A DISCUSSION OF THE ELEMENTS OF
FOUR ASPECTS OF
ONE PRACTICE

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Chapter I: Introduction

This thesis is based on a series of four projects accomplished over the course of my final year at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa. The reason for the inclusion of multiple projects is that it is consistent with my synthesist and diverse working style and is necessary for the proper grasp of the whole of my thesis endeavors. I am constantly revisiting and reworking core conceptions and strategies that play out in time through various media, and involve various venue choices, and diverse target audiences.

Hybridity is a key conceptual factor of my art. My work ranges from interactive sonic/sculptural installations, light/sound/video multimedia performances, electro-acoustic recordings, and guerrilla radio broadcasts, to drawing, printmaking, photographic experiments, and kinetic sculpture, there are multi-fold and simultaneous tendencies in my work. I consider myself a bricoleur and am constantly searching for new ways to combine and integrate disparate media into coherent, viable works of art. I am fascinated by the interplay between media and the new critical and expressive possibilities that arise through cross mediation, especially as it relates to time, place, and the viewer. I am particularly interested in sets of dichotomies and the simultaneous expression of conflicting or self-negating conceptualizations resulting from the temporal experience of interaction.

I see the experience of audience interaction as analogous to a slow musical experience that reveals to the viewer/experiencer new levels of archeological/conceptual data. This is consistent with, and revealing of, the experience of the artist during the
creation and development of the work, as layers of meaning add up over time often altering or even negating the original conceptual intention.

The four projects included in this thesis are:

1. The YELLOWROOM Project Space.
2. The Radiodelia Experiment.
3. Turn It On.
4. Sugarctic and the Green Slide Show.

Subsequent chapters will discuss each of these four projects as facets of a larger conceptual framework, their relationship to the above-mentioned concerns, their historical referents and theoretical origins, and what they posit for the development of future work.
Chapter II: Discussion of Method

A: The YELLOWROOM Project Space:

"The creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act."-Marcel Duchamp

The YELLOWROOM originated from a desire to extend the boundaries and the function of the studio, the primary and most important 'frame' the artist possesses, to include various performative, temporally ephemeral, and collaborative events mostly in the realm of sound art and video. It was also designed around the concept of a space existing as a marker, an evidence, and a 'spent' theater. A place where the remnants of a transitory event existed as a fetishized, activated zone. Similar to an abandoned theater or recording studio the YELLOWROOM was open to all interested passersby. Those that wished to, participated. Those that wanted merely to observe could do so freely.

This kind of space was made problematic due to the use of University of Hawaii at Manoa, Department of Art and Art History facilities, i.e.; open studio space adjacent to my studio, though this factor was minimal due to the general liberal nature of the Department of Art and Art History regarding experimentation as well as the fact that most of the activities occurring in the YELLOWROOM were nocturnal.

Without this slight tension concerning the question of official spatial allotment and behavior the YELLOWROOM would have been merely a noisy, bright yellow artist's space. But it was also the intentional conflation of this seemingly mundane aspect
with the brief and impossible demand of a truly autonomous space within the walls of the University.

Two important critical relatives of this work are Bruce Nauman, particularly his evolution of thought surrounding the artist's relation to the studio, and the essay *Chaos: The Broadsheets of Ontological Anarchy* in the book *TAZ (Temporary Autonomous Zones)* by Hakim Bey.

As a project designed around the ideas of autonomy, collaboration, the extension of the function of the studio, and theatrical staging of space, the work of Bruce Nauman is an ideal critical touchstone for the YELLOWROOM project due to the clarity with which he has articulated the problem of the studio in contemporary art practice. As the primary site of art activity, the studio has a level of importance for the artist above that of the gallery or museum. Nauman's critical practice reveals and highlights this importance. As he has said: "My conclusion was that I was an artist and I was in the studio, then whatever I was doing in the studio must be art." (1). This statement places the locus of art squarely on the artist, his activities and body in space, and the studio as the first formalizing arena, field, or frame.

Hakim Bey's TAZ; *Temporary Autonomous Zones* provides another interesting perspective. Bey's conception of true autonomy as being only attainable for brief periods under highly organized conditions is a useful touchstone for YELLOWROOM activities and art activity in general. As he says:

*If History IS "Time," as it claims to be, then the uprising is a moment that springs up and out of Time, violates the "law" of History. If the State IS History, as it claims to be, then the insurrection is the forbidden moment, an unforgivable denial of the dialectic—shimmying up the pole and out of the smokehole, a shaman's maneuver carried out at an "impossible angle" to the universe. History says the Revolution attains "permanence," or at least duration, while the uprising is "temporary." In this sense an uprising is like a "peak experience" as opposed to the standard of "ordinary" consciousness and experience. Like festivals, uprisings cannot happen every day—otherwise they would not be "nonordinary." But such moments of*
intensity give shape and meaning to the entirety of a life. The shaman returns--you can't stay up on the roof forever--but things have changed, shifts and integrations have occurred--a difference is made. (2)

To conceive of art activity as a brief 'up-rising', and the studio as the arena of this 'up-rising', is to enter into the originating logic of the YELLOWROOM activities.
B: The Radiodelia Experiment

"Noise can blow your head out. Noise is rage. Noise is ecstatic. Noise is psychedelic. Noise is often on the edge between annoyance and bliss. Noises are many things. Noise is a difficult concept to deal with..."-Torben Sangild (3)

The Radiodelia Experiment was a sound performance and guerrilla radio broadcast that took place at 39Hotel Gallery, Honolulu, Hawaii. It was primarily an attempt to engage with the ideas of Noise and indeterminacy on a formal level in an official gallery setting. Secondarily it was conceived as a direct political act of disruption against one of the primary Christian FM broadcast channels located in downtown Honolulu.

Using a series of eight clock radios, eight microphones, amplifiers and an LPFM (Low Power FM) radio transmitter, (a deliberately spare set of tools), the Radiodelia Experiment resulted in five hours of uninterrupted, indeterminate, abstract, and chaotic noise. This noise was subsequently broadcast at least one eighth of a mile, and up to one quarter of a mile, around the gallery, on the frequency 91.1 FM, thus blanketing and disrupting the signal originating from the Christian station that normally broadcasts on this frequency.

This action was deliberately illegal, aggressive, and disruptive in an attempt to conceptually embody the various qualities inherent to Noise itself. What are these qualities? Torben Sangild in his essay The Aesthetics of Noise, 2002, traces the etymology of the term noise in an attempt to partially define it:

Etymologically, the term “noise” in different Western languages (stoj, bruit, Gerausch, larm, etc.) refers to states of aggression, alarm and tension, and to powerful sound phenomena in nature such as storm, thunder and the roaring sea. It is worth noting in particular that the word “noise” comes from the Greek nausea, referring not only to the roaring sea, but also to seasickness, and that the German word Gerausch is derived from rauschen (the sough of the wind), related to Rausch (ecstasy, intoxication), thus pointing towards some of the aesthetic, bodily effects of noise in music. (3)
Sangild continues, providing three basic definitions of noise; an acoustic, a communicative, and a subjective definition. These definitions are worth considering as they articulate very closely my concerns regarding this phenomenon and its use in this project.

A. Acoustic Noise
In the field of acoustics the concept of noise is in principle purely physically defined. Noises are sounds that are impure and irregular, neither tones nor rhythm – roaring, pealing, blurry sounds with a lot of simultaneous frequencies, as opposed to a rounded sound with a basic frequency and its overtones.

B. Communicative Noise
In communication theory, noise is that which distorts the signal on its way from transmitter to recipient. There will always be an element of distortion, either externally or internally, coming from the medium itself.

C. Subjective Noise
"Unpleasant sounds" – This is the common and colloquial, but also the most intricate, meaning of noise. And it is obviously a subjective definition. There are very few general rules as to which sounds are unpleasant...it is to a great extent a matter of personal idiosyncrasy and cultural/historical situation. An important factor in coming to dislike certain sounds is the extent to which they are considered meaningful. The noise of the roaring sea, for example, is not far from white radio noise, but is nonetheless not considered unpleasant and irritating. We still seek meaning in nature and therefore the roaring of the sea is considered blissful, whereas radio noise, even if we were to hear it as indistinguishable from the sea, is normally considered a disturbance. Artists, who deal with noise in their music, as well as their audience, have a different approach to white noise, no longer considering it a nuisance. One might conclude from this that the subjective definition is not relevant to the aesthetic use of noise in music. But, as I have already suggested, that would be a hasty dismissal of the important tension you get from infusing the formerly negative. To reach a point where a white, harsh noise is not considered unpleasant demands a training of the senses to the point of being familiar with this expansion of musical sounds. Reaching this point, noise will still contain a certain power due to the tension of listening to what used to be dismissed as repulsive. (3)

These definitions are extremely accurate in their description of my own thoughts about the power of noise and its metaphoric and practical use for art purposes. Sangild’s communicative definition, “noise is that which distorts the signal on its way from the transmitter to the recipient”, and his subsequent statement that “there will always be an element of distortion...coming from the medium itself”, seem to yield the meaningful metaphoric layers I was concerned with in this project. They function as comments on
the communicative limitations of the artist and the art object as well as the art practice itself in relation to the viewer/experiencer.

Part of Sangild’s subjective definition points toward another aspect of this project. His statement- “To reach a point where white, harsh noise is not considered unpleasant demands a training of the senses to the point of being familiar with this expansion of musical sounds.” (3)– echoes my intentions in relation to the audience. The five-hour duration of the performance of *Radiodelia Experiment* served as an almost pedagogical attempt to alter the audience’s consciousness to match my own subjective experience of the event and open a depth of discernment in relation to the initially disorienting noise.

Finally, the broadcast itself functioned on the level of cultural critique and ‘art sabotage’, (2). While choosing to turn the gallery into an illegal broadcast space, essentially a pirate radio station, and purposely blanketing and disrupting the Christian FM broadcaster’s signal, I defined the work in relation to the normalizing power structures of the FCC and Christianity. In doing this I was literally claiming the gallery as an active space temporarily more powerful than these forces of control.

The Radiodelia experiment has its historical roots in the simultaneous poetics of Café Voltaire era DADA, the Intonorumuri (Noise Machines) of Luigi Russolo and the Futurists, and certain Cageian compositional strategies.

It is perhaps more similar in form and intention to the free noise work of Masami Akita (Merzbow). Akita is widely regarded as an important pioneer in the genre of ‘noise music’. Noise music as is demonstrated in the essay *Masami Akita (Merzbow),* (4), focuses on complex soundwave composition and the technology required for such composition.
The noise music genre contains two crucial elements: a focus on complex waves and technology. Noise music, like a sonic magnifying glass, focuses on the complex, "noise-like" wave forms of sound. Complex waves or noise are defined acoustically as sound which does not reinforce a specific single frequency. The simplest type of sound is a sine-tone which is comprised of only a fundamental with no overtones and heard as a single pitch. A harmonic sound is composed of two or more sine tones (a fundamental with one or more overtones), and is also heard as a single pitch. A complex sound is composed of many harmonic sounds which is not heard as a single pitch. Complex waves, therefore, are not absent of pitch, but rather are comprised of many pitches which do not reinforce a single pitch, and is perceived as noise. Along this sonic spectrum from simplest to complex sounds, noise music focuses on complex sounds.

In addition, noise music uses electronically produced sounds. It is, therefore, closely linked with technology and science. As shown by the progression of equipment used by Akita; before the advent of the digital computer he was using electronic analog hardware equipment. Now that the computer has become more useful and especially more inexpensive for musicians, Akita has begun to use computers and software for live performance and composition. These two factors, the focus on complex waves and utilization of electronic technology, are critical factors for noise music.(4)

The *Radiodelia Experiment* differs from Akita’s conception of noise music in the use of ‘throwaway technology’ of clock radios and their attendant AM/FM reception as the generators of the noise.
C: Turn It On

*Turn It On* was an exhibition that took place in 39Hotel Gallery, Honolulu, Hawaii. It was an exhibition undertaken with Honolulu artist Duncan Dempster and was concerned with questions surrounding urban, shared aesthetic experiences and history.

My part of the project included the re-creation of various (1940’s and 50’s) storefront signs from the urban landscape. Familiarity with the city of Honolulu would make these signs recognizable as those that dot the buildings throughout the city indicating spaces that no longer exist, except in the memories of the local residents. The seeming uselessness of these signs alters their function from that of quaint tools of commerce to architectural and sculptural objects experienced and collectively owned by the residents of the city. I mimicked their worn and dilapidated, (but ultimately well crafted) state, concentrating on the aestheticized realism and enigma of purpose surrounding the originals.

This project investigates, through a specific perspective, my concerns with sculptural staging, transmutation of subtextual qualities or hyper-meanings, and collective experience or audience interaction.

Audience response to this project suggested it was effective in two ways: during the show several people asked where I had found the signs, indicating a successful mimesis and confusion of the real and ‘unreal’, and after the show several people made comments like “Wow, after your show I see all the old signs around town differently.”, suggesting a successful altering of the viewer’s future consciousness and a tapping-in to latent aesthetic perceptions.
D: Sugartctic and the Green Slide Show

*Sugartctic and the Green Slide Show*, the culmination of the thesis year, was an exhibition at the Commons Gallery at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Department of Art and Art History. It was designed to illustrate various examples of my work surrounding generative art, indeterminacy, and framing strategies. Presented in a traditional salon or group show fashion the works were intended to be accessible only after some time in the gallery.

The works in the exhibit each contained a conflation of intentions and meaning. As much as possible I used the ‘laboratory’ or ‘playpen’ model as a framing device, meaning the work was not complete until the viewer completed it through interaction, discovery, and play. I also used various generative and indeterminate strategies, from the use of unstable and malleable materials i.e.; sugar, ‘silly-putty’, and mordancage chemicals, to the inclusion of drawing machines whose surfaces changed throughout the show with viewer interaction. All these strategies were intended to foreground ideas of mutability, unstableness, and entropy throughout the duration of the exhibit.

This exhibition can be analyzed by dividing the nine works into three categories based on my intentions in relation to the above ideas and the subsequent level to which they can be seen as successful:

1. **Works using unstable materials that physically change over time.**
2. **Works using interaction, making the viewer responsible for change over time.**
3. **Works using indeterminate strategies for their generation presented as finished pieces.**
1. Works using unstable materials that physically change over time.

Mutability, evolution, and entropy are most readily illustrated through the use of materials that actually change, grow, and disintegrate. Three works in the exhibition were of this category:

_Sugarctic_, a title piece for the exhibit, originated from my experience of a frozen lake in Minnesota and subsequent photographs. This was an attempt to recount in three dimensions both the photograph and the memory. The body of the piece is a 32 by 54 inch trough of growing sugar crystals suspended horizontally from the gallery ceiling. This trough can be viewed either from its sides or through a distorted lens in the front of the piece. If viewed through the lens the sugar field resembles a frozen lake similar to an adjacent photograph of three people on a frozen lake. This association is further enhanced by the inclusion of plexiglass tubes that the viewer must place his/her head into to view the piece. When this is done a sound like a vast arctic wind is created, inducing an overall state of immersion allowing for a momentary suspension of disbelief, ideally engaging both the imagination and the senses.
"The Spider Is Your Problem Now", is a series of four pages of photographic narrative collages, styled in a rigid comic book panel format, that had been treated with mordancage chemicals (acetic acid and hydrogen peroxide) and not rinsed. Placed in clear boxes on the wall the photographs both grew (crystalline residual salts) and disintegrated over the duration of the exhibition.
Silly Putty, is exactly that. Forty pounds of Silly Putty, a mixture of white glue, borax, water, and coloring, in an overlarge gum machine plastic container. A game of scale, surprise, and fun, but essentially a statement of extreme mutability and chance.
2. Works using interaction, making the viewer responsible for change over time.

Three works in the exhibition were interactive, their site of mutability and transformation being their relationship to the audience:

*The Poet's Drawing Machine*, is a drawing machine dependent on the viewer for alteration of the drawing surface.
Collision: Two Movies, Prototype I, Two animation-lightbox-style drawing machines presented one beside the other. Each box had a series of drawings (cells) for cell animations, dependent on the viewer for continuance of the narrative.

Figure 15
Central Sound Piece; Nighttime, This piece was concerned mainly with the distribution, in a convoluted way, of a series of indeterminate sound experiments. A multi-part system, (see plates #16, 17, 18), this piece required viewer actuation. The unraveling strands of seven cassette tapes were fed through an apparatus containing seven magnetic ‘play’ heads. The viewer, often frustrated due to the minimal and sporadic content of the recordings, could pull the various strands or several at once to amplify the resultant sounds through the gallery.
3. Works using indeterminate strategies for their generation presented as finished pieces.

Three pieces were presented as completed works and examples of the aesthetic results of indeterminate art strategies:

*Green Slide Lightbox I*, resulted from the discovery of found slides from a friend's trip to Laos, formalized into a lightbox.
Wind Through the Trees, a series of Intaglio etchings made from placing zinc plates in various trees on Tantalus, a mountain near the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa. The motion of the trees, when blown by the wind, move an etching stylus over the surface of the plate, inscribing the image. Each print serves as the evidence of the passage of wind over the mountain and the specific character of the different trees there. Each print is titled with the Latin name of the tree in which it was made.

Figure 20
*Accidental Flowers From the Flood; Duncanized Version*, an aesthetic game formalizing and accentuating abject or invisible streams of information, this piece has three stages. The first stage was the collection and collaging of the inside covers of found books damaged in a significant flood of Manoa Valley and the University of Hawaii at Manoa. The second stage was the manipulation, by Honolulu artist Duncan Dempster, of this collage by drawing 3inch circles delineating specific areas. The third was my formalization of Duncan's aesthetic choices into 24inch diameter circular lightboxes. This project was included with the intention of escaping my own aesthetic preferences while quoting another artist as a means of completing a system.
Chapter IV: Conclusion

Though each of the four projects discussed in this thesis differed widely in their materiality and immediate conceptual and aesthetic framework, they all shared certain larger theoretic commonalities. My interests in systemic and generative art were prevalent as were concerns regarding audience response and participation.

This body of work indicates my interests in conceptual and phenomenological art strategies of the past and a desire to rework these into a coherent contemporary practice. A practice based on the engagement with (disturbance of/relation to/escape from) systems of power or larger systems in general, investigation of the interstices of objects and contexts, and the alteration of perception through relationships with technology. I have developed work along these lines while skirting overtly political art through the development of more flexible models based upon improvisation, interactivity, and open-ended experimentation.

This indicates the possibility of a future practice combining multiple simultaneous strategies for the development of works as a way of both hiding and revealing various layers of the history of their making. Opening the way for the creation of complex works that are both honest and mysterious. Works that reveal the evidence of their making while remaining in contact with the audience/viewer/experiencer providing successive plateaus of experience and multiple possible interpretations.
REFERENCES


