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Abstract

The Names of Minimalism:
Authorship and the Historiography of Dispute in New York Minimalism, 1960-1982

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Several of the composers we most frequently label “minimalists” have been engaged in disputes about musical authorship with fellow composers and former colleagues. This dissertation uses those disputes as starting points towards understanding minimalism as a practice of authorial critique. Drawing on the philosopher Jacques Rancière, I also examine the historiographical practices that have frequently denied that critique any efficacy.

In the introduction I outline Rancière’s method of dispute, and how histories of minimalism have used composers’ later renunciations to deny the minimalist critique of authorship any efficacy. To exemplify this method, I consider the “confiscations” in effect when musicologists read Reich’s “Music as a Gradual Process” and Pendulum Music. Chapter 1 introduces Ranciérian concepts of importance throughout my study—politics and police, the pedagogic relation, noise and “low music”—through considering Rancière’s disputes with his professor Louis Althusser, his classmate Jacques-Alain Miller, and his “friend-enemy” Alain Badiou. Chapter 2 examines the conflict between La Monte Young and Tony Conrad over the authorial propriety of the music they created together in the Theatre of Eternal Music. I draw on primary documents to argue that the ensemble functioned as the first appearance of compositional collectivism in western art music. Chapter 3 considers a pair of disputes: between Terry Riley and Steve Reich, and, between Reich and Philip Glass. Through a close reading of interviews from the late 1980s and early 1990s, I show how these
composers retroactively articulated a singular minimalism by effacing collaboration in favour of pedagogic transmission. Chapter 4 leaps ahead into the era of the “death of minimalism” to consider the relationship between Glenn Branca and Rhys Chatham. I focus in particular on the diverse applications of the terms “minimal” in late 1970s downtown New York to show the many “indistinct minimalisms” (including punk and no wave) ongoing at the time. In the conclusion, I articulate a Rancièrian theory of names and naming to tie together several themes from the different case studies. My concern is to ask how the authorial name—whether proper, collective, or improper—attached to a piece of music impacts our historiographical treatment.
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Introduction

Early Minimalism and Dissensus

Tony Conrad proposed his “aesthetico-historical” project *Early Minimalism* in 1997.¹ His concern was to recover the inaudible work of the Theatre of Eternal Music, an ensemble he performed in from 1963 through 1966 with La Monte Young, Marian Zazeela, John Cale, Angus MacLise, Terry Riley, and others. In the liner notes to the *Early Minimalism* box set, Conrad admitted that the designation “early” minimalism is ridiculous—clearly a historical error, but an illuminating one. His aim was to displace the normative suggestion that Young’s *Trio for Strings* (1958) set the foundations of minimalism. Instead, Conrad gives the name “minimalism” to the motivating practices of the Theatre of Eternal Music as he understood them: the rejection of the “authoritarian trappings of the score” in the wake of the Cagean challenge to authorship. “Conrad was wilfully putting himself into a paradoxical position,” the art historian Branden Joseph writes, “becoming the ‘author’ or ‘composer’ by means of appropriating practices he claimed challenged the notion of author or composer.”² The Cagean challenge to authorship, undertaken as a problematization of the written musical score, laid the ground among the subsequent generation for sustained and consistent authorial challenges, often in the form of disputes between minimalist authors. If composerly authorship is no longer stable, it becomes open for dispute over not only who wrote what, but over who wrote what first—and indeed, whether composers could or should write at all. The composers most commonly labelled minimalists—La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass, to which I add Conrad and others—developed a performance practice in opposition to the

generation of their teachers (Cage included) which fundamentally began, as Conrad notes, by dismissing the score as a documented delegation to performers. This rejection led Young and Conrad to form the Theatre of Eternal Music; it similarly led Riley, Glass, Reich, Charlemagne Palestine, Laurie Spiegel, Glenn Branca, Rhys Chatham and many others to form bands, under collective names, “to get their music out,” as Chatham told me in 2016.³

It is this subsequent decision that bands were the ideal formation from which to compose music, despite still producing “works” by individual “composers,” that led to a series of disputes between the soon-to-be-minimalist composer-performers who had performed and composed together. I am not the first to note this string of disputes as a novel aspect of the history of minimalism; in his book on Conrad and the “arts after Cage,” Joseph writes:

The history of minimal music is to a surprising degree a history of authorship disputes. The estrangement between Young (and Zazeela) and Conrad (and Cale) is echoed by that between Riley and Steve Reich, between Reich and Philip Glass, and between Chatham and Glenn Branca… It becomes clear that we are dealing… not just with differences of opinion, but with opinions that are different in kind.⁴

It was in an effort to find the means to write against singular authority that the minimalists came together into various social formations, and attempted to properly recognize that collaborative element, despite constant demands from critics and musicologists to name the singular author of the “works” in question.

These disputes are the focus of this dissertation. My interest began from a personal effort to account for Conrad’s radical claims about authorship within the broader history of minimalism, and within the context of musicology, a discipline which has often viewed him as a hypocrite: how can someone whose name appears on his album covers suggest that he is anti-authority, anti-authorship, even anti-art? In contrast to this reading of Conrad’s work, I present him as part of an under-

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³ Author’s conversation with Rhys Chatham, Skype, September 2014.
recognized tradition of minimalism that goes back to June of 1963, when Conrad joined Young’s ensemble with Zazeela, Maclise, and Billy Name, or perhaps more importantly to the end of 1964, when Cale, Conrad, Young, and Zazeela collectively took on the name the Theatre of Eternal Music. Each chapter examines disputes between authors who were formerly collaborators and colleagues. I consider these disputes as central to a political reading of minimalism, which takes its revolt against “structural secrecy,” as Steve Reich would write in 1968 (see below), as a major though largely dismissed political-aesthetic event in mid-twentieth century composition. This introduction will develop two concepts central to this dissertation, borrowed from Tony Conrad and the philosopher Jacques Rancière respectively: *early minimalism* and *dissensus*.

**Early Minimalism**

For my purposes, “early minimalism” does not refer to specific works like Young’s *Trio for Strings* or *Compositions 1960*, nor Riley’s *In C* or Reich’s early tape pieces, or any of the other works labelled as the foundations of minimalism. It is not even the years 1958-1964 or 1960-1966, or the shift from west coast to east coast, as some scholars have suggested to delineate the style chronologically or geographically rather than by works.\(^5\) By “early minimalism” I mean an aesthetic and a politics of authorship—perhaps a politics of aesthetics, following the philosopher Jacques Rancière, on whom much more to come—subscribed to by most composers we now consider “minimalists” while they were developing their compositional voices and performance practices. These first developments occurred, in at least several very prominent cases, during the years prior to the authorial disputes that Joseph highlighted above. For this reason and others, those disputes structure this dissertation. I focus on the period prior to the disputes as a means of considering the

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consistency-in-disagreement of this aesthetic-politics. This approach is in contrast to, on the one hand, trying to find formalist consistency among a handful of composers already agreed upon as “minimalist” or, on the other, rejecting the name on the grounds that there is no sufficient, scientific consistency to hold the classification together. “Early minimalism,” then, describes the working practices and resultant music created by La Monte Young and Tony Conrad (and Marian Zazeela, John Cale, and Terry Riley, among others) under the collective name the Theatre of Eternal Music; it is the time Riley and Reich spent together developing compositions like In C and It’s Gonna Rain in San Francisco in 1963-4; it is the music that resulted from Reich’s close interaction with Philip Glass when both began performing together extensively in New York in 1968-1971 and created works like Music in Fifths, Four Organs, Two Pages, and Pendulum Music; and, perhaps least intuitively, it is the working environment and music Glenn Branca and Rhys Chatham created from 1977 through 1981, including with bands like Melt Down, Theoretical Girls, and the Static, and in pieces like The Ascension, Guitar Trio, and Branca’s first symphony.⁶

In approaching minimalism as an authorial politics, I am most directly building upon the dual concepts of Conrad’s “early minimalism” and what Joseph calls the “metaphysical history of minimalism.” Joseph’s was the first extensive critique of minimalist historiography; he notes that in the dominant literature on minimalism from the 1980s through the early 2000s, “methodological assumptions about the writing of history remain largely unquestioned, narrating the development of musical minimalism according to the tropes of authorship, influence, expression, linear progression, and disciplinary specificity.”⁷ This scholarship aimed to highlight the unchanging “originary essence”

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⁶ Perhaps ironically, Early Minimalism cannot be considered a work of early minimalism. The recordings were made in the mid-1990s, and thus were not part of the actual foundation of the compositional styles or practices in question. Rather than existing as pre-dispute recordings, Early Minimalism is in fact a discursive foray into the dispute—a musical comment on the dispute rather than an event prior to the dispute. One piece in the collection, Four Violins, was recorded in 1964 by Conrad on his own and should surely be considered a foundational piece of early minimalism, though it does not come up in this dissertation.

⁷ Joseph, Beyond the Dream Syndicate, 37.
of minimalism in Young’s *Trio for Strings* and its development in the output of four specific composers. In doing so, historians (and I include here the composers themselves) have produced what Joseph labels a “metaphysics” of minimalism:

Within the larger history of minimalism, this originary content, variously modified and inflected, continues through the canonic lineage connecting Young to Riley to Reich to Glass, a trajectory that is presented, both collectively and in each individual case, as illustrative of the increasing sophistication and establishment of minimalism, a trajectory that ends in opera and appearances at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. 8

Within the canonic metaphysical literature we can place, most centrally, Wim Mertens’s *American Minimal Music*, K. Robert Schwarz’s *Minimalists*, Keith Potter’s *Four Musical Minimalists*, and, at some moments, Edward Strickland’s *Minimalism: Origins*. 9 In the research for this dissertation, the significance of these four monographs has been equivocal: alongside my archival work, they provide the primary material on which I build my own narrative. Nevertheless, in their formalism and insistence on a linear (and teleological) progression of influence from Young through to Glass (exclusive), they simultaneously provoke the historiographical critique—extending from Joseph’s—that is my central theoretical concern. To draw on the distinction between genres of historiography used by Hayden White, I am indebted to these “metaphysical” works as chronologies; but as narratives, in the historiographical framing of the events and analyses that they write up, they have given me much reason for critique. 10 I will return to them throughout.

Less present in the following pages is *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice*, in which Robert Fink provided a New Musicological reading of minimalism. Fink aims to “colour the minimalist monochrome” by drawing upon its cultural context, including disco,

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advertising, Suzuki pedagogy, and mail-order baroque records. Fink’s book was a revelatory update to the literature of minimalism in addressing longstanding assumptions about (a)teleology and desire in minimalism, and thus troubling formalist presuppositions by drawing on critical theory. The writing is at its strongest when it critiques Wim Mertens’s attack on minimalism for taking up the philosophy of anti-teleological jouissance, marking as it does “the desertion of history in favour of a utopian world.” Fink prioritizes claims like this and turns them into relativist values rather than deficiencies, and thus marked a massive shift in approaches to minimalist concepts and repertoire which has provided a massive influence on recent scholarship around the foundation of the Society for Minimalism in Music. Exemplary here are Ross Cole’s two articles that position Steve Reich within the context of the New York visual arts scene; Peter Shelley’s overview of the discourse of minimalism in relation to the visual arts; scholarship on Philip Glass’s community organization and collaborative practice by David Chapman, Sasha Metcalf, and Leah Weinberg; Kerry O’Brien’s insightful writing on intersections between minimalism and Bell Laboratory’s “Experiments in Art and Technology”; Jeremy Grimshaw’s ethno-critical biography of La Monte Young; and of course Joseph’s book on Conrad.

12 See Mertens, American Minimal Music, especially 118-124. Indeed, Mertens’s book ends, “According to Marcuse, the breakdown of dialectics is not a solution but is a symptom of the disease—the desertion from history in favour of a utopian world. This can only bring pseudo-satisfaction and will probably serve to strengthen the historical impasse for the worse.” Mertens, American Minimal Music, 124.
In the 2013 *Ashgate Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music*, co-editors Kyle Gann, Keith Potter, and Pwyll ap Siôn attempt a balance between the formalist literature and the more recent socio-cultural literature growing out of *Repeating Ourselves*. The volume is a strong testament to the growing interest in minimalism, the variety of approaches being brought to its study, and the disciplinary desire to make sense of a genre that among many still provokes, first of all, knock-knock jokes. A number of scholars provide formalist readings of compositions by lesser-known figures; while this is of course not in itself a problem, these inclusions of “other” minimalists are constantly rationalized through reference to the formal techniques developed by the “big four,” such as Young’s pure tunings and drones, Reich’s phasing processes and speech melody, or Glass’s additive rhythms. The result is that no piece can be admitted to the minimalist canon without deference to the techniques of the big four: the music of Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass shifts from central objects of analysis to overarching disciplinary constraints. In the end, the book seems to suggest, minimalism isn’t only the music of the big four—but it is delimited by the formalist techniques that they developed.

This formalism is most visible in the only definitional criteria the co-editors are willing to put forward, a set of ten Wittgensteinian “family similarities,” all of which are formal features: harmonic stasis, repetition, drones, gradual process, steady beat, static instrumentation, metamusic (a fascinating concept, though entirely unexplored in the subsequent chapters), pure tuning, and audible structure. I agree with the editors that minimalism should not be defined by a “single technical feature”; I am unconvinced, though, that turning to a list of ten is a stronger, more convincing, or more flexible solution. Jonathan Bernard offers the strongest disciplinary comment in

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the rather large Ashgate volume when he writes that “there is perhaps less certainty now than ever before as to what minimalism actually is.”20 What minimalism “actually is”—what the term “minimalism” names—is nevertheless presumed to be grounded in formalist criteria.

Bernard’s concern in fact offers hope for those of us convinced that a style of composition should not be restricted by a single formalist “kernel” (or even ten). Against both Bernard’s claim about a lack of cohesion, as well as those formalists who insist that a name be equivalent to a flawless taxonomic classification, I contend that “minimalism” is in fact a rather clear concept—one which art historians have been far more accurate in pinpointing. In his book on minimalist art, James Meyers claims that he “views minimalism neither as a clearly defined style nor as a coherent movement,” but rather “a debate, an argument if you will, that initially developed in response to… three-dimensional abstraction… during the period 1963–1968.”21

Joseph, an art historian, offers a similar lead. While entirely opposed to the construction of a “major” history linked to any formalist category, he paradoxically offers the most compelling formalist definition of musical minimalism:

Without a doubt, it is via… such tropes [the confusion of pitch and rhythm in Conrad’s early structural film and musical work]—understood as aspects of a consistent Conrad “style”—that a continuous linear history, a major history, of Conrad’s development from 1959 to 1966 would be written. Indeed, it would even be possible, were one so inclined, to locate the kernel from which all minimal music derived in, say, rhythm/pitch interaction, this being arguably a more characteristic and encompassing trait of the genre as it stretches from Young to Glass than sustained tones.22

22 Joseph, Beyond the Dream Syndicate, 73; my emphasis. This language of the “kernel” is surely drawn, both in Joseph’s quotation and for me throughout this dissertation, from Althusser’s critique of authors who confuse Marxist materialism with an updated form of empiricism. Samuel Chambers has summarized this dispute in remarkable depth, noting how Althusser argues that empiricists view all knowledge as the “kernel” (of gold, for example) surrounded by layers of “dross” that it befalls the intellectual to draw away. For Althusser, the problem is that the empiricist then turns this “kernel” into the real; Marxism, he would argue, in contrast begins from the abstract idea and moves towards materials in question, or draws the “real” (Althusser calls it “scouring”) from a constant dialectic between the idea and the material, without forgetting the incredible work involved in removing the “dross” of, in his case, ideology. I deal more extensively with Althusser in the next chapter. The critique of practices of “seeing through” is one of the major developments of Rancière’s thought that I will introduce and develop in the following chapters. See Althusser For Marx, and Chambers Bearing Society in Mind: Theories and Politics of the Social Formation (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 117-134.
Joseph’s tone here is important: he dislikes the construction of a singular major “kernel” in reference to which to define minimalism-as-formalism. This does not stop him from poking at the flaw—that if there were to be a singular kernel, it would most accurately be rhythm/pitch interaction. In following Conrad out of music, and himself working outside of music history, Joseph arrives at a more compelling and indeed simple formalist definition than had thus far appeared in print. The problem is not imprecision in its definition; it is simply that the dominant practice of classification in musicology has been to turn to the categories of music theoretical formalism—that is, to a methodological approach founded on analysis of the very parameters minimalism critiqued. That art historians have been less concerned with formal criteria, I argue, has made their definitions not only more culturally grounded, but also simpler and more direct.

Still, Joseph’s minor history is of course not without faults. The metaphysical narrative functions in his book as a homogeneous background against which to position the disruptive career of Tony Conrad, the anti-authority author whose practice undermined the metaphysical narrative. I challenge Joseph’s representation of the metaphysics of minimalism, not to claim that his label is incorrect, but because it is enough of a rupture in minimalist history to deserve extended investigation. I use Joseph’s insights on the metaphysical narrative to rethink the history of minimalism from within a perspective grounded in recent musicological work on experimentalism. Primary here is Benjamin Piekut, whose focus on ontology, institutions, and cross-genre pollination has developed the productive means for setting aside formalism in favour of the material traces appropriate to studying experimentalisms. Michael Heller’s research on the 1970s loft jazz scene in

23 That this conceptual pairing is itself largely outside of standard music analytic practices suggests that Joseph’s indisciplinary approach was required to formulate it; I discuss indisciplinarity and the general importance of impurity, indistinction, and so on later in this introduction (and indeed throughout the dissertation).

New York provides a similar model, in which a genre is studied and delimited by associational networks, community, discourse, and debate, rather than by sounding criteria read as evidence of an absolute compositional plan. Most importantly, in delimiting specific moments of experimentalism in New York—Pickut’s very precisely to 1964, Heller’s to the 1970s as the reparation of an aporia in jazz studies—these two texts have provided strong models both for recognizing the breadth of many of the issues I am concerned with here across New York arts in the 1960s and 1970s, and also for historiographically accounting for the temporal challenges “experimentalisms” provide for their historians.

I propose that more coherent, non-formalist reasons can be located for the designator “minimalism” as it is shared across many of the composers and musics. These include: the fact of collaboration as evinced in eventual disputes over authorship; the return to composers performing their own work; the decision to form bands (including the composer) to not only perform, but also develop their music; the rejection of published or even complete scores in favour of oral and rote development in rehearsal; and the way that this music exists, ontologically, more often on magnetic tape (whether released professionally or stuck in archives) than on manuscript paper. Each of these material practices developed prior to the disputes in question—thus, “Minimalism” as traditionally understood by a broad audience, develops from the practices of what I am calling early minimalism. The difference is that “Minimalism” proper relies on effacing those material practices of collaboration and the authorial-political allegiances from which they result.

The early careers of the composers we know as “the minimalists” were periods of intense collaboration; my interest is in tracking the subsequent disputes to see what consistency they can offer to an authorial-political reading of minimalism. What has long gone unrecognized among historians eager to forget these disputes between composer-collaborators as (at best) pre-historic and

inevitable, or (at worst) biographical trivialities and gossip, is that the composers in question developed their idiomatic compositional and performance techniques during these periods of collaboration. We can of course—and many scholars across many disciplines do—dismiss these engagements as part of an inevitably abandoned 1960s zeitgeist. I disagree with the historical approach that ties any revolt to a destiny without taking into account its contemporary efficacy or potential afterlives. It is towards articulating this position that I turn to Jacques Rancière.

Dissensus

If I am so fixated on collaboration, why, then, is my dissertation focused on the disputes of early minimalism? I have two answers: the first is brief; the other gets at the methodological core of the following chapters.

First: the fact of being in dispute points to earlier instances of having been in conversation, if not necessarily in agreement or collaboration. Interpersonal disputes among authors—as indeed among people generally—point to the fact of having been in touch; to actual human beings that worked and talked and thought together. This in itself stands in contrast to an (idealized and largely dead) image of the composer as solitary genius, alone at a desk, inscribing marks on paper to be passed down through a hierarchical division of labour from composer’s hand, to performer’s stand, to conductor’s podium, and to listeners’ ears. While I do not spend much time dealing with the prior generation, interauthorial disputes were not particularly common in the decade or so before the minimalists began writing—or, at the very least, they were not as thematically recurrent as among the minimalists. The composers of the two prior generations—whether they played a direct

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pedagogic role (Luciano Berio, Leonard Stein, Nadia Boulanger) or an indirect one (Milton Babbitt, John Cage)—were not particularly known for their engagement with performance or developing compositions in rehearsal. Milton Babbitt, for example, must be recognized as a looming figure for the minimalist cohort, who entirely (though never directly) rejected his injunction that the composer be separated from listeners—even “society”—with their capacity to potentially misunderstand their achievements.27 In contrast (though only barely, as I will discuss below), John Cage took a more direct role in the performance of his work, and was opposed to what Branden Joseph calls the “bi-univocal” transmission of meaning from composer (or work) to listener.28 Nevertheless, as Benjamin Pickut has argued, Cage was still very attached to score-based ideologies of authority. Pickut’s commentary on the Cagean “chain reaction of paper” is notable in terms of my focus on authorship and historiography: Cage “was a virtuoso at translating… the ruptural potential of his most indeterminate works by rearticulating them into the terms of a high-art identified experimentalism.” The perfect example is Variations V whose score was only written out after its premiere in 1965. In this sense, Pickut continues, no matter how experimental in theory,

Cage folded his output very easily into the conventional concert-music tradition, where it was later taken up by willing performers. Cage’s choice to score even an unscored event like

closely related to my own work, but from later on, are Cage’s disputes with both Julius Eastman and Glenn Branca, which have gained much attention in the last few years. See in particular Ryan Dohoney, “John Cage, Julius Eastman, and the Homosexual Ego,” in Tomorrow is the Question: New Directions in Experimental Music Studies, ed. Benjamin Pickut (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 39-62. I hope to be able to apply further attention to these cases in the future, but for now, the thing that I find interesting—and which Joseph pinpointed—is that the minimalist lineage, broadly understood, is prominently plagued by these disputes, though they have never been treated as focal points. It seems almost a criterion for inclusion among the “minimalists” to have been in authorial dispute with a colleague—or, perhaps more accurately, to have begun your career as a collaborative composer-performer.

27 Milton Babbitt, “The Composer as Specialist (1958),” in The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 48-54. It is worth returning to a brief excerpt from the end of this essay: “I dare suggest that the composer would do himself and his music an immediate and eventual service by total, resolute, and voluntary withdrawal from this public world to one of private performance and electronic media, with its very real possibility of complete elimination of the public and social aspects of musical composition. By so doing, the separation between the domains would be defined beyond any possibility of confusion of categories, and the composer would be free to pursue a private life of professional achievement, as opposed to a public life of unprofessional compromise and exhibitionism.” Babbitt’s fear is the danger of audience misunderstanding: he considers the real threat to contemporary music’s development the necessary evil of an audience who is constantly at risk of misinterpreting the music and not being able to recognize or articulate the singular kernel of a totally serialized work.

28 Edward Strickland notes that Reich in particular “was equally out of sympathy with Cageian aleatorics and the sometimes vaudevillian theatricality it engendered.” See Strickland, Minimalism: Origins, 188.
Variations V sets off a chain reaction of paper: music with a title is listed on a program, and that program ends up in several different archives. Then there is the score, its autograph, sketches, facsimiles, and final printed copy housed at hundreds of libraries around the world.\footnote{Piekut, Experimentalism Otherwise, 17-18.}

While Piekut notes that the trio Cage-Cunningham-Tudor often toured in something that can productively be considered a “band” formation, the Cagean paper trail—something which the composer Ned Sublette has also highlighted\footnote{“Cage’s work may have radically undermined the function of the score, but the position of the score in his work was primary… All of Cage’s work was scored, that I can recall. And it was not only scored; the scores were published by C.F. Peters and dutifully purchased by university libraries everywhere, where we bookish young composition students imbibed them.” Ned Sublette, quoted in Tim Lawrence, “Pluralism, Minor Deviations, and Radical Change: The Challenge to Experimental Music in Downtown New York, 1971–85,” in Tomorrow is the Question: New Directions in Experimental Music Studies, ed. Benjamin Piekut (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 73.}—creates a strong difference between the minimalist composer-performers and Cage’s earlier efforts at criticizing the institutions and norms of art music. In short, for this earlier generation, there was not enough collaborative and egalitarian engagement with one another or with performers to create the conditions necessary for a sustained and substantive authorial dispute. Their methods were too hermetic—and indeed too literate—to allow the kind of interpersonal friction that I track in the following chapters.

That is the first answer. The second answer brings me, finally, to the philosopher Jacques Rancière. As much as this dissertation is a revisionist history of minimalism through its aesthetic-politics of authorship, it is also a sustained introduction of Rancière’s thought into musicology.

sever what he sees as hierarchical “allegories of inequality”\textsuperscript{32} between theory and object, thought and action, master and pupil, knowledge and ignorance, even cause and effect.

I contend that a sympathetic and productive effort to respond to Rancière’s contributions requires not the proper application of an analytic, or revealing the robustness of a system, but rather thinking under the sign of equality that disrupts inequities and hierarchies. I thus include Rancière as one more protagonist among the composers in question, which means similarly examining Rancière’s disputes with other authors and schools of thought. Chapter 1 thus presents Rancière’s disputes with Jacques-Alain Miller, Louis Althusser, and Alain Badiou; Chapters 3 and 4 consider his critique, along with his colleagues at the collective journal Les Révoltes Logiques, of the “New Philosophers” Bernard-Henri Lévy and André Glucksmann. Here, however, I would like to briefly introduce Rancière’s method of dispute or disagreement—which is also his “method of equality.”\textsuperscript{33} That the method of dispute is also the method of equality gets at a key term in Rancière’s work which constantly evades simple definition: \textit{dissensus}.

This method of dispute became central for Rancière throughout his career. Rancière’s most commonly read text among Anglo-American political theorists, \textit{La Mésentente}, was translated by Julie Rose as \textit{Disagreement}. That term has taken on central theoretical weight in writing on Rancière. However, as Davide Panagia has shown at length, the translation is itself probably the result of publisher’s marketing concerns—\textit{mésentente} more literally means “misunderstanding,” and indeed “mis-hearing.”\textsuperscript{34} Rancière presents misunderstanding as the central moment of politics, which for him

\textsuperscript{32} See Jacques Rancière, \textit{The Emancipated Spectator} (New York: Verso, 2009), 12.
\textsuperscript{34} “I suspect that some editorial and marketing choices must have gone into deciding on the word ‘disagreement,’ because Julie Rose is an otherwise excellent translator of Rancière’s work. But here is my point: the original French title is \textit{La mésentente}, which better translates as “the misunderstanding” (or even a “missed listening,” as the root \textit{entente} means both understanding and listening).” Davide Panagia, “Rancière’s Style” in \textit{Novel} (Summer 2014): 289. Another of Rancière’s strongest readers makes the same point. See Samuel Chambers, \textit{The Lessons of Rancière} (New York: Oxford, 2013); see in particular Chapter 3, “Literarity.” Chambers’ critique is, perhaps in keeping with his own Ranciérían
is not about power, but the very force of equality appearing within the confines of “the way things are.” The “misunderstanding” in play is that politics does not only exist in the dispute between pre-established parties (as in a political debate), but rather is already in effect long before that point. Rancière grounds his reading in Aristotle, for whom politics is rooted in separating the phôné as the voice of mere animals, from the logos of a rational human. Rancière builds upon this binary by pushing the question one step further: under what sign do we recognize this sign of human rationality within speech? Politics is already over in those moments in which the sounds emitted from a speaker’s mouth are labelled noise, with no relation to the truth or even speech. Is it not first of all an aesthetic choice to label the emissions of one voice noise while the other is labelled reason? The political theorist Samuel Chambers clarifies this point: “when we encounter a creature that makes sound, only politics can determine whether we hear in that sound phôné (rendering the creature a mere animal) or logos (granting the creature a part in the political community).” Politics in Rancière’s egalitarian formation occurs when those who supposedly emit noise—he relies most often on the slaves of ancient Greece or the pre-Marxist workers of the 1830s as examples—“stage” their noisy speech as rational dialogue, in need of not only recognition, but response. In this way, for Rancière, foundations exist—but they are always “tainted” and even doubled; politics is always impure. Politics is precisely the constitution of this stage (aesthetically: the staging, the “mise-en-scène”) in which former-noise can be understood and heard (entente, both) as discourse. More recently, Rancière has noted that it is because of this problem of translation into English—the problem of mésentente having been translated as “disagreement” rather than playing on the doubled “mis-

impulse, a notably generous one which does not simply accuse Rose of an oversight or ignorance, but carefully and extensively narrates a particular history of philosophical translation—from Greek to French, French to English, Greek to English, of Plato, of Foucault, of Rancière—to clearly make sense of how Rose made her error, and how it was a reasonable result of a number of complex philosophical and linguistic problems.

understanding” and “mis-hearing”—that he put forward a term for which he is more often known among Anglo-American aesthetic philosophers and art curators, *dissensus.*

Beyond his own theoretical intervention along these lines, Rancière had been thinking about disagreement as a method as early as his first book, *La Leçon d’Althusser.* There, Rancière places himself in direct conflict with his *École normale supérieure* professor Louis Althusser over the politics of revolt, history, and discourse. In a first sketch of the methodological value of examining dispute, Rancière criticizes Althusser (in the ideological state apparatuses essay) for turning Marx’s passing comments into transcendent Marxist methodology. Instead, Rancière suggests that prioritizing dispute provides many methodological gains (though here he is specifically referring in Marx’s work): they “draw attention to [first] the actual terms of the debates that had given shape to Marx’s thought, [second] to the links between the transformations in his thought and political confrontations, [and third] to the effects [Marx’s] discourse produced on the labour movements and to class struggles to this day.”

Beyond this articulation of an explicit method of dispute, Rancière has always been directly involved in polemic and its historiographical capture. Practically all of his monographs can be related to a dispute: *Althusser’s Lesson* (1974) with Althusser; *Nights of Labour* (1981) with labour sociologists, and their assumption that workers’ consciousness was unformed prior to Marx; his writing in *Les Révoltes Logiques* (a collective journal which Rancière co-edited, 1974-1981) with the New

36 Rancière claims in this interview that he used the term “disagreement” [*mésentente*] because “it expresses in the most precise way possible the polemical knot between the different senses of the word ‘to understand’ (see, comprehend, agree) that sums up the sensible and conflictual dimensions of the political community—as it was already formulated in Aristotle’s *The Politics.* But in most languages that formula is untranslatable. And, to communicate in English, I had to replace it with a Latin word, even though it doesn’t belong to the Latin tongue: *dissensus*—a word that sheds the power of being understood proper to living languages in favour of the possibility of a functional definition.” Rancière, *The Method of Equality*, 83.


Philosophers; *The Philosopher and His Poor* (1983) and *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987) with Pierre Bourdieu; *The Names of History* (1989) with the historians of the *Annales* school; and so on. Whether examining historiography, politics, pedagogy, or aesthetics, all of Rancière’s writing proposes “indisciplinary” interventions *between* disciplines, pointing out the problems of distinction and the principle of indistinction and impurity at the foundation of each. To quote one of the collective introductions to the journal *Les Révoltes Logiques*, Rancière’s historical writing aims always to “recognize the moment of a choice, of the unforeseeable, to draw from history neither lessons nor, exactly, explanations, but the principle of a vigilance toward what there is that is singular in each call to order and in each confrontation.” *(Les Révoltes Logiques* is discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.) More than anything else, Rancière’s method is always one of equality, in which, to paraphrase Davide Panagia, politics = democracy = equality = dissensus. In some profound senses, these terms (ignoring momentarily their different contextual mobilizations) are interchangeable in Rancière’s writing. All of these terms are about the *unqualified*, the *indistinct*, the *ignorant* (in a non-pejorative sense), the *uncounted*, the *contingent*, and so on. Democracy is not the reign of equality, a mode of managing power, or a system of voting; it is the absolute rejection of any qualifications for rule, or any criteria for determining priority.

Several of Rancière’s foundational concepts are introduced at length and developed throughout all subsequent chapters. Nevertheless, an important methodological point should be

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40 As is hopefully becoming clear, issues of indistinction, zones of indiscernibility, partitions of sensibility, and so on are central to Rancière’s work. In Chapter 4 I discuss “indistinct minimalisms” ongoing in the moment before Minimalism became a household term in 1982. While the term is not directly one of Rancière’s, his comments about his own “indisciplinary” practice are illuminating. In response to a question of whether his work should be considered inter-disciplinary or a-disciplinary, he responds “Neither. It is ‘indisciplinary’. It is not only a matter of going besides the disciplines but of breaking them. My problem has always been to escape the division between disciplines, because what interests me is the question of the distribution of territories, which is always a way of deciding who is qualified to speak about what. The apportionment of disciplines refers to the more fundamental apportionment that separates those regarded as qualified to think from those regarded as unqualified; those who do the science and those who are regarded as its objects.” See “Jacques Rancière and Indisciplinarity,” http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/jrinterview.html.

clarified here. When I claim that the non-hierarchical or egalitarian practices that minimalism engaged in exemplified Rancière’s notion of equality, it is specifically in relation to Rancière’s sole axiom: everyone is of equal intelligence. The form that this takes in Rancière’s work is as a presupposition of equality, rather than an argument requiring proof. In that sense, it is methodological and even aesthetic: a “distribution of the sensible” for which one searches for evidence at all times. Equality is not a goal to be achieved, but a practice, a method, and an aesthetic orientation. As he writes in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, “our problem isn’t proving that all intelligence is equal. It’s seeing what can be done under that supposition”42 (see Chapter 3). It is in this sense that I will admit that perhaps minimalism did fail to destroy compositional authority: few composers have refused to sign their names or take credit for their work, surely there are always power differentials between composer and audience, composer and performer, expert and amateur listeners, and so on. But in holding to a Rancièrian framework, I aim to presume the efficacy of the egalitarian gesture, and see what insights result from this methodological position. This must be understood on the order of a thought experiment rather than a refusal of critical responsibility.

**Early Minimalism and Dispute**

In pursuing these authorial disputes, I do not aim to reconstruct or arbitrate. Instead, I use the disputes as scenes—what Rancière calls “little optical machine[s]”43—for approaching broader theoretical issues about politics, pedagogy, authority, historiography, and genre. More than anything, the disputes provide an axiomatic chapter format which I have held onto through several changes of direction, specifically because they provide a centre around which more compelling theoretical issues can develop. At several points in planning the dissertation, the concern was raised that the topic

risked becoming little more than airing “gossip”; in every case, I hope to have avoided this. While Chapter 2 approaches legal territory more than the others, by the time I have arrived at Chatham and Branca in Chapter 4, the dispute itself—its motivation, the form it took, the reasons for it, even the events immediately prior to and following the dispute—has become almost irrelevant, as I view the two composers principally as the first instance when an “early minimalism” was entirely erased by the appearance of “big four” Minimalism proper; that is, an early minimalism that no one would thus far have recognized as being (chronologically) “early.” I held to Branca and Chatham primarily to maintain consistency across case studies. Perhaps following Dylan Robinson’s call for an “apposite musicology,”—a performative practice of writing which maintains a parallel and egalitarian relationship between content, form, and method—dispute is not only the content, but the theoretical method;\textsuperscript{44} Chambers makes a similar claim about Rancière’s method: “Rancière’s theory of politics must be understood as thinking the paradox, as capturing its flavour and mobilizing its force, rather than attempting to erase or resolve it.”\textsuperscript{45} In my focus on dispute and disagreement as content, method, and organization, the chapters to come may feel, at times, like disputes all the way down, with little effort of resolution; I attempt to capture the “flavour” of these disputes by placing in contrast not only the music and biographies in question, but contemporary writings from musicologists and critics, and the contemporary discourse within which the authors in question were polemically positioning themselves.

I should raise a major downside of this organization-by-dispute: none of the case studies centre on women. I hope that the weight of this omission is mitigated by a theoretical observation. As I just said, I do not aim to reconstruct or arbitrate disputes. Nevertheless, in approaching disputes over authorship in the 1960s and 1970s, we come up against the role of masculinist

\textsuperscript{44} Dylan Robinson, \textit{Hungry Listening} (forthcoming).

\textsuperscript{45} Chambers “Jacques Rancière and the problem of pure politics,” 301.
acculturation and authorial paternalism in experimental authorship. Composers attending university in the late 1950s, as did the big four, were trained in the lineage of “Great Men” extending from Leonin and Perotin through Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms and Schoenberg, all drawn together within a newly ordered discourse of the history of Western art music. Throughout the following chapters, it should never be forgotten that these disputes are, at least in part, what we can colloquially label (because there is no better term) “pissing contests.” The composers involved have inherited ideas of influence, tradition, pedagogy, priority, and authority, such that the disputes are largely over who did what first. These are in some sense territorial claims that, without turning to a form of essentializing the already extensively gendered politics of composition and musical authorship, are strikingly recurring among men during the period in question, while interauthorial disputes between women seem entirely absent.

Sally MacArthur has criticized the masculine environment that dominates art music composition as, at least in part, a pedagogic one: “The standard system of composing reinforces the authoritative status of the composer. This, in turn, produces a subject which composes and competes for recognition out of its independence and radical autonomy. The closed system I am describing can be summarized accordingly: the dominant music produces the composer; and the composer produces the dominant music, endlessly.”

One of the unsolved issues of this dissertation is how the project of minimalism, and specifically the practices enacted by what I am calling early minimalism, were aimed at dismantling the hierarchical, authoritative and specialist view of the composer that MacArthur attacks as masculinist and exclusive. In many ways, the turn from this early form of minimalisms to a Minimalism proper—which I place around 1982 in Chapter 4—results from a group of radical authors, led by Reich and Glass most strongly, subsequently turning back to the norms of art music composition. But what I call the “indistinct minimalisms” that they

46 Sally MacArthur, Towards a Twenty-First Century Feminist Politics of Music (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 43.
efface, which were characteristic of downtown 1970s New York music, were scenes of near gender
parity in bands and ensembles that I would suggest, despite not having hard data, still goes
unmatched in even today’s experimental music scene. I think this is at least in part owing to the
practices of critique in which the early minimalists engaged. In short, the experimental scene of late
1970s downtown New York created an openness to composition and performance that was less
exclusionary than the electroacoustic labs and conventional ensembles of the mainstream
compositional scene that was the only option even a few years earlier.

Nevertheless, the “pissing contests” remain, and I, another male author focusing on the
masculinist conflicts of other male authors, am well aware of that fact. As my research into the
disputes surely continues and further constitutes the fact of male authors bickering over authority, I
consider it important to highlight the numerous paradoxes of authorship that frame and motivate
my writing this dissertation. My interest is to ask how it is that radical attempts at collectivizing
composition ended in disputes over authorship. How is that, in the 1970s, the anti-authority dream
of the late 1960s became a nightmarish dispute over who had it first? This is a question to which I
do not think I can arrive at any single or satisfactory answer; still I am inspired by the contradictory
practices in which authors like Conrad, Young, and Rancière engaged, as well as in finding the
methodological and historiographical means by which to write about those paradoxes without
simply declaring hypocrisy or lack of self-awareness at every turn. The disputes in question have
long been read—when they were not ignored outright—as evidence of the failure of the collective
ethos ascribed to minimalism in its 1960s formulation: an ethos of collectivism that Marianne
DeKoeven ties to the existence of “the bomb.” “The viscerally palpable threat of total annihilation,”
she writes, “truly did unite ‘people of this generation’.”

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these disputes to consider what they have to offer about mid-century authorship and experimentalism generally, and in New York in particular, rather than treating them as pre-historical, biographical contingencies that reveal the failures of 1960s utopian thinking.

In short, authorship is messy: it involves petty concerns of ego and cash, priority and privilege, legacy and legitimacy. Rancière is invaluable in developing a discourse with which to combat the apathy that would reject any political efficacy of the minimalist (or any other) critique of authorship. My goal, whenever the paradoxes, disputes, and “hypocrisy” become most persistent, is not to resolve them, but to exacerbate them and look outside for analogy or resonance across scholarly disciplines, musical genres, and artistic media. I think the regime of criticism in which any paradox, conflict, or contradiction by an author or speaker—particularly when relating to their attempts to challenge their own authority—is dismissed out of hand is overdue for some self-reflection. Among contemporary critical theorists, Rancière is leading this charge. While many have understood his work as a new level of continental cynicism—particularly his well-known claim about the rarity of politics—many others have found in his writing the means of escape from postmodern cynicism towards liberation discourses. He is perhaps the theorist of, if not critical utopian thought, at least the necessity of taking revolt and protest seriously, and finding the proper means of writing revolt as reasonable, even logical, in opposition to the proleptical castings that highlight the inevitability of the return to order.

No historian has taken up this *Les Révoltes Logiques*-inspired idea of historiography as an ethic of “fidelity” to resistance as extensively as Kristin Ross. In her history of the “afterlives” of May ’68, Ross concretized the mode of historical prolepsis as the “police order of history,” drawing on a quotation from Sartre about the nineteenth-century novel’s dominant mode of narration, the bourgeois reflection on a turbulent youth: “There was difficulty to be sure, but this difficulty ended long ago… the adventure was a brief disturbance that is over with. It is told from the viewpoint of
experience and wisdom; it is listened to from the viewpoint of order.”48 That efforts at authorial collectivization and collaboration fell into quarrels over propriety is clear; this point has frequently been used as evidence of the failure or naivety of the very politics that I have been arguing for.49 The challenge of this dissertation is to articulate the efficacy of this critique rather than once again proving its inevitable failure.

It is for this reason, as well, that Rancière functions as another protagonist among the composers in question. Rancière overlaps biographically with the “big four” minimalists (and Conrad) in that all of them were born between 1935 and 1940, and thus engaged in similar relationships to changing questions of authorship, authority, and publication in the late 1960s into the mid 1980s. While I do not ascribe any direct homology between them, I would like to consider some shared points in their political biographies. There is a potential irony, even of missing my own point, in making such a structural comparison; I am aware of the danger of this shared trajectory

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49 Robert Adlington is an exceptional figure in this context. While his work frequently focuses on the 1960s avant-garde and its relationship to radical politics, his position is one of pervasive cynicism towards any potential efficacy. Throughout *Composing Dissent: Avant-Garde Music in 1960s Amsterdam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), this position is backed up with reference to scholarship within and beyond musicology. “Dutch musicians were by no means alone in perceiving a connection between aesthetic and political radicalism at this time—a connection governed, in Eric Drott’s words, by ‘a logic as dubious as it was durable’” (3-4). Later in the introduction he focuses on the “recurrent failure” of 1960s political and aesthetic goals: “Over and over again musicians fell short of the lofty social ambitions to which they claimed to subscribe… Gerard DeGroot’s characterization… of the American campus antirwar movement in terms of ‘immaturity, sensationalism, insensitivity, naivety, [and] lack of leadership,’ is typical of a narrative that determinedly aims to separate achievement from mythology. Peter Doggett, evaluating the part played by rock musicians in the revolutionary movements of the sixties, finds ‘a repertoire steeped in the rhetoric of counter-revolution—betrayal, reticence, role-playing, and ultimately incoherence’” (11-12). Adlington is only one example of this trend, and I draw specifically on his literature reviews to call attention to the general pessimism and cynicism that characterizes much scholarship on 1960s activism in the arts. There is a general sense among scholars that being “critical” about this period means pointing out the failure of lofty goals; my own approach is more inclined to trace the afterlives of even minor successes, as I will continue to argue below. In a volume edited by Adlington, Beate Kutschke follows a similar rejection of music’s ability to provide a clear or *pure* political program: ‘“New Music,’ according to the program as it was pursued by contemporary musicians, ‘should actually be music that is adequate for a new society.’ Yet, while the decision was easily taken, precisely how to carry out this program was by no means clear—and did not become any clearer during the following years. The reason for this situation was obvious: music, a nonverbal sign system, is unable to refer unambiguously to political issues” (78). In the following chapters, I will argue (following Rancière) that the fear of ambiguity, and the effort to foreclose on its possibility (as in Babbitt above), is precisely the erasure of politics.
suggesting a common biographical narrative of authors born during this period. This is far from my goal, and I hope that the following chapters will reveal my refusal of such an oversimplification. My interest here is instead in setting up a simplified binarism of before and after around the central point of the summer of 1968 as a means of considering two major points of conflict throughout the following chapters: first, the methods and discourses through which “spokesmen” of earlier radicalism (artistic or political) negate the efficacy of their own prior actions, and second, the fact that there is, despite this common trope of failure, the possibility of a fidelity, efficacy, continuity, or (to borrow Ross’s preferred nomenclature) afterlife to these moments of revolt. Where these two meet is in the historiographical privileging of the names of the former over those of the latter.

We can perhaps view the late 1950s and early 1960s training against which Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass rebelled as parallel to Rancière’s own prominent rejection of the structural Marxism of his teacher, Althusser. My title references Rancière’s 1992 text Les Noms de l’Histoire: Essai de Poétique du Savoir, translated into English by Hasan Melehy shortly thereafter, in 1994. The “poetics of knowledge” to which the title refers is the “study of the set of literary procedures by which a discourse… gives itself the status of a science, and signifies this status.” The pedagogic practices and “poetics of knowledge” of styles like serialism and Cagean chance stand in close relation to the structural and Althusserian Marxism that Rancière denounced. This is not a blanket dismissal of all “intellectualized” practices tied to the mid-century university; the attachment is more

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50 See Jacques Rancière, The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 8; I will discuss this text at length in the conclusion.
51 The specific poetics of knowledge that Rancière critiques in his historiographical text is the contemporary Annales school, who claimed to escape history’s literary status, turning it instead into a science, by turning to statistics and data. For Rancière, the focus of this turn is the literary devices that these historians use to signify this scientific status, and the means by which claims about “society” and “the masses,” represented by demographic statistics, displace any actual political potential. His most notable example here is François Furet who, in the Social Interpretation of the French Revolution, makes the polemical claim that the French Revolution “never happened” because, by the time of the major events, the French monarchy was so weakened that its failure was inevitable. For Furet, this is read as evidence of a fatalistic history in which actors—as they were for Althusser in May 68—are over convinced of their own efficacy despite the (retrospective) statistical facts that can be mobilized against their “ideological” positions. I deal with this text and this argument in much more depth in the conclusion.
specific. What Rancière specifically rejected in Althusserianism—and later in “Marxist” projects broadly—was the singular focus on alienation, dissimulation, and, most generally, the articulation of a divide between science and ideology (all drawn from Feuerbachian “Young Marx”\(^{52}\)) that could only be teased apart by the intellectual. The means by which this training, and its rejection, arrives in the mid-1970s is a second important period for historicizing (the dismissal of) the “long 1960s.” In most histories of that period, utopian currents are tracked up to 1968 before their failures are declared in the violence and factionalism of the early 1970s.\(^{53}\) As musical versions of these *groupuscules*, including Rancière’s own involvement in the *Gauche Prolétarienne*, we can recognize the parallel formation of ensembles by Reich and Glass, Young’s re-formation of the Theatre of Eternal Music, Conrad’s trip to the German band Faust’s commune and recording studio in Wümme, or any number of collaborative performances at the newly founded artists-run space the Kitchen. Moreover, it is following about the year 1972—Baader-Meinhof and so on—that this factionalism turned towards institutionalization via the renunciation, by prominent spokesmen, of their own earlier radicalism. For the former *soixante-huitards* this position was taken up most fiercely by the New Philosophers, who became the primary targets for the editorial collective at *Les Révoltes Logiques*. The New Philosophers’ “trumpeted renunciations” (as Alain Badiou later called them) around the tenth anniversary of May are closely paralleled by those same renunciations of earlier radicalism by, again, Reich most centrally, throughout the 1970s and beyond.\(^ {54}\)


\(^{53}\) While Ross’s book is my major historical reference on the events of May ’68, a strong (and less polemically and theoretically Ranciérian) is Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007). I deal with May in more detail in the next chapter.

\(^{54}\) See Alain Badiou, “The Lessons of Jacques Rancière: Knowledge and Power After the Storm,” in Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts, *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics* (Durham: Duke, 2010), 35. Badiou’s comments are taken up at length in Chapter 1, and I return to the issue of “trumpeted renunciations” from the representatives of a collective discourse, in terms of both minimalism and May ’68, in Chapter 4.
While none of the New York-based minimalist composers seems to have had any direct involvement with the Columbia protests in March, 1968, all would have been at least peripherally aware of the students’ methods and arguments, which were then taken up—not directly, and with much broader impact—by students in Paris and across France, Rancière included. For any history of this period, mine included, the summer of 1968 must remain a focal point. While the students in Paris were in the streets articulating a form of radical indistinction between student and teacher, worker and intellectual, and so on, Steve Reich was spending his spring and summer in New Mexico at a cottage for some isolated writing time. What is shared between both the minimalists and the militants is a practice, developed collectively or collaboratively, of writing against forms of authority premised on mastery and especially secrecy. Two important documents that Reich produced that summer help in articulating the “poetics of knowledge” against which minimalism originally formed as a reaction. The discomfort that scholars of minimalism experience regarding the minimalist composers’ early political orientation is nowhere more palpable than in writing on these works that Reich produced simultaneously with May ’68, the “elusive” revolution: Pendulum Music and “Music as a Gradual Process.”

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55 The Columbia strikes, while of course geographically closer to the composers in question throughout this dissertation than the general strikes in France, play no part in the chapters that follow. Nevertheless, some very strong research has been done on those protests, which create an interesting parallel (though few would say precedent) for the ones that began across the Atlantic a few weeks later. Louis Lusky and Mary H. Lusky provide a strong contemporary perspective in “Columbia 1968: The Wound Unhealed,” Political Science Quarterly 84, no. 2 (1969): 169-288. For a more updated and critical history, see Eleanor Raskin, “The Occupation of Columbia University: April 1968” in Journal of American Studies 19, no. 2 (1985): 255-260. Most interestingly, scholars writing on Columbia have had to pay far more attention to race than is ever at issue in writings on May. See, for example, Blake Slonecker, “The Columbia Coalition: African Americans, New Leftists, and Counterculture at the Columbia University Protests of 1968” in Journal of Social History 41, no. 4 (2008): 967-996; and Stefan Bradly, “This is Harlem Heights’: Black Student Power and the 1968 Columbia University Rebellion,” in Afro-Americans in New York Life and History 32, no. 1 (2008): 99-122.

Pendulum Music and “Music as a Gradual Process”

Pendulum Music retains a central function, a generally unchanging one, in writing on minimalism. In the first monograph on minimalism Wim Mertens writes, “Pendulum Music is a clear illustration of Reich’s well-known statement: ‘Once the process has been set up it inexorably works itself out’.”

Keith Potter, two decades later, cites the exact same passage from “Music as a Gradual Process” to argue that Pendulum Music is “the only work by Reich to adhere unambiguously” to the language of pure process.

K. Robert Schwarz calls Pendulum Music “atypical of Reich’s output” because it engages “rigorously structured musical process;” Edward Strickland claims that “Pendulum Music… is another pure process piece;” Sumanth Gopinath calls it “arguably, the only piece of Reich’s that works… as a single process;” Michael Nyman, in his 1972 interview with Reich, was eager to hold Reich to the politics of his early manifesto, but nevertheless noted that Pendulum Music is “the only piece of yours that one can talk of in terms of a natural process;” Martin Scherzinger claims that Reich’s processes were “not as pure as [his] hindsight assessment would have us believe,” an assessment that Ross Cole picked up and developed in line with Nyman’s concern for naturalism, to insist that “the naturalistic paradigms of gradual process offered in [Music as a Gradual Process]… were only ever realized in Pendulum Music.” These quotations are not excerpted from larger analyses: they often constitute the respective author’s complete commentary on the work. Pendulum Music is always mentioned—and always in passing, in remarkably similar terms across most writing.

57 Mertens, American Minimal Music, 54.
58 Potter, Four Musical Minimalists, 175.
59 Schwarz, Minimalists, 227.
60 Strickland, Minimalism: Origins, 198. The “another” here is slightly misleading: Strickland is referring to Violin Phase which he distinguishes from the earlier phase pieces in that it does not return to unison—though, of course, returning to unison is a central feature of any phase process allowed to run its course. In short, Strickland is a bit confusing here.
64 Ross Cole, “Fun Yes, But Music?,” 239.
on minimalism—as a solitary example of the pure process the writers understand as set forth in “Music as a Gradual Process.” A question arises: why has Pendulum Music attained such an important historiographical and narrative function while remaining unworthy of extended consideration? And further, why is Pendulum Music exclusively read as the sole practical instantiation of the theory of gradual process before Reich abandoned his own politics? I think, put simply, the two together underline (for the musicologists cited above) that minimalism aspired to a politics, that it had a pure moment which they associate with the kind of utopian thinking that they intend to pin onto this politics, but that (they claim) was never pursued sufficiently.

Richard Taruskin’s Oxford History offers an extensive analysis of Pendulum Music and “Music as a Gradual Process.” Like the scholars of minimalism quoted above, Taruskin considers Pendulum Music “a limit case to test his theory [of gradual process] to a logical extreme;” what’s more, “Pendulum Music is the conceptual paradigm or limit-case to which all of Reich’s early works for conventional performing forces can be meaningfully related”—that is, Pendulum Music is the “naturalistic” ideal to which instrumental works must be compared to mark their failure to attain formal-political purity. Throughout, Taruskin’s tone is blatantly dismissive of Reich’s writing: “Music as a Gradual Process” is written in “short explosive paragraphs like planks in a political platform” in which “Reich deliberately cast himself, like Schoenberg before him, as a Great Emancipator.” “But,” Taruskin continues, “whereas Schoenberg (like Cage) purported to liberate sounds, Reich (like a sixties agitator) was out to liberate people.” Taruskin’s biggest concern is that Reich insists upon the removal of “secrets of structure” from his compositions in turning to gradual process; for Taruskin, this is always an impossible naïve goal—a dream of “infantile leftists” as
Althusser might argue about Parisian students’ contemporaneous desire to be involved in the administration of their universities (see Chapter 1). Citing Paul Epstein’s 1986 analysis of *Piano Phase,* in which he points out the (necessarily, I should add) non-retrogradable form of any complete phase process, Taruskin writes, “It turned out that, in seeming contradiction of Reich’s manifesto, there was after all a “secret of structure” in *Piano Phase* that listeners did not know.” He continues, “but if, as seems likely, the composer himself was unaware of (or did not envision) the retrograde… then his famous maxim—‘I don’t know any secrets of structure that you can’t hear’—remains literally true.”

I find this closing claim particularly significant, as it helps in moving away from Taruskin and towards my own reading of “Music as a Gradual Process”; perhaps more, it provides a concrete exemplar of Rancière’s “method of equality.” Taruskin’s reading relies on at least one point that is, if not necessarily a factual error, surely a grave interpretive misdirection. The sentences immediately prior to “I don’t know any secrets of structure that you can’t hear” are the political core of Reich’s essay. Reich writes, “what I’m interested in is a compositional process and a sounding music that are one and the same thing,” to which his friend, the composer James Tenney, responds, “then the composer isn’t privy to anything.” Any scholar aware of Tenney’s comment would recognize how influential this conversation must have been not only to Reich, but to his younger colleague visiting him in New Mexico. Taruskin’s misdirection, which clearly shows his position in approaching Reich’s ideas broadly, is in that he frames Tenney’s comment as a “complaint;” Taruskin suggests that Tenney complained to Reich about the composer not being privy to anything within his newly formulated gradual process music. This brings Taruskin’s dismissive comments about agitation,

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70 Tenney quoted in Reich, “Music as a Gradual Process,” 35.
manifestos, and platform planks to a head: his approach in reading the essay at all is clearly to underline the fact that a composer, as composer, cannot destabilize the long-standing relationship between composer and audience—his job is not to liberate people (surely an unwelcome and heteronomous entry into the concept of “the music itself”) but to liberate sounds (the sole content of this music “itself”). This all points to a broader discursive issue: in an academic and musicological context, terms like “manifesto,” “utopian,” and even “repetitive”—all central concepts in relation to minimalism—are often used as stand-ins for, or the sole content of, critique. Paradoxically, they often demand a “pure” politics: yet another impossibility which, through the very setting up of frames of reference, rejects a priori any political efficacy to those musics.

Central to Taruskin’s concern around Reich (and minimalism broadly) is that “Music as a Gradual Process,” the “forbiddingly grim (and rather prim) essay of 1968” is actually a “manifesto”—a claim made by several other scholars of minimalism cited above. Martin Puchner argues that the manifesto, as a genre, is a poetic literature comprised of performative speech acts that yearn to constitute an authority that their authors do not possess; as he reframes it from Althusser, a manifesto projects “the political agent that will help realize its vision.”\(^7^2\) Reich himself joins Taruskin, Scherzinger, Gopinath and others in using the generic label “manifesto” as a means of distancing himself from the tone of his essay as early as at least 1976;\(^7^3\) he clarified this position more recently: “when I wrote ‘Music as a Gradual Process’ in 1968, I was very accurately reflecting all the music that I had written before 1968. All good music theory is basically referring to music that was written before the theory was written… But if it’s a prescription for what you ought to do in the future, then you’re writing a manifesto, and I think manifestos are inherently for stupid people who can’t fly by the seat of their pants.”\(^7^4\)

\(^7^4\) Steve Reich, interviewed by Joshua Klein. *Pitchfork.com* (November 22, 2006); my emphasis.
Reich’s doubled gesture here is constitutive of understanding minimalism as a politics of authorship. On the one hand, Reich recognizes the value of the essay as a proleptical document: I wrote that essay in 1968 reflecting on the work I had created to that point. On the other hand, he is dismissive of the tone of the essay, and is so specifically by reference to the general impression of what a manifesto is. Reich thus sets himself up as an analyst and historian of his own music, rather than as the “sixties agitator” that Taruskin recognizes him as. If it is a manifesto, he must have been “stupid;” he would perhaps agree with Taruskin’s inversion of his own claim, when he turns the “I don’t know any[thing]… that [the audience can’t access]” into, simply, “I don’t know anything.” Put another way: “I can’t recognize my own ignorance.”

This latter formulation is precisely how Rancière summarizes the tautology of Althusserian ideology: “On the one hand, it said: people get pinned down to their place in the system of exploitation and oppression, because they don’t know about the law of that exploitation or oppression. But on the other hand, it said: they don’t know about it because the place where they are confined hinders them from seeing the structure that allots them that place.” In short, “They are where they are because they don’t know why they are where they are.”

By the same means, Taruskin turns the core emancipating gesture of the manifesto into a shared claim of ignorance with the audience, in practically the exact same language as that of Althusser forty years prior, faced with a potentially political event (in Rancière’s sense), Taruskin responds by declaring ideologically-induced (Althusser’s and Lenin’s “infantile”) ignorance (see Chapter 1).

I join Taruskin, Scherzinger, Gopinath and others in considering “Music as a Gradual Process” a manifesto, but without the kind of cynical dismissiveness that the term often implies in scholarship. For me, this manifesto was noteworthy in setting out something that we could call, following Althusser’s writing from around this time, an epistemological break. Jumping a few

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sentences prior to Tenney’s “complaint,” we find Reich’s major historical and epistemological intervention:

John Cage has used processes and has certainly accepted their results, but the processes he used were compositional ones that could not be heard when the piece was performed. The process of using the I Ching or imperfections in a sheet of paper to determine musical parameters can’t be heard when listening to music composed that way. The compositional processes and the sounding music have no audible connection. Similarly in serial music, the series itself is seldom audible. (This is a basic difference between serial (basically European) music and serial (basically American) art, where the perceived series is usually the focal point of the work.)

I do not think that this paragraph has received the attention it is owed in the scholarship on minimalism. To my knowledge, no writers to that point had found the means of articulating a shared political relation between serialist and chance musics; a radical young composer could be either a Cagean or a serialist, depending on stylistic (and political) allegiances. With Reich’s gesture, these two ends of the compositional spectrum premised on secretive methods are displaced, becoming the shared, single end of a pole defined by audibility and audience positionality in relation to the composer’s labour. Immediately following the block quotation above, Reich continues: “What I'm interested in is a compositional process and a sounding music that are one and the same thing. James Tenney said in conversation…”

It is absolutely central to my understanding of not only “Music as a Gradual Process,” but also to minimalism broadly, that Reich’s critique be read as not only aesthetic, but also historiographical and pedagogical—a truly epistemological disruption of the existing discourse. Audibility and accessibility are introduced into mid-century discourse on art music: “I don’t know any secrets of structure that you can’t hear. We all listen to the process together since it’s quite audible.” My methodological approach in what follows, building on Rancière’s method of equality, is to take seriously both Reich’s pedagogical critique and his political claim. I suggest that it is an egalitarian program, even if it did not become one for Reich himself, it has held incredible discursive value, and opened the field of composition in a way that has long gone unrecognized by scholars...
who follow Reich’s biography, rather than the concepts he put in motion. The only thing that the metaphysical narrative needs from these two 1968 documents is to point out that there was one naïve moment in which there was a pure politics of minimalism, but its time has passed—and it was doomed to fail all along because composers should focus on liberating sounds, not people.

As Rancière has noted, however, any effort by historians to find a pure politics is exactly the erasure of politics; indeed, in that “political philosophy” has long set the goal of locating a pure, logical, rational politics, it has always functioned as a form of policing. Once again, Samuel Chambers has written more succinctly on this point than Rancière: “From Plato to Aristotle, from Marx to Arendt, political philosophers have sought to supplant the anarchic disorder of politics with a hierarchical order of the philosopher.”76 He continues, “Rancière consistently recurs to the theme of an ‘impure’ politics, a politics that thwarts the order of the philosopher… politics can never be pure precisely because politics names a fundamental impurity, an essential impropriety that renders all essentialism futile.”77 Politics means impurity means dissensus—which again means equality. The consensual insistence on the purity of Pendulum Music in relation to “Music as a Gradual Process” cannot be taken as the founding political moment of minimalism as it is in fact the historiographical gesture of its effacement.

Rancière’s method highlights the central problem of Taruskin’s analysis of “Music as a Gradual Process,” and further, of the way minimalism has regularly been portrayed in the dominant historical imaginary as the failed, naïve, tonal, repetitive, boring other of both modernist and romantic art music. In a recent interview, Rancière outlined how his mode of critique becomes a practice of writing that then becomes a personal ethical maxim:

What am I doing as a researcher? I’m betting on equality. And that means a lot of things at once. I’m betting I’m not searching for something that’s unknowable, that I’m not faced with the unknowable, the incomprehensible, the sublime, etc. When I’m going to talk about

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76 Chambers, “Rancière and the problem of pure politics,” 304.
77 Ibid., 309.
art, politics, emancipation, literature, I force myself to go and look at configurations whose articulation can be studied; that requires work, it presupposes going to work every day... I’ve imposed on myself a practical rule to work every day, to go to the library, learn something, write, and so on. For me, that’s an egalitarian maxim. To caricature it a bit, the inegalitarian maxim says that it’s a bit of a bore to have to go out, that it’d be better to stay at home and look at the papers or watch telly to see just how stupid people are, and tell yourself: I must be really intelligent since everyone else is so stupid. The choice of maxim is also this: are you intelligent because everyone else is stupid, or are you intelligent because they are intelligent? That’s a Kant-style maxim: am I betting that the capacity to think I’m granting myself is everyone’s capacity to think, or is my thinking to be distinguished by the fact that everyone else is a moron?78

In opposition to the mid-century poetics of knowledge embodied in Cagean chance and academic serialism, one of the founding documents of minimalism declares, “We all listen to the process together” because “I don’t know any secrets of structure that you can’t hear.” Discussions of a potential political critique within minimalism have generally looked to Reich’s 1968 work as something to dismiss before turning to a more pragmatic formalism in the mid-1970s (with Music for 18 Musicians, Einstein on the Beach, and so on). In the chapters to follow, I argue that this has long stood as both an exemplar of the inegalitarian maxim in research and a displacement of the radical practices of authorship that the composers later named the “minimalists” developed. I would like to conclude with another Rancière quotation, this time from a 2006 speech at the Australian Parliament—a location in which he was clearly uncomfortable speaking: “dissensus means a conflict between one sensible order and another. There is dissensus when there is something wrong in the picture, when something is not at the right place. There is dissensus when we don’t know how to designate what we see, when a name no longer suits the thing or the character that it names, etc.”79 In short, this is all a matter of sensory approach—of upsetting the relation between sense (as sensory input) and sense (as in making-sense). For most scholars on minimalism, the name “Music as a Gradual Process” means manifesto, means utopia, means purity, means failure; taking a dissensual

approach means, instead, recognizing the discursive, musical, and political work done by disrupting the consensual relationship between “politics” and “purity” in favour of an impurifying process that is also an egalitarian process. In the following chapters, I consider the work of indistinction and dissensus performed on “art music” under the name “minimalism.”

Chapter Outline

Each chapter of this dissertation focuses on composers in dispute, and on some aspect of Rancière’s thought that can help elucidate the political and authorial value of that dispute. Chapter 1 stands out slightly from this scheme as perhaps a “theory” or “method” chapter, in which I use Rancière’s own disputes with Jacques-Alain Miller, Louis Althusser, and Alain Badiou to introduce some of the major themes of Rancière’s thought in the context within which they developed.

Chapter 2 considers the disagreement between La Monte Young and Tony Conrad over the authorial propriety of their work as the Theatre of Eternal Music. While several scholars have focused on the music this group created, almost all of them—with the notable exception of Branden Joseph—have done so within the context of writing on Young. As I will show, this has resulted in histories that treat the Theatre of Eternal Music as a single event, work, or period in the teleological development of Young’s career. Instead, I look to documents from the time of the group’s existence to consider the consistency of Conrad’s longstanding claims that the group was, in fact, a collective and collaborative ensemble formed to escape the authoritarian function of the composer. While I do not specifically aim to side with Conrad against Young, my methodological approach surely makes me sympathetic to Conrad’s egalitarian and anti-authority arguments. Nevertheless—via Rancière’s discussion of politics and the police—my argument arrives at a recognition that both Young and Conrad are correct in their claims, as I suggest that the Theatre of Eternal Music most often referred
to in histories of music only existed from late 1964 through the summer of 1966 and was, at that period, a band-formation operating under a collective name. That is, I argue that the name “Theatre of Eternal Music” constitutes the first compositional “we” in Western art music—and the reasons that this has posed a problem for histories of art music.

Chapter 3 turns to Rancière’s thought on pedagogy in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* to consider the disputes between Steve Reich and Terry Riley, on the one hand, and then between Reich and Philip Glass on the other. I examine retrospective interviews with the “big four” from the late 1980s and 1990s to show how the discourse of the “pedagogic relation” (introduced in Chapter 1 in relation to Althusser and Rancière) carves up the relationships among these three composers to turn collaborative efforts into a line of transmission of pedagogic influence that extends from Young to Riley to Reich to Glass. In this sense, I argue that Joseph’s “metaphysical narrative” in fact relies on what Rancière calls the *abrutir* of the pedagogic relation: turning students, listeners, followers into brutes. In these cases, the disputes are over propriety and pedagogy: Riley suggests that he taught something to Reich that was not sufficiently recognized, and Reich claims the same of Glass. As a means of disputing this hierarchical imposition onto the early forms of collaboration, I consider five pieces that problematize the simple hierarchical narrative of the metaphysical/pedagogic relation in both directions: Riley’s *In C*, Glass’s *Two Pages*, and Reich’s *It’s Gonna Rain, Four Organs*, and *Phase Patterns*.

Chapter 4 functions as a companion to Chapter 3 in again focusing on how “early minimalism” was turned into the pre-history of capital-M Minimalism. Here I jump a decade ahead—well outside the traditional scope of any “early” conception of minimalism—to examine the dispute between the electric-guitarist composers Glenn Branca and Rhys Chatham. Their fruitful interaction, from about 1977 through 1981, had a major impact on subsequent experimentalism across many genres of music, as their “no wave” bands became models for downtown
experimentalists like Sonic Youth, Ut, and Swans. In a stark rejection of the methods of partitioning individual practitioners within a single scene into their proper “place,” I use their work to consider the mainstream discourse of “minimalism” in late 1970s downtown New York as one that referred far more often to the “punk” and “no wave” bands than to composers like Reich, Riley, or Glass. In short the goal of the chapter is to return to the moment before many “indistinct minimalisms” were institutionalized into “Minimalism”; to consider, on the one hand, what music this subsequently silenced, and, on the other, what associations Reich and Glass were rejecting in the “trumpeted renunciations” of the early 1980s.

In the conclusion I hold to another meaning of what is minimized, one that aims to reconstitute the effaced authorial politics connected under the term “minimalism”: not the use of “minimal” materials of composition, but the minimization of the distance between composer and listener, between art and popular musics, between composer and performer, band and ensemble, and so on. Minimalism produces indistinction between formerly opposed terms. Minimalism holds together as a form of authorial politics in which received traditions of western art music are thematized and challenged as a means of minimizing hierarchical distance between these and other central terms by which the genre of art music elevates itself. That it has not achieved these goals—that people still study and perform art music, that authors still sign their names—is not evidence of the failure of this politics, but simply a reminder that research and political practice are interesting because the names of things do not directly correspond to their efficacy. Politics, Rancière argues, exists because words and things are put in common and made open to disagreement; “because no primeval legislator put words in harmony with things.”\(^80\) In the conclusion I will argue that the politics of minimalism can only be read as “failed” by insisting, first of all, that it formed within and

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\(^80\) Rancière, *The Names of History*, 35.
existed as an art music, and second, that those musicians and ensembles who took up this politics of indistinction did so at the expense of being separated from the labels “art music” and “composer.”
Chapter 1

The Low Music: Jacques Rancière in Disagreement

This chapter involves two interrelated arguments about the philosopher Jacques Rancière that will introduce theoretical concepts of value to my later case studies on minimalism: on the one hand, that the Rancièrian view of politics as a presupposition of equality provides context for understanding the authorial politics of early minimalism; and on the other, that the concept of “the low music” plays an unacknowledged role in Rancière’s political thought, and can be helpful in considering how minimalism staged its critique of authorship. I articulate these arguments through three disputes over authorship, and the forms of authority derived from it, between the philosopher of aesthetics and politics Jacques Rancière and colleagues from his student years: first, his teacher Louis Althusser; second (and secondarily) his classmate Jacques-Alain Miller; and third, three decades later, his “friend-enemy” Alain Badiou. Throughout, I outline central Rancièrian topics that will return in my musical case studies: most notably politics, the police, and dissensus; the function of the pedagogic relation; and the axiomatic declaration of the equality of intelligences that ties them together. Methodologically, I am dealing with conflicts over authorship to examine the new models of authorship and their subsequent object, authority, in relation to which artists of this period were newly required to position themselves.¹

I first briefly consider Althusser’s role as a teacher at the École normale supérieure, particularly his foundation of collective research groups in the mid-1960s, including the one around his landmark seminar on Capital. Next, I outline the terms of the dispute with Jacques-Alain Miller over

¹ Liz Kotz and Branden Joseph have both written on the broad influence of Cage’s thoughts about authorship on artists—not just musicians—in the 1960s. See Liz Kotz, Words to be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2007), and Joseph, Beyond the Dream Syndicate.
the propriety (or not) of the concept of “metonymic causality” that developed through and beyond that dispute. This concern for propriety leads me to the “mass concepts” of May ’68, and how they are very differently accounted for by Althusser and Rancière. Here, importantly, my interest is in how central aspects of the Rancièrian discourse were developed in disagreement with Althusser’s response to May ’68, which he saw as an “infantile” manifestation of bourgeois leftism that reveals, more than ever, the necessity of the Communist Party and its theorists to authorize revolt by producing their “low music.” In the second section, I turn to one of the “canonic” disputes between Rancière and Alain Badiou. In Metapolitics, Badiou claims that Rancière stole, without grounding its ontological State function, both the concept “the police” and the formulation for which Rancière is best-known: that equality is declared and never programmatic. I follow Jeff Love and Todd May—as well as a later Badiou—in arguing against Badiou’s claims, and then focus on the methodological value of Badiou’s axiomatic distillations of Rancière’s thought. I develop here a Rancièrian “low music” to consider how the egalitarian transmission of knowledge (or of political experience) is based on rejecting the norms of authority and mastery under the paradoxical guidance of “Ignorant Masters.” Before doing any of this, however, I will briefly outline Rancière’s project, which departs greatly from “political philosophy” first of all, in his declaration that all speaking beings are of equal intelligence. Rejecting the “allegory of inequality” that produces the binary knowledge/ignorance, or the “absolute condition” of a distinction between knowledge and non-knowledge, he argues that there is not an intelligence that thinks and writes, and an ignorance that works and does, but simply one form of intelligence with infinite manifestations, the differences between which are always of translation rather than hierarchy. From this founding axiom—this presupposition of equality between all speaking beings—Rancière draws his definition of politics. It has nothing to do with elections, or the management of power, opinion polls, labour strikes, and so on; it is simply the force
and logic of equality. In Rancière’s thought, politics means equality. Much of his thought revolves around a complex question: Equality in what sense?

In his best-known works among political theorists—La Mésentente, and his “Ten Theses on Politics”—Rancière defines, in opposition to politics, la police—the police. His seventh thesis states: “Politics stands in distinct opposition to the police. The police is the distribution of the sensible (partage du sensible) whose principle is the absence of void and supplement.” His eighth thesis articulates that this opposition of politics to the police is not one of the individual vs. the State, but rather something more novel: “Police interventions in public spaces consist primarily not in interpellating demonstrators, but in breaking up demonstrations. The police is not the law which interpellates individuals (as in Louis Althusser’s ‘Hey, you there!’ [as in the “police” function of the ideological state apparatuses, discussed below])… It consists, before all else, in recalling the obviousness of what there is, or rather of what there is not, and its slogan is: ‘Move along! There’s nothing to see here!’.” The police is thus the way things are: it is the non-pejorative, even “neutral” mode of listening to and viewing the world in which there are subjects who have particular functions to which they must remain attached. It is the count of those of ac-count; the counting of parts of a whole, an account of the world as it is, in which there is no possibility of void or supplement. Subjects have a place to which they are “naturally” tied as a result of their position (he ties this to the Platonic myth of the metals). There are certain subjects whose place it is to govern, to speak, to

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5 Ibid., 37.
6 This political formulation references set theory and is common to both Rancière and Badiou; as I show below in discussing the critique from Jeff Love and Todd May, it is at least in part because Badiou’s whole system is based in set theory that he feels his version of this “supplement” is better founded and thus more entitled to a proprietary claim in contrast to Rancière’s theft.
manage, to write, to think. On the other hand, there are those whose work is of the hands and the
body, and whose speech thus functions as noise, expressing an ignorance that has no relation to
power, justice, or their management. These people are often treated as the “ignorant” or “the
masses”—whether directly or indirectly—in philosophy and political thought; for Samuel Chambers,
they are the unthought background generally labelled “society” against which all political thought
occurs. The police mode of sensibility is that which articulates the impropriety of these noises of
equality—or better yet, sets up contexts (distributions of sensibility) within which these claims are
obviously nonsensical because invisible and inaudible.

Politics, in contrast, requires an attendant police to disrupt; politics is the force of equality
that enters the scene and redistributes our mode of sensibility: that is, both sensation and our mode
of making sense of it. These two together, the interaction of a way things are and a disruption of it
under the force of equality, is what Rancière calls dissensus: the manifestation of two worlds in one;
the possibility of more than one understanding, more than one sense-making, of a particular given-
to-sensation. Rancière’s world of politics is one of democracy, in which all speaking beings share
the common power of language to account for things, to take (ac)count, to listen and speak, to
receive and make sense; it is not a democracy of the ordering of power and the attainment of
consent through elections, but rather the democracy of the “rabble,” a thinking of this mode of
dissension, dissensus, and even dissonance as the only true form of politics as democracy as radical
equality of all to all.

Dissensus, as the material enactment of politics as the manifestation of two in one, is
something that Rancière constantly plays on in his writing. While Alain Badiou—examined at length
below—relies on lists of interrelated theses and axioms, Rancière’s writing is full of “on the one

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hand…” and “on the other…” as a means of presenting arguments. At every turn, his arguments present a dual meaning, a disruptive function, a “double break” and so on. This manifests itself in his terminological reliance on homonymy, as a means of manifesting a dissensual relationship between a word and its account. The equality of intelligence and of speaking beings is made visible especially in moments where inequality is premised on a prior equality: Rancière relies frequently on the example of a master giving orders to a slave who must, first of all, understand the content of the order, and second, understand, as part of the very “genre” of an order, that he must obey it. Building upon this in his more recent aesthetic writing, his central concept, *le partage du sensible* as the partition of the sensible, uses the French *partage* to signify a partition that not only separates but also creates a new space, a new distribution of sensibility. Even more, this *partage* plays off his earlier political thought about the *avoir-part*, or the part-taking of politics, the judgment of whether one is entitled to have a *part* in a dispute, the *part* of those with no *part*, *party* politics, and so on. This list could continue indefinitely. Within Rancière’s thought—mirrored in his method and his writing style—there is a constant effort to always split meaning open and redistribute it, even with his own words and authorial discourse. It is a stylistic means of pointing out that his interpretation is one among many, that he is not in a position of Mastery in relation to any discourse or to his readers, but that he is rather—like the nineteenth-century pedagogue Joseph Jacotot, whose voice Rancière notoriously slips in and out of in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*—what Badiou defines as an Ignorant Master: a master whose mantle is momentary, taken up only to profess the impropriety, the anarchic impossibility, of anyone maintaining authority or mastery.

*The Ignorant Schoolmaster* is related to other texts of the period. These include *The Nights of Labour*, which examines the poetry and political pamphlets of the pre-Marxist French workers who, Marxist labour historians have demanded ever since, spent their nights sleeping to prepare for the gruelling days of work ahead; and *The Philosopher and His Poor*, which argues that the discourse of
“leftist” philosophers like Marx, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Pierre Bourdieu were little more than instantiations of the silencing of workers’ and peoples’ discourse so as to “benevolently” speak for them. In each of these books, Rancière argues that politics, as activist and militant, can only continue beyond the mantras of “politics is everywhere” (and thus nowhere, and not worthy of being actively engaged in) by presuming the equality of all. He contends that the discourses of Marxism and “leftism” had long relied methodologically on dismissing the actions of others by revealing—whether through Marxist “science,” cultural capital or the habitus, ideological state apparatuses, ideologies—that people are incapable of thinking for themselves, and that all efforts at change, liberation, or emancipation (whatever term might occur at the time) can only ever be launched at phantom structures because these ignorant agents are locked in the structures of false consciousness and alienation. The duty of these discourses, running from Plato to Bourdieu, has been first of all to theorize and account for the ignorance of “the people”—to produce their imagined silence—so that the philosopher or theorist can speak on their behalf.

The rest of this chapter aims to develop these and other concepts, and point out their foundations in actual disputes with people close to Rancière—Miller, Althusser, and Badiou. In the case of Miller, the dispute is directly one over the authorial propriety of the very anti-subjective (anti-authorial?) concept of “metonymic causality”; for his part, Althusser is attacked for silencing the noise of May ‘68 to declare his own the “theoretical discovery,” that the school is the dominant instrument of ideological reproduction; lastly Badiou, after abandoning his own earlier critique of Rancière’s concept theft, articulates the importance of the “Ignorant Master” in Rancière, and raises a central question: is a non-stultifying practice of pedagogic transmission possible? These relatively minor arguments thus highlight two central themes for the coming chapters: first, the terms under which the pedagogic transmission of concepts occurs; and second, how proper names become attached to those concepts. In that sense, the issue is of propriety of concepts and the mode of their
authorization for future use: the disputes acknowledge the authority resulting from being the
authorizing author of an authorial idea. Like Conrad or the “Young Reich,” Rancière begins from an
attempt to figure out a practice of authorship that retains cultural production while diminishing the
stultifying practice of delegation. Is there a practice of musical authorship that points out a
discomfort with and criticism of that very institution? These ideas will be central to later chapters.
Between Young and Conrad, the dispute is over who authorized particular sounds, or whether they
could have an author at all; by the late-1960s, Riley, Reich, and Glass find themselves clashing over
the propriety of new compositional processes, and the appropriate means of—or necessity of—
citing a name when borrowing a concept. A decade later, the dispute between Branca and Chatham
takes place within institutional structures—bands, venues, programming, criticism—in which even
proper authorial names are often abandoned, leaving the dispute to take place primarily on the level
of genre: between a dominant, formalist “Minimalism” and the many musics (drone, punk, noise,
new wave, no wave) often named “minimal” specifically for their experimentalist rejection of all
norms of art music authorship.

**Althusser’s Cercle d’Ulm**

Louis Althusser arrived at the École Normale Superieure in 1948 as the elite school’s new caïman—
the professor charged with preparing the *normaliens* for their *agrégation* examination in philosophy. In
the years following his appointment, Althusser wrote on Montesquieu, Machiavelli, Feuerbach, and
Hegel before turning his attention primarily to Marx around 1960. Althusser’s first texts on Marx—
his essays “Theses on Feuerbach,” “On the Young Marx,” and “Contradiction and
Overdetermination”—dealt with Marx’s relationship to Hegel and Feuerbach, the movements of
thought, and changes in language in response to the discourse and debates of the time.\textsuperscript{10} For François Dosse, in his history of French structuralism, Althusser’s major “innovation” at the ENS was the introduction of Marx to its reading lists for the infamously difficult doctoral examinations; discussing Althusser’s mid-1960s seminars, Dosse writes that for his students, “reading Marx like Aristotle or Plato was completely surprising.”\textsuperscript{11} In 1961, following the publication of “On the Young Marx” in the French Communist journal \textit{La Pensée}, a group of ENS students, likely Étienne Balibar, Yves Douroux, and Pierre Macherey,\textsuperscript{12} approached Althusser in his office and asked him to work with them through Marx’s writing in their original form. Balibar tells the story in his interview with Peter Hallward:

we told him “we would really like to work with you on this, we want to read Marx, etc.” And Althusser said: “get to work and read a certain number of texts (Marx’s 1844 manuscripts, his text on the Jewish question, etc.—there wasn’t any question of \textit{Capital} yet). Come back to see me at the beginning of the next academic year, in October 62, and we’ll see what we can do together.” It was obvious that he was very keen.\textsuperscript{13}

The students wanted to treat Marx as a philosopher, to read his work in full and hold it to the scrutiny with which they read Aristotle or Plato. Althusser agreed, leading first his seminar on the “Young Marx” and then, in 1965, his seminar on \textit{Capital}. The result was the famous \textit{Lire le “Capital,”} a collaborative volume with long contributions from Althusser, Balibar, Macherey, Douroux, Roger Establet, and, most importantly for this dissertation, Jacques Rancière, whom Althusser says “agreed to sort out the [theoretical] difficulties” to everyone’s “great relief” as “no one else was prepared to

\textsuperscript{10} All three essays are available in \textit{For Marx}, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Verso, 1969 [1965]).
\textsuperscript{12} In his autobiography, \textit{The Future Lasts Forever}, Althusser says it was Macherey, Balibar and François Regnault, and uses this to suggest that “it was not my initiative which led me to talk about Marx at the École but rather a request on the part of a few students.” \textit{The Future Lasts a Long Time and The Facts} (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), 208. In his earlier autobiography, \textit{The Facts}, he claims it was Balibar, Macherey, and Establet; Althusser, \textit{The Future}, 352.
\textsuperscript{13} Étienne Balibar, quoted in \textit{Concept and Form Volume Two}, eds. Peter Hallward and Knox Peden (New York: Verso, 2012), 170. Throughout this chapter I will return to interviews from this collection with members of the editorial collective at \textit{Cahiers pour l’analyse} as well as people not directly involved in the journal, but who were around, like Rancière.
start the ball rolling.”

From these seminars, Althusser and his students developed a collaborative work and research practice that directly included engagement in organized political action, as part of enacting a revolutionary “theoretical practice”; indeed, Warren Montag refers to Althusser and his group of students at the Cercle d’Ulm as “a kind of theoretical and political collective.” For Samuel Chambers, Reading Capital is “collaborative in spirit,” and moreover, should be read as “a large quilt [rather] than a singular, coherent whole.” Nevertheless, Chambers argues that most scholars have approached Reading Capital as a strange text, not worthy of close reading, and as primarily by Althusser: an approach that “would require one not only to accept the elision of the other contributions to the volume but also to pretend that the elision never occurred.”

While the Capital seminar, and the book that resulted from it, led to new collective forms of research and writing, these also paradoxically created the necessary conditions for disputes over the propriety of the concepts that circulate within the collective. Early on, much of the Cercle d’Ulm’s activity was tied to the Communist Party of France (PCF) particularly through the students’ group the Union des étudiantes communistes (UEC). These later led to the formation of organizations critical of the PCF for its conservatism, its electoral goals, its bureaucracy, and so on: these included the Union des jeunesse communistes (marxiste-léniniste) (UJC[M–L]), and the Gauche prolétarienne (GP), to name only a few academic-oriented militant groups, and to the publication of journals such as the Cahiers

14 Althusser, The Future 208 and 352. This book’s history includes a series of disagreements and re-organizations between 1965 and 1968 that, in many ways, were again reordered in an almost across the board anti-Althusserianism after May 68. Rancière had been especially critical and requested to include a new text, “How to Read Lire le Capital” in the second edition; when the publisher refused, Rancière published it elsewhere and refused the inclusion of his original writings. The publishers then decided to simply republish the book for a second French edition as it had been originally. Subsequent editions in other languages, including English, consist exclusively on Althusser’s and Balibar’s contributions. In July 2016 Verso press published an unabridged English edition for the first time, likely as a result of the constantly increasing interest in this circle of thinkers, and for the historical importance the volume—and its attendant disputes—now signals.

15 Pierre Macherey has been the clearest on the notion of the “object” of knowledge, when he writes that criticism is a “certain form of knowledge” and that it “has an object, which is not a given but a product” of that criticism. See Macherey, A Theory of Literary Production, trans. Jeff Wall (London: Routledge, 1978 [1966]), 7.


17 Chambers, Bearing Society in Mind, 139-142; emphasis in original.
Marxistes-Léninistes and the Cahiers pour l’Analyse. All this is to say that the modes of collective research production and organization led to increased solidarity and publications for the cooperative development of arguments and theoretical concepts. Another member of the Cercle, Jacques-Alain Miller, was “the one with the most fixed ideas on the subject,” and became angry about Althusser’s decision to make the Capital seminar open to the public. Miller thus left after the first session, and vanished for months before returning, furious with Rancière for his contribution to the seminar, which had relied on a concept that Miller felt was his own, la causalité métonymique.

[During a talk Althusser was giving on Lacan], Miller intervened to announced [sic] a “conceptual discovery”: “metonymic causality” (otherwise known as the absent cause), which caused quite a stir. […] [W]hen Miller returned… in June 1965 and read the duplicated pages of the papers people had given he discovered Rancière had “stolen” his own concept of “metonymic causality.”

The issue was apparently smoothed over by Althusser citing, in Lire le “Capital”, the concept of “metonymic causality” as one formulated by Miller, before changing to the use of the phrase “structural causality” throughout the rest of his writing, which he notes in The Future Lasts a Long Time was no one’s concept and thus could be used freely. That is, for Althusser a different name applied to the same concept changes its authorial propriety, or rather sidesteps the issue of propriety altogether.

Miller’s ideas seem to have gone against the grain of the rest of the group working around Althusser; Yves Duroux claims that in general, “Miller was too sensitive about the risk of concept theft.”

21 He similarly notes in his earlier autobiography that the dispute between Miller and Rancière was “quite exceptional. Concepts circulate freely as they are being developed without any controls being placed on them.” Althusser, The Future, 353.
22 Concept and Form Volume Two, 195.
thus worth taking into account, particularly in light of the meaning of metonymic causality.

Althusser’s definition above, as “the absent cause,” is the simplest way of accounting for its meaning, though he more specifically refers to it as “the existence of the structure in its effects” in opposition to the structure as “an essence outside the… phenomena which comes and alters their aspect, forms and relations.” The concept originated in Miller’s unpublished first “manifesto” for the *Cahiers pour l’analyse*, which was widely shared around the *Cercle*, though its first published mention appears at the end of Althusser’s section of *Reading Capital*. There, as part of the project of finding the “object” of *Capital*, that is the unthought, external “product” of Marx’s discourse, metonymic causality is “the determination of the elements of a structure, and the structural relations between those elements, and all the effects of those relations by the effectivity of the structure.” In Rancière’s contribution to the original *Lire le “Capital,”* he gives credit to Miller, writing that his own contribution relies on ideas developed both in Althusser’s *For Marx*, as well as upon “concepts established and worked out by J.A. Miller, on the occasion of unpublished papers read during the year 1964, and devoted to the theory of J. Lacan.” Rancière’s definition of the concept positions him in relation to this new form of causality:

> We are no longer dealing with an anthropological causality referred to the act of subjectivity, but with a quite new causality we can call metonymic causality, borrowing this concept from...

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24 Several interviews in *Concept and Form* reference original mimeographed copies of papers, essays, articles, presentations, books, etc. that circulated among them. As such, it is imperative not to fall into the belief that an argument or a term would not have been seen, for example, by Rancière before writing it down just because Miller’s was not published yet when his was. It is necessary to keep in mind the circulation of concepts and their *authorial status*, at various points, as primary rather than the actual published, chronological date. Members of the *Cercle* all seemed eager to share their ideas and open them to dispute, and writing “in the heat of the moment” was considered of utmost importance—especially for Althusser, who is known to have done all of his writing in short manic bursts before the onset of unproductive depressive periods. At one point in *Althusser’s Lesson*, Rancière slightly distances himself from a critique of Althusser’s massive introduction to *Reading Capital* by noting that it was written as a single draft.
Jacques-Alain Miller… Here we can state it as follows: what determines the connexion between the effects (the relation between commodities) is the cause (the social relations of production) in so far as it is absent. This absent cause is not labour as a subject, it is the identity of abstract labour and concrete labour in as much as its generalization expresses the structure of a certain mode of production, the capitalist mode of production.27

In Rancière’s contribution to the published text, then—if not the seminar—we have clear evidence of his acknowledgment of Miller’s authorial stakes in the concept of “metonymic causality.” What is important for Rancière is that metonymic causality allows a form of causality that is neither expressive nor linear, but relates to the functioning of the parts of a structure on the elements of it. While he would later dismiss his contribution as too structuralist, what remains valid throughout his career is the critique he develops of producers of concepts that mystify a process, or create pedagogic stultification based on the presumption of intellectual inequality.

I draw on this dispute to bring attention to an issue articulated by Peter Hallward that will remain of central importance throughout all of my case studies: “Perhaps it’s no accident that this most anti-subjective concept [metonymic causality], one conceived to help bury the old notion of authorial ‘paternity’ once and for all, should so quickly have become the object of such a quarrel.”28 I will return to Hallward’s words, at least implicitly, throughout the following chapters: in all four case studies, it is out of moments of collective authorial organization—of political action resulting from a theoretical concern, of an attempt to refuse the old powers of authorship—that we end up in moments of inter-authorial dispute over the paternity of anti-authorial concepts and the modes of organization that they might suggest. The dispute similarly leads Althusser to a question that had not previously occurred to him: “Is it not the case that concepts belong to everyone? I certainly thought so, but Miller had different ideas.”29 That is, the weight of theoretical concepts had become so important that thinkers, for the first time, began to take into account their objective and material value,

28 Hallward, Concept and Form Volume Two, 28 (fn. 97). My emphasis.
whether or not a person can claim propriety, whether collective discussion produces an object, or
the theorist writing at his desk, and so on. While “metonymic causality” in its structuralist function
will retain little value in the coming chapters, Miller’s critique of Rancière, and the responses of both
Althusser and Duroux, highlight the fact that in the wake of open, collective production of
discourse, authorial propriety had become an object in relation to which scholars had to position
themselves.30

1966 saw many shakeups in both political and academic organization at the Rue d’Ulm. The
collectively edited Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes was moving in an increasingly Althusserian direction;
building from a first issue in which Miller’s “The Function of Theoretical Training” introduced
metonymic causality, its eighth issue (on literature) caused a stir within the editorial collective.
Robert Linhart in particular accused Miller and others of “only looking for an academic career, a
bourgeois position of authority.”31 This led Miller to start the Lacanian Cahiers pour l’analyse. At the
same time, the Chinese Cultural Revolution was getting underway, and looked, at least to some of
the young members of the PCF and the UEC, like a valuable development of revolutionary thought.

30 While I have repeatedly felt inclined to draw something of value from the notion of metonymy— in keeping with my
interest in names, naming, homonymy, and so on—the concept seems to offer little to my broader argument. In a recent
study of metonymy as a literary device, Sebastian Matzner focuses specifically on the term’s lack of clarity, as most
handbooks of rhetoric, whether ancient or modern, simply define the term in distinction with metaphor. Most often, this
occurs by stressing metonymy as expressing a real relationship, rather than a metaphor’s comparative one. Further
prodding my interest in all things —nym, and highlighting its long history of obfuscation, Matzner writes that, in the first
century BC, the first definition of metonymy was as “an expression that explains a synonym by a homonym” (5). Matzner
also comments on the use of the term in structural linguistics and philosophy: “Ironically enough, metonymy’s
great success as a tool of structuralist criticism seems to be owed to a good extent precisely to its hitherto rather vague
and underdetermined status within its original context of stylistics, which has endowed it with an appealing and
convenient openness and malleability that allows it to fit a wide range of phenomena” (8). For Matzner, then, the value
for the French structuralists of trying to think Marx’s revision of the cause/effect relationship—different than the
expressive and anthropological forms that would have been the norm at the time of his writing—in terms of metonymy is
specifically that it is unclearly defined and provides a rather ambivalent (even stultifying) means of dealing with the
interrelationship of cause and effect, base and superstructure, in determining priority of action within the structure. See
Sebastian Matzner, Rethinking Metonymy: Literary Theory and Poetic Practice from Pindar to Jakobson (Oxford: Oxford University
Press, 2016). During the 1970s and 1980s, most English texts on French and structuralist Marxism (e.g. Ted Benton, The
Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism: Althusser and His Influence, Paul Hirst, Law and Ideology, etc.) outlined the term, generally
as part of a long reading of Reading Capital; by the 1990s, it barely appears in the literature.

31 Francois Regnault, quoted in Concept and Form Volume 2, 208.
When Mao criticized the USSR for its “revisionism,”[32] many of the younger students took the critique to heart, drastically affecting their perception of the Party. As a result, several members of the UEC split off from the Communist Party and organized as the “Chinese” influenced *Union jeunesse communistes Marxistes-Léninistes* (UJCM-L).[33] While Althusser remained within the Party—his personal politics always tended towards remodeling the existing structure from the inside rather than breaking off and restarting—Dosse notes that he clearly gave his students his “blessing” as he wrote an essay in the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes* on the Cultural Revolution.[34] Though unsigned—Althusser only felt comfortable commenting anonymously, separating his discussion from his proper authorial name—the essay takes very seriously the concrete situation at hand without dismissing it for falling out of line with supposedly ideal theoretical ordering. Althusser praises the importance of the “revolutionary road” being followed in China as it promoted an awareness of the essential role of culture in producing the conditions of possibility for communism. Methodologically, he even relies on a number of pamphlets and brief samples of writing from peasants and political organizers as his

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[32] Revisionism is a word thrown around constantly in Communist polemics around the Chinese-Soviet split. While *Althusser’s Lesson* includes forty-three uses the word, the nearest to a definition is only from the 1969 essay on Althusserian ideology: “To join the proletarian struggle at the level of this denegation means joining the camp of bourgeois politics disguised as proletarian politics. In other words, the camp of revisionism.” Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*, 153. In short, then, revisionism is the maintenance of a bourgeois position while claiming to be proletarian within the discourse of mid-1960s Marxism. Mao’s major critique of Stalinism was that it was revisionist, leading to Khruschev’s “cult of personality” critique at the Twentieth Congress, when the word seems to have taken off as a discursive strategy used in seemingly every debate over communist actualization: one must be constantly vigilant against revisionism lest it cause the full slide back into capitalism as a result of bourgeois concepts. Not least, then, this included the intense centralization of power in one person with desire for too much power, as Lenin warned against Stalin shortly before his death in 1923; that is, against the overvaluation of singular authority within Communist organization. In his 20th Congress speech, Khruschev attacked Stalin and his cult of personality for creating a position of authority for himself through taking on “supernatural characteristics akin to those of a god.”

[33] Rancière discussed the turn towards militancy from theoreticism during the period of the Chinese-Soviet split: “As far as theory was concerned, we knew where we stood: we didn’t have to stay awake nights pondering where to locate a real faithfulness to Marx, in Khruschev’s whining sophisms or in Mao’s beautiful rigor. *We were not Maoists, though. There were no Maoists in France then, only pro-Chinese sympathizers.*” See Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*, 43.

[34] Rancière was the first to publicly claim that the article was written by Althusser; see *Althusser’s Lesson*, 55 (“Althusser’s ‘On the Cultural Revolution’… this insider discourse had to be held anonymously and ‘outside’ the PCF.”) This attribution is further agreed upon in *Concept and Form Volume Two*, 265. The essay was translated into English by Jason E. Smith in *Décadages* 1, no.1 (2010), with the author listed as “Anonymous [Attributed to Louis Althusser].” Althusser also acknowledges he was its author in *The Facts*: “After a difficult start, *Les Cahiers marxistes-léninistes* sold very well. For their first number, devoted to the recently initiated Cultural Revolution, I gave them an unsigned article (which I here acknowledge, after Rancière).” Althusser, *The Future*, 354.
only source material. Importantly, May ’68 would not be read with the same attention to the concrete subjects of the struggle. Despite later turns, throughout 1966 Althusser and his students seem to have been in at least general agreement, as they continued producing their experiment in collective research organization and publication. Even as some split off from the Party, he began a “flirtation” with Maoism, likely following the support and excitement of his students. By 1968, a drastic shift effected not only the relationship between Althusser and Rancière and the rest of the students, but the mode of critique that developed out of this period. I would like to turn now to the Rancière’s and Althusser’s differing approaches to writing the history of May ’68—most particularly, their differing accounts of causality and authorship within the chronology of events. The difference between the two methods highlights Rancière’s major break with his teacher, and how it took place in particular through a rejection of the stultifying “science” of Marxism as long as that meant ascribing collective political achievements to the “theoretical heroism” of the solitary researcher transcribing his history.

May ’68: “A quoi sert Althusser?”

In *The Facts*, Althusser introduces his discussion of May by noting that he “was about to go into a psychiatric hospital… on the eve of May ’68.” Never short of dramatic flair in his autobiographies, he continues, “As I was leaving by car for the hospital, I saw groups [at the Sorbonne] marching beneath the Red Flag. It had begun.”35 It became a major cause of disdain that Althusser was absent as France was overtaken by a general strike of nine million students and workers from all sectors. The events are popularly remembered by the imagery of young students throwing paving stones at

police, mimeographed posters, and incisive graffiti. As Kristin Ross notes, “only the most ‘immediate’ of artistic techniques” (political cartoons, posters, and graffiti) could keep up with the speed of events. This immediacy combined with striking French television crews produced an absolute dearth of news footage, and thus a very specific form of imagery of May.” Among the graffiti that mark its memory, one was notable for my purposes for how it highlights the changing perception of Althusser’s paternal theoreticism as a result of the strikes: “A quoi sert Althusser?”—What use is Althusser? While there is not space here for a full account the general strike—for that, see, for example, Julian Bourg’s *May 68: From Revolution to Ethics*, or, more importantly though taking a decidedly Rancièrian perspective, Kristin Ross’s incredible *May ’68 and Its Afterlives*—my interest in the following pages is to consider the terms of the dispute between Althusser and Rancière over the meaning of May, and the ways in which its critics, historians, and militants position themselves in relation to the authority to transcribe meaning from the noise of events.

A major precursor to May can be found among the student activists at the Sorbonne who, in 1963, took action against the organization of their school, demanding student involvement in administration and curriculum through their slogan “Sorbonne for the Students!” While Rancière warns against seeing these activists as direct precedents, his list of their concerns nevertheless mirrors those of May:

The students were eager to move beyond the opposition between a corporatism limited to economic issues and a politics limited to supporting the struggles of others to be able to focus their attention on the problems of student labour, of the modes for acquiring knowledge and the ends of knowledge. These initiatives… drew attention to the following topics: the ends of academic knowledge, which seemed to be to educate future auxiliaries of the bourgeoisie; the forms for the transmission of knowledge—the ‘pedagogic relation’—tied to this objective (lecture courses which inured students to being docile); individualism

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36 The tone of Althusser’s account of the events is captured in statements like this one: “in the Latin Quarter… for a month, battles raged with cobble-stones and tear-gas, but without a single shot being fired, the CRS [the specialized riot police, often tasked with ending factory occupations during the time] obviously having been given orders, by a Prefect of Police whose daughter was among the demonstrators, to handle the students carefully, most of whom were children of the upper middle class. They showed less clemency at the Peugeot factory, where three workers were shot.” Althusser, *The Future*, 354-5.

(which the UNEF [French National Students’ Union] had opposed with its proposal for research groups...); and the arbitrary nature of exams. Students saw their overall situation within the university through the categories of student alienation and dependence... And it was to offset this situation of assistance that the students demanded student wages, a demand that clashed with the PCF’s advocacy of scholarships for underprivileged students. 

It was in oppositional response to these students of the syndicalist left that Althusser published “Student Problems” in December 1963 in La Nouvelle Critique, a work that Rancière calls Althusser’s “only political intervention, in the strict sense,” as it was in print, commenting on the arguments of a protest movement, while the event was still ongoing. The PCF’s 1963 educational policy had focused on quantitative issues—more campuses, smaller classes, more scholarships—which the UNEF criticized, asserting instead qualitative concerns based on critiquing the “pedagogic relation.” Drawing on Althusserian Marxism, they asserted that the traditional pedagogic relation, regardless of class size or available funding, produced financial and academic dependence, and thus alienation. Entering the debate on the side of the PCF, Althusser displaced the dividing line from the professor- or university-to-student relationship back to the content and quality of the knowledge itself: “The pedagogic function has as its object the transmission of a determinate knowledge to subjects who do not possess it. Therefore the pedagogic situation is based on the absolute condition of an inequality between a knowledge and a lack of knowledge.”

He further argues, setting up a topography, that “it is content (knowledge) which is dominant, and the form subordinate” in the pedagogic relation; in contrast to this, Rancière (as well as Hayden White) is interested in what we could call the content of the form—here, most broadly, authority grounded in authorship. Althusser’s

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38 Rancière, Althusser’s Lesson, 38; emphasis in original.
39 Ibid., 37.
40 Althusser, “Student Problems” in Radical Philosophy 170 (2011), 14; emphasis in original. Readers familiar with Rancière’s later work will recognize here the terms of what can easily be considered the fundamental issue in his whole body of work: the equality of intelligences, and specifically in The Ignorant Schoolmaster. Althusser continues below, again framing the terms of Rancière’s later polemics: “No pedagogic questions, which all presuppose unequal knowledge between teachers and students, can be settled on the basis of a pedagogic equality between teachers and students.” Rancière, via Jacotot, would of course refute this assertion through the panecasticism of Universal Teaching, through which illiterate fathers were taught how to make their children literate. See Rancière, The Ignorant Schoolmaster, 135-138.
intervention, then—his only directly political one of his career—is specifically in the service of order; students inspired by his readings of Marx from 1961 and 1962 were suddenly surprised to find this introducer of Marx to the ENS using his theoretical arguments against their efforts to oppose alienation and financial dependency.

Within most histories, “May” proper began on May 13 when “thousands of students” entered the halls of the Sorbonne “and pitched there the flags of their revolt.” 41 By the end of the month, millions of French workers, bureaucrats, and students (from older grade school students through the lycées and, most importantly, into the Sorbonne and the ENS), had walked out of work. Students appeared at banlieu factory gates to support workers in their forced factory occupations, and workers assisted students in the occupations of Parisian cultural sites like the Sorbonne and the Odéon Theatre. According to Ross, May was most succinctly a “crisis of functionalism”:

What came to be called “the events of May” consisted mainly in students ceasing to function as students, workers as workers, and farmers as farmers. May was a crisis of functionalism. The movement took the form of political experiments in declassification, in disrupting the natural “givenness” of places; it consisted of displacements that took students outside of the university, meetings that brought farmers and workers together, or students to the countryside… It involved physical dislocation. 42

For these students, the crisis of functionalism often meant questioning the form of pedagogic authority which upheld their teachers’ power, or perhaps what type of power their teachers chose to derive from their pedagogic authority.

While Althusser had little to say about May as it was ongoing, he did comment directly on the “Student Movement” in some places. Most notably, a long letter to Maria Macciocchi dated March 15, 1969 focuses exclusively on his reading of the “May Events.” 43 While Althusser’s

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41 Rancière, Althusser’s Lesson, 22.
42 Ross, May ’68, 25; emphasis in original.
commentary is broader—including discussion of organization (necessary to all political action44), the “infantile” problem of leftism (drawing on Lenin), and so on—I would like to focus on only two points: First, he asserts that most interpretations of May had prioritized the “chronological” rather than the “Historical” ordering of events, and thus allowed the students’ barricades to be seen as the “spark” that preceded and overshadowed the general strike of nine million French workers in the aftermath of the May 13 march. Regarding the form of “order” imposed on the events, Althusser chastises those interpreters who treat the events in their chronological order. Instead, Althusser organizes and normalizes the events to match them to his “properly” Marxist conception of History, criticizing the students for undertaking things in the wrong order, without the direction of the Party or even the workers themselves. Second, he criticizes the use of the term “Student Movement” because, unlike the “Workers’ Movement”, the students were not unified, and instead revealed “divergences in both initiatives and actions.”45 Althusser challenged the validity of the students as a Movement in that they were heterogeneous, non-unified, and diverse, in both their intentions and their actions. Althusser’s challenge to the validity of the Students’ Movement on the grounds that a “Movement” should be unified in intention or practice also reveals the origins of Rancière’s turn to the archives in the 1970s. The implication here is that Althusser views the Workers’ Movement as unified, following a single discourse, without divergence or challenge; the workers have always stayed in their place, a place which is grounded in attempting revolution, challenging bourgeois order, singing revolutionary songs, and following the dictates of the PCF.

44 While some aspects of Nathan Brown’s critique of Rancière are valuable, his reading of other parts of Rancière’s thought, and Althusser’s broadly, are quite off target. One need only read this letter—or much of Althusser’s other writing!—to know that concerns over political organization were far from “laughable” in the context of Althusserian structuralism. This idea, like much in Brown’s article, seems based in a general impression about what “Althusserianism” is, while trying to defend it as an intense formalism and scientism, rather than an actual reading of any of the man’s writing. See Nathan Brown, “Red Years: Althusser’s Lesson, Rancière’s error, and the Real Movement of History,” Radical History 170 (2011): 21.
45 Althusser to Macciocchi, 312.
Rancière responds to Althusser’s letter to Macciocchi in *Althusser’s Lesson*. Relying heavily on the free indirect style that leads many scholars to misunderstand and misquote him,⁴⁶ Rancière adopts Althusser’s voice, though without direct quotation: “Instead of going to factories and meddling in what is none of their business, the students would have done better to have invited syndicalist leaders, who could have taught them how to organize an occupation, to the Sorbonne.”⁴⁷ The students are misled! They are not yet militants! The benevolent Party, Rancière’s Althusser argues, must be “patient and take the time to explain their mistakes to them calmly and deliberately: they imagine that they played a determinant role in May and that their actions led the workers to strike.”⁴⁸ In short, the students must learn that, historically, workers lead revolt (themselves organized by the Party and its theorists) and young people follow; this topography is essential to class struggle, in which everything is subordinated to the primacy of the action of workers who themselves must be organized by the Party, which is led by its vanguard theorists. History and chronology, like knowledge and non-knowledge, are not equal. Rancière further notes that Althusser attributes to the students “a thesis that very few of them would have accepted”:⁴⁹ “The mass of the students thinks that they were the *vanguard* in May, leading the workers’ actions.”⁵⁰ The students, petit bourgeois one and all, are trapped in the bourgeois’s ideological illusion, Rancière’s Althusser argues: “unable to distinguish between historical and chronological order, [the students] need vigilant advisors” to guide their political action.⁵¹

This many-voiced, ironic critique of Althusser, itself focusing on Althusser’s critique of the students, again highlights the methodological function of examining disputes. Throughout this

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⁴⁸ Ibid.
⁴⁹ Ibid.
⁵⁰ Althusser to Macciocchi, 304.
⁵¹ Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*, 70.
chapter in *Althusser’s Lesson*, Rancière carefully outlines the terms of the debates, and shows how a discourse is necessarily framed as a response to ongoing disputes—something which he insists Althusser used to recognize, particularly in his 1961 texts on Marx, but which he had forgotten by his writings of 1965 onwards, in which the role of philosophy is to police the proper Marxist use of concepts as a means of keeping idealism and ideology at bay. Rancière returns to the importance of highlighting disagreement as moments in which the transformation of thought can be mapped:

> Is the passage from “petit-bourgeois communism” to “proletarian communism” [in Althusser’s summary of Marx’s periods from *Reading Capital*] a fact? What petite bourgeoisie and what proletariat are being discussed here? What do the qualifications—“petit-bourgeois communism” and “proletarian communism”—mean in Paris in 1844, in the context of the debates that were then occupying the minds of communist groups, and of the members of the League of the Just in particular?\(^{52}\)

The consideration of concrete disputes returns us to the debate over May ’68 and its outcomes in Rancière’s and Althusser’s thought. Rancière directly ties “the fundamental theoretical lesson” of May ’68 to thought that the “leftist critique of Althusser had started to systematize”—to articulate, to announce, to *authorize*—in the street protests:

> The bourgeoisie’s ideological domination was not the result of a social imaginary wherein individuals spontaneously reflected their relations to the conditions of their existence. It was, instead, the result of the system of material power relations reproduced by different apparatuses. Ideological domination was not exerted on students primarily through the content of the courses themselves [as Althusser argued in “Student Problems” in 1963]… but through the concatenation of the forms of selection, transmission, control and use of knowledges.\(^{53}\)

This is the development of the ideological state apparatuses, though in the barricaded streets of Paris rather than at Althusser’s desk. Rancière rejects Althusser’s earlier notion of ideology, and in particular, the argument from “Student Problems” that bourgeois ideology within the schools was not exercised in the “pedagogic relation” (that is the form), but in the content (whether “scientific” or “ideological”) of the courses. Rancière highlights the year of his essay “On Althusser’s Ideology”

\(^{52}\) *Ibid.*, 78.
to point out the priority of his critique, “on the morning of May,” in relation to Althusser’s later “leftist” turn: “In a text from 1969 on the theory of ideology, I undertook to criticize Althusser’s conception of knowledge by showing that, more than a simple form of knowing, knowledge is an apparatus of power.” Rancière says that the turn to ideological apparatuses articulated by many involved in the events of May was both a rupture with the idealism of science/ideology and also “manifested the point of view of those who saw ideological struggle as the struggle against the apparatuses that produce the bourgeoisie’s ideological domination,” rather than simply a matter of “theoretical” class struggle, a policing of concepts and language, as had been the Althusserian line.

In short, for students, May was at least in part about articulating the functionality and productivity of the form in which concepts are put forward—that is, the potential methods of declaring authorship. Most importantly, the concept ideological state apparatus was “a theoretical product of the May movement,” and developed as one of many splintered forms of collective critique of the Althusserian project going back to the Sorbonne strikes of 1963 via the street fights of May. We return here to notions of the concept and the theoretical product (the object) that are still the language of Rancière’s immediately post-Althusserian structuralism. I raise this issue not as a policing of his terminology, but rather to draw attention to the lesson in authorship that Rancière gained in his dispute with Miller over metonymic causality: Rancière, even while quoting from his own essay in which he was the first person to use the term “ideological apparatuses,” directly tying it to Marx’s “state apparatuses,” does not declare the concept his own creation; rather, it is a “theoretical product” of the May “mass movement.”

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54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 In the introduction to his 1969 essay on Althusserian ideology, Rancière writes that, following his first course at Vincennes, on Marx’s texts on ideology, “Saul Karsz, who had attended the course, asked me to write an article based on it for a collection of essays on Althusser to be published in Argentina. It is quite likely that he showed my piece to Althusser and possible also that it might have played a part in Althusser’s introduction of the notion of ideological state apparatuses to his thought.” See Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*, 127. In the essay itself, Rancière introduces the concept tentatively: “The ‘ideological forms’ Marx talks about in the ‘Preface’ to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* are
as undue modesty, or a rejection of his own writing; rather, in keeping with the new historical method he is developing, he does not turn this into an opportunity to claim precedence or paternity. Instead, he declares the masses the authors, in direct rejection of the “theoretical heroism” of the scholar at his desk with the correct set of texts. It is an intensely Maoist move, in its context, but it is also a quintessential claim of Ignorant Mastery. Rancière is insisting that the ideas developed from the function of the structure, of which he was a part, and that the fact of their articulation—even on paper, even published—does not create a pure context for propriety authority. He acknowledges that he wrote “On Althusser’s Theory of Ideology” on the “morning” of the May events, and as such recognizes the development of the ideas during May, as a response to Althusserian ideology. It seems that authorship, much like equality—though with very different consequences—is declared, causing individuals to position their thinking, writing, and speaking in relation to that declaration. The posture of Ignorant Mastery is not about modesty or authorial nihilism, but about recognizing the multiple, refracted, and contradictory impulses in which an idea can be developed collectively in the heat of vigorous, militant debate.

Rancière’s reflection on this collectively authored concept leads him to a musical, or at least sonic, metaphor that is uniquely concrete, considering his minimal commentary on music and sound:

The notion… of theoretical heroism… takes on its most outrageous form [in the formulation] May 68 did not exist.57 It is instead the solitary researcher Althusser who

57 This formulation predicts the argument of The Names of History, which is centrally a refutation of François Furet’s history of the French Revolution, in which he infamously dismisses the actions of the Revolutionaries and Republicans by claiming that their action was useless because of the inevitability of the downfall of the monarchy (Furet, Interpreting the French Revolution, 1981). Similar arguments have frequently been made about May 68 and many other revolutionary events; Nathan Brown similarly dismisses Rancière’s critique of Althusser by noting that, while many of his points are valid, “by 1973 Althusserianism is a sitting duck, and Rancière’s aim is good enough to blow it out of the water” (Brown 2011, 20). This all to say that this specific formulation—the actions of political agents were unnecessary, the event was imminent and necessary—is professed by reactionaries with Hegelian views of historical necessity that Badiou below calls “Jacobins:” that is, those militants who later apologize for their involvement and work in the service of order. In
discovers—as he treads the arduous path of his research—the idea, which he presents as a stunning hypothesis (“This is why I believe that I am justified…”, “This thesis may seem paradoxical…” but which no one following the May movement could have doubted, of the dominant character of the academic apparatus…: “In this concert, one ideological State apparatus certainly has the dominant role, although hardly anyone lends an ear to its music: it is so silent! This is the school.” Yes, the music of the dominant ideology is indeed quite ‘silent’ for those who do not want to hear the noises of revolt, for those whose theory depends on the theoretical suppression of that noise, for those who find—in this theoretical need—the principle of their membership in an organization committed to putting an end to this noise in practice. Althusser’s theory of ideology remains a theory of the necessary domination of bourgeois ideology, a theory of ideological normality that must be shored up by the reality of its normalization. “It is so silent.” Meaning: thank heaven that it is so silent, that no noise disturbs the theoretician of this silence.\footnote{Rancière, \textit{Althusser’s Lesson}, 75. First emphasis Rancière’s; later emphasis mine. Internal quote from Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation,” in \textit{On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses} (New York: Verso, 2014), 251.}

He continues, offering a historical observation on the time and place of Althusser’s discourse: “The Althusserian project of the 1960s unfolded against the real silence of the masses. Now that this silence didn’t exist anymore, \textit{Althusserian theory had to announce it} so as to be able to claim that only the heroes could pick out the \textit{low music}, inaudible to coarse ears, of class domination.” Althusser of course stimulates the musical metaphor, but the noise/silence dichotomy, and the “low music” that is a theoretical invention within it, take on a decisive role: Rancière develops them, seems clearly intent on them; had he continued the sonic language, rather than turning to “normalizing” (for example, “tuning” or “filtering” the noise?) this would have been one the most strongly developed applications of a musical concept in Rancière’s writing. It is still clearly thoughtful and intentional: the masses are noisy and, like his free indirect review of Althusser’s thoughts about May, many-voiced; on the other hand, silence is the necessary state of things, the way of dismissing noise and refusing its political presence so that one can find its echoes, its “low music” in a far corner away from the “noisy” rabble. This is a task for experts, for specialists, for scientists—in short, it is for those whose place it is to lead; it is an authorial act, and therefore an act that produces authority.
Indeed, Althusser immediately after asks the “pardon of those teachers who, in dreadful conditions, attempt to turn the few weapons they can find… against the ideology,” because, he continues, “They are a kind of hero.” While the noise is unauthorized and disorderly, keeping things in a state of silence can allow the specialist to pick out the “low music” (the overtones or reverberation of the noise in a distant place, perhaps drifting in through window above the writer’s desk at a hospital in the Parisian suburbs) and attribute to it his own auratic, authorial power—one best enacted by teachers. In this context—both of Rancière’s critique and my reading of it—it is worth noting that the critique is not of teachers or teaching as a whole; again, keeping in mind “the movement of thought” and the value of considering disputes, it is important to remember that Althusser articulates this heroism specifically as against the students in the street. What’s more, it is one small part in his larger project of maintaining the priority of the Communist Party and its theorists against the barbarous intrusions of student Maoism. In comparison to the events of the Cultural Revolution, which led Althusser to consult pamphlets and peasant discourse, May was seemingly only dealt with second hand and cynically. The noise itself is not admissible to discourse—it requires translation, discursive transcription into a meta-language of Truth, to be transmitted as approved pedagogic content—as authorial “low music.”

**Ignorant Masters and Proletarian Aristocracies**

I would like to consider one last dispute, between Rancière and his “old friend-enemy” Alain Badiou, over two modes of proposing and organizing an egalitarian pedagogic relation. What’s more, the dispute is of value in that it is clearly agonistic and friendly: in an essay on Rancière, Badiou writes, “I have spoken critically of [Rancière] so often that my stock of negative comments has run out. Yes, yes, we are bothers, everyone sees that, and in the end, I do too.” The two were both

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students under Althusser around the same time at the ENS and both were active in the events of May 68 to which, Badiou claims, both have maintained fidelity. As Badiou notes, in scholarship on post-68 French thought, “The Rancière/Badiou comparisons are, little by little, on their way to becoming somewhat canonical in some limited but international and (without appearing too shameless) significant contexts,” and outlines three functions of these canonic comparisons: the first demonstrates their differences in respect to central figures like Mallarmé, Plato, or Godard; another synthesizes their arguments to point out a “supposedly unnoticed problem which circulates ‘between’ the two”; and the last arbitrates a conflict and sides with one or the other. Badiou decides to follow this last route, casting himself in the negative position, and promising to praise, in his “totality,” a “pure Rancière.” While I of course overall am focusing on Rancière, and am more sympathetic to his writing than to Badiou’s, my interest is in staging a specific dispute that “circulates” between them, and that is legible in a series of writings by several people beyond simply Rancière and Badiou. In short, I am relying on a combination of Badiou’s second and third categories. My broader goal remains to draw something of value to my musical case studies about how discourses are formed through dispute. In this case, I am interested in thinking about the possibility of pedagogic transmission of political experience—the possibility of a politically helpful

61 Badiou: “We do not, neither I nor Rancière, draw any particular pride from [the canonic stature of their comparison, mentioned in the next sentence]. Full of good sense, Jacques told me one day, ‘You know, we are advancing only by virtue of seniority.’ That’s true, but we might congratulate ourselves on the passage of a seniority that remains true to the faith and not that of the social advantages found by some colleagues in their trumpeted renunciations (‘we were mistaken, oh dear, we believed in Communism, we were totalitarians, yes, yes, yes, long live demo-cracy’).” See Badiou, “The Lessons of Jacques Rancière,” 35.

62 Badiou, “The Lessons of Rancière,” 35. Among many others, the following is a list of recent articles published on the relationship: John Philips’ “Art, Politics and Philosophy: Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière,” Theory, Culture & Society 27, no. 4 (2010): 146-160 is something of a survey of then-recent publications like Badiou’s Handbook of Inaesthetics and Rancière’s The Politics of Aesthetics. Nina Power reads both thinkers’ notions of equality in relation to Hegel’s, Feuerbach’s, and Marx’s in “Which Equality? Badiou and Rancière in Light of Ludwig Feuerbach,” parallax 15, no. 3 (2009): 63-80. Power’s essay circles very much around issues taken on here, including the chapters on Rancière from Metapolitics, but without offering much of value to my argument. Rancière scholar Joseph J. Tanke has written on Rancière’s and Badiou’s different forms of anti-philosophy of art in “Reflections on the Philosophy and Anti-Philosophy of Art: Badiou and Rancière,” Philosophy Today 53, no. 3 (2009): 217-230. More could be listed here, but my interest in outlining some of these was that, while they touch the role of disagreement in Rancière’s work and life, and most specifically to Badiou through the two chapters in Metapolitics, their arguments are largely irrelevant to my interest here; I offer them to point to literature that backs up Badiou’s claim about the Badiou/Rancière binary.
“pedagogic relation” in the wake of May—in both Rancière and Badiou, and, tying it back into an earlier dispute in this chapter, its relationship to the theorist (or for Badiou, the militant) who is responsible for picking out “the low music” of domination. This section focuses on the paired issues of transmission and mastery—the modes of mastery necessary to understand how knowledge, practice, politics, thought, and so on are transmitted in the Rancièrian pedagogic relationship. In hopes of reigning in this discussion, I will stick to a circumscribed set of documents: first, Badiou’s 1996 (2005 in English) essay “Rancière and Apolitics” and, more broadly, the book Metapolitics from which it is drawn; second, a 2008 essay by Todd May and Jeff Love that refutes this critique of Rancière; and third, Badiou’s 2006 (2008 in English) essay “The Lessons of Jacques Rancière: Knowledge and Power After the Storm.” I will first consider Badiou’s method in his critique of Rancière, before turning to examine a specific challenge to authorial propriety—this time around the axiomatic declaration of equality present in both Badiou’s and Rancière’s work.

Badiou’s readings of Rancière are consistently fascinating, and reveal a relationship that has evolved over decades. Despite often blistering critique, theirs is clearly an agonistic relationship: a reader familiar with their work will see sarcastic, jocular, and even winking writing back and forth between the two (as in the “pure Rancière” above). More than the rest of my case studies, the dispute itself is, at least in part, performative, or, more critically, one of developing and clarifying arguments based on the harsh, loving critique of a long time “brother” and sympathetic companion maintaining what they see as “fidelity” to the lessons of May ‘68. All of this in mind, two dominant features stand out from Badiou’s readings of Rancière. On the one hand, Badiou distills Rancière’s thought, method, and style into short, axiomatic theses that are generally fair and accurate in content, though not in form. That is, Badiou is excellent at transcribing what he considers Rancière’s “anti-philosophical” discourse into the logical proofs and axioms that fill Badiou’s mathematically driven philosophy. On the other hand, in a clearly performative paradox, Badiou critiques Rancière
on the grounds of his (Badiou’s) own philosophy, calling out Rancière for a crime that Badiou surely knows he intentionally commits: not rigorously fulfilling the conditions demanded of philosophical discourse. Badiou demands of Rancière, “where is your ontology of the State?” only after having revealed his own awareness that Rancière rejects the founding premises of the question and will thus never give him the satisfaction of a direct refutation.

Badiou’s axiomatic distillations of Rancière’s thought are worth examination for how much they can reveal, within “normalized” philosophical discourse, about Rancière’s work. Badiou largely trades in numbered lists of interrelated, logical statements—a format entirely foreign to Rancière’s work. Summarizing Rancière’s books The Nights of Labour, The Philosopher and His Poor, and The Ignorant Schoolmaster, he comments on what Rancière would call his “indisciplinarity”: “In sum we can say that Rancière takes delight in occupying unrecognized spaces between history and philosophy, between philosophy and politics, and between documentary and fiction.”63 This is tied to another of Rancière’s “anti-philosophical” positions: “Rancière never refutes anyone, for this would confirm the master’s authority. Refutation establishes heritage, succession. In the great anti-philosophical tradition, Rancière wants instead to discredit the master by showing that his position suggests representations whose arrangement is fallacious.”64 In short, Badiou continues, ““Two very simple theses support Rancière’s constructions:

1. All mastery is imposture. Rancière thereby inscribes himself, in spite of everything, within the French anarchist and utopian tradition of old, of which he is both the second-generation thinker and the sympathetic, patient and ironic archivist.
2. Every bond presumes a master.

These two theses are worked out through a pairing of method and style that Badiou, in Metapolitics—a book written immediately in the wake of Rancière’s Disagreement, and which knowingly takes the name of that book’s last category of non-politics—calls Rancière’s “doctrinal style”:

63 Badiou, Metapolitics, 108.
64 Ibid., 109.
1. always situate yourself in the interval between discourses without opting for any of them;
2. reactivate conceptual sediments without lapsing into history
3. deconstruct the postures of mastery without giving up the ironic mastery of whosoever catches the master out.65

In his later, positive essay, Badiou similarly outlines three features of what he now more generously calls Rancière’s “median style,” by which he does not mean centrist, and surely not consensual, but “one that is never immediately conclusive:”

1. He is assertive; he connects affirmations, but he does so with a singular fluidity that makes it seem as though his assertions are derived only by virtue of his style.
2. His style is also without argumentative discontinuity. One does not find moments where he proposes an isolated demonstration to support a given thesis.
3. It is a style that seeks a conceptual unfolding of examples with the goal of creating a certain zone of undecidability between actuality and the concept. It is a question of showing the presence of a concept, in the real of historic eruptions, in the effects of its rhythmic behaviour.66

Together, these few lines constitute a very clear outline of Rancière’s method though one that we would never find so concisely presented in Rancière’s writing. In its refinement alone, it feels like a powerful refutation of Rancière’s entire project: Badiou’s rigorous precision suggests that, if all of Rancière’s thought can be made into such concise axioms, why so many thousands of pages of writing out of Rancière, who, in a tongue-in-cheek third person essay, claims that he loves trees so much that he refuses to “produce a theory of… anything”?67

The problem, if we want to appraise Rancière’s work on its own terms, is that in creating these condensed lists, Badiou draws Rancière onto his stage—perhaps into his ring—and challenges him to a fight the terms of which Rancière’s writing attempts to negate by, most simply, ignoring them. By turning Rancière’s thought into a set of axioms, Badiou opens up the conversation on the internal integrity and consistency of a theoretical “system” that Rancière has not set out to produce.

67 Rancière, on himself: “He never intended to produce a theory of politics, aesthetics, literature, cinema or anything else. He thinks that there is already a good deal of them and he loves trees enough to avoid destroying them to add one more theory to all those available on the market.” “Some thoughts on the method of Jacques Rancière,” *parallax* 15/3 (2009): 114.
Badiou demands: What is your ontology? Where is Being in this? What is the role of the State in your political philosophy? Is there a metaphysics? None of this is to suggest that Badiou does not know what he is doing, or that he is ignorant of Rancière’s inevitable refusal of refutation. Quite the contrary, it is an argument that negatively points out the conditions of possibility of Rancière’s anti-philosophy and makes them openly visible. It’s a very direct critique that relies on bringing Rancière into the philosophical ring, despite the fact that he has always been the person outside protesting the conditions of possibility, the mode of visibility, and even the necessity, of the fights. It is a critique that approaches Rancière heterogeneously, as his discourse insists, and draws out the failing of that same discourse: that it is only able to go one way, away from disciplinarity, but never back towards it. Within Rancière’s median style, within his egalitarian method, returning to the ring would be a failure of his project. Refuting Badiou would create heritage, and lineage, and would necessitate staging his argument in terms of the knowing Rancière producing the non-knowledge of the ignorant Badiou. In short, it would return to the rejected “absolute condition” of Althusser’s pedagogic function.

Badiou’s essay “Rancière and Apolitics” from *Metapolitics* again challenges Rancière on the authorial paternity of a concept: Badiou, “along with a few others” recognize themselves in “important parts of Rancière’s work,” because they have “justifiable feelings of having largely anticipated” them. Badiou first cites minor differences in their terminology—his own “the state of things” to Rancière’s police—and notes that while Rancière lacks a rigorous account of ontology or a theory of names, this is (mockingly) because “Rancière doesn’t do politics… Rancière doesn’t do philosophy either.” Despite these similarities, “as so often is the case when everything appears similar, nothing really is.” Badiou argues there is a “radical discord” between the two and

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enumerates them in four parts. First, the two disagree on the relation between politics and philosophy—one of the core concerns of *Disagreement*, which argued that the two had nothing to do with each other. In comparison, always a defender of philosophy in its classic sense, Badiou argues (perhaps paternalistically) that “the correct thesis is that all philosophy is conditioned by instances of politics, to which philosophy gives shelter through a particular transcription destined to produce strictly philosophical effects.”

Second, in a claim directly tied to authorial propriety, Badiou argues that Rancière’s concept of the “counting of parts of a society” as one definition of the police function, is identical, “with little or no alteration,” to his definition of the “state of the situation.” For Badiou, both concepts are the same, though Badiou’s can be referenced to 1988, and Rancière’s only to 1996. We are back in the realm of the *Capital* seminar’s dispute over the propriety of the concept “metonymic causality.” The problem for Badiou is that Rancière’s conception of the police both dismisses an actual mathematical ontology of the count, and, more importantly, entirely avoids “determin[ing] the formal conditions for a politics beyond the State” because he rejects “ever examining how the question [of the State] is posed for us.”

Third, a point that Badiou has made more clearly elsewhere, including in his 2006 essay, Rancière believes in the possibility of an absence of politics—that is, its rarity; in the 2006 essay, he suggests that this relates, like his second critique, to Rancière’s long absence from organized politics. Finally, Badiou argues that Rancière “fails to mention” that every political process is necessarily an *organised* process. The result, much as in the last two, is that Rancière “has the tendency to pit phantom masses against an unnamed State.” In contrast, Badiou claims, “the real situation demands instead that we pit a few rare political militants against the ‘democratic’ hegemony of the parliamentary State.”

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70 *Ibid.*, 118.
71 Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 120.
72 Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 121.
Jeff Love and Todd May challenge Badiou’s claims not by coming to the defense of Rancière, but by turning to Badiou’s writing and suggesting that his own claims about the place of equality in his system are an unfair stretch of his position from *Being and Event.* Love and May highlight two aspects of Badiou’s critique: first, that Rancière lifted Badiou’s political orientation without proper credit (that is, the authorial paternity point); and second, that without Badiou’s conception of the State, grounded in a mathematical ontology, Rancière’s political orientation is “inert.” In a brief overview of this ontology, Love and May show that Badiou’s focus is on universality, which admittedly has affinities with equality, but it is “not of the axiomatic and radical form envisioned by Rancière”—which is importantly Rancière’s only axiomatic claim. As a result, Love and May conclude that the distinction between the two is that Rancière produces a theory of democratic politics that is the only type of politics that could really count as such (that is, as politics), while Badiou sees Rancière’s politics as only one type among many others within a conception of politics as universal—and a lesser, faulty one at that, in its rejection of the standard political philosophical rigor like an ontology of the State. Love and May show that Badiou’s Platonic philosophy is always grounded in “truths that are universal, and those who grasp those truths are the militants.” These militants are like “Lenin [and] Mao”—that is, “figures capable of grasping the excess that eludes a situation.” Once they grasp this excess, they must “lead others to it. This is why politics, *if its goal is equality, does not necessarily start from that presupposition.*” They continue, “Militants can teach others, those who do not know.” Badiou’s politics, then, does not start from equality; it

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76 To turn to some anecdotal music history, Love and May’s argument regarding the difference between Badiou and Rancière recalls Karlheinz Stockhausen’s comment to Morton Feldman that “one of his pieces could be a moment in my music, but never the other way around.” Stockhausen quoted in Michael Nyman, “Against Intellectual Complexity in Music” *October* 13 (1980): 81.
77 Love and May, “From Universality to Equality,” 65.
starts from truths grasped by a knowing vanguard whose responsibility is to teach those truths under the sign of equality. Where Rancière claims that anyone can teach anything—even an illiterate father teaching his children to read—and that the position of the teacher does not matter, so long as they formally reject the division between knowledge and non-knowledge, Badiou requires an egalitarian teaching performed by the knowing militants, those receivers of the low music. In short, Badiou reactivates the Althusserian “absolute condition” of an unequal relation between a pure knowledge and a pure non-knowledge that Rancière had disrupted through the presupposition of intellectual equality.

Love and May seem not to have read Badiou’s 2006 essay in its original French edition, released the same year as their critique, as they essentially re-produce Badiou’s self-critique. In his essay, Badiou, still promising to speak only positively of his brother, draws on “two distinct oxymorons” to highlight the difference between his and Rancière’s image of transmission within a functional, post-68 pedagogic relation: the Ignorant Master and the Proletarian Aristocracy. The first paradox again reveals Badiou’s powerful insight into Rancière’s work. At all times, as he had suggested in the Metapolitics essays, a bond presupposes a master. While the claim sounds like one that Rancière would reject, Badiou argues convincingly for the absolute necessity of an Ignorant Master in all moments of Rancière’s thought: notable in this regard is of course Joseph Jacotot, into whose voice Rancière steps in The Ignorant Schoolmaster; at other times, he relies not only on Jacotot, but also the floor layer Gabriel Gauny in The Nights of Labour, or the Icarians and Saint-Simonians in Short Voyages to the Lands of the People, or upon himself as a model in his own writing. “The oxymoron of the ignorant master activates its place, which is the place of no-place, in contingent collectives. There it undertakes a transmission without any guarantee of what takes place or what it affirms.

78 Rancière, The Ignorant Schoolmaster, 4.
under its title.” Nearly anyone Rancière praises takes on the mantle of the Ignorant Master—most often individuals that he has pulled from archival anonymity. For Rancière, the Ignorant Master is someone who is only ignorant of ignorance—that is, someone who refuses the stultifying logic of the pedagogic relation as founded in a knowledge of the students’ lack of knowledge (or ignorance). Rancière’s thought, then, is not without Masters, but allows only a specific kind of Master, one whose mastery destabilizes the very concept. That is, these Masters are pedagogues whose role is to teach that we do not need masters—at least, not beyond the emancipatory moment in which they reject their own mastery by not presuming the “absolute condition” of the pure non-knowledge of another person within pedagogic situation they are activating. In contrast, Badiou presents his own mode of transmission as aristocratic: “it does not democratically testify to the powers of taking place, of becoming placed, of the out of place” because “it is clear that the formation of” specialist knowledge “and the organization of their proper transmission is always the work of a small group” of experts. His interest is in drawing as many people as possible into that aristocracy, but still agrees with the necessity of its specialization. That is, Badiou demands for the pedagogic relation a militant who can hear the low music.

As such, Badiou’s later essay reformalizes the way he “formaliz[ed] Rancière’s formalization:”

1. Under the condition of a declared equality, ignorance is the point from which a new knowledge can be born
2. Under the authority of an ignorant master, knowledge can be a space for equality.

The interaction of these two theses, Badiou notes, is extremely subtle. The two shuttle back and forth, undercutting each other and playing off their mutual interaction in a way much truer to Rancière’s project than the earlier claim that every bond presupposes a master. At the time, that

80 Ibid., 37-8.
81 Ibid., 42.
claim was read as a refutation; here the same idea is formalized as the Ignorant Master which, paired with the above thesis, acknowledges that Rancière’s project is in a constant process of redistributing the institutions of which it is a part. The two new theses “retain an essential point, which has become synonymous with the work of Rancière: equality is declared and is never programmatic.”

This is the kernel of Rancière’s thought that Badiou claimed Rancière had stolen from him in 1996. In 2008, Badiou continues:

This may be obvious for the convinced Rancièrians that we are, but we should also stop to punctuate this major contribution of his enterprise. It was he who first introduced into the contemporary conceptual field the idea that equality is declared rather than programmatic. It was a fundamental reversal, and I pronounced my absolute agreement with this thesis early on.

Badiou highlights the differences in their means of declaring equality, but the point stands that what had originally been an authorial challenge, even a charge of plagiarism, later becomes Rancière’s “major contribution” to philosophy. While the paternity is again of little interest, what is valuable here are the debates over the concept and the way that they are clarified, formalized, given names, in relation to disagreements over organization and pedagogy, and thus authorship. In Metapolitics we seem to return to the Rue d’Ulm in 1966, with an argument over the authority of concepts, and even the possibility of such a thing; by 2008, we are shown that the essay in Metapolitics was, more likely, a direct attempt by one friend to spur clarification and defense from a colleague whom he knew would never respond, in their ongoing effort at articulating the value of discursive disagreement: the terms of dispute that shape thought, the links between transformations of thought and political confrontation, and the pedagogical products of an authorial discourse.

Conclusion: the Low Music

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82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
Authorship very often takes the form of a transmission of knowledge (content, concepts, ideas) under the proprietary authority of a proper name attesting to its own low music. Rancière’s unique contribution is to declare equality in relation to the speech, the writing, the interpretation, and especially the affirmation of collectively produced concepts; he similarly focuses on a practice of writing history, of examining the archives, of producing discourses, which brings to attention the problem that traditional authority is upheld by undermining the intelligence of others. The central issue in all three of these disputes, as in many of the ones that will follow, is over who declares authorial propriety over concepts, as well as the form these declarations take. Jacques-Alain Miller charged Rancière and Althusser with “stealing” the concept of metonymic causality without following the proper rigor of academic citational style, as they had (improperly, he’d say) assumed that concepts were public, to be shared and “circulate freely” towards their further collective development, as Althusser had hoped for his collective research seminars. Rancière subsequently attacks Althusser for appropriating the concept of ideological apparatuses, not because he intends to declare his own authorship of the concept, but because he considers the partisans of May ’68 as the mass authors of the school as an apparatus of ideology. For Rancière, what May ’68 specifically pointed out was the fundamental “wrong” of the pedagogic relation, traditionally understood, as an allegory of inequality. From his perspective, Althusser has misunderstood the events—because he was too busy dismissing the infantilism of the protesters—in possibly thinking the idea of the ISA was his own heroic contribution. Alain Badiou, finally, attacks Rancière for having stolen and renamed his concept of the “state of the situation” as the supernumerary count, the order of society in which void and supplement are made impossible, as well as for copying his belief in the axiomatic declaration of equality. When he later declares his desire to speak only kindly of Rancière, his central means of doing so is by pointing out Rancière’s “fundamental reversal” and Badiou’s own agreement with it from early on.
In the course of these disputes, several themes emerge, despite the multivalent approach to concrete disagreements. In concluding this chapter, I would like to tie in some thematic issues articulated through these disputes that will be of theoretical value in the subsequent (musicological) case studies. While there is hopefully more of both broader and more specific value within Rancière’s disputes, three themes emerge: organization, pedagogy, and the History/chronology distinction.

First of all, organization has become something of a fetish (in its colloquial rather than rigorous sense) among Marxist theorists and philosophers. The word has a paradoxical value: organization is the mode through which militants or activists show their true, unchallenged dedication to the cause in opposition to those who merely practice theory from their desks in the acquisition of (bourgeois) academic positions. Simultaneously ordering, organization—in the Deleuzo-Guattarian sense—has a negative connotation as the top-down, authoritarian, molar, Oedipal form of management of noise that is rejected specifically as a result of post-1968 French thought. Within these dissensual meanings of organization, we must recall that Badiou berates Rancière for not keeping in mind that every political process is necessarily an organized process; he similarly, and conveniently, uses his involvement in the Organisation Politique to point out the flaws and misunderstandings of Rancière’s non-Statist conception of politics and his broader absence from organized politics. Nathan Brown likewise argues that “the debates concerning […] the ultra-left in the wake of May ’68… were debates over, among other things, the problem of organization—debates in the context of which Althusser’s Leninist commitment to the party form and the role of Marxist philosophy in the construction of a “general line” would have been laughable.”84 For Brown, then—very unfoundedly—the nature of Althussarian politics was that it had no interest in and would even laugh at organization as a concern in Marxist philosophy and action.

84 Brown “Red Years,” 21.
Organization, nevertheless, is a broadly useful term. In service to my upcoming case studies, I think that the word should be accounted for in terms of Althusser’s distinction between History and chronology. Rancière criticizes Althusser’s ideological state apparatuses as unfairly claiming heroic, sole authorship, a problem that arises from how he organizes and transcribes a collective concept, and in that transcription recognizes his own original contribution. The interplay between organization and transcription is of central importance here. It seems that, in Althusser’s Historical critique of the student chronology of May’s events, we can see him writing down his own way of making sense of the protests by forcing them into the standardized constraints of how we have always understood revolution: as an action supposedly “authorized” by “the workers”—at mid-century, of course mobilized by their revolutionary theorists, whose words we read as the documents of that revolution. Althusser tells the students that, in their focus on unordered chronology, they have mistaken a one-off event that should not have happened for revolutionary precedence. The double meanings of organization again become clear: on the one hand, the historical transcription of events necessitates some historiographical organization, but on the other hand, this necessity to account for the events leads to the presumption of singular authors as the authorizers of that form of protest and organization even when it is a specifically anti-authorial protest.

This point must not be understated. Following upon Hallward’s commentary on metonymic causality, and the broader issue of attempting to make sense of how it is that the minimalist dream of anti-authorship became a dispute over authority, we must keep in mind the role of writing in these anti-authorial events and discourses. The problem again of course raises the issue of my positionality: can I, with any sincerity or critical awareness, write my own critiques of authorial propriety as a doctoral dissertation? Clearly the answer is that I think I can, and that the way of going about the task is by keeping in mind always, and first of all, the shaky foundations upon which the
very ideas of authority and authorship rest. Althusser’s criticism—that the students were blinded by
chronology when it is their duty to recognize (scientific) History—is premised on responding to the
noise of revolt in the street by reaffirming the necessity of Science. Althusser thus critiques the
students for their (dis)organization—recall his critiques of the “Student Movement” discussed
above—while imposing a top-down organization upon them, both in his Historical ordering of the
events (we should not see the May 13 protest as the “spark”), and in transcribing into a “low music”
the ISAs from the broader, noisy terms of the May critiques that Rancière treats as a collective,
popular annunciation. It is necessary for Althusser, the theorist of the PCF, to uphold the ordering
of History that always validates and rediscovers the authority of Marxist “science.” As the cover of
each issue of the Cahiers marxistes-léninistes reminded its readers, quoting Lenin, “Marx’s theory is all
powerful because it is true”—even if this means denying the propriety of revolutionary actors, or
calling out as a manifestation of ignorant ideology their lived experience of revolt. Althusser’s
reading of May is his transcription of the events: the low music that only he can hear because of his
pure relationship of knowledge with the truth of Marxist science, but surely not of the actual events
of a concrete struggle.

Throughout the following case studies, this combined interest in organizing-as-transcription,
and the transcription of “noise” into organized, single-authored concepts (or compositions) should
be kept in mind whenever any of these terms arise. Many of the political-theoretical arguments that
turn to sonic metaphors rely on the binary between silence, on the one end, and noise on the other.
These binaries are what Rancière calls “allegories of inequality”: authorial binaries which function to
produce capacities and incapacities in relation to idealized, immaterial concepts. Within this
spectrum between noise and silence, we find the material actions and ideas of real subjects and
actors. On the one hand, nearer the noise, the heterophony of the crowd: that is, the real sound and
discourse of a group of people who have not yet been organized into a coherent, ordered whole.
Nearer to the (impossible) silence of the theorist at his desk, we find the “low music:” the transcribed, ordered, organized, and signed concept or document that authorizes the author’s authority. Within this spectrum, then, we have a (non-existent, ideological) “noise” that, when heard on its own terms, we can call the heterophony of the crowd; and on the other hand, we have a declared “silence” by the solitary theorist at his desk, who imagines the heterophony as his own ideas, transcribed into an orderly low music. In both Rancière’s writing and in my methodological intentions for the coming chapters, the issue at hand is to account for the heterophony—or better, to practice a historiographical method in which the heterophony is maintained and exacerbated, made dissensual, rather than normalized into an authorizing and consensus-based low music, that would free it from all of the tensions and inconsistencies that constitute it.85

Finally, we must remain attentive to how these relationships between organization and transcription, heterophony and low music, silence and noise, play into the proper names under which concepts and forms of authorship are transmitted—not only politically, but also pedagogically. As Badiou most clearly noted in the examples above, much of the disagreement between him and Rancière has to do with models of transmission, and thus a theory of (militant) education: while Badiou criticizes his own Proletarian Aristocracy, he praises Rancière for theorizing the Ignorant Master. This Master is one whose authority, and even whose declaration of authorship, happens under the “sign of equality” in relation to the word, its account, its writing, and so on. The Ignorant Master, then, is part of the long tradition of authors who mock their own authorship, composers who try to destroy composition, anarchist “politicians” whose goal is the destruction of the State, and so on. Under Rancière we can historically think these individuals who are typically dismissed for their hypocrisy or inconsistency within most historiography. For many readers,

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85 Remember here that for Samuel Chambers, it is central to Rancière’s style and method that one not overcome paradoxes.
Rancière’s claim here—and my positive recognition of it—is a sign of hopeless utopianism: of course authors cannot entirely revoke their own power; of course authors who do this are hypocrites at best and taking advantage at worst. It’s important to keep in mind the value, as well as the inherent, structural and institutional pitfalls, of those who critique their position of privilege in relation to their audience or those whom they represent. This is why for Rancière, the focus is on pedagogy and the role of the Ignorant Master. Rancière’s project, most broadly, can (but probably should not) be boiled down to a response to Althusser’s claim about the “pedagogic function” in “Student Problems.” While Rancière maintains the belief that this pedagogic function or relation is about the transmission of knowledge, he rejects Althusser’s “absolute condition”: that this be a transmission between an absolute knowledge and an absolute non-knowledge. Again: binaries of inequality whose objects are capacities and incapacities and, always, a new low music. As Badiou frames it in his 2008 essay, what would a pedagogic function that was not an imposition look like?

The following chapters deal with this question through both minimalism and Rancièrian philosophy. The claim is not that authority can be negated—when we hold a book, we are enthralled to the author; when we listen to a performance, we are giving up something to the performer; and so on—but rather that there are practices of authorship which aim to undermine themselves, and that particular names become attached to a politics of diminishing one’s authority and power, rather than aiming always to profit from its exploitation.
Chapter 2

Writing the Theatre of Eternal Music: 
Tony Conrad and La Monte Young

Prologue

In the summer of 1962, Tony Conrad attended a series of concerts at New York’s 10–4 Gallery by the “La Monte Young Quartet.” Reflecting on the concerts decades later, Conrad writes, “While Young played saxophone, (somewhere between Bismillah Khan and Ornette Coleman), Angus MacLise improvised on bongos, Billy Linich (Billy Name [of Warhol’s Factory]) strummed folk guitar, and Marian Zazeela sang drone.” He continues, “All in all, those were hysterical and overwrought concerts; they went on for hours in overdrive, with frequent breaks for the musicians to refresh themselves offstage or in the john. The music was formless, expostulatory, meandering; vaguely modal, arrhythmic, and very unusual; I found it exquisite.”

Conrad joined the group on violin in early 1963, following the departure of Linich, and later that year the violist John Cale began attending rehearsals. The droning “iron triangle” of Conrad, Cale, and Zazeela upheld the wildly modal, arrhythmic improvisations of Young and MacLise until April 1964, when MacLise left, and Young joined the drone with long, sustained pitches on his soprano saxophone; Young and Zazeela retroactively refer to this period’s music as the Pre-Tortoise Dream Music. At some point in the following months, Young left the saxophone behind entirely to focus on singing, thus stabilizing the

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1 This name, though unofficial and only available in one source, is helpful. See liner notes to Angus MacLise, The Cloud Doctrine (Sub Rosa SR182, 2002).
2 Conrad, Early Minimalism, 14-5.
3 Joseph, Beyond the Dream Syndicate, 27.
4 A bootleg recording of this style is available on several sources and of varying lengths. Strickland suggests that it was recorded at a performance for the director of the Tanglewood Festival in hopes of getting a gig; Branden Joseph backs up this argument and reproduces a photograph. The date would place it on the night of MacLise’s day of the holy mountain. This date from Year and the title Pre-Tortoise Dream Music are both frequently used in bootlegs.
ensemble as two string players and two vocalists, all performing a sustained, long-duration drone in precise just intonation. It was around this time that the group began using the name The Theatre of Eternal Music, calling the music “Dream Music,” and giving their performances long poetic titles that eventually stabilized under the umbrella title that Young views as his exclusive output during this period: *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys*. This ensemble is foundational to the early history of the genre we retrospectively call minimalism, in that it marks the first instance of drones as the sole content of a Western musical performance.\(^5\) This chapter examines the dispute over the authorial status of those drones.

While the ensemble made tape recordings of many of its performances and rehearsals, none were released during the group’s tenure, and to date the only commercially available release, *Day of Niagara*, is out of print and was released against much protest from Young and Zazeela (considered at length below). By the time of the group’s dissolution in 1966, each member had moved on to his or her own projects: Young and Zazeela undertook decades of study as disciples of the Indian musician Pandit Pran Nath, developing a Hindustani-inspired vocal practice that prioritized precise and sustained intonation within installations comprised of light and sine waves; Cale co-founded the influential rock ensemble the Velvet Underground and then had his own successful career as a solo musician and producer (of Nico, the Stooges, and others); and Conrad parlayed his work in experimental film into a career as a professor in the trailblazing media studies program at the State University of New York at Buffalo. The massive archive of group’s tapes sat idly in Young and Zazeela’s apartment, where the ensemble had rehearsed, and Conrad and Cale assumed that they could obtain copies if ever they were needed. All members had apparently developed a working

\(^5\) This is true from the earliest texts on the Theatre of Eternal Music to the most recent. Wim Mertens writes, “The use of long tones is in itself no novelty, but up till recently they were only used as a drone over which a melody was placed. For Young it is precisely these long notes that are the subject of his music.” Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, 21. Thirty years later, Barry Shank writes: “Instead of the tamboura [ṣrī] ringing behind the improvisations of lead instruments, *Young began to compose* for a variety of droning sounds as the sole object of audition, not only in the foreground, but unaccompanied.” Shank, *The Political Force of Musical Beauty*, 117.
agreement on the authorial propriety of their music during its active period, and maintained professional relationships beyond their collaborative performances: for example, Conrad worked for Young at Documenta V in Kassel, Germany in 1972 maintaining the sine-wave oscillators at Young’s Dream House installation, while presenting his own solo video work. Conrad and Cale also briefly performed with a newly formed Theatre of Eternal Music in 1969 and in the 1972 installation but quickly left as they felt that, reformed by Young, the ensemble had become something different and was clearly under his authorial direction. 6

In 1986, the record label Gramavision expressed interest in releasing some of Young’s early tapes which, according to Conrad, “were our collective property, resident in their unique physical form at Young and Zazeela’s loft, where we rehearsed, until such time as they might be copied for each of us.” 7 When Young asked Cale and Conrad to sign release forms acknowledging their role as performers in the ensemble with Young as the sole composer, they insisted that all members be given equal authorial credit—an arrangement not of multiple authors, or of improvisation, but of collective authorship. While all members of the ensemble had seemingly been in agreement about the status of their work—or, perhaps, had all found ways to function within heterogeneous understandings of its authorial status—Young’s request staged a conflict between him and Conrad, as the political, historical, and authorial terms of the drones were opened for dispute.

In 1990, Conrad showed up to a series of Young’s concerts in Buffalo to picket them, holding up signs and handing out pamphlets reading “La Monte Young Does Not Understand ‘His’

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6 See Branden Joseph’s liner notes to the 2016 vinyl reissue of Outside the Dream Syndicate (Superior Viaduct SV048, 2016). We can further speculate that Conrad was on good terms with Young despite not wanting to be involved in the ensemble. After leaving Documenta, Conrad went to the farm/commune of the “Krautrock” band Faust and recorded his only official release until the 1990s, Outside the Dream Syndicate (Table of the Elements Li-3, 2002; 2CD 30th anniversary version with bonus tracks of 1993 CD reissue of 1972 original vinyl release). The album did not receive much attention until Table of the Elements re-released it alongside Conrad’s new albums as part of their larger aesthetico-historical project. Aside from the name of the album —Conrad says it was his first musical work “outside” of the Dream Syndicate—an outtake track released in the 30th anniversary reissue is titled, “The Death of the Composer was in 1962,” presumably in reference to the first collaborations of Conrad, MacLise, and Young.

7 Conrad, Early Minimalism, 20.
Music.” Books on minimalism from the mid-1990s—as well as a nascent industry of experimental music press and record labels—appeared as a formerly inaudible ensemble was constituted through dispute over music that no one had heard. What I am calling the music’s “inaudibility” is central here: this music was inaccessible to listeners, and despite (or perhaps because of) this unavailability, the music’s influence and power were enlarged. Thus, in an effort to make the music audible to contemporary listeners, Conrad became involved with the Atlanta-based record label Table of the Elements. The label, owned by Jeff Hunt, released a number of Conrad’s albums, which claimed to recreate the sound and practice of the Theatre of Eternal Music. Most importantly for my purposes are Slapping Pythagoras and the boxed set Early Minimalism, Vol. 1, both of which featured long essays critical of both Young’s position on the early tapes and the Young-oriented, pre-emptive image of tonal, repetitive minimalism represented in popular and scholarly history. Around this same time, several mysterious bootleg recordings of music by the original ensemble began to appear; the distributors and creators of these releases are still unknown, but in most cases, the music had been taken from radio broadcasts, including one on WKCR in New York celebrating Young’s 49th birthday in 1984. In 2000, with the consent of Cale and Conrad, Table of the Elements released Day of Niagara, a poor quality copy of a tape from April 1965, with all five performers—Cale, 

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8 The full text of his pamphlets and placard is reproduced in Conrad’s interview with Brian Duguid of EST magazine: http://media.hyperreal.org/zines/est/intervs/conrad.html

9 The Wire: Adventures in Modern Music published a story each on Conrad (Issue 170, April 1998) and on Young and Zazeela (Issue 178, December 1998) during the period of their 1990s dispute. Both interviews are fascinating, though they offer too much to get into here. One notable quote from Young’s: “Tony has enough talent to actually do something worthwhile with his life. It would be sad if he limited himself to this level of untruth and personal attack that he has chosen to use as his prime vehicle of expression. I think that he’s capable of evolving beyond that.”

10 Robert Fink made a very similar point in the question session after Cecilia Sun’s paper at the 2013 meeting of the Society for Minimalist Music in Long Beach, California. For Fink, and I agree with this point, Young’s archive of tapes becomes only more valuable as it becomes more mysterious. His eventual willingness to release the tapes—in some form—will likely tender incredible profit for him (or whoever inherits the material).

11 Tony Conrad, Slapping Pythagoras (Table of the Elements, V-23, 1995) and Early Minimalism: Vol. 1 (Table of the Elements, As-33, 1997).

12 The WKCR broadcast was hosted by Brooke Wentz, and featured commentary by a number of participants in Young’s career, including Young and Zazeela, Christeter Hennix, Alex Dea, Dan Wolf, Henry Flynt, and Terry Riley. The full 24-hour marathon broadcast is available at the British Library as part of the Michael Gerzon tape archive.
Conrad, MacLise, Young, and Zazeela—listed in alphabetical order on the cover. Though this was the group’s first “official” release of material from the actual tape archive, and was widely distributed and attached to a label, Young threatened legal action for releasing the music without his consent and published a 27-page open letter on his website attacking the release, the history it proposed, and Conrad’s arguments. The “open letters” continued: Conrad responded to Young, largely continuing his arguments from *Slapping Pythagoras* and *Early Minimalism*, and Arnold Dreyblatt, a Berlin-based American sound artist and composer—who copied the tape for his personal listening when he was Young’s first tape archivist in the 1970s—released a letter apologizing to Young and Conrad and pleading with both sides to come to an agreement so that more of the material, of better quality, could be heard by the public.

This chapter provides the first extended study of this ensemble—alternately known as The Theatre of Eternal Music (Young’s and Zazeela’s preferred nomenclature), or sometimes as the Dream Syndicate (Conrad’s and Cale’s)—that is not framed within a chapter or a book on either La Monte Young or Tony Conrad. The “Dream Music” is my subject, and in particular, the arguments about politics, historiography, authorship, composition, collaboration, collectivity, and recording enlivened by those massively influential but largely unheard drones. In the first section, I survey the literature on this music, arguing that while there has been much writing on the group, it occurred mostly in publications on minimalism from the 1980s and 1990s whose authors had already decided that La Monte Young was the “founder” of minimalism, and simply traced his career backwards to find proof. Next, I examine Conrad’s presentation of this history, often dismissed as hypocritical or

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13 See John Cale/Tony Conrad/ Angus MacLise/ La Monte Young/ Marian Zazeela — *Inside the Dream Syndicate Vol. 1: Day of Niagara (1965)* (Table of the Elements CD W-74, 2000).
fantastical when recognized at all, by reading Conrad’s autobiographical and theoretical writings alongside the thought of the philosopher Jacques Rancière. I turn to Rancière because his better-known writings on history and politics provide a context for Conrad’s arguments, which tend to fall on deaf ears among musicologists. Rancièrian concepts like politics and the police, the wrong, and dissensus provide terminology with which to hold both arguments in tension once Conrad’s argument is made sensible and the assumptions about authority underlying Young’s authority are denaturalized. Lastly, I present my own archival work to argue that the ensemble, under the collective name The Theatre of Eternal Music from December 1964 through August 1966, was somewhere between what Young claims and what Conrad suggests simultaneously; most importantly, I argue that the ensemble was inherently dissensual in that it announced the potential and paradoxes of collective authorship by constituting two modes of hearing authorship within the same tapes. Throughout, my goal is to treat Young and Conrad as historians of this early period, one whose recorded silence straddles the gap between the post-Cagean critique of score-based determinacy and the early-1970s explosion of record labels like Gramavision and Shandar that first began releasing minimalist LPs. During this time the ensemble disrupted the necessity of the score as delegating document by recording their collective rehearsals and performances directly to magnetic tape. In spite of the extensive bibliography that ascribes the music to Young, I argue that Conrad makes a legitimate claim for the Dream Music, not as his own, or as by Conrad/Young, but as an early model of deliberative, democratic, and collective composition—the first manifestation of a compositional “we” in western art music.\footnote{Throughout this chapter, I will refer to the ensemble as a “collective,” “deliberative,” and “democratic.” The collective can be thought of as parallel to the rock band, falling under a group name, rather than the name of an author; deliberative refers to the fact that aspects of the composition/performance were debated by all present at any rehearsal or performance, and should be separated from “democratic” which has to do with the members’ equality within the collective. A “deliberative democracy” is thus a model of governance in which decision making for the collected members of that democracy is deliberated by all present. In contrast, a “representative democracy” relies on}
La Monte Young’s Ensemble: The Theatre of Eternal Music

In most literature on minimalism, The Theatre of Eternal Music is the name of the mysterious ensemble that Young led between his early Fluxus works and his first commercial recording in 1969. Declaring 1962-1966 a homogenous period in which one ensemble performed music written entirely by Young requires that the contributions and influence of the other members working with him be underrepresented, dismissed as irrelevant, or even entirely erased. In the first monograph on minimalist music, Wim Mertens says little more than that “in 1967 [sic], Young “formed his own ensemble,” called The Theatre of Eternal Music, consisting of Young, MacLise, Zazeela, Conrad and Cale.” He continues, correcting the earlier dating typo: “in 1964 the personnel of The Theatre of Eternal Music changed and from 1964 till 1966, it included Young, who no longer played the saxophone but sang instead; Zazeela, voice; Conrad and Cale, strings and (sometimes) Terry Riley, voice.” K. Robert Schwarz suggests much the same in his chapter on Young: “To accompany his saxophone improvisations, Young assembled an ensemble; its sole purpose was to prolong static, endless harmonies while he played. In its early incarnation of 1963, the ensemble consisted of Zazeela singing a vocal drone, Angus MacLise playing hand-drums, and a young Welshman named John Cale sustaining drones on viola.” That Schwarz’s book was published during the dispute between Conrad, a film professor, and Young, one of Schwarz’s interlocutors, should not be forgotten. In particular, it’s important to note that John Cale was never in The Theatre of Eternal Music at any point when Tony Conrad was not. I am not the first to note this: Branden Joseph representatives of the people to make decisions on their behalf. Conrad’s model of the group is thus as a collective whose compositional process was deliberative and democratic. At times, I will use only one of these terms to refer to a specific function of the ensemble’s organization process. In the dissertation’s conclusion, I will suggest that this authorial collectivity moves the music beyond the generic and political demands that delimit western art music; that is, the authorial “we” points out an unacknowledged limit of western art music’s generic and discursive practices.

16 Mertens, American Minimal Music, 27; my emphasis.
17 Ibid, 28.
18 Schwarz Minimalists, 37; my emphasis.
writes that Schwarz’s history is not only a “falsification” but also a misleading analysis, as Conrad is removed from this history, attesting to the threat of his political vision of minimalism for historians of the style.  

Schwarz’s later mention of the “four [sustaining] members of the ensemble” suggests that he was indeed thinking of the ensemble’s classic formation—Cale, Conrad, Young, Zazeela—as depicted in the best-known photo of the group, taken at the Filmmakers Cinematheque in December 1965. While Schwarz is unique in entirely denying Conrad’s presence, other historians simply downplay his contributions or misrepresent his argument. Keith Potter writes of the dispute, “the issue of whether the music in the many surviving recordings of the group constitutes compositions by Young or improvisations in which all the performers made important creative contributions… remains unsettled to this day.” He continues,

> It may be asserted that Young provided the material; but others may also have had an input into this, especially at the earlier stages of such music’s conceptualization. The group clearly provided the elaboration of it, each performer being ultimately responsible for his own part. But the interaction not only included Young as one of the protagonists but was also, on the available evidence, driven by someone who acknowledges that he is “very authoritarian” and—in an oddly characteristic moment of self-deprecation—“not fit to be collaborated with.”

Potter misrepresents Conrad through a false binary between authorship by Young or improvisation by the whole group, a method exactly followed by Cecilia Sun.

> To my knowledge, Conrad never suggested that the group was improvising, nor did he demand credit as co-composer; instead, he has long insisted that the music signaled the “death and abjuration of the composer”—a substantially more complex and nuanced political argument that

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19 Schwarz, Minimalists, 38. See also Joseph, Beyond the Dream Syndicate, 376, fn 66.
20 The photo is reproduced in Joseph, Beyond the Dream Syndicate, 28-29.
21 Potter, Four Musical Minimalists, 73-76.
23 See liner notes to the CD-release by Tony Conrad and Faust, Outside the Dream Syndicate (Table of the Elements Li 3, 2002). See also Conrad, “Tony Conrad’s Response.”
has yet to be properly taken into account. Musicologists have thus far tended to distill the argument into binaries of composition against improvisation, with nothing in between. In contrast, I contend that The Theatre of Eternal Music/The Dream Syndicate did not perform music “by La Monte Young and Tony Conrad” or any other combination of people involved, nor was it open improvisation. It was rather the beginning of a form of collectivist and deliberative composition, in which all performers present, working on the “living sound itself” from “inside the sound” and directly to magnetic tape, are all given equal credit for its composition under the collective name as a result of the open, deliberative practices within which the music developed. The Theatre of Eternal Music was, in the sense typically applied to the first rock ensembles around this same time, a band: that is, a collective authorial nomination. Again, I cannot guarantee any change in intention or any misgivings about Young’s or Conrad’s understanding; what is important is that both interpretations hold up. Conrad’s claims hold together coherently and plausibly within the authorial and political environment of New York experimentalism. Without any change in the performance or the interaction, it makes sense that one member saw the ensemble as a deliberative collective, while another viewed himself as a director, either by understanding himself as directing others’ actions, or by diminishing the importance of those actions in contrast to his own authorial intention and dictation.

Indeed, the talent, diverse creativity, and traceable input of the other members of the ensemble force us to question Young’s claim that he was “not fit to be collaborated with.” Edward Strickland’s extremely valuable history of the origins of minimalism outlines the contributions of Cale, Conrad, MacLise, and Zazeela. While I focus on writing about Conrad in depth below, and so will largely leave him aside for now, Strickland’s initial comment about Conrad points to the historiographical method through which Strickland relegates everyone in the ensemble except for Young to secondary status: “Apart from his musicianship on bowed and occasionally plucked
strings, Conrad was a Minimalist film-maker trained as a mathematician.” Conrad was not a filmmaker when he began performing with Young; his visual art work rather grew out of this period of collaborative work with sound, and only came to public awareness in his 1965 film *The Flicker.* This proleptical practice of writing history—mapping who the members became onto who they were when they started performing together—highlights how Young, the most famous person in the group when historians first began examining it in the 1990s, came to be understood as the leader. Further, it entirely negates the possibility of change, and thus positions itself as ahistorical and apolitical.

Strickland’s descriptions of the other members continue in this proleptical mode. Discussing Cale’s contributions, Strickland writes, “to this point, Young’s instrumentation was entirely acoustic. The drone was augmented by the arrival of electric violist John Cale.” Again, the electric viola did not exist in 1963—it was a solution arrived at by the ensemble in relation to its specific needs. Like calling Conrad a filmmaker, Strickland’s assumption that Cale played electric viola is based in a proleptical view of history in which individuals are always-already exactly who the dominant narrative expects them to be—side players of “Young’s ensemble”—without taking into account the chronological and temporal development of the group in its material interactions. Within Strickland’s narrative of identifying Young as the author, stating that Cale developed one of the signature sonic aspects of the Theatre of Eternal Music’s drone would give too much credit to Cale, drawing sole responsibility away from Young, whom we are expected to see as “very authoritarian.” As such, Strickland continues:

[Cale] was later to become one of the founding members of the Velvet Underground… which pioneered proto-punk drone-rock under Young’s influence… Along with their harmonic stasis the Velvets borrowed their relentless volume from Young’s drones. In this, Cale’s arrival with his electrically amplified instrument had been crucial, as had Conrad’s

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introduction of contact mikes, which enabled Young to realize more adequately his construction, in avant-garde adaptation of rock producer Phil Spector, of a “wall of sound.”

Again, eventual historical events are presumed to be self-evidently and necessarily consequent upon earlier, entirely uncertain events. First, Strickland suggests that Young’s influence on the Velvet Underground can be heard in the use of both harmonic stasis and relentless volume. Immediately following this observation, Strickland states that in its relentless volume, “Cale’s arrival… had been crucial” as a result of his (already mentioned as problematic) use of the electric viola. That is, Strickland grounds Young’s influence on the Velvet Underground through features of the ensemble that he argues Cale brought to Young’s attention. In the above passage, Strickland is so intent on upholding the narrative of La Monte Young’s influence on the Velvet Underground, and Young’s sole authorship of The Theatre of Eternal Music’s drones, that the extremely circular passage does not really even make sense: and yet, it has never been directly challenged in the literature on minimalism because of the presumed obviousness of Young’s priority. Like Althusser, who needs always to hunt for the evidence that the proper ordering of History is presented, as understood by Marxist science, Strickland’s reading is premised from the very beginning on stripping away contingencies and difficult narrative events that might complicate the founding premise of the metaphysical histories of minimalism: that La Monte Young invented it, and that his music is the ongoing elaboration of an “eternal” music.

25 Strickland, Minimalism: Origins, 156; my emphasis. In his autobiography, Cale credits Conrad with bringing the pickups; see John Cale and Victor Bockris, What’s Welsh for Zen: The Autobiography of John Cale (New York: Bloomsbury, 1999), 60. In his biography of Cale, Tim Mitchell makes the same point, writing that “Conrad bought some cheap contact microphones, the kind of pick-ups that John Cale used and which were available from any street corner electronics store;” see Tim Mitchell, Sedition and Alchemy (Chester Springs: Peter Owens, 2003), 37. For a compelling and potentially relevant account of Cage’s use of pickups in a New York Philharmonic concert on February 9, 1964, see Benjamin Piekut’s chapter “When Orchestras Attack!” in Experimentalism Otherwise, 20-64. In the most immediately preceding bootleg tape, the “12 I 64 first twelve Sunday morning blues,” the strings are both unamplified; in the next tape following Cage’s (potentially unrelated) philharmonic concert, the “2 IV 64 day of the holy mountain” (the Pre-Tortoise Dream Music), all players are amplified.
Angus MacLise’s contributions to the group are given the exact same historiographical treatment. MacLise was a percussionist and poet, whose dominant contribution to the ensemble, though he left before it took on its collective name, was his calendar-poem \textit{YEAR}, in which he assigned unique names to all 365 days of the year. These names were taken up by the group, and they provided the evocative titles for many of the Theatre of Eternal Music tapes—the day of the antler, the day of niagra, fifth twelve, and so on—each one labeled by its recording date according to \textit{YEAR}.\footnote{August 15, April 25, and February 29, respectively, in MacLise’s “Universal Solar Calendar,” \textit{YEAR}, a “calendar poem” of 365 days in which each day of the year is given its own name, replacing poetic titles with organization by month and number. There is sadly not time to go into the differences in the many available versions of MacLise’s poem, but Young has always used this dating in his work to date specific instantiations of a larger piece.} However, for Strickland, MacLise’s departure for Kathmandu on February 18, 1964 is again read as a sign of Young’s compositional foresight: “With the drummer gone, the rhythmic element was essentially eliminated, and the music in a sense was permitted to retrogress towards the unaccented sustenance of [Young's] \textit{Trio [for Strings, of 1958]}.”\footnote{Strickland, \textit{Minimalism: Origins}, 157} In his 2000 open letter, Young writes:

Angus left New York on Tuesday, February 18, 1964 to begin a protracted journey to the East. Although \textit{Early Tuesday Morning Blues} stands as a good example of what my fast soprano saxophone playing was like without Angus, without the excitement of his remarkable drumming technique to play my saxophone rhythms against, \textit{I discontinued the rhythmic element}. Carrying on the inspiration of my previous work with sustained tones, I began to hold longer sustained tones on saxophone.\footnote{Young, “Notes on the Theatre of Eternal Music,” 11; my emphasis.}

The movement from “Young’s ensemble,” with a drone upholding his saxophone improvisations, to the purely droning Theatre of Eternal Music, must be accounted for in terms of the role of each individual as the group becomes flattened (into a drone as sole content) rather than hierarchical (with drone “supporting” Young) through individual deliberations, arrivals, and departures. In a 1966 interview, Young noted that “one of the reasons I stopped playing saxophone and began singing” is that pure intervals are available “to the singer and the violin player,” though surely not to
a saxophone player.29 The instruments chosen are not abstract exemplars: these pure intervals were available to the instruments played by Cale, Conrad, and Zazeela, creating a situation in which Young, in relation to the new pure tunings and “iron triangle” drone, was the odd man out within a new working practice, rather than the dominant character within the the old conception. Cale’s account is more inclined towards the choice as a deliberative one by the group: “We gave a concert once at Rutgers University while La Monte was still playing saxophone. There was a riot; people booed.” He continues, “Eventually we just drove La Monte off the saxophone. He stopped playing fast and spent all his time trying to get in tune and couldn’t [i.e., the period Young and Zazeela call the “Pre-Tortoise Dream Music”], so he started singing… To this day he refuses to acknowledge our contributions.”30 While Young may have brought in Conrad, Cale, MacLise and Zazeela to support his saxophone improvisations in 1962, by the time he moved to singing (a more elaborate, amplified, purely tuned) drone, this group’s purpose was definitively not to uphold Young’s virtuosity. In short: Young shifted from rapid modal improvisation to sustained tones, marking the start of the Pre-Tortoise Dream Music (as it was later known) in the absence of MacLise’s drumming as the only other rhythmic element; Young then moved from saxophone to voice, eventually marking the start of The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys, because he could not get in tune with the drone that, with the introduction of amplification by Conrad and Cale, had overtaken his playing and become the more interesting element. In writing on the Theatre of Eternal Music, not only are both of these steps interpreted as evidence of Young’s compositional foresight, but they also later become incontrovertible evidence for Young’s sole authorship when Conrad challenges it.

30 Cale, What’s Welsh for Zen?, 60-1. A copy of Young’s works list sent to Peter Yates suggests that this performance occurred on November 19, 1963 at the Music Activities Building at Rutgers, which would put it five months before the Pre-Tortoise Dream Music tape. Peter Yates Papers. MSS 14. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego Library.
As much of this account suggests, The Theatre of Eternal Music was a band: individual members came and went, introducing new possibilities and impossibilities as they did so. And because Tony Conrad was not simply a line in a score delegated to “violin” and MacLise was not “hand drums,” each member’s entry and departure required shifts and concessions. Arguably, if *Sunday Morning Blues* was a composition by La Monte Young that featured hand drums, he would have found a new hand drummer when MacLise left. Similarly, when John Cale left the ensemble at the end of 1965, there does not seem to have been an effort to find a new viola player; instead, Terry Riley was brought in as another politically and aesthetically sympathetic composer-performer to supplement their work and bring it in a new direction. We must imagine the remaining members, perhaps in a first rehearsal after MacLise’s departure, sitting together and saying “now what?” and finding a means to move forward.

Revolving membership within a defined community is of central importance throughout the rest of this dissertation: in most of the pieces of minimalism under discussion, there are no parts written for “saxophone” or for “viola” but for “Jon [Gibson]” or “John [Cale].” Further, there are often no parts written at all: there are parts developed, elaborated, worked out, in relation to the idiosyncratic stylistic interaction of a long term and sympathetic collaboration between and among several composer-performers. Rather than positioning the drastic shift in the texture and instrumentation of the ensemble as a response to MacLise’s departure, historians like Strickland read it as the initiator of a “retrogression” to the long sustained tones in Young’s 1958 *Trio for Strings*. Much like his circular reading of Cale’s position in the Theatre of Eternal Music and the Velvet Underground, Strickland’s search for evidence of Young’s claim of sole authorship necessitates convoluted logic to turn him into the author of even MacLise’s departure. The *Trio*, a twelve-tone work with no “drones” and no amplification, which was not written in pure tunings, and bears no clear resemblance to anything listeners today might call minimalism, is thus able to become proof of
Young’s sole authorship of music from six years later that has almost nothing to do with it other than an interest in extended time scales. In their refusal to take seriously the collaborative nature of the ensemble, historians are forced into extravagant readings to fill holes where there is no evidence of Young’s priority as composer; the job of the music historian becomes to find the logical traces and formative moments for Young’s contemporary status in his biography and earlier work. As Branden Joseph has argued in his critique of the “metaphysics of minimalism,” most histories decided in advance that the only important minimalists—perhaps the only minimalists worth studying to create cohesion—were Young, Riley, Reich and Glass. From that presumption, each of their actions and works becomes a step towards the music’s becoming-minimalist, a double gesture that also makes them the only historical subjects capable of speaking for or acting on behalf of “minimalism.” Examining Young’s conceptualization and historicization of two early pieces will help me provide examples of how malleable chronology (perhaps something we can call “History”) and dating often function as artistic material within his work.

First, Young uses subsequent versions of his “1962” piece The Second Dream of the High-Tension Line Stepdown Transformer from The Four Dreams of China to eliminate the developmental and conceptual distance between his equal-tempered Trio for Strings (1958) and his later (post-Theatre of Eternal Music) work in 31-limit just intonation. In his 2000 open letter, Young mentions four different tetrads of partials for the chordal drone that is the only material of The Second Dream: G-C-C-sharp-D (the [0127] set from the Trio), 12:16:17:18 (“which I specify in the current score,” Young writes, though the score is presumably only accessible to him), 24:32:35:36, and 42:56:62:63.

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31 There are of course important elements to the Trio for Strings that have led scholars to position it as foundational. Most importantly here are the [0127] set and the very long tones. I do not aim to suggest that these analyses are pure fantasy, but rather to keep in mind which works, ideas, and contributors must be erased to create such a tidy, pure fable of minimalisms origins in a single score.

32 Young, “Notes on the Theatre of Eternal Music,” 3.

33 The “35” that Young claims was present in the version he suggested to Lukas Foss and the Buffalo Creative Associates in January 1965 is unique among any interval in Young’s music in being factorable by 5. While the absence
Young focuses on this work for two reasons: first, Tony Conrad’s earliest performance of Young’s music was this piece, on May 19, 1963; second, he traces its development through various tunings while still always holding it to the date of its original score, 1962, and further, to the 1958 score for the Trio where the [0127] equal tempered version finds precedent. In his meticulous analysis of tuning in Young’s music, Kyle Gann notes that the *Four Dreams of China* “predate Young’s interest in just intonation.” The piece was also played during Conrad’s first public appearance with Young and Zazeela, at the 1963 YAM Festival.\(^{34}\) Despite the conceptual difference between an equal-tempered tetrad from a twelve-tone piece and a 31-limit tetrad held as the sole content of a drone composition, Young collapses this distance while simultaneously using it as evidence of his influence on Conrad. In the 2000 letter, he cites a note from his archive on which Conrad’s handwriting is visible labeling a “possible sequential order quantifying the combinations and demonstrating that Tony had seen my chart.” He continues,

> The handwritten chart includes written notations, also in my handwriting, qualitatively describing some of the chords, such as question marks, arrows, and the words “special,” “far out,” “doubtful,” and most significantly “Dream,” over the combination 63, 62, 56, 42. This “Dream” is actually a version of my four-note “Dream Chord” from *The Second Dream of the High-Tension Line Stepdown Transformer* from *The Four Dreams of China* (1962), this time using 31 as the divisor of the 9:8 interval (63:56) instead of the 12-note equal tempered divisor used in the [May 19, 1963] Segal’s Farm performance.

Based on his use of the qualitative word “Dream” over Conrad’s quantitative just intonation notation, Young turns this chord into a “version” of *The Second Dream* (1962), which he then attaches to the *Trio for Strings* (1958). This all despite the fact that in his 1966 interview with Richard Kostelanetz, in response to a question about how just intonation works and how many pitches the Theatre of Eternal Music uses, Young defers to Conrad: “I haven’t taken a count; but just glancing over

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at Tony Conrad’s chart on the wall here… we have used about twenty-seven frequencies to the octave, which is more than double the number used in the twelve-note system.” Because Young sees each tuning as a successive “version” of the same chord grounded in the *Trio*, he can claim that they all originate in 1962 by attaching the name *The Second Dream of the High-Tension Line Stepdown Transformer*, rather than acknowledging the collaborative developments that occurred in the Theatre of Eternal Music period.

A second piece in which Young’s active use of transcription, dating, and chronology is clear is the *Compositions 1961*. The work has a rather clear genesis, which follows upon Young’s *Compositions 1960*—a set of ten text pieces, including one which directs, “build a fire in front of the audience” (#2), and another which advises the performer to sit on stage and watch the audience (#6). The most famous of these pieces is likely #7: an open fifth “to be held for a long time.” The *Compositions 1961* follow this trend. “Having further decided that originality need not be a criterion for a legitimately ‘new’ work,” to quote Branden Joseph, Young wrote the piece as a response to and copy of his own earlier *Composition 1960 #10 (for Bob Morris)*, the complete text of which is “Draw a straight line and follow it.” Adding to the multimedial (or transmedial) nature of these works, #10 was itself a conceptual extension of *Compositions 1960 #9*, which consisted of a straight line on a catalogue card. On January 6, 1961, Young conceived and wrote the complete *Compositions 1961*. Realizing that he had written, on average, a piece every thirteen days throughout his compositional career, Young decided to write his average yearly quota in one night: twenty-nine iterations, spaced thirteen days apart, beginning on January 1 and ending December 31, 1961, of the

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text of *Composition 1960 #10*—“draw a straight line and follow it.” In keeping with the norm of compositional practice, he dated each iteration:

- Composition 1961 #1 (January 1, 1961)
- Composition 1961 #2 (January 14, 1961)
- Composition 1961 #3 (January 27, 1961)
- Composition 1961 #4 (February 9, 1961)\(^\text{37}\)

And so forth. Young comments on the piece in his interview with Kostelanetz: “What is also important historically is that I performed all of them in March, long before many of them had ever been written according to their dates of composition. I think that was interesting.”\(^\text{38}\) Several musicologists and art historians agree with Young on the work’s historical importance; the work has inspired broad, interdisciplinary commentary. Jeremy Grimshaw suggests that the *Compositions 1961* provide an “elemental teleology” that his book follows “through the compositional methods Young subsequently developed and the cosmological outlook to which he anchored them.”\(^\text{39}\) Liz Kotz, as part of a wide-ranging reading of text-based 1960s art, writes “[l]aboriously performing the line piece as a repeated, real-time task structure, Young would not only concretely link certain spatial models—transferring the line from the graphic space of the card to the three-dimensional architectural container—but bring into focus an altered perceptual/spectatorial position in the process.”\(^\text{40}\) Branden Joseph suggests that “nearly all of the work’s appeal lies in the conflict between intention and result.” He continues to describe the performance as “a dialectic, executed in time, between the ideal of a straight line… and the inevitable alterations that arise in actual, real-world production.”\(^\text{41}\) This aligns with Young’s claim that when he performed the work with Bob Morris, “each time [the


\(^{38}\) Young quoted in Kostelanetz, *Theatre of Mixed Means*, 204.

\(^{39}\) Jeremy Grimshaw, *Draw a Straight Line and Follow It*, 82.


\(^{41}\) Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate*, 112.
straight line] invariably came out differently. The technique I was using at the time was not good enough.” Joseph also quotes Henry Flynt on “the conceptual conundrum” of dating:

I remember when he told me over the telephone how the works were to be listed in the program. As he dictated, he came to Composition 1961 #8, dating April 2, 1961! [The concert was to take place on March 31.] He was going to perform 22 compositions before they were composed. In logical terms, he was going to follow a rule which he had planned, but which did not yet exist. From the point of view of the conventionalist explanation of the existence of abstractions, Young was introducing time travel at the level of whether given abstractions existed or not.42

The typography in the Harvard-Radcliffe Music Group program from its first performance suggests that the pieces were not “titled” by date, but specifically that each number in the series, 1-29, was dated, in brackets, by Young (on January 6).

That these are dates and not conceptual titles put forward as part of the idea of the work produces chronological confusion is evident in Mertens’ book: “However, at this point [1961] Young had not yet made a specific move in the direction of repetitive music. The works of 1961 do point to a number of aspects that are shown in this kind of music. Young keeps concentrating on the singular unique event, and at different points during that year he wrote the same composition 29 times: Draw a straight line and follow it.”43 The anecdotal evidence from Kostelanetz’s interview was either missed by Mertens or dismissed as historically irrelevant now that all 29 dates were, in fact, in the past. Indeed, from Mertens’ perspective, Compositions 1961 was Young’s first repetitive work in that, twenty-nine different times in the course of the year, he wrote the same piece; for Flynt and others who are aware of the use of dating as material, that is its sole content and it thus stands as Young’s final Fluxus work. The problem in Young’s case is how this transcription is titled, dated, and discursively tied to the rest of his career: in short, how Young uses history as another material within his work. Keeping in mind the closed nature of Young’s archive and his constant desire to cite the

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42 Henry Flynt, quoted in Joseph, Beyond the Dream Syndicate, 155.
43 Mertens, American Minimal Music, 27; my emphasis.
precedence of his concepts and work through reference to it, it’s worth considering another aspect of the *Compositions 1961*: they represent one case in which inaccurate dating is made a material, and even the sole novel content of a piece. Like *The Second Dream*, the *Compositions 1961* reveal political and historiographical problems both in how Young accounts for his works, as well as in how they fit into—and help reframe—the limits and capacities of authorship during the 1960s. In both works, Young uncouples the sounding event and its inscription on paper, making each a mobile, historical event whose name and date of origin are malleable to serve his needs.

**Tony Conrad’s Egalitarian Politics: The Dream Syndicate**

I turn now to Conrad as a historian of *The Theatre of Eternal Music/The Dream Syndicate*, focusing, as I did with Young, on his historiographical and political modes of self-presentation. Conrad’s arguments show the mark of having spent the last several decades as a filmmaker and professor in the media studies department at SUNY Buffalo, as he frequently draws on aesthetic and political theory, referencing scholars like Michel Foucault, Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, and Chantal Mouffe in mobilizing his claims against Young. Conrad’s historiography might be broadly categorized as “postmodern” in contrast to Young’s modernist (or even Romantic) assertions. I will read Conrad in relation to Rancière’s idea of politics and the wrong (*tort*); though there is no direct sign that Conrad ever read Rancière, reading the two together reveals resonances between the structure, tone, and content of their arguments. I do not bring Rancière in here simply to “prove” that Conrad’s arguments have a foundation in theory, but as one step in a larger activation of Rancièrian thought in relation to a revisionist history of minimalism which will continue throughout the following chapters. I will move away from “Young’s ensemble,” the Theatre of Eternal Music, and further investigate Conrad’s argument that The Dream Syndicate created identical music, and
featured the exact same individuals, but was in fact a collaborative, deliberative, democratic ensemble that heralded collective composition in art music. I begin by presenting how Conrad’s historiography draws on the dual influences of Heinrich Biber and John Cage to present his view of minimalism as grounded in listening rather than writing. Through these two influences, Conrad developed a mode of attention to sound that was culturally productive, even compositional, and played a central role in making possible the Theatre of Eternal Music. That is, he does not make a claim for having authored the music, but suggests that the group learned, at least partially through his ideas, a new mode of listening and crafting from “inside the sound” that made listening an active and productive engagement. In this way, cultural production is retained, while authorial privilege, gained at the expense of the listener, is challenged. In contrast to Young’s claims, Conrad recognizes as equal all of the voices and ideas within the ensemble, and refuses to position his contribution as more important, more foundational, or more authorial than any of the rest. In short, I argue for Conrad as another Ignorant Master. Following this examination of Conrad’s egalitarian historical poetics, I show how the police order of history—now signified by Young and his colleagues rather than by musicologists—responds to his arguments in the wake of the 2000 release of the Day of Niagara CD.

Rancière’s understanding of the relationship between politics and police as one of a distribution of sensibility is central to making sense of Conrad’s egalitarian declaration. In La Mésentente: Politique et philosophie, Rancière writes:

> We should take disagreement [mésentente—perhaps more accurately “misunderstanding”] to mean a determined kind of speech situation: one in which one of the interlocutors at once understands and does not understand what the other is saying. Disagreement is not the conflict between one who says white and another who says black. It is the conflict between

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44 In an interview with David Grubbs, Conrad casts the central concept that he drew from Cage as a “misreading”: the idea that one could, and had an obligation to, listen to any music that they did not like until they managed to like it. This was Conrad’s approach alongside John Cale, Henry Flynt, and others, to popular music in the early 1960s. See David Grubbs and Tony Conrad, “Always at the End,” Frieze 124 (2009) http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/always_at_the_end.
one who says white and another who also says white but does not understand the same thing by it or does not understand that the other is saying the same thing in the name of whiteness.\textsuperscript{45}

Rancière’s politics does not refer to the “rational” Habermassian dispute in which one party argues “black” and the other party responds, “no! white!” Rather, politics is founded in disagreement/misunderstanding between two parties, one of which is made invisible or unrelated to the issue at hand within the existing distribution of sensibility, which he labels the \textit{police} order:

There are two modes of human being-together, two types of partition of the perceptible that are opposed in principle and yet bound up together in the impossible counts of proportion… There is the mode of being-together that puts bodies in their place and their role according to their “properties,” \textit{according to their name or their lack of name}… Politics is generally seen as the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution. I propose to give this system of distribution and legitimation another name. I propose to call it \textit{the police}.\textsuperscript{46}

Everything that typically falls under the category “politics” is rebranded instead as \textit{the police}: “an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise.”\textsuperscript{47} The police sensorium draws on a long history of people of high status doing things that way, writing about them, producing documents for the archives that constitute the limits of the common sensorium, what is thinkable and sayable. It is “the way things are,” called upon by the representatives of order when facing a challenge to their regimented mode of sensibility. If elections, opinion polls, the management of power, the attainment of consent, the distribution of resources, and processes of power and legitimation are all \textit{the police}, what is left for Rancière to label “politics”?

I now propose to reserve the term politics for an extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing: whatever breaks with the tangible configuration whereby parties and parts or

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Ibid.}, 27-28, my emphasis.
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Ibid.}, 29.
lack of them are defined by a presupposition that, by definition, has no place in that configuration—that of the part who has no part.”

Unlike the dramatic, rhetorical setup of his introduction of the police, politics tends to be defined in brief, aphoristic comments scattered throughout texts:

Politics occurs when there is a place and a way for two heterogeneous processes to meet… [T]his term means the open set of practices driven by the assumption of equality between any and every speaking being and by the concern to test this equality.

Politics has no objects or issues of its own. Its sole principle, equality, is not peculiar to it and is in no way in itself political… What makes an action political is not its object or the place where it is carried out, but solely its form, the form in which confirmation of equality is inscribed in the setting up of a dispute, of a community existing solely through being divided. Politics runs up against police everywhere.

Politics has no object or location of occurrence; rather it is a force of equality that can pass through any event and can be introduced by any subject (“the workers” or “the masses” are not the only subjects of politics, revolution, or change). Importantly, it always emerges in its particularity and contingency from a determinate police order. For an event to constitute a politics, it must disrupt the distribution of sensibility that organizes “the way things are;” it must force all within earshot to re-distribute their notions of sensibility, by confronting an orderly inequality with disorderly egalitarianism. Thus one of Rancière’s most famous statements: “A worker who had never learned how to write and yet tried to compose verses to suit the taste of his times was perhaps more of a danger to the prevailing ideological order than a worker who performed revolutionary songs.”

Centrally here, politics and police are modes of sensibility; ways of looking at the world: there does not need to be a literal redistribution of anything other than sensibility. The Theatre of Eternal

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48 Ibid., 29-30.
49 Ibid., 30-32.
50 As discussed already in Chapter 1, his was one of the key points of contention between the Maoist students and the Communist Party of France during May ’68. The party argued that it was the workers, the masses who made history, and the student protests were merely childish bourgeois delusion on a grand scale. Rancière and other students and supporters of le Mai dismissed these arguments as abstractions aimed at a Leninist maintenance of power among the intellectuals of the Party, who alone could call for Revolution when “the time is right.”
Music, for example, can be viewed through a police sensibility that demands that a well-known composer like La Monte Young must have been in charge, while an understanding grounded in egalitarian politics sees in the same ensemble the possibility of group interaction in which no coercive authorial power is required.

Keeping in mind Rancière’s recognition of politics as a force of equality which emerges from a determinate police sensibility, two features of Conrad’s narrative help position his historiography of minimalism. Much as Young’s “mytho-biography” grounds his focus on the drone in stories of his youth in Bern, Idaho listening to the stepdown transformers and the wind through the walls of his family cabin, Conrad’s essays from *Early Minimalism* rely on a series of experiences early in life which position his later interventions and artistic career. Conrad’s tale focuses on his childhood violin lessons with his teacher Roland Knudsen, “an excellent young symphony violinist” who highlighted playing slowly and with precise intonation. While Conrad “hated vibrato,”—which he marks as the expressive core of his instrument’s heroic nineteenth-century performance practice—Knudsen’s introduction of seventeenth-century music that included double stops changed things drastically: “I discovered what it was like to hear two notes sounding together.” Conrad claims that Knudsen continued to urge him to play slowly, in tune, and to listen carefully; he later brought a book on acoustics to the lessons. The lessons thus revolved around activities that Conrad will claim were the dominant activities of Theatre of Eternal Music rehearsals: “long conversations about the harmonic series, scales and tunings, intonation, long durations, [and] careful listening.”

Conrad then discovered the *Mystery Sonatas* of Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber. Writing about Biber’s music, Conrad’s narrative turns ecstatic: “for the first time, my violin sounded truly wonderful. It rang, and sang, and spoke in a rich soulful voice… I perceived Biber’s music as having

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52 For accounts of Young’s childhood in Bern, see Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, 19; for a more critical perspective on Young’s “mytho-biography” see Grimshaw, *Draw a Straight Line*, 178.
been constructed according to timbre, not melody.” Together Biber and Knudsen facilitate an alternate narrative of Conrad’s travels in the avant-garde, founding his childhood practice in seventeenth-century violin technique, which he learned through thinking of duration, intonation, and listening. While I do not doubt the specifics of either Young’s or Conrad’s childhood narratives, I focus on them as “mytho-biography” in the same sense that I criticized Strickland above: in these stories, all childhood events are proleptically cast as founding eventual stylistic interests; it is not the events (the chronology) that are in question, but their narration (the History).

The second feature is more theoretical: a set of “three pathways that made sense to the performers” in the ensemble as a means of moving past an impasse resulting from the Cageian critique of authorship. The first is the complete dismantling of the whole edifice of high culture, an option investigated by Benjamin Piekut in relation to Conrad’s “anti-art activism” with Henry Flynt, and to his interest, shared with Flynt and John Cale, in listening to rock ‘n’ roll, African American, and hillbilly musics, and other forms of “new ethnic music.” This model of listening as active practice allowed him to hear Biber as a “hillbilly” form of seventeenth-century technique. The second option was to “dispense with the score, and thereby with the authoritarian trappings of composition, but… retain cultural production in music as an activity.” Conrad thus establishes a middle ground—what many might consider the hypocritical ground—allowing for “cultural production” and art-making, while maintaining a critique of the “authoritarian trappings” of the score and other commencing documents of art and history. Conrad writes:

When we played together it was always stressed that we existed as a collaboration. Our work together was exercised “inside” the acoustic environment of the music, and was always supported by our extended discourse pertinent to each and every small element of the totality… Much of the time, we sat inside the sound and helped it to coalesce and grow

54 Ibid, 11.
55 Ibid, 12.
56 See Benjamin Piekut, “Demolish Serious Culture!” Ch. 2 in Piekut, Experimentalism Otherwise, 65-101. See also Grubbs “Henry Flynt on the Air” in Records Ruin the Landscape: John Cage, the Sixties, and Sound Recording (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 19-44.
around us… In keeping with the technology of the early 1960s, the score was replaced by the tape recorder. This, then, was a total displacement of the composer's role, from the progenitor of the sound to groundskeeper at its gravesite.57

Magnetic tape is able to capture sound for posterity, without the delegating intermediary act of authorial inscription of notes on paper. Cultural production remains a possibility, but the role of the composer as writer of a delegating document is rejected. The collective shapes the sound in rehearsal—developing a performance practice that is also a compositional language—without delegations from a writer who makes marks on paper rather than smearing textures across a living sound (and who will likely fantasize ownership nonetheless as a result of having experienced the typical means of interacting with sound and musicians). Conrad’s third post-Cagean option completes this trajectory: “move away from composing to listening, again working ‘on’ the sound from ‘inside’ the sound.” He continues,

Whenever any of us altered our performing premises in the slightest way, our ensuing discussion brought every justification or objection by any member of the group to the surface… There was a baseline which stabilized the group—our (then) shared conviction that the collaborative composer/performer identity was the way to proceed (historically), and that the mechanism which could make this congruence fruitful would be attention to, and preoccupation with, the sustained sound itself.58

In short, the turn to listening is made conceptually prior to, and is worthy of greater emphasis than, composing. The new composer-performer becomes, first of all, a listener searching for the mode of production in which his or her privileged role is removed in favour of a common sensorium in which no listener is “privy to anything.”59 In this Cagean overview, or this response to Cage’s challenge, Conrad outlines what I have already described in my Introduction (drawing on his writing) as the material practices of early minimalism.

57 Conrad, Early Minimalism, 20; my emphasis.
58 Ibid.
59 I am referring here to Reich’s “Music as a Gradual Process.” See Introduction.
Throughout his writing, rather than claiming propriety, Conrad highlights his contributions to the ensemble as a listening-based performance practice that negates the possibility of authorship. Conrad knew when he became a second performer, along with Zazeela, on drone in 1963, “that my presence would introduce entirely new standards of attentiveness to pitch and stability.”60 He continues:

At the point of my arrival in the group, the sound itself… was incontrovertibly good, but [it] had no particular sustained structural integrity or richness. At first, as co-drone (on violin) with Zazeela (on voice), I played an open fifth… After a month or two, however, I suggested that I might also sometimes play another note. What should it be? —And so began our extended discourse on the advisability of each of the various scale degrees.61

With his arrival, the sound of the group becomes singular—the sound—with deliberative compositional practice made possible by the drone’s elimination of melodic and rhythmic content (“discussion brought every justification or objection by any member of the group to the surface”; “and so began our extended discourse on the advisability of each of the various scale degrees”). The ensemble is constituted in this deliberation, Conrad argues; it becomes a collective capable of inscribing sound to tape, rather than an ensemble reciting the notated delegation of an Author.

Again: early minimalism fundamentally relies on “writing” to magnetic tape as a fundamental means of maintaining cultural production while moving away from the antiquated social structures enabled by the single-authored score. Conrad construes this mode of listening and performing as the foundation of the sound for which the ensemble is known:

I played two notes together at all times, so that I heard difference tones vividly in my left ear… Any change in the pitch of either of the two notes I played would be reflected in a movement of the pitch of the difference tone. I spent all of my playing time working on the inner subtleties of the combination tones, the harmonics, the fundamentals, and their beats—as microscopic changes in bow pressure, finger placement and pressure, etc., would cause shifts in the sound.62

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60 Conrad, Early Minimalism, 16-7.
61 Ibid., 21.
62 Ibid., 21-2. Performing—and equally, listening to—just intonation drones through their difference tones is a unique experience that differs strongly from typical concerns for playing in tune, as it is primarily a rhythmic rather than tonal phenomenon. For a powerful description of Conrad’s performances (from someone who has played in many of them) see Grubbs, Records Ruin the Landscape, 35-6.
This quotation could create the basis for a major claim for sole authorship. That is, if Conrad wanted to stake a claim against Young, on Young’s terms, to argue who was the true, single author of the music, this would be the place for it. If this were the case, we would have a Habermassian rational debate between two homogeneous claims for the same role of Composer, to the same share and on the same terms: La Monte Young is the composer because X vs. Tony Conrad is the composer because Y. In Rancière’s formulation: white! No, black! But, as Branden Joseph notes, the disagreement is one of kind and not content: while Young argues about his priority as author, Conrad is discussing the conditions of possibility of that institution within the music they were creating: “At their core, the hundred or so recordings of Dream Music emblematically deny ‘composition’ in its authoritarian function as a modern activity.” This form of listening, grounded in both his prehistorical, biographical stories of studying with Knudsen and his reading of Cage (not to mention his background in mathematics), becomes the defining feature of the group’s performance practice. “We lived inside the sound, for years. As our precision increased, almost infinitesimal pitch changes would become glaring smears across the surface of the sound.” For Conrad, at all points the ensemble was a collective, and its status as a collective was grounded in the potential offered to them by turning to listening rather than writing, manifested by using magnetic tape, rather than a delegating written score, as documentation. This both enabled their deliberative processes in rehearsal, and short-circuited the typical division of labour in art music grounded in the score as document.

Nevertheless, the policing discourse of art music, with its demand for sole authors, returns to remind of the necessity of the “way things are.” In the last section of his 2000 open letter, Young

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65 Ibid., 24.
provides three categories to uphold his claim of sole authorship of the music performed by the Theatre of Eternal Music/the Dream Syndicate: public opinion, the opinion of “informed individuals,” and Young’s own opinion. For the first, Young points out that “many articles in dictionaries of music, histories of music, music journals, newspapers and magazines” credit *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys* to La Monte Young. In this context, the major history of minimalism is called upon to assist in maintaining order.66 Second, he quotes colleagues: the composer Dennis Johnson states that he has never seen La Monte “do anything where everybody is ‘doing their own thing’,” again suggesting, like Potter and Young, that the only other option than Young being the composer is an improvisatory free-for-all, which Young’s auratic and heroic form of authorship would never allow (even when it perhaps seems to). The poet Dianne Wakoski claims, “no one who has spent any time around La Monte could ever perceive him as a collaborator.” Terry Riley notes that Cale and Conrad were “certainly… inspiring collaborators for La Monte,” but in spite of the “elements that were contributed by Tony Conrad (such as the math for getting around in Just Intonation) and Angus MacLise (incorporating his names of the days as part of the title…), and most prominently the stunning visual art of Marian Zazeela,” that the “framework for the composition” was Young’s. Zazeela defends her husband, noting that she designed flyers, staging, and lighting, and that even though “the lighting developed into a major projection work of my design, for which I trained various projectionists to perform during concerts… none of the projectionists I worked with… ever considered themselves the ‘lighting co-designer’.”67

66 It should be noted that Young allowing Potter to publish the “score” is entirely at odds with Young’s typical secrecy; giving permission for its publication during the period of intense critique, and only months before Table of the Elements released *Day of Niagara*, was more likely strategic. Young could now point to his writing in a peer-reviewed, scholarly publication, rather than in a filing cabinet in his apartment.

Third, Young’s perspective is based in the function of authorship and the authority derived from it in other musical traditions, arguing for the “extraordinary understanding, bond and trust that had long existed between composer and performer.”

The bonds that existed between European classical composers and their performers in a time when improvisation was very much in vogue, the bonds that exist between composers and performers of Raga, the bonds that exist between composers and performers of jazz compositions, that Conrad and Cale, either naïvely, or intentionally, betrayed, taking advantage, unbecoming to their stature and acclaim, of an established tradition existing between composers and performers back into time.  

Like Riley above, Young points out that Conrad and Cale made many contributions to the ensemble, in the “realms of performing, theory, acoustics, mathematics and philosophy,” and that Conrad’s own archive of tapes includes the names of all performers as having been the “Composers” of the works. “This shows that Tony Conrad has a very particular sociological approach to the problem in which he concludes that anyone playing in a work that is improvised comes under his very broad definition of co-composer.”

Young is again relying on the false binaries, treating any case of collaboration onto tape—any music that is not written down in advance and then performed based on that command—as “improvisation.” To Young’s mind, then, any case of improvisation—if one person present has an idea of the direction it might take in advance—is actually not improvisation, but that individual’s composition. He notes that when he initially approached Conrad and Cale to sign off on his tapes and say that they were performers on music in which Young was sole composer, they refused and “threatened to block releases of my fast sopranino saxophone playing with Angus accompanying, on which they (merely) held drones.” Young places a value judgment on the (mere) performance of drones by attaching it to the guru-student “bond” in Indian classical music, suggesting that Conrad is ignorant of these hierarchies rather than that he is rejecting them.

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69 Ibid., 26.
70 Ibid., 27.
Pointing out that Conrad’s tape archive lists all performers on a tape as composers (again, not really, he just lists everyone on the tape with no role attached), Young continues: “For example, Tony lists the tambura player as a co-composer. The tambura can only play a drone. It is a very beautiful instrument but it would require great creativity to get a composition out of a tambura that was any different from the music that all tamburas have played throughout time.”

While Young is the composer most immediately associated with the drone (as mentioned above by Mertens and Shank), in the final paragraphs of his 27-page essay, he relies on the problematic, hierarchical relationship of the droning tambura player to his master in Hindustani music as final proof of the invalidity of Conrad’s argument. As Badiou noted in his critique of Rancière, “every bond presumes a master.”

Drawing on scholarship, copyright law, the testimonial of friends and colleagues, and the traditions of both Western art music and music of other cultures, Young argues that there is a specific place for performers to stay as delineated by their “bond” with the composer. He simultaneously argues that Conrad and Cale calling this “bond” one of servitude and unfair hierarchical assumptions is “unbecoming of their stature.” Conrad instead wants to reveal Young’s conception of history as what Rancière calls an allegory of inequality: Young, Zazeela, Riley, Wakoski, and Johnson—perhaps unbecoming of their stature and avant-garde credentials—see an authorial hierarchy as necessary for the creation of work that is anything more than “improvisation” in which “everyone is doing their own thing.” In Rancière’s image of the allegory of inequality, there are always, on the one hand, people of authority who write and create, and on the other, people who follow those orders without adding any noise to the delegated signal.

Conrad’s *Early Minimalism* project included not only the record release, the music, and the revisionist essays, but even picketing, pamphlets, and media interviews. Taken together, they present

Young as a convenient example of what Rancière would call the foundational “wrong” of authorship that has been perpetuated against not only performers, but also listeners for millennia, stretching back in Conrad’s historiography to Pythagoras. He picketed Young’s 1990 Buffalo performances not because Young would not listen to him, but to make his “noisy” discourse a matter of public record:

La Monte Young’s social elitism makes it impossible for him to take my picketing for anything other than interpersonal bickering, but for me that has nothing to do with the message… Picketing—picketing for or against something, and handing out literature—these are conspicuously formal actions. They have to be understood as indirect communication. Yes, I am “in communication” with La Monte Young, of course, when I picket and he is there to perform his public action—but by clearly shaping my own action as “picketing” even though there is only me there, I am making my action [interpretable] only as a public or political action, not as a private communication.

Again, his argument comes from Young’s policing—and Conrad is fully aware of this. As he told the New York Times in 2000, “If I had all of these tape copies sitting on my shelf right now, you’d probably not have the advantage of all this rich discourse.” Politics emerges from the police and requires it; it appears within a heterogeneous space in which the logic of domination is confronted by the logic of equality, and must always be framed in relation to the former to have a critical function. To return again to Rancière:

Politics is primarily conflict over the existence of a common stage and over the existence and status of those present on it. It must first be established that the stage exists for the use of an interlocutor who can’t see it and who can’t see it for good reason because it doesn’t exist. Parties do not exist prior to the conflict they name and in which they are counted as parties. The “discussion” of wrong is not an exchange—not even a violent one—between constituent partners. It concerns the speech situation itself and its performers. Politics does not exist because men, through the privilege of speech, place their interests in common. Politics exists because those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account, setting up a community by the fact of placing in common a wrong that is nothing more than this very confrontation, the contradiction of two worlds in a single world.

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73 See Tony Conrad, Slapping Pythagoras (Table of the Elements CD V-23, 1995).
75 Rancière, Disagreement, 26-7; my emphasis.
Rancière is here again pointing to the two methods of human being-together: a world of politics (of always disruptive, noisy equality), and a “police” world in which those in power are upheld by the obviousness of “the way things are,” which can be called upon to dismiss those attempting to redistribute roles and modes of sensibility.

Conrad’s noisy discourse is heterogeneous to the system that Young recognizes and that sanctions his practice of authorship. Holding together politics and police and acknowledging their inter-constitution, their production of two heterogeneous worlds in the place of one, is what Rancière calls *dissensus*. At every moment that Young argues for the precedence of his cultural actions, Conrad finds gaps which can only be closed through the recognition of collective, democratic labour and production. What has hopefully become clear is the rather asocial and sometimes ridiculous role authorship can take, particularly in mid-century avant-garde art music, when it relies simply on the heroic transcription of collective labour. Within the authorized, police mode of writing history, if one finds evidence of collaboration or collectivism, historians and critics can be called upon to find evidence that everyone was not, in fact, “doing their own thing,” as Johnson writes. Rather—it is suggested with all of the obviousness of “the way things are”—they were all acting under the charismatic, invisible power of the singular Author, and merely deluded themselves into thinking they could be acting of their own creative volition. Philosophy, acoustics, theory, lighting, mathematics, poetic titling, amplification, teaching, tuning, listening: these are not acts of authorship in music, because they were not performed by people already (or even retrospectively) labelled Composer, the person whose place it is to write music. They are merely resources to be extracted and organized by a composer who knows better. The wrong is authorship, in its ability to deny others the equal validity of their self-determined contributions to a larger musical structure; in Young’s case, this dismissal is handled by simply being the inscribed, authorizing name at the top of a document presented in a musicology text. Developing a listening-
based, collective practice of composition does not carry value historically when held in conflict with a delegating authorial document. As Conrad notes, historical writing on minimalism has been framed so as to include as “compositions” Young’s “extra-musical events” like “leading a bucket around by a string, feeding a piano some hay, releasing a butterfly,” and the neo-Dada and Fluxus events that “incorporated unobservable events, were sometimes performed before they were composed, and otherwise exploited logical and textual paradoxes and aporias of the composer-to-performer relation.” But Conrad’s interventions, critiques, and protests are dismissed as “interpersonal bickering.”

He continues, clearly outlining his networked and heteronomous ontology of music:

> What I’m trying to say is that both the message conveyed through my picketing, and the picketing itself, were not communications primarily intended for La Monte Young personally. They were communications which took place on the public level, which is the level of culture, of symbolic statement. These were symbolic or formal statements, which are as much a part of “Music” as this interview is—even though this interview is actually silent, and we aren’t even speaking out loud.

By contrast, La Monte Young’s vision of authorship is grounded in misdating, as in the Compositions 1961, or retrospective naming to set up precedent, as in the Pre-Tortoise Dream Music or The Second Dream, or the subsumption of the labour of others by creating hierarchies of input and tying each person to a role through historical “bonds.” How has this been upheld as a positive vision of authorial politics? More importantly, what is it about art music historiography that demands a representative author be drawn out from the would-be collective?

**Writing the Dream Music**

I contend that The Theatre of Eternal Music functioned in its short time as a deliberative, collective community of equal “composer”-performers. This chapter has critiqued the existing history of this

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76 Duguid, “Interview with Tony Conrad (1996).”

77 *Ibid.*. The concluding statement is in reference to the fact that the interview took place by email—probably a relatively novel concept for both Conrad and Duguid in 1996.
music that reads “The Theatre of Eternal Music” as the name of “Young’s ensemble” from 1962-1966. In place of this narrative, I have argued for the potential of collective creation once the underlying assumptions of sole authorship are disrupted. My interest then has been in the historical and authorial organization of the group as positioned by scholars and the members themselves. I now turn to several contemporary documents to argue that The Theatre of Eternal Music was an adventure in collective composition that existed for less than two years, from December 1964 through the fall of 1966, and consisted of John Cale and Tony Conrad, strings; La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela, voices; and, in 1966, Terry Riley, voice. In taking on the collective name The Theatre of Eternal Music, these musicians manifested in their performances a compositional *we* for the first time in Western art music. Conrad’s and Cale’s occasional identification with the name “The Dream Syndicate” should not be dismissed: like the nineteenth-century anarcho-syndicalist workers Rancière has studied who occupied their factories, Conrad and Cale made The Dream Syndicate an ensemble identical to and inside of The Theatre of Eternal Music—a relationship, perhaps, of metonymy. They thus maintained their identification with and pride in their work, but refused the logic of order and authority that allowed their production to be subsumed under the name of a delegating, managing authority.

In sticking with the name the Theatre of Eternal Music I am not denying Conrad and Cale’s syndicalist alternate narrative, or siding with Young’s Pythagorean esotericism. Rather, I am leaving behind my own earlier theoretical constructs—in which I proposed that the single ensemble was in fact two identical ones, operating under differing logics of organization—in favour of a very material reading of the ensemble, which was known almost exclusively during its time as The Theatre of Eternal Music. One notable exception to this will be considered below. Several documents will help in this examination. While hardly exhaustive, they make legible some of the confusion around the radical authorial positioning of the collective among critics, press, and the members themselves. I
first examine several invitations and concert announcements for their performances from
November 1964 through the fall of 1966 to show how, both in print and more importantly in
Marian Zazeela’s calligraphy, the four members’ names were consistently intertwined in an
egalitarian, diamond-shaped presentation with increasing ornamentation intended to present them as
equal composer-performers. Second, I examine Young’s 1965 “score” for the day of the antler in
contrast with Conrad’s manifesto from the same year, “Inside the Dream Syndicate.” I am interested
in reading the two documents together as transcriptions of the group’s sound, as they are very
different both in genre of writing and in authorial accreditation. Lastly, I compare Young’s famous
“Dream Music” essay, as presented in his Selected Writings and in a 1971 issue of Aspen, to two of
the group’s first public programs under their collective name, in which Young’s essay is the middle
section of a larger program note signed by the Theatre of Eternal Music as a collective we.

The group’s public self-presentation is visible in the concert announcements and program
notes, and especially in invitations to small concerts written in Marian Zazeela’s calligraphy. I
would like to track briefly the development in the presentation of the names of all four members in
a diamond-shaped organization, moving between typewritten examples and Zazeela’s increasingly
ornate calligraphy. Young claims in his 2000 open letter that he began using the diamond as a means
of “giving the musicians billing as performers with no mention of a composer, in order to give me
time to think over a problem that I had never dreamed of.” The problem in question was the
insurrectionary claim by Conrad and Cale about the music’s collective provenance: its grounding in

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78 All issues of Aspen are hosted online at ubuweb.com. For Young’s essay, see
79 Zazeela’s collaborative light-installation work with Young, which began with the December 1965 Filmmakers
Cinematheque concert, has been the focus of some attention, most notably from Henry Flynt in Duckworth and
Fleming (1996). Surprisingly, there has been no commentary on her calligraphic work, which is arguably as important to
Young’s visual presentation, and much more so to historical readings than is her more ephemeral light work. All
announcements and invitations mentioned below were sent to Peter Yates by La Monte Young, and are present in the
Peter Yates Papers, MSS 14. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego Library. A copy of The Celebration of the
Tortoise invitation is also in Steve Reich’s papers, sent to him by Larry Poons.
80 Young, “Notes on the Theatre of Eternal Music,” 24; my emphasis.
equality. Young claims this occurred around the time he began singing rather than playing saxophone—what Cale would call the time the rest of the group “drove him off the saxophone.”

The diamond is present in typed print, with Young’s name bolded and slightly larger, in the announcement for the series of concerts at the Pocket Theatre on November 20-22 (Figure 2.1). A few weeks later, a December 10, 1964 preview in the Village Voice for the performances at the same venue on December 12-13 still feature Young’s name in bolder font than the other three performers (Figure 2.2). Their names now encircle the collective name “The Theatre of Eternal Music”—this despite the fact that Edward Strickland claims that “according to Young, the first documented use of the name dates from February 1965.”\(^81\) The next available use of the name is the March 4, 1965 performance at the East End Theatre, the program booklet of which includes on its cover only the words “The Theatre of Eternal Music.” The first inside page repeats the collective name, laying out below it, in a typed diamond, the four constitutive names, all of equal size and density (Figure 2.3).\(^82\) This same layout is used for an (undated) program note from a performance of The Ballad of the Tortoise or Pierced Earrings, a work that Jeremy Grimshaw’s chronology lists as having been performed sometime between The Obsidian Ocelot (the piece transcribed for Young’s score for the day of the antler) and when they began performing 7 early in 1966.\(^83\) The rest of the East End Theatre program’s contents are considered in more depth below.

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\(^81\) Strickland, Minimalism: Origin, 159.
\(^82\) “A Partial Index of the American Theatre for Poets, Inc. 1961–1965.” Available at http://2011-2014.pastelegram.org/features/282/event/692. The website lists the program as being from a February 25, 1965 concert, though this date is not cited anywhere in the existing literature on the ensemble and is more likely the March 4 performance, though if it is February, this would back up Strickland’s narrative of the use of the name above (though it would still be late). Many of these dates—as has hopefully been made clear throughout—are most definitely still up for question.
\(^83\) Grimshaw, Draw a Straight Line, 186.
Despite these cases, it is significant that the group’s most striking self-presentation frequently leaves aside the collective name, while developing the modes of visually inscribing all performers on equal footing graphically. Among Zazeela’s most compelling calligraphy works are the small, folded cards on heavy white paper sent out to people like Peter Yates and Steve Reich (among many others, presumably) inviting them to small, private concerts.84 Posters for the October 30-31 and November 20-22 series at the Pocket Theatre present all four names, in equal font size, encircling the title of the performance (Figure 2.4). While the type for Conrad’s name is perhaps slightly finer, this seems more an issue of space and typography than of conceptual weight. Another, to be held at the apartment of Museum of Modern Art curator Henry Geldzahler on March 7, 1965, just days after the East End Theatre performance, presents all names entirely equally, eschewing much of the ornamentation from the Pocket Theatre card. Here, in place of a specific performance title, the names surround the broader genre name, “Dream Music,” which the group had used for

84 I first found one of these cards in Steve Reich’s correspondence at the Paul Sacher Foundation in September 2014. I subsequently found others in Peter Yates’s correspondence with Young at the UCSD special collections. They are also present in Tony Conrad’s archives, courtesy of Jeff Hunt.
the first time in the program to the 1964 Pocket Theatre performances (discussed below). Despite using the more generic title, a work list that Young sent to Yates in late 1965 suggests that the group was performing *The Obsidian Ocelot, the Sawmill, and the Blue Sawtooth High-Tension Line Stepdown Transformer*. . . , the same work that they performed at the East End Theatre and later that year at the Theatre Upstairs at the Playhouse on October 16, 1965 (and which Young transcribed for a Guggenheim fellowship grant in late 1965, and was subsequently published in Potter’s *Four Musical Minimalists*).

*Figure 0.2 December 10, 1964 concert announcement in The Village Voice*
THE THEATRE of ETERNAL MUSIC

LA MONTE YOUNG

voice drone

TONY CONRAD violin

string drone

JOHN CALE

voice drone

MARIAN ZAZEELA

design & stage

Figure 0.3 March 4, 1965 East End Theatre program. Full program available on the pastelegram.org “Partial Index of the American Poets Theatre, Inc. 1961-1965” archive.
While I have not found any other hand-written invitations from the rest of 1965—the group’s most active period according to most histories, as it includes the period of *day of the antler*, *day of niagra*, Young’s score and Conrad’s manifesto, and the infamous photo of the group from December at the Filmmakers’ Cinematheque—a pair of invitations from 1966 show the developing artistry of Zazeela’s visual presentation. The first, at the invitation of Larry Poons and Geldzahler, is for a concert series at Poons’ loft, “The Four Heavens,” on February 24-27, 1966 (Figure 2.5). The title of the performances is simply 7, with all four names encircling the single number in an ornate development of Zazeela’s calligraphy. The names have changed though: Terry Riley now fills

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*85 The works list that Young sent to Yates in late 1965 suggests that the middle of 1965, while it may have been active for rehearsals, saw few public performances; none are listed between the March 7 performance at Geldzahler’s loft and the October 16 performance at The Theatre Upstairs. Peter Yates Papers. MSS 14. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego Library.*
space on the right side of the diamond left open by Cale’s departure after the Filmmakers’ Cinematheque concerts of December 1965.

One last invitation represents the height of this genre of graphically inscribing their collective organizational structure: an invitation, “On the Occasion of the Opening of Midsummer ’66,” to Christoff De Menil’s festival at her home in Amagansett, Long Island—with ornate map of the region, also in Zazeela’s hand, above the fold—for two evenings of performances of a newer work, The Celebration of the Tortoise (Figure 2.6). In a bootleg recorded that weekend, Riley’s low voice—much lower than either Young’s or Zazeela’s—at times creates the impression of root movement, as the three voices intertwine and move around Conrad’s now solitary strings. As I suggested at the start of the chapter in relation to MacLise’s departure, the sound of the ensemble

Like all of the available bootlegs, the Celebration of the Tortoise CD is hard to accurately date without access to Young’s tapes. Nevertheless, the recording is clearly of the Theatre of Eternal Music, and shows several voices (one quite low and recognizably Riley) for the first time overpowering the strings. I recognize that this may not have been recorded the same weekend, or at De Menil’s commune; nevertheless, I am relatively confident of it. The De Menil weekend seems to have been quite a major event. Photos taken by Frederick Eberstadt for a planned magazine profile of Conrad show the performance load in as Conrad, Riley, Young, Zazeela and others set up a large tent in an open field and begin setting up what, at the time, must have been a remarkable amount of gear for an outdoor concert. Robert Adler, their frequent technician and the person acknowledged with having recorded most of the rehearsals (see Young, “Notes on the Theatre of Eternal Music,” 18), is also visible in the photos. So while I would happily be proven wrong, I am in fact more confident about the dating of this recording than about most available Theatre of Eternal Music bootlegs.
once Cale had been replaced by Riley was more of rupture than of continuity, revealing the band-
ness of the ensemble: rather than finding a new electric viola player, the sound was filled in with a
sympathetic performer, and a new sound was developed in response. Riley sent a letter to Steve
Reich on August 2, 1966, where he says they had just returned from a week in Long Island
performing concerts for people whose extreme wealth seems distasteful to Riley. The letter is
sparsely typed in metered lines across a whole page. Riley discusses the huge expense of the event,
and that it is the best playing the group has done together, and specifically clarifies that he means
Conrad, Young, Zazeela, and Riley—by first name, and listed in that order. The letter is striking
not only in its form, but also content: while it’s difficult to discern what combination of playful,
poetic, and perhaps drug-addled the author’s tone suggests, the letter is fascinating in that it is the
only contemporary writing on the Theatre of Eternal Music and the Tortoise from a member other
than Young and Conrad. What’s more, Riley suggests at this point, following one of their last known
performances, that it was their best ever, and is clearly of the impression that this was a collective
creative effort rather than a performance of Young’s music.

![Figure 0.6 Detail of program for July 29-30, 1966 performances at Christof de Menil's commune, showing only the “diamond” shape presentation of names and the performance title. Marian Zazeela’s calligraphy. Peter Yates Papers. MSS 14. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego Library. Also Paul Sacher Stiftung, Sammlung Steve Reich, Correspondence. Also Tony Conrad’s archives, courtesy of Jeff Hunt.](image-url)

87 Terry Riley to Steve Reich [2 August 1966]. Paul Sacher Stiftung, Sammlung Steve Reich, Correspondence.
I turn now to consider two transcriptions of the Dream Music that help fill in the period between the early 1965 invitations and those of 1966. First is La Monte Young's score for the *day of the antler*, which he claims was written out in Zazeela’s calligraphy in November 1965. The “score” should more properly be considered a transcription for two reasons. First, it was written down after the fact, from an August 15, 1965 tape recording of Cale, Conrad, Young, and Zazeela. In contrast to Ben Piekut’s reading of Cage’s “chain reaction of paper,” provoked by his belated transcription and publication of *Variations II* and other works, Young did not publish the work; indeed, in keeping with his practices, he kept it entirely locked away and private, aside from submission for a Guggenheim grant, until allowing Potter to publish it at the height of the dispute between Young and Conrad (and on the eve of the release by Table of the Elements of *Day of Niagara*).

This leads to the second, more important point, which is that the “score” was never used as a set of performance directions for a work by La Monte Young. The problem then is more of historical positioning. Within the pages of a musicological text like Potter’s, the presentation of the score makes a stronger claim for authorship than Young himself may have intended when he had Zazeela write it out for submission for a Guggenheim grant in 1966. When one reads a score, even an unconventional one like *the day of the antler*, the name at the top is read as author of the sounds because the written document is presumed to have authorized the first and all subsequent performances. That is, the score is understood as the material and inscribed directions for performers, the set of instructions that led instrumentalists and singers to produce a particular sound that can then be attached, through the conventions of intellectual property, to that author’s personal “style.” In never having fulfilled this role, the score, as foundation of Potter’s defense of Young’s
authorship, enables a conceptual leap that is exposed as such in light of more recent available evidence.\footnote{88 Potter himself recognizes this problem in his contribution to the Ashgate Companion. Keith Potter, “Mapping Early Minimalism,” in Ashgate, 19-38.}

Young’s score takes the form of a chart, a “system of frequencies,” outlining the just intonation pitches performed on August 15, 1965 as part of The Obsidian Ocelot, The Sawmill, and the Blue High-Tension Line Stepdown Transformer… The page’s gridded array designates which pitches were played by each member of the ensemble, written out equivalently in cycles per second, lowest binary form of partials, factors of the partial within the three octaves 512/64, nearest equal tempered pitch, and so forth.\footnote{89 The score is reproduced Potter, Four Musical Minimalists, 75. Young’s layout and column titles are strikingly similar to a chart from one of Conrad’s notebooks that Joseph reproduces. See Tony Conrad, “Table of Harmonics and “Harmonics in Octal and Binary” from July 1, 1964 in Joseph, Beyond the Dream Syndicate, 32-33.} “The Theatre of Eternal Music” does not appear anywhere on the page, and the other members of the group are represented as (merely) “articulating instrument(s) or Voice(s)” in one column, inscribing a delegation of pitch content that very likely never took place—at least not coming monodirectionally from Young to the performers. Notably, the individual’s names are present, revealing that even Young at the time knew that to designate the score for “violin, viola, and two voices” would have undercut the collective labour of their project. Young imagines his position, as Potter notes, as being what George Orwell might call “more equal” in being listed as both an articulating voice and the top-billed figure casting his sovereign, authorial glance down upon the entire score—a composer-performer among performers. As Potter writes, “[t]he group clearly provided the elaboration of it, each performer being ultimately responsible for his own part. But the interaction not only included Young as one of the protagonists but was also, on the available evidence, driven by someone who acknowledges that he is ‘very authoritarian’.”\footnote{90 Potter, Four Musical Minimalists, 76; my emphasis.} Unlike all other contemporaneous concert announcements, program notes, and invitations, the diamond formation of proper names is entirely absent.
Both the ecstatic, rambling tone of Riley’s letter, and the diamond-shaped presentation of names is present in what I consider another transcription of the Dream Music from around the same time as Young’s score. In 1965, Conrad’s film *The Flicker* gained enough notoriety that the journal *Film Culture* dedicated three items to it in its first issue of 1966: an interview with Conrad, Conrad’s November 1965 letter about the structure of the film, and an essay he wrote about his analogous work in music.\(^9\) Conrad’s essay, “Inside the Dream Syndicate,” begins with the same title as Young’s score, suggesting that the essay is, in some sense, a transcription, if we take that to mean broadly the inscription of marks on paper in response to music:

**INSIDE THE DREAM SYNDICATE**

Tony Conrad

“The Obsidian Ocelot, the Sawmill, and the Blue Sawtooth High-Tension Line Stepdown Transformer Refracting the Legend of the Dream of the Tortoise Traversing the 189/98 Los Ancestral Lake Region Illuminating Quotients from the Black Tiger Tapestries of the Drone of the Holy Numbers”

La Monte Young

Tony Conrad       John Cale

Marian Zazeela

Meyer-F
the binary
a new foci
turn a late
earlier Jap.
mentally pa
perceive s
because o
chain the
been a bi

\(^{92}\) There is a single exceptional use of the first-person singular: “I don’t want to seem to represent that everyone should use the new scale, but it’s hard to throw light on the scene without coloring my tone.”
the theoretical foundations of the ensemble, their performance practice, influences, political goals, and interaction with technology—features which I have outlined above in relation to his writing in *Early Minimalism*. Predating Reich’s better known “Music as a Gradual Process” by three years, “Inside the Dream Syndicate” can be seen as the first manifesto of minimalism: “Our music is… droningly montonal [sic], not even being built on a scale at all, but out of a single chord or cluster of more or less tonically related partials;” the “seven[th harmonic] sounds to us as clear as vulgar 5[th; major/minor thirds] once did; the ear does magically retrain;” “We sometimes modulate to 7, 9, or 63, but rarely.”

Turning to the group’s political goals, he writes: “The genius of conglomerate [i.e. collaborative or collective] action raises the overall harmonic operative level beyond what is rationally controllable [by a single author] without great care.” The possibility of their conglomerate action is based in a technological utopianism developed from their interaction with the noises of the city, which “are not ever pitchless:”

[the music opens up a] collaborative awareness of the machines. Alternating current is pouring into this building; we only alter, modify, store, and use it as our energies direct. We treat it with respect of machines for the source of all power, and it gives us the 6th partial of our Tonic, 10 [cycles per second]. It is in the air. Outside the domain of 60 cycle current, our music will fall less resonantly on the city ear, the most tonal of all cultures.

This new form of listening in which performers harmonize, in pure tuning, with the power grid leads to the timbral indistinction that Peter Yates described in his *Arts and Architecture* review of an October 1964 performance: “the resulting accumulation of never more than four tones in correct acoustical relationship produced a play of overtones and difference tones which, via loudspeaker,

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95 *Ibid.*, 7. Young’s strongest critiques from his open letter is that when Dreyblatt’s bootleg tape was made from Young’s archives, it was accidentally sped up such that the 60 Hz drone is made 80—in Conrad’s words, then, *Day of Niagara* “fall[s] less resonantly on the city ear.”
seemed almost orchestral.”

Conrad sees this as a musical realization of their collectivist political goals:

After the years pass, we fail to have consciousness of the changes: the voices sound like something else, the violin is the echo of the saxophone, the viola is by day frightening rock ‘n roll orchestra, by night the sawmill… Ours is the first generation with tape, with proper amplification to break down the dictatorial sonority barriers erected by the master instruments of the cultures.

That is, the Dream Music is a political action, grounded in collectivity and listening, enabled by both modern technology and the deliberative process of composing drones specifically because they challenge the norms of musical authorship (as Young himself argued discussing the music of the tambura and Conrad’s “very particular sociological approach to the problem” of authorship).

Amplification bypasses individual performers’ sound differentiations, and tape the necessity of the authorizing gesture of the score. However, these two examples from 1965—Young’s *day of the antler* “score,” and Conrad’s “Inside the Dream Syndicate” manifesto—are both “transcriptions” in that they present the creators inscribing marks on paper in retroactive response to the new music they were making in rehearsal and onto tape; they are both documents of a new sound, in relation to which choices had to be made as to what means of inscription were appropriate.

The distinction here of the genre of writing is extremely important. While I criticized Young for his sole billing on his score, I do not think the critique is necessary in terms of Conrad’s by-line in his manifesto. The conventions of reading a score suggest that the author on top of the page is the author of the sounds transcribed; the same generic convention is not assumed for an essay, and perhaps even less so for a manifesto. Conrad, as a member of the group, is writing about the sound;

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96 Peter Yates, “Music,” *Arts & Architecture* (October 1965), 35. Yates also gives a thorough description of the performance, which he calls “Young’s *Dream Tortoise.*” He continues: “The small audience sat without shuffling its feet or coughing, seemingly as relaxed as I became; and the two hours I sat there paid tribute to a unique musical experience—no tribulation. At 11 p.m. we were invited to enjoy a 15-minute break and return for another 1 ½ hours of the same thing. Regrettfully—I mean it—I apologized to the performers that I must leave.”

97 Conrad, “Inside the Dream Syndicate,” 7-8. The mention of “the rock ‘n roll orchestra” references Cale’s daytime work with the Velvet Underground before heading to Young and Zazzela’s loft for their night-long rehearsals and concerts.
nothing about his essay suggests his sole authorship of the sounds about which he is writing. For Conrad, writing provides a chance for an ecstatic manifesto drawing on the group’s performance methods and constituting The Theatre of Eternal Music rhetorically within the pronoun “we”; for Young, the music is an opportunity to cast a collective effort within an authoritarian medium from which several members thought they had found an escape; as Rancière says, everywhere politics runs up against the police.

The differing generic conventions of a score, an essay, or a manifesto include presumptions about how the reader is expected to understand the document, its relationship to the music described, its author’s position, and so on. Most importantly, Young’s preferred format, the musical score (albeit a novel one), relies on being read as a delegation, even though it never was one: the name at the top of the page suggests some degree of authorial creation and intention, as well as direction of the performers in the chart below. In contrast, Conrad’s essay-manifesto entirely eschews that possibility of reading the description of the sounds in prose as a solitary claim of authorship of those sounds. As in his 1996 interview with Brian Duguid, Conrad feels that the political arguments, theoretical concerns, motivating practices, and so on are all as much a part of the music as anything else, and for that reason, the social context (“we”) included in his chosen medium communicates the collectivity of authorship, while nevertheless acknowledging that this particular piece of writing is his personal response to that collective effort. Conrad’s method is that of the Ignorant Master—using a medium, the manifesto, in a publication, a film journal, to undercut the traditions of art music authorship—while Young’s is perhaps nearer to the Proletarian Aristocracy: as he noted in his interview with Kostelanetz, he believes he has done more than anyone since Cage to open up authorship. Young’s conception of a radical opening of authorship aims to expand its ambit such that someone like him can claim more territory within it (letting loose butterflies, creating charts of frequencies, drawing lines on the floor), not so that it is more open to
would-be authors not yet branded as composers. His is a restatement of the powers of authorship for those already known as authors; it is a situation in which those authors can claim all the power they want, can name anything music, so long as they are already recognized as musical authors.

Finally, I would like to consider another set of documents of this music, ones that would have actually been read by audiences in the same space and time as performances of the Dream Music, providing context for what they were hearing. Jeremy Grimshaw notes that Young’s “Dream Music” essay first appeared in an “unknown” concert program in 1964. After this it was frequently reprinted in literature on Young, and scholars have cited the essay from any of three sources: Young’s 1969 Selected Writings published by the Heiner Friedrich Gallery; the 2004 online “second edition” of the writings by ubuweb.com; or issue 9 of Aspen magazine, “The Psychedelic Issue,” edited by Angus and Hetty MacLise. The essay draws extensively on Young’s tortoise imagery, discussing the animal’s conceptual influence on the music’s longevity. He also theorizes his compositional practice, noting “The Disappearance of Melody” in that this music’s sole melodic content is implied “by the overtone structure of the fundamental” of one sound, leaving any notion of melodic movement to the listener’s preconditioning. He argues for the development of “Dream Houses”—a challenge he has taken up through the previous four decades as both stand-alone sound and light installation with Zazeela and the space in which his various ensembles rehearse and perform. Young argues that Dream Houses will create a living tradition, become literal organisms as a result of their internal standing waveform interactions, their longevity, and precise intonation that ensures that all intervals are constantly the same, as compared to the infinite, non-periodic and irrational complexity of an equal-tempered interval.

98 Grimshaw, Draw a Straight Line and Follow It, 193 (fn 27). This “unknown” status is extremely important: Grimshaw had access to Young’s archives, and this is the only case in which he specifically needs to mark an important document as unknown or missing.
99 La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela, Selected Writings (Munich: Heiner Friedrich, 1969); republished online by ubuweb.com (2004); Aspen No. 9: The Psychedelic Issue (1971), Angus and Hetty MacLise, eds. (New York: Roaring Fork Press).
Though Young notes in his 2000 letter that it was first published as part of the program note for the East End Theatre performances, he certainly cuts short its context. Indeed, the essay was embedded in the middle of the essay presented at the first concerts billed collectively to the Theatre of Eternal Music, those in December 1964 at the Pocket Theatre, and in March 1965 at the East End Theatre. As Grimshaw notes, the program was unknown or lost, but scans of the full East End Theatre program were recently posted online as part of an archive of materials from the American Poets Theatre, and Young’s correspondence with Peter Yates includes a letter dated “16 I 65” (January 16, 1965) in which he attached the program notes for the December Pocket Theatre concert series. The East End Theatre program, as originally printed for all of these concerts, introduces Young’s much-quoted essay with this introduction:

Welcome to this presentation of Dream Music. We are pleased to be continuing our performance of ‘The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys.’

In ‘The Obsidian Ocelot, The Sawmill, and The Blue Sawtooth High-Tension Line Stepdown Transformer Refracting The Legend of The Dream of The Tortoise Traversing The 189/98 Lost Ancestral Lake Region Illuminating Quotients from The Black Tiger Tapestries of The Drone of The Holy Numbers,’ we have chosen to demonstrate only a select group of pitches which are found in the structure of the overtone series of bowed strings and vocal cords.

“We” is clearly the Theatre of Eternal Music of the cover page, credited—as in Conrad’s essay, but unlike Young’s score—in a diamond-shape on the inside page of the program, with no composer or author suggested. Young writes about this in his 2000 open letter: “after the first group concerts in which I did not play saxophone, but rather sang”—that is, spring or early summer of 1964, when they had not yet taken on the name The Theatre of Eternal Music—Conrad and Cale began to raise the issue of all four members’ collective input into the works they performed. Young notes he was caught off guard by this, but in an effort to avoid “hurt[ing] their feelings”, and because he “did

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appreciate their collaborative contributions on the levels of performance, philosophy, theory, physics and mathematics,” the “problem was temporarily ameliorated by establishing a method of billing the artists on posters and in advertisements” in the diamond-shaped layout shown on the title page of the East End Theatre program, and in Zazeela’s poster/programs.101 Young writes, “[t]his did not deal with the problem of who was the composer, but rather avoided coming to an agreement on the issue by simply listing the individuals as performing artists and giving me top billing, Tony and John equal billing to each other, Marian symmetrical billing to me, and each of us equal distance from the title of the work being performed.”102 As he claimed above above, he never dreamed that any performer would claim that they had helped develop the piece, rather than simply performing it and accepting that as their “place,” as the historical bonds (and hierarchies) in relation to the composer had long been established. For Conrad and Cale, “bond” is surely the wrong term.

Adding to Young’s problematic reproduction of the content of the “Dream Music” essay, it does not end at the point where Young stops it in his own publications. Several passages are worth highlighting, following the point where Young’s own publications suggest the essay ended, at “…the tapestry of Eternal Music.”

First, the “we” continues throughout: at no point is any member made to speak for the whole group. In keeping with one of the primary rhetorical functions of collectives throughout history—whether a new republic (“We the people”), a workers’ union, a political party, an arts collective and so on, all of which often turn to the manifesto as a genre—the essay relies on the first person plural to acknowledge that, in banding together under a collective name and cause, though

101 Young, “Notes on the Theatre of Eternal Music,” 17; my emphasis. Young also acknowledges his appreciation of Conrad, Cale and MacLise’s work in the following duties: carpentry, painting, Hoovering, polishing, archiving, carpentry and repairs. In the context, Young is suggesting that they were of course there and of course did stuff, but it was not the stuff of authorship. That he claims that their disagreement was temporarily ameliorated is misleading as well: even as late as the July 1966 concerts at Christof de Menil’s home in Long Island, the four names Young, Zazeela, Conrad, and Riley are presented in the same diamond figuration.

102 Young, “Notes on the Theatre of Eternal Music,” 17; my emphasis.
still revealing the constituent parts, no single member can or should speak as sole representative. As Marianne DeKoeven writes, this “communal ‘we’,” in the context of the 1960s counterculture, arts manifestos, and student protest, “was always an aggregate of consenting, actively participating individuals.”

This is the clear and intentional rhetorical positioning in the essay, as it is in Conrad’s *Film Culture* essay.

Second, the “we” engages in very careful positioning of influence and performance practice:

We recall [from past performances of *The Tortoise*] … that in order to produce convincing textures exemplary of more complex rational frequency ratios than are used in almost any other music and at the same time to maintain the forcefulness of just intonation as found occasionally in Oriental, Country and Western, or pre-Baroque music and often in sounds of electrical equipment and machinery, the performers avoid vibrato or other rhythmic changes.

The influences mentioned here draw upon on all members of the ensemble: the “Oriental” music of Ali Akhbar Khan, whose impact on both Young and Conrad Barry Shank outlines; the country and western music on which Young was raised in rural Idaho, and to which Conrad and Cale had been obsessively listening with Henry Flynt, making what they understood as a Cagean effort to focus their listening until they liked something they formerly did not; and, most strikingly, the pre-Baroque music of, presumably, Heinrich Biber—a genealogical trace that has never been mentioned in any literature on Young, but is central to Conrad’s construction of his own biography since *Early Minimalism*, as discussed above. These influences lead the group to outline their performance practice, which avoids vibrato—again, something Conrad notes his distaste for, leading him to the pre-Baroque “fiddling” of Biber—and rhythmic changes, which subsequently “led the group to amplify each sound source, so as to make the presence of partials and combination tones accessible to the listener.”

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103 DeKoeven, *Utopia Limited*, 130.
105 Program notes to East End Theatre and Pocket Theatre performances. In his discussion of the original impetus for amplification leading Conrad to attaching a contact microphone, Cale mentions that Conrad had described how vividly
The document retains this close focus on the listener, and is something that we can find in both Young and Conrad—as well as in Reich and Glass later—and is in stark contrast to the other American art music of the time, which had a decisive and frequently-noted lack of concern for audience listening practices. Even more concrete confirmation of the presence of more voices than simply Young’s in this program note comes from Young to Peter Yates, where he explicitly claims that the program notes were created in much the same way as the music: through group collaboration. Young tells Yates that he wrote the sections that constitute the Dream Music essay, while Conrad wrote paragraphs four through seven.

I do not mean to suggest that Young’s comment reveals his hypocrisy, or entirely seals the case on “who wrote what.” Indeed, we need only look at the sole letter that Conrad sent to Yates, in November of 1965, at Young’s suggestion, in which he explains what the string players were doing when Yates heard them in performance in October 1965. Conrad writes of how proud he is of the music he has “been involved in for the last several years in collaboration with La Monte Young, Marian Zazeela, and John Cale.” He continues by calling Young the “leader of the group”—a position which Conrad still held to in our conversation in September 2015, noting that Young was a person of great influence in the New York art scene, with money, connections, gear, and a loft to make the whole thing possible. He nevertheless rejects the conceptual leap that would turn this set of contingent social facts—and much less the act of having transcribed one of the tapes—into legal or theoretical authorship of the sounds produced in their rehearsals.

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106 The most notable example here is of course Babbitt’s “The Composer as Specialist,” which was originally printed in *High Fidelity* in 1958.
107 Young to Yates, January 16, 1965. Peter Yates Papers. MSS 14. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego Library. Importantly, Young uses the term improvisation in the letter—one Conrad has never explicitly claimed—and prioritizes the contributions of Young and Conrad over those of the other members, both in the music and in the essay.
Young’s acknowledgment of the collective authorship of the essay, just like Conrad’s recognition of Young as the group’s leader, reveals once again the incredible complexity of authorship in the collective. For the first time, collectivism was being thought of as a condition of possibility in the creation of music. The drone’s authorial status was up for discussion as another material, and required thought and action in its own right. Much as the dispute between Rancière and Miller thematized the propriety of collectively elaborated concepts (see Chapter 1), The Theatre of Eternal Music seems to have created the conditions of possibility for staging the conceptual status and propriety of collectively authored sounds within musical experimentalism, and the attendant necessity to consider the political implications of musical authorship, rather than taking it as a given.

My reverse chronology of the events—from the musicological literature of the last two decades, to the debates in the 1990s and 2000s, backwards in time to the original documents of their performances—allowed me to work from problematic historical conclusions based on eventual fame to a prior moment at which eventual notoriety was absent, focusing particularly on how authorship was inscribed at each point. My aim has been to approach matters in a way that would make impossible the concerns I raised about Strickland’s historiography at the start of this chapter. It is worth summarizing again: In 1962 and into 1963, Young was leading his own ensemble that was founded to back up his saxophone improvisations, as stated by Schwarz. However, by late 1964, when a group called “The Theatre of Eternal Music” first performed their drones tied to collectively authored essays, this was decidedly not “Young’s ensemble” or even a chamber ensemble called “The Theatre of Eternal Music” playing compositions by La Monte Young. I think that the major problem has been that—in its initial shroud of secrecy and silence, followed by its eruption as an object of dispute—the Theatre of Eternal Music has always been understood, first of all, as “Young’s ensemble,” and, second, as a singular ensemble that lasted from 1962–1966, as scholars have attempted to approach it (with few available primary resources). The group’s “classic”
formation—tied to the *day of the antler score*, the *Day of Niagara* CD, and the photo of two singers flanked by two string players seated in front of Robert Morris’s gong—existed only very briefly, from the fall of 1964 until the first week of December of 1965, when John Cale performed with them for the last time at the Filmmakers’ Cinematheque and that famous photograph was taken. I think it makes sense to expand this to at least July of 1966, when the group performed with Riley in place of Cale in Long Island. The historiographical accounts that span 1962-1966 as if it was one, seamless ensemble under La Monte Young’s direction are dealing with precedents, prophecies, retrospections and prolepses. This history only makes sense if both the writer and the reader are looking to privilege the most famous member of the collective to the detriment of the others; it subsequently allows Young to turn their inaudible music into a hermetic secret to use against his collaborators.

This is the dominant police function within collective authorship: Who’s in charge here? This question grows out of two formulations of the problem of individuality against “the masses,” and in doing so creates another binary or allegory between those who act and those who are acted upon. Althusser’s famous *interpeller*—“Hey! You there!”, developing the way a teacher “calls upon” a student by proper name with a tactic of the bourgeois state—uses the police as symbols (metaphorically, but still more more literally for Althusser than for Rancière) for how the bourgeois state creates individuals and ideologically subjectivizes one member of the crowd.¹⁰⁹ For Rancière, this becomes a key example of the problem of Althusser’s scientific Marxism: its obsession with the individual against society, the confusion over whether “man” or “the masses” are responsible for “making history,” and so on.¹¹⁰ Rancière thus reformulates his own police line: “Move along!

¹¹⁰ *Althusser’s Lesson* opens with a discussion of Althusser’s essay “The Reply to John Lewis,” in which he chastises the (then prominent) English Marxist for his reading of Marx that proclaimed that man makes history. For Althusser, the clear and necessary Marxist line was that the masses make history. Rancière outlines how this claim, made in April of 1968, would change a few weeks later in light of the mass protests in France that Althusser refused to recognize the
Nothing to see here!” This is the police of sensibility, rather than Althusser’s police of “the truncheon blows.” Rancière’s police, carried along by modes of thinking and writing history that are obsessed with authorship and authority, turns the space of the disruptive event into the space of circulation—to make invisible the claims, complaints and declarations of wrong by groups who we cannot yet see as groups, specifically because there is nothing yet to see, no stage for a proclamation of wrong to be mounted.\(^{111}\) While both of these police proclamations maintain their theoretical value, “Who’s in charge here?” draws attention to the ever-present obstacles to attempts to move away from sole authorship and towards deliberative and democratic models: it’s not that the actions themselves are impossible; it’s that the police mode of history constantly demands that someone step forward and claim to have been the one letting people think they were “doing their own thing.”

Much the same problem was in play for Rancière and his fellow militants during May ’68 (as discussed at length in Chapter 1). Political discourse demands a leader—a representative of the people—to step forward and make claims on behalf of the unruly, noisy collective. Those involved were fully aware that the moment someone stepped forward to speak on their behalf, they would lose a central formal feature of their organization. It is the police imperative—whether of historians, musicologists, media, or actual police—when faced with a collective to find someone to take responsibility for the actions of the whole, to “tune the noise” and make it coherent and palatable for the format of a Habermassian debate. This can be handled in either of two directions, depending on need: one person can be prosecuted as a scapegoat, picked out as representative and attacked to discredit a whole movement; or an individual can become the hero of a collective effort,\(^{112}\) forcing

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111 Rancière critiques the logic of Althusser’s police and establishes his own in his “Ten Theses on Politics.”
112 A role into which Rancière, as historian of May ’68, places figures like Daniel Bench-Capon and the 1980s New Philosophers who took to television political panels to reject and apologize for the naivety and even fascism of their student politics.
historians to find methods of writing to minimize the input of others in spite of obvious evidence to the contrary. Forms of writing and representation that play within this logic have no means by which to deal with collectivity (grounded in proclamation of a wrong) and demand that an individual speak on behalf of the mass, someone who wants to be a representative of the “noise” of a crowd and thus tune it through a consensual, singular account; group deliberation and collectivism become impossible, utopian concepts in the face of this historiographical necessity.

This is what has happened, historiographically, in the case of The Theatre of Eternal Music. When a group claims to write and take responsibility for something together, they are already butting up against the foundations of a new genre, a new way of hearing and thinking. The conventions of art music discourse are predicated on the idea that a collective is not supposed to be capable of the same large-scale formal or conceptual coherence as can an individual writing down music in advance. This is the logic that places La Monte Young as the sole author of the music played by the Theatre of Eternal Music: his strength comes from the fact that the group’s noise, the “dream” of it being deliberative, and so on, are clear evidence of his ability to be in charge even while letting those around him think they are “doing their own thing.” According to Young, Wakoski, Riley, Zazeela, Potter, Schwarz and others, collaborators like Conrad and Cale should have been aware that they were not and could not have been collaborators “doing their own thing” as a result of who they are and who Young is—they are performers of secondary status, and Young is the “founder” of minimalism, as evidenced retrospectively, many claim, by a 12-tone string trio written in 1958. Histories that handle authorship in this way create it as a discursive tool through which to dismiss or devalue, through deference to “the way things are,” the work of some in relation to that of others.

In this chapter I have argued that there is a form of musical composition that holds as central to its coherence the idea that nobody is in charge, while maintaining that something
productive has taken place. Is there a way to write its history without starting from the presumption that this is a naïve or utopian conceit?
Chapter 3

The Lessons of Minimalism: Steve Reich in Dispute with Terry Riley and Philip Glass

I. Introduction

At some point between February 1969, when he wrote it, and April of the same year, when it was performed at the New School, Philip Glass shortened the name of his piece *Two Pages for Steve Reich* to simply *Two Pages*. At least, this is what Steve Reich frequently claims in interviews, telling William Duckworth it caused “some grief” between himself and Glass, as evidence of Glass’s unwillingness to recognize the influence and pedagogic impact of his predecessors;¹ La Monte Young echoed this claim, telling Duckworth that Glass believes himself to have come out of a compositional “vacuum.”² Throughout their interviews with Duckworth, like those with Edward Strickland and K. Robert Schwarz, each of “the big four” minimalists is asked about and focuses on their often fractured relationships with the others. In this chapter I suggest that during these interviews from the early 1990s, La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass, prompted by their interviewers, crafted the ordering logic and hierarchies of what would become Branden Joseph’s “metaphysical narrative of minimalism.” Indeed, in prior interviews, such as those with Walter Zimmerman, Cole Gagne and Tracey Caras, or Michael Nyman, there were no questions posed about a minimalist lineage, or the relationship among these four composers.³ There was certainly an

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³ Walter Zimmerman speaks at length to Glass, with no mention of the others; Reich and Young are only included in the book as jokes, as neither responded positively to interview requests. See Walter Zimmerman, *Desert Plants: 23 Conversations with American Composers* (Vancouver: A.R.C. Publications, 1976). Cole Gagne and Tracey Caras speak to Glass and Reich without bringing up either of them, let alone Riley or Young. See Cole Gagne and Tracey Caras, *Soundpieces: Interviews with American Composers* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1982). Michael Nyman interviewed Reich twice, in 1971 and 1976; neither conversation includes questions about the other minimalists. See Steve Reich, *Writings on
awareness that these individuals had worked together, that composers influence and teach and help one another—but there was no concept of “minimalism” premised on Glass downplaying the influence of Reich, nor the assumption that Riley or Reich would spend part of each interview discussing the relative weight and importance of their exchange. (And there was certainly no conversation about Tony Conrad, John Cale, or Marian Zazeela’s role in creating the style.) Indeed, Wim Mertens, in the only book on minimalism (labelled “American repetitive music” in the original Flemish title) written prior to these interviews, makes note of Young’s and Riley’s collaboration, without ever dividing the space of collaboration into master and pupil. Similarly, Riley and Reich go unmentioned in each other’s chapters; Reich only comes up in a footnote in the chapter on Glass, when Mertens claims, directly against the ordering of the metaphysical narrative, that “it is possible that Glass influenced Reich” in the use of sudden modulations. Further, there was no cohesive narrative of minimalist collaboration and its failure to encourage interviewers to probe its prehistory. Nevertheless, by the time of Strickland’s Minimalism: Origins in 1993, he was able to write, “It would be unfair and misleading to suggest a Minimalist ‘genealogy’ from Young to Riley to Reich to Glass, but one might suggest a line of transmission of influence in that chronological order, perhaps the inverse order of their current notoriety.” As in Chapter 1, at issue are the modes of pedagogic transmission.


4 This is particularly true when he mentions, in both the chapter on Young and the one on Riley, their collaborative work together with Anna Halprin. See Mertens, American Minimal Music, 20 and 35. Throughout the chapter on Riley, he and Young are written about as equals in a way entirely uncommon in much subsequent literature: “While La Monte Young’s early compositions were influenced by Schoenberg, Terry Riley was initially influenced by Stockhausen… During 1959 and 1960, Riley’s and La Monte Young’s improvisations, which gave their great stop for experiment and accident, served as accompaniment to Anna Halprin’s dance… Though both Young and Riley were interested in the physiological and psychical effects of music, they both had very different attitudes to these effects,” and so on. Mertens, American Minimal Music, 36. In all following publications, as will be shown below in the interviews, Riley’s career would be narrated as subsequent to Young’s, rather than simultaneous and parallel.

5 Mertens, American Minimal Music, 77; my emphasis.

6 Strickland, Minimalism: Origins, 211.
As Branden Joseph has argued, attaching the history of minimalism exclusively to the words and compositions of four individuals has created a rather static and, to borrow language that Young would appreciate, “eternal” image of the genre. While I agree with Joseph entirely on this problem—and I think his is the central historiographical critique of writing on minimalism—his critique falls short in that he had no need for tracing the foundations of this metaphysics, as for him it was about setting up a stable “major” history in opposition to which Tony Conrad’s minor history could be positioned. As a result, Joseph does not concern himself with the origins of the “big four,” taking it for granted as an (eternally?) problematic structure of the work of (most notably for their titles) Mertens and Potter, as well as the broader trend highlighted in the chapter structure of Schwarz and the central subjects of Strickland, Fink, and others. In supplementing this omission, I would like to show the epistemological foundations of the metaphysical history in a pedagogic community put forward by the minimalists themselves, most strongly in interviews from the 1980s and early 1990s, but already visible even during the time of their late 1960s collaborations. While many have productively and accurately argued for the non-priority of this set of four composers at the time of their original interactions—we could just as easily have been studying a group that included people like Conrad, Charlemagne Palestine, Jon Gibson, and many others, in addition to or in place of the “big four”—there are grounds to argue that the minimalists, from at least the time that all four were living and working in New York, had already constituted a “scene,” and a particularly strong one in that they were developing their ideas collaboratively, performing together, and using these opportunities to compose to tape rather than paper. Tracking comments from “the big four” in

7 Indeed, Young, Riley, Reich and Glass were frequently lumped together by astute critics. Keith Potter calls Tom Johnson’s “La Monte Young, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, Philip Glass” (Village Voice, 6 April 1972) the first instance of this tendency in criticism. See Potter, Four Musical Minimalists, xiii. For another example, see Joan La Barbara’s 1974 essay “Philip Glass and Steve Reich: Two from the Steady State School” in Writings on Glass, 39-45. La Barbara begins, “La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass have been linked together in a school of composition based on repetitions and exploration of minimal amounts of material.” La Barbara’s case is notable in that she was a member of Glass’s early ensemble and a composer and critic. For more on La Barbara, see Chapman, “Collaboration, Presence, and Community,” 199-239.
interviews from the 1980s, before any of the major texts on minimalism had appeared (with the notable exception of Wim Mertens’s) points out the means by which they paradoxically highlight the very close interaction of their collaborative period by introducing, at each stage, an inegalitarian “pedagogic relation” of knowledge to nonknowledge. The metaphysical narrative’s suggestion that Young begat Riley begat Reich begat Glass is a pedagogical trajectory that ties them all together as a community, while simultaneously tearing them apart as equals.

In this chapter I examine a pair of disputes—between Riley and Reich, and then between Reich and Glass—to argue that this line of transmission of influence serves the same function as what Rancière already called, in criticizing Louis Althusser in Chapter 1, the “pedagogic relation:” the inegalitarian division of the world into two groups premised on an absolute knowledge and an absolute nonknowledge. I first introduce some ideas on pedagogy, egalitarianism, and historical “confiscation” of political radicalism from Jacques Rancière and Kristin Ross that will set up my theoretical method for the chapter. Next, I read through the interviews with Strickland, Duckworth, and Schwarz to show how the metaphysical history of minimalism developed primarily through first-person reportage from Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass in the 1980s and 1990s. In this, I am not disagreeing with Joseph, but supplementing his very accurate critique by pointing out the construction of the stage upon which the metaphysical history became visible; I historicize and draw attention to the pedagogic foundations that Joseph had no need to account for. From this reading, I argue that across these interviews, each of “the big four” positioned himself in relation to his fellow minimalists through what Ross calls a “confiscation” of the collaborative political potential of minimalism in the 1960s and 1970s. In short, these composers frequently reported their own contributions as central, while turning their compositional colleagues into passive students or receivers of their own influence; it is a practice closely related to how Young had to credit the (mere) contributions of Conrad, Cale and MacLise to uphold his solitary authorship. As viewed from within
the broader context of this dissertation, there was a turn to filling the authoritative void created by the minimalist critique of compositional authority with a proleptically imposed pedagogic authority. I read this pedagogic authority, this imposition of a relationship of influence and learning, in relation to what Rancière calls *abrutir*: a term that Ross (very self-consciously) translates as “stultify” but in the French more literally means, “to render stupid” or “to treat like a brute.” In all, I argue that these disputes paradoxically highlight that the sounds and discourse of minimalism, even in 1980s polemics and autobiographical confiscations, were only possible as a result of early collaboration between the minimalists. To show this, I lastly examine a set of pieces—Riley’s *In C* (1964), Reich’s *It’s Gonna Rain* (1965), Glass’s *Two Pages* (1969), and Reich’s *Four Organs* and *Phase Patterns* (both 1970)—to consider their constitution specifically in fields of interactive influence between the big four minimalists.

II. *Abrutir*: Stultification and Confiscation

Rancière’s ideas play a major role in this chapter; as such, I would like to briefly outline some of his arguments in *La Maître Ignorant: Cinq lessons sur l’emancipation intellectuelle* as a means of building from the discussion of Althusserian pedagogy in Chapter 1. In her translation of Rancière’s text, Kristin Ross relates that book to his first text, *Althusser’s Lesson*, as both announce themselves as “lessons.” While Rancière was already critical of Althusser’s “pedagogic relation”—which posited the necessary inequality between a teacher’s knowledge and a student’s non-knowledge—in *Althusser’s Lesson* (1974), his text *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1981) develops the pedagogic relation into the “pedagogic myth”: an image of the world split in two by those who, from positions of mastery, dismiss the

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8 Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 7 (translator’s footnote).
intelligence of others (abrutir) as a means of upholding their own authority. 9 While the pedagogic relation was a passing critique of Althusser in Althusser’s Lesson, its development into the pedagogic myth is central to The Ignorant Schoolmaster, where it becomes the standard mode of pedagogy, disruptively outlined in its presumption of ignorance. That is, the relation Rancière critiques as central to traditional pedagogic thought is outlined as its founding myth: that the world be divided always into those who know and those who do not, those of superior intelligence and those of inferior intelligence, those of capacity and those of incapacity. Whether or not this is a true and necessary facet of all pedagogy (or even all social relations) is not my concern. Instead, what I hope to show throughout this chapter is how frequently in interviews from the 1990s each minimalist renders those that followed him in this “line of transmission of influence” into a brute in Rancière’s sense. In short, the metaphysical history so accurately critiqued by Joseph relies entirely on various pedagogic relations between Young and Riley, Riley and Reich, and Reich and Glass that were only articulated decades after the fact. (As I will show in Chapter 4, this was tied to all manner of material circumstances around the rejection of minimalism as the name of a style.) The major question this chapter asks is what role this pedagogic partition played in bringing to attention a cohesive founding narrative of minimalism.

The Ignorant [School]master of the title is Joseph Jacotot (1770-1840), an exiled French academic who taught students at the University of Louvain in 1818, despite not speaking Flemish. As a result of his linguistic inability, Jacotot developed a pedagogic philosophy that he called Universal Teaching centered on the axiomatic belief that all people are of equal intelligence and that anybody can teach anything to anyone. Rancière’s book is a re-introduction from the archives of Jacotot’s thought and biography in a free indirect style, such that “the reader is not quite sure where

The voice of Jacotot stops and Rancière’s begins.” Rancière’s archival work was proposed as an intervention into the 1980s debate over François Mitterand’s pedagogic reforms in France which, developing from the work of Pierre Bourdieu on the reproduction of distinction and inequality in the education system, focused on the racist and infantilizing suggestion that “the children of the working class—and especially immigrants—should be provided with a less ‘abstract’ or ‘cultural’ curriculum.” In contrast to this normative perspective on state pedagogy, Rancière’s intervention was to suggest that any pedagogical system which presupposes the relative ignorance or intelligence of anyone based on their social background or “place” in the world is guaranteed to reproduce, over and over, the same hierarchies.

Jacotot’s philosophy—which is also Rancière’s—can be summarized in brief: all humans are of equal intelligence. Most pedagogues have operated from the assumption that the “essential act of the master [is] to explicate: to disengage the simple elements of learning, and to reconcile their simplicity in principle with the factual simplicity that characterizes young and ignorant minds.” The problem, Rancière continues, is that “the logic of explication calls for the principle of a regression ad infinitum: there is no reason for the redoubling of reasonings ever to stop. What brings an end to the regression and gives the system its foundation is simply that the explicator is the sole judge of the point when the explication is itself explicated.” That is, traditional pedagogy is a mode of relation in which “the explicator sets up and abolishes [the distance between learning and understanding]—

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11 Ross in Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, xiv. While he is more focused on economic rather than pedagogic policy, see Eric Drott, “Rereading Jacques Attali’s *Bruit*,” *Critical Inquiry* 41 (Summer 2015): 721-756. Drott provides a more recent account of the concerns and goals of Mitterand’s socialist government, elected in 1981; further context on the protests and the understanding among some of 1981 Mitterand’s election as the belated victory of May is available in Drott *Music and the Elusive Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). The *Critical Inquiry* article surely adds some strong context to the earlier book, which concludes with Mitterand’s election and thus misses out on many of the policies and aims undertaken during the early 1980s that few closely involved with May would have recognized as victories.
13 Ibid., 4.
departs it and reabsorbs it in the fullness of his speech.”¹⁴ The unspoken feature of this explicative order is that it is actually the pedagogue who needs the ignorant to define his position, and not vice versa. Explication is thus “the myth of pedagogy, the parable of a world divided into knowing minds and ignorant ones, ripe minds and immature ones, the capable and the incapable, the intelligent and the stupid”—¹⁵—a relationship embodied most typically in the teacher and the pupil. This pedagogic myth and its practice of explication leads the child to understand, first and foremost, “that he doesn’t understand unless he is explained to.”¹⁶ Jacotot calls this mode of teaching—the typical mode of teaching, applied in almost all cases in schools and in most childhood learning with the notable exception of the mother tongue—the mode of enforced stultification.

It is of the utmost importance for this chapter, and for the dissertation as a whole, to keep in mind the translator’s note Ross provided on the word stultification: “In the absence of a precise English equivalent for the French term abrutir (to render stupid, to treat like a brute), I’ve translated it as ‘stultify’.¹”¹ Jacotot’s fundamental offering, and the one that Rancière turns into a philosophical axiom in his work throughout his career, is the rejection of this binary in favour of entering all exchange from the presumption of intellectual egalitarianism. As Rancière often argues, equality is not a program to be achieved, but a presupposition to be confirmed by rigorous thinking, writing, listening, and speaking.

Ross is important in this chapter not only for her translation and introduction to The Ignorant Schoolmaster, but also in her own right as a historian of French radical politics and its “confiscation,” drawing on Rancière’s critiques of his repentant former colleagues. Ross’s book on May ’68 focuses on the event’s “afterlives,” by which she means that “what has become known as ‘the events of May

¹⁴ ibid., 5.
¹⁵ ibid., 6.
¹⁶ ibid., 8.
¹⁷ ibid., 7.
'68’ cannot now be considered separately from the social memory and forgetting that surround them.” She continues, “the management of May’s memory—the way in which the political dimensions of the event have been… dissolved or dissipated by commentary and interpretations—is now… at the center of the historical problem of 1968 itself.” Ross highlights in particular that this active forgetting and dissipation of May’s political dimension has been undertaken, on the one hand, by scholars (primarily sociologists in this case) who note that “nothing changed” as a result of May, that it was “merely cultural,” and, on the other, by the partisans most willing to speak on behalf of the mass movement:

Forgetting… is made possible by the work of various narrative configurations—narratives that model the identity of the protagonists of an action at the same time as they shape the contours of events. To reduce a mass movement to the individual itineraries of a few so-called leaders, spokesmen, or representatives (especially if those representatives have all renounced their past errors) is an old, tried and true tactic of confiscation. Circumscribed in this way, all collective revolt is defanged; it doesn’t amount to anything more than the existential anguish of individual destiny; revolt is confined to the jurisdiction of a few “personalities” upon whom the media bestows seemingly innumerable occasions for revising or recasting previous motivations.

Confiscation and the subsequent defanging of collective revolt is a dual problem, historical and biographical: “narrative configurations” privilege charismatic “leaders” who, in speaking for the event, actualize a form of authority in which the meaning of the events is tied to what those leaders think at any given time. These “custodians of memory,” Ross notes, dominated discourse in the 1970s and 1980s, “to produce an official history, a discernable doxa.” In the case of May ’68, “a few of the mass event’s actors have been granted the authority… to deny or repudiate aspects of the events according to the needs of the present moment.” She continues, “to view ’68 through the frame of the television commemorations that are produced every ten years is to confront the fact

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18 Kristin Ross, *May 68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1. Ross’s study of the afterlife of the Paris Commune is also a strong influence on my method in this chapter, though I never directly cite it. See Kristin Ross, *Communal Larceny: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (New York: Verso, 2015). We should perhaps here remember Conrad’s claim to Brian Duguid, central to his understanding of what “music” is, that it cannot be separated from protest, dispute, interviews, interpersonal bickering, and so on. See Brian Duguid, “Interview with Tony Conrad (1996).”

19 Ross, *May 68*, 4; my emphasis.
that old *gauchiste* principles like ‘*la base doit emmener la tête*’ (literally, the base should lead the head) or ‘Don’t let the loudspeakers speak for you’—principles that governed the movement—hold no sway in its commemoration, as again and again the same ‘spokesmen for a generation’ appear.” These spokesmen become the only ones permitted to represent and thus speak for May, with the result that what these spokesmen think at any moment becomes “what [May] really meant.” Their willingness to speak for the event by speaking loudest allows them to confiscate the event towards their own ends, in direct opposition to the May tenet (itself developed out of the contemporary critique of the Stalinist “cult of personality”) not to let those most willing to speak take charge. For the most popularly palatable commemorators and spokesmen of May—the ones with government positions, or at least frequent television commentary invitations—looking back on the events is always an apology; as Badiou writes, reflecting on the distinction from his and Rancière’s methods, these “New Philosophers” repent their own prior naivety and ignorance:

> Full of good sense, Jacques told me one day, “You know, we are advancing only by virtue of seniority.” That’s true, but we might congratulate ourselves on the passage of a seniority that remains true to the faith and not that of the social advantages found by some colleagues in their trumpeted renunciations (“we were mistaken, oh dear, we believed in Communism, we were totalitarians, yes, yes, yes, long live democracy”).

Ross fundamentally avoids spokesmen that claim “We didn’t know then what we know now.” Instead, she suggests, “maybe ‘we’ did know then what ‘we’ve’ now forgotten: Let no one speak in your place.” The claim is again one fundamentally grounded in a Ranciérien historiography that takes seriously the claim of intellectual equality; against the norm of teleology in both public history and personal biography (age = wisdom), Ross insists that perhaps the youthful protesters were every bit as intelligent as the middle-aged pundits they would become.

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20 Ibid., 157.
22 Ross, *May 68*, 158.
Ross’s method draws on the one formulated by the editors of the collective journal *Les Révoltes Logiques*—an outgrowth of May ’68 which took as its founding principle the axiom that “it is right to revolt.” In turning to the archives, these scholar-militants argued that concepts that generated mass revolt throughout history were the result of rational thought by actors typically dismissed as unreasonable (in their case: workers, women, militants, immigrants, plebeians, proletarians). For Ross, the *Révoltes Logiques* collective founded their specific fidelity to the events of May in developing a new mode of thinking and writing history that aimed to thwart the forms of mastery, representation, and leadership that ordered the event, refusing the possibility of the loudest and most willing spokesperson to speak for everyone:

*Révoltes Logiques* rejected any pedagogical relation between past and present, any conception of the past as a knowledge that can be extracted in the form of lessons or edifying stories. They did not seek to perform historical reconstitution in the form of a story. Nor were they drawn to systems or lessons as a mode of expression. The past teaches nothing. “Leave lessons to those who make a profession out of revolution or a commerce out of its impossibility.” If the past does not give lessons to the present, then why study it? The “lesson” of history at best, is to “recognize the moment of a choice, of the unforeseeable, to draw from history neither lessons nor, exactly, explanations, but the principle of a vigilance toward what there is that is singular in each call to order and in each confrontation.”[^23]

While much history takes eventual catastrophes or failures as evidence of the ignorance of those revolting—a task made easier when wilful spokesmen step forward to renounce their prior actions in exchange for present power—the *Révoltes Logiques* collective argued that the manifestation of a critical ideology of revolt (“Don’t let the loudspeakers speak for you,” for instance) is reasonable and generates actions in a given time and place. According to Badiou, Ross, and Rancière and his colleagues at *Révoltes Logiques*, those who position themselves as the singular leaders or representatives of a collective concept or movement (or perhaps ensemble), particularly one grounded in direct democratic ideals, are necessarily in a position of confiscation as they attempt to

articulate why they, and only they, can speak authentically to the true nature of the event. This revisionism requires the transcription of ideas that were formulated to escape representation, leadership, and authority, into the discourse of state, media, and institutional demands for someone to speak for the masses. Again we return to what I argued, in the last chapter, is the police line in collectively authored music: “who’s in charge here?” In writing the history of collective revolt, as in collectivized composition, scholars have long begun from this police question as a means of finding out what really happened, which individual author, leader, or representative appears to have been directing matters once the misleading dross of context and collaboration have been removed from the singular kernel of authority.

Minimalism was far from a collective revolt or a mass movement. Nevertheless, many of the same concerns are in play regarding the proleptical perspective on the relationship between the individual author and the collective idea. Movements—whether political or artistic—whose foundational premise is the critique of singular authority, delegation, and hierarchy, demand careful attention to the writing of history so as to not to fall into narrative tendencies that privilege the memories and accounts of the individuals most willing to take responsibility. This is the source of my interest in May: the parallel to minimalism, beyond synchronicity, is that both arise from a desire to write in opposition to singular authority. In this sense, this chapter considers the means by which minimalism’s authorial critique has been “defanged” by the protagonists themselves in much the same way that Ross and Rancière have held in tension the relationship between, on the one hand, the spokesmen of May ’68 who have renounced their earlier ideals, and on the other, the potential viability of the renounced ideas themselves. This is not a means towards the end of claiming that this early politics was bankrupt, naïve, utopian, hopeless, hypocritical, and so on; rather, it is a step towards leaving behind the hagiographic treatment of the central protagonists of the style—“the big four”—so that the ideas they put forward can be followed in what Rancière might call their “mute”
travel, separated from the discourses of confiscation and apologetics always enlivened by repentant “leaders.”

III. Interviewing “the big four”

In this section, I consider the relationship between Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass as presented primarily in interviews with Edward Strickland (1991), William Duckworth (1995), and K. Robert Schwarz (1996). Beginning briefly in California in the early 1960s before moving to France, back to San Francisco, and subsequently to New York in 1965, I show how, three decades after the fact, the “big four” have organized and authorized their relationship along the terms of an imposed, proleptical pedagogic relation that holds together their relationship and the coherent genre of minimalism, while constantly drawing new lines and hierarchies within it.

Terry Riley’s compositional practice has always centered on performance and collaboration. After his “inseparable” friend La Monte Young’s return to New York following their graduation from the University of California at Berkeley in 1960, Terry Riley headed to Paris in February 1962 and spent several years performing ragtime on military bases and in circuses. Much of this was for floorshows and in bars—a situation quite distinct from that of most recently graduated composers from prestigious universities. This performance-oriented period shifted back towards composition when he was offered the chance to score Ken Dewey’s theatre event *The Gift*. That this work was still far from traditional solitary composition is evident in a 1995 interview quoted by Robert Carl, where Riley comments on the collaborative and communal development of the piece:

Ken [Dewey] rented an old chateau in the Valdomois, south of Paris. All the actors and everybody lived in it while the show was being put together… We rehearsed in the [attached] barn… I’d come to the chateau at night and bring back the tapes I’d been working on. We’d listen to them, and the actors would try to get a sense of how to relate to the music. Occasionally Chet [Baker] and the band would come out to the chateau and we’d have a full rehearsal with everybody. Ken would watch the whole thing and would try to get the actors
to interact more with the musicians, and try to get the musicians to be more involved with the action.\textsuperscript{24}

Central to the piece was Riley’s use of the “time-lag accumulator,” a primitive tape delay system created to Riley’s specifications by a “very straight guy in a white coat” from French National Radio.\textsuperscript{25} In creating the mechanical capacity for the long accumulation of very short looped patterns, Carl calls \textit{Music for The Gift} “the last piece in the puzzle” towards assembling a set of compositional precedents for \textit{In C}.\textsuperscript{26} Riley finally headed back to the US following JFK’s assassination when the US Army Clubs abroad that Riley had been performing in were closed as a gesture of respect. He tells Strickland, “\textit{Music for the Gift} made me want to try a live piece that would have the same effect.”\textsuperscript{27}

He began working with small modules looped by performers, but the ideas were not working out. Around this time, his friend Bill Spencer invited Riley to join him at a performance of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, featuring music by Steve Reich’s free improvisation group. “It was Steve and a few other people. I can’t remember, but maybe Jon Gibson was there. They were performing music that Steve had done for the Mime Troupe.”\textsuperscript{28} Riley continues the story, noting that he was not impressed by the music: “I went to the first half and left.” Reich, presumably aware of who Riley was, noticed the slight. Riley says:

> The next day at my studio in a garage up on Bernal Heights, where Steve also lived, though I didn’t know it, there was a bang on the door, and it was Steve Reich. He was so furious, right? So I told him to come in. We sat down and got to know each other. I showed him \textit{In C}, which I was working on, and he helped me a lot. He was really enthusiastic for the project. He wanted to \textit{do} it.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{24} Robert Carl, \textit{Terry Riley’s In C} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 36.
\textsuperscript{25} Strickland, \textit{American Composers}, 112; see also Strickland, \textit{Minimalism: Origins}, 149.
\textsuperscript{26} Carl, \textit{In C}, 37.
\textsuperscript{27} Strickland, \textit{American Composers}, 113.
\textsuperscript{29} Strickland, \textit{American Composers}, 114. Emphasis in original.
(Reich’s and Riley’s relationship around *In C* is discussed at length below; for now I am interested only in setting up the terms of their introduction.)

“In despair of the Vietnam War,” Riley sold Reich his tape equipment and headed to Mexico in June of 1965. ³⁰ Reich moved to New York in September, as he was “no longer easy with the cultural situation in California… including the emergence of a heavier drug scene.”³¹ Riley came to New York in October, having driven with his wife and daughter to Mexico in their Volkswagen bus with the intention of shipping it to Tangiers and living in it in Morocco. When they could not get a boat, they drove back up to New York to get a boat from there, “but [he] started hanging out with La Monte again and renewing old acquaintances.”³² Riley immediately began rehearsing with the Theatre of Eternal Music, soon to replace John Cale after his final performance with the group in December 1965 at the Filmmakers’ Cinematheque. During the three years that Riley stayed in New York, he and Reich saw one another but did not work together professionally: “several associates confirm that at the time [Riley] was annoyed that Reich was gaining recognition by exploiting ideas he had originated.” Reich confirms this: “There was definitely strain. Terry felt that I was ripping him off, just the way I felt later that Phil was ripping me off. We saw each other, but it was not comfortable.”³³ Potter similarly writes of the tension in the Riley-Reich relationship, “Riley’s brief, intense relationship with Reich in 1964 had been based on more than merely the preparations for the premiere of *In C*. The two composers had also been showing each other their recent work which, in both cases, consisted largely of tape compositions. Reich recalls hearing *She Moves She.*” Potter continues, “Riley’s insecurity over his friend’s adoption of modular repetition using speech material

³³ Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 194; my emphasis.
on tape [as in *She Moves She*] was compounded when, after returning to New York, ‘people would say, “Oh, you’re doing the kind of stuff Reich does!” And that hurts, you know.’”

Despite the absence of professional collaboration, the letter from Riley to Reich already discussed in Chapter 1 shows that they were hardly on bad terms. Dated “day of the great return”—August 2, 1966 in Angus MacLise’s *YEAR*—Riley informs Reich that he was headed back to New York from the Theatre of Eternal Music’s *Celebration of the Tortoise* concert at Christoff Thurman’s (De Menil’s) commune in Amagansett, Long Island. Riley responds to a suggestion or offer (it’s unclear as no carbon of Reich’s letter is there) from Reich for Riley to put on a performance of *In C* at the Fillmore in San Francisco. Although this is the only letter from Riley in the archive (at least the only publicly available one as of September 2015), it clearly shows a friendly relationship between the two. Strickland notes that when Reich moved back to New York, he “did not seek to collaborate further with Riley.” Reich tells Strickland, “I came back to New York in the fall of ’65. At the time I felt very much out of place. Downtown it was basically works by or in imitation of John Cage, Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff, and Earle Brown. Uptown it was pieces in imitation of Stockhausen, Boulez, and Berio. I felt equidistant from both.” (This distance from both would of course become the motivating perspective from which Reich developed his critique in “Music as a Gradual Process”; see Introduction.) Reich continues

> I began to realize that I was somewhat in isolation. I knew what Riley was doing, and I knew what La Monte was doing [they were working together at the time, though Reich does not make this clear]. They were the people I knew who were doing something like this, but we didn’t get on personally at that time. When Phil [Glass] came along, I befriended him and gave him the ensemble to use because it was nice to have somebody to talk to.

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35 Terry Riley to Steve Reich [2 August 1966]. Paul Sacher Stiftung, Sammlung Steve Reich, Correspondence.
Throughout these interviews from the 1990s, Reich and Riley highlight the transmission of pedagogic influence that flowed in both directions between them. The supposed self-evidence of a minimalist lineage grounded in “the pedagogic relation” as an ordering concept similarly begins to appear around this same time. Asked by Duckworth to define his idea of a “minimalist hierarchy,” Riley highlights the influence that Young had on him, calling the Trio “the landmark minimalist piece,” and claiming that “La Monte introduced… this concept of not having to press ahead to create interest.” Riley continues, “without that there could have been no In C, because In C is a static piece in that same tradition.”

Even though [In C] uses fields with repetitious patterns, it couldn’t have existed without this other concept [Young’s stasis] being born first. So then, Steve Reich played in the first performance of In C. Before that, he was studying with Berio and his music, I think, reflected more of an interest in European music. So obviously, after In C he changed his style, and starting using repetition and developing his own style of phases and pulses. 38 He makes even stronger claims in his interview with Schwarz, saying that Young had “very evolved thoughts about music, and I thought it was better than what I was getting from the teachers I came to [Berkeley to] study with;” 39 nonetheless, Riley is relatively modest about his authorship, particularly in comparison to the much stronger authoritative claims of both Young and Reich regarding their influence on Riley and Glass, respectively. What’s notable, though, is the pedagogic function of his language: the idea of concepts in place of techniques, and that concepts beget other concepts; that Reich’s studies had been in one (more conservative, European) direction, but that the trajectory was altered, it is suggested, by his involvement with Riley and In C. Riley extends this reading to include Glass: “Then after that, Phil Glass played with Steve, and of course Steve was his teacher.” 40 Riley outlines the dispute between the two, which seems to have been extremely visible at the time (indeed, I would argue that in the 1990s, the fact of dispute was the connecting logic of this

38 Duckworth, Talking Music, 282; my emphasis.
39 Schwarz, Minimalists, 28; quoted in Carl, In C, 18.
40 Ibid.
minimalist hierarchy). They were constituted not so much in dispute, but in their having had a falling out from a former communal environment of exchange and collaboration. Riley tells Duckworth:

“Now, I don’t know why [Reich and Glass] have this problem with each other, but that’s my honest impression of what happened.” He continues, offering his egalitarian worldview:

> You know, there’s room in the world for everybody’s ideas. *But you have to give credit where credit’s due.* You always have to acknowledge your teachers. Otherwise you won’t go anywhere in the world. It’s part of the respect of a tradition. It’s great to be a student; a student is one of the highest forms. Once you’re a teacher, then you’re in a very hard role. It’s very difficult; it’s laden with great responsibilities.41

Reich relies on almost the exact same model, though more oriented to his own interests and concerns, when he brings up, unprovoked, “the history of this kind of music” to Strickland:

> It does not begin with Terry Riley, it does not begin with me, and it *certainly* doesn’t begin with Glass. It begins with La Monte Young, who was at the University of California in Berkeley with Terry in the late ’50s… La Monte was dragging gongs along the floor, doing neo-Cage things, and was otherwise getting interested in long tones—and we’re talking *real* long tones [*laughs*]. He wrote the *Trio for Strings*, a pivotal piece, based mostly on perfect intervals sustained for long periods of time on three strings. This had a profound effect on Riley, who as I understand it was still writing serial-type stuff.42

For Reich, it’s important—as it was for Riley in relation to Reich—to point out that, before he met Young, Riley “was still writing serial-type stuff.” For the minimalists, the escape from the pedagogic constraints of mid-century American serialism into tonal music of long duration is essential; the capacity to remember “when I met X he was still doing serialism” is thus central to claiming who had arrived at this sound and who had not yet. Reich described his reintroduction to Glass at the Park Place Gallery in 1967 in much this way: “After the second night my old friend from Juilliard, Phil Glass, came up and said he was back from studying with Nadia Boulanger and working with Ravi Shankar and had a string quartet he wanted me to see, which was certainly not anything like

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41 Duckworth, *Talking Music*, 282-3; my emphasis. Riley’s pedagogic theory came up in a later conversation with Robert Ashley for his series *Music with Roots in the Aether*: “Guruji [Pran Nath] says this too: teaching and learning are the same thing. Teaching is a learning experience because in order to teach you have to examine a thing very closely, so you’re learning what its nature is.”

42 Strickland, *American Composers*, 41; emphasis in original.
what he’s doing now but which was getting away from dissonant intervals.” Describing the monodirectional influence that Reich sees as constituting their relationship, he tells Strickland:

From then until the beginning of ’68, he and I played some things that I would basically give him criticism on and my reactions to… He knew Arthur Murphy from Juilliard. I said, “Listen, whatever you write, we’ll get together and play it with Arthur.” I introduced him to Jon Gibson and James Tenney, who became his group. All of this is in programs and can be verified historically. In early 1968 he wrote One Plus One, which was for rapping on a table top in groups of twos and threes. That indeed was his original insight, and he was very much off on his own from then on. Reich connects One Plus One immediately to another work: “The next piece he wrote was called Two Pages for Steve Reich… which subsequently became Two Pages.” Typical of his pointed way of speaking, Reich concludes, “So there’s your historical sketch.” Reich clearly has a set narrative in mind, which is barely altered in most interviews, and follows a very clear teleology: Glass introduced himself, asked me to look at his work, I coached him, he made his major breakthrough, dedicated a piece to me, and then removed the dedication.

Young concurs about Reich’s influence on Glass’s compositions. In his conversation with Strickland, Young claims that—in the one concert that had ever featured music by all of the “big four” to that point—“Phil brought a piece that was just a single line.” Zazeela interjects, “A single meandering violin line, sort of unfocused,” before Young takes over again: “Clearly [from] before he had worked with Steve Reich.” The story is nearly identical—interjections and all—in their conversation with Duckworth:

Young: Well the story I tell is that there’s only one concert that I know of where all four of us appeared together. This was a concert that was put on by a group at Yale called Pulsa. They were doing a lot of work with light and…
Zazeela: A lot of art and technology stuff.
Young: This concert was in 19…
Zazeela: I think ’67 or ’68…
Young: … and it was all tapes. I played a tape of Map of 49’s Dream—very sophisticated La Monte Young. Terry probably played some of the two-tape-recorder stuff that he was doing with a saxophone—very clearly Terry Riley. And Steve Reich was sounding like Steve Reich.

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43 Ibid.; my emphasis.
44 Ibid., 42; my emphasis.
But Phil Glass played a piece that just sounded like a single line. It was either a violin or a saxophone…
Zazeela: It was a violin.
Young: … And it just went on. It was incredibly dull. There was none of what you would call minimalism going on at all. 45

Young likewise follows the line of pedagogic transmission; asked by Duckworth if he was “pleased with being considered the ‘Father of Minimalism’,” Young responds:

I think that’s true. I think it would have never started without me. Terry Riley was the person who began the kind of repetitive phase-shifting music that is known as minimalism, and there’s no question in my mind or Terry’s but that I was a primary influence on him… And [Terry] influenced Steve Reich, who played in In C, and who came to Terry afterwards and said he wanted to write like that. Actually, Terry discouraged him. He said, “No, you should find your own way.” But Steve really wanted to write that way, and he did. And although it’s different from Terry, it’s clearly out of Terry. Then, according to Steve, Phil and Steve had a group together, and Phil began to play the way he does after he was in that group with Steve. 46

(There has been little narrative relation between Young and Glass. Strickland writes that Glass was never impressed by Young’s “more conventional (i.e., audible) compositions” though he greatly admired Young as a conceptual artist, and writes that Glass attended Young and Zazeela’s February, 1968 voice and sine-wave performance at the Barbizon Plaza in New York, but left after half an hour. Strickland continues, “Young, like Reich, objects to Glass’s refusal to acknowledge the influence of his Minimalist forebears and summarizes Glass’s contributions to classical music as ‘record sales’. 47

Several things become clear across this account of interviews. First of all, by the 1990s, these composers had consistent autobiographical narratives, based on asserting an inegalitarian “pedagogic

45 Duckworth, Talking Music, 239-240; ellipses in original.
46 Ibid.
47 Strickland, Minimalism: Origins, 204. Glass also mentions Young in his 1975 interview with Walter Zimmerman: “I was very much at the time, very much alone… When I was living in Paris I had no contact with any other musicians. I knew Alla Rakha. But the Indian music developed so clearly along different lines. It could be important in inspiration, but they didn’t offer new models for my music. Because the instruments were too different. The raga system demanded a kind of perception of intonation, which I’m not particularly gifted at. Someone like La Monte, who works with intonation in a very precise way, could be attracted to that. But for me personally, my strong point was not that kind of precise hearing to hear microintervals.” See Walter Zimmerman, Desert Plants: Conversations with 23 American Composers (Vancouver: A.R.C Publications, 1976). Glass’s interview is available online at http://home.snafu.de/walterz/biblio/06_phil_glass.pdf (accessed March 27, 2016).
relation” between themselves and the other members of a style which gained its cohesion as “minimalism” around the time of these interviews. Further, they were all acutely aware that they were being grouped together into a continuity, and thus that the only way to stake the claim of their unique contribution was by positioning it in relation to the others; this had the perhaps unintended result of positing an eternal minimalist formalism into which a series of firsts and conceptual innovations were then outlined. As a result, these interviews helped frame the context of “the big four.” That is, beyond the claims that Joseph has made for the metaphysical cohesion of the group put forward in chapter organization by scholars like Schwarz and Potter, in these interviews we find Strickland and Duckworth developing this grouping, framing their questions around the fact that the four worked together early in their careers and were not only aware of but had been directly involved in developing each other’s styles which cumulatively produced “minimalism.” It is not enough for Young, Riley, Reich and Glass to stake their own claims of the value of their work; rather, each must position his own work as being in reaction to, or a development, elaboration or clarification of, and so on. This is particularly evident in Strickland’s conversation with Riley, where many of his questions come through a presumption of Young’s role and importance—including non-question conversation prompts like “La Monte had the same background of dance bands,” and “You met [Young] as grad students at Berkeley in 59.” He offers Riley the chance to acknowledge the relationship while dismissing their grouping: “It was an important meeting in the development of what’s called Minimalism. I guess my next question is ‘Are you tired of the term?’.” These continue:

Strickland: What was it like to meet La Monte? What was he like back then?
Strickland: What was it like to hear the Trio for Strings?
Strickland: How did confronting La Monte’s music affect your own compositions? Did you ever follow him into long tones?

48 Strickland, American Composers, 110-1.
One that seems to be a question directly for Riley, and perhaps challenges the viability of defining Young’s early (pre In C) work as “minimalist,” turns back into a question about Young: “Even though La Monte originated the Minimalist style, he was still writing atonally. The most important things that you added were repetition and the re-embracing of tonality. He wasn’t composing tonally at all, was he?” In contrast, it’s difficult to know what to make of the fact that Strickland does not ask Glass any questions about the minimalist lineage: it seems that Strickland views Glass as the end of the line, a dead end in dispute with his predecessor, and perhaps considered it rude to probe that area with someone whose career was understood as a repository of past influence, rather than one of mastery in his own right. Similarly, Ev Grimes, in an interview with Glass from 1989 (called “Education”), focuses entirely on his university education—he learned “not much” at Juilliard—and his studies with Nadia Boulanger. On the other hand, that Glass never attempted to create an abusatir over any younger colleague by suggesting his own position of mastery perhaps helped, in its own way, to end the hierarchy with him.

IV. Case Studies

A. In C

Terry Riley’s In C is a potentially contradictory place to begin, resulting as it did from a comparatively egalitarian and mutually beneficial exchange of influence between Riley and Steve Reich. Nevertheless, Keith Potter’s commentary on the piece is formalist, and largely dismissive of the communal ethos: “The notion, all too frequent, of In C as a kind of glorious, hippie free-for-all—the more the merrier, appreciated all the better if you’re on certain substances—has tended to encourage performers to ‘do their own thing’, to use the terminology of the period, and not to

49 Ibid.
attempt to relate much to what other musicians were doing.” In his analysis, Potter therefore sees his job as precisely to interpret the piece in its formalist cohesion and creativity, rather than giving in to the heteronomous perspective of the piece as a part of the 1960s counterculture.

In contrast, Robert Carl’s book on the piece extensively examines the work’s context and its genesis. Carl is strongest in developing an oral history of the development and premiere of the piece. Carl speculates that Riley showed Reich the score for *In C* when the two met at Riley’s studio (“he was furious,” discussed above), at a point when the score would have been complete, though “hot off the press.” The rehearsal process “remains vague,” Carl writes, as a result of the fluctuating nature of both the piece and the potential roster of performers. When Riley’s old colleagues at the San Francisco Tape Music Center offered him a one-man concert, he began planning the premiere, which Potter writes was put together with “a high degree of collective input,” quoting Riley’s claim that the room was “full of composers” who were always making suggestions. The list of composer-performers involved in the premiere is extensive, and a veritable who’s who of the San Francisco musical vanguard:

Werner Jepsen (Wurlitzer electric piano), Sonny Lewis (the tenor saxophonist who had played with Riley in Europe), James Lowe (electric piano), who in turn was introduced by Lewis, Pauline Oliveros (accordion), Ramon Sender (who played a Chamberlain organ relayed from an upstairs studio), Stan Shaff (trumpet), Morton Subotnick (clarinet), Mel Weitsman (recorder), and Phil Windsor (trumpet), plus the composer himself on electric piano. With Reich, who also played electric piano, came two other performers: Jon Gibson (soprano saxophone) and Jeannie Brechta (electric piano), Reich’s girlfriend at the time. In addition, an artist called Anthony Martin, also onstage, projected “a rhythmic/melodic light composition” of various shapes and colours simultaneously with the music.

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51 Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 112. Potter does not give a concrete example of these “all too frequent” performances or their specific performance problems.

52 Carl, *In C*, 41.

53 Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 108-9. Potter’s listing of the ensemble is notably different from many others, including Carl, who suggest that the gathering of musicians was made entirely possible by Reich drawing on his own performer friends. It’s also worth noting here that Martin’s light show predates those of both Zazeela and the more broadly known progressive rock ones by at least a year.
Carl refers to the performance forces as “an experimental chamber orchestra,” highlighting as well that it was drawn together out of available performers among friends and friends-of-friends, while simultaneously registering a strong disregard for institutional norms in favour of collective input. On the nature of the rehearsals, Carl quotes Riley:

My memory of the early rehearsals was, at least the first couple, [there] were just a few of us. And then we had one which was almost everybody, including a couple of hippies who came in off the street, who tried to blow over it, and Steve threw them out because he was totally intolerant of anything like that… I would have probably let them do it [laughs].

Riley’s memory of the events is very much in keeping with his lifelong commitment to a generous and open performance practice, and a shared perspective on Reich’s reputation as a traditionalist within the broader community. Indeed, Richard Landry later said of the collaborative rehearsals of Reich’s and Glass’s music a few years later in New York: “Philip and I both played for a year with Steve Reich. Performing with Steve was like being around a teacher who, if you made a mistake, would rap on your knuckles with a ruler.”

Riley by contrast maintained a clear interest in creating a non-stultifying space in which not only the performers but even the audience could contribute to the nature of the event: at the San Francisco Tape Music Center premiere, Riley suggested “[w]hy don’t we just leave the chairs by the door, and let people sit wherever they want and see how they organize themselves in the room.” He adds, “also I started playing Music for the Gift as they were walking in, so it wasn’t like walking into a concert.”

Reich has frequently mentioned the importance of this piece to his own compositional practice, while never failing to bring attention to his own contributions. He notes that the work is

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54 Carl, *In C*, 44.
55 ibid.
56 http://www.paristransatlantic.com/magazine/interviews/landry.html
57 Carl, *In C*, 46. Like my above comment about the concert predating Zazeela’s projections at Theatre of Eternal Music concerts, Riley’s idea of having music already playing and encouraging the audience to choose their own seating arrangement has long been mapped onto Young’s performance practice, where audiences enter to his latest instantiation of the “Dream House” music and seat themselves on the floor well ahead of the entry of performers.
chamber music at its best in that “there’s a lot of listening to other people.”\textsuperscript{58} Asked by Duckworth in 1996 if he had any “composer friends” in 1964, Reich responds: “I became friendly with Terry Riley in 1964 and helped him prepare the first performance of \textit{In C}. I gave him a lot of my players to play in the first performance; I played in it, and I also suggested to him in the course of rehearsals that he put a pulse in to keep everybody together.”\textsuperscript{59} Despite prioritizing his own influential role in making the piece possible—not to mention Riley’s comments above about Reich keeping out the hippies—Reich continues, “[w]hile that was important, perhaps, I certainly learned a tremendous amount from putting the piece together, and I think it had a very strong influence on me.”\textsuperscript{60}

The relationship of influence between Riley and Reich is surely much more one of collaboration and bi-directional influence, rather than the monodirectional, confiscating image of pedagogic authority discussed at the start of this chapter. Reich says much the same in a 2014 interview with Seth Colter Walls leading up to his Brooklyn Academy of Music “reunion” performances with Glass: “The important thing with \textit{In C} was, I certainly learned a lot about how to organize repeating patterns from playing in the piece. And Terry in turn got the pulse from me, which has now become part of the piece. So it was a very healthy exchange.”\textsuperscript{61} In light of this, we can perhaps frame the collaboration that produced \textit{In C} as—hardly surprisingly—a much more communal, egalitarian, and, indeed, “hippie” type of interaction than subsequent projects of collaborative influence discussed both above and below. The egalitarian mode of exchange and historicization that Riley provided as part of \textit{In C} should be kept in mind when discussing further collaborations below.

\textsuperscript{58} Carl, \textit{In C}, 50.

\textsuperscript{59} Duckworth, \textit{Talking Music}, 296.

\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Ibid}.

B. It’s Gonna Rain, or Meet Brother Walter in Union Square After Listening to Terry Riley

Given Reich’s willingness to positively frame In C’s influence on him, matched with his critique of Glass for effacing the dedication of Two Pages for Steve Reich a few years later, it is extremely revealing to consider Reich’s first cataloged “early” work: It’s Gonna Rain, which was originally followed by the supplemental clause or Meet Brother Walter in Union Square After Listening to Terry Riley. In contrast to the relatively stable role of collaboration and influence in In C, and in stark contrast to the historiographical confiscation mobilized by Reich regarding Two Pages (still to be discussed below), It’s Gonna Rain requires a little more attention, though from a decidedly theoretical perspective. My interest here is in considering, first, the influence that led to Riley’s proper name being included in the title, and second, the role of listening not only to the black voice of Brother Walter in 1964 or to Terry Riley’s music, but specifically to listening to Brother Walter after listening to Terry Riley; that is, listening to Brother Walter speak while still under the influence of Riley’s music. To do so, I consider the changing discourse about Riley and Brother Walter in early program notes.

Strickland and Potter both note the impact of In C on Reich’s thinking, drawing particular attention to Reich’s shift from twelve-tone and collage-based repetition to a more “organized and consistent kind of pattern-making” after being involved in Riley’s piece. Potter makes the important observation, though he does not draw anything from it, that “Reich acknowledges a debt to his colleague’s innovations, though he stresses In C rather than the tape compositions” that he had heard in 1964, like She Moves She from The Gift. He also notes—unlike Strickland—that It’s

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62 It’s Gonna Rain is the first piece discussed in Reich’s essay “Early Works (1965-1968),” in Reich’s Writings on Music, 19-21. It is also on the 1989 Nonesuch CD Steve Reich – Early Works. While by many standards the piece is now several years into Reich’s public development as a composer, my point here is that this is typically the first piece he will recognize as part of his contemporary biographical narrative, rejecting earlier works like Oh Dem Watermelons, Livelihood, Improvisations on a Watermelon, his compositions for the San Francisco Mime Troupe, and so on. For more on this earlier period, see Sumanth Gopinath, “Contraband Children: The Politics of Race and Liberation in the Music of Steve Reich, 1965-1966” (PhD diss., Yale University 2005); Gopinath, “Reich in Blackface;” and Chapman, “Presence, Collaboration, and Community.”

*Gonna Rain*, even as late as January 1968, was still carrying its full title on concert programs. Indeed, this was the title included on the programs of many of Reich’s most important early performances: on May 27-29, 1966 at the Park Place Gallery; at the Farleigh Dickson University Art Gallery on January 5, 1967; and again, in January ’68, at the Philip Exeter Academy as mentioned by Potter (Figure 3.1).⁶⁴ In his program notes at Farleigh Dickson University, Reich writes, “Brother Walter was a young negro Pentecostal preacher who appeared occasionally on Sundays at Union Square in San Francisco. Terry Riley is a young American composer and was the first to use repeated figures in his music.”

The longer title carried throughout most of the time that Riley was living in New York. In contrast, on July 12, 1968 the piece was simply listed as *It’s Gonna Rain* at the University of New Mexico where Reich was teaching for the summer (Figure 3.2). In the program notes, Riley goes unmentioned, and Brother Walter has been made anonymous; taking on a quasi-scientific and objective tone, Reich simply states of Brother Walter that “The voice on the tape belongs to a negro preacher the composer recorded in Union Square in San Francisco.” In a series of concerts in February 1969 at the North Shore Country Day School Arts Festival, no mention is made at all of the sound source, focusing entirely on the technological means of producing the piece in both *It’s Gonna Rain* and *Come Out*, as when he states that “eventually, the two voices divide into four and (at the end of *Come Out* and *It’s Gonna Rain*) into eight.”

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⁶⁴ Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 165.
Figure 0.1 January 14, 1968 program from the Philip Exeter Academy, Paul Sacher Stiftung, Sammlung Steve Reich.

We can gain some sense of the travel of the piece—as well as Riley’s own rising influence following the 1968 release of *In C* by Columbia Records—in the program for a concert on October 30, 1970 at the University of York in England where the full title again reappears (Figure 3.3). There, Richard Orton led what was presumably the first full program of Reich’s music to be performed without the composer present. Orton writes in the program that “During the summer of 1970
[Reich] briefly passed through London on his way to study African drumming, and in a very friendly way gave me the scores which will be performed this evening.” These included *Pendulum Music, Phase Patterns*, and *Four Organs*, as well as presentations, from the LPs, of *Come Out* and *It’s Gonna Rain*, with its full title. Notably, the LP release by Columbia of *It’s Gonna Rain*, from which the piece was likely played, used the shortened title; nevertheless, the program is the last published program to include the full title in Reich’s archives.

Several scholars have provided strong critical readings of the politics of race in play in *It’s Gonna Rain*. Lloyd Whitesell offers the most compelling reading, labelling Reich’s use of a black voice as one further example of how “white culture seeks vitality and even definition through the foregrounding of non-white cultural characteristics.” Whitesell notes that, in *It’s Gonna Rain* and *Come Out*, “the entire sound material for both pieces consists of recorded black voices” such that “each piece’s frame is filled with a black vocal presence.” The problem for Whitesell, however, is that in this framing, “[w]hiteness is thematically absent; yet a white author has set up the frame” and attempts to use it to “disappear within an attitude of rigorous objectivity.” In the end, “the music moves toward an abstract, metaphorical whiteness, mesmerizing in its unfathomable remoteness from the material black vocality of the opening” such that “whiteness is the unspoken field of play”—in this piece, as in most works of the Euro-American avant-garde.

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The University of New Mexico  
July 12, 1968  
Fine Arts Center Recital Hall  
8:15 p.m.

AN EVENING OF LIVE ELECTRONIC MUSIC

Rozart Mix - for many tape machines with loops..................John Cage (1965)

Performed by Cecilia Case, Lyn Grayland,
Pauline Gonzales, Lynn Loomis, Lillian Manson, Carol Higdon, Dave Roberts, and
Lawell Russell

Wave Train - for magnetic pick-ups, freely vibrating ........David Behrman (1966)
strings and amplification systems

Performed by George Forrester, Larry Cysman,
R. David Lester, and Edward Wolfe

SHORT INTERMISSION

Strung Out - for amplified solo violin.........................Philip Glass (1967)

Gilberto Orellana, violin

How Now - for piano....................................Philip Glass (1968)

Steve Reich, cimbalom

SHORT INTERMISSION

It's Gonna Rain - tape..................................Steve Reich (1965)

Piano Phase - for two pianos.............................Steve Reich (1967)

Steve Reich, cimbalom
and pre-recorded tape

Cimbalom courtesy of the M. Behner Corp.

Technical Assistance - Ralph Mirobal

Figure 0.2 July 12, 1968 program from University of New Mexico. Paul Sacher Stiftung, Sammlung Steve Reich.
Other scholars have commented along these lines as well. Sumanth Gopinath’s dissertation chapter on the piece activates an exceptionally dense network of concerns, ranging from Asian and African influences on American culture of the time, transcription and formal analysis of the piece, and reflections on the place of religion, mass culture, and contemporary political events such as the
American Civil Rights movement and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Martin Scherzinger’s exceptionally nuanced article highlights Reich’s discursive positioning of Walter’s voice between speech and song as emblematic of the African-American voice for white listeners. “Walter’s agency,” Scherzinger writes, “is assimilated into what one might call a historical-transcendental musical tradition. The ideological effect is to incorporate the Other into tradition—first causing a rupture with tradition and then overcoming it—which ultimately serves the interests of a progressive music history, characterized by a quasi-deductive logical line of formal innovations.” More recently, Siarhei Biareishky has drawn on all of this literature to provide a psychoanalytic reading of the “split subject” produced by Reich’s (very white) compositional process of making the black voice “completely incomprehensible” as a necessary moment of constitution of the avant-garde in music as a means of creating a non-racist white subjectivity that nevertheless maintains its privilege. John Pymm has in some sense supported these approaches to It’s Gonna Rain by examining the source material that Reich originally recorded in June 1964 in San Francisco’s Union Square. Most of this focuses on Reich (seemingly—he edited himself out of the tapes) interviewing people in the square on what Pymm asserts was probably a Sunday; these included not only Brother Walter, but also another preacher named Ray, a shoe shine man, several “winos” and people Reich labels as “Spanish women.” Rather than adding to their astute observations, my interest is more modest and perhaps benign: I would like to focus simply on the constitution of listening and citation in minimalism as attested to in the original title, and the effects of its subsequent effacement.

The original title invites us to reflect not only on Reich as a listener to both Terry Riley and Brother Walter, but to sequential and hierarchical listening—to Brother Walter after listening to Terry

Riley. In his conversation with Duckworth, Reich is asked about how he got the initial idea for *It’s Gonna Rain*. Beyond his earlier discussion of his interest in “real sounds” in opposition to *musique concrète*, which he considered “boring, partly because the composers had tried to mask the real sounds,” he tells the interviewer: “It was when I was fooling around with tape loops of the preacher’s voice, and *still under the influence of In C.*”\textsuperscript{72} What seems important to me, and has gone unacknowledged perhaps as a result of its mundane obviousness, was that something about the context of San Francisco, the Tape Music Center, his collaboration with Riley, his dissatisfaction with his work with his improvisation ensemble, and so on, led Reich, on the advice of a filmmaker friend to “undertake using a portable Uher tape recorder and a shotgun microphone in front of the St. Francis Hotel in late 1964.”\textsuperscript{73} Pymm of course gets near this material concern for listening to the marginalized and eccentric, but his interest is primarily in thinking through the way that Reich “narrates” the raw material into the finished composition.

As Reich told Strickland a few years earlier, *It’s Gonna Rain* only happened because Reich had been put into a particular frame of mind by the way that *In C* drew upon “tape loops, African music, John Coltrane—and tied them all together.” Reich says, “[u]ndoubtedly this was the trigger for *It’s Gonna Rain.*” He notes that he started it earlier, intending to approach the source material as a collage (which does happen at the start of Part II), but the approach changed when he began rehearsing *In C* and a filmmaker friend said to him, “Come on, you’ve gotta come down to Union Square and hear this preacher.”\textsuperscript{74} These knotted impulses—tape loops, Riley’s music, Coltrane’s practice of actually making musical sound rather than writing on paper, African music, Civil Rights (Gopinath notes that Reich’s father was a social-democrat who encouraged his son to be a labour

\textsuperscript{72} Duckworth, *Talking Music*, 296.
\textsuperscript{73} Gopinath, “Contraband Children,” 155.
\textsuperscript{74} Strickland, *American Composers*, 41.
lawyer from a young age\(^ {75}\)—had put the composer into a frame of mind in which, under the sway of a “young American composer” working with tape loops, going into Union Square and recording the voice of a “young black preacher” made sense and seemed important. None of this is apologetics for Reich’s potentially unethical, non-permissive recording, or for the machine-like destruction of blackness that Whitesell considers the role of the white avant-garde, or the “becoming animal” to which Scherzinger suggests Reich submits Walter; rather I want to suggest that *It’s Gonna Rain*, in its original form until early 1968, directly entered into a network of citations of proper names, and that it was specifically with these very literal erasures—of a performer and an influence—that the piece becomes the canonic first mature work of the Minimalist composer Steve Reich. As tied to its longer title, the piece prioritized a more transparent focus on listening as a compositional act, and composing as beginning in a particularly contingent and structured distribution of listening as sensory engagement with a number of heteronomous sources. The title was citational, referential; an account of a particular listening, to Brother Walter within a specific frame of mind influenced by Terry Riley, rather than to an anonymous black body that has been turned into an archetype of the songful nature of African American speech, as Scherzinger argues. The piece becomes foundational to “Minimalism” specifically in effacing—literally erasing—an earlier stage in which collaboration and influence were recognized as important.

But the name change—the removal of the combined dedication and citation (to an influence, Riley, and to a source, Walter, respectively)—drastically alters the work’s associational context, if not its sound. Why the effacement? Once again, the role of pedagogy seems to be of central importance here. Riley tells Duckworth, “Steve Reich played in the first performance of *In C*. Before that, he was studying with Berio and his music, I think, reflected more of an interest in European music. So obviously, after *In C* he changed his style, and started using repetition and

\(^ {75}\) Gopinath, “Contraband Children,” 191.
developing his style of phases and pulses.” A few years earlier, when Strickland asked whether Steve Reich invented the process of phasing, or only the term, Riley responded:

Riley: Well, I don’t think so, because I’d already done that… he had this piece he’d recorded in Union Square called Brother Walter. In Union Square he’d recorded—

Strickland: It’s Gonna Rain.

Riley: It’s Gonna Rain, right. He was driving a cab then. He played me fragments, and then he started making a piece out of it. The first thing he tried before he heard what I was doing was sort of a collage piece. It’s funny that if you listen to Brother Walter and hear [sings] It’s gonna rain! It’s gonna Rain! It’s like the first two notes of In C. It’s C and E. I don’t know if it’s C and E but it’s major third. Not only that, but I’d made pieces with words and tape loops before that. And when you play two tape loops on the same machine they don’t play at the same speed. What Steve did, because he’s very methodical and clean in his work, was to make the phasing work very gradually and to make a process out of it. I made the tapes go backwards, forwards… it was fun, very funky. So I think his contribution was to clean all these things up and make kind of a method out of it, but what’s important here is my invention of the form built solely out of repeating modules. When two identical modules are playing simultaneously by either tape machines or live performers, imperfections in speed or pitch result in ‘phasing.’ I introduced the process into music composition; Steve correctly labelled it.”

Potter similarly writes that “[w]hile Reich built his early aesthetic on the rigour with which his compositions are constructed, Riley was uninterested in applying such structural severities in his material.” There are again here a number of things to draw out. First of all is Riley’s mistaken memory of the title of the piece as Brother Walter. He notably does not recall the full original title, including reference to him—as Reich would in relation to Glass—but simply highlights that the piece was voiced by, and, he thought, named for, the street preacher whom Riley is seemingly just as aware of, and highlights prior to his own name. While Reich seemingly remembers Two Pages for Steve Reich the second anyone mentions Glass’s early compositions in general, Riley’s associations with It’s Gonna Rain go directly to Brother Walter’s voice. Further, while It’s Gonna Rain, or Meet Brother Walter in Union Square After Listening to Terry Riley is “about” a material practice of listening and recording,

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76 In his Introduction to Reich’s Writings on Music, Paul Hillier recounts an oft-repeated anecdote about Berio’s role in encouraging Reich’s later compositional voice. “Among the works Reich showed Berio [who was visiting professor at Mills in 1961-62] was Music for String Orchestra [in which he repeated the twelve-tone row over and over] written the previous year back in New York. Berio’s response was: ‘If you want to write tonal music, why don’t you?’—Riech assured him that he would.” See Hillier in Reich, Writings on Music, 10.
77 Strickland, American Composers, 114.
78 Potter, Four Musical Minimalists, 117.
and while *It's Gonna Rain* is “about” the Cuban Missile Crisis and apocalyptic faith (or about the constitutive white erasure of blackness within the Euro-American avant-garde), Riley’s imagined *Brother Walter* is “about” the man whose voice is the sonic content. The name of the piece—which short-lived, real, or imagined—provides a different account as to what the title names.

Second, Riley begins to draw comparisons to his own work, noting first of all the (almost certainly contingent) fact of opening on major thirds, but more importantly, he stakes his territorial claim over having surely begun working with tape loop effects years prior to Reich, regardless of whether Reich concretized it into a singular, named concept. As Young already told Duckworth above, Reich supposedly told Riley that “he wanted to write like that,” which Young says Riley discouraged, suggesting that Reich “find [his] own way” before “Steve really wanted to write that way, and he did.” Of this difference in application Strickland writes, “Reich was to systematize the phenomenon, whereas Riley in characteristic fashion had been playing the tape-loops in reverse, changing their speed randomly, and so on.”79 For Strickland, as for Riley, Reich’s role was merely of conceptual clarification—but this of course carries substantive value within mid-century composition. Potter similarly writes that “Riley always allowed his patterns to accumulate into a psychedelic wash of sound” while “Reich generally stressed the audibility of his ‘gradually shifting phase relations’,” further noting Riley’s intuitive method versus Reich’s rigor.80

As minimalism was not a “collective revolt,” surely Riley’s compositional practice with magnetic tape loops cannot be considered one either. What is important is the staging of a conflict between two composers over the development of a specific practice and its redeployment in a slightly different context. Were Riley and Reich both writing out scores, at home in silence at their desks, there would be very little chance of a dispute over who did something first—both because it

80 Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 165.
would not be as immediately, sonically noticeable, and because they could point to specific, dated documents in defense of their claims. But, because the two had been working together, developing ideas in close proximity, creating music together, there is much more space for overlap and misunderstanding. In the cases under consideration throughout, material practices constituted in collaboration lead to sounds on tape whose paternity can be contested. Recall here Althusser’s response to Miller’s claim that he had invented the concept of “metonymic causality.” Althusser thought it was the case that concepts belonged to everyone, and had specifically developed his collaborative research seminars for the purpose of open theoretical production and deliberative application. Perhaps much the same, Reich did not see a problem in developing the idea of looping tape into the rigorous concept of phasing.

*It's Gonna Rain* draws attention to the constitution of the “minimalists” both contemporaneously (1964-65 in San Francisco, just before both Riley and Reich moved to New York) and after the fact in interviews. Without even touching on formalist analysis, a number of important aspects are activated: the relationship between Riley and Reich; the development and conceptual re-articulation of tape looping as “phasing”; the relative weight and importance given, at various points by each Riley and Reich, to Brother Walter as a performer; the central role of magnetic tape as both an archival and a compositional medium; the modes of listening that these composers were developing in approaching the world as potential (undisguised) material for tape compositions; and so on. Most importantly, it highlights the centrality of their interaction in developing all of these aspects on tape rather than on paper as had been the case only a few years earlier during their student days. All of these things—Riley’s travel in France and Spain, Reich’s work with his improvisation ensemble, their shared creation of a group to play *In C*, Reich’s Sunday afternoons spent hanging out among street preachers in Union Square—are actualized out of a specific mode of listening and a mode of making sound as the stuff of authorship, and
experimenting with the material actions most conducive to making good work that continues the movement away from traditional authority. When Riley and Reich moved to New York later in 1965, their split occurred largely along these lines: while Reich returns to composition for live performers reading his scores, Riley moved further into performance and improvisation. Strickland writes, “[Reich] did not seek to collaborate further with Riley when he in turn came to New York a month or so later, in part because of Riley’s feeling that his techniques had been expropriated by Reich.” Although Reich was later more careful in acknowledging the influence, “at the time he had no interest in their work in the Theatre of Eternal Music,” in which Riley was working with Young, Conrad, Zazeela, and briefly Cale on sustaining deliberatively composed, just intonation drones.

C. Two Pages (for Steve Reich?)

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, Reich frequently draws attention to Glass’s 1969 piece Two Pages as evidence of his unrecognized influence on his younger colleague. Here is Reich, in his interview with William Duckworth:

And One Plus One was to Phil what It's Gonna Rain was to me. It was his first original musical insight—the additive process. After that, he wrote a piece which he dedicated to me, but later took the dedication away. It was called Two Pages for Steve Reich, but is now Two Pages, subtitled Music in Unison. Basically, what happened between Phil and me was very much the kind of thing that had happened to me with Riley, which is that a lot of things are floating around in your mind and somebody comes along who really sets things straight. The difference is that, for whatever reasons, he has been unwilling to admit that. And that has been the source of some grief between us, for sure. I don’t quite understand, with all the success that he’s had, why that remains something that he’s very uptight about. But those things happened; they are documented in programs, reviews, and scores. It’s not conjecture.\(^{83}\)

\(^{81}\) Strickland, Minimalism: Origins, 189.
\(^{82}\) Ibid.
\(^{83}\) Duckworth, Talking Music, 301; my emphasis.
I have already repeatedly observed the central facts of this story through the relationship to Riley and Reich: Reich recognizes his own influence on Glass (a clarification of ideas), who dedicates a piece to Reich before subsequently effacing the dedication. The important distinction to make in this case is that despite where he begins—a parallel between Riley’s influence on It's Gonna Rain and Reich’s own influence on One Plus One as the moment before a compositional and technical breakthrough—he of course does not point out that the very same piece that Reich highlights from his own career originally included a dedication to the person to whom he is giving credit. What’s more, as noted above, It’s Gonna Rain was performed under its original title for several years, even being used in a 1970 program that Reich was not involved in, in which the piece was presumably played from the Columbia LP that listed the shorter title. In stark contrast, a program from a joint Reich and Glass concert on April 18, 1969 at the New School—only two months after the score of Two Pages dated “2/69”—only uses the shortened title, with Reich performing on clavinet in the performance (Figure 3.4). That is, while Reich frequently brings attention to the effacement of his name from Two Pages, this shortening seems to have happened almost immediately; neither he nor Riley has ever mentioned in interviews the inclusion of Riley’s name in It’s Gonna Rain for at least two years after its completion. Keith Potter offers the clearest dismissal of the dedication issue: “Reich says that Glass originally headed the score Two Pages for Steve Reich, but, when the recording came out in 1974, dropped the homage to his erstwhile friend.” (This statement of course omitting the fact that the April 1969 performance already lacked the dedication.) He continues, “Glass says that Reich liked Two Pages so much in rehearsal that he appended the words ‘for Steve Reich’ to a score and presented it to him, never intending this as anything more than the spontaneous gift of a copy.”

What should we make, then, of Reich’s frequent (and unprovoked) rehearsal of the story of Glass having removed the dedication on Two Pages? What does Reich stand to gain from constantly adding

84 Potter, Four Musical Minimalists, 287.
this feature to his autobiographical narrative, particularly when he is the only person who supposedly has evidence of the title (though he has not made it available in his archives)?

Figure 0.4 April 18, 1969, American premiere of Two Pages, featuring Steve Reich on clavinet. Paul Sacher Stiftung, Sammlung Steve Reich.
My reading of the dispute between Glass and Reich does not require an in-depth literature review since that work, and a critique from much the same angle as my own, has already been undertaken by David Chapman. His dissertation considers space and community in the early years of the Philip Glass Ensemble, with attention to the relationship between Reich and Glass. Building upon Branden Joseph’s claim that minimalism is a history of authorship disputes, Chapman mentions that the “tense disagreements between Conrad and Young, Riley and Reich, as well as Reich and Glass,” resulted from “questions of who influenced whom and who deserved credit for what technical innovations.”

Chapman’s primary focus, though, is on the ideas of space and presence that are central to the Glass Ensemble’s collaborative relationship as influenced by their work in art galleries, between and among and within pieces of visual art. “Rather than extracting Glass, Gibson, Landry or Reich from the art histories in which they appear and appropriating them into a separate music history,” Chapman addresses them “in their original locales” through their “embeddedness with a group of painters, sculptors, and performance artists as an inherent aspect of the milieu in which they were then understood to be most relevant.”

Following Joseph, Chapman also criticizes scholars like Strickland, Schwarz, and Potter for segregating elements of this period into the distinct biographies of either Glass or Reich, without ever treating them in relation; most importantly for my interests, Chapman writes, “Reich’s critiques of Glass, which focus on abstract musical concerns like repetition, modularity, and counterpoint, suggest an attempt to assert mastery over their shared history. They provide early evidence of the tensions that would split the two composers in the early 1970s.”

This is all to say that, following the same historiographical impulse from Joseph, Chapman’s reading of the early days of the Philip Glass ensemble—which focuses on Jon Gibson and Joan LaBarbara, rather than just Reich and Glass—deals with the exact same issues.

86 Ibid., 11-12.
87 Ibid., 46; my emphasis.
in relation to the Glass-Reich dispute that I deal with in terms of Young and Conrad, Riley and Reich, and would have through Glass and Reich. Nevertheless, some space remains open for me. Chapman’s focus is notably on community and collaboration, while mine is on dispute; as such, I would like to turn my attention to commentary from Reich and Glass on Two Pages to consider its position between the two, much as I had read It's Gonna Rain and its effaced dedication as an object pointing to the relation between Riley and Reich.

As noted above, Glass is unique among the “big four.” While interviewers regularly ask Young, Riley, and Reich about their interrelationships, Strickland and Duckworth notably leave that line of questioning aside entirely for Glass. He has similarly been attacked by both Reich and Young for a supposedly ahistorical belief in the development of his work—in Young’s words, the idea that he came out of a “vacuum” in that he supposedly refuses to recognize Reich’s input. He likewise rejects the influence of Riley, at least on his early work: Strickland quotes Reich in February 1992 saying “I undoubtedly played the tape [of In C] for Philip” and Glass in September of that same year saying “[n]o, I never heard the tape, Steve showed me the score after I wrote Two Pages and asked where I’d gotten the idea for writing in modules. I first heard Terry at the Electric Circus” in April of 1969, which would suggest that Glass did not even take notice when Columbia released the LP of In C in late 1968, or that he was unaware of Riley despite having gone to see Young as early as February 1968.88

Further, Glass can be considered, at least in these limited contexts, something of a classicist within the group: this is frequently noted in relation to his studies with Nadia Boulanger, whose pedagogical focus returned most students to species counterpoint and voice leading, leading to a situation in which Glass, unlike the other minimalists, seems never to have entirely turned his back on the score—his work surely requires notation to be performed—and never worked with tape as a

88 Strickland, Minimalism: Origins, 211.
compositional medium. Still, Glass’s denial that he had heard *In C* is confusing. The claim is almost certainly untrue, raising the question, like the one above about Reich bringing up *Two Pages*, as to what Glass would possibly have to gain by denying the potential impact of *In C* on his early compositional output. What is this form of autobiographical positioning intended to achieve?

Glass seems to have more going on in his claims about the period than is let on by Young and Reich in their “vacuum” critiques. Strickland notes that “Glass has objected to this categorization [minimalism] as journalistic shorthand which misrepresents the collective nature of the ‘very intense generational search’ that was transpiring—an objection which Reich considers a ‘smokescreen’ cast over Glass’s direct debt to others, particularly himself.”

Glass comments further on what this specific generational shift was in his conversation with Duckworth:

Glass: I’m not the only person of my generation who became a composer/performer. We really came back to the idea that the composer *is* the performer and that’s very, very valuable. For one thing, we became real people again to audiences. We learned to talk to people again. As a group we lost our exclusivity, the kind that had been built up through years of academic life. I personally knew that I didn’t want to spend my life writing music for a handful of people…

Duckworth: Do you have any idea why that change happened in your generation?

Glass: We all went through the cultural crises of the sixties. It was civil rights, pop music, and drugs… We saw our friends work in the field of popular music, living in a very connected way with their culture, and many of us wanted to have the same connection in our work. We wanted to be part of that world, too. It didn’t mean writing popular music; that wasn’t possible for people like myself. I have no training in it, and I have no inclination to do it. But it did mean that we saw the role of the artist in a much more traditional way—the artist being part of the culture that he lives in.²⁹

This distaste for academic music of course continues in his infamous quote about the Boulez scene in Paris as constituted of “crazy creeps,” less frequently commented upon, though, is his writing in *Music by Philip Glass* about the minimalist grounds for escaping the serialist tradition. He writes that serialism “produced a very abstract and, to most ears, ‘modern’ sounding music… Probably its

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intellectual rigor and sheer difficulty for creator, performer and listener made it seem almost automatically worthwhile, regardless of how it actually came out. After the premiere of a new piece, it was not uncommon to hear the remark, ‘It’s actually much better than it sounds!’\(^9^1\) This comment is very near to the reading of “Music as a Gradual Process” that I provided in the introduction; Glass’s critique of the generation preceding him, the feature that forced him into revolt against it, was less the actual sound of it, and more the discourse surrounding it in which it was possible for an audience of insider listeners to dismiss the taste of another audience members by saying the music is actually better than it sounds, if only you knew how to listen through. Much the same, as he tells Duckworth, he did not want to spend his life writing music that few people would listen to. Glass is critiquing the normalized mode of listening highlighted by the generation prior, based on “secrets of structure” as the locus of valuation. He is critiquing the entirely normalized abrutir of contemporary music listening.

Much of this is well-trod ground. Indeed, we could relate these critiques to the idea of “presence” in Glass’s music that Chapman highlights as a central thematic in concert reviews during the 1960s and 1970s. Chapman writes, developing the ideas of art historian James Meyer, for whom minimalism is specifically a genre constituted in polemic, “[p]resence, as interpreted by Meyer, described the viewer's embodied experience of an artwork, the powerful impression of a work on its spectator, and the active articulation of the proximity between the viewer and the object being viewed.”\(^9^2\) This term was part of visual arts critique before it was picked up by critics commenting on Glass’s performance, and eventually by Glass himself. Chapman articulates how Glass, in a 1972 interview, relates the idea of presence specifically to volume following similar developments in rock music (and, by all accounts, the Theatre of Eternal Music), where volume is seen as an

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encompassing, space-based means of ensuring that “the sound” is a singular phenomenon to which everyone in the performance space has equal access—presuming there isn’t a “secret” agenda in play, disadvantaging the listener in relation to a privilege generated for the composer and performers (or composer-performer).

The point, then, is that Glass very much views his involvement with minimalism as part of a generational movement that has as much to do with Young, Riley, and Reich as with civil rights and pop music, and with the general “anti-establishment” or “anti-authority” movement of the late 1960s, which would have similarly included the student protests at Columbia and in Paris. That Reich calls this a “smokescreen” aimed at hiding his indebtedness to the other “big four” minimalists is surely possible; but what might also be possible is that Glass is less willing—and less expected by interviewers, for some reason—to engage in a form of positioning based on combining what Chapman calls, drawing on Taruskin, the “race to the patent office” with a pedagogic focus on technical developments and one-upmanship.93 Indeed, as Chapman’s dissertation argues, Glass’s entire career is about collaboration: the influence of Riley and Reich is only a very early moment in a career that saw him collaborate with literally dozens of librettists, directors, stage producers, poets, and musicians. The first and most visible of these close collaborations is of course with Robert Wilson and Lucinda Childs on Einstein on the Beach, as Leah Weinberg has shown; Sasha Metcalf has similarly done excellent work on Glass’s relationship with opera organizations and presenters. These continued into his production of the rock band the Raybeats; his films with Godfrey Reggio (and many others); his album Songs From Liquid Days in which he worked with lyricists David Byrne, Paul

93 Chapman, “Collaboration, Presence, and Community,” 5. Here Chapman is building on Taruskin’s idea, borrowed from Christopher Williams, of “the principal obsession of modernists, artists and historians alike.” While I appreciate Chapman’s application of the concept to his reading of Joseph’s metaphysics critique, I consider the actual arbitration of “who did it first”—or the reading of psychological concerns for one-upmanship—less interesting than the discursive and historiographical means by which the authorial disputes are staged. For this reason I am leaving aside a larger engagement with the concept which, as is hopefully obvious from citing Chapman citing Taruskin citing Williams, has been handled very well already.
Simon, Suzanne Vega, and Laurie Anderson; his setting of Leonard Cohen’s *Book of Longing*; and much, much more. All of this work points to the fact that, when it comes to Glass, themes of community and collaboration are the central topic—we see much less scholarly work focused on formalist analysis and separating him from his colleagues through ahistorical ideas about composer biography, and much more work on the ensemble and its makeup—as Jeremy Grimshaw perceptively did when he discussed the role of sound engineer Kurt Munkacsi as a full-time member of the Philip Glass Ensemble. It seems that, perhaps because his career is so heavily focused on collaboration already, Glass is less willing to carve up any point in his career through reference to the pedagogic myth or *abrutir* that Reich and Young so wilfully turn to.

What should we make of Reich’s and Young’s critique, that Glass refuses to acknowledge the paternity of his ideas, based on these two composers’ beliefs that the history of Western art music always happens progressively, through a concentration of existing ideas which are then elaborated upon by each composer recognizing roots? What’s striking is that if the moment of confiscation or defanging of the “collective” (perhaps generational) politics of minimalism occurs by declaring pedagogic authority, then Glass is the only one who does not engage in this form of organizing. Read this way, the economy of exchange within the community of the “big four” is registered through positioning what each gained from the others and how it was handed down. Glass becomes a dead end in this circuit. Surely there is a composer for whom Glass could claim to have concretized or clarified a particularly messy set of ideas—and such a claim would extend our “big four” into perhaps a big five or six. The underlying logic that upholds this musicological articulation of four composers known as “minimalist”—from Mertens through Strickland to Duckworth, Schwarz, Potter, and Fink—is that they were originally part of a community broken by

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the relative (un)willingness of members of that community to “give credit where credit's due.” The currency of this community is articulation of pedagogic paternity, which aims to negate the former critique of the composer’s privilege. The minimalist community of “the big four” is a partition of sensibility, in Rancière’s sense, a partage that, in dividing sense and its organization, draws attention to the underlying logic of its constitutive singularity. The turn to dividing the four into their own “proper” technical place, as Joseph and Chapman have argued, reminds that they were all developing these techniques very much from within a shared commons of sensation: one based in attacking the secrecy that generated authorial privilege.

D. Four Organs and Phase Patterns

Finally, I would like to briefly consider the origins in programs and sketches of two pieces that Reich wrote in early 1970: Four Organs and Phase Patterns. It is specifically because these pieces are less often called upon as part of upholding the metaphysical narrative of minimalism that I am interested in briefly considering their influences and practical origins. I contend that reading these two pieces draws attention to the very open network of exchange going on in 1970 among “the big four” minimalists in a way that creates a more dispersed and networked image of influence and pedagogy, rather than the monodirectional one typically held to.

Both pieces were premiered in one of Reich’s major early concerts: the May 7 and May 8, 1970 performances at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York billed as “An Evening of Music by Steve Reich” (Figure 3.5).
Four Organs is dated “1/70” and featured Steve Chambers, Philip Glass, Art Murphy, and Steve Reich on electric organs and Jon Gibson on maracas. Phase Patterns, dated 2/70, was performed twice, once as a warm up before the performance began, and then again as the second half following the intermission; the performers were Steve Chambers, Jon Gibson, Art Murphy, and Steve Reich.

In his program notes for Four Organs, Reich writes that the piece is “the result of working with an electronic device,” the Phase Shifting Pulse Gate, which he had developed in 1968-1969.
with Larry Owens, a technician at the Bell Laboratories. While the idea for the composition came from the Pulse Gate, the only electronics actually involved in the creation of the piece were instruments. The piece itself is based on “a short repeated chord where individual tones… extend gradually out like a sort of horizontal bar graph in time.” He continues that “eventually all tones [are] held for an extremely long time creating a sort of slow motion music.” To create this long-duration music inspired by his abandoned Pulse Gate idea, Reich “briefly thought about a large group of brass instruments” but eventually, “electric organs were used because they were available and because they have strong attacks and releases that can be clearly heard through all the sustained notes.”

Why were electric organs available? Reich had never composed for them before; indeed, following Four Organs, and Phase Patterns of 1970, the only other work to feature the instrument is 1973’s Music for Mallet Instruments, Voice, and Organ. I contend that we can tie the availability of organs at this point, as well as Reich’s decision to use them, to his friendship with Philip Glass and, more importantly, their frequent tours together at the time. Indeed, the Guggenheim concert was part of a series called “Live/Electric Music” whose first concert featured music by Glass. Chapman lists Glass’s performances as occurring on January 16-17, 1970. The program for Glass’s performances featured three organ-dominated pieces, performed by Glass, Gibson, Reich, Murphy, Richard Landry, David Berhman, Berly Lauridsen, and James Tenney, including the premiere of Music in Fifths, Music in Contrary Motion, and Music in Similar Motion. Further, the first line of Glass’s biography in the Guggenheim program is “Philip Glass, who plays the electric organ, was born in 1937 in Baltimore, Maryland.” In Glass and Reich’s conversation with Tim Page from 1980, Glass brings up their

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95 See Reich, “The Phase Shifting Pulse Gate—Four Organs—Phase Patterns—An End to Electronics (1968-1970),” in Reich, Writings on Music, 38-51. Kerry O’Brien’s forthcoming dissertation deals extensively with Reich’s relationship to electronics during this period, including archival work on his time working with Owens and the Bell Labs.

96 “Live/Electric Music at the Guggenheim Museum,” concert program in Paul Sacher Stiftung, Steve Reich Sammlung, Programmen. Also published in part as “Four Organs—Program Note,” in Reich, Writings on Music, 50. My emphasis.

97 Chapman, 251.
relationship specifically in terms of pieces for electric organs. Glass says, “It’s so clear we are dealing with two different personalities. Ten years ago, when you had something like *Music in Fifths* on the one hand and *Four Organs* on the other, there wasn’t an awful lot of other music around to compare it to.”98 (This claim could provide much new meaning in the context of Chapter 4: What music existed in 1980 that can be so readily compared to their earlier works?)

Reich’s agendas show the frequency of rehearsals with Glass and the use of organs during the months leading up to the Guggenheim performances.99 November and December of 1969 are full of plans to rehearse with Glass, Gibson, and Murphy. While many rehearsals during this period do not specify which piece is being rehearsed, entries on December 3, 12, 14, and 21 specify rehearsing *Four Organs* at Glass’s loft. In January 1970, the rehearsals intensify, as January 3, 4, 10, 11, all include entries for rehearsal at Glass’s, leading up to entries for Glass’s concert at the Guggenheim on January 16 and 17. January 19 and 24 include entries about buying an organ and then picking up the organ, and on the 25th Reich makes himself a note to copy out *Four Organs*, which he then writes he Xeroxed for the other performers on the 27th. The rehearsals of *Four Organs* continue throughout February and March, and in April he has a note to himself that Glass will be coming by to pick up an organ. Leading up to Reich’s own Guggenheim concert on May 7 and 8, as well as the joint concerts by Reich and Glass at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis (in which Glass performed on *Four Organs* as well), several rehearsals were held, for a number of pieces, at Glass’s loft. This suggests that during the period from the winter 1969 through the spring of 1970, Glass and Reich were involved in an intensive series of rehearsals, centered at least in part around the use of electric organs in Philip Glass’s apartment rehearsal space, where the ensemble he had been developing was predominantly and infamously centered around the timbres of multiple Farfisa

98 Glass, *Writings on Glass*, 47.
organs. Reich bought his own—presumably for composing at home—days after the first performance of several of Glass’s early organ-driven pieces at the Guggenheim, and dates the score of *Four Organs* January 1970, the month of Glass’s concerts, and *Phase Patterns* the following month.

What’s more, *Phase Patterns* has its own relationship to collaboration and effaced dedication. In his book on performance practice in Reich’s music, Russell Hartenberger discusses the genesis of *Phase Patterns* in Reich’s sketchbooks from early 1970. On February 22, Reich titles a sketch “Keyboard Drumming for Art Murphy.” An entry from April 8, reproduced in Hartenberger’s book, shows Reich working through several potential patterns of alternating left and right hands on a sustained chord, including one that develops from LR to LLR LRLRLR to LLRLRR LRLR with an annotation suggesting that it “tends toward Phil’s music” for its “additive” quality. He finally moves towards the title *Phase Patterns for Art Murphy* and dates it, retroactively, 2/70. By the time the score was published by Universal Editions in 1980, the piece was simply *Phase Patterns* with no dedication to Murphy; Reich does give credit in the directions for performance, writing that “the resulting patterns appearing in this score were contributed by Steve Chambers, Jon Gibson, Art Murphy, James Preiss, and myself during rehearsals preceding the first performances of this piece.” It’s difficult to pinpoint whether the dedication was removed at the same point in 1970 (it is not included in programs, even at the premiere) or whether it was kept in place until its publication a decade later. (Indeed, this raises an issue of central importance: what is the difference between a dedication and an actual component of a title?) Perhaps *Phase Patterns* and *Four Organs* explain why Reich claims that he was only advising Glass on his compositions until early 1968: beyond that point, the two were in more sympathetic collaboration, though he never feels the need

102 In conversation, Hartenberger noted that Preiss was not involved in the ensemble in 1971, so his inclusion is either an error, or an effort to give credit for Preiss’s later contributions and development of the piece beyond the premiere.
to directly state that. In contrast to Glass, Riley, or Brother Walter—with whom interactions were relatively brief and historically circumscribed—Reich and Murphy worked together throughout the rest of their careers and were close colleague and collaborators. This removal of title or dedication, then, does not necessarily have to do directly with rejection or effacement of influence, but involves a number of contingencies upon which it’s difficult to speculate. What is worth noting is that *Phase Patterns* was developed in close collaboration with Chambers and Murphy, whose credit in developing the patterns is maintained in the notes to the score, and similarly, that Reich was clearly under the direct influence of Glass’s organ-based compositional style while writing. Keeping in mind, still, the broader context of Reich’s critique of Glass for effacing the dedication, *Phase Patterns* could perhaps be citationally named *Phase Patterns, or Keyboard Drumming with Art Murphy After Listening to Phil Glass*.

**V. Conclusion: Minimalism, Pedagogy, *Abrutir***

That La Monte Young influenced Terry Riley, and Terry Riley influenced Steve Reich, and Steve Reich influenced Philip Glass has been tracked, over and over, in histories of minimalism; I have neither reason nor ability to deny this. What I hope to have shown throughout this chapter is that the role of pedagogic relation within the metaphysical narrative is problematic and unacknowledged. While I have most centrally focused on Reich’s claims about his own function within this trajectory, this is not to suggest that he is more at fault or more wrong about his position than the others; it is merely a result of the fact that he brings up the issue more often, and with more consistency, than the others, while rarely showing self-awareness of his claims (as when he uses Riley influence on *It’s Gonna Rain* to call out Glass for removing the dedication in *Two Pages*).

I think broader claims can also be made. Philip Glass clearly had an influence on Reich, as Mertens wrote in the 1980s and as I believe I have shown, redirecting the proposed relationship
between the two of them as put forward most often by Reich; more importantly, though, looking at the broader scene between late 1969 and early 1971 points to a number of resonances across “the big four.” La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela released their first LP, singing along with sine wave drones, as *the Black LP* in late 1969; in 1970, Reich released his first LP with Shandar of *Four Organs* (the live recording with Glass on one of the organs from the Guggenheim) and *Phase Patterns* (recorded live at UC Berkeley; Glass was not present for that performance); Glass recorded and released his first LP, of *Music with Changing Parts*, later in 1971; while Terry Riley had been performing solo organ concerts for several years, live performances in April 1971 (in Los Angeles) and May of 1972 (in Paris) were released as *Persian Surgery Dervishes* in 1972; Riley and John Cale, the former members of the Theatre of Eternal Music, also released an LP together called *The Church of Anthrax* in 1971 (recorded 1968) that has had practically no place in the literature on minimalism, crossing as it does, over and over, the genre barriers supposedly separating rock and art music, as well as placing in collaboration Riley and one of the “secondary” characters in the “big four” narrative. All of these recordings prominently feature electric organs or synthesizers.

The important question is: How did we get from this simultaneity to a clean-cut, hierarchical succession? As I have shown, this happened entirely through organizing and authorizing claims of pedagogical priority. But those claims came well after the fact, and are important within the context of this dissertation for two central and interrelated reasons.

First of all, the metaphysical narrative is grounded in pedagogy and functions as a confiscation of what I earlier argued was the political potential of minimalism: its attack on the hierarchies instantiated by art music’s traditional division of labour. While I have argued that minimalism began around 1964 as a form of authorial critique aimed at thwarting the privileges of

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103 If record releases can be used as any barometer of popularity or renown, Riley was surely the most prominent minimalist in 1972, as *Persian Surgery Dervishes* was his seventh LP, in contrast to one or two by the other members of the “big four.”
authorship, the interviews quoted above, and the scholarship developed from them, show that by the late 1980s, the “big four” minimalists found it expedient to position themselves in a teleological hierarchy that Joseph has accurately labelled the “metaphysical narrative.” Further, I have suggested this narrative is entirely grounded in constantly reasserting the “pedagogic relation”; the absolute inequality between knowledge and nonknowledge, and the means of transmission from the former to the latter. This positioning had two features: it made La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass into the default spokesmen, “the big four,” for an entire style; and it also foreclosed on the possibility of the style developing or standing on its own without their discursive presence as a normative model. This is perhaps the reason that we find such taxonomic confusion in the Ashgate Companion’s effort to expand beyond the centrality of these four composers, as well as the constant need, when expanding beyond the repertoire of these big four, to refer back to compositional practices enacted by them. That is, whenever one of the authors in that text attempts to expand the sphere of composers or sounds defined as minimalist, they have to articulate their argument through reference to Young’s drones, Glass’s additive processes, Reich’s replacement of notes for rests, and so on. (Riley does not typically carry much discursive authority in this method—this is perhaps for many a failing of his as a composer, but within the politics I have argued for, and the mode of non-coercive authority, it is evidence of Riley’s greatest strengths. 104)

Second, in asserting this pedagogic relation between each of the “big four” and those around him, each composer necessarily relies on what Rancière labels the act of abrutir: making brutes or rendering stupid. As I presented in the introduction through reference to Rancière’s The Ignorant Schoolmaster, this is an underlying presupposition of all traditionally pedagogic ventures, and thus potentially un-notable. The importance only becomes clear by keeping in mind what I have claimed

104 Wim Mertens suggests that Riley differs most from Young, Reich and Glass in the freedom that he offers his performers. “Riley is a performer who composes and not a composer in the narrow sense of the word.” See Mertens, American Minimal Music, 44.
as the unique value of minimalism as a genre: its rejection of traditional authority and the attendant privileges of authorship founded in a specialized “hearing through” that relies on making brutes of audiences. In claiming his priority over Glass, Reich, for example, necessarily renders Glass a brute: “From then until the beginning of ’68, he and I played some things that I would basically give him criticism on and my reactions to.” Young also takes this stance in explaining the relationship between Reich and Glass: “Phil brought a piece that was just a single [meandering] line… Clearly [from] before he had worked with Steve Reich.” Riley does the same for Reich: “Steve Reich played in the first performance of In C. Before that, he was studying with Berio and his music, I think, reflected more of an interest in European music.” That none of them calls the other a brute or stupid is not the point; it is the positioning of a before and an after—a relativity of temporalities in which one is better as a result of the supplement of the master’s knowledge.

What is significant is that the entire metaphysical history of minimalism is held together and ordered into a coherent singular narrative by the self-proclaimed pedagogical authority of its dominant practitioners. This imposition of pedagogic authority into the vacuum left by the early critique of authority becomes a pivot for my remaining chapters. In suggesting that Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass, to various degrees, confiscated the egalitarian politics of “minimalist” music, I am highlighting both the egalitarian potential of that music, and the means by which it has been historically turned into something other: a formalist compositional style, defined by a set of sonic characteristics that were merely the means to a confiscated and defanged political end. In considering this networked relationship of inter-influence, we should perhaps not forget the role of other human and non-human actors in constituting this early understanding of minimalism: not only the electric organs, the loft spaces, magnetic tape and tape recorders, but also individuals like Brother Walter whose names have been effaced in favour of centralizing power within this network.
As such, in the next chapter I broadly expand the number of names included among those defining a form of minimalism. This includes not only the proper names of individuals, but also pseudonyms, improper names, collective names, as well as the names of festivals, venues, and genres. My interest is in exploring the interaction between a now widespread and well-known compositional style called “Minimalism” and the various minimalisms that had to be effaced for its singular constitution.
Chapter 4

“Classical Music for Loud Guitars”:

“Minimalism has gone on to influence rock on the one hand and composers like John Adams on the other. But if you want to say minimalism as a school is dead, I’d say ‘hear, hear, but I’m not dead’.”
— Steve Reich

“We didn’t think of ourselves as minimalists. We thought of ourselves as living in a world of music where composers and performers were one, and where the audience were right in front of us.”
— Philip Glass

In 1981 and 1982, Minimalism became recognized in national American news magazines as an accessible style of American composition demanding audience attention, though the label itself was widely judged inadequate. After all, the two most recognizable composers of the style, Philip Glass and Steve Reich, had begun writing large-scale commissions for traditional orchestras and performing organizations. In a New York Times profile, John Rockwell wrote that Reich’s new piece Tehillim includes “variation of tempo, a freer harmonic palette and specific examples of word painting,” which leads him to a simple question: “Can Mr. Reich still be called a ‘minimalist’?” In response to the question, Reich proclaimed “if you want to say minimalism as a school is dead, I’d say ‘hear, hear, but I’m not dead’.” Tim Page, writing in the more nationally circulated High Fidelity, raised similar issues: “Minimalist Music? Pulse Music, if you prefer. Pattern Music. The New York

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Times has called it ‘trance music’; critic Richard Kostelanetz refers to ‘modular music’. Philip Glass, one of the leading figures in the field, likes to call his work ‘music with repetitive structures’; the rock crowd grooves to ‘space music’; and detractors have decried the ‘stuck-record school of composition’.

Eventually, as his “Minimalist Primer” suggests, Page “settle[s] upon the most popular, if not the most apt, label for this style.” He echoes Joan LaBarbara, a composer and performer of minimalist music in her own right, in a 1977 article in Musical America in which she announces that the label minimalism is “purely laughable to label such rich and complex music.”

Despite—or perhaps alongside—all of these dismissals, in a blurb recommending Reich’s newly released Tehillim LP on ECM Records, Time magazine, surely the most widely read of the above-mentioned publications, labelled 1982 “the year of minimalism.”

I hold firmly that Reich’s music and writing are central to understanding what I have called “early minimalism.” Nevertheless, I have to take account of his eventual rejection of the label, and the part this rejection paradoxically played in defining minimalism. “By the time the term Minimalism had been (re)introduced in the visual arts in 1965,” Edward Strickland writes, “the best of Minimalist painting had long since been done.” Similarly, “by the time the term was affixed to the music, the period of strict Minimalism was long since over and the composers had evolved in distinctly non-minimal directions.” If the music was already non-minimal by the time it became “Minimalism,” what do critics and historians consider the minimal features of what was, at least at one point, an “early” (and accurate) minimalism?

For many writers—both critics during the period in question, and historians in the intervening years—the music we consider minimalist from, for example, 1964-1975 went by other

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4 Joan LaBarbara, “New Music,” High Fidelity/Musical America (November 1977).
5 Time Magazine, (January 3, 1983), 80. The record in question is Steve Reich — Tehillim (ECM 1215, 1982).
names, such as the ones Page offered above: hypnotic music, trance music, or solid-state music. The label Minimalism only appears as national, “middlebrow” critics bemoaned the movement away from earlier austerity while simultaneously praising the (un-minimal) music that resulted, like Reich’s *Music for 18 Musicians* and *Tehillim.*7 Paul Hillier’s stance in his introduction to the 2000 Oxford edition of Reich’s *Writings on Music* is characteristic of the more recent ahistorical treatment of this period. “By the mid-1970s,” Hillier writes, soon pointing specifically to 1976, the style of music based on steady-state tonality, a fixed rhythmic pulse, and unremitting focus on a single, slowly unfolding pattern… had earned the epithet “minimalist”…, although the composers most deeply involved were already beginning to produce works of such size and stature that both the label and the dismissiveness with which it was so often applied began to look mean-spirited and, worse, misguided.8

And indeed the years 1976 to 1982—from *Music for 18* and *Einstein on the Beach* through to Reich’s *Tehillim* and Glass’s *Glassworks* or *Koyaanisqatsi* and *Time*’s “year of minimalism”—have been treated as the obvious stopping point in many of the major histories of minimalism. Wim Mertens—in the only book on minimalism published during the period in question—writes up to the then-current activities of the composers involved, introducing *Music for 18 Musicians* (1974–1976) and *Music for a Large Ensemble* (1978) together as expansions of Reich’s compositional forces, before ending the chapter on Reich with a few words about *Octet* (1979). Mertens similarly ends his chapter on Glass with the 1977 film score and album *Northstar*, as well as the 1980 premiere of the Gandhi opera

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7 While any sort of hierarchical designation of “brows” strongly contradicts much of my political argument in this dissertation, I borrow the term “middlebrow” here from Bernard Gendron for convenience to distinguish (as he does) between the local press (even major, internationally distributed papers like *The New York Times*) and arts magazines that are the primary focus of my argument, and the more broadly circulated national magazines like *Time* and *High Fidelity*. See Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 162 (where, importantly, he labels *Time* “lowbrow” during the mid-1960s).

8 Hillier in Reich, *Writings on Music*, 4. Hillier highlights 1976 for his own collection of pieces well outside my own interest in this period, but that again points to the desire to return “minimalism” to a traditional (and European) direction: in his narrative, *Music for 18 Musicians* and *Einstein* are paired with Andriessen’s *De Staat*, Pärt’s early tintinnabuli style, and Górecki’s *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*. Again, this sort of trajectory is precisely the one I’m arguing against in favor of turning to the no wave scene and the Branca-Chatham trajectory.
Satyagraha. Two decades later, Keith Potter concludes his chapter on Reich with the exact same pieces that Mertens references, similarly focusing on Reich’s increasing instrumental forces as he began taking commissions for ensembles other than his own.\(^9\) While K. Robert Schwarz continues his study of Reich up into the late 1990s with pieces like *The Cave*, he too prioritizes the commissions *Music for a Large Ensemble* and *Octet* as a ramping-up of forces that connects *Music for 18 Musicians* to *Tehillim*. Robert Fink relies on examples from around this period as well, using *Music for 18 Musicians* to consider the broad “culture of repetition” in the late 1970s through comparison to Donna Summers’ “Love to Love You Baby,” and *Octet* to exemplify his argument about the “media sublime.”\(^10\) It is precisely this period of large-scale commissions for European orchestras and operas, of constantly expanding forces, that Branden Joseph critically identifies as the functional end to the metaphysical narrative of minimalism among all of the above writers: the years 1974–1976, and *Music for 18 Musicians* and *Einstein on the Beach* in particular, are read “as illustrative of the increasing sophistication and establishment of minimalism, a trajectory that ends in opera and appearances at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.”\(^11\)

In this chapter, I argue that the establishment in the early 1980s of capital-M Minimalism—as the proper name of a style of composition, in contrast to a minimal or minimalist aesthetic, or the early minimalism I have been drawing from Tony Conrad—was heavily dependent upon what I will call a “double rejection.” I borrow the term from Johan Girard, whose uses it to allude to Reich’s dual refusal of both serialist and chance-based approaches to composition, though I turn his terminology in another direction to consider this series of rejections as central to how minimalism developed.\(^12\) For my purposes, the rejections that institutionalized Minimalism as the style of music

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\(^11\) Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 49-55 and 145-152, respectively.
\(^12\) Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate*, 39.
written by the “big four” were, first, the rejection of the radical authorial politics and practices of early minimalism, and second, of the link critics were constituting between their music and the music actively, frequently, and positively being labelled as “minimalist” in downtown New York in the late 1970s: namely the various “waves” of punk, and “no wave” in particular.

I present my argument by focusing on the critical reception of two composers, closely and collaboratively involved in no wave and punk, who have long self-identified as minimalists, and who once again found themselves in an eventual dispute over authorship: Glenn Branca and Rhys Chatham. Branca and Chatham, during the period of their collaboration from about 1977–1980, were each considered leaders and stars of the SoHo experimental scene by critics like John Rockwell, Tom Johnson, and Greg Sandow. Looking at reviews of their music, which all discursive histories of minimalism have left behind, shows the close interaction between the emergent styles of punk and minimalism during that period, and the indistinct application of the term “minimal” to both styles. It is important to note, however, that my choice of these two artists is essentially a contingent one, resulting from my focus on authorial dispute as both content and method. In this sense, the two are included here primarily to exemplify the dispute between the various minimalisms ongoing in New York at the time and the emergent, institutionalized form of Minimalism proper that appeared and papered over that indistinct plurality. Core to the material practices Branca and Chatham relied on—like many in their community—was that their early music was presented within explicit band formations, closely tied to the punk and no wave scenes in SoHo, and performed in the same galleries, clubs, and lofts as Reich, Glass, Tony Conrad, La Monte Young, and Charlemagne Palestine.

Viewed through the designations I have been developing throughout this dissertation, the early careers of Branca and Chatham mark a third instance of early minimalism, much like the early careers of Young and Conrad, or Riley, Reich, and Glass. Through readings of New York music
criticism, I argue that when Reich and Glass began rejecting the term “minimal,” it was at least in part because when the “solid-state music,” as it was often called in the 1960s and early 1970s, took on the label “Minimalism” among an international audience, there had appeared, in the same neighbourhood and venues, styles of music which prioritized bare-bones amateurishness in the name of an artful rejection of expertise and authority. Perhaps most importantly, this music was coming indistinctly from composers, visual artists, and punks, all banded together under collective names. I rely extensively here on the term indistinct as a means of escaping the postmodern discourses of “genre crossing” and hybridity so typical of describing this scene. Keeping in mind the core Rancièrian conception of politics—that by the time parties are constituted in a Habermassian debate, politics has already been effaced—my concern is to highlight the simultaneous interconstitution of punk, no wave and minimalism; most importantly, to avoid any idea of temporality that would suggest that any one style preceded the others and thus influenced it. All were developed indistinctly, together, in the same spaces and scenes, with critics drawing on the same discourse and terminology to discuss them, forcing them to make distinctions in other ways. For example, around the time the term “minimalism” came into common usage in music discourse in 1976, the Ramones played thirty shows at CBGB and other clubs in support of their first album, released on 23 April, immediately prior to the 24 April premiere of Reich’s Music for 18 Musicians. I contend that it would have subsequently become difficult to hear anything particularly “minimal” about 1977 works like Reich’s Music for a Large Ensemble or Glass’s North Star when they appeared on record store shelves following the first Ramones LP in the spring of 1976, or in comparison to No New York produced by Brian Eno (discussed below) in the fall of 1978. In this sense, Reich and others were not only distancing themselves from the authorial politics of their own early music, which they often recognize as “minimal” up to a given point; they were also refusing to be lumped together with the Ramones, Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, Theoretical Girls, and all other manner of
bands being labelled as “minimal” far, far more often than were Reich or Glass in the New York music press of the time.

Les Révoltes Logiques vs. Les nouvelles philosophes

To position my argument about the multiple minimalisms occurring in the late 1970s, I once again turn to one of Jacques Rancière’s disputes, and to the historiographical method he engaged as a tactic in that dispute, at the same historical moment that the indistinct minimalisms were ongoing in New York. Much of the activity of the collective journal Les Révoltes Logiques around the tenth anniversary of May ’68 (including a special issue titled The Laurels of May) was a critique of the “New Philosophers” who had become media celebrities through their professionalization-via-denunciation of their own militant involvement in the general strikes of 1968. These were the militants Badiou referred to earlier for their “trumpeted renunciations:” “we were mistaken, oh dear, we believed in Communism, we were totalitarians, yes, yes, yes, long live demo-cracy.” In a solitary English article written while New Philosophers like André Glucksmann and Bernard-Henri Lévy—both former Maoist militants—were dominating the popular imagination of radical critique in France, Peter Dews wrote, “a history of political militantism has become an almost indispensable trademark for a New Philosopher.” The public perception of intellectual authority for the New Philosophers was precisely in this “having been there” and subsequently declaring that they had learned the error of their ways. Of the general response to the New Philosophers among the dominant French thinkers at the time, Julian Bourges writes:

Though the New Philosophers’ names were on everyone’s lips in 1977, few had anything positive to say about them. “I think their thought is worthless,” said Gilles Deleuze. Jean-François Lyotard published a mocking pamphlet, Pagan Instructions, on the “Clavel and Lévy affair.” “Latest attraction: the New Philosophy,” wrote Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi: “the

newspapers are calling their regression a renaissance.” … [The New Philosophers] painted themselves as “inheritors” of May 1968... [and], disillusioned after 1968, had become spellbound by the question of unassailable mastery and the impossibility of rebellion.16

Perhaps most importantly, “among the most vocal castigators of New Philosophy were the alleged New Philosophers themselves, who rejected the suggestion that they had a coherent program.” Glucksmann was the best-known of the New Philosophers for his 1975 book La Cuisinière et le mangeur d’hommes, which argued, against his gauchiste past, that Marxism is a philosophy of totalitarianism that leads inherently to the Gulag. When Glucksmann was asked “if he considered himself a ‘New Philosopher,’ [he] replied ‘Absolutely not’.”17

Glucksmann in particular drew much authority and respect from a photo captioned “the philosophers are in the streets,” which showed Foucault speaking through a megaphone at a May protest, while an elderly Sartre and young Glucksmann stood nearby. For both Ross and Rancière, it is specifically the lack of distinction between intellectuals and others in the street that made the May events notable. In an extended critique of the New Philosophers in Les Révoltes Logiques Rancière, in collaboration with his wife Danielle, acknowledges that

What enables the words of the “new philosophers” to crown the edifice of the intellectuals’ new social power is the legitimacy they have acquired in activist struggle. If earlier philosophers prided themselves on not seeing the potholes in their path, it is essential to the brand image of their new counterparts to have—in Maoist terms—come down from the horse... There were quite a few philosophers in the street, in 1968 and after, but they did not emphasize their presence, which was certainly not seen as that of representatives of a corporation. It was rather a refusal to identify themselves with such a position that drove them there.18

Ross develops this same line of thought, writing that intellectuals “had no specific place in May, no particular role; they were like everyone else, part of the crowd.” They were figures who, in the Maoist terminology of the time, “had once gotten down off their horses in May to gather the

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17 Ibid.
flowers, but who were once more firmly back in the saddle, reclaiming the specificity and prestige of a social category that May had disrupted and put into question.”

For Ross and the Rancières, then, the importance of intellectuals during May was specifically that they had given up their importance to join the crowd; in a country that has long treated its intellectuals as rock stars, it was specifically in contributing to the indistinct masses that the students and intellectuals were valued alongside, rather than above, everyone else.

Many historical specifics get in the way of making a direct homology between the authority the New Philosophers spun from their earlier political militancy and the rejection of the label Minimalism by composers like Reich and Glass. Nevertheless, several facts about the chronological simultaneity make the comparison valuable. A height of militancy in 1968—whether the rejection of authority in May or the “double rejection” of serialism and chance written up in “Music as a Gradual Process”—led to the early-1970s’ split allegiances to those earlier forms of optimism; 1975–1977 saw the publication of Bernard-Henri Lévy and André Glucksmann’s dominant texts and the widespread critique of these New Philosophers from the French philosophical tradition, as well as the first commissions of both Reich and Glass for European orchestras, and La Monte Young’s move into the “palatial” Mercantile Exchange building *Dream House* with (he thought) infinite funding from the Dia Foundation’s oil money. In 1981, *Les Révoltes Logiques* published its last issue, as the ten-person collective involved in its creation, editing, publication and printing announced that they had “debts instead of salaries” from trying to run the journal on their own terms for six years;

the Kitchen hosted its ten-year retrospective gala “Aluminum Nights” (discussed in the conclusion); and *High Fidelity* published Page’s “Minimalist Primer.”

In 1982, the New Philosophers were the dominant public representatives of French intellectual thought, constantly declaring their

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renunciations of former radicalism; and *Time* magazine announced, with the release of *Tehillim*, the “year of minimalism,” while Reich, in the *New York Times*, assured readers that “minimalism is dead—but I’m not!” What is shared are the methods by which former radicalism is transformed into institutional privilege and authority through what Ross calls the “confiscation” of collective revolt. Central to this confiscation is highlighting the “individual itineraries of a few so-called leaders, spokesmen, or representatives (especially if those representatives have all renounced their past errors).”

The collective specifically criticized the kinds of confiscations and renunciations attributed at the time to the New Philosophers: “Leave lessons to those who make a profession of revolution or a commerce out of its impossibility.” The only possible “lesson of history,” they continued, is to “recognize the moment of a choice, of the unforeseeable, to draw from history neither lessons nor, exactly, explanations, but the principle of a vigilance toward what there is that is singular in each call to order and in each confrontation.” The goal, Rancière said in a more recent interview, is not to learn “lessons” from history, but to “destabilize it, to take away some of its obviousness.” Bruno Bosteels has highlighted the long centrality of this destabilization in Rancière’s development during the *Révoltes Logiques* period: “For Rancière… the purpose of thought always lies in following this double procedure: to reinsert (a discourse, a practice, a regime of doing, seeing or speaking into its system of constraints) and to derange (this system of constraints itself).” The reason for Rancière’s

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26 Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism*, 131. The full quotation Bosteels summarizes, in Emiliano Battista’s translation, is: “That was the purpose of the double operation performed here upon an exemplary discourse of this sort: to re-inscribe it in its history, that is, in the system of practical and discursive constraints that allowed it to be uttered at all; and to surprise its articulations by forcing it to answer other questions than those posed by the complacent partners it had picked out for itself, and by reinserting its argumentation into the concatenation of words used, now as in the past, to articulate both the inevitability of oppression and the hopes for liberation.” See Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*, 123.
turn to the workers’ archives in both *Les Révoltes Logiques* and *La nuit des prolétaires*, he recently told interviewers,

was to start from the meeting—and misunderstanding—between Marx and working-class political theory. My idea hinged on the *Manuscripts of 1844*. Roughly speaking, while Marx was writing these inaugural essays, what was happening down among the workers in 1844? What did Marx notice; what didn’t he notice? That was always the idea: not to go back to the original origins, but to the origins of dispute and dissensus.27

As he wrote at the start of his first article for *Les Révoltes Logiques* in 1975, his “first intention was to track down the initial identity of the specific thinking of the working class that the overlay of Marxism had covered up.”28 Central, then, is how the things that Marx missed or misunderstood produced the possibility of returning to dissensual origins.

Again, while I am not claiming a direct homology between the rejections of the New Philosophers and those of the minimalists, I draw much from Rancière’s historiographical method and the ongoing confiscations which led him to it. My task in this chapter is similar to his return to the dissensual origins of Marxism within Marx’s misrepresentation of French workers. Drawing extensively on the mainstream New York music press coverage of the community within which Branca and Chatham performed, and keeping a close eye to the presence of the word “minimal” in that writing, I am interested in seeing what the emergent, major discourse of Minimalism from about 1977 to 1982 covered up. My claim is not that Branca and Chatham are more (or less) authentically minimalist than Reich or Glass, or Young or Conrad; rather, I aim to show that each dispute results from very similar material practices in early collaborative careers—what I have been calling “early minimalism.” In this sense, I am less interested in this chapter in staging the dispute between Branca and Chatham than in using writing about them to stage a dispute between minimalism and Minimalism. We can look at the tactics utilized by the dominant composers and in the major papers.

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28 Jacques Rancière, “The Proletarian and His Double, Or, the Unknown Philosopher,” in *Staging the People: the Proletarian and His Double* (New York: Verso), 21.
as they responded to the multiple minimalisms still ongoing in New York, to observe how a term which explicitly named a revolt against authority is confiscated towards a singular, authorized meaning.

Building “Minimal” Consensus

Edward Strickland, Keith Potter, and Peter Shelley have offered the most thorough overviews of the discursive development of the concept “minimalism.” Strickland was first to draw together a number of important precursors prior to the term taking on any denominative consistency, and most subsequent scholarship of this type has necessarily built from, supplemented, or critiqued his overview. A handful of critical events have become canonic, many of which are closely tied to the (slightly earlier) development of the term in the visual arts: Barbara Rose’s essay “ABC Art” which ties Young’s music to minimalist visual art; Jill Johnston’s 1964 review of the first Theatre of Eternal Music performance; John Perreault’s 1968 article on Young. Donal Henahan, in his negative review of an early performance of Four Organs, used the term, Strickland writes, “more specifically than Perreault’s relatively casual adjective, though still not in a specifically denominative manner.” Michael Nyman’s first interview with Steve Reich, in 1970, is often connected to Reich’s 1972 Artforum interview with Emily Wasserman, in which he concedes that “there is some relationship between my music and any Minimal art” in that an artist like Sol LeWitt “will set up an idea and work it through rigorously.” Pride of place frequently goes to Village Voice critic Tom

30 Barbara Rose, “ABC Art,” Art in America, October/November 1965, 57-69.
31 Jill Johnston, “Music: La Monte Young,” Village Voice (November 19, 1964); see Chapter 2.
Johnson, who “first applied [minimalism] explicitly and directly to the music as a movement or shared style in” September 1972 in his article “La Monte Young, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, Philip Glass.” Nyman is generously credited with writing *Experimental Music* in 1973 ahead of the 1974 publication, placing him only slightly after Johnson—though Strickland expends little time on tracing priority between the two in their usage. John Rockwell, another New York critic who will be of central importance below, used the term widely around 1974, noting in particular that Glass’s music relied on an “austerely minimalist aesthetic.” A few months later, Johnson continued the stronger designation of the label, referring to the tape music of Charlemagne Palestine as “perhaps the most extreme form of musical minimalism” he had yet encountered.

Despite this flurry of applications of the term, Strickland contends that its frequent usage by Johnson, Rockwell, and Nyman around 1974 “did not cause either a terminological or musical revolution” because the “music itself had yet to attain mainstream acceptance as classical music.” Instead, it was only with the popular and institutional successes of 1976—Reich’s *Music for 18 Musicians* premiered at Town Hall on April 24, and Glass’s *Einstein on the Beach* at the Metropolitan Opera on November 21—“that mainstream critics began looking in earnest for a label… and Minimalism… slowly became a household word, at least in more progressive households.” Strickland is rather clear in his critical position: while the word appears more or less concretely, more or less assertively, and more or less frequently from the mid 1960s on, it only takes on a strong denominative consistency following the major 1976 premieres by Glass and Reich. He further makes the case—

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39 Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 244; my emphasis.
without drawing enough from it—that as the term began to appear in heavy circulation, it was already being dismissed. This occurred “first and most forcefully” in Joan LaBarbara’s 1977 review in *High Fidelity/Musical America* where she suggests that the term “minimalism” is “purely laughable to label such rich and complex music” as “the minimalists” were making at the time.  

Around the same time, Peter G. Davis wrote that Glass was “on the verge of romanticizing his minimalist vision.” Tim Page’s 1981 dismissal in *High Fidelity* (which will be of central importance below) was likely the most nationally read writing in which Minimalism is outlined as a style of music with an inadequate name.

More recent overviews of the discourse of minimalism have largely supplemented or corrected Strickland. Peter Shelley’s is the most recent and thorough, and while it offers an incredibly productive archival overview of the term’s appearance, I think it more helpful to examine it as a critique of both Shelley’s and Strickland’s method. What quickly becomes clear in reading these scholars—and Potter can be included here as well—is that their methodological approach is to track the progressive teleological development of the term “minimalism” as the word for the body of music that we have retroactively labelled minimalist; we are back in a proleptical image of minimalism as transcendent metaphysics. In overviews of this kind—and here I will exemplify them through Shelley’s most recent one—readings can be generally split into two categories: first, pieces of criticism that use the term “minimalism,” but require qualification in that they do not precisely align with the meaning of the term we expect today; and second, pieces of criticism that accurately reflect the aesthetic of minimalism as we today understand it, but use a different label than “minimalism.”

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43 For example, when he writes of Johnson’s December 30 1974 piece on David Behrman; see Shelley, “Rethinking Minimalism,” 23.
44 As when Shelley outlines Johnson’s use of the term “hypnotic school” for Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass; see Shelley, “Rethinking Minimalism,” 22.
discourse of minimalism did not spring from critics’ minds fully-formed, and carefully follow the 
u nuances and subtleties of reception, there is a general methodological fault in trying to build up the 
discourse around dominant figures and applications of closely related terminology; minor 
contingencies like “hypnotic music” describing minimalism almost perfectly are rounded off and 
treated as clear steps in the progressive move towards the major “metaphysical” image of 
minimalism Joseph has so accurately criticized.

That this is a methodological fault in Shelley’s work is particularly evident in that he cites all 
of his readings of Tom Johnson from Johnson’s volume of selected writings, *The Voice of New Music*, 
rather than directly from the pages of the *Village Voice*. Some notable omissions result, both in 
Shelley’s research and in Johnson’s clear effort to flawlessly narrate his prophetic vision of 
minimalism in that volume. While scholars frequently note that Johnson’s first review was of Reich’s 
*Drumming* premiere in 1971, that he grouped together Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass in 1972, or that 
he labelled Charlemagne Palestine’s music a radical form of minimalism in 1974, no one has 
remarked on the very strong application of the term minimalism that Johnson used in writing about 
Rhys Chatham in March 1972.

Rhys Chatham became the Kitchen’s first music programmer at the end of 1971—a position 
that he held until 1973, and then again in 1976–1978. During the first months of his programming, 
Chatham put on a concert of his own music that drew a review from Johnson in the *Voice*. Despite 
the existing narrations of the term’s appearance, this review of Chatham’s performance strikes me as 
the earliest strong use of the term “minimal” in Johnson’s writing.45 The March 1972 article, titled 
“A Surprise Under the Piano”—only three months after the review of *Drumming* that began

suggests that his March 30, 1972 article “The Minimal Slow-Motion Approach: Alvin Lucier and others” marks the “first 
time that the new music was described critically as ‘minimal’.” See Tom Johnson, *The Voice of New Music: New York City 
Johnson’s career at the *Voice* (and which did not include the word “minimal” in any form⁴⁶)—reviews Chatham’s concert “Music with Voice and Gongs” at the Kitchen. Johnson writes that the closing piece for four amplified gongs “allowed [the gongs] to do their own beautiful thing, with a minimum of human tampering.” While the adjective minimum here is a soft descriptor within the kind of reading set up by Strickland and others, it is closely followed by the proclamation that Chatham’s music was “a radical new kind of minimalism which almost negated the whole idea of composition.” Here, the close proximity of two applications—“minimum” as a descriptor, and “minimalism” more explicitly—encourages consideration of the concept’s consistency. Indeed, the second usage recalls Johnson’s frequently highlighted claim two years later about Palestine’s tape music as “the most extreme form of musical minimalism” the critic had yet encountered. What is *minimal*, across both usages in the article on Chatham, is not the sonic materials; instead, *it is that the composer’s interventions in the sound world are kept to a minimum*, and that this refusal to tamper created a music in which *the traditional concept of composition was “almost negated.”* This seems to get at the problem of distinguishing “minimal” (which he often applied to Palestine, Spiegel, Behrman, and Chatham) and “hypnotic” (Young, Riley, Reich, Glass) in Johnson’s writing. For Johnson, minimalism has more to do with authorship than sound; though minimal authorship is surely audible in the sonic product, emphasis is placed on the composer’s minimal involvement in producing that sound.

Strickland’s and Shelley’s approaches strike me as very much part of the consensual maintenance of the metaphysical narrative of minimalism—in Shelley’s case, even beyond Joseph’s critique. Even in the discursive overviews, which do an otherwise excellent job of tracking the term’s arrival, the archival search is undertaken from a very specific position and with certain goals in mind. It is for this reason that I think an engagement with writing on Branca and Chatham is particularly useful. I do not simply aim to introduce two more characters into the metaphysical narrative; rather,

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I hope that adding these two relative outsiders can provide the foundations for redistributing the limits of what we consider minimalism and how that discourse was first concretized. Perhaps more importantly, as I will show further below, reading through a specific historical moment (roughly 1977 through 1982) and pursuing where the term “minimal” does appear—and just as importantly, where it does not—makes for a clearer conception of its circulation at that point and thus, what actual, material sounds and styles Reich, Glass and critics writing on them had in mind when they rejected the term “minimal” as inadequate. My goal, in short, is to draw on the method of dissensus: to produce a split between the sense of a word and the sensory input associated with it, or within the common sense of the word, towards the goal of reconstructing what sounds composers like Steve Reich or Philip Glass might have had in their ears when the term “minimal” came up as critics tried to lump them in with punk, no wave, and drone musics.

Bernard Gendron provides a productive means for considering the discourse of minimalism outside Minimalism proper during this period. His overview—building on Strickland’s—considers the development of the aesthetics of “minimalism” by early punk writers like Lester Bangs. Gendron names Bangs the “chief theorist” of punk, summarizing his philosophy under three themes: “sheer aggressiveness and loudness,” “minimalism,” and “defiant, rank amateurism.” While Gendron’s outline of the Bangs/punk aesthetic as a whole is fascinating, I will focus on his understanding of “minimalism” to consider the discursive centrality of a variety of interrelated senses of the “minimal” in music in late 1970s downtown New York, and, importantly, the various minimalisms scholars have ignored in favour of building a singular understanding. Gendron writes:

As a label, “minimalism” entered art world discourses rather late, only in the mid-1960s, when it became a favorite aesthetic buzzword in painting and sculpture reduced to bare-bones abstraction…. By the early 1970s, “minimalism” was being applied to the stripped-down, repetitive pattern-oriented music of Lamonte Young [sic], Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass—*not to their liking, one might add* [Gendron here cites Strickland’s overview of the term]. By the mid-seventies New York rock criticism, operating within the hothouse

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atmosphere of the New York art world and increasingly receptive to Bangs’s punk philosophy, was actively incorporating the art label “minimalism” into its discourses about the CBGB scene.\(^{48}\)

Bangs’s punk philosophy tracked the development of a freer, noise-oriented, and less song-based form of rock music that was developed initially by the Velvet Underground and the Stooges, which straddled an entirely different relationship between artfulness and populism than the one explored by groups like the Who and what Bangs called “lumbering sloths like Led Zeppelin.” Gendron centrally reads this distinction through what he calls the “art/pop dialectic;” after initially outlining it in relation to punk, he turns his attention to how “minimalism” functioned in “promotional jargon for the CBGB underground… [as] the productive dissonance of art and pop.” And Gendron argues that the group that appeared as the “ultimate and paradigmatic minimalists”—producing this indistinct dissonance between art and pop—was, for critics at the time, the Ramones. Within their music, the term “minimalism” served a dual discursive function:

- On the pop side, “minimalism” implied simplicity and adherence without ornamentation to a basic universal rock framework, which in turn implied accessibility, familiarity, and eminent commerciality…. On the other hand, “minimalism” is clearly an art term betokening a certain self-conscious approach to musical materials—a certain conceptuality, certain views about history and tradition, even a certain detachment.\(^{49}\)

There is a problem with Gendron’s reading of “minimalism,” however. None of the critics that he cites directly uses the term minimalism; minimalism is Gendron’s own term to summarize a particular aesthetic value within the punk scene, which he sees as the relationship to a “universal rock framework” that refuses the flighty song forms, improvisation, solos, jams, and so on of many of the dominant stadium rock bands of the time. (This distinction is heavily racialized, with many of the new wave and no wave bands entirely erasing any African American influence from their music,

\(^{48}\) Gendron, *Montmartre*, 238; my emphasis.

\(^{49}\) Gendron, *Montmartre*, 255.
in contrast to most rock music of the time.\textsuperscript{50}) The first time “minimalism” directly appears in this section of Gendron’s book is in a quotation from Tommy Ramone, cited decades later in Clinton Heylin’s oral “pre-history for a post-punk world:” “Whenever we had to find someone to play with us, we’d use the Talking Heads. Even though the Ramones played hard and raunchy, conceptually there were a lot of similarities: the minimalism.”\textsuperscript{51} Later Chris Frantz of Talking Heads, again reflecting back on the period in question, is quoted as saying: “The Ramones, in their purist minimalism, could be viewed more abstractly ‘not just [as] a band,’ but as ‘a real good idea’.” Indeed, minimalism, “with doses of irony and parody,” Gendron writes, “became the recognized aesthetic trademark of the Talking Heads as well as of the Ramones.”\textsuperscript{52}

Nevertheless—and Gendron surely knew this, but did not directly need to quote these sources to make his case—these two bands, and many others, were frequently labelled minimalists directly in the rock press of the late 1970s. This was particularly true of English publications like \textit{Melody Maker} and \textit{New Musical Express}, who used the concept of “minimalism” to clearly distinguish a feature of the American punk scene from its counterpart in England. Reflecting on this difference, Michael Watts writes that “Patti Smith, Lenny Kaye, Tom Verlaine of Television, and Jonathan Richman… are veritable PhD’s of punk.” For Watts, writing from England in September 1976, New York “punk is Minimalism (I think it means making a virtue out of very little),” in contrast to the aggressive assault of the British bands.\textsuperscript{53} Indeed, when Talking Heads were put on the cover of the \textit{Village Voice} following their third ever concert in 1975, James Wolcott wrote that they are “one of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{50} For a consideration of the racialized implications of the split between the various downtown musics of the late 1970s—downtown and punk on the one hand, disco and hip hop on the other—see Gendron 2002, 254-7. The best known contemporary, critical take on racism in the 1970s punk scene is by Bangs himself. See Lester Bangs, “The White Noise Supremacists,” in \textit{White Riot: Punk and the Politics of Race} (New York: Verso, 2011); the article was originally published in the April 30, 1979 issue of \textit{The Village Voice}.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Tommy Ramone, quoted in Clinton Heylin, \textit{From the Velvets to the Voidoids: A Pre-Punk History for a Post-Punk World} (London: Penguin, 1993), 210; quoted in Gendron, \textit{Montmartre}, 258.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Michael Watts, “So Shock me, punks;” \textit{Melody Maker} (Sept 11, 1976).
\end{itemize}
the most intriguing off-the-wall bands in New York. Musically, they’re minimalists”—and this at a
time when the term had only barely surfaced as an identity for composers. The title of the article—
“A Conservative Impulse in the New York Rock Underground”—suggests that minimalism in rock
is a backwards-looking mellowing of bombastic 1970s rock.54

In the summer of 1977, Nick Kent wrote that Talking Heads had immediately taken their
place among “Television, Patti Smith, the Ramones, and Heartbreakers” as part of the CBGB scene.
“Convenient tags like ‘punk’ and ‘art-rock’ found themselves strange bed-fellows in numerous
articles consummated by the inevitable bandying of the term ‘minimalism.’” For Kent as well,
minimalism was a stark contrast to the “gashed-up rock” represented a few years earlier by the New
York Dolls. He asserts that this minimalism marked a “new austerely dressed-down form of rock”
for which Talking Heads were the dominant practitioners.55 Mick Farren, also writing from England,
offers a similar perspective. He refutes the belief that the Ramones draw on the noisy legacy of the
New York Dolls, the MC5 or the Who; rather, Farren claims, their music recalls “the Shangri-Las,
the Ronettes” and all the rest of the “baroque” school of early sixties, Phil Spector pop. The
difference is that “they’ve taken that music, and… they’ve removed the arrangement, the harmonies,
the twenty-piece orchestra, the introduction, the coda, and even the melody.… This is minimalism in
its highest and purest form.” He concludes, recognizing one of the central critical problems of the
coming years, by noting that “one of the crosses the minimalist has to bear is that the lumpen
public always tends to assume that his constant efforts to reduce everything to its basic components is a
symptom of stupidity and lack of talent.”56 The British press continued its effort to make sense of

56 Mick Farren, “Notes on Minimalism (or Learning To Live With The Ramones),” NME (May 21, 1977). Consider, for
instance, Gunther Schuller speaking about minimalism in the October 1991 issue of Musician: “Minimalist culture is now
dead or dying. All the former minimalists, like John Adams or Steve Reich, are hopping off the bandwagon and saying
‘Me? I’m not a minimalist. I never was a minimalist.’ That’s like the Nazis who said they were never Nazis. It makes me
sick. By definition minimalism is minimal. When we have all this maximal music that we’ve achieved over 700 years of
development, to suddenly throw all of that out and reduce it to this primitive music is really sad. Of course, that
the New York rock scene even into 1980, when an article in *Melody Maker* again referred to the “the infectious minimalism of the Ramones [which] has been with us for six years now.”

Talking Heads and the Ramones became the dominant models of this self-conscious, intellectualized version of American punk-as-minimalism. What’s more, the term is applied sincerely, without claiming its inadequacy; that is, it is a more direct and literal application than was the case, at the same time, of “Minimalism” among the big four.

“Minimalism,” as I will continue to show, meant a lot of things throughout the 1970s in New York. In the early years, it referred to a style of visual art in which an idea was set up and allowed to rigorously run through a process, which critics immediately recognized as heavily influential on Reich (via Sol LeWitt) in particular. Around this same time, it became an important adjective for critics like Johnson and Nyman, who used it rather consistently to refer to music involving little contrast between materials such that most of the material is present at the outset, as well as music in which the authorial voice is defined by as little tampering as possible in the resultant sound or formal structure. When rock critics picked up on the term, it was used, as Gendron notes, to reference the self-conscious conceptualism of the art world, as well as to the stripping down of song structures to their bare bones. It was only after this punk usage that the term took on consistency as the proper name of a genre defined by repetition and drone, as exemplified by emergent household names like Steve Reich, Philip Glass, Terry Riley, and, shortly thereafter, John Adams.

I would like now to turn to other reviews from this later period through coverage of two of the dominant downtown composers of the period: Rhys Chatham and Glenn Branca. In adding

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wouldn’t have been a success, except that the *New York Times* and a few other would-be tastemakers in the United States got behind that movement. They committed themselves, they invested in it and they sold it to a dumb, musically illiterate public.” See Josef Woodard (in an article ironically titled), “Hail! Hail! Gunther Schuller,” *Musician* (October 1991), 28. 57 Patrick Humphries, “In search of the lost chord,” *Melody Maker* (Oct 11, 1980).
these reviews onto the existing pile of uses of minimalism, I am not claiming to be repairing
Strickland’s or anyone else’s errors in their surveys of the term. I am, however, pointing out that the
term was in broader circulation, and that most research has prioritized reviews of the “big four.” I
am merely adding two more names; they are admittedly contingent, and a similar point could have
been made by focusing on Charlemagne Palestine, or by focusing exclusively on Johnson’s reviews,
and so on.58 That is, my method is different in that I have chosen a pair of names and a delimited
period of time to see what “minimalism” emerges, rather than sifting through content to build an
idealized image. I want to show that, while authors for major publications like High Fidelity and Time
made a central point in their writing about Minimalism (vis-à-vis Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass) to
note the inadequacy of the term, downtown critics like Johnson, John Rockwell, Greg Sandow, and
Jon Pareles, when writing about Branca or Chatham, frequently labelled their music minimal without
any cynical distance—that is, without feeling the need to reject the term as inaccurate or insufficient.

Rhys Chatham’s Minimalist Education

The value of considering early press on Rhys Chatham within reception histories of minimalism
becomes immediately evident. As a result of Chatham’s involvement as the Kitchen’s first music
director, he begins to appear several years earlier than Branca in the New York music press. Indeed,
it seems that Chatham was centrally involved in what “minimalism” was and would become in the
early 1970s—not only through his own compositions, but also his mode of performing, curating,
and sharing resources within a broader community. More importantly, Chatham can perhaps be
viewed as the first composer to have been pedagogically steeped in the early music of Young, Riley,

58 Indeed, even Johnson seems to have chosen to privilege a certain narrative in his early criticism. In a collection of his
Voice essays, The Voice of New Music, he follows Strickland and others in placing his first uses of “minimal” in the Village
Voice later than was actually the case. Tom Johnson, The Voice of New Music: New York City 1972-1982 (Paris: Editions 75,
1989).
Conrad, Reich, and Glass while they were all still involved in collaborative “early minimalism;” like each of them, Chatham’s turn towards minimalism was a specific rejection of an earlier attachment to academic serialism.

This rejection, as part of what I will call Rhys Chatham’s “minimalist education,” formed at a 1969 Terry Riley concert as part of a series called the Electric Ear. The (very 1960s) intermedia concert was well attended, and even drew a positive review from the notoriously conservative Harold C. Schonberg in the Times.\footnote{Harold C. Schonberg, “Music: The Medium Electric, the Message Hypnotic” \textit{New York Times} (April 15, 1969).} A 1981 profile of Chatham by John Rockwell singled out the importance of this concert for the young composer. Chatham is quoted as saying, “[i]n 1968 [sic], the Electric Circus had a Monday evening series of new-music concerts called ‘The Electric Ear.’ At the time, I didn’t even like tonal music, but I heard Terry Riley, and that was [a] big influence.”\footnote{John Rockwell, “Classical Road to Rock” \textit{New York Times} (April 17, 1981).} Chatham further discussed the event in our conversation,

I went to hear Terry Riley. I was this young composer and I thought “I’m gonna hear some really good noise!” and I got there and saw this long haired guy with red hair and striped bell bottom pants playing circus organ! And I was absolutely disgusted… because at the time, tonality was completely out. If you wanted to be a hip composer it had to be dissonant. So I went downstairs and asked for my money back. It was $5 to get in, which you can imagine what $5 was like for a 17-year-old in 1968 [sic]… And they wouldn’t give it to me so I said “Aw what the heck, I’ll go back and listen.” And I listen, and I said, “you know this isn’t so bad!” Of course it was Rainbow in Curved Air—like a long, hour and a half version. And then there was an intermission and then they played Poppy Nogood with David Rosenboom playing viola. And all I can say is I walked in there a serialist and I walked out converted as a hardcore minimalist.\footnote{Author’s conversation with Rhys Chatham, Skype, September 2014.}

Chatham told me that, following the Riley concert, he became involved in Morton Subotnick’s studio at New York University, where he met composers Marianna Amacher, Charlemagne Palestine, and Ingram Marshall. “And so, there was Charlemagne doing these pieces of long duration and I said, ‘Well I like pieces of long duration too.’ I had just been to see the Terry Riley concert. And Marianne was into music of long duration too.” He continues,
composers back then, on the Downtown scene, couldn’t play at McMillan Hall at Columbia because we weren’t doing the right type of music. And neither was Philip and neither was Steve. And so the way all those guys handled it, Philip and Steve before Charlemagne and me of course, and La Monte and Terry ten years before anybody—the way we handled it, we realized we could do the concerts in people’s living rooms in SoHo.\(^6\)

The realization led Chatham to set up a music series to provide himself and his friends a space to perform their music. As he told me, “I modeled the series I did at the Kitchen on Thais Lathem’s series Monday nights at the Electric Circus” — including Riley’s performance two years earlier.\(^6\) It was thus out of that first minimalist experience that Chatham became a “minimalist” not only in aesthetic orientation, but also in relation to programming, institutional relations, and performance practice; in the 1981 profile with Rockwell, he would retroactively label it a “first epiphany.”

Chatham’s first series as a concert programmer began in October of 1971 and already shows the strong influence of Young and Conrad. The October 4 concert featured works by Laurie Spiegel alongside pieces by Chatham with titles like Composition Equalizer, Composition 15.iv.71, and Journey of the Sine Wave Generator and the Square Wave that clearly reflect Young’s influence not only sonically but in titling practices (Figure 4.1). On March 11, 1972, Chatham booked Conrad for the first performance of Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plane, featuring Conrad on “violin, intervals from the just intonation families of 2, 3, 7, 11, and 17,” Chatham on “long string drone” and Spiegel on “pulsing bass.”\(^6\) A few months later, on May 25, “Rhys Chatham & Associates” presented the New York premiere of “Dr. Drone in Concert performing his quiet version of ‘composition in the key of 60 cycles’.” The piece again shows the overlapping influences of Conrad and Young, and reminds that the two were still on good terms; indeed, the work seems a direct outgrowth of the Theatre of Eternal Music, which Young had reformed with Chatham included as one of the singers. Labelling

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\(^6\) Ibid.

\(^6\) Ibid.

the music “in the key of 60 cycles” recalls Conrad’s writing from *Film Culture*: “Outside the domain of 60 cycle current, our music will fall less resonantly on the city ear, the most tonal of all cultures.”\(^6^5\)

Indeed, Conrad wrote the program notes for the concert, as prominently noted on the poster (Figure 4.2).\(^6^6\)

A few months later, over the summer, Young and Conrad both headed to Kassel, Germany for Documenta V, at which the *Dream House* was presented (with Conrad hired to maintain Young’s oscillators), as was some of Conrad’s film work. When the performances were done, Conrad headed to Wümme where he made his record with Faust, *Outside the Dream Syndicate*.\(^6^7\) Chatham recently claimed that he felt slighted at the time, as he had been involved in developing the music with Conrad. In a 2008 interview, Chatham told Alan Licht that he was “really jealous… and a little pissed off” about Conrad recording the album with Faust. “Because we had developed the music as a trio—Tony, Laurie Spiegel, and myself. And then Tony went on tour and that record with Faust came out, and I was so sad. But I got over it really quickly. I liked what they were doing so much and I still listen to the album with great pleasure.”\(^6^8\) Chatham also booked Young for a concert on December 13. While the Kitchen could not afford to pay Young any money, he was offered 100% of the door sales—a concert agreement which Young typically would not accept. As Chatham recalls it, Marian Zazeela insisted that they accept the offer as the pair were particularly cash strapped that week and needed money for groceries. Young’s concession was to put on a “performance” that was

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\(^{6^6}\) After repeated requests, Chatham, whose assistance greatly contributed to the state of this chapter, was unable to find a copy of Conrad’s notes. It seems, however, that they were an updated version of his 1966 “Inside the Dream Syndicate” essay.

\(^{6^7}\) The album was released with almost no notice, and remained, as Jeff Hunt has said, an album of extreme fringe interest even for fans of the avant-garde. Hunt subsequently released it on his record label, Table of the Elements, in 1993 with twenty minutes of extra material. In 2003, Table of the Elements also released a 2CD thirtieth anniversary edition. For further context, see liner notes by Branden Joseph and Jim O’Rourke to Superior Viaducts 2016 vinyl reissue of *Outside the Dream Syndicate*. See also Branden Joseph, *The Rob and the Cooked: Tony Conrad and Beverly Grant in Europe* (Buchhandlung Walter Konig GmbH, 2012).

simply a listening session to Young and Zazeela’s record 31 VII 69 10:26 - 10:49 PM / 23 VIII 64 2:50:45 - 3:11 AM The Volga Delta (more commonly known as The Black Record): “So we had the record player and La Monte put the needle on and we listened to the record. And on one side it was a version of just Marian and he and the Moog synthesizer playing The Tortoise, his dreams and journeys, and on the other side was the gong piece. And the concert finished and Marian was very pleased, ‘well La Monte we got our grocery money’”69 (Figure 4.3).

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69 Author’s conversation with Rhys Chatham, Skype, September 2014. I think Chatham’s memory is slightly off here: as the poster notes that it was a preview of a new LP, the concert more likely featured the music from the 1972 Dream House 78’ 17” LP released on Shandar in 1974 (and subsequently reissued by Aguirre Records in 2016).
Rhys Chatham & Associates present:

ny. premier - **DRONE In Concert**
performing his quiet version of
"composition in the key of 60 cycles"

**video projection by Krut Harjolisson**

with program notes by Tony Conrad

Thursday 25 May 1972 midnight

*Figure 0.2 May 25, 1972 program Rhys Chatham, "Dr. Drone in Concert," with program notes by Tony Conrad. The Kitchen online archives.*

*Figure 0.3 December 13, 1972 poster for La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela at the Kitchen. The Kitchen online archive.*
Tom Johnson was impressed both with the new venue and its precocious young music director. He profiled Chatham in an October 1972 piece titled “Someone’s in the Kitchen—with Music.” There Chatham is described as “a 23-year-old [sic] composer,” and “remarkably open-minded,” though “not the ambitious type that you might expect to be organizing concerts.” The Kitchen is described as “simply a space where composers can organize their own concerts,” in contrast to the institutionalized contemporary music venues and performance organizations around New York. The major contribution was in the concert format, as particularly highlighted by events in the upcoming second season, and in particular the “one-man” events by composers like Laurie Spiegel, Jim Burton, Judith Sherman, Garrett List, Phil Niblock, Tony Conrad, Alvin Lucier, and others. This “one-man format,” Johnson explained to his readers, was a welcome contrast to the typical art music program consisting of pieces by several different artists—a format in which “many remarkable ideas have gone by almost unnoticed, simply because they were stuffed into the middle of a concert which contained a potpourri of conflicting styles.” In contrast, the Kitchen allows artists to craft their own presentation context, giving their (often drone-based, or duration-oriented, or repetitive) music the space and time required to best present itself. As in Riley’s In C premiere, or the Theatre of Eternal Music loft concerts, composers now had a venue that allowed authorship and presentation to be properly framed. What’s more, the composers themselves were in almost every single case involved in the performance—a situation unheard of in uptown venues.


71 Chatham was, even more precociously, only 19 at the time. It’s unclear whether Chatham and the Kitchen had lied to Johnson about his age in an effort to be taken more seriously, or whether this was a simple mistake.

72 Typically a phrase like this would be followed by a bracketed, “and they almost are always one-man,” though the Kitchen’s programming, and indeed the downtown scene of this period, represents what strikes me as an unprecedentedly high ratio of female to male composers and performers on programs. In this article, only two of thirteen composers mentioned directly by name are female, though in many later programs and festivals like New Music, New York, or the Kitchen benefits, women experienced an unprecedentedly high representation that I would suggest, though without hard statistics, even remains uncommon today in new music festivals. Similarly, the no wave bands examined below featured something resembling gender parity across most groups, with women like Nina Canal, Pat Place, Ikue Mori, Barbara Ess, Christine Hahn, and many others playing dominant roles.
In 1973 Chatham passed off the music director job to the cellist and composer Arthur Russell—recently arrived from the west coast—so that Chatham could focus on his own music; he would later take up the position again from 1976–1978. But at this earlier date, Chatham decided that he “had had to break away from La Monte” because the pieces that he was writing “ sounded very very much like Charlemagne Palestine or La Monte Young.” In the spring of 1976, Chatham had what he would call (beginning in Rockwell’s 1981 profile) his “second epiphany,” following the first one at Electric Ear; in this case, the composer Peter Gordon (of the Love of Life Orchestra) brought Chatham to see a Ramones concert celebrating the release of their first LP, The Ramones; the concert was probably in April or May of 1976.73 As Chatham had been working extensively with Young, Conrad, and Palestine during the period, and writing his own drone-inspired electronic music, his first experience of the Ramones was one of harmonic complexity: “Those guys, their music was highly complex. They were playing two more chords than I was. They were playing three, I was only playing one.”74 The Ramones “epiphany” became an experience through which to clarify his own compositional voice; he realized a common trend among the composers he was interested in: “La Monte… had been highly influenced by a different kind of music, by North Indian classical music. Steve was influenced by jazz and had studied Ghanaian music. Philip was highly influenced

73 Gordon is one of the scene’s more astute commentators: “Punk rock was in the nascent stages, and was literally just around the corner, at CBGB’s and other clubs. The punk aesthetic (not unrelated to minimalism) extended to the visual artists and writers, as well as composers. I took Rhys Chatham to see the Ramones in 1975, and he never looked back. Brian Eno showed up in 1978, and handpicked a few bands for his ‘No New York’ anthology, garnering attention for certain noise bands, Talking Heads first appeared as a trio at St. Mark’s Church Parish Hall, and David Byrne appeared on recordings by Arthur Russell and myself. Rhys Chatham and Glenn Branca began writing ringing guitar pieces, with their influence extending to Sonic Youth. There was a whole group of musicians who made their own instruments, others found connections with the loft-jazz scene. Disco and dance music was in its heyday…” Peter Gordon quoted in New York Noise (New York: Soul Jazz Publishing, 2007), 92. Notably Gordon says 1975—it has been difficult to pin down the precise date on which the two saw the concert, but Chatham’s recollection that it was for the album release seems likely.

74 Author’s conversation with Rhys Chatham, September 2014. There is of course a jocular sarcasm in him referring to the Ramones as “highly complex”—with Chatham’s background and experience, it was clear that his claim is both a joke and sincere: that is, he is well aware of the discourse of the Ramones as the height of musical simplicity, while simultaneously pointing out the fact that his music at the time was even more minimal. I do not mean by this latter point that it was a contest—who’s more minimal—but that within mainstream commentary on the Ramones, arguments about harmonic complexity surely miss the point and are out of touch with the broader context in downtown NYC.
by process art and by Ravi Shankar. And I said, ‘What can I do?’ Chatham immediately borrowed a Fender Telecaster from the composer Scott Johnson and began learning how to play electric guitar.

The two epiphanies are of great importance in positioning his compositional career as a meeting of what we would today call “punk” and “minimalism”—though neither term was yet in concrete circulation—as Chatham was primed for the Ramones concert as a result of prior listening experiences going back to the Electric Ear concert. He heard the Ramones as “complex”—against all discourse of the time, which labelled their music as the peak of punk rock “minimalism”—because he had been working with one chord since, after listening to Terry Riley, he became a self-described “hardcore minimalist.” Chatham made the connection clear as early as 1981 in his conversation with Rockwell: “I had never been to a rock concert in my life, and I loved what [the Ramones] were doing. There seemed to me a real connection between the minimalism I had been involved with and that kind of rock.” That Chatham clearly and loudly identifies as a “minimalist” is central—and that he was doing so in 1981 even more so. As in my reading of Reich writing It’s Gonna Rain “after listening to Terry Riley” (see Chapter 3), the foundational mythology of Chatham as a composer forms around a double epiphany in which he was converted into the identity “minimalist” after hearing Riley, which allowed him to hear the Ramones as minimalist. I say as minimalist in a double sense: that is, both Chatham himself listening as a minimalist, and that he heard the Ramones as fellow minimalists.

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75 Author’s conversation with Rhys Chatham, September 2014.
76 While it was not his first band, Chatham told me in a more recent interview that, following the breakup of the Gynecologists, he took a job as guitarist in the short-lived band Arsenal to learn basic progressions.
77 John Rockwell, “Rhys Chatham: Classical Road to Rock,” New York Times (April 17, 1981). I have directly asked Chatham about this claim—which he has made in many interviews and in his writing—because I find it surprising that, in the break he took from programming at the Kitchen, he never heard any of the rock bands that Arthur Russell programmed, including the Modern Lovers. It is possible he has forgotten, that they had no impact on him, or that he entirely avoided the Kitchen once Russell took over.
The importance of Chatham’s role as programmer cannot be overstated, even before his compositional career took off. As I will show throughout this chapter, the Kitchen was the central institution for forging together, in the early years, what Piekut might call an “actually existing” minimalism. While Branden Joseph does not specifically mention it, the “death at BAM” surely implies leaving behind not only private concert venues like Glass’s loft at Chatham Square, but in particular artist-run institutions like the Kitchen where not only Young, Conrad, Chatham, Spiegel, and Palestine performed under Chatham’s direction, but where Reich and Glass workedshopped their major pieces like Music for 18 Musicians and Music in 12 Parts while Russell was music director.

Chatham’s musical tastes—converted overnight by an encounter with Riley’s repetitive form of composer-performance—set the tone for music curation at the Kitchen, and drew together the nascent “minimalist” scene of early 1970s New York. Nevertheless, it is only when his Ramones epiphany truly sets in, and his engagement with volume and electric guitars brings him into contact with the rock scene and colleagues like Glenn Branca, Jules Baptiste, Jeff Lohn, Wharton Tiers, and Robert Longo, that Chatham becomes notable as a composer in his own right, rather than just a precocious young organizer.

**Bands at Artists Space, May 1978**

In the May 8, 1978 *Village Voice*, Robert Christgau’s addition to the “Voice Choices” column was a concert labelled “ARTS SPACE NEW WAVE ROCK”:

Showcasing some of the horde of third-generation New York bands to have surfaced recently. Schedule: Terminal and the Communists May 2 (before this issue goes on sale); Theoretical Girls and the Gynecologists May 3; Daily Life and Tone Death May 4; DNA and the Contortions May 5; Mars and Teenage Jesus and the Jerks May 6. Except for the May 6 groups (both of whom have struck me as arty and empty), I like all the bands I’ve seen enough to catch them again, and the word-of-mouth on the others is intriguing. Those who seek finished music should stay away; otherwise, check it out.  

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Alongside the poster for the event, whose capitalized heading “BANDS at Artists Space” suggests some novelty to hosting rock acts at an art gallery, this announcement created some excitement in the downtown music and art scene—despite the fact that none of the artists listed on the program had released a record. That Christgau calls the music “third-generation” suggests it is a “third wave,” following on early adopters like Television and Patti Smith, and then the Ramones and Blondie. After the release of Brian Eno’s LP later that year—discussed below—this short-lived third wave took on the nihilistic label “no wave” in subsequent histories of underground and experimental rock. I would like to consider how this scene intersected with minimalism; I contend that the scenes were not pre-existing such that there was the kind of cross fertilization that Gendron highlights, but rather that these two scenes were specifically and necessarily constituted in their interrelation.

Artists Space was founded in 1972 by arts administrator Trudi Grace and critic Irving Sandler. Much like the Kitchen a few blocks away—which opened only a few months earlier, and with a similar mandate and funding from the New York State Council on the Arts—Artists Space was founded by artists to support “the needs of artists who were involved in the production and presentation of work outside the context of an existing institutional structure.”79 In this sense, both venues were closely tied to the impulses that developed the loft jazz scene, again in the exact same neighbourhood. Michael Heller has discussed this scene in very similar circumstances, developing out of the desolation of downtown New York, and artists capacity for self-determination in live-work venues like Ornette Coleman’s Artists House at 131 Prince Street, just around the corner from Artists Space.80

The Artists Space festival itself grew out of a regular event among many of the Buffalo-associated artists in the “Pictures” generation—including Robert Longo, a close collaborator of

79 http://artistspace.org/about/mission-and-history
Chatham and Branca during the period in question, who created album art and projections for both of them at various points—who frequently held Battle of the Bands evenings at the loft space owned by Paul McMahon and Nancy Chunn at 135 Grand Street: “raucous competitions in nonmusician musicianship that made the punk bands of the moment seem like virtuosi.” That many of these “bands” featured conservatory-trained musicians and composers from New York or Mills College by no means deterred from the anti-everything aesthetic; indeed, the composers were in the minority. Many of the “musicians” involved in the scene were artists from other media, as the gallery’s publicity material for the festival makes clear: “This area of music has lately received much attention by artists, both as listeners and as performers. The series is in keeping with Artists Space policy of presenting what is currently of interest in the art community.” Indeed, no wave can most easily be defined as the sonic result of avant-garde theatre, performance, and visual artists forming amateurish, anti-specialization “punk” bands. In his oral history of no wave, Marc Masters makes clear the indistinction no wave bands produced between artists, artistic medium, and output in the downtown scene at the time. Glenn Branca, one of the scene’s early leaders, told Masters:

"I wanted to make art, and it was so cool that you could make art in rock clubs. You can’t imagine how exciting that was to people. There was this whole new scene of young visual artists who had grown up listening to rock music, who had come to New York to do visual arts, to do painting, to do conceptual art. And they heard these bands that were clearly coming from the same kind of sensibility, and all they could do was imagine themselves up on that stage playing this fucking art music."

The designator art music is surely a careful choice on Branca’s part: he is not referring to “Western art music” but rather to music, made by visual artists, that was itself their artistic output. Other no wave musicians have made similar claims. China Burg of Mars says she got into bands because “it’s very

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81 Douglas Eklund, The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984 (Metropolitan Museum of Art: New York, 2009), 196. One such event can be seen on the DVD 135 Grand Street, 1979 (Soul Jazz Films SJR DVD226), which features, among others, the Static, Chatham performing Guitar Trío, Jill Kroesen, and Ut.


83 Branca quoted in Marc Masters, No Wave (London: Black Dog, 2007), 20; my emphasis.
up front sleazy. It’s not this world of pretension that the fine arts can be so entrenched in.”

Pat Place of the Contortions argues that the music scene was “way more exciting to me than what was going on in the art world… in performance art and conceptual art.” Her bandmate Don Christensen said, “I came to New York basically to be a painter, [but] I got seduced by the CBGB’s scene and meeting musicians and having a good time.”

Branca later discusses the constitution of audiences: “It was clear there was this audience made up of people just like me[,] they were visual artists or theatre artists or performance artists.” The filmmaker James Nares told Masters, “Different disciplines came together. There were filmmakers, artists, musicians, poets, everybody. Everyone seemed to have a common purpose.” In a quote that closely echoes Tony Conrad’s 1965 claim that John Cale was “by night sawmill and by day a frightening rock ‘n’ roll orchestra,” Nares continues “We would be making a racket in a studio one day, and shooting a movie the next.”

Lydia Lunch of Teenage Jesus and the Jerks agreed: “Everybody was doing everything. You painted, you were in a band, you made films, you wrote songs.” For many artists involved at Artists Space, the “band” was a new medium that supplemented film, paint, or theatre as a collaborative enterprise for artistic production. Artists thwarted their own training, talent, and expertise towards the indistinction between disciplines and media, such that an anti-virtuosic anti-music became a form of anti-art broadly rather than specifically a musical project.

Following on the popularity of this anti-virtuosic anti-music among the artists, Artists Space organized the “BANDS at Artists Space” series. The festival’s legendary status results from indirectly producing one of the infamous documents of the period: the Brian Eno-produced LP No

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84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
89 Masters, No Wave, 20.
90 Ibid.
New York, which supplemented the record industry-preferred punk label from “new wave” to an anti-institutional and anti-art no wave. While the festival featured ten bands, Eno’s LP, released in fall 1978, only included four short songs each by four of the bands—DNA, Mars, Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, and Contortions. Much debate has circulated as to how the four represented bands were chosen, and has produced particular mystery around the “other” bands—most of whom never even got into the studio. Pitchfork’s review of the 2005 re-issue of No New York credits the close interrelationship among the four recorded bands as the principal reason the other artists were left off: “Original DNA member Gordon Stevenson left the band to play bass for Teenage Jesus & the Jerks. DNA’s name came from a song by Mars. Lydia Lunch and James Chance were dating—he quit Teenage Jesus in ’78 to do his own thing. Bands who weren’t as entrenched in the loop—Red Transistor, Static, Theoretical Girls [only the last of whom played the Artists Space festival]—were left off the comp.”

Bernard Gendron relies more on genre distinctions among the downtown crowd of the time—so often lumped together as homogenous under the heading of “no wave”—as being the result of Eno’s dismissal of some of the other, now lesser-known bands:

Both [Branca and Chatham] appeared at the original Artists Space festival, Branca with Theoretical Girls and Chatham with the Gynecologists. But from its first days, no wave proved volatile in its designations and divisions. It did not take long for a split to appear between the East Village groups closer to the pop scene at CBGB’s—Teenage Jesus, the Contortions, among others—and the SoHo “art fags,” such as Branca and Chatham. The East Village groups soon were perceived as central to the no wave movement and the SoHo groups only marginal to it. This separation was permanently fixed in 1979 [sic] with the release of the No New York album, that canonical no wave compilation, which only featured the East Village bands.”

While I agree with Gendron’s general interpretation, it requires brief supplement. First of all, it’s even more notable that Branca and Chatham were not included in any form on the No New York

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91 See Various Artists, No New York (Antilles AN-7067, 1978); reissued (Lilith Records LR102, 2005).
93 Gendron, Montmartre, 292.
compilation in that they were not only in Theoretical Girls and the Gynecologists, who played on the second night, May 3; beyond that, on May 4, Branca also performed as a “side guitarist” in Daily Life, which also featured Barbara Ess, Paul McMahon, and Christine Hahn, and Chatham performed a version of his *Guitar Trio* as Tone Death. Branca and Chatham were thus members of four of the ten bands, though none of them made it onto Eno’s LP.

Second, while Gendron suggests that no wave was “volatile in its divisions,” I think something less contentious was in play. These groups were never formalized *bands*; the band names were a means of positioning this music as an art project, perhaps turning each composition or compositional style into a stable political formation. As such, the Static and Daily Life are largely the same people, performing under the same concept; the same is true of Tone Deaf and the Gynecologists. They can perhaps be more likened to the title of an art show or museum event—they form, draw work and artists together, take a name, and are gone again. This was not a failure of the musicians involved or evidence of volatility; rather, it is evidence of the non-concern for the institutionalization of these groups in favor of short term experimentation in contingent combinations among groups of collaborators whose friendships allow them to recognize the contributions any one person could bring to the larger sound. Presenting this music as performances by *bands*, regardless of how contingent or momentary, and in rock music spaces, was central to the material practice of no wave and, by extension, Branca and Chatham’s early careers.

Simon Reynolds, in a history of postpunk which begins the year of the Artists Space festival, follows Gendron in arguing that the divisions within the scene resulted in the selective *No New York* track listing—though like the metaphysical historians of minimalism, he explicitly relies on the subsequent roles of the people involved to make his case. “Theoretical Girls and the Gynecologists, two highly regarded bands who’d shared the Wednesday-night bill of the Artists Space festival,” Reynolds writes, “had been pointedly excluded because of their association with the SoHo art
scene.” He accurately notes that Chatham was “an avant-classical composer and music director of the Kitchen, one of SoHo’s most important performance spaces” but then turns to proleptical casting of the events of 1978 by writing that “Theoretical Girls, meanwhile, boasted no less than two composers in its lineup, Glenn Branca and Jeffrey Lohn.” While Lohn had studied composition, Branca was—as I will discuss extensively below—a musical “primitive” about whom it would have taken incredible prescience to suggest he was a “composer” in 1978 when Theoretical Girls performed at Artists Space. Much as I criticized the historiographical handling of Conrad as already a filmmaker in 1963 (see Chapter 2), suggesting that Theoretical Girls was excluded from the collection because Branca was a composer is to proleptically introduce divisions between the scene that did not necessarily exist at the time. Even more importantly, to call Branca a “composer” at the Artists Space festival, or to use that as the reason why he was not included in No New York, is to use the results of that scene as evidence of its formation. It recalls Rancière’s critique of the New Philosophers—they were only in the streets as a rejection of the very hierarchy that designated the social position “intellectual.” It is only as a result of the Artists Space festival and the indistinct interrelation of various “minimalisms” in downtown New York that Branca was ever able to become a “composer,” a claim which I will elaborate upon in the next section.

Importantly, Gendron’s and Reynolds’ comments on the festival come decades after the fact: DNA, Teenage Jesus and the other East Village bands had become underground legends through their influence on bands like Swans and Sonic Youth, and Branca and Chatham had been canonized as “composers” by several decades of work. Looking at contemporary reviews of the concert from the New York Times will help clarify the actual position of these artists at the time. Much like his British colleagues discussed above, Rockwell distinguishes New York’s “underground” scene from the one in London, insisting that the former involves “a more deliberate attempt to create art out of
rock, a closer connection between young rocksters and experimental artists.” Most importantly, he writes, “sometimes the bands are ones that have also played the C.B.G.B./Max’s circuit… sometimes they are more obviously experimental…. But usually—and here’s where things get really interesting…—you can’t tell the difference.” Rockwell lists the bands involved in the festival without interpellating any individual “composer” out from the band of which they are members, though he does mention that “like all such groups their memberships appear to be in a constant state of flux.”

Turning to the keyword throughout all of this, Rockwell describes Mars as performing a “tightly controlled and generally interesting brand of minimal rock” and Teenage Jesus and the Jerks as “content[ing] themselves with minimalist instrumentals.” He closes by warning—against all contemporary perspective on how shocking no wave was in its time—that the “minimalism… of both bands suggest[s] that the whole New York underground scene is in danger of falling into a new orthodoxy as rigid as anything that may have preceded it.” It is quite clear that Rockwell is not referring to Reich and Glass, and that no contemporary reader would make that mistake.

A longer piece in the June 2 Times developed many of these ideas. Rockwell’s “The Rock World and visual arts” includes a more fleshed-out take on the distinction he had argued for in the May 8 coverage. First discussing the several years of “rock-art” that had come out of British “art-school graduates” and progressive rockers, Rockwell argues for a distinction between these acts and bands like the Velvet Underground, Patti Smith, Television, and Talking Heads—all performers central to the punk aesthetic that Lester Bangs and others were outlining:

Up to now, most of the bands coming out of New York—even those that seemed at first to be defiantly uncommercial—have had some sort of hope that they could appeal to people in general. Rock has always been a populist medium, and that populism has tended to express itself in commercial terms. Artists may or may not have been kidding themselves when they said the money was secondary in their priorities. But record and ticket sales at least served to enable them to carry on their work, and became a tangible symbol that their music was reaching an

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95 Ibid.; my emphasis.
For Rockwell, the distinction between rock and art has always been that rock is inherently populist—“commerciality incarnate”; now that there are bands about whom this decidedly cannot be argued, he seems to be asking, how are we to redraw distinctions? Again, indistinction is the principle in play, rather than a problem to be sorted out: this indistinct experimental sensibility is a result of avant-garde artists from painting, theatre, performance art, film, and sculpture pervading what would have (or should have) simply been another “rock” scene. That the noisy music made by these bands can be heard as “rock” is every bit as conflicted as is the capacity to hear it as “art.” After noting that “Mr. Eno is now producing a documentary collection of some of these bands,” Rockwell introduces them: “These bands go by such as names as Theoretical Girls, Tone Deaf, Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, Mars, D.N.A., the Contortions and many more.” He reiterates that they often perform at “such punk haunts as Max’s Kansas City or CBGB’s” but also at venues typically set up for “experimental ‘classical’ music, loft jazz, performance art or video,” including Artists Space and the Kitchen, who have been offering “rock nights more and more often” (importantly under Chatham’s second period as director, post-epiphany). The distinction, it seems, between rock and art, or between pop and experimentalism, has been minimized so far as to raise questions about the very terms of that distinction.

In reviewing the festival, Rockwell does not single out Branca by name from Theoretical Girls (as any author writing after the fact would), though he does write that, “Rhys Chatham, who’s the Kitchen’s music director and a long-time SoHo composer, is in Tone Deaf.”

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97 Ibid., my emphasis.
98 Masters includes posters for performances at the Kitchen. On April 9, 1978, Daily Life, The Gynecologists, Theoretical Girls, and Arsenal (the band in which Chatham played as a backup guitarist to learn guitar) played. Another Theoretical Girls concert poster is dated May 21—probably also 1978. See Masters, No Wave, 110-111.
art-pop binary still in place, and capturing a strong contemporary definition of no wave, Rockwell writes:

this sort of rock is itself so uncommercial that even most rock fans would be confused by it,… Much of the music of this sort carried the notion of minimalism to new extremes. A few lonely chords are pummeled away with furious strumming while a drummer pounds out a repetitive beat with merciless, humorless insistence. Tuning seems to strike most of these bands as a silly frill, and the vocals are generally toneless screams. But amid the silly posturing some fascinating ideas can emerge. Theoretical Girls got into some unusual shifting planes of instrumental color at the Kitchen, balancing gritty blocks of aural texture in an eerie, affecting way.  

Several notable things appear in Rockwell’s two reviews. First, Branca is not mentioned at all by name, though Theoretical Girls is clearly the band who most caught Rockwell’s attention; Chatham is the only individual interpellated from any of the ensembles, and there only as a potentially valuable contextualizing name (he was still music director at this time) among readers of the Times. Second, commentary on the music focuses on specifically the lesser-known bands from these performances: Rockwell is not interested in discussing James Chance’s infamous mischief (including getting into a fistfight with Voice critic Robert Christgau at the festival—the other major reason why the Artists Space festival makes it into most histories of punk), but rather focuses on Theoretical Girls’ “unusual shifting planes of instrumental color” and Nina Canal (of Gynecologists and Tone Death, and soon to be in the all-female punk band Ut) who “came on stage with a little girl and sang duets with her to a half-rock, half-harmonium accompaniment that was very beautiful. But also very, very far from the commercial arena” (Figure 4.4).

Rockwell, “The Pop Life;” my emphasis. This piece continues, with more clarity, some of the ideas he first wrote up in “When the Punks Meet the Progressives” (New York Times, Oct 23, 1977). There he focused on distinguishing European art-rock from New York punk. Towards the end of the article, he undercuts the earlier distinction by noting a zone of indistinction between the two: “When the punks get minimal and the progressive get austere, the two can become one—as Patti Smith and Talking Heads, in their own different ways, have already shown.” The article also highlights the ever-present grouping of Eno-David Bowie-Iggy Pop-Robert Fripp, writing that “the basic idiom of leaden, driving, minimal art-rock goes back to such London progressives of the early 1970’s as the original Roxy Music” which included Eno, whose work is highlighted in relation to Bowie’s recently released Heroes (featuring Fripp on guitar), and more peripheral involvement (via Bowie) on Iggy Pop’s new Lust for Life. Fripp and Enö also released No Pussyfooting around this time using a system identical to Riley’s time-lag accumulator, which they dubbed Frippertronics.
These performances—and no wave as a genre—introduce an important fact into the musical discourse of “minimalism” in late 1970s New York experimentalism. In writing that the no wave groups “take the notion of minimalism to a new extreme,” it’s impossible to tell whether Rockwell is referencing the concerts by Talking Heads and the Ramones at CBGB, Reich at Carnegie Hall, or Arthur Russell, Tony Conrad, and Charlemagne Palestine at the Kitchen. He also may have been thinking of Philip Glass’s first concert (“At Last”) at Carnegie Hall that same month; Robert Palmer wrote in a preview of that concert that Glass’s music has been called “solid state, minimalism, [and] trance music.” He continues, “the aesthetic of minimalism, repetition, and structural lucidity is now an important aspect of the punk and new-wave movements in rock,” as evidenced by the fact that
Glass had recently been seen hanging out with Brian Eno at CBGB. Nevertheless, when Rockwell reviewed Glass’s concert—his second article in the June 2, 1978 issue, along with the above “The Rock World and the visual arts” in which he described so many of the Artists Space bands as minimalists—he did not describe Glass or his music as “minimal,” highlighting instead a disappointing shift uptown as Glass hired professional singers, unamplified, and turned his own electric organ way down: “the result was extremely quiet for a Glass piece,” and to someone who had followed Glass's small space ensemble development of Music in 12 Parts and other pieces, “a little disconcerting.” No matter which idea of “minimalism” Rockwell had in mind when he claimed that it had been taken to a new extreme (Ramones? Reich?), the central fact stands: the howls, yelps, incessant detuned strumming, and neurotic percussion of the Artists Space bands had produced a new extreme of how “minimal” music could be—both in material and in compositional intervention. No wonder that, in the New York press of 1978 or 1981, it became difficult to call a European orchestral commission by Reich or a concert by Glass at Carnegie Hall “minimal.” And no wonder those composers were rejecting that label for their own work.

Glenn Branca, Illiterate Symphonist

The network of associations set up among artists and composers forming their own bands in the wake of the Artists Space festival led to a number of collaborative performances and events in all

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100 Robert Palmer, “Philip Glass Comes to Carnegie Hall—At Last” New York Times (May 28, 1978). The integration of the “minimalist aesthetic” and trends in punk music was of course nothing new for Glass. In June 1973 John Rockwell wrote of Glass “the avant-garde composer” (no mention is made of minimalism) “making an effort to broaden his audience beyond the ‘in’ crowd” by performing at Max’s Kansas City and a doing a five-boroughs park tour. See John Rockwell, “Philip Glass Works To Broaden Scope Beyond ‘In’ Crowd,” New York Times (June 28, 1973).

101 John Rockwell, “Music: Philip Glass” New York Times (June 2, 1978). This review perhaps reveals the drastic changes in taste that the minimalist aesthetic effected over the course of the decade; in a February 21, 1973 review of a Glass concert at the Kitchen, Rockwell opined that Glass had his “Music for Voices” performed by the Mabou Mines dance troupe—“it would be interesting to hear it sometime with a trained choral ensemble.” John Rockwell, “Music and Theatre Offered at Kitchen in a 3-Part Concert,” New York Times (Feb 21, 1973).
manner of venues between 1978 and the early 1980s. Glenn Branca recently unloaded a number of signed posters on eBay that help to some degree in discovering events in which Branca and Chatham performed together, though they offer little more than a disjunct and surely incomplete chronology. There was a concert, held at the Kitchen a few weeks before the Artists Space festival, which included Daily Life and the Gynecologists opened for Theoretical Girls and Arsenal (April 9, 1978); there was an early Static concert on 13 June 1978 which featured Branca’s *Instrumental For Six Guitars* (though the poster does not specify that it is his own composition) and probably included Chatham as one of the guitarists; a January 29, 1979 show at Hurrah’s featured both Branca and Chatham by name, backed up by the bands that had largely stabilized by then to perform their music; a page from the 1979 itinerary of the booker at Tier 3 shows Branca penned in for December 5 and Chatham for December 6. Further, at Branca’s first solo gig—at the Kitchen, discussed below—in January 1980, the program claims that Chatham played guitar in *Instrumental for Six Guitars*, and existing recordings and commentary from both suggest that Branca performed semi-frequently in Chatham’s *Guitar Trio*.  

Sometime following these performances—probably around 1981 or 1982—the two ended their collaboration. I am not particularly interested in pursuing the moment of their falling out or its causes for two reasons: first, because there is no clear record of it; and second, because all of my research suggests that the dispute resulted from situations similar to the ones examined in earlier chapters: that is, some combination of not giving credit where credit is due, and the general disagreements that plague friendships, and particularly professional ones. Nevertheless, following Branca’s and Chatham’s careers in the years following the Artists Space festival reveals the growing  

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102 This last image appears in a website cataloguing the early chronology of no wave concerts. See http://www.fromthearchives.com/ll/chronology4.html  
103 The earliest available recording is from the “audio cassette magazine” *Tellus*. Issue 1 includes a performance of *Guitar Trio (1977)* from May of 1979 performed by Chatham, Branca, Nina Canal, and Wharton Tiers.
indistinction between populism and experimentalism, punk and classicism, composer and band, that
developed under the label “minimal” or even “minimal rock” in the moment of Reich and Glass’s
move towards mainstream legitimacy. In particular, I would like to consider the dual processes of
what Gendron calls (in relation to the Beatles) “accreditation” that occurred for the two during this
period, as Branca became a celebrated (and rather traditional) “composer” in his own right, while
Chatham became a recognized “rocker.”

Particularly informative in considering this indistinction between band and composer that
occurred under the name minimal is John Rockwell’s June 1979 review of a no wave concert. Rockwell writes that the scene had moved on from lofts and art galleries to assert itself in the same venues that “spawned the new-wave [punk] scene of just a few years ago.” In this context, this titular use of the label “no wave” implies a balance between two political formations: there is the impulse towards the tradition of art music, of sole authors, with recognition that they are attempting to present their work under collective names; and there is the simultaneous observation that these performances are noisy, distorted, and performed on electronic instruments by bands well-versed in and more associated with rock music. While Chatham was performing under his most recent band name, Melt Down, and Robin Crutchfield (formerly of DNA) with Dark Days—recall that “these ensembles tend to exchange members from gig to gig”—the proper names Chatham and Crutchfield were treated as those of composers, and the pieces they performed were read as works.

“Mr. Chatham’s first effort Tuesday was the same piece he’d done at the Kitchen festival of new music recently: one chord strummed in a rhythmic ostinato with light percussive accompaniment, illustrated by Robert Longo’s handsome slides.” “Minimal” comes up repeatedly, objectifying this

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105 John Rockwell, “Rock: 2 of the No-Wave,” *New York Times* (June 28, 1979). Rockwell’s title challenges the claim made by most musicians involved in, and historians of, this period that the genre label “no wave” only appeared after the Eno LP was released.
indistinction between composers within bands, or bands formed by composers: “It’s easy to mock the no-wavers, who reduce rock to such minimalism that to some it might seem there’s nothing there at all. But minimal painting can look simple, too, and at its best no-wave rock focuses the issues of musical creation and perception in a remarkable way.”

The recent “Kitchen Festival of new music” Rockwell references was New Music, New York, which subsequently toured for years as New Music America, becoming one of the dominant forums for 1980s American experimentalism. The festival’s biggest names were surely Glass and Reich, but it also featured major downtowners like Tony Conrad, Meredith Monk, Garrett List, Jill Kroesen, Tom Johnson, George Lewis, Laurie Spiegel, Jon Gibson, Charlemagne Palestine, Annea Lockwood, Gordon Mumma, and Barbara Benary. In his review, John Rockwell praises in particular Phill Niblock, Charles Dodge, David Behrman, Rhys Chatham, Frankie Mann and Laurie Anderson. While many of the New Music, New York artists might today be at least peripherally labelled “minimalists,” the term barely comes up in the article. Niblock’s piece “sounded like the inside of some cosmic organ;” Behrman’s “blended humanism and electronics in a specially charming way;” Anderson “confirmed her status as about the most charismatic performance artist we have who uses sound extensively.” In fact, the only appearance of the term “minimal” is in reference to Chatham, who “did a minimal-rock piece that really fused those tendencies superbly.”

Chatham’s performance—of Guitar Trio, which he performed extensively throughout 1977–1979 with bands including Tone Death at Artists Space—occurred on the final night of the festival, June 16, alongside pieces by Anderson, Gordon, Lohn, Mann, and Ned Sublette. While Branca was not included as a composer in the festival—why would he have been?—he was a member of the band.

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106 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
Lohn formed for the evening, alongside Wharton Tiers, Margaret Dewys (already performing their own shows as the Static), Julius Eastman, Scott Johnson, and Lohn himself.

The distinction between Glenn Branca, the composer, and the Static, the band, was still lost on Tom Johnson in a review of the Static’s first 7” record in September 1979. While he writes that the new band is “an experimental rock trio headed by Glenn Branca,” he does not explicitly hear the music as Branca’s writing. Although he typically ignored popular music, Johnson felt inclined to comment on the record because the music is not “addressed primarily to teenagers, involved primarily with the physical and the sensual rather than the intellectual and the spiritual, tailored to current market trends, or created primarily to make money.” Without singling out the musical ideas as specifically compositional ones by Branca, Johnson provides the first strong description of what would become Branca’s compositional style: “My Relationship’ revolves around a curious kind of chord change. The two guitars alternate between a unison and a two-note cluster, while the drummer pounds out a beat that is extremely insistent, even for rock. The song isn’t all that ‘static.’ In fact, it changes tempo once and even builds to a climax before its three minutes are over.” In that Johnson’s review recognizes the group as “headed by” Branca, but still hears the music as by the Static, it differs sharply from Rockwell’s review of the Dark Days and Melt Down concert. A few weeks later, Rockwell wrote about an evening of short pieces by “emerging composers” on the SoHo scene at the Kitchen; he bemoans that while “two or three top-notch successes can redeem a concert like this… only one piece had much luck:” Branca’s “limply titled ‘Untitled’” which was “another of the minimal-rock efforts the Kitchen likes to present,” and “made one want to hear more of Mr. Branca’s music.”

110 Ibid.
Later in November, the magazine *New York Rocker* published an essay by Branca on his colleague Rhys Chatham. Branca wrote the single-page piece from a dual position of upholding Chatham’s academic pedigree while pushing for his recognition as a rocker in his own right by the magazine’s dominant audience. “Over the past two years,” Branca writes, “Rhys Chatham has been performing ‘Guitar Trio’ in clubs, galleries and new music spaces around New York under the successive names Tone Death, Meltdown, and New Americans.” In a description that any in the new music scene of the time might have read as relating to Young, Branca continues, “[t]he piece has varied in length from six or seven minutes to thirty minutes, and has undergone many changes of personnel and instrumentation. At the Mudd Club, Rhys added two trombones; at Hurrah, three percussionists, bass, and twelve-string guitar; at the Kitchen, a full orchestra. But the standard set-up is three six-string guitars and drums.” Whether this is true—it does not seem to be, I have come across no mention of a full orchestra—is less relevant than the rhetorical position Branca takes on the music. “Although this music can certainly be seen as innovative or modern, the final effect is still that of vicious, uncompromising rock music. This is what [Lou Reed’s] *Metal Machine Music* should have sounded like.”\(^{112}\) Branca’s appraisal is clearly aimed at pointing out *Guitar Trio*’s capacity for wide programming at punk clubs (Hurrah’s), art-discos (the Mudd Club), and avant-garde spaces (the Kitchen).

While Branca was attempting to offer his colleague the punk rock credibility he needed, he was eager in his own right to be seen as a composer. In January 1980, Branca’s first solo concert took place at the Kitchen (Figure 4.5). The program for “Glenn Branca: Loud Guitars,” which eventually toured to other venues including the Hallwalls Gallery in Buffalo, featured pieces titled so “limply” as to assure audiences of their artful nature and not risk a possible misunderstanding as popular music: *(Instrumental) for Six Guitars*, Nos. 1, 2, and 3 from *5 Lessons for Electric Guitar*, and

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Greg Sandow published a review in the *Village Voice* which combined Branca’s January 16 Kitchen concert with performances by Rhys Chatham at the Mudd Club on January 10 and Hurrah’s on January 29. Titled “Classical Music for Loud Guitars,” and headed by a Deborah Feingold photo of Branca and Chatham in front of a graffiti-covered wall (Figure 4.7), Sandow opens by commenting on the generative tension of this music. “Glenn Branca and Rhys Chatham write some of the most challenging classical music in town;” and then he adds— “for their rock bands.” The differing positions from which the two composers arrived at this classical music for loud guitars are Sandow’s major focus. “The idea in the piece comes from Chatham’s classical background;” Chatham’s stage presence, “rapt and impassive,” is contrasted with that of “the members of his band (Jules Baptiste, Robert Longo, and Wharton Tiers), [who] thrash at their instruments more wildly; it’s easy to tell that Chatham moved over from classical music only recently.” Branca, on the other hand—whom Sandow compares to Reich and Glass—is musically illiterate: “Sometimes Branca’s musical structure is a little rough… [and] Chatham is the only member of either band who reads music; the complicated scores have to be notated informally and taught to the players by rote.” Sandow closes by noting that while “Chatham, music director of the Kitchen, has made a conscious effort to become a rocker… Branca… [has] always been involved in rock.” Later in the year, on September 17, Sandow was “surprised to see people dancing to Rhys Chatham’s new music, and I thought that Chatham’s stuff might be rock after all,” just before Chatham, “stung, perhaps, by put-downs from rock critics… decided that his music… is really, at heart, classical.” Branca, on the other hand, surprised Sandow with “how far his music… has evolved.” Sandow describes a newly updated version of *Lesson No. 1* before concluding that “Branca

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is now frighteningly good, *one of the best composers alive…* Rock and roll shocked and transformed the pop-music world when it emerged; when Branca’s work surfaces, the new-music community is in for an equivalent surprise.”

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**THE KITCHEN**

**CENTER FOR**

**VIDEO, MUSIC**

**AND DANCE**

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**GLENN BRANCA**

January 16, 1980 8:30 p.m.

Program

Film by JOHN REHBERGER (2 1/2 min)
(Performance from evening of short pieces at 33 Grand St., Spring 1978)

"LESSON #2" (From "5 Lessons for Electric Guitar") - 6 min.
  Nadx, Glenn Branca - Guitars
  Frank Schroder - Bass
  Anthony Coleman - Piano
  Stephen Wischerth - Drums

"SHIVERING AIR" (12 min)
  David Rosenbloom, Glenn Branca - Guitars
  Frank Schroder - Bass
  Anthony Coleman - Piano
  Stephen Wischerth - Drums

"LESSON #1" - 7 min.
  David Rosenbloom, Glenn Branca - Guitars
  Frank Schroder - Bass
  Anthony Coleman - Organ

INTERMISSION

(untitled) 1979 - 11 min.
  Harry Spitz - Sledgehammer
  David Rosenbloom, Glenn Branca - Guitars
  Anthony Coleman - Piano
  Stephen Wischerth - Drums

"[Instrumental] For Six Guitars" - 14 min.
  Jules Baptie, Mark Bingham, Glenn Branca, Rhys Chatham,
  Paul McMahon, Wharton Tiers - Guitars
  Stephen Wischerth - Drums

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*Figure 0.5* January 16, 1980 program for Glenn Branca: Loud Guitars at the Kitchen. Kitchen online archive.

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115 Sandow, “Classical Music for Loud Guitars.”
On April 17, 1981 at the Kitchen, Chatham put on a concert titled “Drastic Classical Music for Electric Instruments.” Sandow reviewed the performance a few weeks later as a case study in a long-form article about the relationship between the new music scene and academicism. Sandow begins his review with bafflement: “I met someone a while ago who told me that events at the Kitchen were generally all right, ‘except all that academic new music.’ Academic new music? ‘The far-out stuff Tom Johnson and I write about is academic?’”

The remainder of the review uses Chatham’s concert to argue for the strength of the rock/classical hybrid in the downtown scene and as particularly exemplified by Chatham: “Rhys Chatham’s music is too loud and too exciting to be

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academic. The excitement’s partly physical—from high volume and a rock and roll beat—and partly intellectual.” While some find it “brash and punky,” Sandow hears it as “severe and classical.” Sandow indirectly hearkens back a decade to when Johnson praised the Kitchen’s “one-man” programming: because the Kitchen concert allowed a whole evening of Chatham’s music, the compositions “seemed even stronger encountered all at once than they seemed when I hear them one or two at a time during the past year in clubs and at Dance Theatre Workshop.”117 Chatham—along with “Glenn Branca, Peter Gordon, the members of DNA… and Laurie Anderson and Robert Ashley”—“is writing the newest new music around;” its newness is “aggressive and triumphant” in the face of the “older new music” (the reference is clearly to minimalism) which is “often soft, playful, or meditative,” embodying “a search for alternatives.” In the two Sandow essays and Rockwell’s “no wave” review, we see much the same: critics attempting to sort, amid a number of concerts in 1980 and 1981, the distinction between minimalism in rock, in “classical” music, and the terms of any minimal-rock hybrid.

Sandow was right in his prediction about the shock Branca’s music would provide for the new music scene as he settled into his role of—rather traditional—composer. Between 1981 and 1983, Branca composed and performed his first three symphonies: *Symphony No. 1 (Tonal Plexus)* (1981), *Symphony No. 2 (The Peak of the Sacred)* (1982), and *Symphony No. 3 (Gloria): Music for the first 127 intervals of the harmonic series* (1983). While Kyle Gann has repeatedly suggested that critics were bothered by Branca’s pretension in labelling the pieces “symphonies,”118 major paper critics like Rockwell and Sandow who had been following Branca’s career had little issue with the change and, other than criticizing Branca’s understanding of large-scale form or notation—and thus labelling him a “primitive” directly oropaquely (an *abrutir*)—were excited by the quick rush of work. In the first

118 Kyle Gann, “Metametrics as an Illiteracy Solution,” *Postclassix* blog (March 1, 2006).
review of one of the symphonies, John Rockwell calls the work “ambitiously entitled,” before conceding that Branca is no exception among the long line of “composers [who] have been violating the orthodox symphonic form for 150 years now.” Rockwell is simultaneously untroubled by including the work within the symphonic tradition and, what’s more, considers it “the acme of what recent New York art-rockers have yet accomplished.” The work has its roots in both “art rock”—though without its “neobombastic approximation of orchestral sound”—and in “the conceptual sound explorations of the ‘classical’ experimentalists” like “Cowell, Varèse and Cage.” Rockwell concludes, only eighteen months into the decade, by noting that Branca has “the talent, organizational skills and charisma to establish himself as the glamorous leader of the lower Manhattan experimental scene of the 80’s.”

Breaking with their practice of having Branca’s music reviewed by new music critics, the Times handed off the review of Branca’s second symphony in May 1982 to their chief rock critic, Robert Palmer. Perhaps caught on the work’s subtitle, The Peak of the Sacred, Palmer notes that Branca’s “transcendentalist strain,” which goes “back through La Monte Young to Ives, Ruggles, and other American tinkerers,” is brought “into the foreground” in the second symphony. Immediately after praising the work for being more “rapturously lyrical and hymnlike than much of the Symphony No. 1,” Palmer nevertheless argues that “Mr. Branca is running short of ideas. There was little in Symphony No. 2… that one hadn’t heard in his earlier pieces.” He continues, turning to the primitivist line, “Mr. Branca may eventually have to learn more about conventional music notation in order to avoid painting himself into a corner.” The article then suddenly changes on a dime:

But what a corner! The sound of all those guitars, overtones bouncing around the room, sonic masses forming and dissolving like curtains of rain, is still utterly invigorating. And Mr.
Branca has made remarkable strides in his ability to control dynamics, foreground-background relationship, and other fine-tuning aspects of his presentation. He is an inspired American original, and one can imagine him winning a sizable [sic] nationwide audience in the months and years to come.\textsuperscript{122}

It’s hard not to read Palmer—the \textit{Times}' first rock critic—as nervously upholding rock criticism as a composer begins to invade his territory, much as Bernard Gendron has shown the kneejerk reactions of many classical critics when the Beatles made their first forays into the avant-garde.\textsuperscript{123}

The tone is distinct from the preview of the second symphony that Rockwell wrote a week earlier, in which he praised Branca’s “music of massive sonic grandeur.”\textsuperscript{124} Like every one of these articles, Rockwell raises for the reader the problem of placing Branca within a genre: “What… are we to make of Glenn Branca?... Whether this is ‘serious’ or classical or rock or all three, Mr. Branca is the leader of the most vital new trend to transform downtown new music \textit{since the minimalists}.” Placing him decidedly within a serious lineage—or at least a downtown-minimalist one—and dismissing the question of crossover, Rockwell writes that “Mr. Branca is presenting neither classical music nor instrumental rock but a new kind of electronic music.” While Branca tells Rockwell that “there’s no adherence to any kind of classical structure,” Rockwell disagrees with the primitive, writing that, “while there is no sonata-form, there is certainly the sectional juxtaposition of contrasting moods that characterizes the modern, post-Mahler symphony.” Despite Gann’s claims (which are likely true in some other contemporary publications), Rockwell, as at least one major critic, was perhaps even more defensive of the use of the term “symphony” than the self-conscious Branca in the early years, arguing for its consistency with historical application. Nevertheless, Rockwell asserts that Branca’s “development might seem to be impeded by his inability to read music with any fluency”; while his music is written down, it is “in a kind of shorthand that does not correspond to conventional

\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{123} Gendron, \textit{Montmartre}, 161-187.
notation.” Branca is thus “a prime example of the postliterate avant-gardism that has sprung up in the electronic era—an era in which the recording studio and electronics provide the ‘permanent’ documentation that written notation used to provide.”\textsuperscript{125} For both Palmer and Rockwell, Branca is not a minor character on the downtown scene: he is the best composer living and primed to be the “leader” of the experimental 1980s, continuing the legacy of the composers who can now be labelled without qualification “the minimalists.”\textsuperscript{126}

Across all of these reviews, we see what we might call, using Gendron’s language, the dual accreditation of Branca and Chatham: Branca within the classical world, and Chatham within the punk scene which he hoped would stop viewing him as a poser. Further, Johnson and Rockwell had their work cut out for them in articulating the genre of music being performed by the bands Branca and Chatham were in—Theoretical Girls, Daily Life, the Static, the Gynecologists, Melt Down, Tone Death, and so on—which was exceeding the definition of rock music as “commerciality incarnate,” in much the same way that critics ten years prior had to deal with how to handle a form of contemporary composition that was both tonal and accessible. Now that Branca was writing “symphonies,” Rockwell and Palmer often argue that, whatever their titles—and here we’ve now come from short “rock songs,” through the limply-titled austere “works,” to full-blown transcendentalist “symphonies”—and despite how well they may play into the long history of symphonies that break the rules, Branca’s are the compositions of a primitive “art-rocker” expanding his palette to varying degrees of success. This accreditation runs in near-exact opposition

\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{126} Branca became best known in 1982 when the performance of his piece \textit{Indeterminate Activity of Resultant Masses} at the Chicago edition of the New Music America festival (which grew out of New Music New York, discussed below) drew the intense criticism of John Cage. The event was a major piece of downtown mythology for years, but the entire interview was released on CD by Branca as “So That Each Person is In Charge of Himself (1982 interview with John Cage)” on \textit{Indeterminate Activity of Resultant Masses} (Atavistic Records, 2007). Notably, the person interviewing John Cage is Wim Mertens.
to the movement of Chatham from serialist prodigy to “hardcore minimalist” concert organizer and momentary punk-rocker.

What I find compelling in comparing the two—more than the fact that they ever directly performed together or had a dispute—are these dual, chiastic processes of accreditation. That Johnson, Rockwell, Sandow and others were so closely tracking genre shifts among Chatham, Branca and others at the Kitchen (often as “minimalists” or “rock-minimalists”) at the exact moment that the national “middlebrow” press defined Minimalism for their readers as a style without adequate label, is revealing of those major publications’ interest. Of course, for *Time* or *High Fidelity*, the goal is to present their readers with up-to-date information on trends moving out of the vanguard and into mainstream acceptance; rather than following an aesthetic into the run-down lofts and art galleries of late 1970’s SoHo, they turn the best-known and most successful members of that style into representatives and spokesmen of that aesthetic. That tracking the style in its early development is beyond the scope of *Time* is of course not news to any historian of an avant-garde. Indeed, by definition, the appearance in middlebrow press is typically taken as a sign of that vanguard’s death, which is of course what many (including those magazines) proclaimed. Perhaps the death of minimalism is the necessary criteria for its public emergence as Minimalism. As Ross has argued, this sort of turn to spokesmen from within a pluralist and vibrant movement is a “tried and true tactic of confiscation” of a political message; as the alliance between French media and the New Philosophers shows, it is even more helpful in dismissing an effective critique if those spokesmen are listened to primarily for their “trumpeted renunciations.”

In contrast to following the big names, pursuing “actually existing minimalism” as evident in an event like the Artists Space festival reveals the dual paths that a musician within the late 1970s downtown scene could follow. For Chatham, it was an entry into the punk scene authorized by the

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connection Branca forged between Guitar Trio and Lou Reed’s Metal Machine Music, for Branca, the formation of the Static allowed enough indistinction between his “limply titled” minimalist works and his rock songs to allow him to slide into the role of “composer” of transcendental symphonies. These two cases raise important issues of generic and biographical constraints: are we to consider Chatham as having successfully become a punk? Or is he forever stuck in the position of a serialist aiming to escape the status of poser? In contrast, is Branca—perhaps one of the most prolific contemporary symphonists—a “composer” or a “rocker”? As Rockwell wrote in his early review of no wave, it doesn’t matter. The distinction between composer and band had been so minimized by the time of the Artists Space festival as to be irrelevant. After a decade of composer-performers leading their own ensembles, focusing on in-rehearsal development and recordings rather than scores, and playing in lofts and art galleries rather than concert halls, it had become entirely possible for Glenn Branca, the illiterate symphonist, to be proposed as the uncontested leader of the downtown compositional vanguard. Moreover, it had become pretty unclear to critics how to position this music generically for their readers. When bands are in artists’ spaces, composers are performing in clubs, jazz musicians are in live-work lofts, and so on, critics and audiences have been deprived of the clear, institutional boundaries that define genre at least in part by venue, concert etiquette, audience makeup, and so on. To follow Kristin Ross’s description of May ’68, perhaps downtown experimentalism, too, was a crisis of functionalism, requiring physical dislocation.

That contemporary critics were often concerned to draw boundaries to explain how some musicians crossed them is perhaps little more than a requisite of their job—to communicate a context to readers. Musicologists and historians have less excuse, but nevertheless the hybridity explanations have held up for decades, as was already evident in Gendron’s writing about the no wave scene. Similarly, in a 2003 review of Chatham’s box set An Angel Moves Too Fast to See: Selected Works, 1971-1999 on Table of the Elements, Kyle Gann focuses on Chatham’s successes as the
“melding of high art and rock” and called his music “transparent and melodic, not thick and harmonically vague like the electric-guitar symphonies of Glenn Branca.” He continues, “Whoops. I wasn’t supposed to mention that name, because of the 23-year feud between the two. But like Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen, Philip Glass and Steve Reich, Mr. Chatham and Mr. Branca are a pair, and comparison is inevitable.”

Even for as astute a critic and historian as Gann—who was closely involved with the 1980s and 1990s scene in New York, having taken over from Johnson as Village Voice new music critic—asserting minimalism as a form of “high art” requires partitioning Chatham’s and Branca’s music as a metaphysical form of “high art” that has been hybridized with rock. That the history of minimalism is so insistent on this hybridity, on the one hand, while so willing to consider minimalism already over by this point, clearly signals the refusal to take seriously the critique of traditional art music authorship that unites the “pure” minimalism of early Young, Conrad, Riley, Reich, or Glass, with the precisely equivalent working practices of Branca and Chatham a decade later. That is, scholars are hesitant to acknowledge that it is the rejection of the traditional role of “composer”—like the partisans of May ’68 rejecting clearly defined distributions of social roles such as worker and student, intellectual and proletarian, which pushed them into the streets—that drove these artists out of the concert hall and into the art galleries in the first place. To centre histories on following those who in turn renounce that rejection is to confiscate the legacy of radicalism that produced it, leaving historians afloat among relativism that insists that minimalism does not specifically name anything, that it died in 1977 or 1982, or to classifying its existence as a formalist-transcendent set of “family similarities.”

**Conclusion: Aluminum Nights**

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In short, in late 1970s downtown New York—under the logic of the “minimal”—compositional authority was minimized to the point that theatre performers and trained composers could start punk bands, and illiterate punk rockers could call themselves symphonists. As such, minimalism names a principle of authorial indistinction, growing out of the efforts of Young, Conrad, Riley, Reich, or Glass to perform their own music, reducing the distance between composition, performance, and listening. That Branca and Chatham—from at least the early 1980s up to the present—identify as minimalists is quite clear. What is probably more important is keeping in mind what, to them, “minimalism” is or was. Discussing the mid-1970s scene in New York, Chatham told me “the big minimalists in the early to mid 1970s were La Monte, and Terry, and Charlemagne was huge with *Strumming Music*. Those performances were absolutely amazing. And Philip and Steve. And these guys were all either my fathers or my uncles. I essentially had a student relationship with them. I felt like a student when I was before them.”

The power dynamic involved here—of filial relationships, and the heightened rhetoric of being “before them”—suggests something much more traditionally pedagogical than the egalitarian forms of transmission examined in the last chapter, though it still occurred outside of formal educational institutions, and was primarily centered around Chatham’s role as a concert organizer. “Uncle Phil” and “big brother Charlemagne” were neighbours and collaborators; everyone involved called upon the others when they needed performers, space or instruments. Since it was nearly impossible to get a piece performed in the late 1960s—as he notes it often is today—on a traditional art music concert, Chatham says composers had to find their own way of getting music performed by “sharing services.”

For Chatham, as a next-generation minimalist, “the great debt that we owe” to the minimalists was in turning to performing their own pieces. He further discussed his understanding

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130 Author’s conversation with Rhys Chatham, September 2014.
of minimalism as a received lesson in a 1999 interview in which he claims that Young, Conrad, and Palestine were his “role models”—it was through studying and performing with each of them in the early 1970s that he “broke out of the idea of a composer as a kind of dictator who tells musicians what to do and bosses them around.” Chatham continues, “Along with Terry Riley, it was Charlemagne, Tony, and La Monte who turned me on to the idea of being a composer-performer in a real-time context, working with a group of musicians to arrive at ideas rather than sitting alone in a room at one’s desk with a pencil, eraser and manuscript paper.”131 He made similar claims when we first spoke in 2014: “a lot of us saw Terry playing A Rainbow in Curved Air and Poppy Nogood and his Phantom Band, or we saw La Monte perform with the Theatre of Eternal Music in all its various forms and we got the idea, ‘Hey! If we want to have our music performed, we best perform it ourselves and get like-minded people to perform it with us’.”132 This was an influence not only on his generation; it was primarily Young and Riley, Chatham argues, who influenced Reich and Glass to take up performing their own music. “A lot of those people ended up playing in each other’s bands simply to get the music out.”133 Chatham’s description of minimalism as a practice closely relates to the goals of the May student protesters: the problems of the “pedagogic relation” and the school as an apparatus of the state were not discovered by a heroic theorist, alone at his desk, but rather collectively, in the streets. For Rancière and his colleagues at Révoltes Logiques, learning how to properly write and frame this collective discourse was the major call of the protests that demanded response. How, Chatham and his colleagues in the late 1970s asked themselves, can we find a way of “writing” our music, or of communicating with audiences, that is non-stultifying? That does not rely on the delegations of the score? That recognizes collaborative development rather than being “a

131 “Rhys Chatham interviewed by Rob Young,” The Wire (February 1999), available online at http://www.rhyschatham.net/nintiesRCwebsite/wire.html
132 Author’s conversation with Rhys Chatham, September 2014.
133 Ibid.
dictator who tells musicians what to do?” That is, the method of composers forming bands—and the way that this opened up spaces and opportunities for non-musicians to form bands that could barely be distinguished from them—was the first step in the great, successful afterlife of the challenges raised by Conrad and Reich; it was a next form of “early minimalism.”

Branca’s identification with and understanding of minimalism follows on Chatham’s. In a 2012 interview, David Todd asked Branca, “Do you feel like your work is minimalism?” Branca responds:

I mean, yeah, it’s minimalism. I’ve tried to tell people, “I’m a minimalist.” Period. End of story. I’m not a postminimalist, I’m not a postmodernist, I am a minimalist, and I feel as though my work should be seen in that context. I’m not doing what Philip Glass is doing, I’m not doing what Steve Reich is doing, or La Monte Young, or Phill Niblock, or Charlemagne Palestine—there’s a long list of good minimalists whose work is different from mine. But what I’m doing is definitely minimalist, the way I see it and the way I think about it.¹³⁴

For Branca, minimalism centers on “the idea of repetition” which he first noticed in Reich and Glass, but that he also recognized early on, used “to great effect” in the music of Bangs’s “lumbering sloths,” Led Zeppelin. The important thing was that minimalism uses repetition and “manipulate[es] it and draw[s] you to another place, [so that] it became like a spiritual experience.” He continues,

There’s music within music. That’s what the message of minimalism is. There’s music that you haven’t written down that goes on while the music that’s been written down is playing. And it’s both psychoacoustic and… well, it’s both acoustic and psychic. It’s something that happens not only inside your ear but inside your brain… Minimalism opens up the potential of that subjectivity.

Turning to a historical consideration, he says “now that fact is, I didn’t feel as though minimalism stopped in 1967. Or in 1968. Minimalism still had potential to keep moving.” He claims that he has dreamed of somehow writing this stuff down… But there is a music that sounds like it hasn’t been written, that sounds like it’s happening inside your ear, that you’re dreaming it… It’s difficult not to try to figure out how to put it in a bottle and put it on a piece of paper in

such a way that it can be reproduced. And the whole world can hear this magical thing that has never been heard before by human ear. And this is what my music is about, and it’s why I’ve so often failed.  

For Branca, the meaning of “minimalism” returns to what consistently struck each of the minimalists at their earliest efforts: the search for a singular sound, made in physical space, at high volume, with the composer present as a collaborative member of the band, directly in front of the audience or listener. Minimalism focuses on the search for this maximal material inside minimal differentiation of sound, over long durations. It’s the “sound itself” that Conrad highlighted, or the long standing waveforms that led Young to proclaim, in 1968, that “tuning is a function of time.”

It’s the same ideas about sound that led both Reich and Glass, in the late 1960s, to continue their work with homogeneous textures based on multiple single instruments, to strong amplification, and to including a sound engineer as part of the ensemble in Glass’s case. It’s the sound that has led every composer mentioned in this dissertation to speak about psychoacoustics, difference tones, or revelatory moments in which their overloaded ears suggest the sound of horns and high women’s voices that are not physically present in the ensemble. Again, it is the long list of sonic results of their working practice that have been formalized and de-politicized as the written “family similarities” that supposedly define minimalism as a domesticated event in the long history of Western art music. These working practices—what I have called “early minimalism”—produced the iconic sounds each is known for during their early collaboration before they stagnated as formalist categories: Reich’s “gradual processes,” Glass’s “additive and subtractive rhythms,” Young’s or Conrad’s different takes on drone, stasis, and pure tuning. Their individual conceptions of “minimalism” are not about a formalist set of “family similarities,” rather, they have to do with (as Glass says in the epigraph to this chapter) composers becoming composer-performers, and focusing

\[135\] Ibid.
\[136\] Young, “Dream House.” (See Chapter 2).
\[137\] See Grimshaw, “High, ‘Low,’ and the Plastic Arts.”
on a constituent and often singular sound. This paired set of concerns led composers to form
“bands simply to get the music out.” These bands, working together at least partially
collaboratively, developed sounds that took into account the validity of each individual performer’s
voice, and led to the creation of specific sounds that were heavily identified with that composer,
despite the fact that the departure of any individual member may have radically altered the
constituent sound, as with the Theatre of Eternal Music. It has not been a feature I have discussed
thus far, but it seems to be of central importance to minimalism that all performers and instruments
perform at equal volume: no “singing out” as Tony Conrad has written; no solos like the
“lumbering sloths” in Led Zeppelin, no matter what they may have led Branca to recognize; and no
timbral or harmonic hierarchy of parts as erected by the “master musicians of the culture.”

Despite claims to the contrary in the national middlebrow press, in 1981 seemingly everyone in
downtown New York was a “minimalist.” To celebrate its tenth anniversary, the Kitchen threw a
two-night benefit concert at Bond International Casino in Time Square. Running through the
performers involved, John Rockwell includes, among many others, “the Philip Glass Ensemble,
which plays Mr. Glass’s popular Minimalist music… Maryanne Amacher, a Minimalist composer…,
and Steve Reich and Musicians, who like Mr. Glass’s ensemble, specialize in the Minimalist music
of their leader.” Note, here, the capitalization. Jon Pareles also reviewed the event, playing up the
minimalist aspect far more aggressively:

In the course of the 70s, minimalism—those simple repeated patterns—escaped the avant-
garde and found itself an audience. Although some minimal procedures germinated in the
60s, the Kitchen… has been closely associated with the growing respect accorded Glass,
Reich, and fellow travellers including Laura Dean, Michael Nyman, Eno, and others. As art
music goes, minimalism has definitely hit the bigtime. Instead of playing for 200 people at

138 Author’s conversation with Rhys Chatham, September 2014.
139 See liner notes to Tony Conrad, Slapping Pythagoras (Table of the Elements CD V-23).
the Kitchen, Glass and Reich can each sell out Carnegie Hall annually… Perhaps because minimalism dovetails with the drone of rock and the repetition of funk… there’s no culture shock between pop and this facet of the avant-garde. The presence on the benefit program of the Raybeats (surf-minimalism), Bush Tetras (hard-funk minimalism), Love of Life Orchestra (atonal jam-funk minimalism), Lydia Lunch (abrasive minimalism) and Red Decade (suite minimalism) showed how much cross-fertilization has occurred.

Pareles continues that the “static-harmony, simple-rhythms repetition that rock picked up on is only one aspect of what Reich and Glass (and Meredith Monk and George Lewis and Glenn Branca and Robert Ashley and Laurie Anderson and Rhys Chatham) are doing.” He labels Glass and Branca as the most striking performers of the night, as well as George Lewis and the poet John Giorno; he is so focused on the minimal in the event that he feels it necessary to assure his readers that minimalism was not “the only permitted style” at the benefit. Clearly, for Pareles, who has been one of the central writers on the downtown scene throughout the late 1970s, the Kitchen is the space in which minimalism developed—beginning from Chatham’s first programming in late 1971—and, when it comes time to host a benefit a decade later, the program, which was collaboratively programmed by past music directors Chatham, Garrett List, George Lewis, and Arthur Russell, could not help but be dominated by minimalism. Apparently no one informed the Kitchen, Pareles, and Rockwell—not to mention the Raybeats or the Bush Tetras, the Love of Life Orchestra and Red Decade, all those improper band names—that minimalism is the inadequate name of a style of composition that has already been over for five years.

A few months later Tim Page’s “Minimalist Primer” closed by suggesting some future paths for this new, albeit badly named and hardly minimal, style. “While Glass and Reich dominate the current minimalist scene… there are some promising records being made today that may signal a ‘second wave’ of minimalism.” Following all of the above writing that crosses over between the

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143 Ibid.
discourses of “minimalism” and “punk,” we should perhaps not be surprised at Page borrowing the language of “new wave” and “second wave” punk rock; indeed, Gendron notes that these “waves” were the preferred nomenclature among record labels, who did everything they could to avoid the label “punk” being applied to their new roster of artists. Among this second wave Page includes work by Robert Ashley and Meredith Monk, but only after signalling out the “rare talent” that is John Adams for his recording *Shaker Loops*. The piece is “far from rigid minimalism; it owes as much to Bartók as to Riley” but its “synthesis of styles bodes well for the future of this gifted artist.” After discussing Adams’ work at some length, Page quickly notes that he “cannot find space to discuss the work of such notable composers as Jon Gibson, Beth Anderson, Rhys Chatham, Harold Budd, Laraaji, Glenn Branca, Jeffrey Lohn, and others.” For Page, the minimalist aesthetic—as one to be sold to the nation-wide readers of *High Fidelity*, including reference to how far “classical music” has come in terms of audience engagement since the magazine published Babbitt’s “Who Cares If You Listen?” in 1958—should be more prominently pitched in the direction of Adams’ “seven solo strings” and “exciting and fresh” repetitions and less towards the Branca/Chatham/Lohn axis.

But as has been made clear throughout this chapter, Branca and Chatham and the rest of their community were by no means marginal: the New York press was lauding their efforts as the continuation of the experimentalism that had been going on in the same lofts and galleries since Yoko Ono’s 1960 series curated by La Monte Young. Despite there being a vibrant, active, and

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145 Ibid.
146 “In the late 1950s… Babbitt thought that musical history had ‘killed’ tonality, finished the idea of repetition, and made serialism inevitable. Believing that audiences would eventually catch up with his work, he penned a famously titled article for the February 1958 issue of *High Fidelity*, ‘Who Cares If You Listen?’ Do Minimalist composers care if you listen? Reich answered the question recently for a New York Daily News reporter: ‘I don’t want my audiences just to listen. I want them to love it!’”
147 This despite the frequent, odd claim by Philip Glass that major papers were not reviewing downtown concerts: “There was little press of those early concerts. ‘Until, I would say, the 1980s, the regular newspapers—The New York Times, for example—they had a rule that they didn't review any art events below 14th Street,’ Glass says. ‘Believe it or not, that was a policy of the paper! And, of course, that meant that they didn't have any idea of what was going on! How could they write about things?’” Steven Thrasher, “Philip Glass’s Life as an East Village Voice,” *The Village Voice* (February 1, 2012).
radical composition scene occurring in downtown New York, garnering attention both locally and internationally, we can perhaps take the pulse of the perspective of institutional American art music in 1981 by reference to the complete text of that year’s Pulitzer panel decision: “Since the majority of the members of the 1981 Pulitzer Prize Music Jury decided that no work was worthy of a prize, the Pulitzer Prize Board followed that suggestion and decided to give ‘no award’ in this category.” My claim here of course is not that any particular minimalist deserved the prize, that the judges were unaware of conspiring against these composers; it’s simply to remind of how much music was being composed at that point, in a moment which continues to confuse music scholars: what was the dominant ism or style of the early 1980s? This is perhaps yet another doubled rejection: at the same moment that national audiences refused the multiple minimalisms ongoing in New York in favour of a singular, homogeneous Minimalism, the Pulitzer Prize Board refused to recognize any work of that year as deserving of an award, despite how prominently American art music had entered the public consciousness for the first time in decades.

What seems clear is that, in 1981, in New York City, under the name “minimalism,” the institution of traditional art music authorship had been critically damaged. Not only had the most exciting composers, as highlighted by the *Times* or the *Voice*, refused notated scores, choosing instead a less authoritarian mode of collaborative development in rehearsal, they had also abandoned the venues, schools, and ensembles that had long upheld the hierarchical priority of classical music composition. What’s more, these composers had turned to creating their music at loud volumes, often with rock instruments, and in formations that ranged from their own ensembles to groups that directly named themselves “bands” and performed primarily at gallery spaces and in punk clubs, alongside “musicians” drawn from theatre, painting, sculpture, film, dance, and the newly formed

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mediums of simply “performance” and video art. I contend that it was at least in part because of these naming practices that the discourse of art music has been unable to include and account for these artists. In my concluding chapter I would like to draw together many issues of naming and nomination taken up in these case studies by claiming that the central political challenge posed by minimalism—the reason its politics have been rejected, the reason that it has been unsuccessfully accounted for beyond the names of four dominant practitioners—arises because of its constitutive refusal of the authorial power of proper names.
Conclusion
Noise, Band / Policeband

“The name, insofar as it names a thing, is nothing but the thing insofar as it is named by the name… What the State cannot tolerate in any way, however, is that… singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging.”

—Giorgio Agamben¹

“The classes that name themselves, and that are named, are never what classes must be, in the scientific sense: sets of individuals to which it is possible to attribute rigorously a finite number of common properties… There is history precisely because no primeval legislator put words in harmony with things.”

—Jacques Rancière²

Noise Fest

On June 16, 1981 Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth launched a nine-night festival called “Noise Fest” at White Columns, an art gallery closely associated with Artists Space and similarly developing out of the Buffalo “Pictures Generation” (Figure 5.1). Much like the Artists Space festival within the mythology of no wave, Noise Fest has long played a major role in histories of noise music for its inclusion of bands like Sonic Youth (their first show), Built on Guilt (featuring “Pictures Generation” artists Robert Longo and Richard Prince), Ut (Nina Canal’s new band), and Y Pants (featuring Barbara Ess, formerly of Daily Life and the Static); Battle of the Bands alumni such as Chinese Puzzle and Jeffrey Lohn; and members of the no wave scene (and performers from Aluminum Nights) such as Dark Day (Robin Crutchfield of DNA’s new band), Jules Baptiste’s Red

Decade, Rhys Chatham, and Glenn Branca. The festival began the night immediately following Aluminum Nights; I draw upon it here for its close geographic and temporal relation to the anniversary concert, and concerts at the Kitchen generally. I think it is worth making note of the contemporaneity of downtown New York events—as in the last chapter, where I noted that the Ramones’ first LP was released on April 23, 1976, the night immediately prior to the premiere of Reich’s *Music for 18 Musicians*—in order to highlight these (non-)relationships of proximity for what they offer about various conceptions of “minimalism,” rather than trawling a wide span of time to find harmonious adjacencies.

Nevertheless, the fact that it occurred right after Aluminum Nights is not the reason I am drawing on the festival here; recognizing what is important once again requires turning to the importance of giving and taking names—for authors, for institutions, for genres, and so on. As David Novak writes, Noise Fest was a “definitive event in the naming of Noise Music.” The schedule and poster for Noise Fest is headed by a comment, cited to the May 13, 1981 issue of the *Soho Weekly News*, from Robert Boykin, the “ex... co-owner” of Hurrah’s, which was one of the first among the major “new wave”/disco clubs that sprung up in New York in the late 1970s and 1980s. There Boykin declares, “Let’s face it, a lot of music has just become noise.” While Hurrah’s began as a venue supporting some of the major punk acts, it is one of the locales that can surely be credited with the shift which saw “new wave” *punk* turn into simply the idea of “new wave” music that became popular on national radio. For Moore and the other organizers, the dismissal from Boykin, as a supporter of the prior generation of punk-related musicians, was a call to arms. In light of the way that artists and musicians named “minimal” in New York had developed—from drones, pure tunings and repetition, to what Gendron and Bangs call the “rank amateurism” of the punk

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4 Robert Boykin, quoted on the Noise Fest poster.
(and “new wave”) bands like Talking Heads and the Ramones, to the wailing vocals and de-tuned
guitars of the “no wave” bands—what was minimal had become closely tied to what was noisy and amateurish. Thanks to the development of a network of low-level music and arts institutions downtown, however, a negative nomination from critics was taken up and turned into a banner under which a new scene emerged. Where the name “minimalism,” as I have argued, is one which has retroactively been considered inadequate by both its critics and its composers, “noise” was one immediately taken up by this group of radical composers and bands (composer-bands?) who had a new network of instruments, performers, and institutions to draw upon: venues, galleries, record labels, rehearsal spaces, studios. In one very important sense, I would say, with the development of a major compositional Minimalism being followed into the concert halls and score publishing houses, the other branch of this downtown music was being relabelled as simply “noise.” Or, more accurately, as “Noise.”

![Noise Fest Poster](image_url)
Of course, the Noise Fest performers were neither the first nor the last to have a critic refer to their music—whether directly or indirectly—as “noise;” this is a dismissal nearly as old as music. Indeed, as Rancière has noted, it is also as old as politics, and points directly at how music and sound, or at least musical listening, are central to the formation of Ranciérion politics. To recount Rancière’s account: for Aristotle, politics is about the domain of ruling and being ruled; it is an activity undertaken by human beings, the political animal. Humans are political animals because they are rational animals, literary animals. The human logos of rationality, that is political humanity, is placed in opposition to the mere voice or phoné of animals and slaves. One can tell a political being from a (mere) animal (or slave—a social function which the distinction between logos [as speech] and phoné [as mere voice] is explicitly mobilized to exclude) by whether that being speaks rational discourse or uses its mouth merely to voice pleasure and pain.

For Aristotle, this is the instantiation of politics; for Rancière, politics has already been effaced. “The only practical difficulty,” Rancière writes, is that Aristotle offers no account of how to distinguish logos from phoné: “how one can be sure that the human animal mouthing a noise in front of you is actually voicing an utterance rather than merely expressing a state of being?” Under what sign are we to recognize this logos, the rationality in speech? This sign of reason in opposition to noise? This is the foundational reason why politics is, not metaphorically, but literally, aesthetic—it is a distribution of sensibility. The way that some individuals become rational, political beings while others become (mere) animals mouthing noise is through the always aesthetic and even methodological decision as to whether to hear rational content in their emissions or simply the sound of pain, joy, or suffering.

5 The following paragraph is a truncated overview of Rancière’s reading of Aristotle, and particularly in its relation to noise. The primary sources here are Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics” (Thesis 8 in particular, and paragraph 23 especially), and the first chapter of Disagreement, which begins with a long quotation from Aristotle’s Politics: “Speech is something different from voice…” See also Samuel Chambers, “Jacques Rancière and the Problems of Pure Politics,” 309.

Perhaps most importantly, one names something “noise” out of fear of its near-indistinction from “the proper” of politics. Rancière argues that for Aristotle as for Arendt and others, the “proper” of politics is defined as the *eu zên*, something along the lines of a good or ethical life, in contrast to merely the *zen* of unmarked living defined simply by cycles of reproduction (which defines the proletariat). But, in affirming an impure and *improper* politics, Rancière suggest that defining what is “proper” to politics based on a certain style of life is to entirely negate politics from the beginning. “If there is something ‘proper’ to politics, it consists entirely in this relationship which is not a relationship between subjects, *but one between two contradictory terms through which a subject is defined*,” we could perhaps say, by which a subject is *named*. Something becomes named *noise* (in contrast to a new *proper* called “Minimalism”) out of a self-consciousness about the porousness of the boundary needed to uphold the distinction of the *logos* (in a given situation: the music, the art, the proper, the rational, and so on). “Noise” is a category declared out of fear of the possibility of indistinction, or to reaffirm the boundaries of the territory of the *logos* when something that looks or sounds quite similar appears on it shores.

There are many names of minimalism. Critics early on referred to solid state music, process music, music of long duration, record-stuck-in-the-groove music, and so on. Since the 1980s, scholars have proposed Minimalism as a singular, cohesive generic classification constituted by the works and discourse of a set of proper names: most often Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass. More recent scholarship has supplemented this account (either to problematize it or to support it) with second generation or less common proper names: John Adams and David Lang, or Tony Conrad, Karel Goeyvaerts, and Charlemagne Palestine. For my part, I have prioritized three historiographical nominations: an “early” minimalism, a variety of “indistinct minimalisms,” and the Minimalism proper extracted from them. I have not been concerned to challenge the dominant usage of the term

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minimalism, but rather to show that the means by which it is held together consistently thwart and efface its authorio-political origins in favour of the metaphysical formalism of the “family similarities.”

In this conclusion I would like briefly to draw together a few threads from the preceding chapters. I begin by more explicitly articulating the place and role of the “institutions” of minimalism: in particular, their pedagogic role, the way that they have carried forward a non-stultifying lesson in authorship and its egalitarian transmission beyond the supposed “death of minimalism” in the mid-late 1970s, all while remaining almost entirely distinct from academia. I articulate this discussion of institutions in close proximity to the idea of the band as a political formation, a situation in which multiple authors declare their authority under a shared nomination. In this sense, I want to consider the importance of these institutions, and the possibility of the band in downtown “minimalisms,” under a Rancièrean theory of names—something which he never explicitly puts forward, but that I suggest is present at all times in his writing—as part of articulating the authorizing name under which the rejection of the *abruptir* is transmitted.

**The (Band) Names of Minimalism**

I mean by the “institutions” of minimalism the material practices introduced and made possible by their methods of composing music. More specifically, I mean the elements of “early minimalism” that I developed from Tony Conrad in the introduction. To review these: minimalism is performed by composer-performers who form ensembles with whom to create their music; it is developed primarily in rehearsal with these sympathetic composer-collaborators; it is generally recorded for posterity to magnetic tape (whether commercial or archival) rather than to notated scores; and it is

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8 See Potter et. al., “Introduction,” 4; see also Introduction to this dissertation.
typically played in lofts (whether by invitation or open to the public) and art galleries rather than in concert halls.

A feature that draws these together, and which has not yet been explicitly outlined, is the institution of a compositional practice that is, to borrow language from Rancière, non-stultifying—that avoids the *abrutir* that this generation of composers felt was constitutive of the art music of prior generations. This earlier art music-as- *abrutir* was not only a critique of the academic pedagogic practice of composition, but, as Reich articulated in “Music as a Gradual Process,” was also the pervasive ethic of that music’s composition, performance, and reception. In response to this situation, the minimalist composers discussed in this dissertation took up performance and avoided scores to escape the methods of delegation so central to art music practice; they also moved into art galleries and loft spaces to escape the hushed reverence and concert etiquette typical of art music, to enable alternate and non-coercive modes of presentation, and indeed to blur the distinction between “rehearsal” and “performance” as massive pieces like *Music in 12 Parts* were workshopped and performed in Glass’s Chatham Square loft. I have already provided numerous examples: Conrad first hearing Young’s ensemble with Zazeela, Name, and MacLise at the 10–4 Gallery; The Theatre of Eternal Music playing primarily in invitation-based performances in lofts (Young’s, Geldzahler’s, Poons’s) and art galleries; Riley insisting that the premiere of *In C* involve not only a light show, but also that the folding chairs be left by the door so the audience could choose their own arrangement; later, the Electric Ear series on St. Mark’s led to Riley, in “bell bottoms,” performing on “circus organ” (heard by and converting the young and staunchly academic) Rhys Chatham; Reich and Glass first becoming reacquainted at an art gallery concert, and proceeding to perform in a number

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9 Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 7. To recap from Chapter 3: *abrutir* is Rancière’s term that was translated, recognizing its insufficiency, as “stultification” by Kristin Ross. I have returned to the original French to retain some of the lost relations of the original term that Ross highlights, “to render stupid, to treat like a brute.”

of them (as well as a few university art galleries) throughout the period of their collaboration; Chatham convincing Woody and Steina Vasulka to let him program a music series in their new venue for video art; and the many, many performances in the downtown no wave scene, often featuring Branca and Chatham, that led from the Kitchen to Hurrah’s and CBGB’s, and especially introduced the idea of bands performing in an Artists Space, perhaps further setting the stage for the above-mentioned Noise Fest at White Columns, still one of New York’s preeminent independent galleries.

Much as I argued that the disputes between these composer-collaborators should not be dismissed as coincidence, biographic trivialities, or gossip, I contend that the development of alternate institutions for not only performance but also recording, dissemination, and pedagogic transmission needs to be taken seriously as a fundamental part of what minimalism is. Scholars have never denied the fact that these performances took place in galleries, or that the composers were involved in their performance; at times, however, they have prioritized “the music itself,” and moreover felt it irrelevant to mention (or did not know) that the scores that they analyzed were transcriptions from taped document to notated score. They have similarly treated the movement out of the concert hall and the dominant institutions of art music as simply an element of the related “counterculture” without cohesively accounting for its efficacy or impact. Further, I would argue that these (anti-)institutional features, these material practices, should be foregrounded in relation to formalist features; to borrow Althusserian language, we could say that minimalism is determined, “in the last instance,” by the relations of production rather than the object itself.

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12 Althusser uses this turn of phrase frequently in “Contradiction and Overdetermination,” there quoting Engels; perhaps more importantly for my purposes, it is also central to his explanation of structural causality (what Miller called metonymic causality) in Althusser et. al., Reading Capital, 188-191. The term was explicitly formulated by Engels, Althusser
approach in humanities scholarship, but it has only barely played a part in histories of minimalism, which have largely failed to recognize the importance of focusing on the practices (indeed, the process) and not the product. That is, composing in rehearsal led to an emphasis on long tones or repetition rather than serialized structures; working with a collaborative ensemble meant that the particular development of the sound ("itself") leaned in the direction of the interests, limits, and skills of the performers present, and in more egalitarian relationships with them; being interested in audibility of structure and creating an egalitarian musical surface surely made it more productive to work with homogenous textures and timbres (and indeed dynamics) rather than creating hierarchical harmonies in which one voice is expected to be heard as taking the lead; and so on.13

All of this relies, very directly, on a theory of names. The word “name” appears frequently in Rancière’s writing: ideas appear “under the name” of something (modernism, politics, democracy, history); concepts are clarified with a “namely,” set off from the sentence; and, most importantly, contingent and indistinct individuals drawn from the archive (Gabriel Gauny, Joseph Jacotot) are named, and indeed read, rather than extracted as statistical exemplars of a class (“the workers”) blindly speaking their ideology. What is perhaps most notable is that often when the word “name” appears, it seems to spiral out, as for example in his chapter in Aisthesis on Walt Whitman, whose famous self-affirmation—“I celebrate myself, and sing myself / And what I assume you shall assume”—Rancière reminds us, “goes along with the erasure of the poet’s proper name. No author’s name appears on the cover of the collection.”14 Or, at the beginning of The Names of History, when Rancière focuses on the word “history” as the name of a discourse, discipline, and style of writing.

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13 I thank an anonymous reviewer at Twentieth-Century Music for pointing out the importance of clarifying the practical development of the sounds of minimalism that had been underemphasized in relation to the compositional politics that I have focused on articulating.

14 Rancière, Aisthesis, 69.
This dispute over the name of a discipline that is also a practice of writing needs to be recounted at length to get at the idea of name in play in the text whose name I’ve borrowed for this dissertation.

The Names of History begins, like many of Rancière’s texts, with a quotation: “For more than a century, those interested in history—and they are many—have struggled with the word.”

Rancière explains, “the [Annales school] historians who wished to break with the old tradition of chronicling, in order to give history… the rigor of a science, had to struggle with the presuppositions and equivocations attached to the very name history.” With good reason Rancière reductively defines history as simply “a series of events that happen to subjects who are generally designated by proper names” and, in a second sense, “the narrative of those series of events attributable to proper names.”

The problem for Rancière is that, at the time of his writing in the late 1980s, the dominant mode of historiography in French academia was that of the Annalistes, who strove to give history the rigour of a new “historical science,” one “precisely aimed to abolish the primacy of events and proper names in favor of long periods and the lives of the anonymous.” The Annaliste historians largely avoided the primacy of individual subjects—monarchs and their secretaries—in favour of improper subjects, such as oceans, “the people” or “the masses,” that can be quantized and verified scientifically. The problem for these “homonym hunters,” as Rancière labels them, is that while the English language had long differentiated stories and histories, and German marks the gap between Historie and Geschichte, French was stuck within the “unfortunate homonymy [which] designates lived experience, its faithful narrative, its lying fiction, and its knowledgeable explanation all by the same name.”

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15 This tactic of opening on a large quotation has been noted by both Panagia and Swenson in their analyses of Rancière’s writing style. His practice, as Swenson has shown, is closely tied to the French stile indirect libre, as both a practice and method of writing; see Swenson, “Stile indirect libre.” Starting with a long quotation—as he does most famously by quoting Aristotle on the logos/phôné distinction at the start of Disagreement (see Chambers, The Lessons of Rancière), and as he begins every individual chapter of Aisthesis—allows Rancière to begin by immediately undercutting the act of, as we might say, “having the first word.”


17 Ibid.
name”: *histoire.* For Rancière, the irony in all of this is that words cannot escape their misunderstanding (*mésentente*), and the means of scientifically assuring accuracy to get around the dangers of misunderstanding further relied on the methods of literature, and thus more words in “excess.” The confusion of language was in fact needed to measure the dilemma in its rigor: the new historical science could no longer be a history, and still had to be one. The difference between history as science and history as narrative was necessarily produced in the heart of narrative, with the latter’s words and use of words.” In a rather broad attempt to clarify this distinction, he continues:

The human and social sciences are children of the scientific age: the age of a certain number of decisive revolutions in the fundamental sciences; but also the age of scientific belief, the age that conceives of the rationality of every activity according to a certain idea of scientific rationality that has no necessary connection to the revolution in question. But—we forget this too easily—the age of science is also that of literature, that in which the latter names itself as such and separates the rigor of its own action from the simple enchantments of fiction, as with rules on the division of poetic genres and procedures suited to *belles lettres.* It is finally—we “know” this more and more—the age of democracy, the age in which democracy appears, even in the eyes of those who combat or fear it, as the social destiny of modern politics; it is the age of the broad masses and great regularities that lend themselves to the calculations of science, but also that of a new disorder and arbitrariness that disturb objective rigors.

For Rancière, the nineteenth century, with its workers, its revolutions, and the writings of Saint-Simon, Fourier and Marx, is also the age when *literature* is distinguished from the other genres of

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18 Ibid., 3.
19 See the third chapter of *The Names of History,* “The Excess of Words.” It is also worth mentioning that *The Names of History* was written immediately prior to *Disagreement.* Indeed, papers presented—particularly one presented at an English language conference—between the two books show the central play of “homonymy” in the development of Rancière’s idea of *mésentente.* He begins that paper, “In a sense, the whole matter of my paper is involved in a preliminary question: In what language will it be uttered? Neither my language nor your language, but rather a dialect between French and English, a special one, a dialect that carries no identification with any group. No tribal dialect, no universal language, only an *in-between* dialect, constructed for the aims of this discussion and guided by the idea that the activity of thinking is primarily an activity of translation, and that anyone is capable of making a translation. Underpinning this capacity for translation is the efficacy of equality, that is to say, the efficacy of humanity. I will move directly to the question that frames our discussion. I quote from the third point of the list of issues we were asked to address: ‘What is the political?’ Briefly and roughly speaking, I would answer: the political is the encounter between two heterogeneous processes. The first process is that of governing, and it entails creating community consent, which relies on the distribution of shares and the hierarchy of places and functions. I shall call this process *police.*” That Rancière put forward the first English translation of *police* as *policy* has not gained any commentary in English language literature on Rancière. Most importantly, I think the connection here to *The Names of History* makes something clear that is perhaps too obvious to have been worth comment: that *police* and *politics* are near homonyms, both of which come through the the Latin *polis* as the people. See Rancière, “Politics, Identification, Subjectivization,” *October* 61 (1992), 58.
writing, and also the age of Darwin and Kropotkin and their theories of evolution, whether individual or collective. His claim, in short, is to suggest that we should not separate the new practices of scientific rigor from the appearance of “the people,” the major Revolutions of that period, and the appearance of a new art appropriate to writing them as separate from the belles lettres. For Rancière, the name histoire is not a messy conflict between science and fable to be surmounted through a turn to quantifiable classes—it is the foundational conflict that produces history as a practice of writing in relation to literature, to revolt, to Marxism, and so on. The disorder of histoire—its noise—is not its threat but its power.

In his preface to the English edition of Les Noms de l'Histoire, the historiographer Hayden White notes that “Rancière is interested… in the relationship between the ‘words of history’ and the ‘things’ of the past that they indicate, name, or otherwise signify, whether these be events, persons, structures, or processes. But he is also interested in the relationship between these ‘words’ and the ‘things’ of the past that they misname, unname, obscure, or otherwise ignore.” “Names,” then, have two functions. On the one hand, a proper name is a “signature that gives order” to a series of events, things, ideas, and concepts tied to that name; for example, Althusser’s name is forever tied to the concept of the ideological state apparatuses. This first claim adds little to what Foucault put forward in “What is an Author?”: “the links between the proper name and the individual named and between the author’s name and what it names are not isomorphic and do not function in the same way,” and so on. We can also add here Davide Panagia’s claim that “all of Rancière’s writerly figures (Althusser, Flaubert, Jacotot, Marx, etc.) present sensibilities rather than arguments or attention…

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22 Hayden White, “Foreword: Rancière’s Revisionism” in The Names of History, viii; my emphasis.
The author is, for Rancière, a mediator of associational dispositions—a curator of the divergences of thought and affect.”

On the other hand, nominations are means of both subjectifying and disidentifying assemblages from their given place. To this end, again in the 2011 foreword to *Althusser’s Lesson*, Rancière reflects on his method of 1974: “From the very beginning, my concern has been with the study of thought and speech there where they produce effects, that is, in a social battle that is also a conflict, renewed with each passing instant, over what we perceive and how we can name it.” In this sense, names are closely related to the distribution of the sensible, the sensory, and of the means of partitioning it such as to carve out specific ideas and concepts. Names are a central part of the *poetics* Rancière so frequently highlights: “The poet must reunite words and things, give things the names that express their nature as speech, give words the sensible potential that links them to the movement of life. This tasking of naming is not a work of art… It is the work of life. The poet names things in the way that things name and symbolize themselves.” While here he is specifically referring to Emerson and the work of poetry, as a proper genre of writing, he just as often writes of his own work as a *poetics*, of the poetics of knowledge, and as poetics (rather than science) as a central element of his “method of equality.” Further, tracking how a name is misused, reused, or misappropriated is central to pursuing politics and history on their own terrain; to instead pick and choose the exemplars of its use that provide for it a singular and coherent line, is to efface its political misappropriation, its use against its own partisans, it diverse travel and inherent “excess.”

Turning to my case studies, we can consider, first, the names of and in specific compositions. *The day of the antler* is not written for two voices, violin and viola. As I have argued, it perhaps should not have been “written” at all, but in the form that it was, even by a composer

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24 Davide Panagia, “Rancière’s Style,” 287; my emphasis.
whose name is closely tied to a particularly domineering form of authorship and autobiographical narrativity, the parts are written out for Young, Zazeela, Cale, and Conrad. This is because when Angus MacLise left the ensemble, as I have already noted repeatedly, there was no search for a new hand drummer. Rather, the group carried on towards such a point that the two strings and voice became the dominant sound, “driving [Young] off the saxophone” that was no longer able to stay in tune to join the vocal drone, thus leading to a “singular sound” that, it was felt, deserved its own nomination: The Theatre of Eternal Music. As Conrad and Cale further insisted on their equal role in the creation of that sound, the group (as Young admits this in his 2000 open letter) had to find a way to represent all four names in such a way as to recognize, against all convention and precedent, an egalitarian relationship under the banner of the collective name; simply listing names risked hierarchy, and indeed, what were they even going to write their names on in the wake of their rejection of the score? This produced the diamond formation seen in concert invitations, press releases, and programs though entirely absent—and exclusively absent, during this period—in Young’s individually signed “score” for day of the antler. The problem of naming here, then, is one internal to the genre chosen for “writing” musical works-as-directions for performance: the musical score was wrong, at least half of those involved have claimed, and had to be left aside specifically because the musical score relies on the individual author whose signature orders mouths and fingers and bows, and thus institutes a style attached to that name. What’s more, in 1964-1966, the Theatre of Eternal Music could not go solely by that name; not yet in the fully band-oriented regime of a decade later, there was felt obligation to maintain the presence of four proper names.

It’s Gonna Rain, or Meet Brother Walter in Union Square After Listening to Terry Riley, as I have argued, was a citational title that recognized the authorizing contributions of two individuals (neither

27 John Cale, What’s Welsh for Zen, 60-61; see Chapter 2.
28 See Young’s “Notes on the Theatre of Eternal Music,” as well as the “score” for day of the antler in Potter, Four Musical Minimalists; both are discussed in Chapter 2.
of whom was the composer). Its effacement has led to all number of critiques of Reich; if the piece’s title directly named Brother Walter, turning him into a credited “performer” rather than an abstract black voice framed by an unmarked white formalism, the critiques by Scherzinger, Whitesell and others would have less force (and indeed, may well not have been offered at all). Further, I think that Potter’s explanation of the Two Pages dispute is likely: Glass probably wrote on Reich’s part, “Two Pages (for Steve Reich)—but perhaps another sheet in an archive somewhere says, “Two Pages (for Jon Gibson)” or “Two Pages (for Joan LaBarbara).” That is, these parts were written for their actual performers, and not for “keyboard 2” or “saxophone 1” or “voice 3.” While my claim about the potential of similar copies with other proper names on them is an extrapolation from Potter’s own speculation, the more concrete point is central here: again, these parts were written for members of a band, not for abstract instruments to be sought out later; they were not for a “whatever” saxophone (in the sense of Giorgio Agamben’s quodlibet, for example29), but for a particular saxophonist, in the room, here and now. We should, on the other hand, remember that when the transcription of Music for 18 Musicians, for example, was published as a score, these proper names were removed in favour of abstract instrumental parts. The effacement of the other people in the room is central to classifying Minimalism as a proper style of formalist art music composition, with pieces like Music for 18 Musicians—its written form developed, but left unsigned by another composer30—central to that work of classification, and indeed of distinction. Central to the creation of a style of art music composition called “Minimalism” is the effacement of collaborative and contributive labour in favour of single authorial names.

We can lastly add the complex interaction of proper and improper names in play in the no wave scene, beginning even as early as Chatham’s programming at the Kitchen in 1972. “Dr.

29 Agamben, The Coming Community, 1.
Drone” was surely intended to create a different performance context, and thus a different set of expectations, for the audience. While the insider audience of artists attending the concert knew that Chatham was Dr. Drone, performing under the banner of an improper name provides a certain freedom and malleability of audience expectation that is not in place when attending a concert by the Kitchen’s music director. Chatham was perhaps acting under the influence of Riley—the composer under whom he was “converted” to a “hardcore minimalist” four years earlier—who performed the 1969 Electric Ear concert under the name “Poppy Nogood,” labeling his time-lag accumulator and its looping saxophone atmospherics his “Phantom Band.”

Collective nominations—band names—continue throughout the following years. What Bernard Gendron called “volatile” groups changed membership and names frequently: Chatham performed Guitar Trio in its first four years under the auspices of Tone Death, Young Americans, Melt Down, and presumably others (in the early 2000s he toured as the Essentialist and again as Melt Down). Branca began his performing career creating theatre under the name of the Bastard Theatre before moving to New York, when he quickly formed Theoretical Girls as his form of punk-musical theatre, and subsequently joined Daily Life; when Paul McMahon left New York, the remaining three members (Branca, Christine Hahn, and Barbara Ess) continued on as the Static, before Branca began presenting his music—initially with “limp” and austere titles like Untitled before turning to what one critic called his “transcendentalist symphonies”—under his own proper name. The same was true of many others in the no wave scene. Critics never quite seem sure whether to refer to Robin Crutchfield by his proper name or as Dark Day following the breakup of DNA; Jules Baptiste, a member of Chatham’s original Guitar Trio performances, formed his well-known

31 As discussed in Chapter 4, the time-lag accumulator is in essence identical to the “Frippertronics” developed in 1976 by Brian Eno and Robert Fripp.
32 An early Bastard Theatre poster that Branca posted on eBay in 2016 reads like a manifesto: “we are buzzards in your carriion… we will grow inside your bellies till you are driven out with the force of your own excrement… we will give you what you want and you will be disgusted by it.”
33 See Chapter 4.
band Red Decade, which was seemingly always billed as Jules Baptiste’s Red Decade; Peter Gordon, another Mills-trained composer, credited the majority of his work as the Love of Life Orchestra (which featured Chatham, Jill Kroesen, “Blue” Gene Tyranny, and Scott Johnson) rather than under his own name. This is not apart from the recognition that, as I showed in Chapter 4, critics had a hard time distinguishing whether the music of DNA, Mars, Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, The Static, and others were to be considered rock, performed by bands, or art music, written by composers (or, as Branca suggested to Marc Masters, as “art-music”—that is, music created and consumed by visual artists).

Within the scene and venues where these figures were playing, such indistinction produced confusion in which differentiations perhaps didn’t matter; nevertheless, critics had to find something to say and a means of framing the performances that they reviewed. “Minimalism” was a term consistently mobilized towards these ends. As I argued in the previous chapter, I think this must be kept in mind when considering the prominent rejections of “minimalism” from the early 1980s—the composers and critics were not rejecting some ahistorical label that they felt insufficient for their music, but were likely rejecting association with the music most often being given that name in the late 1970s. All of this points toward a Ranciérian principle of indistinction operative between bands and composers, or bands and “ensembles,” between performer and composer, music and audience, rehearsal and concert, punk show or art music concert—indeed, eventually between noise and music. Under the name minimalism, all of the social factors of music are minimized into productive indistinctions: tiny gradations that produce conflicts and buzzes and difference tones; a (social and

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34 Baptiste and Red Decade were certainly well-known at the time, though are barely recognizable names today. Following performances at both Aluminum Nights (where they were referred to as “suite-minimalism” by Pareles) and Noise Fest, Baptiste released an album under his own name, but with the title Red Decade, on Branca’s record label, Neutral, in 1982. Today it is difficult to find any reliable information online.

35 In terms of critics’ trouble writing these names, a similar problem is frequently evident in contemporary writing on band names. While “The Beatles” or “Radiohead” easily fit into writing about an author or performer, the recent trend of musicians taking on less marked names—Alvvays, xx, !!!—frequently reveals the lengths to which critics and writers must go to fit these disruptive (and indeed indistinct) author names into the syntax of music writing.
political, in addition to sonic) form of “metamusic” as introduced but left entirely unexplored in the Ashgate Companion’s “family similarities.”\textsuperscript{36} To return to Branca’s definition of minimalism, there is much more happening psychoacoustically than can be reproduced on the page; as Conrad wrote: “Noises are not ever pitchless, to say the least. Pitched pulses, palpitating beyond rhythm and cascading the cochlea with a galaxy of synchronized partials, reopen the awareness of the sine tone—the element of combinatorial hearing.”\textsuperscript{37} All of this indistinction was swept aside—confiscated, effaced—by the declaration of an orderly “low music” called Minimalism in the early 1980s, one which specifically appropriated the name of the disciplinary threat to “art music” as the name of a new compositional aesthetic. I think it more productive to consider these tiny gradations between formerly binarized relationships as the real minimization in effect.

The important thing is that names are given, taken, and contested, that collectives are banded together by a name. That is the purpose of an improper name, and of the poetic act of naming rather than the scientific act of classifying. Groups can disidentify, declare their separation from their assigned places, by staging the means of their own sensible articulation—by “writing their name in the sky.”\textsuperscript{38} Doing so, Rancière might claim, is the entire history of politics: groups coming together under a collective name to produce for themselves such and such contingent associations and references, towards such and such ends. These groups, when a taxonomic principle of combination is demanded of them, probably have little to offer.\textsuperscript{39} Just as quickly, there is often a counterforce eager to reject the group, the name, the terms of its appropriation, its propriety in

\textsuperscript{36} Potter, Gann, ap Siôn, “Introduction,” 4; see the Introduction of this dissertation.
\textsuperscript{37} Conrad, Film Culture; see Chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{38} Rancière (quoting Ballanche), Disagreement, 5.
\textsuperscript{39} Rancière has frequently cited the importance of E.P. Thompson as a labour historian; his The Making of the English Working Class begins with the foundation of the London Correspondents’ Society, whose charter was the first to include the demand “That the number of our Members be unlimited.” See E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Vintage, 1963), 17.
labeling the terms of their coming together, and so on.⁴⁰ That these nominations become the locus of misunderstanding is not a problem to be overcome: it is the whole work of history. For the kind of scientific historians whom Rancière names “homonym hunters,” the threat of misunderstanding is a constant presence; this is why they insist on a clear “gap between nominations and classifications,” and indeed a precise overlap between words and the things that they name. As Rancière claims, “classes that name themselves, and that are named, are never what classes must be, in the scientific sense: sets of individuals to which it is possible to attribute rigorously a finite number of common properties.” Formalist readings of minimalism have long aimed to turn the nomination “minimalism” into a classification; but “a name identifies, it doesn’t class.” Importantly, Rancière continues, “The evil [of nominations prone to mésentente being used, rather than perfect classifications] is slight as long as the kings [composers?]—whose names... guarantee their identity—make the history. It risks becoming irremediable when classes [bands? ensembles? -isms?] take the place of kings, precisely because these classes are not classes.”⁴¹ Indeed, he summarizes, “There is history”—and later in his career he might say there is politics, there is art—“precisely because no primeval legislator put words in harmony with things. Pushed to its limit, the will to liquidate improper names comes down to the will to liquidate the impropriety and the anachronism by which events in general happen to subjects.”⁴²

Classification thus simultaneously demands and produces a science: scientists classify their objects, and in doing so produce themselves as subjects of a discipline with a clear subject-object division. In contrast, nominations are a danger: heterogeneous assemblages give themselves names; where classifications produce a science, nominations produce a poetics, one founded upon the

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⁴⁰ Novak notes that on his second trip to Japan for fieldwork on the noise scene, he “strained to make sense of a chorus that seemed to speak with two voices: one shouting, ‘Noise is dead,’ the other whispering, ‘Love live Noise.’” Novak, Japanoise, 15.
⁴¹ Rancière, Names of History, 34.
⁴² Rancière, Names of History, 35.
possibility of mésentente and indeed noise. This noise and subsequent potential for misunderstanding are only a danger to subjects and systems premised on the propriety that they introduce through arbitrary distinctions. A collective nomination—an improper name—does not meet the criteria of a proper “I” that can sign itself, that can order things, that can delegate and direct, that can act as guarantor of the propriety of actions undertaken under its name. “We” invites conflict over the consistency of the name, both among its constituent individuals and among those historians tasked with making sense of the revolt that the “we” claims to undertake. The “we” of Baudelaire’s “We will destroy all logical revolt,” for example—from which Les Révoltes Logiques took its name—“inverted,” according to Rancière, “the usual function of the first person: that of attesting to the presence of the person speaking, ensuring the embodiment of the meaning that activist discourse presupposes.”43 That is, “I” attaches a body and a name under the authority of a singular subject who can act, think, and speak on his or her own behalf; “we” in contrast leads to a series of questions—who is we? Under whose authority do they (or does it) speak? What are the terms of their collective constitution? What legitimizes those terms? And, in an effort to discredit the whole “we,” the police conception of history appears to ask whether or not that specific member, that interpellated individual, is unreliable as a result of x, y, or z. To return to my question from Chapter 2, “Who’s in charge here?”

Drawing this all together brings me to a rather crude dialectic. On the one hand, it seems that the composers in question wrote for proper names—parts for Steve Reich or Jon Gibson rather than for keyboard or saxophone; for Young, Zazeela, Cale and Conrad rather than for two voices and strings—because they were bands. When MacLise departed, they did not replace him; much the same, when Cale left to perform with the Velvet Underground, they did not seek a new string player,

but invited “Poppy Nogood” to join, which created an entirely new sound for the band. When Paul McMahon left Daily Life to head to the west coast, they felt unable to continue under the same name, but instead became The Static. These groups were bands, formed of specific individuals listening to, writing, and playing music together. While Two Pages or Music for 18 Musicians eventually became pieces for any performers, their development, the very fact that they exist in their known form, is because of the creative practice developed among the people involved in that time and place, working in the way that they did, led by ignorant masters like Glass or Reich who were interested in guiding the work in a particular direction though without the specific mantles of strong authority that grounded art music in their teachers’ generation.

On the other hand, these groups frequently took on and moved towards the constitution of improper names for the exact same reason: because they were bands. The Theatre of Eternal Music, as I understand it—against both Young’s and Conrad’s proposals—is a collective name taken on to entirely avoid the question of who wrote what. Indeed, to make that question irrelevant. I think that with fifty years of hindsight it is difficult to recognize what a novel fact this was: musicians trained (to varying degrees) in the tradition of Western composition refusing to put a single, authorizing proper name as the mind and pen responsible for the delegation, whose authorial voice authorizes its performance. Though it of course drew on contemporary trends in popular music, theatre, visual art, and so on, I think that it provides an unrecognized rupture in the possibilities of art music composition. That Young sees a social formation and recognizes something in need of his direction, while Conrad sees it as an opportunity for productive conflict and dissent, is at the core of what disensus means: a police sensibility from within which an egalitarian sensibility arises. We should not

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44 The Montreal rock collective Thee Silver Mt. Zion Memorial Orchestra—a group who would strongly declare their close association with minimalism, particularly with Reich and Conrad—have changed their name in advance of almost every album they have released since 2000. Asked in a 2010 interview why they had changed their name prior to their most recent release, singer and guitarist Efrim Menuck responded, “[t]hree members of the band left. We’re a different band with different people. What we do, we do together, so the name changing is out of respect for that.” See https://www.thefourofhfive.com/music/article/interview-efrim-menuck-of-a-silver-mt-zion
forget here that Conrad’s and Cale’s preferred nomenclature “The Dream Syndicate” draws on the
word in labour history for workers who overtake their factory in their own name; that is, workers
who still love and identify with their work, but have rejected the authoritarianism by which it is
credited under the name of a boss or manager. Conversely, Reich, Glass, and Riley continued on in
largely their own direction when it came to labeling their performances and recordings; but their
primary influence on subsequent generations of composers was still that they “formed bands to get
their music out,” as Chatham told me. “Steve Reich and Musicians” and “Philip Glass Ensemble” of
course still prioritize the name of a leader—perhaps like “Bill Haley and His Comets” and “Duke
Ellington and His Orchestra,” or later “The Miles Davis Quintet” and “The Cecil Taylor Unit”—but
the fact remains that the field of visibility, the number of names in question has been expanded from
that typical of Western art music creation. We are perhaps in a situation that can be likened to the
dispute between Rancière, arguing for the school as an apparatus of ideology as articulated in the
street, in contrast to the theoretical heroism subscribed to by Althusser, alone at his desk, traversing
the classics of Marxism to “invent” the counterintuitive concept of the school as the dominant
apparatus in the ideological reproduction of capital. By the mid-1970s in New York, if not earlier,
the authorizing name—proper or improper, collective or singular—has become another element to
take into account when putting forward musical work, alongside creating the sounds, learning the
performance practice, considering the locale and stage setup, and so on.

There is thus a close relationship between the band as a social formation and the act of
nomination; indeed, etymologically, to be a band is, on the one hand, the result of a process of
bringing together a group of individuals (banding together, as with a band or a sash) and, on the
other, being together under a collective name (a banner, from the French banière). So to be in a band
is to have a contingent collective (a whatever) banded together into one through the act of giving itself
a name. This is true perhaps of any collectivity: they become collectives in inventing a common
name, or, as Rancière once wrote (drawing on Serge Ballanche), in “writing their names in the sky”—that is, creating a place for themselves in which they “count” and can be accounted-for in the cosmological “order of things.” Indeed, I would go so far as to suggest that these collectivized nominations disidentify minimalism with the genre of art music. Musicological discourse on art music has no methodological practice of writing to account for an improper name as an author (Foucault: “The author’s name is a proper name”). The typical response, when confronted with something like “The Theatre of Eternal Music” is to turn to the policing question: “Who’s in charge here?” (Steve Reich and Musicians and Philip Glass Ensemble play somewhere in between these two: who’s in charge is kept evident, while the impulse towards the band is kept intact.) Much the same, in musicological writing on popular music, the collective, improper nomination is entirely taken for granted and left unthought. In either case—studies of Western art music or popular music—the band name is either taken for granted and ignored, or becomes provocation to hunt out who is most responsible for the creation of the music, and who is (merely) responsible for contingent side issues: for inspiration, for carpentry or mathematical knowledge, for providing resultant patterns, and so on.

What developed under the name “minimalism,” then, is a non-stultifying practice of composition; one that insisted neither on opaque, complex structures nor on the composer’s proper name as evidence of authorization. This returns us to issues raised in Chapter 1. Rancière and Jacques-Alain Miller disagreed over the propriety of the concept of metonymic causality, which Rancière borrowed

46 Foucault, “What is an Author?,” 209.
47 This raises another important question: are there other examples which could I provide in the context of a history of Western art music? The free improvisation ensembles AMM and MEV are perhaps the only other groups that come to mind, though neither has typically been placed within the history of art music because they are explicitly improvisation-based. On the composition/improvisation relationship and its relationship to race, see George E. Lewis, “Improvised Music After 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives,” Black Music Research Journal 16, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 91–122.
assuming the concept was usable, while Miller saw this use as “concept theft” even though it was specifically a concept aimed at escaping authorial propriety and subjectivity. Althusser weighed in, agreeing that he thought concepts belonged to everyone, but expeditiously used “structural causality” to escape the problem entirely; he similarly notes that he had created the working groups as in the Capital seminar to work on the collective production of theoretical concepts.48 Nevertheless, when it comes to writing his essay on the ideological state apparatuses—what post-Marxist concept is as directly tied to its author’s proper name as the ISA and the notion of the interpeller?49—he takes credit for this “heroic” concept which, Rancière claims, was in fact put forward in action, in street fights and on posters, collectively, by student partisans of the 1968 general strikes.

In that sense, I think it is fair to consider all of those minimalisms I have outlined in the preceding chapters—the “early minimalism,” “Minimalism” proper, the “indistinct minimalisms”—as grounded in a challenge to pedagogy. I mean this in a variety of senses. Returning to Rancière’s critique of Althusser in “Student Problems,” we have to keep in mind that what ties together minimalist composers has long been a rejection of a coercive pedagogic practice. They refused it among their teachers, in the institutional pedagogies within which they were trained, and the music that those methods produced; they similarly refused it in their own ensembles, as they insisted on performing their own music, and creating bands and ensembles as the necessary forces increased; they refused the traditional mode of delegation that the prioritization of the notated score set up; they even refused, at times, to have any of the authoritative acts undertaken by musical production under their own proper names. In Chapter 1, Badiou asked of Rancière’s discourse, can there be a

48 See Chapter 1; the reference is to Althusser’s autobiography, The Future Lasts a Long Time.
49 Samuel Chambers has provided the most interesting commentary on this problem, criticizing Judith Butler in particular for having turned the interpeller into a problem attached to Althusser, and then turning him into a strawman without providing much evidence that she had recently read the text at her time of writing. That is, for Chambers, Althusser is so tied to the interpeller that his articulation of it is forgotten behind the concept’s “excessive” travel. See Chambers, Bearing Society in Mind, 60-70.
mode of transmission of knowledge, a pedagogy, that is non-stultifying? While I do not intend to claim that minimalism perfectly achieved this ideal, I think the central claim of this dissertation must be that the material practices of minimalism aimed for the realization of such a goal, particularly in its “early” formulations (which I noted moves beyond the years 1960–64, or any other specific chronology). What is most important discursively, in considering the “policing” element of its historiographic treatment, is the way that minimalism, when read as having any relation to politics, has often been turned into a parable of the failure of radical critique. The problem that minimalism has set up for itself is that its critique was effective, but only if one is willing to follow it beyond the confines of its own “proper” place, the genre of “art music.” I think properly taking account of the political impact of minimalism requires—and this suggestion points well beyond the scope of the remaining pages here—a consideration of how the very discursive category of “art music” changed during the period in question. How does the discourse of “postmodernism” and its supposed destruction of the hierarchies of modernism at one and the same time make the critiques I have claimed minimalism was responsible for seem unnecessary, while also perhaps having had their ground set by those practices? That is, to what degree did the things I have claimed of minimalism lead to the very crisis of confidence in hierarchies and power that led us to dismiss efforts at critique as naïve, failed or even unnecessary? Perhaps much like François Furet claiming that the French Revolution was carried out by ignorant revolutionaries unaware that the nobility had already failed, or Nicolas Sarkozy and the New Philosophers suggesting that May ’68 had no impact, critics of minimalism have been unable to account for the necessity of the critique it introduced in the wake of the epistemic rupture of the priority of “art music” that it had a major part in articulating.

A historiographically-minded conception of minimalism, then, articulates a compositional practice that is non-stultifying. What is minimized is the distance between art music’s foundational “binaries of inequality”: student/teacher, composer/performer, composing/listening, author/band,
and so on. Minimalism denaturalizes and produces indistinction between these formerly clearly demarcated terms. This extends well beyond the composers who teach the music to their ensembles by rote, or who develop the music deliberatively, collaboratively, and directly to tape in real time rather than (as “solitary heroes”) to paper at their desks; it also includes the very relation between the object and its inscription. That minimalism has been considered a naïve political project is owed not to the failure of the actors involved or to the work that they produced, but to the failure of historiography to accurately stage the terms of its revolt. By the time minimalism came to broad attention, critics and scholars had already decided that it was dead, but that the music was worth studying. To borrow Reich’s phrase, minimalism was dead, but he was still around—and indeed, in that 1982 quote, he directly set out the split pathways of following its impact: into rock music, or into the music of John Adams. These claims set out a taxonomy, a subject (historian) to object (scores) relationship, and in doing so had already mistaken the causes for the effects—and indeed, entirely missed the principles of indistinction at the core of minimalist politics. In following Reich and Glass, and treating John Adams as the first “student” of the “big four” rather than, say, Rhys Chatham or indeed the Ramones (“minimalism in its highest and purest form”\textsuperscript{50}), minimalism was “defanged.” It became a practice of composition, and not even a particularly exciting or notable one, as its detractors never fail to remind us. Its authorial politics were failed in following it into the concert halls and the opera houses, treating its primary subjects as writers-of-scores, and leaving an entire school of radical compositional practice to be treated as a biographical triviality, tied to the rest of late 1960s radicalist zeitgeist in producing (merely) cultural change.

**Afterword: Policeband**

\textsuperscript{50} Mick Farren, “Notes on Minimalism (or Learning To Live With The Ramones)” *NME* (May 21, 1977); see Chapter 4.
The name Boris Policeband appears in only a handful of places online. Owing to a lack of sufficient contextualizing information, I could not directly fit him into my discussion, in Chapter 4, of the no wave scene in which he played a peripheral part. Indeed, if not for a handful of photographs and one 7” released in 1978, it might be hard to believe that he is even a flesh-and-blood person, rather than a convenient metaphor for all the intertwined conceptual interests of the preceding chapters.

Boris Policeband draws together practically every issue I have explored: the band-formation, noise, authorship, no wave, drone violin, post-68 French philosophy, politics and the police, the Kitchen, no wave, magnetic tape (indeed, as its own kind of *band*) and so on. While he is one of the three performers on a short film by Alan Moore and Coleen Fitzgibbon, he only appears for less than a minute, in which he repeats the words “drop it… somebody’s gonna get hurt.” That text was part of his on-stage performance practice, in which he played heavily amplified, distorted violin drones through a series of tape loops and effects, while wearing a headset/microphone that broadcast policeband chatter to his ears, which he would then shout into the microphone. The video, which also features DNA and James Chance and the Contortions, was taken from a 1978 benefit at the collective arts space Colab as a benefit for X Magazine, though it was only edited and released online in 2012, when these no wave bands had become historically notable.51 Like the Artists Space festival, the X Magazine benefit—which occurred on Saturday, March 11, 1978, at Colab on East 4th Street—is central to the very brief official no wave narrative; indeed, it’s something of a predecessor and featured many of the same bands including Contortions, DNA, Theoretical Girls (featuring Branca), and Terminal, as well as Erasers and Policeband (Figure 5.2).

GH Hovaginyam, who was the drummer for the Artists Space band Communists, and was closely involved in the foundation of Colab, provided the best description of Policeband that I’ve come across so far:

51 https://collaborativeprojects.wordpress.com/x-magazine-benefit/
GH: [discussing the solo performances by Alan Vega of Suicide…] It was really interesting—He used to… it was in SoHo, he was performing in this basement space in SoHo, and you’d go there and he’d just be doing one long riff. Kind of jamming, and he’d be slamming himself with a microphone, you know, kind of unbelievable distortion, synthesizers… this and that. And there was another guy who was even cooler, this guy Boris Policeband.

PN: I actually planned to ask you about him eventually.

GH: Oh Boris was great. I mean he was just, like, he would have these, somehow, these sort of recordings, and he had like a little Sony Walkman, you know, that he would somehow overdub with a microphone—one of those little ear microphone things—then he would play his violin through a synthesizer, right? So he’d be playing violin and it would be going through these distortion loopers, and he would feed in police recordings, like the police band recordings, and then he would say like “You know we’re gonna mess you up, motherfuckers!” Like this—he was brilliant. I don’t know what happened to him. He was a total mystery. That was his whole thing [laughs]. He was an enigma. And he played it all the way to the hilt.

PN: So you didn’t know him around the city? Around the downtown scene?

GH: I would see him play, but also we used to hang out at this bar called Barnabus Rex in TriBeCa. This seedy place. The only place that was around in TriBeCa. It was all lofts. The only place you could drink and dance—it had a great jukebox. It had a miniscule bar, a pool table, and then some room around the pool table to dance. And that was it. And he used to go there and hang out… we all used to go there and hang out. Performance artists and this and that.

PN: But you never knew his real name even?

GH: No.

PN: [laughs] That’s great.

GH: He really played it all the way.

PN: I’ve been trying to find stuff and can’t find anything, so I’ve started asking all of you people from the scene. And that’s been no more help either [laughs].

GH: Oh he was great. [laughs]… This guy gets up and starts doing this really weird performance art with a violin. It was brilliant. Right? But again—that was the times! He wasn’t doing it for anything! He was doing it for the group [meaning the artists downtown who largely performed for each other]. It wasn’t like he was going to be a commercial success.

PN: It’s been interesting to try to figure stuff out. There’s writing on the scene, but I don’t think it much gets at the complexity of collaboration and interaction.

GH: Have I clarified stuff to you?

PN: I don’t know. I think it muddies things further.

GH: That’s exactly what it should do! [laughs]52

Policeband also played a few shows in the early 1980s at the Kitchen. The first, on September 26, 1981 was the last in a series of solo performances, in this case featuring Policeband and Jill Kroesen.

The press release for the event reveals some of the humour entirely lost on many historians covering

52 Author’s conversation with GH Hovaginyam, Skype, December 5, 2016.
the late 1970s performance art and avant-garde scenes in New York: “[o]bservers claim that Boris Policeband can play anything. He was not available to dispute this nor to provide further evidence into his work at large or this particular Kitchen performance.” Kroesen’s notes also provide some comic material. The piece itself began from a fake letter that she wrote Rhys Chatham, still the director of the Kitchen, from a fictional artist named Lowell Jerkman requesting a gig. But Jerkman, Kroesen writes, “couldn’t even get a gig at the Kitchen without sending in a tape (even though he’s really good). He just couldn’t get a tape together even though he really wanted a gig at the Kitchen, and refused to play anywhere else… So he wasn’t going to make a tape to get a gig, and wasn’t going to get a gig without a tape, so Ms. Kroesen kindly arranged to get him a gig in her name if he would kindly pay her $2,000” (See Figure 5.3). On stage, Jerkman spoke, verbatim, the words of a man Kroesen knew who was dating two of her friends at the same time.

Jerkman was only one of Kroesen’s many male characters—she told me that she used to walk around with a moustache painted on dressed as a guy as one of her performance pieces (Figure 5.4); at other times she performed under the name “Fay Shism” (fascism, from her “systems portrait” Fay Shism Began in the Home\footnote{Kroesen refers to her stage works as “systems portraits,” as they rely on characters who are allegories of power relationships. They were typically darkly comical. The performers were typically non-actors, directly informed not to act, but to read satirical and allegorical parts aimed at focusing on power dynamics between countries, people, things, diseases, wars, and so on. Lou’s Dream, for example, featured a Sheriff named the “Share-If”: “My name is Share-If. Cause I only share if I get some profit.” She told me that she specifically considered them compositions, rather than theatre pieces, because she was working in the new music world and had studied at Mills with Bob Ashley. “They’re like theme and variations, and they’re about this structure. They’re not anything like theatre. There’s no characters, there’s no, you know, there’s no story with a climax and an end or a resolution. It’s just—they’re systems portraits of how things work. It mostly comes from a compositional mindset… In those days, music could be anything. It didn’t have to be music, like after Cage, it could be nothing. I did one piece called Political Music and it was a graphic, explaining how the changes in politics make a certain rhythm and movement. And so it’s like the systems portraits are like how things work with each other, and the disharmony or the harmony. Up and down. It’s just… in music there’s the chords and the changes between the notes and all that kind of stuff. I don’t know theatre is just really different. Theatre is about conflicts and resolutions.” Author’s conversation with Jill Kroesen, Skype, December 11, 2016.}). In our conversation, she noted other pseudonyms, continuing in the tradition of Poppy Nogood and Dr. Drone, that downtown artists of the late 1970s used for performance pieces: Peter Gordon of the Love of Life Orchestra often went as Art
Povera; a performer who went by the name Phil Harmonic did a “piece” called *Win a Dream Date with Phil* in which “he had these cards, and he would walk around in the middle of the night passing them out. It could be anything.”  

I suppose this play of improper names, or false names, was still on her mind when I asked about her 1981 shared bill at the Kitchen with Policeband:

![Press release](image-url)

**Figure 5.2** Press release for Kroesen/Policeband concert. The Kitchen online archive.

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54 Author’s conversation with Jill Kroesen, Skype, December 11, 2016.
JK: Boris Policeband? Who was it? What was his name?
PN: I don’t know!
JK: [long silence]
PN: No one knows. GH Hovaginyam and I spoke the other day, and he said they’d always go to the bar, but he couldn’t remember who he was…
JK: Ohh….
PN: But no one really knew who he was or what his deal was.
JK: Who?
PN: GH was saying that Boris would hang around at Barnabus Rex, but no one really knew who he was. So I can’t tell whether everyone is messing with me or if this guy was this mysterious.
JK: Well there was a Boris Policeband, but—[trails off]
PN: Sure—I’ve seen video—and this program is from the two of you doing solo programs together at the Kitchen in September 81.
JK: Wow. Isn’t that funny.
PN: You have no memories either, eh?
JK: Mmmmm… No. [laughs] Isn’t that funny. In those days… it was just like [laughs]. That’s so funny… that’s very indicative of the times. [laughs] Everyone had aliases.
PN: And you don’t remember who he was?
JK: Mmm… no. I have a picture in my mind of what he looked like.
PN: He played violin and had a microphone and would play like police radio chatter.
JK: Ya ya ya [vaguely remembering]…
PN: It always seems like a thing Tony Conrad would do, but I’ve seen photos and it’s not Tony Conrad.
JK: No.

Kroesen clearly remembers Policeband as a performance artist, but could not remember much about his proper name/identity or what he did on stage. What is notable for her thought—as for Povera, Harmonic, and others—was the idea of identity as in itself an experimental nomination: taking on band names, improper names, pseudonyms, and such had become a means of positioning authorship as an anti-authorship, as a practice that attempted to escape the strong authority tied to presenting work under one’s “proper” birth name. Artists of the period were eager to continue to create, to produce work, but they had a deep, pressing concern for ensuring that the work included in its very genesis, thought, and presentation a critique of the norms of authority, as perhaps most strongly expressed in the idea of the art music composer.

The most substantial commentary directly from Policeband comes from a 1978 issue of *Semiotext(e)*, the radical philosophy and arts journal edited by Sylvère Lotringer. Following his
appointment in the French department at Columbia in 1972, Lotringer set out to acquaint himself with the downtown arts scene. Although he was absent from Paris during May ‘68, Lotringer had been involved in 1960s activism against the Algerian War (which led to Althusser’s “Student Problems”), and was certainly a part of the world of French theory at the time, particularly as editor of Semiotext(e). He became interested in articulating a relationship between the new art he was seeing in New York, and the discourses of French philosophy. As he wrote decades later,

*Figure 5.3* Jill Kroesen as Lowell Jerkman, 1978. Photo ©Paula Court, courtesy of Jill Kroesen.
French theorists didn’t know much about New York art. Paris had lost its artistic pre-eminence in the early 1960s after the French ‘New Realists’ confronted the American pre-Pops—Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, etc.—at the Sidney Janis gallery in New York in 1962, and lost. The death of Yves Klein the following year sealed their fate. The *Nouveaux Réalistes* abandoned ship and moved en masse to New York. When I grew up in France, there was nothing around that could simulate the appreciation of visual arts, music, dance, and what they could tell us about contemporary society. The *cinémathèque*—Jean-Luc Godard—was the exception. Most French theorists, whenever they turned to art, would go to classical painting, keeping a text by Freud at hand. Baudrillard and Foucault, when they went out of their way, would refer to pop art and hyperrealism. They had no exposure to minimalism or postminimalism, let alone conceptual art.

Lotringer outlines how, immediately prior to the infamous protests that he missed in his hometown, his new home institution had contributed in its way to the spirit of ‘68 during protests mobilized by the university’s desire to build a large gym in Morningside Park, which separated Columbia from Harlem. In an effort to articulate the relationship between the French strikes and the Columbia protests, and between “French theory” and American minimal and conceptual art, Lotringer created the “Schizoculture Event” a 1975 seminar that drew theorists from France—Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze and Guattari—to New York and into contact with the art occurring there, long before referencing the big names of “French theory” became a standard process of legitimation among contemporary artists in the 1980s.

Three years later, in 1978, he planned an issue of *Semiotext(e)* that followed up on the seminar, and decided to approach a number of New York artists for interviews. His assumption was that contemporary New York art—with radical critique of authorship and authority at its foundation—and French theory were speaking the same language of radicalism, though through very different media. For his interviews, he turned to world famous artists like John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and William S. Burroughs; but he also spoke to the recent “SoHo artists” he had been living among, artists who were presenting “all these heterogeneous elements… side by side.”

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such as “Robert Wilson and Douglas Dunn, Phil Glass, Marie Overlie and Jack Smith, Arto Lindsay and Laurie Anderson” as well as Steve Reich, Sol LeWitt, and others. In his interview, Glass stages a direct attack on the major musical avant-gardists of Lotringer’s hometown, showing the clear differentiation between the approaches ongoing in New York and those of the French artists (those who hadn’t “abandoned ship”) who were still stuck in a pre-1968 mentality:

The problem that Boulez has specifically is that he thinks he can establish credentials for the avant-garde, and that they will be established in terms of the language, the grammar of music. But it’s not that at all. Rather it’s in terms of how we experience it that music can be altered radically. Even when using the language of Satie or Brahms we can still write pieces that are extremely radical; something that Rzewksi knows. And John Cage knows. People that are working in this way found that what makes a piece new isn’t a new harmony or a new kind of tonal organization; it’s a new perception.  

Glass’s articulation, in its own way, is practically an exact replication of the claims on ideology articulated in the streets of May, and later turned into the ISAs: against Althusser’s earlier account in “Student Problems,” it is not in the content of instruction that one finds ideology, but in the very form and practice of the “pedagogic relation.”

Lotringer also was impressed, it seems, by Policeband. He briefly interviewed him for the issue, which suggests that Lotringer was at either the X Magazine Benefit or the Artists Space festival, again taking part in the scene he had become closely involved in. While the brief interview as a whole is fascinating—Policeband is perhaps notable to Lotringer in that his references to the body as “fascist” for being “completely organized” such that the only solution is “schizophrenia” clearly indicated his reading of Deleuze and Guattari—an exchange about his performance name is particularly valuable:

Sylvère Lotringer: Are you interested in politics?
PB [Policeband]: I like the news that comes out of politics. The one statement that this happened or that happened that I get over the radio. Politics is an exchange of paper. I hate paper, the feel of it.
S: Didn’t you write before?
PB: I did, but not on paper. On tapes.

56 Glass quoted in “Phil Glass Interview (1978)” in Lotringer, Schizo-Culture, 185.
S: Why did you call yourself Policeband—a collective name?
Pb: I see myself as being a lead singer with back-up musicians. The buzzers and the amplifiers are quite out of control. They definitely are like a band.

I have not found any press reception that I could cite to suggest that audiences heard Boris Policeband as a minimalist. But in his working methods and ideology of performance, he surely ties into those practices of early minimalism that I have described throughout: a trained violinist (indeed, one playing an amplified violin as invented by Conrad and Cale fifteen years earlier), performing his music for audiences, under an improper band name, who declares that he hates the delegations of paper and favours instead “writing” to magnetic tape. His claim that the “buzzers and the amplifiers” are “like a band” similarly resonates with Poppy Nogood’s “Phantom Band” of taped saxophone loops. That Policeband’s work creates some kind of connection between Conrad or Riley (and perhaps Laurie Anderson, a few years later) seems clear—and indeed, the only extant photo from the 1981 Kroesen/Policeband concert at the Kitchen is a photo by Paula Court of Boris Policeband, behind a desk as part of a staged setup clearly designed to look like a late night talk show, interviewing a laughing Tony Conrad.

What is most appealing about Boris Policeband is the way he pulls together a number of threads in this dissertation. As I noted, he is dangerously convenient as a conceptual metaphor to summarize my dissertation, which has praised the noisy and indistinct in historiography. Luckily I know almost nothing about him or his performances—combining the authority of the literal police and their radio traffic, with collectivism, and technological practices of writing to tape—and thus I can draw almost nothing from them, other than to recognize that they further complicate this scene. As a concept he is exceptionally clear, a literal summary of many of the most important themes of

57 “Antidisestablishment Totalitarianism”, in Lotringer, The Schizo-Culture Book, 64-65; my emphasis.
58 Court was the dominant photographer of the late 1970s downtown scene. The image of Conrad and Policeband is available online at http://archive.thekitchen.org/?p=5947.
the last five chapters; as a flesh-and-blood person he is entirely unknowable and, as Hovaginyam notes, is one among many characters that make it both impossible and undesirable to write an authoritative or “complete” history of downtown experimentalism. Nevertheless, that he was notable enough to gain the attention of Lotringer (to be put forward as the kind of American art that embodies “French thought” in the late 1970s), to have wowed Hovaginyam (in the same vein but more to a legendary performer in the punk, noise, and no wave scenes like Alan Vega), to pass through the scene as both well-remembered and entirely forgettable (and mysterious), all before the landmark “Year of Minimalism” in 1983, is a reminder that “minimalism”—as a nomination that I think ties many of these activities together productively—was complex and already well-developed long before any idea of a “major” minimalism appeared, and indeed before any scores were in print.

To historicize this scene by analyzing its scores to create a formalist classification is to misrepresent it entirely, by turning instead to the terms of its retroactive confiscation into the narrative arc of Western art music. Further, to follow its influence into the concert hall and score-publishing houses rather than into the Kitchen, Artists Space, White Columns, Colab, or Barnabus Rex is to make a clearly ideological choice in terms of what happened to minimalism. Like suggesting that May ’68’s impact was “merely cultural”—that the major changes were sexual liberation and “women wearing pants instead of skirts”59—it is to propose a metaphysical and transcendent unchanging same. To read Reich’s or Glass’s or Young’s scores by way of explaining why the harmonic practices of minimalism are not as radical as these composers claimed when they were in their late 20s is to guarantee that art music remain moored to singular authority, hierarchical delegation, and stultification-based practices of analysis, listening, and writing—the same modes of transmission that minimalism successfully called into question. What happens instead if minimalism is followed into these alternative spaces? Can we still call its authorial politics utopian and failed

59 Ross, May 68, 13; Ross is critical of that interpretation.
when looking at the 1981 Jerkman/Policeband concert, in which two artists put on a concert of
theatre works under improper names, clearly referencing the noisy lineage of Poppy Nogood,
Conrad, and the Theatre of Eternal Music? If minimalism specifically names anything, it is a practice
of anti-authorship that minimizes, to the point of indistinction, the binaries and methods of
inequality upon which art music and its composers founded their privileged distinction.
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