the intent of better understanding that performer’s music, not to further his own practice.

Gear toucher conversations not only allow audiences to learn, but they allow for a collaborative process of constructing knowledge related to musical expression, technique, and instrumentation to occur. Burns recognizes this collaborative process when he states that gear toucher conversations “can be bidirectional. They can tell me something about their experience of the work, good or bad. If I receive that in an open-minded way, it might be something that I can get an insight from,” resulting in a shared understanding of Burns’ own performance. Ella Schwartz, who often performs in costume under the name Nummy, reaffirms this notion by describing how these conversations help her form her own practice:

There was somebody in the bathroom, so I had to use the reflection in the glass near the entry way [of Brinn Labs] to put my mask on. Bill [Pariso] was standing there and he said to me, "anytime I see you play, you leave and then you come back in a costume. And I've

never seen the costume change. As soon as you come back in the costume, my mind goes to another place. It separates Ella from Nummy." And that was the weirdest conversation I've ever had after a set. Because, to me, Ella and Nummy- that's the same thing. That's never been two different things. But I learned a lot about my project. I need to make sure that people know Nummy is Ella and I need to work on that.

Although a mask may seem categorically different than most music gear, it still serves the same purpose: it provides a material starting point for an artist and an audience member to investigate artistic intent and process. In this case, the conversation allowed Schwartz to not only describe how she conceptualizes her own work but to understand how others view her performances. The popular knowledge related to the relationship between Schwartz's onstage and offstage identity therefore emerges through this conversation and Schwartz can use that knowledge to further develop her own practice.

### **Gear Toucher Conversations as Gendered Interaction**

Examining my field notes for Nick Elert's performance, one crucial detail opens space for a critical analysis of how gear toucher conversations shape DIY communities:

Nick fielded three separate conversations about his gear. One was about the MaxMSP patch he used, another asked if he was using a TC-11 on his iPad (he was not, but he brought it up so the person could play with it), and another asked him about the Tetra synth that he had as well. These conversations lasted for a relatively long time (roughly seven and a half minutes) *and were only with other men at the show.* (observation, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019)

This particular instance provides a somewhat extreme but still representative example. Across the twelve different events in this series where gear toucher conversations happened, a distinct

gender divide emerged (see Table 1). If the featured artist was a man, then the only audience members who engaged the artist in conversation after the performance were other men. But if the featured artist was a woman, then audience members of all genders would ask the performer questions.

While some of the participating artists did not see this gendered division as indicative of all gear toucher conversations, most agreed that this gender divide reflected the norm. Elert strongly connects with this observation and its negative, gendered connotations: “I think that at one point it became very apparent that most of the people in those post-set gear conversations were mostly other white dudes. I can recall at some moment totally dreading that, the possibility of that conversation.” Most of the artists and participants in this study voiced similar issues with the gendered nature of these interactions. Considering the pedagogical importance that gear toucher conversations have in constructing and distributing knowledge, these interactions provide a means through which gender disparity within DIY scenes can, in part, replicate itself. Because gear toucher conversations primarily happen between men (since men represent the majority of DIY musicians), then a process of social reproduction occurs as only men learn through engaging this community. Alternately, if people of marginalized gender identities are excluded from the conversations where popular knowledge at the heart of DIY scenes emerge, then DIY scenes themselves will subsequently exclude people of marginalized gender identities. At the very least, the gendered nature of these exchanges produces the social and spatial marginalization of women described by O’Hara (2001) with men claiming the stage (or the space where a stage would be) and everyone else being pushed the edges of the venue. With this critique in mind, I use this section to explore how the women and non-binary participants in this

study experienced and conceptualized these conversations to further illuminate how gear toucher conversations as informal pedagogies reinscribe gender disparities within DIY spaces.

**Audience Perspective.** During my interviews, the two women and one non-binary audience participant in this study described a reluctance to engage in gear toucher conversations with the artists. Jennifer Zamora, for example, acknowledges her own reluctance when she says: “I guess I could ask. That's what they [the musicians] are there for. I'm sure they want people to ask them. I noticed I get really quiet and it's almost like I'm just listening, like I'm trapped.”

Similarly, Kestrel described their own relationship with engaging these conversations over time:

I'm trying to remember another performer that I saw. He did a drum percussion thing and he had this dulcimer that was custom made. I came up and asked him about it. I never would have done that a couple of years ago. I think I've just had to personally get over the fact that I don't know someone.

While neither of these descriptions specifically evoke issues related to gender, an assertion underscored by the fact that de Junco shared a similar anxiety and Kestrel describes a cross-gender conversation outside of these series, the fact that all of the women and non-binary participants related to this aversion and none of them approached a male artist after a performance during the series indicates a gendered influence.

Beyond this general aversion to conversations, part of the participant's reluctance to engage in gear toucher conversations stems from anxiety related to knowledge of music gear. For George Jackson, this issue intertwines itself with her status as a newcomer in the scene despite her years of experience as a formally trained musician:

I come to these things and there's so many people who are really doing their thing and have been doing it for years and years and years, longer than I've been alive. And to

suddenly be the inferior one is significant. But good, though, because you want to be growing more and you want to be putting yourself around people who you can be growing from. And that's hard.

In this example, the connection between gender and gear toucher conversations begins to emerge. Considering Jackson's comments alongside Britton (2015) and Buchholz et al.'s (2014) discussion of the masculine nature of technology, the fact that gear toucher conversations almost always focus on gear (a focus that results in Jackson feeling "inferior" around others with far more technological knowledge) indicates why these conversations produce such a strong gender divide. Schoofs draws a direct connection between the assumption of masculinity behind technology and gear toucher conversations when describing her former anxieties as a young artist:

When I was younger, I was always scared to go up on stage and talk to people afterwards. I wanted to, but my anxiety about it had more to do with gear than the music. And I do think that it plays into these social constructs of gear-oriented dude world, which I have always hated.

By focusing on the overtly masculine topic of music gear, gear toucher conversations exacerbate the gender disparities in the scene and further marginalize women within these spaces.

Building off this connection between music gear and masculinity, the gear toucher conversations women do have with other women often steer away from gear and focus more on other aspects of the performance. Kate Rissiek saw this distinction after her performance at the EES: "The guys maybe want to talk about things [that are] more technical. They want to look at the gear and whatever. With Ella [Schwartz], it was more of a conversation of how they felt about it." Here, Schwartz engages Rissiek in a gear toucher conversation but totally avoids a

discussion of gear and instead focuses on her response to the performance. Kennedy also portrays this distinction when discussing the different types of questions she gets over her male bandmate: "I think that it's easy for people to connect to the performative aspect of [our music] if they're not already into [noise music]. Also coming at it from a really emotional point of view, I think a lot of women connect with that rather than it just being a dude turning knobs."

Alternately, when women do engage gear toucher conversations about gear with men, they routinely find themselves in precarious interactions. Schwartz describes this issue in her own experience as a novice performer:

When I was super young, I would ask a lot more questions. And more often than not, I wouldn't get the answers that I was looking for. I think people saw a novelty in me being a young woman, so they would give me some bullshit answer that wasn't very helpful.

These comments propose not only a different set of experiences related to gear toucher conversations based on gender, but a different form of conversation altogether, one with a different set of topics and a different (and highly problematic) way of interacting.

**Artist Perspective.** The gendered nature of gear toucher conversations also extends to the ways in which artists perceived that conversation. Primarily, artists in this study recognize the assumption of technology-as-masculine and express how that assumption guided previous conversations. Shanna Sordahl describes one example of this during a festival she played:

I was sitting behind my table and a guy came up, who was also a performer actually, and he's like, "oh, I have that. I have that. I pretty much have all this gear." And I said "Okay, good for you." That definitely felt misogynistic in tone. It's so condescending.

Beyond just asserting a patriarchal hierarchy through gear ownership, the women in this study also describe examples in which male audience members told them how to use their own gear.

Schoofs provided one example when she said

I was setting up my gear to play a show and the sound person came over to tell me I was setting up my gear up incorrectly. Not only do I perform with my gear regularly and I know what I'm doing, but I also teach electronic music. And he came up after the concert to just be like "if you did this and you did this in a different way, you wouldn't be getting these sounds." And I'm like, "why do you feel empowered to tell me these things?"

Despite the fact that both Sordahl and Schoofs used their own gear and demonstrated that they knew how to use that gear by performing with it, men in the audience based these interactions on the assumption that they knew more about this instrumentation than the women performing with it. As a result, the audience members discursively reasserted assumed gender roles within DIY scenes.

In a similar iteration of the gear toucher conversation, the artists often encounter gendered assumptions about technology when they perform alongside male artists. Schwartz clearly describes this interaction as follows:

In the past when I'd perform with Isaac, many people would ask Isaac about the gear. Isaac would have no idea what gear we were using or have a very basic understanding. He'd say, "you need to ask Ella about that." And then they wouldn't ask me. And that happened more times than I can count. They were always dudes that would go right up to Isaac and say, "how did you come up with that performance?" or "what gear are you using?" or "what do you use to record this part of your set?" I never get over that. That's always so weird.

For Sordahl, the gendered nature of these conversations extends even further:

When my partner and I play duo, I have the sense that people do not talk to me as much and as they talk to him. I think that there tends to be more men at the shows and that they feel more comfortable talking to him. And some people have been more explicit about being purposeful, like "oh, I should talk to you because you're a woman," and that is weird.

In this quote, Sordahl points to the issue of tokenizing that also emerges within DIY scenes by describing the gendered motivation behind some of the audience members ("I should talk to you because you're a woman"). Despite good intentions, this motivation still reinforces the gendered nature of this interaction.

In an even more extreme version of gear toucher conversations, men from the audience will use this interaction as an opportunity to inappropriately talk to women. Bertucci touches on this when she describes her mostly positive outlook on these conversations: "I'm never bugged when people want to talk me unless it's some creepy dude trying to hit on me, of course, which sometimes happens." Schwartz, on the other hand, has a less positive outlook:

People don't want to have the conversations with me about what my creative process is, how I came up with the set, how I built whatever [I'm using], or if I sewed whatever I was wearing. I don't have those conversations. Typically, it's somebody who I have not seen at a show before wants to come up and talk to me and find out how they can stay in touch with me. And normally they're a man that's over 45 years old. It's 95 percent creepy conversations.

Considering that Schwartz is currently twenty-eight and started performing when she was fourteen, the age of these audience members holds a disturbing significance. Although one

would hope that these sexist conversations represent an outlier, the fact that Schwartz had to deal with one of these conversations at her performance during the series indicates otherwise.

Combined with the musically oriented misogyny described earlier in this section and the perceptions of this conversation from the point of view of women and non-binary audience members, these findings provide a clear reason why people of marginalized gender identities would want to avoid this conversation. But if gear toucher conversations hold a pedagogical significance, one in which participants construct musical and communal knowledge, then it follows that DIY scenes would inevitably replicate themselves as male dominated spaces. People of marginalized gender identities justifiably do not want to have these conversations, so they avoid having them. And when they do have them, men reassert masculine assumptions or push the conversation away from topics that hold musical or communal significance. This shuts out people of marginalized gender identities from contributing as equal members of these spaces and unfairly positions men as arbiters of the scene and its subsequent knowledges.

**Towards a More Equitable Approach to DIY Pedagogies.** Despite these critiques, the women artists in this study see a positive trajectory within DIY music with more women engaging in the noise scene than in previous years. Bertucci especially notices this difference over the past decade: “I think that over the last 10 years I have seen that change a lot, where it's less macho than it has been because a greater diversity of people are making abstract electronic music.” Kennedy also described this shift when she says “I see it changing. I know some people would say it's not, but from my perspective I see more women doing this stuff and being encouraged to do it.” By including a dissenting voice in this quote, Kennedy draws attention to the fact that the noise scene has improved but not completely fixed the issue of gender disparity. Rissiek draws a similar conclusion when she says “It's definitely changed over the years. There

is a lot more women doing things. But still, I often play shows where I'm the only woman and that does still happen a lot.”

While participants nominated multiple reasons for this demographic shift, one of the most prominent reasons involves issues of representation: if women see other women on stage, then they know they have a place in that scene. Alternately, if the only people on stage are men, “then there is a risk that the ‘face’ of DIY... is a male one” (Griffin, 2013, p. 71) and people of marginalized gender identities will not find a place for themselves in that community. Of particular importance to this study, the artists I interviewed see the importance of representation within the gear toucher conversation itself. Rissiek states this simply when she says, “women approach me and say something specific like, ‘it was really great to see you performing among all these guys.’ Or even just ‘your sound is very different.’ They get something out of it that speaks to them somehow.” Kennedy builds on this by saying:

One thing that we notice is that I get a lot of women that want to talk to me. And [my bandmate] Jon's always laughing. He's like, "all these girls want to talk to you." And it's like, "well, yeah, they're identifying." Which I think is great. I'm very happy to be someone who they can see on stage so they can then see themselves. I've had so many good conversations with women about just doing this, trying to encourage them to keep doing it.

By framing the gear toucher conversation as a potential means for diversifying the scene and reaching out to other women, participants produce a complicated understanding of the relationship between gender and DIY music scenes. To use Griffin’s (2013) phrasing, these findings illustrate “the ways in which spaces can simultaneously offer contradictory and negotiable opportunities for empowerment and resistance, acceptance and exclusion” (p. 67).

Gear toucher conversations, while primarily conceived of as problematic, can also empower people of marginalized gender identities to contribute to these communities. It then falls on those working within DIY music scenes and spaces to create those circumstances.

Under this framing, the gear toucher conversation creates a discursive space in which participants can reinforce or challenge the masculine construction of technology. But because musicians often do not approach this conversation from a critical perspective, the gear toucher conversation regularly reinforces this stereotype. In part, this lack of critical engagement happens because of poor timing. In describing his own mindset during these conversations, August Traeger states “I’m still in this performance zone. It’s usually when I’m trying to put stuff away too, so I’m usually distracted during those moments. I’m just coming off a performance and I’m not back to normal.” Schoofs expands on this and connects it to her own attempts at reorienting the masculine, gear-centric focus of gear toucher conversations: “I don’t know how to change that. Especially since, when I’m the one on stage, I’m kind of exhausted from having just performed.” These reactions by Traeger and Schoofs indicate a need to intentionally redesign the pedagogies within DIY spaces, mirroring the critique that DIY scenes inevitably reproduce homogenous scenes in the absence of specific efforts to build diverse communities (Dale, 2008; Woods, 2017).

In response, the findings from this study also suggest an exceedingly simple (albeit incomplete) solution to this issue. Returning to one concert where the featured artists (Hal Rammel and Rick Ollman) performed but a gear toucher conversations did not occur, my field notes highlight a simple but significant difference between this performance and the rest of the performances in the series:

Hal, Rick, and [name redacted] got settled on stage when they were ready to start playing. Someone in front of me [Kestrel] commented on Hal's palette, saying "Hal's Instrument- do you see that?" before [the audience members] started talking about what it was.

Without saying anything, Hal began playing and the other two joined in... When they ended (after probably 30 minutes), people clapped. *Hal asked if anyone had any questions.* [Kestrel asked] "What was your instrument and how was it mic'd?"

(observation, September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019)

Rather than wait for audience members to start the conversation, Rammel invites the audience members to ask questions. In response, Kestrel (who identifies as non-binary) asks about the technical details of Rammel's instrument. Importantly, this conversation was the only time someone of a marginalized gender identity asked a male artist any questions, much less gear questions, after they performed.

Kestrel also recognized the importance of the invitation, acknowledging that they probably would not have engaged Rammel in conversation if they had to initiate the conversation on their own:

That was really refreshing to me. I might not have felt like asking. Because I think, at the end, they're gonna pack up and try to get their stuff done. And a lot of people come up way at the end at the end of a performance and talk to [the musicians]. But, at the same time, if there's a bunch of people there and they're talking to friends, I don't want to interject on that. So yeah, I think that was important for that [invitation] to happen.

By simply inviting Kestrel to start a conversation, Rammel undermines the gendered nature of this interaction (or, at the very least, the gender specific barrier that dissuades marginalized community members from having that conversation). In doing so, Kestrel aligns their

understanding of gear toucher conversations with my previous research into DIY spaces. Specifically, that an ideological openness to diversity within DIY scenes needs to include some sort of infrastructure for broader participation or else DIY spaces will inevitably reproduce homogenous, white male scenes (Woods, 2017). But that infrastructure does not have to involve an overly complicated reimagining of space. Sometimes an explicit invitation to participate via a simple question can reframe everything.

## **Discussion**

### **Towards a Critical Pedagogy of Place in DIY Music**

Placing Verbuc (2014) and Makagon's (2015) investigations into DIY communities in conversation with this study's framing of DIY venues as pedagogical actors, a connection between the ubiquitous existence of gear toucher conversations and the material affordances of DIY venues begins to emerge. Because DIY venues rarely have stages or backstage areas that separate the musician from the audience, audience members can freely approach musicians shortly after they finish performing. And even in those instances where a stage does exist, the egalitarian cultural politics of DIY that emerged through the intersection of space and community encourage audience members to ignore the social barrier created by a stage and directly engage musicians in conversation at shows (Makagon, 2015; Tucker, 2012). DIY venues as material spaces therefore afford these pedagogical interactions. To highlight the importance of the structural and cultural affordances provided by DIY venues in allowing for these conversations to exist, visualizing musicians and audience members having these conversations in other music settings proves helpful. Trying to imagine, for example, an audience member jumping onto a twenty-foot stage within seconds after Metallica finishes playing in a 10,000-seat theatre to ask the band questions about their performance seems ludicrous. But when a band

finishes playing a set in someone's basement to twenty-five other people, that conversation seems far less extraordinary.

Because gear toucher conversations emerge from the material affordances of DIY venues specifically, I propose that these conversations must be understood as a pedagogy of place. Following Tucker's (2012) assertion that DIY venues act as the material embodiment of popular knowledge formed through DIY cultural production, it follows that DIY music scenes would rely on a pedagogy of place to construct and distribute that knowledge. In creating a space that largely flattens the social hierarchy separating musicians from audience members, DIY venues enact a culturally situated pedagogy of space by materially enacting mechanisms for sharing and constructing knowledge between members of DIY scenes. The gear toucher conversation provides one such mechanism, mirroring Green's (2002) understanding of popular music education by providing a space for conversation between performers and listeners. Although these findings only point to one singular aspect of a DIY pedagogy of place, the importance placed on of these conversations by the artists and audience participants in this study frames these interactions as significant pedagogical moments within a broader understanding of DIY scenes as informal learning ecologies.

But as Gruenewald (2003) asserts when defining a critical pedagogy of place, "acknowledging that experience has a geographical context opens the way to admitting critical social and ecological concerns into one's understanding of place, and the role of places in education" (p. 9). While understanding the ecological concerns of DIY pedagogies remains far outside the context of this chapter, the findings from this study allow for a critical examination of the pedagogies embedded within DIY venues. More specifically, my analysis found that gear toucher conversations routinely reproduce hierarchical gender norms. Although these

conversations also hold the dialectically opposed potential to also empower people of marginalized gender identities described by Griffin (2013), this finding sits in direct opposition to the assertion of egalitarian cultural politics espoused by many DIY communities (Blush, 2010; Makagon, 2015; Reynolds, 2005). The oppressive social reproduction behind gear toucher conversations provides support to Dale's (2008) claim that the universality of DIY politics often falls short while simultaneously providing a pedagogical mechanism through which this cultural politic both forms and fails.

From an educational perspective, this finding further complicates Tucker's (2012) framing of DIY spaces as centers of popular knowledge. Despite holding the potential to produce new knowledges, the reality of DIY communities proves more complex because of their inclination towards reinscribing aspects of mainstream culture (e.g. framing technology as inherently masculine) they hope to challenge. Focusing specifically on noise music, this finding mirrors the critique made by Novak (2013) in his ethnographic study of the Japanese DIY noise music scene since the anti-capitalist theorization behind noise falls apart in the face of cultural production: by releasing noise albums in limited quantities, noise musicians produce scarcity and, thusly, a collector's market with its associated prices. Studying the cultural politics of DIY music scenes or any cultural space therefore needs to consider the practical matter of how community members (and spaces) enact and embody those cultural politics, as the ideological foundation of those spaces may shift through material processes.

### **Expanding DIY Pedagogies Through Maker Education (and Vice Versa)**

Drawing a connection between DIY music and maker education literature, a similar pedagogy of space exists within makerspaces as well. According to Sheridan & Konopasky (2016) and Keune & Pepler (2019), the openness and accessibility of makerspace design (here

referring to a very material sense of both terms) can enact or restrict maker pedagogies in distinct ways. Beyond thinking about maker education as merely a practice of DIY production, these scholars understand how makerspaces themselves enact empowering or restrictive pedagogical mechanisms. The findings in this study extend that same framing of a pedagogy of space within maker centered learning to DIY venues: through an open/stageless design, DIY venues enact a pedagogy in which all members of DIY scenes construct and share knowledge as a community. This occurs through both verbal and non-verbal forms of the gear toucher conversation, mirroring the varied forms of collaboration afforded by the open design of makerspaces described by Halverson, et al. (2018). In turn, the findings from this study reassert Gruenewald's (2003) critique of "placeless" curriculum and challenge scholars who investigate or theorize punk pedagogies to move beyond a framing of this term that displaces these practices from the spaces that embody them. A punk pedagogy rooted in DIY culture needs to consider how DIY venues shape, embody, restrict, and afford these pedagogies as well.

In one point of divergence between the pedagogies of makerspaces and DIY venues, these spaces produce a different set of roles (or, at least, relationships between individuals and those roles) for learners to engage. This occurs in large part because of the connection these two cultural spaces have with education as a practice. As shown by those writing about the maker movement and maker education (see Halverson & Peppler, 2018), the maker movement has explicitly designed and embraced intentionally educational experiences as part of the culture. However, within DIY music venues, these educational affordances often go unnoticed: when people go to shows, they usually do not go with the intention of learning something. Because pedagogical moments (like the gear toucher conversation) in DIY music scenes often go unnoticed as they blend into the cultural background, the barrier between teacher and learner

dissolves along with the metaphorical and physical stages that DIY venues abolished. Especially considering that DIY scene members fluidly shift between these roles, often multiple times over the course of a single show (Makagon, 2015; Verbuc, 2014), traditional understandings of teaching and learning within dedicated educational experiences shifts into a more collaborative, distributed, and often unnoticed process. Rather than aligning the performer with the teacher and the audience with students, DIY scenes allow for the coproduction of musical knowledge to occur between both performers and listeners. And as Burns and Schwartz attest, the gear toucher conversation provides one means towards that educative goal.

Beyond a deeper understanding of the pedagogies of space within DIY music, the findings in this study also illuminate the ways in which DIY production as a whole functions pedagogically. More specifically, it speaks to the ways in which a masculine understanding of technology pedagogically reproduces itself within DIY-oriented communities. Within maker education literature, scholars have both proposed and responded to this critique. While critical scholars such as Blikstein & Worsley (2016) and Sheridan et al. (2020) have drawn attention to the ways in which uncritical conceptions of making and maker technologies (respectively) reproduce dominant narratives, other scholars have acted on these critiques by promoting technologies divorced from masculine narratives such as e-textiles in an effort to reframe makerspaces as gender inclusive (Buchholz et al., 2014; Buechley & Hill, 2010; Kafai et al., 2014). However, the findings in this study raise questions of whether this approach can fully address these issues on their own. Although electronic music gear remains firmly enmeshed in a masculine understanding of electronics and technology, the women and non-binary participants in this study use a wide range of (varyingly gendered) musical gear ranging from Sordahl's hi-tech modular synthesizers, effects pedals, and cello to Schwartz's decidedly low-tech bowl of

cherries and a microphone. Yet the outcome of the gear toucher conversations remains the same as men in the audience reasserted their dominant role within DIY scenes (O'Hara, 2001).

These findings therefore challenge scholars and educators within maker contexts to not only replace masculine technologies but consider the ways in which makerspaces pedagogically reproduce dominant narratives. While these pedagogical considerations may exist within new materials and technologies (see Keune & Pepler, 2019; Sheridan et al., 2020; Wohlwend et al., 2017)), new tools do not always equate to new pedagogies. Using Holbert's (2016) terminology, this involves "highlighting the importance of mental dispositions and 'ways of knowing' that have not been adequately considered in the way we frame maker activities and workshops" (p. 37-38), shifting the means through which knowledge production (as both an end and a process) occurs with a more equitable outcome in mind. In response, Rammel's simple reframing of the gear toucher conversation provides an example of how to pedagogically reorient DIY venues that can extend into maker contexts. By merely extending an invitation to participate in a conversation, Rammel undermined the gender hierarchy that exists in gear toucher conversations between male artists and audience members of marginalized gender identities. Building on the mutual relationship between DIY production and making proposed by Hollett & Vivoni's (2020), scholars should take this finding as a model for future research into maker initiatives.

While exploring the pedagogical affordances of alternatively gendered technologies proves valuable, researchers need to engage a parallel project that uncovers how the pedagogies of makerspaces themselves reinforce gendered norms in tandem with those technologies. Although the gear toucher conversation remains unique to DIY music scenes, similar pedagogical interactions and moments of collaborative learning potentially exist within makerspaces because of a shared pedagogy of space (Halverson et al., 2018). The findings from

this study should therefore challenge researchers to uncover how those pedagogies reinforce dominant narratives and the potentially simple solutions practitioners enact.

### **Conclusion**

Since I first read the description of the basement venue provided Makagon (2015) in the opening paragraph, I have not been able to stop thinking about that passage. As someone who has spent about fifteen years navigating local and national DIY scenes, this description feels so familiar. More than having visited these spaces on various tours, it accurately describes two of the three DIY venues I have ran over the years. While the details may not perfectly align, the overall atmosphere is spot on: the apathetic promoters and organizers, the decrepit infrastructure, the overwhelming amount of dirt and filth, etc. And despite the Tucker (2012) and Verbuc's (2014) contention that DIY venues transform into empowering and energizing social spaces once the show starts (a feeling I have personally felt many, many times), I am also struck by how completely uninviting that basement sounds. While I do not want to end this chapter with a (potentially classist) condemnation of the cleanliness of DIY venues, this description still raises questions related to accessibility. Beyond the issues of physical accessibility, my research into DIY communities has continually posed questions of cultural or social accessibility that I feel compelled to answer as a scholar, artist, and DIY community member. Do DIY communities and events feel welcoming to people of all identities? Does the music being made include or exclude others? And what are DIY musicians, promoters, and organizers doing about it?

I find these questions particularly important because of the supposed egalitarian ideology behind the forms of DIY cultural production at the heart of DIY music scenes and the maker movement. The promise of creative accessibility behind DIY music cultures (Blush, 2010; Reynolds, 2005; Spencer, 2005) and agency within the maker movement (Halverson & Sheridan,

2014) hold so much potential, but these cultural spaces can only reach that promise through a constant, critical analysis of the material practices within those spaces. The old punk slogan “learn these three chords, now join the band!” sounds inspiring enough, but so much else goes into being in the band that also needs attention. Halverson & Sheridan (2014) reframe this call within a maker context when they say, “If we believe that making activities and maker identities are crucial for empowerment, then it is, in part, our job to set up situations whereby all learners have the opportunity to engage” (p. 500). This chapter represents one small step in the process of engaging this critical work within DIY spaces, but the work is far from over. Both within academia and DIY scenes themselves, future research (formal and informal) absolutely needs to map the myriad ways in which DIY scenes and venues enact culturally specific pedagogies while simultaneously critiquing those pedagogies by examining them through the lens of gender, class, and race. In the absence of this work, DIY scenes will continuously reproduce the same oppressive relationships that dominate the culture they act against. If the DIY promise that anyone can do it is true, then it falls on punks of all types to make sure everyone does.

### Addendum 3: Towards a Listening of Noise Outside of Whiteness

#### Introduction

Revisiting Griffin's (2013) assertion that DIY scenes and spaces (including the noise scene) "can simultaneously offer contradictory and negotiable opportunities for empowerment and resistance, acceptance and exclusion" (p. 67), the quote evokes lines of inquiry beyond her focus on gender. Do these opportunities exist for other marginalized groups, and if so, how do they compare? This question in mind, I use this final addendum to address notions of racial marginalization and whiteness. I do so, in part, because of the limitations that exist within my own research design: considering that only one audience participant identifies as a person of color and all of the artists identify as white, I strongly believe that this study needs to consider the ways in which noise music scenes inscribe, reproduce, and potentially challenge formations of whiteness. While the findings from the previous chapter provide insight into the relationship between DIY cultures and masculinity, any assumption of universality behind these claims would engage white formations of feminism by willfully shutting out the voices of women of color (Ortega, 2009). Put simply, the data generated in this project does not provide a methodological foundation to speak to race and its various intersections.

In response to the question posed above, I contend that noise music (along with the broader genre of experimental music) as a sociocultural technology has constructed itself through whiteness. However, the gesture of making noise creates space for othered voices and artists of color to root their artistic practice within their own identities and create new works through and from abjection. To ground this theoretical assertion, I explore and analyze the album *Lebanon for Lebanese* by Koufar, the stage name for the Lebanese American power electronics artist Alexandre Chami (2015). Through this album, Chami produces a work rooted in the conflicting,

problematic, and complicated space between empowerment and exclusion described by Griffin (2013). Rather than one singular politic existing in the album, *Lebanon for Lebanese* enacts a multiplicity of readings through what Deleuze and Guatarri (1987) define as the rhizome. In doing so, Chami both reproduces the formation of whiteness at the foundation of noise music (and the power electronics subgenre in particular) while simultaneously situating the album in his own identity as a Lebanese artist.

### **Sounding the Lebanese Civil War**

The complications behind *Lebanon for Lebanese* announce themselves as soon as the listener looks at the album cover. A large black triskelion (a common symbol used by white power and fascist groups) sits inside of a white circle on a red background, evoking the swastika armbands and flags used by the Nazi regime. Beyond this visual anchor, the album sonically produces a sense of militarism through multiple techniques. In a highly direct approach, Chami includes field recordings of mortars and other technologies of war within the recordings. From a more abstracted position, the use of synthesizers and vocal processing techniques that obscure Chami's lyrics produce what Cooke (2016) describes as "a thoroughly unhuman sonic landscape" (p. 20) in his analysis of Maurizio Bianchi's thematically aligned *Symphony for a Genocide* album. The repetitive, machine-like rhythms on the album also contextualize this work within the historical lineage of industrial music, a genre that has always utilized fascist imagery and thematically centered on state sanctioned machinations of violence and death (Bailey, 2009). Read together, this album comfortably fits within Stevenson's (2016) reading of the power electronics genre, one in which artists ambiguously deploy fascist, racist, and otherwise problematic imagery and symbologies. Stevenson (2016) contends that power electronics artists employ this strategy not as a means for promoting or supporting the ideologies behind these

visual and sonic artifacts but as a way to discursively engage the troubling reality of these ideologies circulating within contemporary cultural discourses. However, a reinscription of whiteness still occurs through this generous reading of power electronics' transgressive practices. Visually and sonically referencing white fascist movements creates a space inhospitable to anyone of any marginalized identity, suffocating any attempts towards producing a discourse outside of whiteness (Woods, 2018). To that end, *Lebanon for Lebanese* reinscribes whiteness.

However, a simple fact undermines this straightforward reading of the album: Chami, the only member of Koufar, is not white. He is Lebanese, a second-generation immigrant whose father was displaced during the Lebanese civil war (L. et al., 2016). Listening to the album through the lens of Chami's racial identity, another layer of visual and sonic elements complicate notions of whiteness within the album. Returning to the album cover, a geometric cedar tree at the center of the triskelion contextualizes this symbology within Lebanese history: the Lebanese Phalanges Party (LPP), a Lebanese political party that foregrounds Lebanese independence, currently uses the tree as a symbol and formerly used the triskelion (L., 2016). This reading then pulls the album out of the context of white power movements and invokes the history of Lebanon as a nation state. The persistent use of delay on Chami's vocals gesture to this historical reading as well, producing a constant echo that affectively links the album to the past as Chami's lyrics constantly return. Furthermore, the field recordings of flares throughout the closing track, "Flares Over the Bay of Jounieh," undermine the oppressive themes evoked by Chami earlier on the record. While military forces use mortars (the dominant technology in the field recordings on "Kiss the Hand You Cannot Bite and Implore God to Break It") as a type of weapon, flares serve the opposite purpose by providing a defense against heat seeking missiles or a way to communicate with others across long distances. Through these visual and sonic maneuvers,

along with Chami's identification as Lebanese, *Lebanon for Lebanese* complicates a straight forward reading of the album within the context of power electronics' inherent whiteness by asking a simple question: through whose eyes do we see this oppression?

Despite this alternative reading of the album, the problematic complications of the album do not necessarily dissolve within the confines of the album itself. Regardless of the context, a triskelion in a white circle on a red background invokes notions of fascism and white supremacy. Similarly, the LPP, the group behind the geometric cedar tree symbol, started as a fascist far right group who inflicted unspeakable, state sanctioned violence on religious minorities (Hirst, 2010). Despite the shift in geopolitical context, the influence of state sanctioned violence and, subsequently, whiteness still pervades the album. In turn, the album evokes what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) would describe as a rhizomatic approach to the complicated sociohistorical and political themes on the album, one in which the record as a cultural artifact embodies a complex set of social relationships rather than a singular theme or ideology. The rhizome provides a powerful lens through which scholars can analyze music in particular because "music has always sent out lines of flight, like so many transformational multiplicities, even overturning the very codes that structure or arborify it" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 34). As I have argued previously, power electronics especially relies on this polysemic approach to thematics (Woods, P., 2019a). Rather than try to produce one cohesive ideology through this addendum, I trace Koufar's lines of flight and understand the complicated relationship to whiteness embedded in the album. To approach these complications, I now turn towards a constellation of texts on sound, noise, and critical race theory to situate this album within the broader cultural context of modern noise music.

### **Constructing a White Noise**

While race may exist as a highly visual phenomenon, a notion that theoretically separates whiteness and noise, Stoever (2016) contends that the construction of race also occurs through the production and categorization of sound. This racializing process results in the formation of the sonic color line, what Stoever (2016) describes as

both a hermeneutics of race and a marker of its im/material presence. It enables listeners to construct and discern racial identities based on voices, sound, and particular soundscapes... and, in turn, to mobilize racially coded batteries of sounds as discrimination by assigning them different cultural, social, and political value. (p. 10-11)

This ability to hear race through sound, including those sounds that exist as part of a specific musical tradition or environment, comes from the disciplining of hearing that occurs through the governing of the body via institutions and cultural norms. This results in the social construction of the listening ear, a disciplined form of listening that allows people to hear sound through the lens of race and implicitly identify the sonic color line (Stoever, 2016). The listening ear racializes our natural soundscapes, linking certain musical forms and material sounds to the corporeal and racialized body (in particular, the black body) while the sounds of whiteness stand in as the invisible and inaudible default. Moreover, it reinscribes race as a dominant force throughout society and, in part, constructs modern formations of race. To understand the racialization of music is, therefore, to understand the ongoing process of defining race.

This process of defining and reinscribing certain sounds or genres as racialized contributes to what Ladson-Billings (2018) calls the social funding of race. This theory asserts that society constantly reinscribes race as a dominant category through multiple channels, both official (i.e. legal definitions and the institutional regulation of racialized subjects) and unofficial (a wide array of social and cultural norms that assume and promote racialization). This process

of funding race even happens “when the ostensible action is to work against racial categorization or identification” (Ladson-Billings, 2018, p. 93). This proves especially potent in challenging whiteness, since “the awesome power of race as an ideology resides precisely in its ability to pass as a feature of the natural landscape” (Jacobson, 1999, p. 10). Whiteness proves especially dangerous because of the unchecked assertion that white bodies and practices exist as the norm against which societies construct and compare other races and racialized acts (Jacobson, 1999; Stoever, 2016). In doing so, the social funding of whiteness in particular often goes unnoticed.

By exploring noise music through the context of the listening ear, I contend that noise music has historically contributed to the social funding of whiteness. This assertion follows Twine & Gallagher (2008) in arguing against the notion that “whiteness is only an unconditional, universal and equally experienced location of privilege and power” (p. 7) and instead contends that whiteness emerges locally through a myriad of cultural forces. This line of critique challenges scholars to examine “how whiteness is deployed and the discursive strategies used to maintain and destabilize white identity and privilege” (Twine & Gallagher, 2008, p. 6). Although segregation and other legal practices in music have played a large role in the formation of the listening ear (Stoever, 2016), the construction and reinscription of whiteness through noise largely occurs through cultural production. A historical precedence for this construction exists in the distinction between experimental music and the black avant-garde that encompassed free jazz (Basu, 2014; Lewis, 2004; Moten, 2004). Scholars and artists accomplished this in part by defining specific artistic practices as part of experimental music while excluding others, a process that connected only certain artists to the (overwhelmingly white) western music canon. The highly influential composer John Cage, for example, clearly delineated between indeterminacy and free improvisation, asserting the musical value of the former over the latter

despite these musical gestures being nearly identical in practice (Lewis, 2004). Similarly, Oliveros' appropriation of deep listening techniques from Buddhist traditions (Basu, 2014) and Reich's introduction of African drumming technique into the western classical canon (Biareishyk, 2012) both illustrate how othered and racialized music traditions only gained value within western music after these musicians redeployed them within a white context. These examples illustrate how this ability to define music as part of the western canon exists as a stance of whiteness (Biareishyk, 2012; Koza, 2008), one that extends to the construction of all genres including noise music.

The social funding of race through genre construction continues well beyond a given genre's historical roots. This expansion occurs because genre construction exists as a discursive, active, and ongoing process, one that "entails a move away from a static categorization... and toward a continual working-through of membership, features, meaning, and evaluation" (Atton, 2011, p. 327). This definition also proposes that genres materialize through a variety of cultural practices that may or may not involve composing or performing, practices that redraw the boundaries of what "counts" as legitimate within a genre and often fall along racial lines (see Koza, 2008). In turn, the formation of noise music and what counts as noise leads to the construction of noise music as white. The formation of the Japanese harsh noise scene provides one example: while Japanese noise artists had made music long before foreign involvement, "Japanoise" as a genre and scene did not exist until US label owners defined the genre's boundaries (Novak, 2013). Basu's (2014) findings from her ethnographic study of American noise shows reaffirm this process. The findings from this study show multiple white, male audience members trying to define groups featuring female artists and artists of color outside the boundaries of noise, claiming that their music did not fit the genre despite clear aesthetic and

gestural connections. These processes again point to the white, epistemological stance of power proposed by Biareishyk (2012): noise music, in these instances and others, formed through whiteness.

Expanding on this critique, conceptualizing noise music as an ahistorical genre (Fox, 2009; Novak, 2013) and framing the gesture of making noise within a musical context as a universal practice (Hegarty, 2007) contributes to the construction of noise music as a white space. The discourse surrounding noise music proposes that the genre exists at the very extreme edge of music, pushing the sonic envelope as far as it can possibly go (Atton, 2011). This discourse assumes a certain universality in music, one that noise has pushed in every direction. But to make this assertion the envelope must exist in the first place. By defining musical extremes through the use of dynamics, harmony/pitch, and structure, the discourse surrounding noise only pushes on the envelope of western music and not all cultural understandings of the art form. This inevitably connects noise to the highly white institution of western music (Moten, 2004) and ignores the multitude of musical traditions outside of a western context that define music very differently (Small, 1998). Defining music as an anti-genre or as something other than music (see Atton, 2011; Novak, 2013) also exists as a position of whiteness, as it places noise outside of the historical traditions that led to its construction. This assumes that the sounds created by noise artists somehow exist without any sort of socialized or historical context. However, since all sounds and all genres have histories (Stoever, 2016), this discursive practice hides the process of socialization. This maneuver, one of separating an act or object from its historical formation, can only occur through whiteness (Jacobson, 1999; Stoever, 2016). The process of abjection that produces the material of noise may render certain sounds meaningless, but only because it hides the histories and social formations of these sounds.

These cultural practices produce what Ahmed (2007) defines as a phenomenological understanding of whiteness. Under this definition, whiteness acts as “an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they ‘take up’ space” (Ahmed, 2007, p. 151). This reimagining presents whiteness as an ever-present condition that lurks in the background of all spaces and social interactions. A phenomenological whiteness also allows white bodies to exist comfortably within white spaces while placing demands on and threatening the racialized other. In music, this form of whiteness permits white composers and performers to exist comfortably in experimental music settings, excludes black performers from occupying this space, and writes the other out of history (Lewis, 2004). Noise music constructs this phenomenological whiteness by crafting works that reproduce affects of violence and subjugation (Woods, 2018). Returning to the use of excess and extremity in noise music, both themes create spaces that reinscribe power relations inherent to social stratification. For example, a straight, white, male audience member would have an inherently different experience watching a Genocide Organ set that includes sampled speeches from Nazi leaders, fascist symbols, and both theatrical and real acts of physical violence than a queer, black, and/or female audience member. The difference exists in the way this musical space orientates these two bodies: the white audience member gets to sit within a reflective space and, at best, consider their complicity within these violent and oppressive practices while the music subjects black and queer bodies to this familiar form of violence through both symbolic and physical acts. The codification of noise performances as white also happens in the over representation of white, male performers (Dietrich, 2016). Every performer being white quickly becomes the norm without strong representation from artists of color and this norm orients othered bodies away from the stage.

In considering this lens of whiteness, *Lebanon for Lebanese* materially enacts the duality evoked by Griffin (2013) by both upholding and challenging whiteness at the same time. As an artist of color, Chami clearly challenges the sonic color line and historical formation of noise (and, in particular, the power electronics subgenre) as a hegemonically white space. Similarly, by overtly rooting the visual aspects of the album within the context of Lebanese history, Chami also challenges the process of dehistoricization at the foundation of whiteness. Rather than considering state violence in an abstract or alienated sense, *Lebanon for Lebanese* does the exact opposite and places the work within a sociohistorical lineage that considers both past and present. This temporal scale becomes clear when Chami describes the meaning behind the closing track in relation to the Lebanese civil war:

“Flares over the Bay of Jounieh” lyrically tells the story of an older Maronite man with his son watching the flares fall as fighting takes place in the adjoining neighborhood to Jounieh. The man speaks of great fervor and how the child will one day take his place and fight not only in his name, but his people’s name and their culture. (as cited in L., 2016).

Sonically, the album suggests this connection to the past through the use of vocal delay. This vocal processing technique evokes the image of an echo, a past voice returning to the present that invokes the living history of the Lebanese civil war.

However, by using the language of power electronics (abrasive synthesizers, shouted vocals, distorted field recordings), Chami also situates this album within a white musical context. While this act could potentially subvert formations of whiteness, the obscured vocals and adherence to the visual and aural aesthetics of the genre fail to enact that gesture. Instead, the album engages what Bassichis & Spade (2014) describe as an alignment with whiteness that

reproduces a politics of anti-blackness. While Bassichis & Spade situate their analysis within the discourse surrounding the legalization of gay marriage, a similar mechanism emerges from *Lebanon for Lebanese*. By reproducing fascist symbology on the cover and using the sonics on the album to situate these symbols within the context of a genre that consistently evokes notions of white nationalism, the album contributes to the social funding of whiteness behind power electronics. Even viewing these symbols within the context of Lebanese history holds its own problematics because of the LPP's history of fascism, xenophobia, and state violence against religious minorities (Hirst, 2010). Similarly, the constant evocation of war and militarism throughout the album produces a "caustic romanticism" (L., 2016) for this political faction, furthering the alignment between Chami's work and the state violence that has historically upheld white supremacy on a global scale. In doing so, *Lebanon for Lebanese* manages to evoke two lines of flight, to use Deleuze & Guattari's (1987) terminology. One links the album to the history of Lebanon and the artist's Lebanese identity, the other to fascism and whiteness. Both exist alongside each other in this musical artifact.

### **Noise of Another Color**

Further complicating this argument, I want to return to my initial formation of noise (here referring to the gesture of creating noise within a musical context and not the genre) within Chapter Two to propose an emergent (and productive) contradiction in terms: if noise exists as a redeployment of abjected sounds and bodies, it follows that noise embodies the sound of otherness (see Biareishyk, 2012). Yet the listening ear codifies the noise of noise music and power electronics as white. So how does one hear noise as anything other than a socialized, white, cultural technology? As a point of departure, I propose that rehearing noise outside of whiteness cannot occur without first understanding how whiteness appropriated noise, with the

disembodiment of noise from the corporeal body providing the primary means towards this appropriation. Russolo's (2012) seminal definition of noise as a product of technology and not the individual establishes this practice as a viable means to theorize this disembodied practice and Cage's attempt to separate all sounds from the individual performer codified this understanding within experimental music (Kuivila, 2009; Nyman, 1974). Novak (2013) invokes this theory when describing the philosophical approach of many noise artists: "Noise is not 'my sound,' or even 'this sound I make,' but 'a noise that surrounds me and becomes my world'" (p. 159-160). Since whiteness holds a monopoly on redefining certain stances and practices as ahistorical, immaterial, or a product of pure reason (Jacobson, 1999), the disembodiment of sound acts as stance of whiteness. Only through the racialization of sound can this dissociation occur, one in which sound exists as an ahistorical and incorporeal object. An inaudible and invisible whiteness, therefore, allows for the appropriation of this sound.

Inverting this relationship, the process of hearing noise as the sound of racialized otherness fundamentally involves reimagining noise as a product of a sounding and othered body, especially since conceptions of blackness always entail a sense of corporeality (Moten, 2004; Stoeber, 2016). This consideration subverts disembodied formations of noise and roots this form of sound with the material and racialized body. The radical nature of black performance via noise, then, does not exist as the overcoming or transcendence of its material origins within the body. Instead, it involves an aesthetic thickening that utilizes noise as a challenge to the listening ear through the incorporation of multiple artistic traditions (Lewis, 2017). This aesthetic thickening generates a sound that must be heard as both noise and black. The multicultural and diasporic noise of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, for example (see Basu, 2014), reclaims those abjected cultural forms jettisoned by whiteness and challenges social constraints placed on both

musical traditions and social norms through noise, à la Hegarty (2007) and Attali (1985). This only occurs, however, by reconnecting noise to the corporeal (and abjected) body and subsequently hearing those sounds as music. Cassidy (2013) points to this dual process in his description of vocal noise:

Vocal noise is about the individual body, about embodied otherness, about an individualized practice. But one of the great ironies of vocal noise is that, despite its seemingly personal, expressive qualities, its essential “noisiness” comes from the fact that vocal noise is, at its core, an erasure of uniqueness. (p. 49)

Read in this context, this erasure is not a product of sound but a process of hearing. Outside of the usual (socially defined) structures that allow us to hear the individual (through acts of discipline), the listening ear needs to find new ways of hearing the sounding body as an individual. Noise provides a means to do so.

This listening of noise implies that multiple types of noise may exist. To this end, Stoeber (2016) proposes that the racialized bodies that create noise create materially different sounds that act in different ways: “whites Other blackness as ‘noise’- in order to better identify, isolate, and eradicate black people- while black people remain vulnerable to random intrusions of whiteness’s ferocious noises, sounds that create an illusion of omnipresence and all-encompassing power” (p. 82). This speaks to noise acting very differently when coming from different bodies in racialized power structures. The noise of blackness comes from the circulation of sound that has been othered and, subsequently, abjected from the normative soundscape of both music and everyday life. The noise of whiteness, however, exists to drown out the sounds of the other. This noise still comes from abjected sound, but that abjection occurs because of the inability to meaningfully account for every sound emitted from a socialized soundscape. The

noise of whiteness uses these sounds to fill space in such a way that the other cannot speak, a means of reinforcing a monopoly on aesthetics. All forms of noise music mentioned in this dissertation, from the harsh excess of Japanese harsh noise (Novak, 2013), the battering ram of power electronics (Taylor, P., 2016), and forms of noise from the US that often rely on overwhelming and static sonic soundscapes (Basu, 2016; Henry, 2016; Candey, 2016) engage this practice. Historically, however, artists such as the Art Ensemble of Chicago, Sun Ra, Anthony Braxton, and many others have deployed the noise of blackness to create cacophonous and dissonant music that must be heard as black to be heard at all (Tinkle, 2015). A growing number of artists of color, female artists, and queer artists have created noise music that challenges the whiteness of both noise music and larger social contexts by employing this corporeal and othered noise (Basu, 2016; Dietrich, 2016). This shifting demographic then speaks to a future in which the whiteness inherent to historical formations of noise music may eventually become irrelevant or, at least, a thing of the past.

White artists can also challenge notions of whiteness through the gesture of noise, but in ways that still rely on white listenings of noise. According to James' (2016), critical forms of white music often reinforce whiteness and the listening ear while simultaneously critiquing white cultural practices. On one hand, the critique proposed through these critical (read: noisy) forms of music act at a distance, challenging whiteness by merely locating and commenting on white musical forms and gestures. This approach, to use Ladson-Billings' (2018) term, funds race. It also allows for a loophole in which white audiences can absolve themselves of their own whiteness since they actively recognize it in others. On the other hand, music can directly challenge white audiences through what Ahmed (2006) calls a politics of disorientation, one that challenges notions of "fun" for white listeners and disorients whiteness through a

musical/bodily/epistemic form of noise. This use of “aesthetic and corporeal disorientation may be one way to acclimate us to the kinds of disorientation from which privilege otherwise insulates us” (James, 2016, p. 224) instead of allowing for a distanced and unaffecting critique. Still, utilizing noise as a critique of whiteness, for white audiences, through white artists, and within white musical genres produces a listening to noise rooted in whiteness that subsequently socially funds race. This noise may challenge white audiences, but it still relies on the noise that forms through the circulation of cultural artifacts through highly white spaces and music traditions.

Although Chami aesthetically roots Koufar within the aesthetics of power electronics (and, subsequently, whiteness), a certain level of aesthetic thickening occurs on *Lebanon for Lebanese* as well. Beyond the front cover, the album art includes a detailed collage of Lebanese historical figures, photographs from the Lebanese civil war, Maronite symbology, and even a small map of the various ethnic groups throughout Lebanon, firmly placing the album within a specific, material, and historical context. The constant references to Lebanese cities in the track titles also root this album in a historical Lebanese context as well. While Lewis (2017) theorizes aesthetic thickening through music and sound, the collage aesthetic on the album’s insert produces the same gesture, an overwhelming collection of visual artifacts that unmistakably situates this album within the artist’s own personal history. Although Chami focuses on a historical context he did not personally experience, he has experienced the aftermath of the Lebanese civil war in his own upbringing as the son of a Lebanese man displaced by the war (L., 2016). Beyond this single artifact, Chami’s work after this album more directly speaks through his corporeal experience as a Lebanese American. The artist describes this physical connection

when discussing the album *Minority Report* (Chami, 2016), the follow up to *Lebanon for Lebanese*:

I... chose to put my face on the front of the tape... with a full beard, because that's when I look the most "Arab." No "sketchy" symbols, no Lebanese politics—just the real me. That is something that usually isn't seen in power electronics, so I had to seize it as mine. (L. et al., 2016)

In conversation with *Lebanon for Lebanese*, Chami's identity as an artist and a person emerges within and between these albums. The works return to Chami's corporeal body, a person taking up and existing in a space where whiteness tells him he does not belong. The noise of Koufar therefore must be heard outside of whiteness or, more accurately, heard as something more than just white noise.

### **Conclusion**

In describing the development of his own Lebanese identity, Chami cites the influence of author Khalil Gibran and his poem "You Have Your Lebanon and I Have My Lebanon."

According to Chami,

In that poem, Gibran touches on the struggle between Eastern and Western values—something that has been at the heart of many of the issues of Lebanon. The title of that poem has always been important to me because it's quite applicable to my life. I've been told numerous things about what I am and where I come from, and the title to that poem means everything to me. I have mine just as much as any other Lebanese person has theirs. (L. et al., 2016)

This multiplicity exists within *Lebanon for Lebanese* as well. Rather than try to resolve the conflict between whiteness and the racialized other via Chami's Lebanese identity, Koufar exists

as a manifestation of the complex sociocultural history of the Lebanese people via Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) rhizome. The violence of the LPP sits alongside the oppression of the Lebanese people under the Syrian occupation with both contributing to the formation of Chami as a person. The noise of Koufar therefore must, to some degree, be heard outside of whiteness while still reproducing whiteness, fascist ideologies, and the "dark genealogies" (see Muñoz, 2013) within noise. While Griffin (2013) conceives of DIY music as a space that "can simultaneously offer contradictory and negotiable opportunities for empowerment and resistance" (p. 67), *Lebanon for Lebanese* collapses these opportunities as the album offers both within the same work through the rhizome of power electronics.

To both hear noise as a challenge to whiteness and listen to noise outside of whiteness, the ability to hear the whisper of the other over the roar of the centered white subject proves crucial. This whisper exists in what Campt (2017) calls the "lower frequencies" of images, those felt and unheard aspects of a work that exist in the social and cultural histories surrounding the object. The listener discovers these lower frequencies by thinking through music beyond the confines of the acoustic experience and evoking the corporeal bodies producing those sounds, the spaces that house the performers, the visual aspects of performance, and the social constructs that define these sounds as music or noise. Since all sounds have histories, even these lower frequencies can reinscribe whiteness or challenge it. The inability to easily hear lower frequencies in noise music comes from the history of appropriation of the other in experimental music's whitewashed history, both in terms of the noises of other cultures and the appropriation of noise itself (Biareishyk, 2012). To hear noise as anything other than white, the listening ear must first attune itself to those lower frequencies (more often felt than heard) that exist underneath those sounds (Campt, 2017). To do so, those invested in noise must attend to the

sociocultural history of sound. This inevitably means exploring and critiquing noise through the lens of the listening ear to understand how certain sounds have been socialized toward racialized ends. Only then can a listening of noise music (and gestural noises more broadly) occur outside of whiteness and emerge as a critical praxis.

## Chapter 5: Limitations and Future Research

### **Introduction**

In lieu of a conclusion, I present this last section as a way to reflect on the previous three chapters and the process of developing this dissertation. Like many of the featured artists in this study, I strongly believe that my work as a scholar and researcher never reaches a point of absolute completion. Instead, this dissertation represents one moment in an ongoing, developmental, and iterative process of understanding the world. This contention in mind, I use this chapter to reflect on the limitations of these articles and highlight some of the future iterations of this research I intend to explore.

### **Limitations**

Most glaringly, the lack of racial diversity across research participants this dissertation remains problematic. Although I engaged with work created by artists of color in the first and last addenda in response to this sampling issue, it still limits the scope of what I can attend to through this work. This issue becomes even more glaring when considering the tensions between liberatory praxis and processes of reinscribing dominant narratives threaded through the chapters and addenda. Especially considering the overwhelming influence that race plays in education and everyday life more broadly (Ladson-Billings, 2018), the assertion that noise can empower musicians and audiences needs to be read with this critique in mind. However, I still believe that studying this particular population holds value because it represents the majority White demographic of the current Milwaukee and international noise scenes (Dietrich, 2016). And while a similar argument exists in relation to the overrepresentation of women artists in this study (see Klett & Gerber, 2014), the growing trend of women in noise music (both in Milwaukee and elsewhere) makes this design choice more valuable. Although the ethnographic

nature of this dissertation may have unintentionally reproduced a lack of racial diversity, future research that uses noise music either as a musical/educational intervention or a context for learning design absolutely should include a more diverse population of participants than the one represented here.

Similarly, by situating this study within Milwaukee, this dissertation paints a very particular picture of noise and noise music. Although Makagon (2015) has noted a decline in differentiation between geographically distinct scenes in the age of social media, each localized music community has its own unique social structures, traditions, populations, and beliefs. When I have toured the country and visited other DIY scenes, I have noticed this same diversity. The shows I have played in Austin, TX, for example, with 15 other harsh noise acts on the bill felt very different than the three act drone shows I played in Boston, MA, despite both of them lasting three hours. If the music making practices and dispositions at the core of these different scenes vary this greatly, it would follow that the pedagogical practices within these scenes would also differ. By including artists from outside of Milwaukee and focusing on those aspects of the data that proved largely universal, I present findings that I believe would emerge in almost any noise or DIY music context. However, specific investigations into the particulars of different geographically located noise scenes would bolster this research.

Beyond the distinctiveness of the Milwaukee noise scene, the uniqueness of both of the series investigated in this dissertation also holds its own set of limitations. As I argue in Chapter 3, noise musicians rarely if ever learn their practice within dedicated educational spaces, so a workshop does not truly represent how most people learn about the genre or develop their own musical practice. The tensions described by some of the featured artists indicate this limitation as well. For Kate Rissiek, she struggled with how to construct a workshop when she valued the

process of self-discovery that led to her becoming a noise musician, in essence positioning the idea of a workshop itself as counterintuitive to learning about noise:

Especially for noise, one of the essentials is really a personal sound. And you have to discover that on your own. So I can show what I do, but it's so personal. It is hard for me to even describe how I do some things, because, again, it really comes back to intuition. I don't want to influence somebody. That's another thing, too: you shouldn't do any kind of a version of something else; you should do your own thing.

Yet while this workshop format may not represent how the majority of noise musicians develop their craft, it still foregrounded notions of teaching and learning within this space. By asking artists to craft a workshop that featured their own musical knowledge, I contend that this research design provoked the teaching artists to deeply reflect on their own learning process and either replicate or respond to those reflections. Additionally, relying on participant's memories about developing their craft also contains its own issues of reliability: remembering how one learns does not always produce an accurate representation of what actually happened. By including Hietpas' development from initial idea to final performance, this dissertation partly addresses this issue. Still, future design-based research can and should further investigate how individuals develop their musical knowledges related to noise and experimental music in situ.

### **Future Research**

I wrote this dissertation as a series of articles intended for publication in a variety of learning sciences, curriculum studies, cultural studies, and popular music journals. With some editing to account for word limits, I intend on publishing Chapters 3 and 4 as written. As a way to make this work more valuable for those who work in or study contexts outside of noise music,

however, I plan on extending this research in a number of ways. I therefore use this final section to map some of these proposed changes.

## **Chapter 2**

In the process of researching and writing this chapter, I started to find connections between a number of different theoretical lenses I have previously explored in my own work within noise music. Formations of constructionism, critical whiteness studies, and posthumanism all started to emerge in my own thinking about the intersection between noise and abjection. Similarly, I also found the lack of a specific object or focal point in the chapter difficult to work with. Although my conception of noise as gesture provides some sort of a central object to work with, I found the final version of the article somewhat ungrounded.

In response to these reactions, I intend on using this first chapter as the foundation for an upcoming book project. I will expand this chapter into two separate parts, one focusing on the connection between the abject and noise with the other delving into the process of reframing the abject as an educational technology via aesthetic education. Additionally, I will write three more chapters that examine the intersections between noise and the three theoretical lenses I mentioned above: constructionism (via making noise), posthumanism (within the non-anthropocentric community of practice that defines noise), and critical whiteness studies (as a critique of how noise-as-genre undermines noise-as-gesture). I also hope to revise the interview data I collected to ground these arguments in empirical data while also using the Addenda from Chapters 2 and 4 (along with new analyses of additional albums and performances) to further explore these themes. In doing so, I intend to create a work that centers on noise but also deeply and critically examines the insights that noise produces into these other aspects of education

theory and critical studies. Rather than using constructionism to understand noise, for example, this project will uncover what noise reveals about constructionism.

### **Chapters 3 and 4**

While I consider both chapters and the addendum to Chapter 3 to be largely finished, I also believe that future research should further examine the findings from both of these chapters in new contexts. In chapter 3, I proposed a model of developing one's artistic practice in relation to noise music. Because I only interviewed noise and experimental musicians who developed their craft within informal settings, these findings are not truly generalizable past this specific context. However, the model I produced and the categories of musical knowledge it contains do hold the potential to exist in other settings. While I found that noise artists iterate between blown mind moments, phases of exploration, and presenting finished products, there is nothing inherent to this process that makes it exclusive to noise music. Similarly, the categories of music, scene, technology, technique, and disposition also apply to broader settings if one changes "music" to "cultural artifacts" and "scene" to "community." To this end, I intend on studying other informal learning ecologies to understand what aspects of this model remain particular to noise and how much of this model applies to other contexts.

Additionally, I intend on bringing this model into my work as a DIY musician and organizer to intentionally design future pedagogical experiences within DIY scenes, venues, and shows. I also intend on engaging my findings from Chapter 4 in the same way, taking the lessons learned from this study about the inherent masculinity behind music technology and gear culture to heart and developing process to allow for more accessible participation. Putting my identity as a researcher aside and thinking about my work in DIY music, these two chapters raise valuable questions: how can noise and DIY scenes facilitate "blown mind moments" for new comers?;

what structures are needed to engage musicians more fully throughout the exploration phase?; do the spaces and scenes I work within value and amplify the finished works of new artists?; and, most importantly, what are DIY scenes doing to make sure people of marginalized identities have the same access to these experiences? Without deeply considering these questions, DIY scenes will continue to reinscribe the same dominant narratives that emerge in this dissertation. As a member of these scenes, I fully intend on raising these questions and responding to them through the intentional design of learning experiences within shows and other events.

### **Future Projects**

Finally, as one final project associated with this comparative case study, I want to write an additional article that foregrounds the experiences of the participants in the workshops. I fully acknowledge that Chapters 3 and 4 mostly focus on the voices of the featured artists, but I did not do so because I valued the opinions of veterans over those new to the genre. In reality, I focused on the featured artists for two reasons: I had access to more of the artist's interviews earlier in the writing process and the findings from my analyses of the artist interviews formed a more complete narrative across these three articles. With this in mind, I want to return to my interviews with the participants and perform a phenomenological analysis of the data to understand how they conceptualized their experience during the series. I believe this article would hold significant value for music educators, providing insights into what value informal noise music workshops hold for participants and also what challenges the Experimental Education Series and Noise Knowledge Consortium posed. Even though, as I mentioned earlier, noise musicians do not normally learn through dedicated educational experiences such as these, the introduction of noise music into other music education curriculum may hold value for other students. This final article will hopefully reveal these benefits.

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## Appendix A

## Background Information on Participating Teaching Artists

Name <sup>6</sup>	Stage, Project or Band Name	Formal Musical Training	Identified Musical Tradition
Lea Bertucci	Lea Bertucci	Instrument training	Noise artist
Bryce Beverlin II	Ice Volt, Bryce Beverlin II	Undergraduate degree	Noise artist, free improviser
Christopher Burns	Christopher Burns	DMA, Composition	Electro-acoustic composer, noise artist
Nicholas Elert	Nicholas Elert	Undergraduate degree	Electro-acoustic composer, noise artist
Shannon Kennedy	Nephila, Pedestrian Deposit	Instrument training	Noise artist
William Mueller	The Smudge, Bucko Crooks	No formal training	Noise artist
Jon Mueller	Jon Mueller	Instrument training	Experimental musician
Rick Ollman	Rick Ollman, Seed Sounds	No formal training	Free-improviser
Taralie Peterson	Louise Bock, Spires that in the Sunset Rise	Instrument training	Noise musician, Free-improviser
Hal Rammel	Hal Rammel	No formal training	Free-improviser
Kate Rissiek	Rusalka	No formal training	Noise artist
Mike Schauwitzer	Slow Owls, Mildew	No formal training	Noise artist
Amanda Schoofs	Amanda Schoofs, Bachelorette Party	Master's degree	Experimental musician, free-improviser, noise artist
Gabriella Schwartz	Nummy	No formal training	Noise artist, performance artist
Shanna Sordahl	Shanna Sordahl	Master's degree	Free-improviser, noise artist
Matt Taggart	Luer, PCRV, Matt Taggart	Instrument training	Noise artist, Fluxus artist
August Traeger	August Traeger	Instrument training	Sound artist

<sup>6</sup> Due to the public and unique nature of the series in this study, all participants were given the option to use an alias or their own name. All featured artists opted to use their own name.

## Background Information on Participating Teaching Artists, cont.

Name	Stage, Project or Band Name	Gender Identity	Location	Artist Webpage or Recorded Material
Lea Bertucci	Lea Bertucci	Woman	New York, NY	<a href="http://lea-bertucci.com/">http://lea-bertucci.com/</a>
Bryce Beverlin II	Ice Volt, Bryce Beverlin II	Man	St. Paul, MN	<a href="http://www.insidesmusic.com/bryce/">http://www.insidesmusic.com/bryce/</a>
Christopher Burns	Christopher Burns, Bridges of Königsberg	Man	Philadelphia, PA	<a href="http://sfsound.org/~cburns/">http://sfsound.org/~cburns/</a>
Nicholas Elert	Nicholas Elert	Man	Milwaukee, WI	<a href="https://nicholaselert.bandcamp.com/">https://nicholaselert.bandcamp.com/</a>
Shannon Kennedy	Nephila, Pedestrian Deposit	Woman	Los Angeles, CA	<a href="https://monorailtrespassing.bandcamp.com/album/subcutaneous-memory">https://monorailtrespassing.bandcamp.com/album/subcutaneous-memory</a>
William Mueller	The Smudge, Bucko Crooks	Man	Milwaukee, WI	<a href="http://thesmudge.bandcamp.com">http://thesmudge.bandcamp.com</a>
Jon Mueller	Jon Mueller	Man	Sturgeon Bay, WI	<a href="http://rhythmplex.com">http://rhythmplex.com</a>
Rick Ollman	Rick Ollman, Seed Sounds	Man	Milwaukee, WI	<a href="https://soundcloud.com/user-240416425/sessions-with-sandy-2018-10-27">https://soundcloud.com/user-240416425/sessions-with-sandy-2018-10-27</a>
Taralie Peterson	Louise Bock, Spires that in the Sunset Rise	Woman	Madison, WI	<a href="https://louisebock.bandcamp.com/">https://louisebock.bandcamp.com/</a>
Hal Rammel	Hal Rammel	Man	Cedarburg, WI	<a href="https://www.halrammel.com/">https://www.halrammel.com/</a>
Kate Rissiek	Rusalka	Woman	Vancouver, BC	<a href="http://rusalka.org">http://rusalka.org</a>
Mike Schauwitzer	Slow Owls, Mildew	Man	Milwaukee, WI	<a href="https://youtu.be/JtqGV0Kui18">https://youtu.be/JtqGV0Kui18</a>
Amanda Schoofs	Amanda Schoofs, Bachelorette Party	Woman	Milwaukee, WI	<a href="https://soundant.isound.com/">https://soundant.isound.com/</a>
Gabriella Schwartz	Nummy	Woman	Oconomowoc, WI	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch">https://www.youtube.com/watch</a>

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Shanna Sordahl	Shanna Sordahl	Woman	San Francisco, CA	<a href="https://www.shannasordahl.net/h?v=2gxT83KqvrY">h?v=2gxT83Kq vrY</a>
Matt Taggart	Luer, PCRV, Matt Taggart	Man	Fargo, ND	<a href="https://pcrv.bandcamp.com/album/implosion">https://pcrv.bandcamp.com/album/implosion</a>
August Traeger	August Traeger	Man	Milwaukee, WI	<a href="https://somnaphon.bandcamp.com/">https://somnaphon.bandcamp.com/</a>

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## Appendix B

## Background Information on Audience Participants

Name	Gender Identity	Number of Interviews
Andy de Junco	Man	4
Jack Hietpas	Man	4
John A. <sup>7</sup>	Man	4
Bill Pariso	Man	4
Jennifer Zamora	Woman	3
George Jackson	Woman	1
Lonán Kestrel	Non-binary	1
Chris Momsen	Man	1

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<sup>7</sup> Participants were given the chance to choose an alias or use their own name. All participants chose to use their own name except for John A., which is an alias.

## Appendix C

### Interview Protocols

*All interview protocols are for semi structured interviews with participants. Some questions may be added, altered, or skipped depending on the participant and their responses*

#### **TEACHING ARTISTS**

##### *Pre-Workshop Interview*

- History
  - How did you first get involved with noise or experimental music?
  - Why did you decide to play experimental music over other genres?
  - How did you learn to play experimental music?
  - What do you find valuable about experimental music?
  - What do you find valuable about the experimental music community?
- Workshop
  - Describe what you are going to do during the workshop.
  - Why is that important to you?
  - How does it connect to your practice as an artist?
  - What do you hope participants take away from this experience?
- Performance
  - Describe what you anticipate doing in your performance at the series.
  - What about this performance is important to you? Why?
  - What do you hope audience members take away from this performance?
- Future orientations
  - If you could have attended a workshop when you were learning about experimental music, what do you wish you could have learned about?
  - What do you think needs to happen for others to become more involved in experimental music?
  - What value do you see in people getting more involved with experimental music (if any)?
  - What else needs to happen if people want to experience these things you value?

##### *Post-Workshop Interview*

- General
  - Please describe what you experienced during the workshop and performance
  - What went well during the workshop and performance? How do you know?
  - What do you wish you could have change?
  - What would you do differently?
  - If you were going to design a follow up workshop, what would it look like?
  - If you were going to do a follow up performance, what would you do?
  - Why would is that follow up valuable to you?
- Specifics
  - Were there any moments during the workshop or performance that stuck out to you? Why?

- Were there any people at the workshop or performance who stuck out to you? Why?
- Did anybody say or do anything that you found surprising?
- What did you find surprising about that?
- Did you think the workshop and performance were successful? Why or why not?
- Orientations
  - Did the experience in the workshop or performance change the ways you think about learning or teaching in experimental music?
  - Did the experience in the workshop or performance change how you think about experimental music in general?
  - Did anything in the workshop or performance change how you might approach your own work as an experimental musician?

## **PARTICIPANTS**

### *Pre-interview*

- General
  - Describe your relationship with listening to music.
  - Describe your relationship with playing music.
  - How familiar are you with noise and experimental music?
  - What do you know about these musical forms?
  - What about these musical forms interest you?
  - What about these musical forms do you find uninteresting or problematic?
  - How do you feel about performing experimental music?
- Series
  - What do you hope to take away from the workshops?
  - What will help you accomplish that goal?
  - What do you expect will happen during the workshops?
  - What do you hope to take away from the performances?
  - What do you expect will happen during the performances?
- Future Orientations
  - How do you see this experience impacting your life, if at all?
  - What do you intend to do with the things you learn in this series?
  - Do you want to continue to make experimental music after the series is over? Why or why not?

### *Mid-Interview*

- Workshop
  - Describe the last workshop you participated in
  - What stood out to you about this experience?
  - What did you find valuable about this experience?
  - What would you have changed?
  - How do you see yourself incorporating this workshop into your own practice as a musician?
  - What happened during the workshop that helped you develop this take away?
- Performance
  - Describe the last performance in the series that you saw

- What stood out to you about this experience?
- What did you find valuable in this experience?
- What would you have changed?
- Do you see this influencing your work as an artist? If so, how?
- Creation
  - Describe your current work as an experimental musician
  - What methods are you incorporating into your music making?
  - Why is this valuable to you?
  - How did you find these methods?
  - Where do you want to take your music making next?
  - What will help you develop those ideas?

### *Post-Interview*

- General
  - Describe your relationship with listening to music. Has it changed during this series?
  - Describe your relationship with playing music. Has it changed during this series?
  - How would you describe noise or experimental music?
  - What about these musical forms interest you?
  - What about these musical forms do you find uninteresting or problematic?
  - How do you feel about performing experimental music?
- Creation
  - Describe your current work as an experimental musician
  - What methods are you incorporating into your music making?
  - Why is this valuable to you?
  - How did you find these methods?
  - Where do you want to take your music making next?
  - What will help you develop those ideas?
- Artifacts (questions would be in response to a specific music recording made by the participant)
  - Where do you see the influence of the workshops/series in this recording?
  - Can you point out any specific moments that you think are exceptionally good or powerful or meaningful?
  - What about that moment do you find exceptional?
  - Can you point out any specific moments that you would want to change?
  - Why do you think it needs to be changed?
  - What would you change about it?
- Future Orientations
  - If you were going to create a follow up piece for this recording, what would it be?
  - Where do you want your music making to go next?
  - If you were going to design a workshop for other people to participate in, what would it be?
  - Why is this important to you?