

# Thoughts On Listening

## Twenty-two Commentaries by William Osborne On Music, Listening and Aesthetic Discernment

These writings were written as emails in 1998 and 1999 for the Deep Listening Discussion List. Generally speaking, they are best read in chronological order, but one can also use the hyperlinks below to skip around.

[Deep Listening, Style and Discernment](#)

[Criticism and Discernment](#)

[More On Discernment](#)

[Discernment and Idealism](#)

[Criticism and the Evolution of Consciousness](#)

[Form, Time and Indeterminacy](#)

[Discernment and the Creator/Audience Relationship](#)

[Discernment and the Witness/Universe](#)

[Zeno and Morpheus](#)

[Apples of the Mind](#)

[Definition of Fathom](#)

[Discernment, Atavistic Creation and the Sacred Marriage](#)

[Sounding the Abyss of Individuality](#)

[Brahmavihara and Deep Listening](#)

[Kinesthetics and "Meta-kinesthetics"](#)

[Maskman's Follies](#)

[Critical Discourse](#)

[Healing the World](#)

[Grand Canyon](#)

[Mozart](#)

[Heightened Sensation](#)

[Luminous Sounds](#)

## DEEP LISTENING, STYLE, AND DISCERNMENT

Andrea raised the subject of self-criticism. I think that if it is used in the -right- way, it is a part of any healthy life.

Concerning Deep Listening, the most important issue is that criticism can take the form of discernment. Through critical discernment we formulate our expression. To discern means to come to know or recognize something that is hidden or obscure. Discernment is notable because it often involves detecting or discovering things with senses other than vision--such as hearing. Through discernment we make out what is at first difficult to

perceive. This discernment can also involve a great deal of reflection. The importance of these functions of discernment for artists is probably self-evident.

The degree and rigor of -critical- discernment can play highly variable roles in various musical styles and genres. I will mention a couple examples. Generally speaking, a classical trumpeter will be far more critically discerning about consistently "attacking" his or her notes than a jazz trumpeter, who might have a far greater appreciation of spontaneous variations of articulation. Aleatoric music reduces many aspects of discernment to a minimum, they are left to chance, while a classical violin sonata places great critical discernment on reproducing a highly defined style.

These rather obvious thoughts lead to an important question concerning Deep Listening. Is Deep Listening a style, or is it a discipline of musicianship? Can a composer writing in a highly belabored post-Webern tradition use Deep Listening as much as a person writing a spontaneous sonic meditation? I think so. I do not think Deep Listening has to be limited by style, and that it can thus encompass highly varying roles of critical discernment. (As such, Deep Listening could be a part of every music student's curriculum, just as is harmony or "ear training".)

There are indeed certain stylistic tendencies apparent in the Deep Listening community as it stands now. This is a natural manifestation of the discipline's origins, but I think it will continue to encompass larger and larger spectrums of the musical community. Due to my style, critical discernment is very important in performance, sound systems, composition, text, lighting, and even in the use of the performance spaces. I feel that this discernment, which can involve criticizing myself and others, is based on Deep Listening. I have learned that self-criticism can bring a great deal of discernment about who we are and our relationship to society and culture. Practiced in the proper way, self-criticism can be a highly meaningful form of Deep Listening--perhaps even the deepest listening of all.

Or is all of this incorrect? The discipline of Deep Listening is strongly based on concepts of inclusiveness and non-judgmental perception. Is my understanding of Deep Listening thus flawed? Does listening without preconceptions necessarily reduce the role of critical discernment? Would this have an effect on the styles and genres of music to which Deep Listening could be applied?

Sorry if this is a bit turgid. I would wager that the mercurial tones of James could say it better.

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## **CRITICISM AND DISCERNMENT**

I will just add a few more thoughts off the top of my head.

This concept of discernment is a useful approach for unraveling some problems. It could help us better define perceptions of art in and between cultures where there is no longer a systematic common practice. Instead of rejecting each other's styles and cultures, we could understand that we are practicing different modes and functions of discernment. Both theory and criticism are attempts to define what is being discerned in a work or style of art. Theory is in effect an attempt to define modes of discernment. Elaboration on concepts of discernment could be relevant to both aesthetic and ethnological theory.

One aspect of this is the question of time and discernment. Is there more discernment in a meticulously composed work than in an improvised work, or do they use different modes of discernment? How are those modes defined? Some cultures seem to define hierarchies of presumed artistic value based on notions involving the presumed "amount" of discernment that is used to create a work of art. This creates aesthetic hierarchies that give improvisation a low status in western culture.

Or is discernment judged according to its quality or rarity? How much discernment could Ella Fitzgerald put into a four minute blues song? Could that song have a lot more discernment than another musician's belabored composition, because her discernment is of such exquisite value? What creates her special discernment? Why does Asian art so often define spontaneity as much more valuable in artistic expression than does western art? (Zen painting for example.) Here in our own culture, why is Fitzgerald's discernment not called high art while Beethoven's discernment is? In one culture "spontaneous" discernment is the language of the patricians, in the other it is the language of the lower classes. Class, critical discernment, and aesthetic theory...

These questions of time and discernment might tell us something about how the brain works. How much can the human mind perceive and discern at the same time? (There are probably some interesting studies on that.) When does discernment stop being a mode of perception and become judgement? Discernment is a special mode of perception that involves making something out, in gradually perceiving the unknown? How does discernment evolve to aesthetics?

How has our evolution affected our discernment? What is the role of discernment when I perceive a python wrapping around my leg, and how is that different from my discernment of voice inflection in Chinese Opera? Examining criticism as discernment might help us define the questions that always come up about culture and nature. Nature makes us discern, but we make our nature discern. What can we say about this complex interplay?

Then we could delve into the questions of discernment and the artist's relationship to society and cultural expression. I make "art" all the time, and I wonder why I am discerning what I am discerning--especially because I want others to discern it and feel enriched. The artist says, "Please discern what I discern, please feel what I feel." The artist's creation sharpens her senses and abilities, and allows her to discern even more. Discernment and creation create a cycle of evolution that develops into style.

And then there is the question of critical discernment and pedagogy. Do we not need to add new disciplines of listening in a music world that has developed entirely new concepts requiring new discernment of timbre, pitch, time, form and dynamics--to say nothing of musical meaning?

One could go on and on. As I say, these are just some random thoughts.

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## **MORE ON DISCERNMENT**

Discernment is a special form of perception that can bundle together the various senses. To discern is to make out the unknown. We can sense something, but we don't know what or how. What we cannot see we hope to hear, what we cannot hear we hope to smell, what we cannot smell we hope to touch. Discernment leads us to integrated forms of sensory intuition that are undefined. Discernment seems to raise sensory perception to a higher level of integration with the mind as a whole. Discernment is intimately related to the mental analysis of perception, which continually reshapes that perception. This cycle seems closely related the cycles humans use in communication, and might explain why discernment seems key to understanding aesthetic perception.

An aesthetic is not perceived, it is discerned. This seems a key to certain aspects of semiotics.

Another thought. Does style (perhaps in the form of aestheticism) incapacitate discernment? When Samuel Beckett was asked why he wrote in French, he said, "So I can write without style." It seems that without style, he could better discern.

Perfect pitch is an interesting aspect of discernment to consider in discussions of nature vs. culture.

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## **DISCERNMENT AND IDEALISM**

Perception and judgement are so deeply interconnected in the human mind, that we have no ""scientific" proof that they can be separated. The forms of "enlightenment" that move us beyond "judgment" cannot be revealed through language, since language itself is a morass of implicit values. Enlightenment, for lack of a better word, is beyond words, methodologies, rationality, etc. In regard to Norman's thoughts, it is beyond the status quo, and it is beyond -rejecting- the status quo, since both are implicit judgments. This affects every discipline. Without discernment, even our beloved Deep Listening could eventually become an ideologically laden status quo for a given set of devotees.

These thoughts illustrate that there are certain dangers for the pilgrim searching for "enlightenment", "mindfulness", or other concepts involving the presumed suspension of judgement, because the perception of a presumed absolute reality might just be another form of absolute idealism. Certainly we see this in practice. Almost all of the "gods-come-down-to-earth-just-coincidentally-in-human-male-form", who have told us they are enlightened and see the world without judgement, have been the centers of religions with absolutist beliefs that have filled history with horror and brutality.

I would submit that before the pilgrim leaps into the abyss of enlightenment, one of the last things he or she should release is discernment. Discernment is by nature mindful, because it is an attempt to make out something unknown. It is an on going search for form. It is difficult for discernment to be judgmental, because there is not yet a known object to be judged.

In other words, there is a danger that the -values- placed on viewing the world without judgment or preconceptions are themselves a judgement and an ideology. Can one become attached to being "detached"? Perhaps that is why Buddha spoke of the Middle Way, which uses moderation as a means of avoiding certain pitfalls of duality. The Middle Way, at least in my mind, seems to have something to do with discerning, which is not so much a judgement as it is a process of becoming aware. Perhaps that is why discerning seems to be a part of Deep Listening. It is a process of becoming aware.

I remember reading once that the Buddha was enlightened after speaking to a musician who had come floating down the river on a raft. The musician looked at the extreme asceticism Buddha was living in and said, "If you pluck the string too hard, it doesn't resonate." This led to Buddha's discovery of the Middle Way. He began plucking his strings with more discernment.

The discernment of the Middle Way gave Buddhism -forms- that made it more compassionate, and allowed more people to "resonate" with its path. This has a relationship to artistic expression. For -my- path as an artist (others will have different ones), the critical discernment of good form is an attempt to be compassionate, like lending the listener a helping hand that allows him or her to "resonate" with me. As a general principle of life, form and compassion seem to be closely related. Through critically discerning good forms in our creations, whether it be a house, a pair of shoes, good manners, or a composition, we compassionately meet the needs of human materiality. In a temporal world it is impossible for these forms to remain fixed. They must always be discerned anew from the unknown, and that discernment is an act of compassion.

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## **CRITICISM AND THE EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

Before I begin, I should mention that this will be my last post for while, since tomorrow Abbie and I leave for Paris. ( It will be several days before I am able to even obtain my email.) In the thoughts below I bring together the concept of "critical discernment" with the original thread concerning the relationship between the meditative and active life. The latter problem has long occupied western culture, and there is a body of literature surrounding it. A modern treatment of this theme which has affected me greatly is Herman Hesse's last novel *Das Glassperrenspiel* (*The Glass Bead Game*), which won the Nobel Prize. Its principal character, Joseph Knecht, is a composer who lives in the 25th century. All intellectual and artistic activity has been relegated to a series of monasteries known as Castalia, an autonomous elite institution devoted wholly to the mind and imagination. The novel traces the developments that lead Knecht to renounce this monastic life and enter the world. It explores the conflict between, and the need to synthesize, thought and action, intellect and flesh. Even though I read it 22 years ago, it still affects me greatly. I would also direct you to an introductory essay to the novel written by Theodore Ziolkowski.

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Norman's and Andrea's post express concern about the role "critical discernment" might play in Deep Listening, since it is difficult to reconcile non-judgmental perception with the forms of selection that seem to be a necessary part of the creative process. Since a work of art is a finite object or process in a world of infinite potentiality, a reductive process based on a conscious selection of materials and forms is inevitable. (Even aleatoric works involve at least a minimum of structural organization in which these processes are applied.) This selection is based on a process of critical discernment, usually derived from a constellation of aesthetic concepts and practical necessities. How can one reconcile this divisive critical discernment with the inclusive world of non-judgmental perception? (With subtle irony Norman describes his "gut feeling", which discerns that something is problematic with discerning.)

I think this problem is better understood if we realize that human consciousness evolves through at least three stages of development in which criticism has a very different position and function. As children, we are born into a state of unity with all being. It is only when we are taught about good and evil that we evolve to a second level of individuation characterized by dualistic perception with its implicit despair and alienation. We are made aware of laws, both natural and moral, but feel incapable of adhering to the seemingly arbitrary standards of our human condition. A few individuals reach a third stage, where they are once again capable of accepting all of being. Most of humanity, however, must remain in the second stage, sustained only by occasional acts of creativity, which from time to time, allow them to share in the unified realm of the third stage.

For humans in the second stage, a life without critical discernment is only an ideal toward which they can strive. Without involving themselves in acts of critical discernment, they could not even survive. Out of a compassion for the conditioned nature of their human

existence, they must continually create forms which will insure their own survival, and that of their fellow humans. Evolution toward the third stage involves acts of critical discernment which in the end presumably become so subtle and refined that they are no longer definable within the second realm's dualistic mode of consciousness.

In the second stage, we must submit to the necessity of critical discernment, and accept it as a method we continue to refine until it leads us to the verge of a unified realm of being. This in essence, is the creative process. As an individual moves toward the third stage, critical discernment appears to become less and less burdened with finite values. It would appear that critical discernment moves toward a state of non-judgmental \*selective\* discernment, which finally evolves to a unified form of consciousness transcending dichotomies.

In the second stage, we must realize that this non-judgmental perception is not a fixed state, but rather a -process- of consciousness we move in and around.

As individuals in the second state of consciousness, we must honestly evaluate the necessity we have for critical discernment. This allows us to establish a responsible and authentic relationship with the world--to say nothing of avoiding pseudo-enlightened hypocrisy. Far from being non-judgmental perception, anything else would be an excess of aestheticism cultivated in isolation from reality. By necessity we must confront the sheer reality of contemporary events, and realize what horror they would bring if we, and our leaders, were not critically discerning. It again becomes apparent, that through critical discernment we give form to compassion. This relationship between form and compassion is the essence of both humanism and artistic creation.

By accepting the materiality of this second stage of consciousness we do not repudiate spiritual ideals, but rather compassionately accept our social responsibilities as individuals. By fundamental necessity, we put our spiritual ideals back into the service of life, through a discerning commitment to our fellow human beings. In the second stage of consciousness this is the only true culture. It rises above self-indulgent solipsism and an overly subjective introversion. Through holding to these spiritual ideals, we gain a form of critical discernment that is an essential condition for translating thought to responsible action.

As this discernment moves toward the non-judgmental, the artist gains a particular form of dispassionate objectivity, a kind of irony towards life, that renders a unique kind of freedom and detachment which gives works of art their most profound meaning.

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## **FORM, TIME, AND INDETERMINANCY**

Pauline's post contains some fascinating comments about form and improvisation. They send about a billion questions through my mind. For now I would just like to make some general comments.

Life is inextricably bound to form. Through form we take our being. I have form, therefore I am. The form of materiality is, so to speak, our Karma. Similarly, it is impossible for music to not have form, since even creating a sound is giving form to something.

Since form exists in Time, life is inextricably bound to indeterminacy. Life is an endless flow of endless variations of form arising from and vanishing into the unknown and the unknowable. What we refer to as predictable and unpredictable are indicative only of the narrow limitations and perspectives of our consciousness. Those who have developed sufficient discernment, hear that a Mozart violin sonata is subject to billions of spontaneous variations that -cannot- be controlled.

Concepts of predictability and regularity are created only by establishing frames of reference in which they can be defined relative to the rest of life. A Mozart violin Sonata is regular in its movement in comparison to the exquisite song of the birds outside, but if the sonata's divisions of time were subject to the minute billionth of a second variations of time used by nuclear scientists studying subatomic particles, the sonata's variations of time would be so wild and random as to be undefinable. In fact, the sonata's divisions of time can only be defined in terms of statistical probabilities. Turn on a computer sequencer with a high beat subdivision for the numbers in an event table, and then try to play five notes that produce the same number. Music is inalienably indeterminate. When we refer to something as being more improvisatory than something else, we are speaking only in the relative terms of our human and personal perspectives. Perhaps that is why Varese once said, "Chance is indicative only of our lack of understanding." And perhaps it is why Cage said, "Form is our only constant connection with the past."

These thoughts might help us understand the relationships between what we call "form" and what we call "improvisation". We are defining a relative perspective. Could someone please offer some thoughts about how this relates to Deep Listening? What, for example, is "working by ear" and how can it be extracted from form when even to create a sound is to create form--to say nothing of many other aspects of form that inalienably arise when we improvise? I could go into this in much more detail, but maybe someone else has some perspectives... They would probably be of much more value than mine.

Bill O. (Who is dead sick of form, because he is notating two one hour long scores with Finale, when he would much rather be out in the cafes of Paris doing "field studies" on why undiscernment makes the French so damned artistic.)

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## DISCERNMENT AND THE CREATOR/AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP

Jann Palser sent me the following question, and I thought I might share my rather windy answer with the list, though it will probably bore everyone. The thoughts bear a certain relationship to Pauline's about improvisation, time, and form. I think the thoughts here about "community" are particularly relevant to Deep Listening.

>We wondered how you think about the differences between discernment in the listener/  
audience and discernment in the  
creator/performer. Are these necessarily related at any one moment, or ideally related?<

Should what the artist discerns and what the audience discerns be related? I'll offer a few random thoughts. The extent of the relationship must surely depend on the artist and her intentions. In any case, the relationship is very conditioned and temporal and that might be a beginning point for discussion.

On the most essential level of a theory defining this relationship between the artist's and audience's discernment, I could formulate some ideas based on my work as a composer/performer. Off hand, I would note that there are three aspects of artistic experience which would define theories of discernment:

the creator/performer  
the listener/audience  
the context/environment

The first two you mention, but of course, the third is also essential to understanding the nature of artistic experience. Much theoretical analysis has been put into "objectified" works of art. Now we are becoming more concerned with the physiological and psychological -processes- of reception, and how they are changed by the infinite permutations of our human existence. Audiences are not simply involved in the -passive- aspect of hearing, but also in the -active- concept of listening. Artistic reception (Listening) is influenced not only by the creator/performer, but also by an ever changing constellation of factors that shape our environment physically, psychologically, and culturally.

This suggests that it is impossible to develop a theory of discernment by simply observing the creation and reception of art, because all three parameters I list above are in a constant state of fluctuation and redefine -every- single creator/audience relationship. Stated plainly, there is no "controlled environment" for observation of the creation and reception of "art" or cultural experience. Neither art nor humans can be objectified in this manner, though western culture seems to think they can. Those not deeply involved in music-making often do not realize, (or forget) that even if a work and its performance were remarkably consistent, the context of each performance can, and often does, vary radically. As a result, every new performance must be discerned anew by both the creator/performer and the listener/audience, based on a multitude of factors in a state of

constant transition and change. This also continually redefines the relationship between the artist and audience.

As a result, refined critical discernment leads to the understanding that all art is temporal, and that it is in its essence aleatoric and improvisatory to a far greater degree than we imagine. Even a Mozart violin sonata can be performed with millions of spontaneously determined variations, however narrow the range of this discernment might appear to be. Ultimately, I think this will require new theories for critically defining the creator/audience relationship, that can better define this process of fluctuation and temporality. Criticism must move from the objectification of art to an understanding of art as a process. Theory must leave behind concepts of artistic experience as a given set of aesthetic principles, concepts, rules, perceptions, or critical evaluations and move toward definitions of artistic experience as an experience constantly transforming in time.

This seems to define a particular weakness of cultural anthropology, and even of musicology. These scholars must remember that due to its temporality, culture is by nature undefinable. The instant a cultural event is defined, it has already transformed. Culture cannot be frozen in time; it cannot be objectified. For example, regardless of how traditional and consistent Hopi dance might appear to be, it is a living phenomenon in constant transformation, because the Pueblos are constantly changing, as is their cultural identity and expression. The best we can hope for is to view our frozen images of culture with an understanding of this process of transformation. The very same applies to our own western art music, regardless of how traditional it might seem. It is this inability to objectify cultural experience that defines the relationship between the creator and her public. An understanding of the transitory nature of artistic expression and reception is also a key element of Deep Listening.

The discerning critic knows that art cannot be objectified, and I have learned this by practical necessity. The work Abbie and I do, for example, is highly feminist, and deals mostly with themes involving the necessity of women to formulate their own cultural identity through creative expression. We once performed one of these works for several hundred Lutherans at a Church Convention in Leipzig, and it fell pretty flat. Two weeks later we performed the same work for a convention of 300 women brass players in St. Louis, where it was like throwing a match into a barrel of gasoline. The factors affecting these variances of reception are pretty obvious. But what is less obvious is that one of those Lutherans attended the St. Louis performance, and had a radically different perception and discernment of the work. I can't define this change. What happens? The listener seems to be affected somehow by the collective experience. Their discernment is radically altered by an environment that can even transcend their cultural conditioning.

(Perhaps that is why thousands of "whitemen" go to see Hopis dance, or Japanese create Kabuki Theater. The "whites" do not discern what the Hopi or Japanese do, but something valuable is still discerned. How is that cross-cultural discernment created and defined? The Hopi's rituals are secret and they would not even want the "whites" to discern the same things that their tribesmen do.)

I should also note that the parameters of discernment are not only ideological or cultural. Mundane environmental factors can also shape reception radically, separating the discernment of the artist and audience. A feminist woman once saw a performance of one of our works that was not well received. The audience couldn't concentrate because it was after a stressful protest event in which they had stood for an hour in the bitter cold, and had been harassed by the police. A few months later she saw the same work ecstatically received in St. Louis by the 300 women brass players. She commented that my "revision" of the work was excellent, that I had "reduced it to its essence". She is a highly trained musician, and is accustomed to listening very closely and with a great deal of discernment. Actually, I hadn't changed a note, and the performance could not have been too different since the accompaniment is on tape. The listener's discernment had been altered by environmental factors, not the work. The variances of critical discernment between the artist and public involve very complex aspects of phenomenology.

These simple examples illustrate that the constellation of factors that alter discernment in both the creation and reception of artistic experience are highly varied and complex, and almost impossible to define. But when artists perform (or critics discern) the definition and control of these factors of discernment is exactly what they -must- attempt to formulate. Abbie and I, for example, begin by examining the performance space with critical discernment, evaluating sight lines, acoustics, and lighting. The characters we create can be very altered by the public seating. If the seating is raked and the public looks down on her, a character can be very different than if the stage is raised and they are looking up at her. Simply stated, the character's iconic meaning is radically changed between "looking up" at her and "looking down" at her, even though the "performance" of the work is the same. Will the hall be dead acoustically and leave Abbie's voice sounding naked? Will the hall have an intimate feeling, or a sense of boundless spaciousness? Will the audience be sympathetic to women's themes or must Abbie try to bring them in? How loud must she speak to be heard? (That can greatly affect how we have to shape the character.) Will the lighting angles leave shadows under her brows if she lowers her head? How dark are the blackouts and how quiet is the hall? Will the acoustics and seating support the quadraphonic distribution of the sound system? Again, critical discernment is shaped by environmental factors that can deeply affect how art is discerned and created. Those factors can also drive a wedge between the discernment of the performer and the discernment of the public.

These endless permutations explain why no two performances are discerned alike. One could say, "Art is not what you want, art is what you get." Perhaps this requires that we define the creator/performer and listener/public relationship as a process. An artist discerns each performance anew from the unknown, as does her public. I think this understanding is essential for formulating theories that define the roles and functions of discernment between the artist and the public. Critical discernment must begin from the standpoint of the temporality of both creation and reception.

The value of the artist/audience relationship can also be defined by the degree to which the artist challenges the discernment of her audience, and to the degree by which the

creation's temporality approaches the listener from the unknown. Musicals provide an interesting example, because the creators, performers and audience are relatively definable and predictable. Publics attend musicals to hear a very specific type of presentation, and this gives such publics a very definable character. The performers fulfill very defined functions reinforced by the mechanical repetition of hundreds of performances. And the musical and theatrical elements are generally formulaic and simplistic. Everything is pretty predictable and no one's discernment is challenged. Perhaps that is why most musicals are not considered a very high form of art.

Opera, on the other hand, creates greater challenges for discernment. The artists and audiences are more widely varied. There are the rich who attend to see and be seen. Then there is the curmudgeon factor, those curious people who attend and decide that, "Yes, this really is ridiculous!" And then there are the students in the peanut gallery who probably discern the most, but who can't pay for the seats that would allow them to experience opera in its fullest glory, and its multiplicity of meanings. The challenges opera provides our discernment help to define it as high art. [One could go into great detail about what is discerned and by whom in any given genre or in comparisons between genres, and by various publics] . But there are points where discernment can be lost if the music is so complex or otherwise unapproachable that most audiences can't begin to comprehend it. Artists vary to the degree they feel responsible for this problem.

Through the critical discernment of these factors arising in time from the unknown, both before and during the performance, I attempt to create an empathetic reaction in my public that will hopefully bring people together through a unified experience of certain aspects of our human condition. My personal predilection as an artist is to relate the discernment of the creator and audience to the greatest possible degree--though other approaches are possible. This is why I speak of form as an act of compassion (if you saw my other posts), even though it contains elements of seduction too. Could one say that the artist seduces the public into a discerning awareness of their world and each other? How far can this seduction go, and how pure can its motives remain? Stated very generally, through form the artist adapts to specific aspects of human materiality with the goal of creating a mutual but fleeting experience of certain aspects of our human identity. Perhaps music is a magical and momentary instant of genuine empathy that gives us hope for an authentic community. (I think this is also the foundation for understanding semeiotics.)

I have experienced this community on several occasions, and I wonder if it has more to do with the listener/audience than with the artist. This "magical" alignment of discernment is based as much on the creative power of the listener/audience as of the creator/performer. No party is passive in artistic experience, hence the power of Deep Listening. At least in some cases, there is a process of discernment that leads this striving for empathy and collective catharsis beyond an ideal to an actual, even if fleeting, moment of reality. To define how one creates these fleeting moments of empathy arising in time from the unknown that bring us to a common experience of our human condition and a genuine sense of community is one goal of a theory of critical discernment. It would help us define the meaning of culture.

But in closing, there is another side to all of this. Meaningful artistic and cultural experience can also be achieved when empathy is consciously rejected. Antipathy is also a part of cultural experience. We can also define artistic and cultural experience by what we -choose- not to accept. (I would think here, for example, of the National Socialist elements in some of Orff's music or the racist motifs in Wagner.) Stated metaphorically, one can love even if one chooses not to accept all the seductions of one's lover. But who is the lover, Music or the imperfect composer? As for me, I can't discern the beauty of a language, without also discerning the hand that writes it. I guess I am just getting to the real question about the relationship between the creator and her public and the roles of discernment, but I have to go for now. The conditioned and temporal discernment that shapes creation and reception is just the beginning point for such a study.

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## **DISCERNMENT AND THE WITNESS/UNIVERSE**

Kim wrote privately and said she felt discernment involves aspects of "evaluation" used during the creative process. And Pauline added the "witness/universe" relationship to the parameters of artistic experience that Jann and I discussed in a recent post. Both Cliff and Pauline then discuss the unfathomable nature of certain creative processes in improvisation.

The evaluations that are a part of discernment are very complex and help us define the witness/universe relationship. They also help us regard the unfathomable nature of artistic experience and the inalienably aleatoric nature of human existence.

Discernment is a continuous evaluation of the perceived, perceiver AND the -processes of perception-. This suggests that discernment brings elements of self-awareness and phenomenological analysis into the creative process. As Pauline said, "The witness observes from outside of the process and yet is inside of it too." When trying to make something out that is at first difficult to perceive, discernment continually evaluates and reshapes the processes of perception. These "evaluations" help formulate the "witness/universe" relationship, and shape our identities as artists. I will list six ways this can happen:

1. Discernment can involve a complex synthesis of modes of perception. Discernment can quickly shift from sensory organ to sensory organ as we try to make something out. If I can't discern the species of a bird in a tree from its appearance, perhaps I can tell by listening to its song. Through the processes of discernment, the two senses begin to function in a close interplay. This self-monitored characteristic of discernment deeply affects the witness/universe relationship, thus formulating both perception and creative processes.

2. The process of discernment can create "new" senses by constellating of modes of perception. Our sense of acoustic space is an example. It is a combination of seeing, hearing, our sense of time in the perception of sound reflection, and the sense of air waves against our body. Discernment creates a new sense beyond the "normal" five. This new sense of acoustic space is fundamental to certain aspects of musical creativity. (For some creatures, such as dolphins or bats, acoustic space is their principle method for regarding existence. Their sense organs and brains have developed in ways that make this process highly effective. Since our sense organs are less evolved in this regard, we humans must discern acoustic space, i.e. we gradually make it out by combining senses. In general, one could theorize that discernment is necessary, because we have limited sense perception in a universe of infinite potentialities. Discernment helps relieve the dichotomies between the witness/universe relationship.)

3. Discernment can involve the comparison of sensory perception with analytical memory. Perhaps I can discern the species of a bird I can't clearly see by analyzing its patterns of flight. The cellist compares the sounds she creates to determine their relationship to idealized aesthetic value that are part of her memory. Through discernment, perception and memory form complex evaluations during the creative process. Through analysis of accumulated experience, the witness discerns her universe. (Witness/Universe = Artist/One-Song.)

4. Discernment can also evaluate the physical quality of sensory data. I might discern that I did not see the bird well enough to make a judgment as to its species if I was blinded by the sun during the path of its flight. At the Met, I might decide I am sitting too far away from the stage to really appreciate an opera for what it is. Discernment does not only evaluate the object, it evaluates the quality of perceived data. Through discernment, we evaluate our sensory capacities as witnesses of the universe.

5. Discernment also evaluates the perceiver's objectivity. If I want to show my friends that I can find a rufus-sided tohee in the forest, I might worry that my aspirations could cause me to mistake a robin for one. Is my lack of appreciation for Wagner's Ring justified by its anti-Semitic iconography? Through discernment we note that the witness is finite in an infinite universe.

6. Discernment allows us to sense the "unfathomable". Since this sixth aspect of discernment is perhaps the most interesting and complex, I will discuss it in more detail. We cannot directly observe the unfathomable scientifically, but it would appear that through undefined senses of discernment we can hold the Unfathomable in regard. This seems related to Pauline's ideas about "playing by ear" and the undefinability of music. She suggests, rightly I think, that "playing by ear" allows for the creation of music with a complexity and subtlety far beyond what notated music could ever achieve. The discernment of the unfathomable also seems related to the undefinable automatic responses Cliff mentions that are part of evolved improvisatory processes.

I just watched a video of the Miles Davis and John Coltrane quintet from 1959--certainly one of the high points of jazz history. Since their music is created "by ear", it freely

creates nuances of rhythm, timbre, pitch, and inflection which cannot be captured by any known system of notation. Even though we can discern the profundity of this music, its exquisite discernment remains unfathomable by its nature. The music maintains an extraordinary clarity, logic, precision and originality to the discerning ear, even though it is for the most part beyond analysis or definition.

The Mind's mysterious capacity to discern allows humans to create and regard the unfathomable, and this is essential to the profundity of creative experience. Our capacity to discern the unfathomable brings into being many aspects of human consciousness that would otherwise not exist, such as both artistic and religious experience, as well as the capacity to experience the irrational aspects of our human psyche, such as dreams and emotions. Through discernment, the witness/artist is able to feel and channel the unfathomability of life.

Sometimes the characteristics of unfathomability appear in notated music as well. I think of Mozart. There could hardly be a more logical, structured, or ordered music, but its style is transcended by unfathomable characteristics for which terms do not even exist. For the sake of discussion, let's refer to one of those characteristics as "celestial irony". Why is it that we can discern this "celestial irony" in Mozart's music, even though we cannot really observe it, much less define its nature? Why has the human mind developed this capacity for discerning the unfathomable? Is this mere subjectivity, or a sensation of something that really exists beyond the five "normal" senses? Could artistic experience even exist without this capacity to discern the unfathomable?

How is this regard of (and for) the unfathomable nurtured by the processes of Deep Listening? How does discernment allow us to tap the power of the unfathomable during the creative process? What is the relationship between the creative process, the unfathomable, and a unified realm of being? And to state a complicated metaphor, can we say that the "witness-as-artist", shapes, and is shaped by, the universe as her oneness-song?

We live in two worlds divided by our skin, the inner world and the outer world. Their interplay makes the processes of evaluation and the witness/universe relationship during creation and perception infinitely complex. The closest "sense of reality" we can hope for comes from discerning how the witness and the universe shape each other. Metaphorically, my human identity is a child of The Artist and the One-Song. Is that part of Deep Listening? Perhaps part of the process of Deep Listening is gaining a fuller regard for the unfathomability of life. Living in this unfathomable existence, all we can do is "play it by ear".

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**ZENO AND MORPHEUS**

Pauline's suggestion that we refer to the transformation of Form and Being as "morphing" is well taken:

"I form therefore I morf!  
My being morfs as I form."

Her thought is something to ponder.

Here is a rather opaque response for those who wish to unravel it. Xeno would say, "I morph, therefore I am a paradox". (He is the old Greek who noted that an arrow moving toward a target must continuously traverse half of the remaining distance, and can thus never arrive, since the remaining distance can always be divided into yet another half.) Morphing is equally mysterious. It is digital and made of discrete units called morphs, between which there is nothing at all. There is no transformation between morphs. Time, if modern physics is to be understood, is similar. It is a series of infinitesimal units separated by something we cannot define. This solves Xeno's problem of the last-half-distance. There is nothing at all between the last-half-distance, neither space nor time. But this "nothing-at-all" is even more mysterious than the "never-ending-last-half".

I think of this paradox in regard to Pauline's extraordinary aesthetic concept of "the least differences" in music. She writes:

"For me the essence of musicianship is the cultivated ability to discern through listening the least differences in pitch, tempo, or timbre and to apply that discernment in phrasing and the overview of a whole process. What is the least difference between phrases or the smallest units of a phrase. What is the least difference between sections? How are those least differences effected by our listening? We know that what is observed is changed by the observation (Heisenberg's principle). Thus listening is action. What is the least difference between one piece and another? What is a piece? What is a composition? Is a piece a composition or part of a composition? What are the least differences?"

Is this not a seminal statement? "What are these fascinating "least differences", the morphs that have no time or space between them, and what kind of art do they bring into being? The least difference will always recede before us into infinitesimality. 2000 years ago Xeno pondered the same "least differences" and new theories of our universe are even harder to lift out of paradox. But it is often artists who lead the way in conceptualizing new approaches to epistemological problems.

For Pauline the "essence of musicianship" is involved with discerning the smallest units of form, the morphs, which formulate the nature of Time. She also tells us that there are limits to scientific thinking, and suggests that the human mind has more cards than it has been playing.



Well, alright, I'll play a non-scientific card. Morpheus is the Roman god of sleep and dreams. Someone who is in the "arms of Morpheus" is asleep. He is a god of transformation. We don't understand the dimension of Time. What exists between the morphs? This god unravels the density of morphs and touches the mortar of Time. Perhaps he tells us that morphs are eternal, and transformation only a dream.

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## **APPLES OF THE MIND**

I've been thinking about the larger metaphysical meanings of the witness/universe relationship (the Artist and the One-Song), Abbie's animistic view of the world, "Normanland", and some of the thoughts of Jung and Depth-Psychology.

Perhaps there is no true subjective/objective dichotomy, since the world-as-rendered-by-the-human-mind is also a manifestation of nature. The apples of the tree are an objective part of nature, but so too are the apples of our mind. The mind is an expression of nature, and nature is an expression of the mind. The mind's acts do not always correspond to nature, but neither does the mind impose its own order on the world. Our mind and nature are not dichotomous, since our mind in all of the fullness of its archetypes is an expression of nature's essential being. And at the very same instant, nature realizes its essential wholeness through our creativity. Nature gives my mind its fullest being, and my mind gives nature its fullest being. That's the reality of Abbie's animistic world, and the archetypal reality of "Normanland". (For those who don't know, and for the sake of brevity, "Normanland" is Abbie's description of Norman Lowrey and his work. He uses elements of dreams and highly iconic masks to create rituals with deep psychological and metaphysical meanings.)

Far from a dichotomous search for some sort of absolute reality through a singular reliance on "enlightenment", "mindfulness", "scientific knowledge", etc., perhaps we should realize the full powers of a disciplined imagination and let empirical observation be -merged- with the imagination's archetypal realities. Both nature and the mind realize themselves through this marriage and find their fullest being. We realize that the world and mind are not separate, but rather a unified whole. Through creative expression I bring nature's subjective and objective reality to its essential wholeness.

This would suggest that Abbie's animistic world unifying the empirical and the archetypal is the the fullest realization of both the mind's and nature's true being. And Normanland is not a world of embodied masks that emerge from the unknown depths and heights of -other- worlds to visit us in ecstatic moments. Normanland is just reality in its wholeness. Normanland is Normal Land, the marriage of the empirical and archetypal through the creative act.

Our dream-like existence rendered by the human mind is one of nature's children, and through our creative expression the child returns to its mother's arms.

Well, that's the theory, anyway. It's rather different than the mistrustful and dichotomizing view of the mind which is presumably so full of preconceptions that it mistakes tarantulas for leaves blowing across the road. Perhaps there is an archetypal force of all-things-that-skitter. Sometimes we just have to look a little closer. Deep Listening.

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### **DEFINITION OF FATHOM**

I looked up the definition of "fathom" to see if it is related to Deep Listening. "Fathom: to measure deepness by sounding."

"Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts. All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me."  
--Psalm 42

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### **DISCERNMENT, ATAVISTIC CREATION, AND THE SACRED MARRIAGE**

As I contemplate how one might create a theory of artistic discernment, my thoughts continually return to the mind's seemingly mysterious capacity to discern the unfathomable. As I discussed in an earlier post, this capacity to discern the unfathomable seems to be not only central, but even essential to artistic experience and creative endeavor. A theory of how we discern the unfathomable might tell us a great deal about human phenomena such as artistic and religious experience, the nature of creative intuition, the role of emotion in mental experience, and the function of archetypes in the human psyche. It might also help us approach highly complex epistemological questions about the origins of knowledge and creativity. It also touches on alternate paradigms to the subject-object dichotomy that affects so much of western thought.

(These thoughts about a new paradigm of reality are also related to a recent work Abbie and I have produced, "Music for the End of Time". It is based on the \_Book of Revelation\_. We create these works, but sometimes it takes months or years for us to figure out what they more or less "mean".)

The elaboration of a theory of how we discern the unfathomable would require two basic steps. First we must define this intangible process we refer to as "the discernment of the

unfathomable", and second, we must explain how it works by discussing the mechanisms of its functioning.

By discernment of the unfathomable, I mean the Gestalt of sensory and mental processes that allow us to sense and contemplate aspects of human experience for which we have no apparent explanation or source as we perpetuate reason beyond fact in the search for knowledge, understanding, and creative expression. We have many terms for this type of human experience such as intuition, insight, inspiration, revelation, or epiphanic knowledge. These processes of discernment are deeply related to creative endeavor. They bring about new formulations of sensory experience, and constellate perception and thought in unique and highly complex interactions that produce new forms of intuition and insight.

Some feel that these forms of thought and knowledge appear as if from nowhere, as if there were a fundamental order to existence that the human mind encounters by processes unknown, random luck, or preordained knowledge. But theorists and scientists are continually trying to evolve more precise explanations for the origins of creative thought. What are the mechanisms of this discernment of the unfathomable? How does it work?

It seems that some of the discoveries of modern science about the nature of the human mind might provide some insights to how we discern the unfathomable. There are three areas of research that seem especially relevant:

1. The theory of archetypes
2. The epistemological theories of physiology
3. The linguistics of a universal grammar

The implication of all three fields is that there is a profound basic imprint of reality encoded in the mind through which nature reveals itself to human consciousness. I will briefly explain how each one might enable us to discern the unfathomable:

1. Jung postulates and gives reasonable proof that forms of universal human experience manifest themselves in the human psyche as archetypes. Certain images and myths appear in all cultures through their religious and artistic expression. One could postulate that through discerning the meanings and permutations of these universally encoded images (or universal processes of transformation), the unfathomability of the world gradually unfolds itself to the human psyche.
2. The physiologist Konrad Lorenz postulates that the forms which comprise the physiology of animals bear direct relationships to the physical world, and that this allows the physical world to continually manifest new dimensions of itself to the human mind. For example, he notes that there are certain physical and structural relationships between the eyeball and the sun, which would indicate that the sun is not merely a figment of our imagination, but rather a physical reality with a direct correspondence to our ontological nature. These correspondences would not only allow, but even incline humans to

continually unravel the mysteries of existence through the discernment of an unfathomable physical world to which we bear an innate physical relationship.

3. The linguist Noam Chomsky and his followers have discovered aspects of a universal grammar in all languages, which would suggest that a fundamental syntactical structure is encoded in the brain. If this is accepted, one could postulate that the human psyche is predisposed to discern at least certain aspects of the unfathomable nature of human existence through the conscious permutation of this universal grammar.

Kantian purists will insist that this is still attempting to pull ourselves up by our own boot straps when it comes to epistemological theories of knowledge, but the fact remains that these studies might provide approaches to understanding creative experience, insight, inspiration, Deep Listening, and the many other ways that we discern the unfathomable nature of knowledge and being.

The three theories of knowledge I list could be related to atavism. Atavism is the reappearance of a characteristic in an organism after several generations of absence, usually caused by the chance recombination of genes. It can also refer to the return of a trait or recurrence of previous behavior after a period of absence. For my purposes, I define atavism as the characteristics of being that precede cultural conditioning, and that formulate a common human nature among -all- peoples. I would describe it as genetic only in the sense that ALL people share this fundamental atavistic common ground of human identity. I would also hasten to add that the potentialities of this atavistic knowledge are almost beyond comprehension. Only with the greatest discernment could we even attempt to distinguish and utilize the relationship between our atavistic and cultural identities. Atavistic sources of knowledge and creativity would need to be tempered with the human mind's many other forms of discernment.

The complex atavistic mechanisms of archetypes, physiology, and universal grammar, might help us understand how performers can recreate a score, even though our notation system represents only the merest outline of the actual musical experience. There seems to be some sort of human commonality that allows the performer to discern on a visceral, syntactical and psychological level, an atypical identification with certain creative processes that exist far beyond the notated music. The reproduction of the score through musical gesture certainly represents cultural conditioning and vast amounts of training, but the atavistic processes of discernment which add greatly to the performance (such as its emotional content, or the sensation of rhythmic pulses), appear to be considerably more fundamental than mere identification with aesthetic ideologies--even if these two realms of creative experience, the atavistic and the cultural, are almost impossible to disentangle. This also explains why radically different cultures can often deeply appreciate certain aspects of each other's artistic expression. They share a common atavistic nature that transcends the limitations of our cultural conditioning. (This, of course, flies right in the face of much post-modern thought.)

Perhaps it is also through these atavistic processes that we discern the unfathomable and develop new forms of knowledge and creative experience that had not previously existed. Instead of bringing something out of nothing, or stumbling upon our destiny by mere chance, we are by nature walking in the footsteps of an order of which human consciousness is gradually revealed as an integral part. (The Navajos might call this "Walking In Beauty".) Perhaps we could define this process as "atavistic creativity", a form of creative experience derived through the synthesis of empirical knowledge with subconscious processes of visceral, syntactical, and archetypal awareness which share a profound common ground with the physical world.

I sense this form of atavistic creativity in the music I have heard of several Deep Listeners. Abbie has been rehearsing a work by Philip Bimstein, which she is to perform in a couple days, entitled "Half Moon at Checker Board Mesa". In the music, the creatures of the plateau seem to form into a collective animistic consciousness giving the Mesa a physical and sentient being in itself, almost as if the composer were speaking from and addressing a "larger grammar of life", the order of a more universal source of Being, which unifies human identity and the natures of all living creatures. This aesthetic concept is also very related to the work of Norman Lowery, which uses aspects of dream-consciousness and archetypal masks to plow deeper understandings of human consciousness and its relationship to our physical and spiritual environment, particularly from an ecological perspective. I also hear aspects of atavistic creation in the vocal works of Andrea Goodman, which seem to discern the voice's relationship to the archetypal meanings of the body's "chakras". Atavistic awareness is also apparent in the forms of spiritual community discerned and evoked by the members of "Comma" when they perform. These artists all seem to strive for creative expression by merging physiological, syntactical, and archetypal levels of their atavistic human identity with empirical reality. In the process, mechanisms are set in motion which attempt to discern the unfathomable.

Atavistic creation also helps explain why and how artists can express things that everyone seems to have felt, but that have never before been expressed. It is almost as if the value of such creative expression is formulated by the recognition of its heretofore unspoken universality. By formulating and giving expression to these atavistic forces that shape our common human identity, artists give us a deeper knowledge of ourselves and our world. We can thus better understand how our mind works and why we perceive existence as we do. And we better understand the nature of creativity.

Atavistic creation also helps explain why what we call chance improvisation in music is so often so utterly right. We are releasing ourselves to a larger atavistic source of being that fully integrates the many levels of our human identity with physical reality. Seen from this perspective, creative experience would not be a fixed, objectified concept frozen in time, but rather an ongoing process of integrating our many levels of identity with their inherent and archetypal kinship with the physical world. Instead of "Truth" being a dualistic, objectified, Kantian ideal, it would be an ongoing process of revelation given conception through both an atavistic and empirical marriage of Mind and Nature.

This view of both creative experience and concepts of Truth, would imply that the Kantian world based on a subject-object dichotomy doesn't really exist. (That might also explain why the Kantian paradigm produces so many paradoxes and leads us down a million blind alleys.) Maybe the true reality of the universe and human existence could be vaguely described as "The-Process-Of- Mind-and-Nature-Being-One". This is not solipsistic, because it is a -process- of continuous interaction between empirical reality and all levels of human identity--of which the atavistic is essential.

This new paradigm seems to be in the air, and to have many implications for a profound change in human consciousness. The subject-object dichotomy of idealistic, patriarchal transcendentalism, with its concept of the cultural-hero-as-redeemer, is being replaced with a holistic and participatory view of Mind and Nature which balances the feminine and the masculine in a sort of sacred marriage. This new paradigm is inherently less dualistic, and thus vastly more balanced than the obsessively patriarchal world we have lived in for about the last 7000 years.

It has been suggested that this new paradigm could produce a new civilization, a new dispensation of human existence that might provide hope for humanity. One of the things I have seen as an artist, (and perhaps as someone who has lived in Germany for 18 years), is that our patriarchal cultural values are inalienably genocidal. On the most archetypal and metaphorical level, it seems to have something to do with the cultural-hero-as-redeemer wanting to annihilate all other patriarchs so that only "His" genes remain--the alpha-male as mass murderer. This lends a certain absurdity and ignominy to human life and cultural expression, when we sense, for example, that the mass graves of the Holocaust and the music of Beethoven have a common "Father", and are so intermingled in a common ground of cultural manifestations, that no matter how hard we try, they cannot be sifted apart. I think one of the first artists who tried to describe that phenomenon was Joseph Conrad in *\_The Heart of Darkness\_*. Abbie and I have seen that world.

"Godspeed" the new paradigm, the synthesis of atavistic creation with empirical knowledge, the union of brain and body, and the archetypal sacred marriage of Mind and Nature-- which might be described as the Second Coming when the Church is the Bride of Christ, St. John's vision of the "Woman Clothed With the Sun". This world will leave the feminine and masculine so united that they are no longer separate. This Sacred Marriage and its implicit emancipation of "womanity" is a vague promise that is our Hope.

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## **SOUNDING THE ABYSS OF INDIVIDUALITY**

In regard to Chris's post, my thoughts about discernment have also led me to think about Deep Listening and synesthesia. I theorize that synesthesia plays an important role in

Deep Listening's concepts of empathy and the creator/listener relationship. I will try to explain, though I fear some of you will think I have gone off the deep end-- if you even read this at all.

Deep Listening is distinguished by its emphasis on empathy and collective processes of creation such as improvisation. This is very different from the central traditions of western music, which emphasize aesthetic ideologies of the "Lone Genius", and celebrate transcendent individuality. In the music of Stockhausen, Babbitt, or Boulez, for example, elaborate formulas and theories are developed which generate the music. Following upon Europe's patrician heritage, the composer is seen as an enlightened genius who conceives and embodies this system, and the performers are seen as his instruments. Composition is viewed as active, and listening and performance as passive. Deep Listening, by contrast, views composition, performance, and reception as equal and fundamentally integrated through -active and creative- listening. This discernment produces new forms of synesthesia, in order to create the empathy required by this collective involvement in the process of music-making.

To understand this I think we must first look at our concepts of individuality. Individuality is thought to give humans their identity, and to make them knowable, unique and creative. This view of individuality also brings a plethora of existential problems. It is an abyss of isolation in which we are forever falling. Individuality makes human identity fundamentally inscrutable. Every human psyche, according to our view of the mind, is mysterious and irrational, hidden within spheres within spheres of intimate and unknowable beingness. Even those people we most know and love remain inscrutable on many levels, locked within the unfathomable enigma of individuality. Even as infants we are born into a sense of desolate separation, and compensate by constantly wanting to be held. Being born into the existential condition of inscrutable separateness is one of the most horrifying and absurd aspects of our human condition. It is the fear of irredeemable aloneness.

As the ego develops, we nevertheless defend our -need- to live in the darkness of our separation, an intimate sphere that no other human can know. We see this inscrutable individuality as a necessary part of our human dignity, because it hides a sense of innate shame about essential aspects of our human nature. This innate disgrace or ignominy of the human condition has been mythologized, for example, as the shame of separateness that Adam and Eve felt after the "fall of humanity", the disgrace of existential nakedness they needed to cover. This archetypal myth of the desolate-shame-of-individuality is almost universal. The need to cover this shame of individuality is an enigma of human existence.

One of the most complicated aspects of cultural expression seems to be that it allows us to momentarily transcend this mysterious shame of individuality. In the West, this has been achieved through communal identification with the "transcendentally-inspired-hero-artist". Through collective identification with such "artist-prophets", the self-conscious shame of our individuality is reassured that we are indeed "made in the image of God".

The ignominy of our existential condition is thus momentarily alleviated as we transcend the disgrace of our fallen condition through the "grace" of creative expression.

Deep Listening takes a very different approach to individuality and the formation of community. In contrast to the worship of a transcendent individual, it encourages the development of authentic community through a process of what might be termed "empathic resonance" based on the interaction of every individual autonomously listening deeply to the -collective-. This gives us a new kind of human dignity.

Though I am not sure it is completely scientific, perhaps this process of community through "empathic resonance" can be illustrated by an analogy from the animal kingdom. Some scientists suggest that dolphins can literally hear emotion, and that this makes them deeply empathic. The values of their aural perception are densities. Their sonar thus passes through each other's bodies and allows them to hear the transformations taking place in each other's internal organs. Through hearing/seeing the beating of each other's hearts, the tenseness of muscles, the churning of stomachs, the throbbing of spleens and the coursing of the blood, they perceive and share each other's innermost being, literally through a process of "collective resonance". This presumably provides a profound common ground that transcends the desolation of innate aloneness and separation. Perhaps it is like the sense of unity we feel as a child in the womb, when we can hear so much of our mother's being. Perhaps this "process-of-empathic-resonance" is related to the deepest aspects of human music-making. Through complex patterns of synesthesia, humans also seem to have a capacity of empathic discernment. Through Deep Listening we come together by sounding the depths of otherness.

What are these creative synesthetic processes that allow humans to sound the abyss of individuality? How do we share our otherness? One answer might lie in the powerful atavistic nature of our perception. Why, for example, are our lips so intimate, bearing immense forces of ecstasy--and its implicit "shame"? Even to put our lips near another person without actually touching them brings the most incredible sensations, mysterious forces of discerning their "breath of life", and the quickening of their body and emotions. How many million things can be communicated in a kiss? What is this sensual discernment that seems to shine for a moment a diffuse beam of light into our desolate separateness? Even the pursing of the lips can create a billion textures of ecstatic sensuality, and their gentle opening reveals the intense longings created by the unfathomable abyss of our otherness.

Since the human mind gives us such extraordinary powers of synesthesia, we constellate these atavistic forces into new forms of discernment that allow us a greater empathy. Can the discerning sensuality of the lips and the "breath of life" be transferred to our hands and ears through music-making with a wind instrument? Why are the lips so central to so many forms of music-making? Can I "purse" and open and move my hands and listening with the same ecstatic power of empathy, passion and compassion as a kiss? What happens when this synesthesia allows us to use our hands, and our breath, and the movements of our body to make music? Can we listen so deeply that we sense the other's sounds as ecstatically as if our lips and breath of life were touching? Can we listen so



deeply we sound the depths of otherness, and light the abyss of our separation? How different this humanistic autonomy and sharing is than an orchestra musician being a statistic in a score of Xenakis.

Deep Listening is the evolution of perception that expands human discernment and gives us a deeper knowledge of ourselves and the universe. Deep Listening is thus fundamentally humanistic. Listen as if music were the Beloved, let it cover the shame of our desolation, let it create community by compassionately sounding the abyss of otherness.

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## **BRAHMAVIHARA AND DEEP LISTENING**

I would like to discuss the Buddhist concept of "Brahmavihara", since it is an interesting model applicable to theories of criticism, creativity, and Deep Listening. The philosophical formulations inherent in Brahmavihara seem especially relevant, because many of Deep Listening's aesthetic ideals have origins in Buddhist thought.

Brahmavihara refers to the "four noble practices" through which humans can obtain subsequent "rebirth" in the Brahman heaven. In a word, the four practices represent the perfection of:

1. Sympathy, which gives happiness to all living beings;
2. Compassion, which removes pain from living beings;
3. Joy, the enjoyment of the sight of others who have attained happiness;
4. Equanimity, being free from attachment to everything and being indifferent to living beings.

These are the four "apramanas" (infinite feelings) which give happiness to "infinite living beings". Brahmavihara is also a stage of meditation in which one makes his or her mind pervade one quarter of the world with each of the four thoughts.

The concepts of Brahmavihara might be useful for developing theories and criticism of cultural experience, because art works in their most universal meanings can often be defined in terms of profound depths of sympathy, compassion, joy, and equanimity. It is, for example, relatively apparent how they might help define the joyful serenity of Mozart piano quintet or the compassion of Bach's "St. Matthew Passion". The four elements of Brahmavihara, sympathy, compassion, joy and equanimity, provide graspable and relatively universal appellations upon which we might develop specific definitions of artistic meaning.

The use of Brahmavihara concepts in theory and criticism might also be illustrated by a negative example. Concepts of sympathy and compassion might help us define why the

illustrations of Maxfield Parish are kitsch. His idealized images reflect a certain empathy for the meaning of youth and fantasy, but they gloss over the suffering of human existence and are thus unable to express genuine sympathy and compassion. Brahmavihara defines sympathy as that which gives humans happiness, but this cannot be done without a relatively complete and realistic view of what human experience really is. Lacking a foundation in reality, the meaning of Parish's work is greatly reduced. We are left with dreamy, bombastic fantasies devoid of truth and thus compassion.

To directly relate Brahmavihara to Deep Listening, it must be understood that Deep Listening defines creativity as fundamental to human experience and identity. (This also stems from the discipline's Jungian orientation.) As a result, Deep Listening expands the role of the artist, assigning to her the specific function of helping others to be creative. This work leads to new forms of holistic and collective expression which specifically induce elements of sympathy, compassion, joy and equanimity in both the artist and audience. Deep Listening's aesthetic ideals are thus closely related to Brahmavihara.

These Brahmaviharic ideals have stimulated the development of new genres, such as "Sonic Meditations", which allow for creative interaction between the artist and audience to mutually enhance the creativity of both. As a result, the artist/audience dichotomy is virtually eliminated. This is in contrast to traditional western views which define the artist as a highly unique, transcendently inspired genius who creates "immortal" works whose meanings are beyond time and cultural conditioning. This view also limits the audience to being only passive receivers of the solitary artist's "revelations".

The Deep Listener's renunciation of the artist's -solitary- "transcendental" expression (and its special status) in favor of aiding the creativity of others is specifically related to the third element of Brahmavihara, which is compassion. The ultimate expression of compassion in Buddhist thought is embodied by the "bodhisattva", who postpones his or her entry into "Nirvana" to work for the "salvation" of others. Similarly, even if the goals of most Deep Listeners are considerably less grandiose than a quest for "enlightenment", they nevertheless create works or processes which allow both the artist and audience to reach for creative (or possibly transcendental) experience together as a -community-. Sympathy, compassion, and joy at the sight of happiness in others thus formulate works of art that help both the artist AND audience achieve creative expression. In Deep Listening, this creativity is thought to be an essential necessity for the full realization of human nature.

The elements of Brahmavihara might also help us better define the role of creativity and emotion in artistic expression and human experience. How is joy given artistic expression? How is happiness given realization through sympathy? Why do these emotions seem to be all but lost in the serious art of the 20th century? It would appear that the western cultural tendency to exert Mind over Nature has led to a form of "anhedonia", the inability to experience pleasure. The Mind rises above the material. We are thus driven from our bodies, and the beauty of Nature falls victim to a lifeless objectification by the Mind. This stands in stark contrast to the Brahmaviharic equanimity of Deep Listening, which allows for joy by deeply experiencing even the

simplest aspects of daily life, such as breathing or listening to a sound. As such, Deep Listening leads to the rebirth of Joy. Deep Listening is an antidote to the anhedonia created by western culture's values of Mind over Nature.

Perhaps the anhedonia of western culture was clearly formulated in the 19th century when Schopenhauer defined happiness only as the removal of pain. He said that we rapidly grow bored with pleasure and that happiness most intensely felt when we experience the removal of pain. In a word, he suggested that through Will we triumph over pain or nature, and that this is the most happiness for which we can hope. His thoughts formulate the foundations of existentialism.

Nevertheless, the existentialist psychologist, Victor Frankel, defined joy as acts of compassion. He survived the German concentration camps and said he maintained his will to live through the joy he received in helping others remain alive. This seems related to Brahmavihara, since it defines sympathy as giving happiness to others, compassion as removing the pain of others, and joy as the perception of happiness in others. This also defines the nature of Deep Listening, which reflects the values of sympathy, compassion and joy by helping people realize their most fundamental human identity through creative expression. This leads to an equanimity which allows for the most complete perception and discernment of human experience.

We thus see how Brahmavihara might work as a conceptual model to more precisely define how the new genres of Deep Listening stimulate collective expression, cultural ritual, and communal identity. Brahmavihara could also be used to show how Deep Listening challenges many of the patriarchal and hegemonistic implications inherent in western concepts of cultural experience. This could be applied both historically and cross-culturally.

From a historical perspective, the aesthetic implications of Brahmaviharic values seem to have been more prevalent during earlier eras of western culture (though I would not want to appear as some sort of reactionary). The Renaissance, for example, esteemed buildings and works of art that reflect a joyful and beautifully balanced serenity. These values were lost as the social forces of industrialization created a world that is often an oppressive and nightmarish affront against human dignity. (I think of the Holocaust, or the nuclear cold war's concept of the "Mutually Assured Destruction" of billions of human beings.) Where is beauty and harmony? What is left of joy and equanimity? So many of the art works of the 20th century seem to derive from the fact that the "Age of Anxiety" is but a component part of an "Era of Atrocity".

Like many artists, I often want to just give up and experience the more immediate nature of the unfathomable beauty that surrounds us, to step outside and feel the warm breezes brush against my body, or watch the sun at dawn outlining frivolous summer clouds in red, or watch the erratic flights of swallows as if they were outlining the words of oracles in the air. Maybe witnessing this unfathomably beautiful existence is the source of joy and equanimity. I don't know. And in a sense it hardly matters, since I am hardly in a position to step into "Nirvana" anyway.

But still, the Brahnavihara of Deep Listening seems to be a historically important development. I think that one could theorize that the progress of all cultures is a movement toward the fullest realization of our human ground of being, i.e. that which brings human identity into its fullest realization and harmony with the natural world in which it exists. Certainly that is a function of Deep Listening, and it represents a major change in the values of western music.

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P.S. One could write a lot about sympathy and Deep Listening. What is this phenomena of "feeling in common"? Why will a very young child cry because a brother or sister is crying? How does our "atavistic" capacity for sympathy affect the way humans make music?

## **KINESTHETICS AND "META-KNESTHETICS"**

Hmm. What an interesting post from Anne! Her thoughts about kinesthesia open so many questions. It is impossible to summarize what she wrote, because (as usual) there are so many subtle dimensions to her phrases. She says her perception is "predominantly kinesthetic", a form of discernment using the "magnetic field" of her "whole body". This allows her to feel the thoughts of others as a "subaudible sound." She knows this seems irrational, but speaks of a "discernment" that allows her to "find distinction within the dense sonic chaos" of our existence, that doesn't always have a "literal affirmation of meaning." And on a metaphysical level, she says this awareness is spherical, without spacial limitation, that it is "open to the cosmos and beyond."

Through this "kinesthesia", she seems to describe forms of experience that many people have, but which remain undefined and thus unacknowledged.

I think this lack of acknowledgement might be explained, in part, by our general cultural relationship to kinesthesia. Kinesthesia is a -sense- mediated by end organs that lie in the muscles, tendons and joints, which is stimulated by bodily movements and tensions. Kinesthesia is, in effect, the sense of our body's movement and position. It is thus more essential to our existence than any other sense. Without it we could not sit in a chair, walk, or grasp with our hands. We could not even chew without biting our tongue, much less swallow.

Since kinesthesia allows us to deeply refine movement, kinesthetic mastery is the essence of musical performance and dance. It also allows us to master paint brushes and clay. Since kinesthesia underlies knowledge of the body's usage, it is the foundation of most artistic achievement. Kinesthesia permeates every moment of being. And yet our culture does not even include kinesthesia in the "five senses".

One reason we ignore kinesthesia as a sense might be a misappropriated Christian concept of materiality, which gives us contempt for our bodies. We are told to rise above the material, when in reality our bodies are one of our greatest sources of spiritual knowledge and transcendence. Disciplines like Tai Chi and yoga illustrate that there are cultures which regard the body and kinesthesia as central to spirituality and self-knowledge. We might even see different concepts of the body within the micro-cultures of our own societies. The predominance of African-American athletes, for example, might derive from a culture of the body which produces a fuller kinesthetic understanding of human nature.

Anne's kinesthetic sagacity might thus seem strange due to our cultural conditioning. While the average western scientist would sneer at her thoughts, the traditional Navajo would probably nod his or her head in acknowledgement. The Tai Chi master or the yogi would call her kinesthetic understanding science and ontological philosophy. I think this is what Abbie meant when she said a few days ago that there are whole aspects of our corporeal existence that we have "forgotten".

This western contempt for the body might be ending. With the development of disciplines such as the Alexander Technique and Feldenkreis, we seem to be rediscovering what might be called "the science of the body's use". In effect, these disciplines are forms of movement training using the principles of kinesiology, the practical application of mechanics and anatomy in relation to human movement. These disciplines develop our kinesthesia as a source of physical well-being, and in some cases as avenues to a fuller life and deeper ontological understanding.

From a philosophical perspective, I think we might discover that kinesthetic knowledge is very profound, because it takes us to the origins and meaning of motility. Motility is the essence of life and volition. Through motility we act upon the world, and this ability stems from the cellular biology of kinesis. A kinetoplast, for example, is a complex cell structure found in flagella that allows them to undulate, while photokinesis is movement induced by the stimulation of light on plants. And on the highest level, kinetogenesis is the evolution of animal structures due to their movements. In effect, there is a form of kinesis in every cell. Kinesis is central to the existence and evolution of all forms of life. Kinesis, motility and life are inseparable.

If our culture were to understand this larger ontological meaning of kinesis, the way it permeates every aspect of our existence, the epistemological implications would be enormous. As in other cultures, kinesthesia might someday move from our unacknowledged sixth sense, to a fundamental area of study, knowledge and self-expression. The metaphysical understanding of the nature of motility, could lead our civilization to rediscover the transcendent nature of the body, and give us an entirely new relationship with the physical world. It is the universe of Anne's kinesthetic magnetism, Pauline's Deep Listening, and Whitman's "body-electric".

No sense, for example, more clearly reveals the inner and outer worlds of our being than kinesthesia. It divides the twin galaxies of existence. Kinesthesia reveals our inner sense

of corporeality and allows it the motility to formulate a relationship with the outer world of dimension. The volition of motility is the origin of free will. Even thought is the movement of neural impulses. Be aware of your body, feel its weight and lightness, feel the movement in your joints, sense the tendons and muscles of your hands, feel your diaphragm's participation in every move you make, feel your spine and the tensions in your eyes, feel the delicate bones in your inner ears, and feel how the infinite world of inner sensation gives you the volition of motility to act upon an unfathomable universe.

Anne's remarks provide a profound intuitive insight representing forms of knowledge that our civilization will eventually discover: the arts and sciences of kinesthetics, and a related philosophy of meta-kinesthetics. For now, they remain intuitive forms of knowledge and discernment, a form of Deep Listening that allows the "magnetic fields" of Anne's "whole body" to sense "distinction within the dense sonic chaos" of our existence, forms of knowledge that remains beyond a "literal affirmation of meaning". These are the speculative doors of perception opened by the argonauts of Deep Listening.

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## **MASKMAN'S FOLLIES**

I just took a look at the photos of Norman's newest masks, including Buddha BigEars, who is truly beautiful and theatrical. It has ears made of cane that rattle when the mask is shaken. I look forward to seeing the mask in action. For a long time I have been thinking about the larger meanings of "folly", and these masks, and things Norman has said about being non-verbal, seem to fit into those thoughts. I think folly is of the up most importance to artists, and I would like to try to explain why.

Norman suggests he meets the challenges of critical discourse by creating icons that reflect archetypal, pre-verbal knowledge. One might call this a language of folly. You might also say he puts on a show, "Maskman's Follies", a "personal articulation" beyond the limiting strictures of language. He describes this work as being an answer that is "no answer at all". He then asks and answers a question:

"...what's an answer that's not an answer? Oh, rivers - rivers of tears, of smiles, of dancing termites chewing up bits of nanoseconds experienced inside another river flowing toward eternity. Buddha BigEars is listening."

Like any good Maskman or Maskwoman, he is speaking the language of fools, a language of folly. Folly is an act or instance of foolishness. It also refers to costly undertakings having an absurd or ruinous outcome. We also have a performance genre referred to as follies, an elaborate theatrical revue consisting of music, dance, and skits. Folly can also be a perilously or criminally foolish action, associated with evil, wickedness, lewdness, or lasciviousness.

The concept of folly raises some questions. Who decides what is absurd? Who tells us what is foolish, criminal, wicked, or lascivious? We quickly see that folly is culturally conditioned. Folly is breaking from the paradigms we are told to live by.

That is why we need artists like Maskman speaking the language of fools. Art in its best sense is actually folly, a costly undertaking that is absurd, something that allows us to momentarily break out of the controlling and stultifying paradigms of our social and cultural conditioning. (That is also why it is sometimes called criminal, evil, and lascivious.) The value of Deep Listening, for example, is its utter folly, the way it leads us to listen with abandon, to transcend the deafness of cultural conditioning. It takes us on a date to the biggest show on earth, The Follies of Life, the three ring circus of sound.

Norman's work is deeply influenced by this aesthetic(?) concept. His pre-verbal language attempts to reach this direct, unmitigated connection with his environment. "Maskman's Follies" move us beyond such deafening mental constructs "logical" discourse, rationality, and traditional music.

Inevitably, however, there is a subtle, implied verbal message in Norman's posts. (How could there not be?) He is hinting that discourse is divisive and leads to dangerous delusions (e.g. "trivializing misappropriations"), because you cannot separate object analyzed and subject analyzer. When analyzer and analyzed are two, the ego persists in its function of differentiating and prevents the emergence of what Norman infers to be a higher knowledge; whereas non-differentiation, or the "answer that is no answer", seeks to break down the boundaries between analyzer as subject and analyzed as object. He is telling us that interpenetration of the two gives rise to a mind of harmony and the attainment of creativity.

This raises some complicated questions. By challenging the authority of language, does Norman break down the masks of our cultural folly only to replace them with disguises of his own? Is the entire concept part of the Buddha-mask that is now only part of a semi-avant-garde western cultural paradigm that has existed since about 1950? I don't know. But Norman is probably correct when he suggests that the immediacy of listening (Buddha BigEars) reveals the nature and meaning of existence better than the dissections of discourse ever will. I would only add that meaningful discourse must also listen deeply. Without listening deeply, meaningful discourse cannot even exist. Will Buddha BigEars tell us that true discourse is first and foremost deep listening? Even if our words are hardly more than the rattling of cane, they bring us together and allow us to share in our human condition.

There is another message inherent in Maskman's Follies (that beautiful show behind the big, cheesy red and white sign flashing the words "Normanland" and accompanied by a \$25 Casio synth while drifting down the rivers of infinity). It is their folly that so attracts us to people like Norman or Abbie, or why people gather around Pauline from all over the world. We admire the controlled folly with which they try to live their lives. As Norman's dreams and masks illustrate, folly is recognized as the wisdom of fools.

Folly also shapes cultural history. We see that what begins as fatuous, gradually becomes the new paradigm we live by, the powdered wigs, the fox trots, or the cadaillacs with big Sputnik fins. Then by the same path of rivers within rivers, cultural paradigms (follies) return to their fatuous status, this time as outdated. What, for example, is more "follyful" than Gothic cathedrals?

We look at the infinitude of gargoyles, saints, Popes and angels and celebrate not so much God as the folly of the human spirit. Righteousness is temporal, but folly is eternal. History is a chronicle of human delusions.

This is why Norman rejects language in a certain way. Is it a wonder that Buddha BigEars communicates with a kind of eternal silence? What are words in the light of infinity but the rattling of cane?

It is this fatuousness, this folly, that has shaped the history of music. That is why some Italian decided to rub horse tail hairs over cat intestines stretched taut over a poorly varnished pine box to make music using a tonality created by a harmony of spheres revolving around the earth like a big, godly clockwork. (And you think Cage is weird.) It took a lot of history and culture to build up such folly. But what would our lives be without it? Folly is why a distinguished musicologist like Jann Pasler goes to Rose Mountain and has a group of adults feeling leaves and bark with their hands so that they can listen to the voices of trees. And it is why a famous composer I know [Pauline] gets a whole audience of cultured, educated people to start making burps and rasberries with their mouths in a concert hall.

The most ironic paradox of being is that our lives are given deep meaning by the sheer folly of our existence.

Norman's speechlessness tells us that folly is the preciousness of life. And paradoxically, that is why we need the humanism of Deep Listening. It protects the folly of life and being.

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## **CRITICAL DISCOURSE**

Perhaps we should examine the role critical discourse plays in the aesthetic and theoretical development of artistic concepts, and in the way we evaluate and judge artistic expression. In reference to Deep Listening, I am referring an investigation of its origins, history, aesthetics, history, theory, practice, and pedagogy.

Rightly or wrongly, there is a lack of substantial critical discourse concerning Deep Listening, even on this list. There are several reasons for this. Since Deep Listening cultivates non-judgemental perception, it is not given to divisive critical discourse. Deep



Listening is also difficult to discuss, because perception is by nature rather abstract. It is much easier to formulate unconscious opinions about art, than it is to analyse the abstract processes of discernment we use to perceive and evaluate the world.

In Deep Listening, the divisive egocentricity associated with the "artist-prophet" as the creator of "inspired" objects is replaced with an openness of mind that allows for the cultivation of a more discerning awareness.

An unbiased openness of mind is not as given to critical discourse as ego oriented aesthetic ideologies. These are some of the reasons this list is so open and tolerant, a safe haven encouraging thought and exploration.

But it would be a mistake to underestimate the value of critical discourse in regard to Deep Listening, since it would help Deep Listening to grow and develop as a discipline. Many of the most important developments in the history of music gained a great deal from meeting the challenges of their detractors. Through questioning and evaluating our aesthetic concepts, our cultural identity is stimulated, expanded, and strengthened.

Some forms of critical discourse concerning Deep Listening would be empirical and comparative. What, for example, does Deep Listening derive from the thought of John Cage, and most importantly, how does it go beyond his work? Are there substantial relationships between Deep Listening and Buddhism, and what are they? How might one illustrate the relationships between Deep Listening's origins and the Beat poets (an area I feel that has largely been overlooked)? How close are Deep Listening's connections to Jungian thought--particularly considering the contributions Ione has made to Deep Listening's development?

There are also more theoretical aspects of a possible critical discourse. What is the role of musicianship in Deep Listening? Does musicianship matter, if the true focus is not so much the creation of art objects, as it is the development of processes to enhance perception and awareness? How would we respond to the criticism that Deep Listening is a form of "exalted dilettantism" that enriches internal experience through heightened sensation, but which gives its aficionados few techniques for creating works of art? Without the objective discipline of crafting objects (such as rigorously developed compositions), what protects Deep Listening from descending into superficiality? What are the aesthetic values of Deep Listening, and what is used as a reference in formulating its standards of intellectual honesty?

Deep Listening also opens many new avenues for a reevaluation of performance practice. At some point in history the performer was "instrumentalized" as a servant of the composer. Did this objectification reduce the musicians creativity, and possibly his or her human dignity? How does Deep Listening, with its focus on improvisation, respond to this problem? Does improvisation necessarily imply a deeper form of listening?

There is an especially urgent need for critical discourse involving Deep Listening and pedagogy. How many people have entered the eight year apprentice program? How well

will this program function? How many people have given DL workshops, and what sort of successes and problems did they confront? What role should this discussion list play in the DL educational programs? Should Deep Listening extend beyond direct association with Pauline, and if so, how? Can Deep Listening's practices be applied to a wide range of aesthetic schools, or is it only a "West Coast" or "Downtown" phenomena? Could Deep Listening become a standard part of the curricula of music schools, and if so, how? Can Deep Listening meet the urgent theoretical and pedagogical need to establish courses that teach students to deal with -all- sound as the potential material of music?

Another important value of critical discourse is that it prevents disciplines from spiraling downward into mindless orthodoxies, which destroy intellectual development. Can critical discourse keep this discussion list (and perhaps Deep Listening itself) from becoming a form of insiderism for the "cognoscenti", as one Pauline Oliveros Foundation board member accused the list of being?

These are the forms of critical discourse that come forth as -any- new artistic concept evolves, and those concepts truly of value rise to the challenge. Deep Listening will survive these questions, but only if we make the effort to answer them. They are questions that people really have. You should not be afraid to posit such questions. Through answering them we will grow, and the humanism inherent in Deep Listening will light the world.

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## **HEALING THE WORLD**

Andrea associates global listening with forms of hearing that move beyond the sphere of literal auditory sensation:

"It is not only hearing that expands. I begin to imagine...", and then she lists sounds ranging from the growing of grass to the breathing of her child. A global focus expands listening beyond the realm of hearing to those aspects of life that are deeply meaningful, but which are often heard only within ourselves. Chris mentions the same idea and quotes Cervantes, "The heart can hear what the ears cannot." Global listening leads to creative thought, and to a greater discernment of our existential condition by unifying the internal and external aspects of our being.

In response to Anne's fascinating rendition of global and interior hearing (which initiated this thread), Pauline comments that, "It's also important to balance focal and global, interior and exterior with a sense of simultaneity." It would be useful to explore why it is important that we develop this simultaneous awareness. Life is a complex phenomenological Gestalt interpolated from both internal and external awareness. Through discernment we bring these two realities to a harmonious balance.

Andrea presented a deeply felt reply to the question of how Deep Listening responds the world's darkness. For her too, it is a question of increased self-understanding. In essence, she finds deep listening to be the foundation of compassion, because listening gives us a sense of unity with humanity. Compassion through listening leads to self-understanding, and thus to a greater communion with humanity through creativity:

"Listening to another, I hear myself. If I can find the courage to wail, some of the grief is released, leaving space for love and creativity."

She identifies separateness--symbolized by non-global listening--as a source of suffering in the world: "When I forget, when I perceive myself as separate, I become paralyzed with hopelessness, because there is nothing I can do to reach around the world and stop the hatred."

Through global listening we "reach around the world". This auditory embracing of the world helps to end its suffering.

Pauline also speaks of "embracing" the world to heal it. And like Andrea, she associates self-knowledge through listening--or an integrated personality--with harmony in the world. She notes that if the heart and personality are disconnected, suffering results: "It is not hearts that do violence, it is personalities that are disconnected from heart and soul." She feels deep listening brings forth the "light of the soul" and dissolves this disconnectedness: "Murder, rape, violence, anger and all the negative emotions that cause heartless disconnection must be countered with the light of the soul. Listening deeply--globally--helps to embrace the darkness and send out light from the soul."

In essence, listening deeply integrates the personality, which can then "embrace" the world, and heal social ills.

Abbie also associates global listening with an embracing healing. She attributes this to an increased capacity for awareness and response:

"[Global listening] is listening in ever expanding spheres. This increases our awareness and thus our capacity to respond. Listening and response, this being in the here and now, is essential to music-making, essential for the healing of the world."

Like Pauline and Andrea, she associates global listening with a more complete integration of the various levels of human identity, specifically mentioning the corporeal. She feels that we are disconnected from our bodies: "...we suppress our awareness of a lot of our animal activities to fit a mindset that says we are superior to animals. There is a whole reality of our bodies that we do not even remember..." This seems related to Barbara who imagines the sound of all the hearts in the world beating together in a "wild blood thunder".

Lauri M. takes a more specifically aesthetic approach in her discussion. She mentions that "darkness" was an important element of her earlier music, and that this affected its reception. For her too, the deciding factor was a question of integration, this time between the intellectual and spiritual. She noticed that spiritually oriented individuals appreciated the dark elements of her work more than those with an intellectual focus. She also mentions that the dark elements of her work were not always consciously created, but that as she became more aware of these forces, she continued to use them, since they are part of our human existence. She defines this aspect of being as an integration between the light and dark, or between "hope" and the "ominous".

Kim also feels Deep Listening involves integrating the inner and outer levels of our human experience. Regarding suffering in the world, she asks, "Was I hearing other people's pain or only my own?" Our inner life can be projected to the outer world, but for her, sound is so "strong and powerful" that it has a healing force, "it fills me with joy, immediately transforms me and makes me happy to be alive..."

Norman also sees an integration of being in global listening. He quotes Theodore Roethke, "All finite things reveal infinitude", and notes that "the focal reveals the global, and the global the focal. That old micro/macro magic." This is the power of unity in multiplicity that allows human folly to rise above the vanity of our finite and conditioned existence.

As I look over all of this I notice what I feel to be a femininity in the responses--though this might be merely my own coding. I appreciate this list since it is the only one I know of in music where men and women can so happily and freely speak with each other--and in about equal numbers. In these responses one sees elements we rightly or wrongly associate with the maternal: the embracing of the world as if caring for its children; the integration of the spiritual and physical in a nurturing way; the response of gentleness, compassion, and receptivity in the face of ignorance and egoistic separation. Again, we see Deep Listening as a healing force to the monolithic cultural paradigm of patriarchy.

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## **GRAND CANYON**

I've been reading about the Grand Canyon (home sickness, you know). It is over 4,000,000,000 (four billion) years old. It is one of the great events of earth history. At its mile deep base are the granite roots of once lofty mountains. The Colorado River carries away 500,000 tons of sediment per day, but people overlook the most significant aspect of the environment that accounts for the canyon's existence. Were it not for aridity, there would be no canyon. Slope wash would have long removed the canyon walls. The distinctive coloring and the stair stepping of the multi-colored rock formations would not exist. The Painted Desert would be gone, the buttes of Monument

Valley would be a few rounded hill tops. Such is the force of droplets of water, the same droplets that cut the canyon.

The aridity is a four billion year long silence that has created one of the great Cathedrals of Nature.

Sometimes I despair of listening, much less of sounding, in a universe where even the Canyon is an infinitesimal part of an insignificant galaxy. But still, there is something about the power of droplets, the collective nature of community. Humanity is a droplet. Let its sound resonate with eternal beauty in the Mother void.

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## **MOZART**

Apropos the US Japanese Internment Camps, Stewart Dempster's wife Renko, grew up in one. Her family was interned during the war and as a result lost their family farm which was never replaced. There was also a Japanese internment camp near my little town in southern New Mexico. After the war my grandfather (who had homesteaded a cotton farm there) bought one of the camp barracks, transported it to the farm, and renovated it into a little house. My parents were living in that former internment camp barrack when I was born.

Anyway, I've been thinking about how through Deep Listening the horrors of things like internment camps can be heard in Mozart. Abbie was playing and singing Don Giovanni at the piano. She laughed and said Mozart was such a rascal. His strange turns of phrase add so much to the already ironic texts of Da Ponte. Wolfgang was a south German rascal teasing the restraints of classical form and Viennese society.

Over time the cumulating stresses of history collapsed those forms and led to the somber moon rise of late Beethoven, through which, at least to my ears, flood premonitions of 20th century darkness. It was already clear that European culture was moving toward catastrophe. I think a close reading of history shows that by 1848 Hitler was essentially an inevitability, and that the Third Reich was largely a manifestation of cultural values. (I have very briefly outlined this in an article, "Patrician Rituals: Toward a Critical Theory of Orchestral Patriarchy", but I won't bore you with all of that.)

So I always seem to listen to Mozart with a strange sadness. What dark intimations one hears as that south German rascal outlines the fissures that mar the less than eternal beauty and equanimity of Enlightenment. We know what form and beauty are, but the dark impulses of human nature cast them to the side like so many dried leaves. There are times when the music of Mozart stands like the satyric laughter of a goat over a long fallen Greek temple. In the fissures of enlightenment we see that Fascism is an impulse of the human heart.

Of course, there is a good deal of irony in this also. Like so many Americans I went Europe to learn about culture, but I think some of my most important lessons have been about barbarism.

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## **HEIGHTENED SENSATION**

A reader asked, "How could enriching internal experience be a bad thing? Am I misunderstanding something here?"

I think you did misunderstand, but still, your thoughts are very interesting. I am all for "heightened sensation" and for "enriching internal experience". The question was, how does Deep Listening help us to translate them into artistic expression.

I would never generalize that heightened sensation is bad. It implies increased awareness and thus heightened discernment. Krishnamurti, however, has made some interesting comments about being too sensitive. He said that if we are too sensitive, it is not really sensitivity at all, because we are in effect, blinded by stimuli. (Sometimes we can see better if we put on sunglasses.) It is a question of focus, of filtering stimuli with intelligence, compassion, and discernment to increase our consciousness. Deep Listening is thus much more than sensation; it is translating sensation into awareness.

I have noticed that as I heighten my capacity for sensation, it not only increases my pleasure, it also increases my pain. Sometimes this pain is genuine awareness, but sometimes it is so unbearable I begin to lose consciousness. I suffer deeply from cultural alienation, and I am trying to sort out how much might derive from over-sensitivity. On a more trivial level, haven't we all noticed that there are times when our insensitivity comes from being too sensitive, especially in human relations? The little hurts I sense so intensely sometimes cause me to act like an insensitive fool. There are times when you can feel too much. It is a question of discernment, of using sensation to create humane forms.

I enjoyed Laura's insightful comments about the relationships between form and sensation in artistic expression. She notes that we can become so lost in sensations, that we are not able to give them form. I like her vivid image of a dancer so buried in the sensations inside his or her body that they lose sense of the forms of dance they should be performing. The way of the artist is to focus, balance and correlate sensation to increase human awareness. Through the forms thus created, "internal experience" is enriched for both the artist AND her public.

I have known and worked with a lot of dancers, but I have never met one able to articulate such keen aesthetic insights. I hope the U of A realizes what they have.

Is sensation in itself beauty? (I use the term beauty here in a very general way.) Or is sensation beauty only when given -form- by the human mind? I never thought cloths pens were especially beautiful until Klaus Oldenburg made a sculpture of one. The "uncultured" hear no beauty in Mozart. I asked how Deep Listening helps us transform sensation into artistic expression, and I appreciate the insights you are all providing.

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## **LUMINOUS SOUNDS**

Due to the limited nature of our hearing we tend to perceive the "luminous" only in terms of vision. Since humans have virtually no capacity to perceive reflected sound, we live in a sonic "darkness" punctuated only by "luminous" objects which can propagate sound waves. It is as if all vision were removed except for those objects that are luminous, as if we could see the disembodied beam from a flashlight but not the flashlight itself. What would it be like to see only the sun but not the world it lights? Sonically speaking, that is the world we live in because only the "luminous" can be heard. In terms of listening, we are like those creatures living on ocean floors that can only see those things which are phosphorescent.

We can occasionally hear reflected sound, but only primitively, such as occasional echos off large surfaces at a minimum distance of several hundred yards. At a closer distance our ears and brains perceive and process auditory experience much too slowly and incompletely to distinguish the echo from its source. How fast a bat's ears and brain must process auditory experience in order to swoop down on a mosquito in an ocean of dark air. The increased capacities of aural perception in bats and dolphins are measured in unfathomable magnitudes when compared to humans. (I so love watching animal shows on television. It is somehow so comforting to my soul to gain a close up view of these other forms of being. More and more the central issue seems to be not that I am a human, but rather that I am a member of this unfathomable group of entities, this beautiful family of creatures.)

The notion that bats or dolphins hear echoes might be far too anthropomorphic. Maybe they perceive sonic space as a form of pressure or a change in timbre or overtones. We humans actually have these capacities of sensing sonic space in terms of pressure and overtones, but only at a range of a few millimeters. In terms of sonic imaging we are myopic to the point of virtual blindness. If we hold a flat surface such as a book or the palm of our hand parallel to our ear and slowly move it almost to the point of touching our ear, we perceive changes. As the flat object gets within a few millimeters of the ear the sound waves reflect so completely upon each other that we hear a "seashell effect", a change in timbre because at that very close distance we can hear the reflection of the higher overtones--and perhaps even their phasing. This can also give us a sense of pressure in the ear even though nothing is touching it.

Another way we might imagine what pinging is like is to blow a narrow stream of air out of our lips and pass a finger back and forth through the stream. We hear a change in the hissing sound as the finger hits the stream. If our ears were sensitive enough we could hear the same interferences in a stream of sound ways we were emitting. Try to imagine the reflected overtones coming from a book sitting a few feet away, as if you could emit a high sound and hear the book reflect those high overtones so strongly that it made a high seashell effect and created a pressure in your ear. And imagine that you could distinguish thousands of different seashell effects as if they had colors and shapes. Is that what it would be like to hear sonic space? Is that what it would be like if we could "ping" our environment? Are there worlds of listening we've yet to discover and develop--even if we need technological assistance?

Try the same experiment by slowly moving a wool sweater close to the ear (being sure that your hand is not behind it). The same seashell effect is not created because the sweater is almost transparent sonically--the sound waves move right through it. In the same manner, if our hand is behind the sweater we can once again hear reflections. Through "pinging" we can "see" beneath the sweater to the surface of the hand. For dolphins it means that they can look inside other beings.

We should also note that the intensity of the seashell-effect varies not only according to the density of the object, but also according to its texture. Rough textures do not reflect the sound as well, but this is very hard for humans to perceive even if the object is held next to the ear.

On a more typical level, these considerations of the hardness, density, and texture of reflective surfaces determine the acoustics of musical spaces. Acoustics is the study of how sound waves are affected by mediums and the objects in that medium. We combine aesthetic and acoustic considerations to create spaces for an -idealized- perception of sound. For musicians and listeners those ideals vary according to genre and generally reflect the space for which the music was created, Gregorian chants for echoey Cathedrals, 19th century symphonies for concert halls, Sousa Marches for streets, rock music for stadiums, new age CDs music for stoned people in suburban living rooms, etc.

From the 19th century on, money seems to have been the principle factor motivating transformations of acoustical spaces for music. Hence the palastial chamber of Haydn gave way to the concert hall of Beethoven, which gave way to the stadium for the rock band, which gives way to the endless mass media space of music, radio, television and cinema. Perhaps as a counter reaction composers such as Cage, Feldman, or Pauline have turned to what Pauline calls the "least differences", the perception of sonic phenomena reduced to the finest degree, an effort to salvage listening from what might be thought of as the deafening forces of market economies. When music becomes a means of conditioning behavior we are longer conscious of its presence. We become deaf. Deep Listening also perceives the largest differences. It can discern the sounds of massive marketing. It can teach us to discern the finest differences in the global view.



But perhaps the most valuable of all forms of discernment given us by Deep Listening is the acoustic space of internal being. As I wrote in my post a few weeks ago, this leads to a way of making music built upon the foundations of empathy and compassion. It teaches us how to share our being and create community by sounding the depths of otherness.

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