

# Product of Culture-Clash: social scene, patronage and group dynamics in the early New York Downtown scene and the Theatre of Eternal Music<sup>1</sup>

Brian Bridges

## Introduction

This article will explore the background to the establishment of the Downtown avant-garde art and music scene in New York, including a survey of the role of the experimental composer in American music. It will investigate cultural interactions and influences between some of the main players in the early Downtown scene, focusing in particular on the Theatre of Eternal Music (TEM), the ensemble formed in the 1960s by New York-based “founding-father” Minimalist La Monte Young. It will examine some of the cross-pollination which occurred between the group and the environment in which it developed and will briefly survey the manner in which historical accounts have attributed varying degrees of credit to members of the group, along with a brief account of the current dispute between Young on the one hand and Tony Conrad and John Cale on the other.

## 1. Scene-setting

The art world in 1960s New York enjoyed the healthy combination of low rents in Downtown spaces (which could be retrofitted for both accommodation and display purposes) and a fortuitous proximity to rich patrons. In keeping with the restless Social Darwinistic nature of the city, these patrons were often interested in funding artistic endeavours which evoked and reflected a certain “edginess”. Along with the changing roles of curators, dealers and galleries in promoting the works of living artists to an unprecedented degree, this created a distinctly favourable situation for many visual artists. Coupled with this was an advertising industry which often provided employment for many Downtown artists if they could not support themselves by artistic work alone. Although by no means all of the hopeful artists inhabiting Manhattan could expect the most favourable of these outcomes (that of being a full-time artist living entirely off their artistic earnings and developing a significant profile), the low rents coupled with a healthy artistic milieu meant that they could at least reasonably hope to continue working and living as artists.

Up to this point, art-music composers in America had not been particularly good at exploiting alternative channels of funding and exposure. Whilst there was the case of Bernstein and the crossover success of a career integrating the presentation of more populist American music with composing for Broadway and his own art-music composition,<sup>2</sup> such crossings of the divide were rare. Before writing his influential article

---

<sup>1</sup> British English spelling is used throughout, including in relation to the ensemble title (after Young’s own usage). La Monte Young: ‘Notes on The Theatre of Eternal Music and *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys*’, written 21/07/00 (<http://melafoundation.org/lmy> accessed 21/07/07). Hereafter referred to as Young: ‘Notes’.

<sup>2</sup> As Gann puts it, Bernstein ‘never fully reached the goals he aimed for as a composer in either the serious or popular realms of music, but as a total musician he had an impact unparalleled in his era.’ Kyle Gann:

on 'The Composer as Specialist' in 1958 (aka 'Who Cares if You Listen?'), Milton Babbitt, the archetypal American academic composer of the period had at one point in the 1940s also aimed to compose musicals for Broadway. He did not enjoy commercial success in these endeavours<sup>3</sup> (*Fantastic Voyage*, his retelling of the Odyssey was never produced),<sup>4</sup> but he was, by the time of the article's publication, philosophical enough about such issues that he was content to concentrate on the sort of conceptual and technical developments which could only be supported in the cloistered conditions of the university.

The American opera house and concert hall were still greatly influenced by the culture of late nineteenth/early twentieth-century Europe; in part due to the level of cultural conservatism and insecurity endemic in the upper classes with respect to the Old World<sup>5</sup> and in part due to a genuine engagement with direct exponents of this culture through the émigrés who came to America (and American universities) fleeing a European continent in turmoil. Avant-garde music was often viewed with strong suspicion by musicians and audiences alike: Bernstein had 'little affinity with the Ultramodernists [...and] deeply distrusted twelve-tone music and the avant-garde that followed it'<sup>6</sup> whilst Babbitt saw no reason why 'the layman should be other than bored and puzzled by what he is unable to understand, music or anything else'.<sup>7</sup> The support structures and outlets for more experimental composers were thus derived mainly from academia. This was met with some engagement from performance institutions: if the composer's educational background was considered appropriate, the composer had some contacts in the institutions and the pieces in question were not too challenging to the sensibilities of audience and musicians.

However, the university itself was not immune from such cultural conservatism. This, coupled with the traditional inertia of the Academy in trying to come to terms with the plasticity of artistic practice, frequently made music departments at established universities less than welcoming or attractive to many American experimental composers who did not fit into a model that was drawn from more established (invariably European-derived) modes of operation.<sup>8</sup>

---

*American Music in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Schirmer, 1997), 62. Hereafter referred to as Gann: *American Music*.

<sup>3</sup> Allan Kozinn: 'MUSIC REVIEW: Show Tunes an Atonalist Wrote Before He Converted' *New York Times*, published October 16, 1999 (<http://www.newyorktimes.com>, accessed 31/08/2007).

<sup>4</sup> Steve Swayne: 'Music for the Theatre, the Young Copland, and the Younger Sondheim', *American Music*, 20/1 (Spring/2002), 83.

<sup>5</sup> Alan Rich: *American Pioneers, Ives to Cage and Beyond* (London: Phaidon, 1995), 6. Hereafter referred to as Rich: *American Pioneers*.

<sup>6</sup> Gann: *American Music*, 64.

<sup>7</sup> Milton Babbitt: 'The Composer as Specialist', quoted in Gann, *American Music*, 122.

<sup>8</sup> An early example of this is the less than fulfilling experience which Charles Ives had whilst studying at Yale—and this even before the additional factor of the European émigrés became an issue. Rich: *American Pioneers*, 36–7. A further (and more contemporary) example is that of John Cage—in one instance greeted with such hostility by the music faculty at Urbana, Illinois at a performance in 1952 that only the faculty composer Ben Johnston would talk to him afterwards. Gann: *American Music*, 85. Furthermore, although Cage had taught at the New School for Social Research from 1957–59, New York, his first appointment at a more mainstream 'degree-granting academic institution'—Wesleyan—only happened in 1960. Charles Hamm: 'John Cage', from John Kirkpatrick et al., *The New Grove Twentieth Century American Masters*, (London: Macmillan, 1988), 272. It should be noted, however, in contrast to what is stated in Hamm, that the New School for Social Research did offer BA degrees by this time. (<http://www.newschool.edu/history.html>, accessed 31/08/07).

The musical stage had been set by various vanguard trends in the 1950s, in two major camps. One camp was occupied by adherents of the twelve-tone (or serial) composition methods of Arnold Schoenberg and Anton Webern; Milton Babbitt was its American company commander. The other camp was occupied by adherents of the random, chance and aleatory methods of John Cage.<sup>9</sup>

One trend, the one epitomised by Babbitt, was much more compatible with (and therefore closely wedded to) the American university. Indeed, Babbitt publicly espoused the view that the composer was a specialist in a similar manner to the physicist and that he or she could best be supported in a university to carry out work in that context.<sup>10</sup> This was logical in terms of the creative context in which he was working; however the "laboratory researcher" model did few favours for the cause of finding a home for the 'other camp'. Babbitt's music, in the laboratory-style context of academia, at least produced repeatable and explicable results, whereas music by composers such as John Cage seemed as if it did not and could not.<sup>11</sup>

However, by the 1960s even Cage (that most radical and challenging of compositional figures) was being offered positions at mainstream universities.<sup>12</sup> Even before this he had given a series of music lectures at the New School for Social Research, a dynamic and atypical university at which Henry Cowell had previously taught.<sup>13</sup> As an interesting aside, at least some of the subject matter of Cage's lectures owed more than a little to the "laboratory researcher" model espoused by Babbitt—these lectures contained substantial reference to ideas drawn from acoustics.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps Cage made certain efforts to be more respectable when lecturing as opposed to when he was producing concerts—in any case, the musical implications drawn from acoustics by Cage were perhaps more philosophical and experiential than essentially scientific in nature.

Notwithstanding his possible tendency towards greater respectability whilst lecturing, the hosting of Cage was probably not something which would have been lightly undertaken by a less progressive institution at this time. The New School was characterised by an alternative stance which was derived from two strands. The first was American progressive cultural politics (many of the founding staff found themselves to be alienated by restrictions on social criticism and discussions of modern arts found in post-World

---

Another major American experimental composer, Morton Feldman, worked at his uncle's dry-cleaning plant until his appointment at the State University of New York at Buffalo, which only happened as late as 1972. Gann, *American Music*, 142.

<sup>9</sup> H. Wiley Hitchcock: 'Minimalism in Art and Music: Origins and Aesthetics', *Classic Essays on Twentieth Century Music: A Continuing Symposium*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz and James Darby (New York : Schirmer, 1996), 309. Hereafter Kostelanetz and Darby: *Classic Essays on Twentieth Century Music*.

<sup>10</sup> Babbitt's views on this matter have often been exaggerated or distorted due to the widespread publishing of his influential essay under the title of 'Who Cares if You Listen?' instead of his intended title of 'The Composer as Specialist.' (It is also interesting to note that he states at the start of this essay that an alternative might have been 'The Composer as Anachronism'.) Milton Babbitt: 'The Composer as Specialist', from Kostelanetz and Darby (1996), 161–167, originally published in *High Fidelity Magazine* (2/1958).

<sup>11</sup> An account of the Uptown/Downtown divide which grew out of this situation is to be found in Kyle Gann: 'Breaking the Chain Letter: An Essay on Downtown Music', written 04/1998 (<http://www.kylegann.com/downtown.html> accessed 21/07/07).

<sup>12</sup> Wesleyan (1960), Cincinnati (1967), Illinois (1967–69) and University of California at Davis (1969)—James Pritchett: *The Music of John Cage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 142. Hereafter referred to as Pritchett: *The Music of John Cage*.

<sup>13</sup> Rich: *American Pioneers*, 136.

<sup>14</sup> Douglas Kahn: *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1999), 282, citing the notebooks of George Brecht, a Fluxus artist who attended the classes.

War I American universities). The second was a progressive European connection solidified by its graduate school, part of whose mission was to provide a refuge and outlet for scholars fleeing totalitarian regimes in Europe.<sup>15</sup> The upshot of this mix was a self-confidently independent institution with a track record of hosting a radical composer in the person of Cowell.

Although Cage was not teaching there by the time Young came to study at the New School in 1960 (Young instead studied with Richard Maxfield),<sup>16</sup> in many other ways he paved the way for Young in terms of a non-traditional and experimental approach, coupled with the collaborative spirit which also informed the developing Downtown scene. Post-Cage conceptualism, to which Young was to bring his focused attention, provided a unifying context for musicians and visual and performance artists. In relation to experimental music of this sort, the resulting connections would be potentially much more lucrative than connections with more traditional networks of support, given the level of cultural conservatism associated with the institutions in question. The scope of what could be considered to be music in these contexts was quite limited and not too open to being redefined. Were it to be presented as, or associated with, conceptual art, a wider range of performance possibilities might begin to open up.

## 2. La Monte Young, Fluxus and New York

In fact, more than just a sharing of outlet and support possibilities leaked between the two worlds at this time. Cage's classes in Experimental Music at the New School from 1957–59 were attended by a number of leading figures within the American Fluxus movement, including George Brecht, Dick Higgins, Jackson MacLow, Al Hansen and Allan Kaprow.<sup>17</sup> Those from the visual art world seemed to be more open to Cage's approach; as James Pritchett has put it 'while New York musicians had no context in which to put Cage's chance works, New York artists did'.<sup>18</sup> Young, when he arrived too late to attend those particular classes, emerged onto a scene with which he already had a certain amount of common ground.

However, although Young initially found some kindred spirits in the movement, and perhaps even some initial benefit, in the final analysis he had a very distinctive philosophy of more controlled works and was (and is still) concerned that an association with Fluxus might interfere with the reception of his own work. He participated in some concerts organised by George Maciunas, the founding member, architect and promoter of the Fluxus movement, but was somewhat concerned that he might be co-opted. 'Anybody was Fluxus in George's mind, he would pull anybody in, and you could call up Fluxus'.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> The New School: 'About The New School: History' (<http://www.newschool.edu/history.html>, accessed 31/08/07).

<sup>16</sup> La Monte Young: 'Resumé' (<http://melafoundation.org/lmyresum.htm>, accessed 31/8/07).

<sup>17</sup> Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (London: Studio Vista, 1974 rev. edn Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999) 13, 51, 75. Hereafter referred to as Nyman: *Experimental Music*.

<sup>18</sup> Pritchett: *The Music of John Cage*, 140.

<sup>19</sup> Gabrielle Zuckerman, interview with La Monte Young for American Public Media (7/2002) for 'American Mavericks', transcript ([http://musicmavericks.publicradio.org/features/interview\\_young.html](http://musicmavericks.publicradio.org/features/interview_young.html), accessed 11/8/07). Hereafter referred to as Young: 'American Mavericks' interview.

This view of Maciunas is supported by a more detached academic view, which describes him as ‘publisher, performer, and curmudgeonly master of ceremonies for the Fluxus community’.<sup>20</sup> With this in mind, Young became somewhat concerned with not becoming ensnared in Maciunas’s agenda to the detriment of his own.

I actually had talent, I won prizes, I won degrees, and I actually have a history of capability. Fluxus people are like tenth grade artists. [...] They ended up doing something on a much simpler level [...] entertainment.<sup>21</sup>

A detailed assessment of Fluxus goes beyond the scope of this article. However, it is interesting to note how some aspects of it relate to the differing world-views of Young and Cage. In the first instance, Cage had a profound influence on many members of this movement:

Early American performance art was dominated by emphasis on accident, most likely due to the fact that it was a significant and energizing theme in John Cage’s composition courses at the New School for Social Research as well as the various public lectures he delivered during the middle 1950s.<sup>22</sup>

There was thus a focus on randomness and multiplicity which arguably derived from Cage’s influence: one which was quite distinct from Young’s approach. However, the Fluxus movement did share with Young (or vice versa) a concern for testing the boundaries of performance and art and, in the music sphere, these boundaries had previously been subjected to some thorough testing by John Cage. Nonetheless, there were clear differences too, as Kyle Gann comments:

If La Monte Young had not existed, it would be necessary to invent him as a counterfoil to John Cage. In Cage’s aesthetic, individual musical works are metaphorically excerpts from the cacophonous roar of all sounds heard or imagined. Young’s archetype, equally fundamental, attempts to make audible the opposite pole: the basic tone from which all possible sounds emanate as overtones. If Cage stood for Zen, multiplicity, and becoming, Young stands for yoga, singularity, and being. Together they are the Heraclitus and Parmenides of twentieth-century music.<sup>23</sup>

In Young’s compositions after his move to UC Berkeley and then to New York there is a growing concern for focused, singular environments.<sup>24</sup> The focused environment is often cited as being derived from childhood experiences in rural Idaho and Utah:

---

<sup>20</sup> Mike Sell: *Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism—Approaching the Living Theatre, Happenings/Fluxus, and the Black Arts Movement*. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 136. Hereafter referred to as Sell: *Avant-Garde Performance*.

<sup>21</sup> Young: ‘American Mavericks’ interview.

<sup>22</sup> Sell: *Avant-Garde Performance*, 143.

<sup>23</sup> Kyle Gann: ‘The Outer Edge of Consonance: Snapshots from the Evolution of La Monte Young’s Tuning Installations’, *Sound and Light: La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela*, ed. William Duckworth and Richard Fleming (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press and London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1996), 153 Hereafter referred to as Gann: ‘The Outer Edge of Consonance’, *Sound and Light*, ed. Duckworth and Fleming.

<sup>24</sup> As can be seen in pieces such as the 1958 *Trio for Strings*, which, with its focus on long sustained tones combined with equally long silences detaching them, acts as what Bob Snyder has termed ‘memory sabotage’, making each new chord a more singular, detached event. Bob Snyder: *Music and Memory: an introduction* (Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press, 2000), 235 and 254. Snyder specifically refers to the CD release of the *Second Dream of the High-Tension Stepdown Transformer from the Four Dreams of China* (Gramavision R2 79467), but the principle is still the same.

I got this start lying in my bed in the log cabin, hearing the wind blow between the criss-crossed legs [...] It wasn't as if I could turn off the wind, like somebody would turn off the radio; when one of those storms came it went on as long as it was going to last.<sup>25</sup>

Certainly, this is different from the archetypal Cage environment, which is more concerned with multiplicity and, indeed, chaos.<sup>26</sup> Even the one apparent exception to this, 4'33", is arguably more focused on the multiple possibilities entailed in filling the silence than the singular silence itself. Compare this piece, Cage's signature one, with Young's closest equivalent, *Composition 1960 # 7*, which requires a perfect fifth (B–F#) to be held for 'a long time': a coherent drone which is, at first glance, a supremely singular event.

Young has, as seen above, sought to draw a clear line distinguishing his work from that of the Fluxus artists. Certainly, it could be argued that many of the pieces which they produced had more in common with that Cagean sense of accident and multiplicity. However, not all of the Fluxus work is so clearly different from the generally singular focus of pieces from the *Compositions 1960* series. Some have comparatively simple event scores such as George Brecht's *Tea Event* (1961): 'Tea Event / Preparing / Empty Vessel',<sup>27</sup> though this particular work 'despite its textual minimalism [becomes...] a baroque monstrosity when it comes to performance'.<sup>28</sup> However, another example which arguably is closer to Young is Emmett William's *For La Monte Young* (1962): 'Performer asks if La Monte Young is in the Audience'.<sup>29</sup>

With pieces such as this enhancing his reputation and notoriety, the question should be posed as to whether Fluxus really was doing Young much harm. Pieces such as the above were more likely to have been beneficial in terms of exposure. The place it gave him in a community of artists was such that Young was, according to his own estimation, 'literally the darling of the avant-garde [...] I was in *Vogue* magazine and *Esquire* and everything just in the early 60's, just after I hit New York'.<sup>30</sup> Certainly, this was a more favourable scene for him to work in than the more established Uptown one, which could only offer composers who were not firmly established short slots in programmes of around twelve to twenty minutes or so.<sup>31</sup> This clearly did not provide sufficient time for Young's sense of scale and duration.

To return to *Composition 1960 # 7*, this piece is arguably one of the most challenging of Young's conceptual pieces in terms of its position in relation to reductionist "paper" single-concept conceptualism on the one hand and traditional Western musical practices with regard to notation on the other. The conceptual importance of the drone is perhaps subsidiary to the actual experience. This is because the perception, on listening, is not that of a single drone, but rather a multiplicity of drones deriving from a single source.

---

<sup>25</sup> La Monte Young, quoted in K. Robert Schwarz: *Minimalists* (London: Phaidon, 1996), 17. Hereafter referred to as Schwarz: *Minimalists*.

<sup>26</sup> John Cale, later a collaborator with Young, bluntly sums up Cage's view as being 'if chaos is the natural state of the universe, then we should accept that as it is, instead of trying to impose some sort of artificial regime on it. "Don't give yourself a headache trying to structure things too much," he used to say.' John Cale and Victor Bockris: *What's Welsh for Zen: The Autobiography of John Cale*. (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), 57. Hereafter referred to as Cale and Bockris: *What's Welsh for Zen*.

<sup>27</sup> Reproduced in Sell: *Avant-Garde Performance*, 140.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>30</sup> Young: 'American Mavericks' interview.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

In an enclosed room, tuning instabilities and standing waves conspire with the mind's "rules of thumb" for auditory perception to begin to decompose the drone in the listener's perception (related to a basic principle discovered by Helmholtz in 1859):

He was discussing the fact that he could help himself hear a harmonic of a complex piano tone by preceding it with a tone whose fundamental was at the frequency of the desired harmonic. [...] Furthermore, if the complex tone did not contain a component that was close to the priming tone in frequency, no harmonic was heard.<sup>32</sup>

One crucial aspect in relation to this phenomenon of 'aural decomposition' and *Composition 1960 # 7* is that the apparent concept does not do justice to the result—the result resists prior "common sense" conceptualisation. An evolving, dynamic sound is heard rather than a static one, with the piece acting like a prism in splitting the component tones apart. In this, it is therefore challenging in terms of notation, because its sonic result is so clearly separated from the elegantly simple performance instructions. It is a piece which resists in the strongest terms an analysis of its parallel existence on paper. The multiplicity of pitches which result from the drone do bear some similarities to the 'minimal instruction, maximum effects' nature of some Cage pieces, but, as Gann has stated (above), the overtones emanating from a single coherent source also mark it as distinct from the products of a Cagean philosophy.

When Young moved to New York, the Downtown area in the 1960s was becoming a hotbed of more alternative activities. Artistic collaborations took place between people from a variety of different artistic backgrounds and disciplines. There was a blurred relationship between concerts and open rehearsals and, indeed, a blurred relationship between people's dwellings and performance spaces. This provided a conducive environment for exploring the boundaries of temporal scale and environment in music. The circumstances in which this sort of environment developed are quite unusual, and deserve some discussion. The fact that New York was able to sustain cheap living for artists who could at the same time enjoy proximity to some sort of capital is one which places it alongside contemporary Berlin in terms of such an unusual conjunction. Kostelanetz makes a further comparison with the tradition of rural artists' colonies in America and their somewhat isolationist focus on aesthetic work as opposed to the more politicised nature of urban bohemia.<sup>33</sup>

The genesis of the Downtown scene happened quite quickly and the change in use of the area was dramatic. In 1962, Kostelanetz describes the area as still being 'an industrial slum'<sup>34</sup> which certainly did not have many of the hallmarks of a residential area's infrastructure: shops, dry cleaners, restaurants etc.<sup>35</sup> Many artists began by living

---

<sup>32</sup> The basic principle which can explain this 'decomposition' is the 'old-plus-new heuristic' proposed by Albert S. Bregman. For more this, see Bregman: *Auditory Scene Analysis*, 220–224. A related principle which applies is the tendency to group 'sound objects' with different rates of modulation (amplitude or frequency) as separate 'objects', which further increases the tendency towards segregation of partials which are beating with proximate harmonic components from other notes or 'sound objects.' For a more succinct explanation of this entire area, see Bregman, 'Auditory Scene Analysis: hearing in complex environments', *Thinking in Sound*, ed. Stephen McAdams and Emmanuel Bigand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 11–36.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 7. Hereafter referred to as Kostelanetz: *SoHo*.

<sup>34</sup> Kostelanetz: *SoHo*, 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

a semi-clandestine existence there,<sup>36</sup> often having to conceal their existence there by distributing their refuse in various garbage cans around the area, rather than concentrating on the one nearest their building.<sup>37</sup> However the relaxation of rules by the State legislature in 1964 (with artists being classed as 'light industry' so as not to conflict with existing zoning regulations) meant that the artists of the area could live there and organise public events without fear of falling foul of the legal system.<sup>38</sup>

Even before this coming of legality, Young had organised the first series of loft concerts in the winter of 1960/61 at Yoko Ono's loft, with a number of works by himself, Riley, Terry Jennings (another musical associate) and some of the Fluxus artists.<sup>39</sup> The conditions under which such concerts could be produced in Downtown spaces certainly suited Young's continuing interest in focused phenomena and long durations (the lack of expectations arguably present in such raw spaces may have helped maintain a level of dignity for the pieces: in Uptown concert halls, they may have seemed all-too-reactive). They were also influential as the first of these archetypal New York Downtown concerts of a type which would become more typical with the advent of Phil Niblock's Experimental Intermedia concerts (held in Niblock's loft)<sup>40</sup> and later, similar presentations at The Kitchen,<sup>41</sup> both of which would ultimately be essential proving grounds for the Downtown experimental music scene.<sup>42</sup>

In financial terms, the proximity to patrons and publicists was also important to many artists. A new fluidity in the art world meant that museums such as MoMA<sup>43</sup> were moving to take on some of the roles that had previously been occupied by galleries and dealers—those of assessing (and therefore, at some level, highlighting and increasing the value of) the work of contemporary artists.<sup>44</sup> The market value for modern art was increasing,<sup>45</sup> arguably impacting upon the optimism and resultant dynamism of many artists. The amount of space available in accessible proximity to the cultural (and financial) capital that was New York coupled with the dynamism in the art market provided an impetus for even the more challenging artists of the Downtown scene to form artists' co-operatives where they might publicise and sell their work. In contrast to the neighbourhood itself in the 1960s,<sup>46</sup> artists were enjoying a favourable change in fortunes, both in terms of changing private and commercial patronage and government intervention.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 14 and 15.

<sup>37</sup> Twyla Tharp, excerpt from *Push Comes to Shove* quoted in Kostelanetz: *SoHo*, quotations page after dedication.

<sup>38</sup> Kostelanetz, *SoHo*, 15.

<sup>39</sup> Edward Strickland: *Minimalism: Origins* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993 rev. edn 2000). 140. Hereafter referred to as Strickland: *Minimalism: Origins*.

<sup>40</sup> Experimental Intermedia Foundation: 'Artists' (<http://www.experimentalintermedia.org/ei/artists.shtml> accessed 9/08/07).

<sup>41</sup> Described by Kyle Gann as New York's most ground-breaking space'. Gann: *American Music*, 298.

<sup>42</sup> John Rockwell and Zdravko Blazekovic: 'New York: 9. Avant-garde Music', *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (2<sup>nd</sup> edition London: Macmillan, 2001), 832–834.

<sup>43</sup> The Museum of Modern Art, located in Midtown New York.

<sup>44</sup> Sharon Zukin, 'Art in the Arms of Power: Market Relations and Collective Patronage in the Capitalist State', *Theory and Society*, 11/4 (7/1982), 430. Hereafter referred to as Zukin: 'Art in the Arms of Power' *Theory and Society* (7/1982).

<sup>45</sup> Zukin: 'Art in the Arms of Power' *Theory and Society* (7/1982), 431.

<sup>46</sup> With the threat to owners of the proposed Lower Manhattan Expressway, which would perhaps result in compulsory purchase orders and insufficient compensation, see Kostelanetz: *SoHo*, 32.

<sup>47</sup> Zukin: 'Art in the Arms of Power' *Theory and Society* (7/1982), 431.



So although living conditions were undeniably primitive, as witnessed by Kostelanetz's accounts, there were (especially for visual artists), some causes for hope. For composers and musicians with much in common with the visual artists, there were the beginnings of new models of collaboration, dissemination, presentation and support.

Initially for Young, in spite of features in *Vogue*, the reality was generally privation after he had used up his scholarship.<sup>48</sup> However, he did benefit from the co-operative ethic of SoHo,<sup>49</sup> with Fluxus founder George Maciunas providing both Young and Zazeela with food to help them through these early times.<sup>50</sup> The collegiate atmosphere of the place ('As an artists' colony, SoHo became an educational arena where people were inadvertently teaching one another all the time')<sup>51</sup> also helped in providing Young with a number of dynamic collaborators. All in all, the burgeoning Downtown scene was a very favourable one for Young to be a part of and, with his later discovery (in the manner of visual artists) by Heiner Friedrich<sup>52</sup> (an art patron who would go on to found the Dia Foundation), Young was set to enjoy all of its varied artistic benefits.

### **3. Backline to a Drone: Formation and Amplification of the Theatre of Eternal Music**

Soon after moving to New York in 1960 Young began to gather a number of open-minded musicians around him. As he began to leave conceptualism behind, one group, known as the Theatre of Eternal Music (TEM), began to coalesce around him. The group comprised, at various times, Terry Riley, Angus MacLise and Terry Jennings; however, in 1963 the nucleus of the group was Young (initially on saxophone, later vocals), his wife Marian Zazeela (vocals and lighting design), Tony Conrad (violin) and John Cale (viola).<sup>53</sup> Terry Riley had been a friend of Young's at UC Berkeley.<sup>54</sup> Cale was a music graduate of Goldsmiths College, London, and had worked with Cornelius Cardew prior to arriving in the US under a scholarship to Tanglewood Conservatory.<sup>55</sup> He would go on to do pioneering work with injecting an interest in timbre, tuning and extended techniques (or to put it more succinctly, an interest in noise) into the hugely influential Velvet Underground. Conrad had studied Baroque violin as a teenager and was also a pioneer of the 'structural film' movement.<sup>56</sup> Zazeela was an artist, trained at Bennington College<sup>57</sup>, who would later produce much work in the realm of light-based installations to be presented in tandem with Young's music.

The initial focus was on extended durations: the group would play an accompanying drone to Young's rapid saxophone runs. According to Downtown composer Rhys Chatham:<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Young: 'American Mavericks' interview.

<sup>49</sup> The place name SoHo is rendered in its customary irregular capitalization, reflecting the conjunction of 'South of Houston Street.'

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Kostelanetz: *SoHo*, 39.

<sup>52</sup> Young: 'American Mavericks' interview.

<sup>53</sup> Young: 'Notes', 7–12.

<sup>54</sup> Schwarz: *Minimalists*, 24–30.

<sup>55</sup> Cale and Bockris: *What's Welsh for Zen*, 36–53.

<sup>56</sup> Gann: *American Music*, 190.

<sup>57</sup> Marian Zazeela: 'Education' (<http://melafoundation.org/mzeducat.htm> accessed 9/8/07).

<sup>58</sup> Electric guitar composer who owes much to this early Downtown scene, having had contact with Young in the early years, though more recently has been more closely associated with Conrad.

Conrad was the theoretical brains behind all these guys working in just intonation. La Monte, when he started out, was primarily interested in music of long durations. It was, you know, the Sixties, the psychedelic era, people were opening up to meditation—and it was just in the air, you know.<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, the genesis behind the group's (and Young's) interest in pure tuning was possibly quite organic and related to the addition of amplification, which

[...] came about one day when Tony bought an electronic pick-up [...] you could really hear what was going on and it was very, very rich [...] Tony put [one] on his violin and I put mine on my viola [...] and every single day [for a year and a half] there was three hours of rehearsal mainly on stringing and tuning.<sup>60</sup>

This amplification acted, in some senses, as a magnifying glass for certain aspects of the sound: comparatively weak string harmonics were suddenly lent volume so that they might compete with other sounds. Cale further illuminates the interaction between amplification and tuning:

We gave a concert once at Rutgers University while La Monte was still playing saxophone [...] I started imitating La Monte's sax playing with harmonics very high up on the strings and took him by surprise [...] because those harmonics, although they approximated what he was playing, were really natural harmonics on the whole strings and therefore more in tune, more part of an organic whole [...] Eventually we just drove La Monte off the saxophone. He stopped playing fast and spent all his time trying to get in tune, and couldn't, so he started singing. And he started immediately delineating which intervals were allowed and which were not.<sup>61</sup>

Cale's quote is interesting in that although it attests to the strong influence which he claims to have exerted on Young, at the same time it appears to acknowledge some sort of leadership role for Young, with the delineation of permissible intervals.

One question which should be posed relates to whether the introduction of amplification was necessary to move the group in this direction. Cale and Conrad would argue that it was, with some justification. However, it is also possible to view the interest in tuning as derived from Young's long-standing interest in long durations, where the deviations from pure tuning which equal temperament entails become more obvious; or, conversely, as Terry Riley has put it, 'Western Music is fast because it's not in tune'.<sup>62</sup> With this in mind, Gann refers to the development of Young's interest in duration into an interest in intervallic quality without directly referencing the role of amplification: 'Young's long durations would blossom into a passion for tuning—getting chords and intervals perfectly "in tune"'.<sup>63</sup>

From this genesis, theoretical developments came as Conrad, a Harvard Mathematics graduate in a previous existence, 'showed Young that perfect consonances were related

---

<sup>59</sup> Rhys Chatham, personal interview, 5/2003, in Brian Bridges: *Amplified Art-Noise: Amplification, Alternate Tuning and Acoustical Phenomena in the Music of La Monte Young, Rhys Chatham and Glenn Branca* (Unpublished MPhil dissertation, University of Dublin, Trinity College, 2003).

<sup>60</sup> Cale and Bockris: *What's Welsh for Zen*, 60.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 60–61.

<sup>62</sup> Terry Riley, quoted in Kyle Gann: 'Just Intonation Explained', (<http://www.kylegann.com/tuning.html> accessed 21/07/2007).

<sup>63</sup> Kyle Gann: *American Music*, 188.

as ratios of the whole numbers in the overtone series.<sup>64</sup> However, Conrad's background in tuning was not merely mathematical. His music tuition had centered on Baroque scordatura violin pieces by the composer Heinrich Biber: his tutor had directed him towards this material because of his dislike for the Romantic repertoire in general and vibrato techniques in particular.<sup>65</sup> According to Conrad, Biber's music transformed his violin playing:

[F]or the first time, my violin sounded truly wonderful [...] the timbre of the instrument, clad in Biber's coat of many colorful tunings, catching and refracting every note differently—reinventing, thereby, the function of the key pitch, the fundamental of the chord. I perceived Biber's music as having been constructed according to timbre, not melody.<sup>66</sup>

The TEM were about to continue this exploration of the blurred line between timbre, harmony and melody. It is this exploration and exploitation of this blurred line that provides a common thread between the work carried out by Young *et al.* and that of subsequent Downtown composers such as Phil Niblock,<sup>67</sup> Rhys Chatham and Glenn Branca,<sup>68</sup> to name but a few exponents of music based on extended durations and investigations of tuning.

#### 4. Consonance and Dissonance: Group Dynamics in the Theatre of Eternal Music

Along with the blurred line between musical elements there was arguably a similar phenomenon in relation to the roles of the various group members: a confusion which has led to recent controversy, with the release of material from the group without Young's assent causing him to reaffirm his position that he is the group's sole composer.<sup>69</sup> The disputes over authorship have meant that this release (unauthorised by Young) is the sole example of the early TEM's work currently in print.

Cale states the case for his (and Conrad's)<sup>70</sup> influence on the compositional direction of the group by saying:

---

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>65</sup> Dan Warburton: 'Tony Conrad', based on citations of liner notes to Conrad's *Early Minimalism Vol. I*, (<http://www.paristransatlantic.com/magazine/features/conrad.html> accessed 7/8/2007).

<sup>66</sup> Tony Conrad, quoted in 'HStencil', 'Early Minimalism and Beyond: Tony Conrad in Music Film and Video', (<http://www.geocities.com/hstencil/tonyconrad2.html> accessed 7/8/2007).

<sup>67</sup> A composer who explores more dynamic drone-based textures than Young, with a less Pythagorean attachment to ideas of tuning systems: 'Niblock is the master and extreme example of the out-of-tune approach to tuning'. Gann, *American Music*, 213.

<sup>68</sup> Branca is a composer of large-scale symphonic works for amplified instruments, often, in his earlier works, using the harmonic series as a structural basis, described by Gann as 'the only symphonist whose music does not come in any way from the European tradition.' Gann: *American Music*, 304.

<sup>69</sup> La Monte Young: 'Statement on Table of The Elements CD 74 "Day of Niagara" April 25, 1965' (<http://melafoundation.org/statemen.htm> written 10/7/00, accessed 31/8/07). Hereafter referred to as Young: 'Statement on Table of The Elements CD 74'.

Arnold Dreyblatt: 'An open letter to La Monte Young and Tony Conrad', shorter version published in *The Wire* (September 2000), (<http://www.dreyblatt.de/pdf/Tony%20Conrad%20Response.pdf> accessed 31/8/07).

Tony Conrad: 'Tony Conrad's Response to *An open letter to La Monte Young and Tony Conrad*, 2000' (<http://www.dreyblatt.de/pdf/Tony%20Conrad%20Response.pdf> accessed 31/8/07).

<sup>70</sup> The author should state a personal interest here, since he studied with Conrad in Buffalo in January 2006. However, he considers his interest in this historical matter to be quite separate from any personal dealings

The electric component of La Monte's group had driven the theory and style of the Dream Syndicate. Tony's introduction of the electric pick-up [...] had forever altered the raga-blues-type music that was prevalent when I first arrived.<sup>71</sup>

The introduction of the amplified component had two aspects to it. In the first instance, it magnified 'smaller' sonic details such as string harmonics (as seen in the Cale quote from the previous section). Secondly, it also further increased the tendency of the complex tones which were being played to 'decompose' in a similar manner to the decomposition of the drone in *Composition 1960 #7* due to minor deviations in tuning. This time, however, the decomposition would be "enhanced" by virtue of non-linearities (or, more plainly, distortions) in the amplification systems and audiences' ears,<sup>72</sup> leading to the creation of difference tones and aural harmonics which would interact with those harmonic partials already present to cause a perception of "detached" harmonics in certain regions. The products of these distortions generally increase the amplitude of upper harmonic partials, making the sound subjectively 'brighter',<sup>73</sup> and thus increasing their perceptibility and facilitating the interaction effects (beating etc.) when other tones are played with components close in frequency to these partials. The resulting (more transparent) texture would therefore highlight notes from that harmonic series being played as separate, pure tones from the overall soundmass, as the 'old-plus-new heuristic' process is applied in a similar manner to the case of Helmholtz's piano harmonics. Pitches which are close to the frequencies of harmonics will cause this frequency component to be allocated separately in perception according to this principle. As the pitches deviate slightly due to bowing, other harmonics are occasionally 'heard out' also, giving glimpses of the wider structure of the harmonic series to further place the intervals in context.

These effects highlight the importance of amplification in the music – Young once refused to exhibit work as a result of the volume level being too low to produce the effects he desired.<sup>74</sup> In fact, as important or more important to Young are the low-frequency combination tones (difference tones) which are generated by these non-linearities in the hearing mechanism (and amplification). These difference tones have often been used to reinforce the fundamental, and he takes the disputed CD release to task for not boosting the bass so that the amplifier difference tones can be heard more clearly.<sup>75</sup>

In addition, the ability to focus on these details is further facilitated, as in the example of *Composition 1960 #7*, by drone-based presentation. Conrad attests to his own initial preference for drone-based work, noting that he chose to play a fifth for the first month or so with the group, at a time when Young was performing intricate soprano saxophone

---

with Conrad, and he has had no contact with any of the parties to this dispute during the writing of this article.

<sup>71</sup> Cale and Bockris: *What's Welsh for Zen*, 63.

<sup>72</sup> Hugo Fastl and Eberhard Zwicker: *Psychoacoustics: Facts and Models* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn Berlin, Heidelberg and New York: Springer, 1/1990, 2/1999, 3/2006, 277–279. Hereafter referred to as Fastl and Zwicker: *Psychoacoustics: Facts and Models*.

<sup>73</sup> Fastl and Zwicker: *Psychoacoustics: Facts and Models*, 277.

<sup>74</sup> Edward Strickland 'La Monte Young', *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (2nd edition London: Macmillan, 2001), 674.

<sup>75</sup> Young: 'Statement on Table of The Elements CD 74'.

lines.<sup>76</sup> However, a possible retort from Young (which would have some degree of justification) is that he had already colonised this territory with *Composition 1960 #7* (and, indeed, the *Trio for Strings*):

Also, both Tony and John were well informed of my *Compositions 1960*, which are scores consisting of verbal and, in some cases graphic, instructions for the performer. John Cale had performed some of these works in London before he came to the U.S., and Tony had written to me about these works after he heard about them in 1960. Indeed, the first documented appearance of Tony Conrad as a performer in a La Monte Young composition was [...] during a 5-hour continuous performance of *Composition 1960 #7*.<sup>77</sup>

One possible retort relates to the argument that *Composition 1960 #7* began life as a conceptual piece which only later, in the context of performance and subsequent group practice, became more clearly related to the more refined practice of the TEM. Young does not claim to have instructed Conrad to reprise the drone—this was one fortuitous aspect of working in such a group performance context. The addition of amplification is another aspect which did not come directly from Young (although it did, perhaps, suit his taste for immersive performances). This is arguably one aspect of the group's working method which might cause problems for scholars versed in the traditional Western art-music model of composer/performer. It is possible that at least some of the credit which Young has received in the survey-based accounts of the period (Whittall, Potter, Schwarz and, perhaps, even Nyman)<sup>78</sup> is due to their assumptions of a "traditional" model of group work with Young definitively at the helm, rather than a distributed model with ideas and refinements coming from other members of the ensemble. A more nuanced survey is to be seen in Strickland's account in *Minimalism: Origins* and that of Kyle Gann in *American Music in the Twentieth Century*.

However, a problem comes when attempting to list composers: for example, the following list—'Reich, Riley, Glass, Young, Conrad, Cale'—whilst attempting to give wider credit, artificially separates people whose most important work derives from their membership of a group that was, at some level or other, collaborative. This leads into another factor which has reinforced Young's pre-eminence in accounts of this period: his subsequent career as a composer. Arguably, this has lent him a greater degree of credibility in relation to this, especially in more traditional art-music circles. Cale later concentrated on work with the Velvet Underground and his career as a rock musician and record producer.<sup>79</sup> Tony Conrad became an influential filmmaker (pioneer of the 'structural film' movement)<sup>80</sup> and academic.<sup>81</sup> Their own experimental improvisations of this period would not be released until three decades later, when Conrad also returned to live performance and recording.<sup>82</sup>

In addition, any other (still living) parties to the group are more likely, perhaps, to see things Young's way. His old friend Terry Riley has generally supported his position,

---

<sup>76</sup> Dan Warburton: 'Tony Conrad', based on citations of liner notes to Conrad's *Early Minimalism Vol. I*, (<http://www.paristransatlantic.com/magazine/features/conrad.html> accessed 7/8/2007).

<sup>77</sup> Young: 'Notes', 9.

<sup>78</sup> Relevant sections include K Robert Schwarz: *Minimalists*, 37–39; Arnold Whittall: *Musical Composition in the Twentieth Century*, 326–7 (which omits mention of the TEM altogether); Keith Potter: *Four Musical Minimalists*, 61–76; Michael Nyman: *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, 141–144.

<sup>79</sup> For more detail on Cale's later career, see Cale and Bockris, *What's Welsh for Zen*, 68 onwards.

<sup>80</sup> Strickland: *Minimalism: Origins*, 11.

<sup>81</sup> Department of Media Studies at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

<sup>82</sup> Tony Conrad: 'Press Kit' (<http://tonyconrad.net/presskit.htm> accessed 30/8/07).

albeit with the addition of diplomatic comments of approval about Cale and Conrad's 'commitment',<sup>83</sup> although he was not, himself, present in the group for the genesis of work on drones and tuning. Zazeela has also supported Young.<sup>84</sup> Given that she has been married to Young for many years and they are generally inseparable, it is perhaps unlikely that any view that Young so publicly espouses is one which she disagrees with. One contributing factor is perhaps that she has another sphere in which to clearly assert authorship—that of the accompanying light installations to many of Young's later pieces.

However, Young's recent pragmatic (and somewhat legalistic) conclusion is a little difficult to argue with in terms of the provability of the case:

Tony Conrad's and John Cale's contributions to the underlying structure of *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys* was not in the realm of composition but were rather in the realms of performing, theory, acoustics, mathematics and philosophy, and therefore not copyrightable as music composition.<sup>85</sup>

This conclusion is compelling. However, it could perhaps be argued that the pieces' drone-based expositions of various combinations of intervals challenge the more traditional boundaries of what can be considered composition: this is frequently one of the main points which Conrad makes in this regard. In addition, earlier comments by Young appear to side-step this contentious issue much more, as can be seen by the use of 'we' to refer to choice of intervals in a quote from Nyman's *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*:

If we have already determined in advance the frequencies we're going to use and we allow only certain frequency combinations [...] then we find that as soon as two people have started playing, the choices left are greatly reduced and limited, so that each performer must be extremely responsible.<sup>86</sup>

This quote is interesting, in that it combines a mention of collective decision-making with an emphasis on being 'responsible' with regard to the combinations, which would appear to imply a group development scenario, rather than a more hierarchical situation. (However, even in Cale's testimony, Young seems to enjoy a pre-eminence in choosing intervals.)

In the final analysis, it is one faction's word against another, with the added confusion of the nebulous nature of compositional credit in a group undergoing dynamic changes in their practice. Whatever the truth behind Cale and Conrad's claims of influence in the development of this compositional approach, this author can only echo some of the feelings of Kyle Gann in relation to this matter:

While I have no wish to take an official position regarding legal distinctions about events that happened in a distant city when I was a boy, for the purposes of this article I treat the Tortoise works [the set of works which Young claims ownership

---

<sup>83</sup> Terry Riley, quoted in La Monte Young: 'Notes on The Theatre of Eternal Music and *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys*' (<http://melafoundation.org/lmy> written 2000, accessed 21/7/07), 22.

<sup>84</sup> Young: 'Notes', 18.

<sup>85</sup> Young: 'Notes', 25.

<sup>86</sup> La Monte Young, quoted in Nyman: *Experimental Music*, 142.

over] in accordance with Young's claims that he should be considered sole composer.<sup>87</sup>

In the present author's case, the events are ones which are even more distant. Nonetheless, the current article requires some form of working assumption. Specifically regarding Young's claims of compositional authorship, he does present a compelling case (though one which is not entirely settled) for assessment under more conventional bounds of what is considered composition. However, the opposing point frequently cited by Conrad in his published comments on the matter is the unconventional (at least in Western Music terms) nature of the compositions and the group. Conrad regards this as one of the most important developments with which the group was associated as part of a pioneering Sixties wave of such ensembles. In relation to this, he has picketed a Young concert in Buffalo (Conrad's new home) with a proclamation containing a number of points, the first of which is:

COMPOSER LA MONTE YOUNG DOES NOT UNDERSTAND "HIS" WORK...

1. The "Theater of Eternal Music" ("TEM") of 1964 was collaboratively founded - and was so named to deny the Eurocentric historical/progressive teleology then represented by the designation, composer.<sup>88</sup>

Young, one presumes, would not agree that this redefining of the composer is the most important aspect of the group.

However, even on the basis of Young's own statements in relation to Conrad and Cale's contribution, their roles (particularly in relation to the addition of an amplified component which led to the utilisation of pure tuning and drones) have probably not been made clear enough in many accounts, with, perhaps, the exceptions (as mentioned above) of the entry in Gann's *American Music in the Twentieth Century* and the account in Strickland's *Minimalism: Origins*. In addition, it also seems that whichever side one chooses in this continuing debate perhaps says as much one's own inclinations and musical philosophy as it does about the matter itself.

Arnold Dreyblatt, Young's former archivist, who is also close to Conrad, has proposed the following way out of the current impasse:

Could not a verbal formulation be found, which grants a "composer" status to La Monte, in a post-modern, leadership sense, yet grants Conrad and Cale an extensive credit as contributors to overall theory and performance methods [...]?<sup>89</sup>

Unfortunately, for the moment, the dispute over a place in history and the release of recordings remains unresolved. However, if nothing else, the controversial first release of an early TEM performance, along with that of other archive material from Cale and Conrad's own experiments, has raised the profile of work from this period.

---

<sup>87</sup> Gann: 'The Outer Edge of Consonance', *Sound and Light*, ed. Duckworth and Fleming, 161.

<sup>88</sup> Tony Conrad, interviewed by Brian Duguid, (<http://media.hyperreal.org/zines/est/intervs/conrad.html> accessed 7/8/07). This is one of Conrad's well-established enthusiasms: on first arriving in Buffalo to study with Conrad in January 2006, the author was mildly reprimanded for using the term.

<sup>89</sup> Arnold Dreyblatt: 'An open letter to La Monte Young and Tony Conrad', shorter version published in *The Wire* (9/2000), (<http://www.dreyblatt.de/pdf/Tony%20Conrad%20Response.pdf> accessed 31/8/07), 3.

## Conclusion

The circumstances which led to the creation of New York's Downtown scene were unprecedented and unusual. SoHo in the 1960s was at once a detached artists' colony and a vital and well-connected urban bohemia, lending it a strange combination of outsider status and mainstream connections. Crucially for Young and his circle, the sheer amount of space available certainly had an impact in allowing for the creation of more time-and-space-intensive works.

Young's inclination towards testing the boundaries of composition and performance meant that he came upon (and engaged with) what was, for him, a very fruitful scene at a formative stage in its development. That the account above highlights the role of Conrad and Cale is more to reinforce aspects of their contribution which have not been widely reported than to eclipse Young's role in the group and, indeed, his subsequent work.<sup>90</sup> In later years, he has enjoyed a great deal of success with this work, developed under the auspices of two major commissions by the Dia Art Foundation: one from 1979–1985 in Harrison Street<sup>91</sup> (in New York's Tribeca district) and another year-long commission in 1989 on 22nd Street.<sup>92</sup> In purely musical terms, his tuning installations may well be his most lasting contributions to Western music in their static exploration of various distant intervals from the harmonic series.

But in terms of the wider social importance of this new context for music and art, the fairly unique crossover nature of the Downtown art and music scenes has had a far-reaching influence on contemporary American musical culture. This influence was only reinforced by Cale's departure for the Velvet Underground, with the avant-garde influence originating in the TEM being moderated by the more Uptown and commercial intervention of Andy Warhol, helping to make it much more public.<sup>93</sup> The visceral nature of the TEM's minimalism (which maintained a certain raw "rock" appeal whilst being a serious artistic statement) arguably paved the way for the compositional experiments which were part of the crossover art/punk experimentation of the No Wave scene, from which Glenn Branca later emerged as a distinctive composer working with heavily amplified (by art-music standards) ensembles. The example of Young and the TEM also provided the prototypical Downtown loft-based performance model which was refined by Phil Niblock in his long-running Experimental Intermedia concerts (which included Niblock's own, more dynamic, drone-based work).<sup>94</sup> This initiative was further developed by the crossover programming which The Kitchen engaged in under its first director, Rhys Chatham (another pioneer in the use of amplified forces).<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> The development of Young's music both before and after this group collaboration period has been well-documented, with the most comprehensive account of the development of his tuning systems being Kyle Gann's 'The Outer Edge of Consonance: Snapshots from the Evolution of La Monte Young's Tuning Installations' in *Sound and Light*, ed. Duckworth and Fleming.

<sup>91</sup> Kostelanetz: *SoHo*, 110.

<sup>92</sup> La Monte Young: 'Biographical Information' (<http://melafoundation.org/ly1para8.htm> accessed 21/07/07).

<sup>93</sup> Cale and Bockris: *What's Welsh for Zen*, 81–105.

<sup>94</sup> Experimental Intermedia Foundation: 'Artists' (<http://www.experimentalintermedia.org/ei/artists.shtml> accessed 9/08/07); John Rockwell and Zdravko Blazekovic: 'New York: 9. Avant-garde Music', *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), 834.

<sup>95</sup> Gann: *American Music*, 298. Gann regards The Kitchen as a vitally important venue in the development of the downtown experimental music scene.



The emerging Downtown music scene which resulted would have far-reaching consequences in maintaining a vibrant alternative to the more conservative and academic Uptown scene. Whilst Downtown experimental music is now increasingly under threat (SoHo is now an incredibly expensive and desirable residential location and many Downtown venues can no longer operate, as witnessed by the recent closure of Tonic),<sup>96</sup> it has, at least, done the service of providing a haven for the more viscerally experimental in contemporary music until quite recently. Whilst the potentially distracting (and, arguably, aesthetically corrupting) lure of “Dad-rock”-style pop-culture commercialism in contemporary music may be a current problem in wake of an atrophying European concert hall tradition in New York (with an upper-middle class in search of something else to enjoy),<sup>97</sup> the validation of “primitive” experimentation in the compositional process has, in the view of this author, probably been worth it.<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> Nate Chinen: ‘Requiem for a Club: Saxophones and Sighs’, *New York Times*, 16/4/2007 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/16/arts/music/16toni.html> accessed 28/8/07).

<sup>97</sup> Epitomised by the somewhat extreme example of The Rolling Stones being invited to the Julliard, cited by Glenn Branca in conversation with the author (5/2005), as an example of all that is wrong with attempts by respectable Uptown institutions to connect with popular and rock culture.

<sup>98</sup> Though, as a somewhat ironic final footnote, Conrad has wryly speculated to the author (1/2006) that the acceptance of the Velvet Underground *et al.* as cultural vehicles may actually have been the root cause of this ‘Stones at the Julliard’ problem.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

Babbitt, Milton: 'The Composer as Specialist', *Classic Essays on Twentieth Century Music: A Continuing Symposium*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz and James Darby (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 161–167, originally published in *High Fidelity Magazine* (2/1958).

Bridges, Brian: 'Rhys Chatham Interview', *Amplified Art-Noise: Amplification, Alternate Tuning and Acoustical Phenomena in the Music of La Monte Young, Rhys Chatham and Glenn Branca* (Unpublished MPhil diss., University of Dublin, Trinity College, 2003).

Cale, John and Victor Bockris: *What's Welsh for Zen: The Autobiography of John Cale* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999).

Chinen, Nate: 'Requiem for a Club: Saxophones and Sighs', *New York Times*, 16/4/2007 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/16/arts/music/16toni.html> accessed 28/8/07).

Conrad, Tony: 'Press Kit' (<http://tonyconrad.net/presskit.htm> accessed 30/8/07).

———: 'Tony Conrad's Response to An open letter to La Monte Young and Tony Conrad, 2000' (<http://www.dreyblatt.de/pdf/Tony%20Conrad%20Response.pdf> accessed 31/8/07).

Dreyblatt, Arnold: 'An open letter to La Monte Young and Tony Conrad', shorter version published in *The Wire*, 9/2000 (<http://www.dreyblatt.de/pdf/Tony%20Conrad%20Response.pdf> accessed 31/8/07).

Duguid, Brian: 'Interview with Tony Conrad' (<http://media.hyperreal.org/zines/est/intervs/conrad.html> accessed 7/8/07).

Experimental Intermedia Foundation: 'Artists' (<http://www.experimentalintermedia.org/ei/artists.shtml> accessed 9/8/07).

New School, The: 'About The New School: History' (<http://www.newschool.edu/history.html>, accessed 31/8/07).

Young, La Monte: 'Biographical Information' (<http://melafoundation.org/ly1para8.htm> accessed 21/7/07).

———: 'Notes on The Theatre of Eternal Music and *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys*', written 21/7/00 (<http://melafoundation.org/lmy> accessed 21/7/07).

———: 'Resumé' (<http://melafoundation.org/lmyresum.htm>, accessed 31/8/07).

———: 'Statement on Table of The Elements CD 74 "Day of Niagara" April 25, 1965', written 10/7/2000 (<http://melafoundation.org/statemen.htm> accessed 31/8/07)

Zazeela, Marian: 'Education' (<http://melafoundation.org/mzeducat.htm> accessed 9/8/07).

Zuckerman, Gabrielle, interview with La Monte Young, 7/2002, for 'American Mavericks', American Public Media ([http://musicmavericks.publicradio.org/features/interview\\_young.html](http://musicmavericks.publicradio.org/features/interview_young.html)), accessed 11/8/07).

## Secondary Sources

Bregman, Albert S.: *Auditory Scene Analysis* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1990).

———: 'Auditory Scene Analysis: hearing in complex environments', *Thinking in Sound: The Cognitive Psychology of Human Audition*, ed. Stephen McAdams and Emmanuel Bigand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 11–36.

Fastl, Hugo and Eberhard Zwicker: *Psychoacoustics: Facts and Models* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn Berlin, Heidelberg and New York: Springer, 1/1990, 2/1999, 3/2006).

Gann, Kyle: *American Music in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Schirmer, 1997).

———: 'Breaking the Chain Letter: An Essay on Downtown Music', written 4/1998 (<http://www.kylegann.com/downtown.html> accessed 21/07/07).

———: 'Just Intonation Explained' (<http://www.kylegann.com/tuning.html> accessed 21/07/2007).

———: 'The Outer Edge of Consonance: Snapshots from the Evolution of La Monte Young's Tuning Installations', *Sound and Light: La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela*, ed. William Duckworth and Richard Fleming (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press / London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1996), 152–190.

Hamm, Charles: 'John Cage', John Kirkpatrick et al., *The New Grove Twentieth-Century American Masters* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 263–287.

Hitchcock, H. Wiley: 'Minimalism in Art and Music: Origins and Aesthetics', *Classic Essays on Twentieth Century Music: A Continuing Symposium*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz and James Darby (New York : Schirmer, 1996), 308–319.

'HStencil': 'Early Minimalism and Beyond: Tony Conrad in Music, Film and Video', (<http://www.geocities.com/hstencil/tonyconrad2.html> accessed 7/8/2007).

Kahn, Douglas: *Noise, Water, Meat; A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1999).

Kostelanetz, Richard: *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

Kozinn, Allan: 'MUSIC REVIEW: Show Tunes An Atonalist Wrote Before He Converted', *New York Times*, 16/10/1999 (retrieved from <http://www.newyorktimes.com>, accessed 31/08/2007).

Nyman, Michael, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (London: Studio Vista, 1974, rev. edn Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999).

Potter, Keith: *Four Musical Minimalists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Rich, Alan: *American Pioneers, Ives to Cage and Beyond* (London: Phaidon, 1995).

Rockwell, John and Zdravko Blazekovic: 'New York: 9. Avant-garde Music', *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (2<sup>nd</sup> edition London: Macmillan, 2001), 832–834.

Schwarz, K. Robert: *Minimalists* (London: Phaidon, 1996).

Sell, Mike: *Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism—Approaching the Living Theatre, Happenings/Fluxus, and the Black Arts Movement* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

Snyder, Bob: *Music and Memory: an introduction* (Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press, 2000).

Strickland, Edward: 'La Monte Young', *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (2<sup>nd</sup> edition London: Macmillan, 2001), 673–675.

———: *Minimalism: Origins* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993 rev. edn 2000).

Swayne, Steve: 'Music for the Theatre, the Young Copland, and the Younger Sondheim', *American Music*, 20/1 (Spring/2002), 80-101.

Warburton, Dan: 'Tony Conrad', based on citations of liner notes to Conrad's *Early Minimalism Volume One*, (<http://www.paristransatlantic.com/magazine/features/conrad.html> accessed 7/08/2007).

Whittall, Arnold: *Musical Composition in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Zukin, Sharon: 'Art in the Arms of Power: Market Relations and Collective Patronage in the Capitalist State', *Theory and Society* 11/4 (7/1982), 423-451.