

# CONSTRUCTION

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Dissertation

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A DEFINITION

My dissertation, *Construction*, was a method to generate unique, rule-based performances of light, sound, movement, and silence. While light, sound, movement, and silence may be individually perceived as abstract elements, in this work they came together in order to emphasize a shifting, affective architectural experience. The intention of this fluid work was generative – to create many iterations of a work, and thus many *experiences* of a work – instead of a single work itself.

From December 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> 2014, a series of performance *Constructions* were presented to the public. These performance *Constructions* were contained within a designed environment: an alternate immersive world in which the public could sit or lie down on cushions (or sit/lie directly on the floor), and could orient themselves in various directions with ample personal space. One after another, these performance *Constructions* activated and animated this environment, inevitably bringing its inhabitants to subconsciously reflect on their surroundings as well as their own re-orientation. Every performance *Construction* was an experience, different from the one previous and the one to follow, with unique light, unique sound, and unique movement, with the possibility of having no light, no sound, or no movement. Through this iterative experience, I ask: what can emerge?

*Construction* was an intensive collaboration with eleven artists, each of whom brought

individual artistry into building this new “world”: shaping the environment on a large scale, performing live sound on the fly on a variety of experimental and electronic instruments, navigating lines of movement, and contemplating silence. The artists who collaborated with me on this project were: Kimberly Young, Jessie LaFargue, Allison Trionfetti (movement navigators); Asha Tamirisa, Peter Bussigel, Luke Moldof, Stephan Moore, Tim Rovinelli (musicians); Cecilia Salama (set pieces); Derek Fukumori (carpentry, partial programming); and Nina Ruelle (audience cushions). I performed as a live musician in *Construction* and also created the lighting design.

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How do we define the word, *construction*?

Merriam-Webster defines the term actively and passively, in physical and abstract ways. *Construction*: the creation of a physical structure, large or small. A building unto itself. The creation of several physical structures in series, considered as a collective entity. *Construction*: the formation of an abstract idea into something concrete, materialized into the physical world. *Construction*: a set of “rules” so that things appear to make sense and be in order. From its origins in Old French from Latin, *construere* is to literally heap together. To *construct* is also to form an idea or theory. A *construct* is a subjective idea or theory that has conceptual elements, and is not based on empirical evidence.<sup>1</sup> Everything that humans are aware of is an ideological construct, from written history to institutional systems.

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster.

To me, a *construction* can be neat, perfectly made and constrained, or it can be messy and sprawling. When something is *under construction*, it is in the process of being made, and is unfinished – sometimes for a few months, sometimes for years. *Construction* is the resulting labor that weathers the external elements after the initial blueprints have been designed. *Construction* is the action of bringing materials together in order to create a new larger whole, organized by some combination of order and chaos. I was drawn to the complex nature of this word, and so *Construction* came to be.

•

It is about making rooms and space. It is about movement, compression, release, proportion, scale and light: the sheer physicality of creating space.<sup>2</sup>

While I am a musician and sound artist in practice, the majority of the brainstorming for this dissertation project emerged conceptually and metaphorically. The creative process for *Construction* was most informed through a metaphor of architecture, and I ask that this dissertation be read with that lens in mind.

There are many concepts in architectural thinking that I gravitated towards in the making of *Construction*: the structure of a space, and how it can be contained and remain open; how light affects a space, physically and emotionally; temporal repetition and emergent behavior of actually navigating the spatial unknown. I began thinking of the physical height of a space as sheer mass; how a metaphorical “landscape” is defined over time; the essence of a space; the play on the term “volume,” volume as the total contained architectural area of a space,

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<sup>2</sup> John Pawson, *Minimum*, 13.

and volume as the perception of musical and sonic volume as waveforms fluctuate and fill a space.

While architecture has been thought to be primarily visual – and most oftentimes it is – Michel Chion makes the distinction that that which is visual is not exclusively or discriminatorily visual, and that this can be applied for all senses. The senses can perpetually expand beyond their boundaries. In his book *Audio-vision*, Chion writes that “the senses are channels, highways more than territories or domains,”<sup>3</sup> in that a bit of the aural exists in the visual and vice-versa. Each sense is actually pan-sensory, and therefore one experiences architecture *pansensorially*, not just visually. This embodied experience is nothing fancy: living, being, and experiencing are all day-to-day. Architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable describes in passing a “fourth dimension” in architecture:

Far more important is the expansion of the art of architecture itself. To its conventional definition as a three-dimensional, spatial art a fourth dimension has been added: an aesthetic of experiences of time, of responses dependent on the passage from one part of the building to another. Interlocking, layered views are seen simultaneously and sequentially. The eye and the body are invited, and required, to register perceptions and sensations of an actual and aesthetic complexity rarely encountered before.<sup>4</sup>

My hope is that this written document allows the reader to be introduced to, and to engage with, the many conceptual layers of this project. Truthfully, what came out of this project was a myriad of things, all of which ended up being called *Construction*. There was the designed environment itself: an alternate world of affective immersion. There were the many iterative performances in demonstration of an idea, presented to the public. But to me, above

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<sup>3</sup> Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 137. On a side-note, Chion goes on to observe that silent cinema can express sound “better than could sound itself,” and with concrete music “in refusing the visual, carries with it visions that are more beautiful than images could ever be.”

<sup>4</sup> Ada Louise Huxtable, *On Architecture: Collected Reflections on a Century of Change*, 24.

all, there was the original idea itself, the *construct*. In its finished state, *Construction* is intentionally conceptually unfinished — it remains an idea. I believe this document can maintain that original idea by helping the reader to navigate through its layered contents.

The first part of our navigation will begin.

•

### ON “ENCOUNTERS”

In order to provide a better, more personalized understanding into *Construction*, I will guide the reader through several of my “encounters.”<sup>5</sup> I use “encounter” as more of a *passing* form of engagement. An encounter could be meeting a stranger at the train station. An encounter could be a unique sound that somehow evades identification in the moment. An encounter could be an unusual dream. In the context of this dissertation, “encounter” is a term that points more towards what happens in passing, in the moment, through lived experience.

The next chapter describes four well-chosen encounters I have had through my lived experience that have brought me to the conceptualization and the creation of *Construction*. Each one has been specifically drawn from a particularly diverse range in order to provide the most ideal perspective in approaching the project. Creating a

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<sup>5</sup> I opt to use “encounter” over “influence” — the word “influence” suggests a committed relationship centered on power between the influenced and the influencer or influencing party itself. In this way, perhaps an “artistic influence” as has been generally understood is possibly misleading, particularly in the experimental and electronic music. “Encounter” is more accurate as to how this dissertation project came into being.

constellation within these four points allows for the core elements of this dissertation project to be revealed.

The first encounter is a first-person narrative of an experience of the *Dream House*,<sup>2</sup> an immersive artwork. The second encounter is an annotated article of architectural criticism by Ada Louise Huxtable published in 1968 by the New York Times. The third encounter is a data visualization/transcription of my brain on the idea of a conceptual slot machine.

The fourth and last element is less of an encounter, and more of what I will call the beginning of a navigation. I use the word navigation here, and throughout this dissertation, to describe a slow tracing, a gradual forming of a line – it continues in a shifting and unknown direction such that a unique trajectory becomes more and more revealed over time.<sup>6</sup> This final element takes the form of a short piece of poetic prose, and is the most brief and concise of all four – it is a touchstone to a life-long navigation of my native language.

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<sup>2</sup> While I will also choose to provide this reader with my encounter of the artwork *Dream House*, I wish separate myself from La Monte Young and to state clearly that I do not agree with Young's personal beliefs, his subjective approaches and his attitudes as he and I are very different individuals with very different backgrounds. Additionally, Young's voice is so strong in all accounts (interviews, texts) written about the Dream House that his voice overwhelms that of his collaborator, Marian Zazeela.

<sup>6</sup> Andra McCartney writes of a practice of *sounding* in her dissertation, "Sounding Places with Hildegard Westerkamp," as she refers to "the mariner's slow and careful navigation through unfamiliar waters." This "slow and careful navigation" allows for a more thorough understanding of one's surroundings, in that one can "[move] slowly and carefully through landscapes, listening to their resonances to avoid carving into them." Navigation, in this way, takes time.

## **II. FOUR ENCOUNTERS**

**-1-**

**THE DREAM HOUSE**



## THE DREAM HOUSE

*The Dream House is a sound and light environment created by collaborators La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela. There have been several Dream Houses – the one on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor at 275 Church Street in TriBeCa, NY has been in existence for over twenty years.<sup>7</sup>*

*I am drawn to the immediate sensory experience in the Dream House. It is an entirely different world, a world of affect through aesthetic. Upon entering, individuals navigate their own paths between two fairly empty rooms and a hallway. The environment is set with seemingly simple constraints: saturated drone-based sound, saturated magenta lighting, present-to-saturated scent of incense, and softness (there are flat cushions on top of a vacuumed carpet – visitors are asked to take off their shoes). People can comfortably orient themselves in this space.*

*The Dream House is warm, relaxed, inviting, and also unknown. Anyone can come in and choose to enter a state of unique beingness through the combined aesthetic: through the sound, the magenta light, the smell of incense, and the generally minimal surroundings.*

*The following is my experiential, sensory navigation of the Dream House.*

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<sup>7</sup> MELA, <http://www.melafoundation.org/>

It's Saturday at 9:30pm in the dead winter of February. We open the black door and begin to trudge up three flights of dirty grey-white stairs, all slightly sunk in the center. Apparently La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela live on the second floor, but who knows for sure? We get to the top of the stairs: a quiet, tired MELA foundation volunteer greets us ("Is this your first time here?") and asks us to take off our shoes. We are at the *Dream House*.

The volunteer opens the door for us, and we hear a sound that is at once many sounds, and also somewhat indefinable, a sound that is at once loud and full and dense without overwhelming our bodies, a sound that maybe is more of the sound of a thousand pointed hums but it could be music. Walking through the doorframe, we are bathed in an atmosphere of focused magenta, but we're not in a club. A white wall faces us – this is the corridor. There are two rooms, one to the right, and one to the left. We go to the left first, either because we're gravitating towards that direction, or because we peeked in the room on the right and saw it was smaller and that there was someone sitting there, or maybe there was no one there, and for whatever reason we decided to walk left down the corridor and enter the larger room. Here, it may be that there are either a few people (separate individuals, one walking slowly, one laying down, one sitting in the center of the room on their ankles) or there is no one. We both wonder separately whether it's better to experience this kind of thing alone, or with another person; one can never tell.

We walk over to an unsuspecting area in a corner and put our small bags down, crumpling our coats, letting them lean against the wall. I choose a cushion and lay down immediately; I've been here before. I lay horizontally on the recently vacuumed white carpet. The smell of incense is sometimes strong and sometimes only just present – it depends on the day. Today it is just present enough – we've been freezing outside for so long, our noses may

be frozen, and may only subconsciously notice the fragrance in this warm, dry place, that these separate sensations begin to feel like one unified sense: it's almost pansensorial.

The cushion is firm, and square and lumpily-flat, and I roll my head around slowly: as my legs, torso, arms, shoulders, neck, and head become more comfortable, I begin to hone in on the sound hungrily, the way one begins to eat a meal after realizing one hasn't eaten properly all day, or for weeks, months. The sound is alive, small and close, large and distant. It jumps, is gradual and amorphous, moving fast and slow, swimming in front of my eyes, like invisible lines crisscrossing and then surrounding me and the other people in this room in almost a humid heat; the density of the sound can only be compared to humidity. I let my head's weight shift itself – how heavy and lopsided a cranium is – so that it almost falls off the cushion and settles on the carpeted floor. I'm now on my side, listening as I stare 90° clockwise at the room, where the floor is now a wall from my perspective. The frequencies of the sound fill the holes in my ears while also not overwhelming them, circling almost, cycling through, pulsing at independent rates in my ears and around the bone of my head.

I go through the motions to sit up – it doesn't feel like sitting up, or even slowly sitting up, but literally I am going through each and every vertebrae in my spine, each micro-muscle of my torso, feeling the strain and tension move around in my back as I go through the motions to sit up: I don't want to miss any of the sound as it, en masse, changes and wavers around me, shimmering in its movement. Of course the sound isn't moving at all; *I am the one moving*. I'm now sitting up. Gradually I turn my head from side to side, in this heightened state of observation. Newer frequencies, frequencies I hadn't heard quite yet, seem to have come out of the woodwork now at this stratum of the space of this room. My legs begin to fall numb, as I'm not sitting in a way where good circulation can actually happen.

I mentally decide to stand up, and begin to do so, slightly faster than when I *sat* up, but still not too fast at all. It almost feels like time is slow here, or longer somehow, and that I must act just as slow and with as much care so as to not disrupt the environment, or disrupt my own focus, my own mind while I am in this space, as if I am in a quiet space and I need to move around quietly. It isn't quiet, but it is just as intimate, this physicality of sound, surrounding me, dancing inside my ear cavities, pushing just slightly against and around my legs, hands, the lower part of my body. I mentally commit to the idea of slowly walking around the space, as I begin to make a slow, intentional diagonal across the room, allowing for the complexity of the sound mass to envelop and move around my calves, my feet (in socks) slowly, quietly sinking into the carpet with every step as the floor reveals its occasional old wooden creaks beneath the surface, in the most random spots.

As I allow myself to physically drift around this place, I notice my head is hearing something different than my feet, my torso hearing something different than my calves. My fingers have their own intimate proximity with the frequency mass, and my forearms have a different experience altogether. All parts of my body begin to become a part of the atmosphere. My mind formulates a thought in response to the moment: "we could stay here indefinitely." In a way, we already *are* indefinitely. It is the experience of *being* that feels internally infinite, whether I am externally sitting, standing, or lying down.

**-2-**

**“SOMETIMES WE DO IT RIGHT”**

## “SOMETIMES WE DO IT RIGHT”

*“Sometimes We Do It Right” is an article of architectural criticism written by Ada Louise Huxtable, published in the New York Times in 1968.<sup>8</sup> Huxtable was the well-known architecture critic for the NYT and later on, the Wall Street Journal, actively penning pieces from 1963 through to 2012, just before her death in early 2013.<sup>9</sup> Her voice provided a shrewd and passionate critique of the constantly emerging architecture that surrounds us on a daily basis.*

*In her writing, Huxtable invites the reader on an experiential excursion – through her words, I feel as though I am exploring an area with a knowledgeable friend. She navigates the surrounding environment not in the abstract, but as a pedestrian right in the thick of it. Through her perspective, I experience the histories, pasts, and futures of a particular area, the messiness and neatness, the planning and the unknown, the hope, the surprises, and the disappointments. In reading her words, I walk away with a visceral memory of an area; consciously, subconsciously, and unconsciously, one begins to understand it over time.*

*The following is the article in full, the way it was published in 1968. My handwritten notes are in the margins of the article. To the right side of the page are compiled transcriptions of my notes with further elaborations. The reader should read through both the original article and my annotations simultaneously to fully understand this encounter.*

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<sup>8</sup> Ada Louise Huxtable, “Sometimes We Do It Right.”

<sup>9</sup> David W. Dunlap, “Ada Louise Huxtable, Champion of Livable Architecture, Dies at 91.”

NEW YORK usually seems to be an all - is - for - the - worst - in - the - worst - of - all - possible - worlds - city. But when it is good, New York is very, very good; which is why New Yorkers put up with so much that is bad.

When it is good, this is a city of fantastic strength, sophistication and beauty. It is like no other city in time or place. Visitors and even natives rarely use the words urban character or environmental style, but that is what they are reacting to with awe in the presence of massed, concentrated, steel, stone, power and life. It is a quality of urban greatness that may not solve racial or social tensions or the human or economic crises to which a city is prone, but it survives them.

Right now, in this sense, one small piece of downtown Manhattan is very, very good. For a demonstration of New York at its physical best, go to Broadway between Cedar and Liberty Streets and face east. You will be standing in front of a new building at 140 Broadway, one of the handsomest in the city, and you will not be able to miss the 28-foot high vermillion steel cube that balances on one point in front of it, at the north end of a travertine plaza. The cube is by the sculptor Isamu Noguchi and it was unveiled by the builders of 140 Broadway, Harry B. Helmsley and partners, and the chief tenant, the Marine Midland Bank, with some fanfare this week.

real talk –  
Huxtable doesn't gloss over or try to paint things in a better, polished picture. the writing is truthful, realistic, and doesn't try to sell something to the reader or convince the reader of something else.

affect –  
material density;  
inherent spirit/energy –  
the emotional reaction, the feeling of experiencing “power and life” – only known in person, by being there.

architectural truth on larger scale –  
it is the lived experience that matters.

aware of imperfection in very real context, not ignoring the very human factor –  
oftentimes the politics of architecture in metropolitan areas reveal economic and racial divides within groups of human beings.

direction: “go”  
this is where you will be, how you will be oriented –  
“go” is a simple instruction that propels a person to action.

point of reference –  
the Noguchi cube centers and grounds the experience – it is the “art” sculpture. art grounds our everyday experience.

just happened –  
the event occurred “this week” –  
this is a current event, a current action that will have an immediate effect on the inhabitants and local citizens.

Figure 1: “Sometimes We Do It Right,” by Ada Louise Huxtable

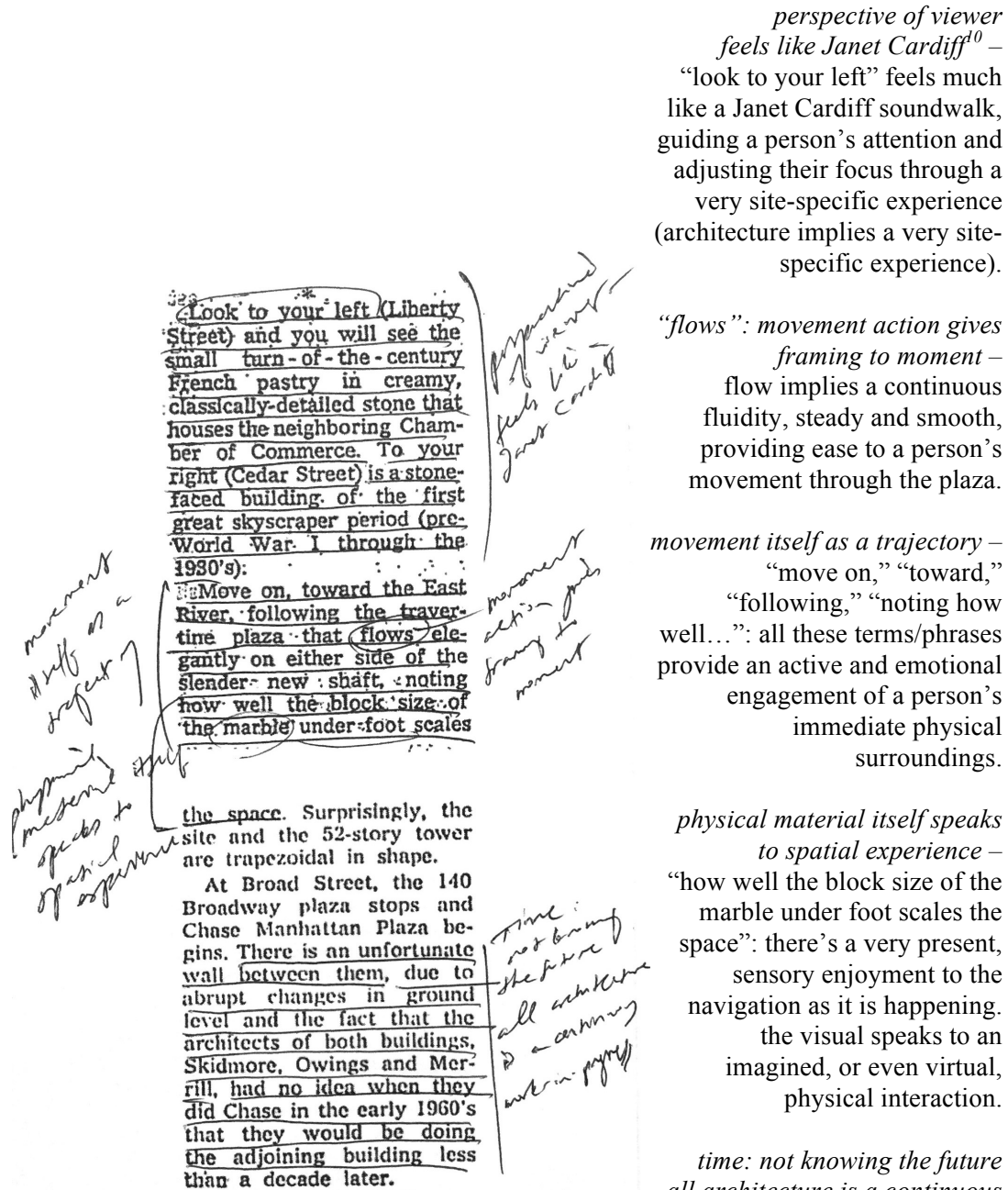


Figure 2: “Sometimes We Do It Right,” by Ada Louise Huxtable

<sup>10</sup> Janet Cardiff is a sound artist, perhaps best known for her sound walks, which investigate personal relationship to places, people, and memories through an intimate navigation of a site. One of her sound walks is Münster Walk, done in Münster, Germany in 1997 with George Bures Miller and Ulrike Groos. <http://cardiffmiller.com/artworks/walks/muenster.html>



*transparency of the citizens' city  
to the citizen, of what will be  
happening –*  
transparent communication of  
how individuals will be affected  
is the key to success of any city,  
institution, government.

Still farther west, slightly off this axis, will be the giant Trade Center twin towers and plaza. For much of this, underground connections are being planned, a lesson that Rockefeller Center taught and then forgot.

essential  
~~thought~~  
a known  
related  
experience  
the fullness  
of the  
a way of  
navigation

17

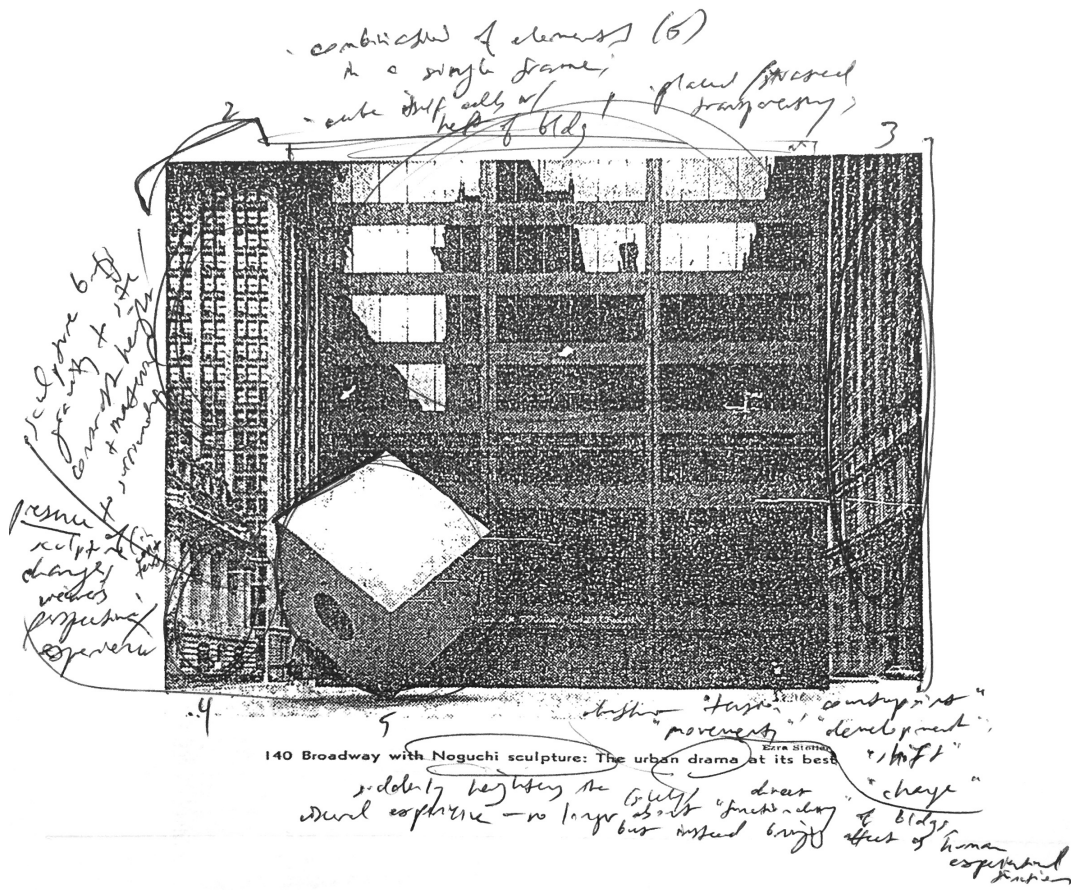


Figure 4: "Sometimes We Do It Right," by Ada Louise Huxtable

(clockwise: from left side, up, down to bottom)

presence of the sculpture (in context) changes the viewer's perspective/experience // sculpture brings gravity to site, in contrast with the height + material to its surroundings // combinations of elements (5) in a single frame; the cube itself adds to the frame w/ help of surrounding buildings; it is placed / situated, emphasizing the transparency of the system // Noguchi sculpture invokes "drama": translates to "tension," "counterpoint," "movement," "development," "shift," "change" ... it suddenly heightens the visceral experience // no longer (solely) about the direct "functionality" of buildings, but instead focusing on the importance of affect in human experience: human experience itself as a necessary function.

*balance/imbalance; over time these things continue to be in flux, thus: “sometimes we do it right” but not always – things are never fixed, always fluid, and thus moments of “thoughtless” loss are balanced by moments of “calculated” gain.*

*comparable without competing  
on historical level –  
appreciating, not negating the  
differences, and thus equating  
the function of pure experience  
on the same level.*

The result, a striking slice through one of the densest, most dramatic cityscapes in the world, is a stunning success in terms of urban design. For once, the losses, such as the Singer Building, are at least being balanced by rational gains. For once, there has been intelligent, sensitive capitalization on one of this century's most fantastic urban phenomena. Instead of thoughtless destruction through new construction, there is a calculated relationship between past and present, and between buildings and spaces.

This small segment of New York compares in effect and elegance with any celebrated Renaissance plaza or Baroque vista. The scale of the buildings, the use of open space, the views revealed or suggested, the contrasts of architectural style and material, of sculptured stone against satin-smooth metal and glass, the visible change and continuity of New York's remarkable skyscraper history, the brilliant accent of the poised Noguchi cube—color, size, style, mass, space, light, dark, solids, voids, highs and lows—all are just right. These few blocks provide (why equivocate?) one of the most magnificent examples of 20th-century urbanism anywhere in the world.

19

Not the least contribution is the new building, for which Gordon Bunshaft was partner-in-charge at S.O.M. One Forty Broadway is a "skin" building; the kind of flat, sheer, curtain wall that it has become chic to reject. Younger architects, off on a wild, Arthurian search for the nouveau picturesque, and an uninformed public that never understood or accepted what was happening, have turned their backs on one of the miracles of modern building: the skyscraper wall reduced to gossamer minimums of shining, thin material hung on a frame of extraordinary strength through superb contemporary technology.

*(easily ignored)*

*notable, functional, not forgotten*

The significance and beauty of this achievement are not dimmed by the instances of its commercial prostitution as the unjustly denigrated "glass box." It is still one of the great developments and most remarkable expressions in all of architectural history from Stonehenge to the present. It has produced some masterpieces and made a lot of commercial building palatable. One Forty Broadway is a commercial building, not a monument. Here the skin is handled with suave expertise.

*minimal powerful, understated*

*acceptance for easier better living*

It is New York's ultimate skin building. The wall is held unrelentingly flat; there are no tricks with projecting or extended mullions; thin and flush, they are used only

Figure 6: "Sometimes We Do It Right," by Ada Louise Huxtable

*skin –*  
 "skin" differentiates the new building from other, older buildings, as this one is sleek and smooth, with strength and resilience. it is new; conservative minds stick with the old.

*(largely ignored) –*  
 the "skin" quality is something easily overlooked, "chic to reject" – not only is it a specific aesthetic, but it is also an incredible modern technology with great sustaining function for commercial buildings.

*notable, functional, not forgotten –*  
*minimal powerful, understated –*  
 Huxtable does not miss the importance of the "skin": she uplifts it, embraces this new technology. simplicity is always overlooked by those who are not looking for it, who do not see the importance of its function and its beauty.

*aesthetic for easier, better living*

–  
 we often overlook the things that allow living to be easier, better. it is when things are visibly broken that we notice something must be fixed. thus it is easy to take things like the "skin" commercial buildings for granted, to ignore them. but how would we survive if we did not have this kind of palatable skin technology for so many buildings?

*simplicity as beautiful, nuanced  
functionality –  
architecture does not have to be  
ornate to be beautiful or to be of  
importance to a person.*

*understated, not trying to be  
more than what it is –  
“quiet assurance” says it all. it  
is exactly what it is, and nothing  
more; it does not suffer from an  
artistic ego.*

*how to thoughtfully manage  
space; how to be in it, see it,  
save it, create it –  
the stakes are high with  
architecture: the experiential  
results for a general public are  
epic, whether largely positive or  
a complete disaster. people’s  
lives, and living, are at stake.*

*the balance, tipping –  
priorities of capital  
investment versus human  
investment –  
architecture is perpetually in  
flux, going back to the title,  
“sometimes we do it right”  
(not always). what matters:  
insensitive capital  
expansion or the lived  
human experience?*

*space is meaningless  
without scale, containment,  
boundaries and direction. –  
...to people. and people  
require meaning.  
architecture affects people.*

*thought, conceptual  
considerations –  
architecture, with its good  
and bad choices, is  
ultimately transient.*

to divide the window glass.  
The metal spandrel facing,  
in one smooth piece, echoes  
the placing of structural steel  
and seeks no “artful” plastic-  
ity. The taut, shiny-dark sleek-  
ness of matte black aluminum  
and gleaming bronze glass is  
an architectural statement of  
positive excellence as well as  
a foil for the ornate masonry  
around it. The quiet assu-  
rance of this building makes  
even Chase look a little  
gaudy.

What next? Probably de-  
struction. One ill-conceived  
neighboring plaza will kill  
this carefully calculated  
channel of related space and  
buildings. Seagram was sabo-  
taged by the recent construc-  
tion to its south; it can  
happen here. It only takes  
one opening in the wrong  
place, one “bonus” space  
placed according to current  
zoning (read “business”)  
practice, to ruin it all.

Space is meaningless with-  
out scale, containment, bound-  
aries and direction. The  
fabled massing of the Wall  
Street skyscrapers has been  
given masterful urban defini-  
tion by the architects’ order-  
ing of these few blocks of  
new construction. It has been  
done by concerned, coordin-  
ated effort. This is planning.  
It is the opposite of non-  
planning, or the normal pat-  
tern of New York develop-  
ment. See and savor it now,  
before it is carelessly dis-  
posed of.

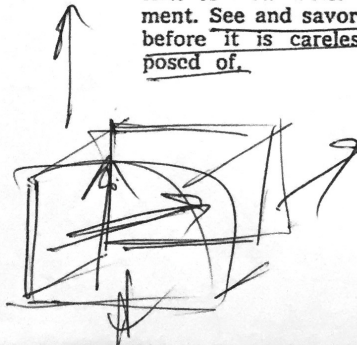


Figure 7: “Sometimes We Do It Right,” by Ada Louise Huxtable

**-3-**

**THE CONCEPTUAL SLOT MACHINE**

## THE CONCEPTUAL SLOT MACHINE

*This encounter was created in my mind. It is an abstraction of a slot machine – which I call the Conceptual Slot Machine – in which winning and losing become irrelevant. Instead of a traditional concrete result, i.e. a monetary gain or loss (as derived from the original intention of a slot machine), there are only questions. The intention has shifted.*

*The Conceptual Slot Machine inspired the structure of my dissertation project. Through it, I've actively brainstormed the simplicity of systems and the profundity of randomness. Simplicity and randomness are related in this way, as randomness is equally profound on very large scales and very small scales.*

*The following 4 pages will need to be loosely assembled – these next 4 pages are 4 sections that make up one large image. If the reader is reading this written document on a computer or otherwise digital device, there should be a .png file included for reference; feel free to zoom in and around it as necessary. The following pages after the large image sections are translations and further elaborations – a transcription of my thinking throughout the Conceptual Slot Machine.*



Figure 8: The Conceptual Slot Machine



STARTING FROM THE TOP LEFT / LEFT:

The top left / left area of the larger image navigates what else exists beyond what is known.

What does it mean to have silence as an intentional part of a system? What can silence reveal about a system in conjunction with the other neighboring parts?

In a slot machine, what does it mean to not “get” a third fruit (or other item)? It would seem that the machine is out of order, that it is not working, that a participant could not have a chance to “win.” But thinking conceptually, if the aspects of “winning” and “losing” are removed, or become irrelevant, what happens? The original intention of the slot machine is erased. It is only then that something new can come out of the slot machine. Rather than explore winning or losing, one explores instead the potential of the unknown.

As for the “*non-fruit*” —

- (rabbit hole)

## THE BOTTOM-CENTER:

The bottom center emphasizes simplicity, keeping things to a minimum, in the effort of creating and revealing a transparent system. Simplicity as being a transparent system does not mean that the system is predictable.

What is a transparent system? In this context, the transparency of a “transparent system” does not translate to one single function of a system. Instead, I imply transparency as a means of approaching the system as a whole. There are a myriad of ways to engage with and understand a system, and in the end, there are always many more ways of engaging and understanding, more than is possible for one to fully comprehend.

Let’s say a traditional slot machine results in the randomized combination of 3 elements. In that scenario, 3 elements are required to make a meaningful result (money gain/loss).

Removing the aspect of winning/losing, what if only 2 elements appeared? Surely that result isn’t totally unimportant. 2 elements still make something new. 1 element makes something new. What about 0 elements? To put things even simpler: *results make something, anything at all.*

- (rabbit hole)

## THE BOTTOM-RIGHT:

The bottom right refers to the curatorial aspect of the process. In a traditional slot machine, fruits have been used: apples, bananas, cherries, grapes, lemons, oranges, strawberries, melons, pineapples, plums, and so on.<sup>11</sup> There is an intentional aesthetic when it comes to curating, whether it is curating fruits for a gambling machine, curating rocks for a rock collection, or curating music tracks for a compilation album.

What remains consistent? What changes? What are the fixed elements and what are the unfixed elements? What is the mapping, and how does the mapping correlate to meaning in some way? What is the material itself? What are the curatorial rules? What happens as a result from these rules, these curatorial constraints?

*What is intention without knowing the answers?*

• (rabbit hole)

---

<sup>11</sup> David Sheldon, “How Fruit Machines Got Their Fruit Symbols.” <https://www.casino.org/blog/fruit-machines-got-fruit-symbols/>

THE TOP-RIGHT / RIGHT:

What happens when the slot machine is spun, and spun again, and spun again, and spun again, over and over? Each randomly generated combination becomes a representative slice of *a kind of reality*. (What that reality is, I'm intentionally not sure.) As the slot machine continues to spin and generate new combinations, the system becomes in motion — *the system becomes into itself, its own being*. When a system is recast, again and again, it creates iterations and further iterations beyond the present. The system becomes beyond: original intentions that existed prior are no longer relevant.

Each iteration is in sequence. Each iteration is a frame, a still, from something that is in motion. Through this continuous motion – an overall animation with this series of slices in time – lines, trajectories begin to emerge. Trajectories go through the entire series, iteration after iteration after iteration after iteration after iteration after iteration after ...

What is the essence? Is there a core? What is revealed over time? What is revealed or unearthed? *Is anything revealed in the end?*

• (rabbit hole)

**-4-**

**NATIVE LANGUAGE**

what is “my” / language? / i  
am able to speak / one  
language / english / i am not  
sure that / it is “mine” / it  
can never / be wholly / mine  
/ it is a language that is / not  
my / “native” / language /  
but my / native / language is  
/ something / i do not know

korean / culture / (like many  
asian cultures) / is a culture  
of / silence / cultivating /  
silence / in everything / it is  
/ impossible / (and useless) /  
to even try / to extract  
examples / silence / is  
entirely lived / i / have  
navigated / this / silence /  
since the day i was born /  
and before then / through  
my parents / their parents /  
wars / schisms / violent /  
occupations / and /  
numerous colonizations / of

a country that / strangely / i  
am a stranger / to

it's ironic / that i am  
silenced in / the korean  
language / it is my native  
tongue / but i can't speak it /  
despite being born / into a  
language / and / culture /  
considered "other" / (an  
otherwise decentralized  
non-western language and  
culture) / some people /  
including myself / end up  
learning / english / by force  
/ to survive / and get stuck  
with it / even / as it / english  
/ continues to / silence me  
anyway

my / navigation of / korean /  
will continue / for the rest of  
/ my life / i exist / in parallel  
with it / (sometimes neatly  
in parallel, and always  
fraught)

perhaps one day / this  
parallel nature / will begin  
to lose / its sharp focus / and  
/ areas of / ambiguous /  
intersection / will emerge /  
time will tell



### III. UNDERSTANDING

#### ON “ANALYSIS”

The origin of the word “analysis” comes from the Greek *analysis*, from *analysein*, meaning “unloose,” from the combination of *ana*-“up” and *luein* “loosen.”<sup>12</sup> An analysis is literally unloosening something such that its inner parts are revealed and can be examined. For example, physically unloosening the parts of a watch allows for one to physically see and examine the inner machinery and structures that allow the watch to work. While this physical method of “unloosening” as analysis may perhaps serve some aspects of mechanical and scientific research, in general there’s something very contradictory about taking something apart in order to better to understand its actual effects – as if such a physical unloosening (in other words: a breaking apart) were the only way to understand something that is unknown.

Despite an assumed mechanical and scientific context, some of the arts are also analyzed in this fashion. Traditional “musical analysis” is essentially a reduction of harmonic structures as they occur in one direction in time. Musical chords are labeled with Roman numerals and corresponding mathematical inversions of the chord’s pitches, all of which refer back to and re-emphasize Western scales and modalities. And so, even traditional musical analysis seems to have followed suit with the mechanical and scientific fields in analyzing via literally breaking apart, and such an “analysis” is proof of understanding how music works.

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<sup>12</sup> Merriam-Webster.

Instead of “analyze,” I ask the reader to simply consider the phrase, “begin to understand” in the sense that, to begin to understand is to acknowledge a kind of affective, empathetic process having to do with the depth of meaning (and multiple meanings). Understanding is a continual process of growth. The word “understanding” also suggests pointing towards the total “whole” of something. If I say, “I am beginning to understand her,” it is suggested that I am beginning to understand her as an *entire human being*, not just “I understand some parts of her.”

Our ears are always changing.<sup>13</sup>

•

For the reader who did not experience any public presentations of *Construction* first-hand, I assure you that this method of understanding-as-analysis will help you gain the most meaningful insight into the project. But first, to frame our understanding, I will describe the major elements that were crucial in the making of *Construction* as well as explain how they relate intrinsically to one another: light, sound, movement, and silence.

Light, sound, movement, and silence are all inherently architectural. To refer back to Ada Louise Huxtable, “space is meaningless without scale, containment, boundaries and direction.”<sup>14</sup> Each element, whether light, sound, movement, or silence, is intrinsically spatial, in that it involves and engages space in its own way. Light can point and cut through

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<sup>13</sup> Christian Wolff, in a public talk at Summer Institute for Contemporary Performance Practice, responded to someone who had asked: “Are there certain performances of your own works, or certain pieces you like better than others?” Wolff paused to think, and then said, “Our ears are always changing. I keep hearing differently, 10 years later, even just one or two years later.”

<sup>14</sup> Ada Louise Huxtable, “Sometimes We Do It Right.”

a space to define it, or it can generously diffuse and fill a space, providing an emotional openness. Extreme brightness may be irritating, while the sudden absence of light – total darkness (i.e. “silence”) – may be either paralyzing or liberating. Sound, an invisible matter, can act to localize points in space, or it can saturate a space at a high level of intensity in a combination of amplitude (loudness), noise characteristics, and frequencies (pitches). Intentional sonic silence is intense, whether providing a platform to listen carefully and with great awareness, or serving as full sonic erasure. Movement – or specifically in *Construction*, human navigation – traces lines through a space, tracing an individual’s time and memory. The experience of navigating a space encapsulates past, present, and future through a kind of being state.<sup>15</sup> Thus these large abstract elements – light, sound, movement, and silence – are architectural in nature.

Earlier in this document, I shared that the impetus for *Construction* was a metaphor of architecture. How is a space structured, simultaneously contained and left open? How does the idea of *sheer mass* relate to light, sound, and silence, and can sheer mass relate to movement? Architecture implies a first-hand experience of light, sound, silence, and movement. It is a personal experience, physically and emotionally. When these elements are separate from one another, they are indeed abstract. Together in *Construction*, these combined elements form new, strange experiences in an alternate world.

•

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<sup>15</sup> I think I finally have a close enough description of this “being state” that I keep referring to (and not just singular, but also plural “being states”). It’s a state of awareness and contemplation, that may or may not be spiritual (sometimes normal is spiritual), but is certainly very noticeable. Robert Irwin describes it as “presence,” this “quality of phenomena” when he would go to the Mojave desert for no particular reason. In Lawrence Weschler’s biography of Irwin, *Seeing is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees*, Irwin explains: “I’m not talking about one sort of spiritual or mystical activity. I’m simply talking about my ability to perceive what was going on around me, that there was something very ‘tactile,’ tangibly existent in this one particular area, say, which was simply not present two miles down the road.”

As such, this chapter will help the reader understand *Construction* through a more affective and empathetic approach, treating the work as a whole. I do not dissect the work mechanically or scientifically, but instead I offer discussions through larger, more organic groupings of ideas; more layers of the work become revealed while the work remains intact. There is much more to gain in overall meaning, than there is in becoming versed in technicalities.

What follows is an experiential navigation of *Construction* from a general audience perspective. This navigation is then followed by a series of detailed discussions, through which the reader can navigate a more affective process of understanding *Construction*.

•

## NAVIGATION OF A CONSTRUCTION

*Hello.*

*This is a relaxed, contemplative space.*

*Please take a seat on a floor cushion,  
or on the floor if you prefer.  
Feel free to adjust yourself to feel comfortable  
and oriented in the space.  
You do not have to remain fixed.*

•

Enter the space. It is a blue-green environment with low-volume, ambient sound slowly pulsing through the large, rectangular room. There are no chairs, but the floor is strewn with randomly scattered cushions that all seem to be shaded in cool tones. Your shoes are off. The windows are large and partially reflective, as you see reflections of yourself and others in the space blended with the actual outside night environment with streetlamps and cars.

You walk around a little, to determine where you'd like to sit. There doesn't seem to be a particular direction to face. You choose a cushion anyway, and plop down. The sound and light environment continue; you may find that your breath has slowed down to a calmer rate. There are about thirty people here sitting or lying down on cushions. You glance around and notice the spaciousness around you, even as the room is "full". The environment lights go down, and the ambient sound quietly fades away to silent dark. It's 6:00 p.m.

A dim pathway of light fades on, directing attention towards a curious rectangular box that is hanging on the side wall. A group of people, assumedly the performers, congregates near the box, as if to await some kind of news.

One performer raises their hand: the box suddenly bursts with patterned light, static noise swishes through the room, and the box fixes on a mysterious pattern as a dial tone-like sound gives a waiting call. The group does not take action just yet. The performer who gave the hand cue looks at this light pattern, then nods to another performer, who faces the group, and the group disperses to different locations. A performer goes into a corner. Two performers go to the long tables full of instruments and gear. They click on their lamps and set up. The lights click off to dark. The dial tone, waiting, fades out. A *Construction* is about to begin.

A deep violet light begins to cut through the darkness as a cluster of electronic sounds gradually diffuses through the room, coming from all around. A performer crosses the room from one corner to the opposite in a focused diagonal. As the sounds and light continue to slowly evolve and grow, this performer — the navigator — begins to move. They adjust methods of movement and position: at times standing, sitting, creating a short trajectory, only to stop and dissolve the fourth wall between them and an audience member before continuing on again. An abrupt, momentary sonic silence occurs; the lights continue, the navigator continues to move, their feet more amplified in the absence of the electronic sound, their localized movement becoming transparently physical in the silence. The sound fills back in, sounding newly changed while still persistently full. The navigator leaves the space, and the audience is left with just themselves in the fullness of the light and the sound. The light and sound cut to silent darkness.

The dim pathway of light from the beginning fades on once more, directing attention towards the rectangular box on the wall. The performers emerge from corners of the space, from the long tables, and elsewhere to congregate near the box again, awaiting the next set of instructions.

One performer raises their hand: the box suddenly bursts with patterned light and complementary static noise followed by the waiting dial tone, as the box lands on a mysterious pattern. The group does not take action just yet. The performer with the hand cue raises their hand again, and the box bursts again with patterned light, static noise swishes, and a new pattern emerges. The group does not take action just yet. The performer who gave the hand cue nods to another performer, who faces the group, and the group disperses to different locations. A performer goes into a corner. Two performers go to the long tables full of instruments and gear. They click on their lamps and set up. The lights click off. The long dial tone fades out.

Another *Construction* begins.



Figure 9: Installation mode





Figure 10: Dim line of light, performers gathering

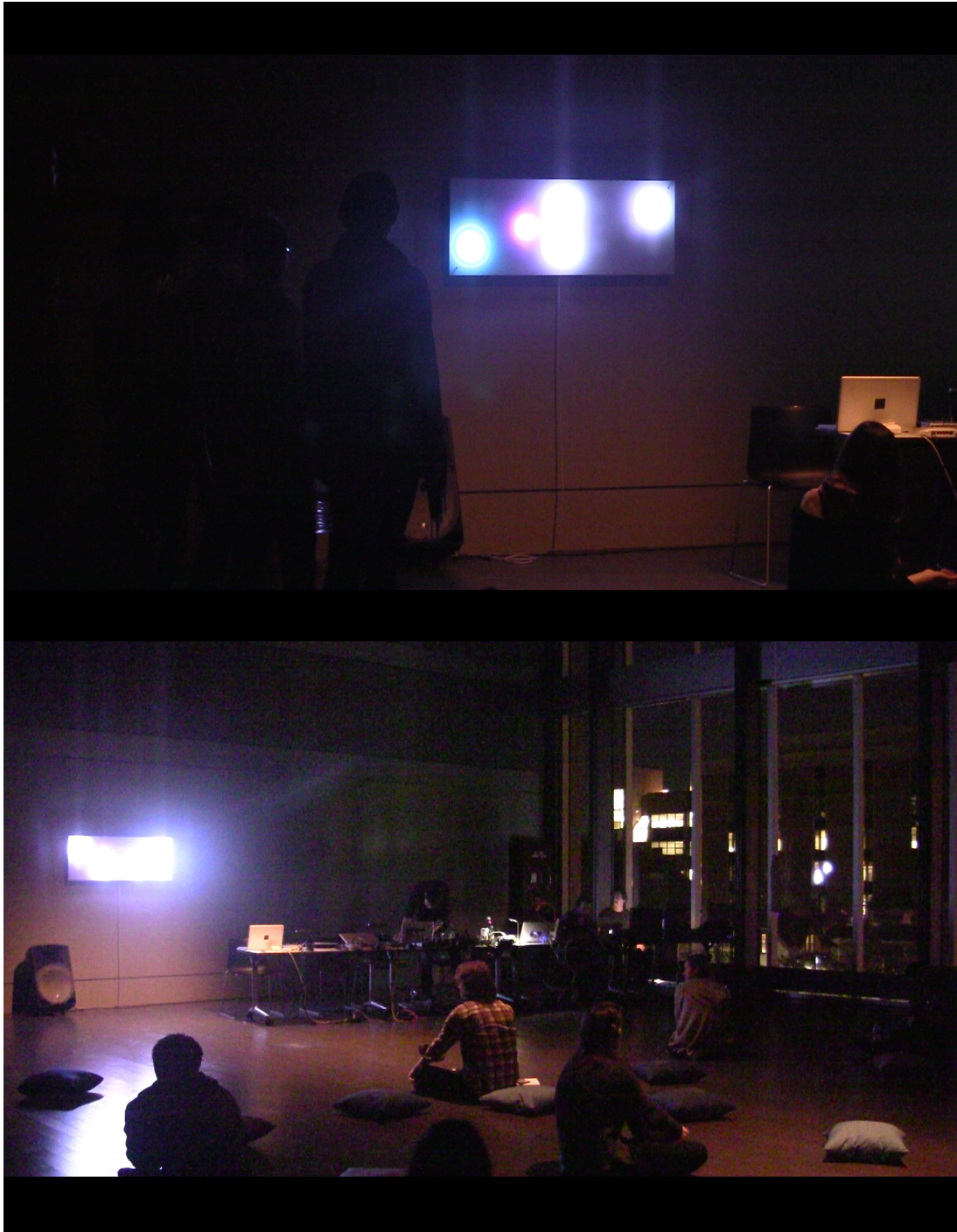


Figure 11: Performers at the Light Box, musicians preparing





Figure 12: Jessie LaFargue, movement navigator



Figure 13: A *Construction* ends, performers gathering again



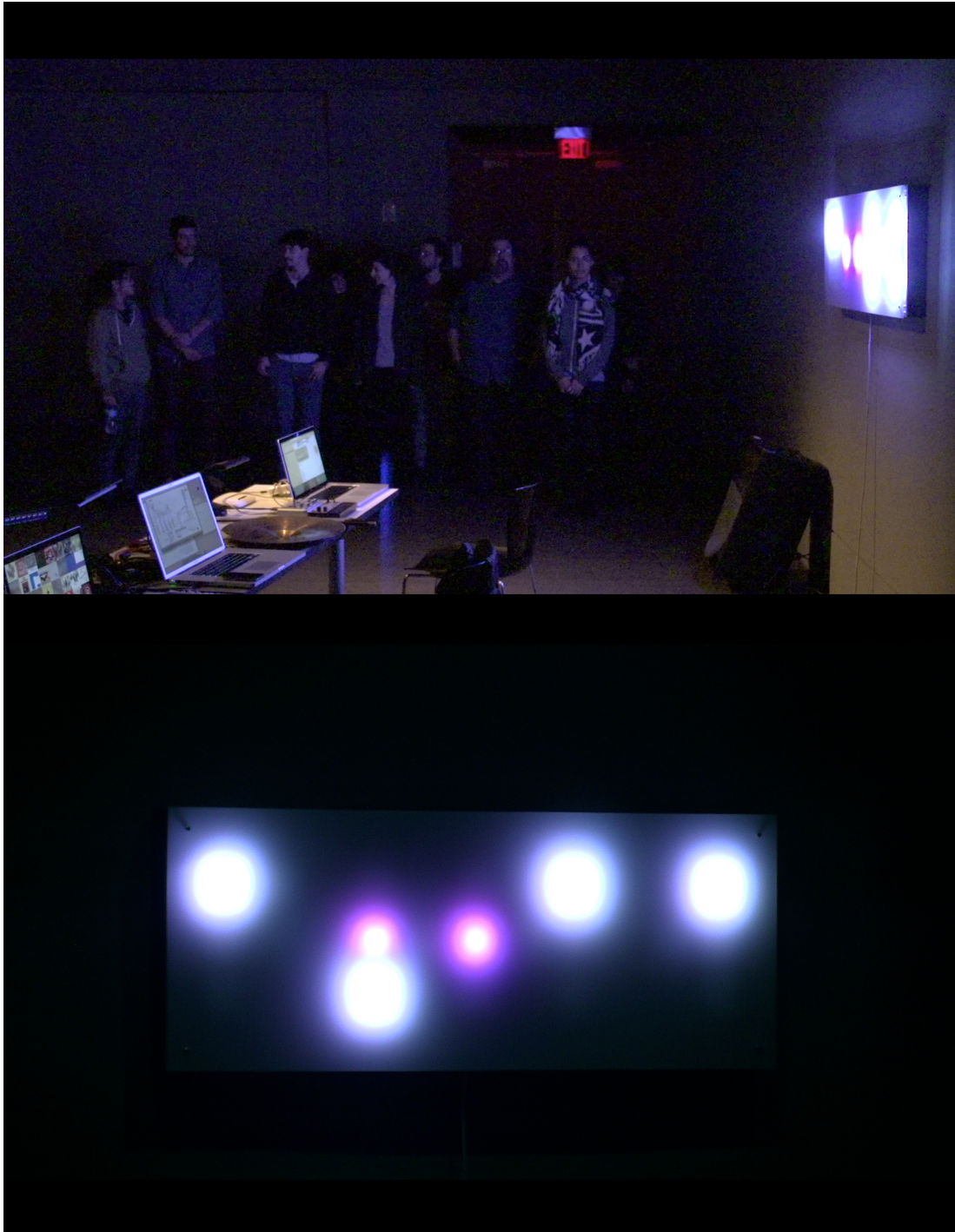


Figure 14: Performers and the Light Box



Figure 15: A *Construction* mid-performance with Kimberly Young, movement navigator





Figure 16: A *Construction* mid-performance with Kimberly Young, movement navigator



Figure 17: A *Construction* mid-performance with Allie Trionfetti, movement navigator





Figure 18: A *Construction* mid-performance with Allie Trionfetti, movement navigator



Figure 19: A *Construction* mid-performance with Jessie LaFargue, movement navigator





Figure 20: Musicians Stephan Moore & Caroline Park, movement navigators Kimberly Young & Jessie LaFargue





Figure 21: Asha Tamirisa and Tim Rovinelli, musicians



Figure 22: Luke Moldof and Peter Bussigel, musicians





Figure 23: Installation mode



Figure 24: The Light Box turns off





Figure 25: Performers bow and exit





Figure 26: Installation mode

## CONSTRUCTING + CREATING SPACE

The first aspect of *Construction* was the structural need for a physically large space: a space with the quality of architectural “mass” in terms of unobstructed height of walls and windows; a space that felt “contained” and yet could still give the sense that it remained “open”. The floor of the space needed to be flat and wide enough in all directions for people to sit — and otherwise simply “be” — with ample personal space around them as they might choose (there were no audience chairs). The largeness of the space needed to generously accommodate the spatial boundaries and agency of each audience member on the floor area. The space needed to be as “neutral” as possible (even as no space is ever actually completely neutral), in that the original intent of the space when constructed was indeed for the purposes of maintaining such neutrality (not the case with site-driven histories in churches, barn houses, defunct factory warehouses, etc.). The space needed to be indoors for a particular kind of intimacy while not being claustrophobic, and relatedly to the indoor aspect, the space also needed to have a theatrical lighting rig for immersive lighting, as well as the capability to install an immersive, multichannel sound system. For the demonstrative performances of this dissertation, Studio 1 at the Granoff Center for the Creative Arts was the ideal site: a neutral black box that could be customized in simple, effective ways to create a new world.



Figure 27: Studio 1, Granoff Center for the Creative Arts<sup>16</sup>

Such a neutral space as Studio 1 could be customized to the right aesthetic environment: the right ambience that was intimate, physically and emotionally safe, calm, generous in its invitation. An environment to fall asleep in, take time in, take space in. An environment that was purposefully not a traditional concert hall, nor club, nor similarly-structured space with seating that intentionally defined an audience's role and the way an audience member should engage with creative work. Instead, this would be a contemplative space, providing an audience member with helpful guidelines for receiving the creative work while allowing for spatial agency without traditional rows of chairs. An alternate mode to experience performance, based on breathability. A futuristic environment without fuss, floating in space, away from the real world.

In Studio 1, light was the first thing that came to mind — I spent many hours in the studio in daylight, cutting the black-out shades on the windows so that just a fine line of light would appear across the entire floor area of the studio. While I knew that ultimately I would be

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<sup>16</sup> Granoff Center for the Creative Arts, Brown University,  
<https://www.brown.edu/academics/creative-arts-council/studio-1-info>

working with immersive washes of colored light from the lighting grid, simply cutting a line of daylight every day into the space while I worked revealed how light could physically affect a space and emotionally affect a person.

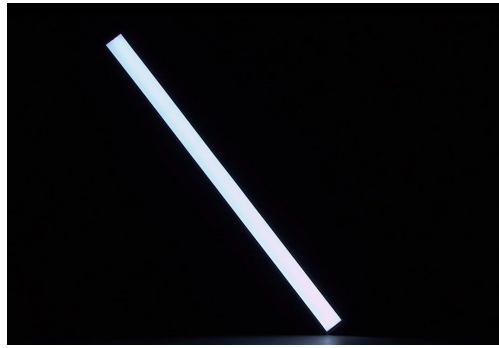


Figure 28: Bar of light from *Einstein on the Beach*<sup>17</sup>

Studio 1 is a black box theatre, meaning that, even with its floor to ceiling glass windows looking towards the outside and floor to ceiling glass windows shared with adjacent studios, there are blackout shades to completely fill the room with darkness. Black-box theatres are ideal for traditional dance and theatre productions where light must be contained in order to have full effect.

The priority in *Construction* was to give the impression of even more space than the confines of a black box with opaque walls. The blackout shades were entirely up on one of the walls that had floor-to-ceiling windows, such that ambient light coming from outside at night — street lamps, cars, sidewalks — spilled in slightly. Floor-to-ceiling glass windows were revealed on another wall of the studio (with shades pulled down on the opposite side), providing a translucent reflection of subtle infinity. The remaining two walls of the studio

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<sup>17</sup> Philip Glass, *Einstein on the Beach*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5Lu4jhkb80>

were opaque, forming a cornerstone of solidity in complement with the two connected sides of reflective glass.

While this studio of walls and glass comprised the “external” environment, the studio itself reflected an internal environment. There were layers of actual opacity, translucency, and transparency: solid frames and the open unknown. This internal environment was dependent on time, as navigating the spatial unknown would require temporal repetition demonstrated in the public presentation of *Construction*. A metaphorical “landscape” is only defined over time, and with much iteration, the essence of the interior space becomes closer to being known.

### **THE PROTOCOL: STRUCTURE + TECHNIQUE**

A Protocol was necessary for structuring the performances of *Construction*. This Protocol was a timing mechanism that allowed for each performance to flow from beginning to end. The Protocol begins from an initial installation mode: the environment.

This installation environment, constructed of ambient sound and light, would be activated before the audience arrived, and would continue as the audience became settled. As the performance time drew nearer, the performers would gather in a corner to begin.

When it officially became time for the performance to begin, the installation mode would fade out to silent darkness. A path of soft light would fade in through the center of the space, directing attention to a rectangular box on a wall: the Light Box. At this moment, all of the performers would collectively and thoughtfully approach this rectangular box. Once all

performers had arrived, the box would suddenly illuminate with light (LEDs), casting a series of random light patterns within itself, and would finally pause on a particular random light pattern. This light pattern on pause was a suggestion of a combination to be performed, specifying which movement navigator (if any), which musicians and sound score (if any), and which lighting scheme (if any).

If such a combination felt relevant to the context of that particular audience,<sup>18</sup> I would first pause to think it over, then turn to one of the performers (Kim Young) and nod, as if to say, “yes, this is my decision.” Kim would then come out to face the group, look at each performer to ensure they all understood the decision, and then nod to communicate “go” – this acted as the cue for everyone to go to their places, whether as that particular performance set’s performers, or as members of the audience.

At 14 minutes,<sup>19</sup> the performance set was over: the sound and light would fade to silent darkness (the movement person would have already exited the space). The path of soft light would fade in, directing attention again to the rectangular box on the wall. All performers would then collectively gather at the light box once more to await direction. If there was to be a second set, the light box would cast a series of random light patterns and pause on a new random light pattern: a new combination to consider. As before, I would pause to think it over and see if such a combination fit the context for the evening, and then either accept the suggestion, or raise my hand as a sign for another recasting. If there were to be no second set, the light box would simply turn off, as if to suggest, “we are done for today; to be continued (tomorrow).” The performers would then turn to face the audience and bow for the

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<sup>18</sup> Even this was a conversation I intuited between the piece and the audience.

<sup>19</sup> Each performance set was 14 minutes in length. Nothing technical about the number 14; it is simply my lucky number.



night. To close, the installation mode (from the very beginning) would slowly fade back on with quiet ambient sound and immersive light.



Figure 29: Installation mode from *Construction*

In order to best demonstrate *Construction* under realistic considerations, audience members would experience two performance sets back-to-back. Experiencing two sets in this manner would allow audience members to determine, for themselves, differences and similarities between the two sets as a means of beginning to understand the work as a whole series.

There are given similarities, within all possible sets, that act as fixed constraints. The external framing maintains itself: the physical environment of the cushions and hanging abstract sculptures; the protocol; the number of performers in a set; the time structure of a set; the moment of sonic silence in a set. If a set was to have a movement navigator, there was always only one movement navigator. If a set were to have musicians, there was always a pair, and the overall sound was always a mass of sound, dense and full. If a set was to have light, the light was always slowly shifting: an amorphous blob of color.

Every set is naturally different within such given constraints: it is the inner content that remains unfixed. Nuanced variations of the actual sound were based on which pair of musicians (of six) and which sound score (of three) were selected. Nuanced variations of the actual light were based on which lighting scheme (of three) was selected. Nuanced variations of the movement navigation were based on which solo movement navigator (of three) was selected.

Within the similarities of sets, what would the differences between sets reveal about the overall work? What would the differences give voice to with regards to the concept of the work? What would the differences bring up in terms of consistency and inconsistency? How might the audience “read between the lines” of each performance set? What becomes revealed with the process of continuation, iteration after iteration?

Architecture is no longer conceived as the making of a formal ‘container,’ as it has developed over centuries of stylistic evolution. These architects think first of the interior space ... they handle space not as finite form, but as fluid and open-ended; for the user, it becomes a serial rather than a static event.<sup>20</sup>

It would be impossible to show every permutation due to the realistic constraints, and even to do so, would not be the point. I wanted to represent a slice of what was possible. I wanted to trust in the unknown as an imagined possibility, and share that trust with the performers and audience. Because of the many performance sets over the course of several days, each audience individual who came each day would have a unique experience of the work, depending on which day and which performance sets they attended. A person who saw performance sets on one day would have a very different experience than another person who saw performance sets the following day. A person who saw performance sets on two

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<sup>20</sup> Ada Louise Huxtable, *On Architecture: Collected Reflections on a Century of Change*, 23.

consecutive days would have very different experiences both days. Even someone who had experienced every performance set during the demonstrative three days would still not concretely know what other possibilities might be revealed.

It was both a conceptual and a practical decision not to show all the possibilities of *Construction*. An audience individual could only see snippets of the whole work, but not the whole work. The work itself is intentionally not a finite, fixed thing. There is still a sense of an unknown, of the possibilities that did not yet emerge, but could, in the future. What was shown over three days was a concise and thoughtful demonstration of a larger system. The only way to fully understand is through the imagination.

#### RECONCILING CONTROL + AGENCY

In *Construction* I inhabited several main external roles: composer (in the sense that I created the work's concept), performer/improviser, and audience member. To me, those roles and relations within those roles are similar to how Pauline Oliveros approaches her own work. Oliveros identifies herself equally as a composer, performer, improviser and audience member: "From early childhood I have been a listener."<sup>21</sup> Listening actively drives her practice.

Similarly for me, listening is the basis for it all: listening as composing, as performing or improvising, as receiving and as being. There are no hierarchies within these roles in my mind; there is simply a mutual understanding that these roles are slightly different while

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<sup>21</sup> Pauline Oliveros, *Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice*, xv.

having a common denominator that relates them all to one another. This common denominator is the act of listening. Listening implies that there is something to listen *to*, as there always is: everything is a two-way conversation (at least).

I think also of the philosophies of the multimedia artist Nam June Paik, when he brought up the notion of “the one-ness of creator, audience, and critic,”<sup>22</sup> uniting these three disparate parties into one fluid, hybrid, participatory experience.

A kid who smokes a joint or so is at the same time creator, audience, and critic. There is no room for comparison and grading, such as “first class drug taker” or “second rated pot smoker” etc... This ontological analysis demonstrates to us once again that drug is a short cut effort to recover the sense of participation...<sup>23</sup>

What are other ways to attain this state of mind, this fluid and participatory experience of one-ness? While *Construction* had these roles visibly separated in terms of creator, performer, and audience (audience/critic<sup>24</sup> too, in some sense), I was in a peculiar hybrid position – at all times, I was always all three. Each role emphasized real-time experience, and in navigating these roles, I felt an internal bleeding between them that somehow maintained movement and static, simultaneously: this was my internal state of being.

In terms of collaboration and control, collaborations continued to be dialogues, and were always one-on-one. As musician and sound artist myself, I would suggest an instruction to the musicians, and some musicians would intuitively and independently interpret what that seemed to mean to them, and some musicians asked detailed questions in search of an exact

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<sup>22</sup> Nam June Paik, “Video Synthesizer Plus.”

<sup>23</sup> Paik.

<sup>24</sup> Audiences can be critics if they wish to be. In my case, there were several potential overlapping critics: the audience/critic, and the creator/critic (the harshest critic).

answer (there were many answers). All of the musicians who performed in *Construction* are experimental electronic musicians who have incredible ears and are terrific listeners. They all also listen and perform very differently, and they were also selected for this reason.

An audience member asked what I thought of the different musicians' interpretations, and if they were to my liking. Overall, I enjoyed engaging with the sets that I (as a performing musician) was not in. And I was glad not to be in them sometimes.<sup>25</sup> I liked listening to other people's articulations (translations).<sup>26</sup> I found it revealing to hear interpretations from other people, specifically people that I trust. I trusted, and continue to trust these musicians.

Collaborating with other musicians is like opening a window; suddenly new elements such as wind, dust, and debris either quietly trickle in, or massively blow right in. In this way, so many different voices suddenly became a part of the overall work. In performances of *Construction*, the musicians I collaborated with revealed certain aesthetics and methods that differed from my own – sometimes greatly, sometimes very subtly. It is important to me to feel some friction in a creative work once in a while. Sometimes it is important to not know what the “ending” is, but rather to see what could happen, and how the work could be understood in new and newer ways.

Because I would not consider myself to be a movement person in active practice (only in conceptual thinking and in my layperson life), much of my preparation time in creating this work was spent with each of the movement navigators, each of whom were incredibly

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<sup>25</sup> Performance has always been and will continue to be stressful to me. It was particularly so in this work, which, due to its random, juxtaposed, and yet curated nature, required much more material to improvise with, more than I alone could possibly generate in real-time for each iteration that was presented.

<sup>26</sup> It is a fine line of control: how much one should and should not have. For this project, it was important to hear other people's articulations, alongside my own articulations.

different from the others. I had the most one-on-one conversations with these movement navigators to learn their thoughts on presence in performance, and how they interpret for themselves what I called “being states,” a state of mind more than a visible physical action.

Similarly with the musicians, I trusted and continue to trust these movement navigators, and I knew they cared in these performances. I provided minimal guidance, which in retrospect I think was both terrifying and possibly liberating for them, as they all were familiar with my musical work personally, and knew I had particular aesthetics and concepts in mind.

Collaborating with these movement navigators was like creating an oral score between two people. It was a conversation of getting to know a person, and a person getting to know me, a fluid state. I gave them a few constraints, they intuited the rest of what I was unable to ask for, and they provided their own gestures, their own energy, and their own translations.

All manner of surprising things happen in live performance. One never knows; it happens in every situation no matter how much control one might assume to have. Ultimately, it’s good for the brain to practice being open to the unexpected.<sup>27</sup>

There were moments that appeared as though I had control over the randomness of the Light Box, in that I could skip the suggestion it gave to me. However, when I asked for a recasting, it was not a rejection, but rather, it was simply an inquiry: “show me another.”

Randomness is a part of the conversation for me. Even though I wrote the code and thus coded in the weights of certain probabilities, it was still seeing what might happen live in the moment that was interesting and was still unknown to me and to everyone. I can accept the

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<sup>27</sup> My interpretation of the writings of Morihei Ueshiba in *The Art of Peace*: “Hear the soundless sound, and see the formless form” (7) – in other words, expect the unexpected, in an “art of harmonization.” (11)

random possibility that is offered, or I can contemplate it, seeing if it seems to fit the occasion, and ask for another recasting. In this conversation, I wanted to not be in, or present myself as having, full control. The Light Box and I were having a conversation, approximately face-to-face.

Context played a large part of the decisions I would make in the moment as to whether a particular combination would be skipped or be received. Because there were so many possibilities, and I only had a certain window of times to present this work, I felt compelled to give a demonstrative slice of the wholeness that was *Construction*. The back-to-back format would help to inform me, for that particular audience, what should be seen and what could wait until another time. For example, if we had just had a set with no light, then it may not make the most sense for the following set to not have sound or not have movement navigation. On the other hand, the same mover might come up twice, and it would be interesting to see how the two sets may be similar or different, given different sound and different light. The back-to-back structure ensured, on the audience's behalf, that the performance situation would make as much conceptual sense without compromising the entire work.

Thinking much more conceptually, with true randomness, one could have the same movement navigator 20 times in a row, or the same lighting scheme 20 times in a row. True randomness is infinite. In knowing this possibility, and knowing the practical logistics I was working within, I also wanted to allow for every performer to be able to perform so as demonstrate the different parameters of the system. I wanted to ensure that the performers, even as they understood that they might not perform, would perform at least once in order to have this experience. These reasons also contributed to my accepting either the suggested combination or recasting again for another combination to display. It was always for that



particular moment and for those particular people, audience members and performers alike. The priority was to be generous.

## **UNDERSTANDING SILENCE**

What happens when there is no light in a performance set? An audience member told me that, to them, a performance set with no light felt like an entirely different piece. So much of our performance experience, sitting and observing as audience members, relies on certain things being a given, and light oftentimes is one of those things. There are always “house lights”, maybe a “half-house” setting, “full-stage”, “spot”, etc. These different lighting cues frame how we perceive and receive a situation, performance or otherwise. Light provides us with a distinct focus, like how a spotlight follows the character of a play across the stage from one corner to the opposite. The light guides the way of this particular trajectory.

Performance situations without light are therefore extreme. The absence of light in a performance makes a viewer have to intentionally choose where their focus should be, whether presently visual, or emotional, mental, psychological. If a situation only has sound and one person moving in darkness, the feeling that is felt by an audience member is very different from when the situation is actually visible. Absence amplifies a situation, and the absence of a sense amplifies other existing senses. Sound becomes amplified; bodies moving far and close to you become a lot more amplified. When a physical sense is taken away, other senses become heightened in the effort to understand what is going on. As many human beings who are sighted tend to prioritize and center the visual sense, situations without light tend to be jarring and require a fairly visceral re-engaging with the environment to re-orient the self.

What happens when there is no movement in a performance set? The same audience member also mentioned that, from their perspective, having no movement in a performance set made for a very different performance experience. The set that had no movement ended up becoming a “sound bath” that felt very independent from the other sets. Without movement, sound and light became amplified. After this particular set, several audience members spoke to me afterward about being in a “sound bath rocket ship.” Most of the audience individuals were lying on the floor during this set, some with eyes closed, others with eyes wide open.

I wanted to make sure that there would be no movement or light in some performance sets. Conceptually, it was critical important to have this silence, this nothingness, this empty space as a necessary component to the work as a whole. Much of our daily experience is dense; should silence enter, are we able to more wholly experience an entire system?

A side note: I had also wished to not have sound for a performance set. However, I knew that given the realistic timeframe, an audience individual might not yet understand what it would be to experience a performance set with no sound. If the circumstances were different – had there been, say, 50, or even 100 sets – audience individuals could begin to understand this conceptual aspect of sonic silence as a part of the work, not as something gone wrong or necessarily negative. No sound seems to make audiences particularly uneasy in live performance – as if sound were a given. This is a normative social construct, but one that I ended up taking into consideration when demonstrating *Construction*. Had there been a set with no sound, it would still be different from another set with no sound. The same goes for sets that have no light, and sets with no movement. Every silence is different.

## RE-IMAGINING & RE-ORIENTING THE AUDIENCE

After the performances of *Construction*, an audience member shared with me a moment they had recalled, when one of the musicians got up and walked around the space while playing an instrument, and some audience members laughed. Other unexpected moments like that had also occurred, with laughter or smiles as immediate reactions within some audience members. What is to be expected, and how does one respond, in an environment that is already unexpected?

The unexpected can cause people to react in certain ways, such as laughter, if they do not know how to let go of expectation, or how to deal with their own nervousness about surprise. Laughter is not too far away from simply being open and not laughing. Surprise is unusual in this way.

The particular performance set in question was one in which a musician, of a pair, got up from the musicians' tables and walked around the room while playing piercing tones from a melodica. It turns out that the musician was demonstrating a localized kind of listening in different parts of the room, based on the acoustic phenomena of the melodica as a sound source emanating acoustic sound waves through itself and into the room (not through the speaker system). As a musician, I am aware of this, but to someone who may not be aware, this musician's actions may have been surprising as it deviated from what was assumed as the normative role for musicians – remaining seated while performing. What are assumptions?

In that instance, it can be strange to be an “audience member” as it may question the roles that appear to be in place. A musician walking around questions what has been *assumed* as the role of the musician, what has been *assumed* as the role of the movement navigator, and

what has been *assumed* as the role of the audience. While the performance personnel (all musicians, movement navigators) may be more informed with regards to context, as they are “in on it,” perhaps such a deviation mostly asks the audience to ask of themselves, “Who am I in relation to what is happening?” or even simply, “Who am I / Who am I in the system?”

Another audience individual told me that they were sitting in a corner during the performance sets of *Construction*, where they felt they could best experience the work. They found that, in the brief moments of sonic silence, the physical movements of the movement navigator suddenly became quite intense and intimate. The proximity of the movement navigator to this audience individual felt even closer somehow. The sound made from soles of the feet (from running, walking, or simply adjusting), as well as breath (in passing, as the navigator moved from one point to another), became even more sensitive as palpable sensations to this audience individual.

In hearing this account, I could not help but think about how much this particular audience individual was truly a solo observing body. From an observing body’s perspective, there is so much to ponder with regards to another solo or independent body. Proximity itself becomes an entire realm of experience. How close is a moving body to you? What is your relation to this moving body? Are you comfortable in lying down, or sitting up? Is it comfortable or uncomfortable to feel the air or closeness of a moving body?

It is real, and it is present – the sound of the body, of the breath, of the contours of the feet, of the contact of the foot on the floor with running, hearing the consequential sonic artifacts of the floor, reading the floor in this way. The sound of air moving, the sound or physical feeling of another person’s clothes, with a certain amount of neutrality — these movement

navigators are “performing” but it almost feels like they are rehearsing, or they’re practicing: they’re in comfortable clothing, there is something having to do with comfort in their attire.

There is a particular one-on-one relationship between an audience member and a movement navigator. The movement navigator is always solitary, as can be an audience member. The navigators and their movement are at once very close, but they don’t move the audience, or do they bother the audience. Occasionally they look at an audience member, for a moment, and continue on with their trajectory. The recognition they give can be highly personal somehow, as if the audience member is being seen for the first time.

There are two people, side by side.  
I’m next to [them].  
I never saw [them] before...  
but I recognize myself.  
It is...  
like..  
an image. But a distant one.<sup>28</sup>

Through simple instructions, audience members were asked to be mindfully present, in a way that was different than most traditional concert setups. Audience members could sit anywhere, lie down anywhere, feel agent or otherwise unfixed (or fixed), in whatever manner was comfortable for each person.

There were 30 seats per set; 30 cushions were spread out on the floor space. It was up to the audience as individuals to position themselves within the space in a manner that felt

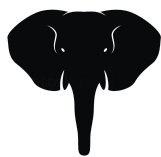
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<sup>28</sup> I first saw text in the program notes for Yanira Castro’s work *Paradis* in 2011. Castro wrote: “The quote above is the translation of a voice-over from Jean-Luc Godard’s 2004 film, *Notre Musique*. It accompanies a woman crossing a clearing in a wood and then returning towards the camera. It is a single shot and the camera never moves. It is a simple image.” Originally the quote describes “her;” however, I adapted it here to the gender-neutral “them.” For me, this quote is about seeing a person, and recognizing oneself in that person: “like ... an image. But a distant one.”

physically and mentally comfortable. Some people chose a cushion and sat upright on it, calm and ready. Others took a cushion and lay their head on it, looking up at the lights, their backs on the wood floor. Some sat in the center of the room within a small cluster of friends, while some sat in a corner, solo, and in the safety of their own winter coats and scarves, taking in the comfort of solitude.

Given the aestheticized environment and brief instructions, I wanted an audience individual to curate their own experience of the performance sets of *Construction*. There are so many ways to engage with a live performance. Oftentimes imagination, ample personal space, and comfort aren't readily available options for an audience to indulge in when dealing with traditional concert setups. By being agent and comfortable, the audience contributed to the mindfulness of the environment.

## THE INTERSTITIAL ELEPHANT



At this point, what may serve as a helpful framing is looking back at the previous chapters in order to see where we are and how far we have come. This act of reflection – of active orientating and *re*-orientating – is at the root of phenomenology, a “set of tools for thinking about orientation.”<sup>29</sup> In her text *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, theorist and scholar Sara Ahmed utilizes phenomenology as a means of investigating the bodily, spatial, and social complexities that exist within queer and critical race studies; by doing so, her work emphasizes a larger and fully embodied perspective that is both grounded and “entangled” in lived experience.<sup>30</sup> Ahmed states that “[phenomenology] can offer a resource for queer studies insofar as it emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds.”<sup>31</sup> In the same way that phenomenology has helped queer studies re-orientate itself, I argue that Ahmed’s take on phenomenology can be applied to my usage of technology in this project, such that technology becomes a realm to formally consider certain aspects of itself, in a way that hasn’t yet happened at large in the technical arts. By mapping on a phenomenological angle that has been helpful for other discourses, primarily queer and critical race studies, my intention is to

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<sup>29</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, 181.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ahmed, 2.



open up this discourse of computer music and multimedia performance as a much more lived and embodied medium of art practice.

This section, titled the Interstitial Elephant, thus acts as a pivot and has two functions in this document: it first reminds the reader of the need to emphasize the larger *ideas* of technology as the initial framing of this project (see previous chapter on “understanding”) in order to then have these same ideas *be* the actual framework for the technology – rather than the technology being the framework for ideas. The second function of this Interstitial Elephant is to then proceed into the details of the technical machinery and software of the project. While, to some, it may seem initially inverted to read about the technology through the lens of larger abstract values, let me assure the reader that this is intentional and important. By doing so in this manner, an emphasis can be placed on these larger values as a top priority, with technology then acting in support of these larger values – not the other way around, which often is the case in computer music and multimedia performance.

Information about the technical machinery and the software designed and built for this project has been, admittedly, the “elephant in the room,” in that I have purposefully chosen to wait until just before the very end to disclose such details.<sup>32</sup> What follows next are the approaches, processes, and purposes ingrained with the main technologies woven into *Construction*.

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<sup>32</sup> A reader may yet still wonder as to why such “technology” was not spoken of earlier than now. In response, it must be realized that it is only as we approach the end that we have learned to develop a more accurate, accumulative perspective in order to better and more thoroughly understand the role of technology and its nuances within this work.

One of the most noticeable technological objects in the room was a Light Box that was installed in the center of the south wall in Studio 1. Essentially this Light Box represented a conceptual slot machine. The metaphorical “fruits” or imagery on this slot machine were abstracted LED shapes representing select movements, select sounds, and select lights. There was no monetary result or “winning combination” – instead, each random combination resulted in a unique performance for contemplation. To me, this is technology – a means to generate, and to experience, something unknown.

One of the first things to consider for the Light Box was how the physical interface itself would be designed; the interface was not only crucial to the concept of the project, but was also going to be particularly noticeable (being a large visual element) and would be perceived in different ways by diverse audiences. After much iteration through many visual sketches, I decided upon a rectangular wooden box – 19” x 49” x 3” – segmented into three distinct portions, left-center-right. Each portion was comprised of large squares of LEDs in unique formations, perceived as simple, abstracted shapes. A translucent plastic diffuser was mounted on the entire front of the wooden box. The whole thing looked like a strange, yet simple object – something no one had ever seen before.

Each of the three portions of the Light Box (left, center, right) symbolized a major component to *Construction*:

- |                     |                                                                                                               |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The left portion:   | <i>movement</i> – a solo movement navigator, chosen within three performers;                                  |
| The center portion: | <i>sound</i> – a pair of musicians and a sound score, chosen within six musicians and three different scores; |
| The right portion:  | <i>light</i> – a light schematic, chosen within three schematics.                                             |

The large squares of LEDs in each of these three portions would be lit in either bright white or bright cyan. The center section – sound – contained additional smaller squares that would be lit in bright fuchsia to indicate a chosen sound score. White-lit squares in any section would indicate an active combination of movement, sound, or light. Cyan-lit squares would indicate NONE in that section – no movement, no sound, or no light.

I designed a program in Max that was comprised of different types of weighted randomness and probabilities in order to bring the conceptual slot machine concept to life in the Light Box. These chance operations were distributed such that the options of having no movement, no sound, and no light were weighted as equal to having those elements, while also ensuring that any given combination would have two present elements. In other words, it was impossible to generate a combination that would have three elements of “nothing” (no movement + no sound + no light) or a combination that had two elements of “nothing.” A screenshot of a portion of the Max patch can be seen in the appendix. Values from Max were then sent to a short Python script, which acted as a translator between Max and custom-made, wirelessly networked MCUs that were installed inside of the Light Box. Reading Max, these MCUs activated the on/off behavior of the LEDs.

The Light Box project was a collaboration between myself and Derek Fukumori. I designed the blueprints for the physical interface and programmed the Max software. Derek programmed the MCUs and materially constructed the physical interface with my direction.

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Expanding outwards, another important technological entity in the room was less visibly noticeable and very clearly audible: the 8.2 sound system. This 8.2 channel system was used

as a dual-quadraphonic setup, with four speakers suspended from the four corners of the ceiling grid, four speakers positioned in the center of each of four walls on the floor, and two subwoofers placed in corresponding floor corners for bass distribution.

The four high speakers, suspended from the ceiling, were installed in the ceiling grid's corners, facing slightly downward, for optimal high sound distribution in Studio 1. The ceiling grid itself is not wall-to-wall, and so the suspended speakers were very much "inside" the space itself by roughly 10-15 feet. The four speakers placed on the floor were arranged in a "cross" pattern, each speaker leaning on the center of each of four walls, as was favored by composer and sound artist Eliane Radigue. For those not familiar, Radigue's approach to speakers and speaker placement was not to emphasize a single "sweet spot" (as is most commonly idealized in stereo/multichannel setups), but rather to emphasize the unique qualities of natural sound distribution through localization. This cross-pattern was ideal for *Construction* due to the nature of the sound scores, all of which gravitated towards drone-based, textural, or ambient soundscapes.

I don't like to tell anyone that they should sit in the middle of the room, as this is where you listen the best. I always say, go wherever you want – you can even walk around slowly. We're talking, of course, about electronic sounds, which are so alive; there is so much possibility for them to resonate with the room, with the walls, with everything.<sup>33</sup>

The double-quadraphonic setup also allowed for a chosen pair of musicians to "play the space" with each musician playing through their own dedicated quad setup. This could translate to four discrete channels or double-stereo/stereo swap. The two musicians would quickly decide between themselves who would play "ceiling" and who would play "floor" and would subsequently connect corresponding cables quickly, in a manner of seconds. All

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<sup>33</sup> Paul Schütz, "Surround Sound," <https://frieze.com/article/surround-sound>

of this created a unique immersive situation, with simultaneous separation and coexistence between the two musicians in a very real-time environment.

•

Drawing back into content of *Construction*, I programmed the light<sup>34</sup> schemes using Max and an ETC ION console, using MSC/Midi Show Control<sup>35</sup> and my own customized hexadecimal strings. The ION is an industry-standard interface that is mapped to the theatrical lighting grid permanently installed in the ceiling of Studio 1. The lighting schemes I created were exclusively large washes of light composed of deep hues – dark reds, greens, blues/purples – to provide a fully immersive experience, one in which an individual could enter into an abstracted state. The most important aspect in programming these lighting schemes was the ability to use real-time randomized timing, a feature that is not built into the physical console itself. The Max program I developed provided the ability to create light schemes that would shift over long-form durations, with bold colors transforming into other hues, or schemes that would allow for a single hue to slowly drift in unpredictable and generative patterns throughout the studio space.

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<sup>34</sup> When it comes to light, I often think of a very brief conversation I had with Laetitia Sonami when she came to visit Providence for a short residency in March of 2014. She and I were talking casually on one of her breaks, and she asked about my dissertation. The project was in its very early stages, and all I mentioned was “large light.” At this, she suddenly said to me, “Tell me about light – I’m interested in light, too. What interests you about light?” There seemed to be a mutual and collective beginner’s mind felt in this moment, both of us being two California sound artists. I said to her in all honesty, “...I don’t know, I don’t know,” and we lingered on this unknown for a while in quiet together. There was nothing concrete to say then; it felt like a series of understandings had only just begun. Later on, even as these light schemes were “successfully” programmed for *Construction*, there wasn’t really a feeling of conclusion that I had experienced at that time about light, whether in that context, or light generally. The medium is still very new to me (I am a sound artist after all), and feels intuitively like life-long work – as if these were the next steps somewhere in the unknown, beyond the plain.

<sup>35</sup> Midi Show Control or MSC is the industry standard for theatrical lighting cues.

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Each of the aforementioned technologies described had an aspect of curated randomness involved, centering curated randomness as the “engine,” so to speak. The Light Box casts a random combination, which then sends the other main technologies into motion: sound and light. Not only would a pair of musicians be chosen randomly, but also the musicians would determine via a quick “coin-toss” who would play which quadraphonic setup. Additionally, the musicians themselves would have to learn how to perform with each other, an unplanned improvisation, having only done solo preparation for the scores before the dress rehearsal and public performances. And finally, the content of the lighting schemes were generative in behavior. All these elements navigated the unknown, asking, “what if?”

The way that these technologies unfolded in *Construction* speaks to an approach that “motivates wonder and a sense of possibility,”<sup>36</sup> an approach which I feel needs to be prioritized by more practitioners such that a more expanded definition of technology can begin to be discussed and applied at large in electronic music.

With all this, we can now begin sifting through some new conclusions.

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<sup>36</sup> Tara Rodgers, *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound*, 9.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

“It matters *how* we arrive at the places we do.”<sup>37</sup>

Throughout this document I put forth several requests for the reader to consider, which functioned to re-orientate the reader to have a better and more thorough understanding of my dissertation, *Construction*. The first request was to consider *Construction* as not a single, fixed result, but instead as an organic, fluid constellation of ideas. In doing so, I asked the reader to do away with the one-result mindset that often pervades the fields of computer music, multimedia performance, and generally the art world. The second request was to intentionally utilize the terms “encounters” and “navigations” in describing the external factors that provided inspirational momentum leading to *Construction*. The third request was to approach the “analysis” of this dissertation as less of a scientific dissection of parts, and more as a myriad of overlapping, whole-minded, and comprehensive understandings of the project, given the notion that understanding is a continuing process. And finally, the Interstitial Elephant, which immediately preceded this final chapter, put forth not a request, but a palpable shift in orientation to the reader as to how to receive technological information in the context of this project.

Before arriving at a series of critical conclusions, I would like to first point toward certain problematic social structures in which technology has inevitably played a rather major role.

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<sup>37</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, 2. Emphasis mine.



Once those have been addressed, we can then shift into some ideas and questions asking ourselves: how can we open up to more empathetic practices in the technical arts as well as within our own social communities (the two are not mutually exclusive)?

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We begin by looking at two particular societal issues, with the first being the mainstream usage of technology in electronic music application. Technology in electronic music, as has been popularized and thus is more widely used today, tends to lean heavily on themes of combat and domination – of power, control, and violence.<sup>38</sup> The language that persists in the production of electronic music tools and its subsequent publicity in social spaces at trade shows/fairs, academic conferences, and on the Internet tends to transparently support the white, able-bodied, and cis-gendered heterosexual male as the ideal client, artist, musician, producer, programmer, and user, creating a white masculine standard that goes hand-in-hand with themes of power and control, exclusively supporting the “one-result” mindset. The vast majority of hardware/software designers, practitioners, and consumers alike are generally unaware of this heavily slanted bias towards white men and towards this toxic masculinity, regardless of their race, gender, and ability (though any social space, real-life or virtual, will quickly reveal its majority demographics to be white, male, and able-bodied); this bias is deeply internalized and is thus presumed – without question – to be the norm. It is then internalized that “fitting in,” “being visible,” “acting white,” “being one of the guys,” the “boys’ club,” etc. all play into the toxic perfectionism of a white male standard.

This subconscious (and at times, very conscious) attitude trickles into the academy, and many electronic music courses often will refer to one specific origin story of electronic music as *the*

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<sup>38</sup> Rodgers, 9.

origin story, the one of Luigi Russolo, the Italian Futurists, and the larger Fascist movement that energetically supported violence and warfare. While it is convenient to abstract Russolo's contribution to electronic music away from its violent origins,<sup>39</sup> are there not different origin stories that uplift a sense of wonder and listening within present-day and future electronic music practices? Composer, sound artist and scholar Tara Rodgers has written and produced much scholarship extensively on this issue, and a recommended reading is Rodgers' introduction to her book, *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound*<sup>40</sup> – for now, I will share a brief excerpt from Rodgers:

Electronic music can move bodies by way of technologically mediated or generated sounds that provoke a sense of wonder. Laetitia Sonami describes the first time she heard a Putney VCS3 synthesizer as a student in the 1970s: “I was like, Wow, what is that? I was hearing sounds that were very crude, but still there was this whole sense of magic, of electricity producing sounds in ways I could not fathom.” ... Sonami was motivated to develop an instrument that respects how technology is “a projection of our dreams, illusions, desires...” rather than one that reduces technology to an expression of “macho” control.<sup>41</sup>

The second societal issue I would like to bring up is the current usage and subsequent misunderstanding of the term “technology.” When the word “technology” is heard (even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century), oftentimes the term translates quickly and automatically to “electrical and computational devices”<sup>42</sup> – especially within our own technical arts spaces, both academic and in the broader community. Used in this way, “technology” remains an outdated reference

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<sup>39</sup> “And we must not forget the very new noises of Modern Warfare.” (Russolo, *The Art of Noise*)

<sup>40</sup> If the reader has not previously read the introduction to *Pink Noises*, I urge the reader to stop reading this dissertation right now and read the Rodgers first. There are two copies in the Orwig Music Library at Brown University, and most of the introduction is available to read online for free via Google Books.

<sup>41</sup> Rodgers, 9-10.

<sup>42</sup> Matthew Warne, “Listening and Reflection in an Electroacoustic Compositional Practice.”

that speaks only to novelty materials and trending tools. The usage of the term “technology” and its definition is thus lacking in expanded depth specific to a given project or context.

From this, I glean that “technology” has widely and generally been misunderstood, as well as widely and generally mis-used – both as a term used in social circumstances, and in its layered applications and contexts. Within arts fields, there still persists the dated notion of separating art from technology, and technology from art. Art students are often encouraged, for instance, “to use technology in their art practice” – a rather vague statement. The truth is that we are well into an era of art *being* technology and technology *being* art, both of which are better understood in tandem through a multiplicity of social and cultural perspectives.

There is recent momentum to shift into such a larger, whole-minded perspective in several academic departments; a notable example is a new undergraduate concentration at the Rhode Island School of Design (Providence, RI) called “Computation, Technology, and Culture” (CTC),<sup>43</sup> which encourages students to intentionally frame their thinking with all three of these elements combined in order to formulate meaningful dialogue moving forward.

With these two related societal issues in mind, I will now move onto some ideas and questions as to how we as human beings can open up our artistic and social practices to more empathetic and engaged approaches in the technical arts and beyond.

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<sup>43</sup> “Through the CTC concentration students gain an understanding of the ideas and techniques of writing in programming languages, while engaging with critical analysis, history, and theory concerning software systems, computational platforms, and associated technologies shaping society.” (<http://ctc.risd.edu/>)

In *Construction*, I emphasized the importance of conversation as a method of creation and have described my collaborations being comprised of many, many conversations. To me, conversation *is* collaboration, and collaboration *is* conversation, or a series of conversations. In this way, I see conversation and collaboration as technologies. Whether it is conversations with the audience, with other artists in the process, or with the code itself in the moment – conversation becomes a vital tool for continuous creation.

Speaking of conversing and collaborating as technologies, Lawrence Weschler, in his biography of the artist Robert Irwin, describes a time period in Irwin's life when Irwin made himself available, for free, to simply *talk* about anything. This confused galleries, curators, and institutions for a while. Irwin explains, "I mean, I don't stand on a corner and hand out leaflets. I'm not an evangelist. I'm not trying to sell anything. But on the other hand, if you ask me a question, you're going to get a half-hour answer. It doesn't make any difference whether or not it's a sophisticated question, only that you have a genuine interest in its properties."<sup>44</sup> In reflection to Irwin, Weschler writes [emphasis my own]:

Moreover, sometimes it is through the conversations which his talks provoke that Irwin achieves breakthroughs in his own inquiries. For although his researches have drifted into zones of ever greater complexity and sophistication, in another sense he has stayed in the same region ever since he began, which is to say right at the frontier of everybody's common sense and simple perception. *It is a dialogue that anyone can enter, a research in which every perception is useful.* Often Irwin's audiences include curious onlookers from all sorts of tangential disciplines, and a simple comment from one of them can redirect the course of Irwin's thinking for weeks. And vice versa.<sup>45</sup>

I would also like to bring up empathy in creating meaningful technologies. Artist and engineer Sophia Brueckner, in her master's thesis, "Out of Network: Technologies to

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<sup>44</sup> Weschler, 164.

<sup>45</sup> Weschler, 166.

Connect With Strangers” conducted at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Cambridge, MA), describes the core problem of social media networks: “Rather than promoting empathy and meaningful connection, social media sites ... promote comparison and competition,”<sup>46</sup> as is also rampant in our uses and developments of all kinds of new technologies today. Social media networks are, in theory, a technology for communities, and yet, while “social networks are clearly powerful and have the potential to do much good ... they need to be constructed in a completely different and much more sensitive, nuanced way.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, Brueckner proposes “a new type of social network that encourages meaningful interactions between strangers and does not allow for comparison.”<sup>48</sup> Along the same lines as Brueckner, I propose that we develop new approaches to technology in art that encourage new, meaningful interactions between strangers and do not rely on, nor perpetuate, hierarchical and masculine tendencies of control. What would it be like if we promoted empathy and meaning in our new technologies? What would happen if new technologies became meaningful social networks for the advancement of our communities?

We can begin expanding the definition of technology through more questions: how can we expand upon what technology *is* currently? What is currently imagined for the technology of the future? Is access open to / does such technology work for / make sense to many diverse groups of people? Can our present-day notions of future technology allow for an emphasis on a variety of methodologies and many unique outcomes, rather than rigidly focusing on the “one-goal” product?

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<sup>46</sup> Sophia Brueckner, “Out of Network: Technologies to Connect With Strangers,” 26.

<sup>47</sup> Brueckner, 26.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

Perhaps we must first re-imagine technology as an active and conscious *idea* within ourselves. In other words, the act of re-imagining is our crucial square one. What I propose is thus a very “human” technology: a technology of empathetically reconstructing the mind in order to question and put aside old and outdated patterns that have been taken for granted. By taking on this act of self-reconstruction – wherein every individual is responsible for their own reconstruction – I believe that we will then be able to collectively re-learn anew, again and again, and from there, re-create, again and again.

•

And just like that, we are back to the idea of construction – the impetus for this project – and, one step further: reconstruction, in which the destruction and discarding of old patterns, old approaches, and old behaviors become inevitable in order to make room for something simultaneously new and open for every individual. Now and moving forward, it is crucial that artists, art programs at academic institutions, and art-focused research centers take on this act of reconstruction. It’s not easy, and fiscally, it may be quite risky. But this is the arts we are talking about – without risk, what’s the point? What matters?

To reconstruct, as we would need to do, is to evaluate oneself and open one’s mind to imperfections that may have once been ignored. It’s important to realize that the “one-result” mentality is a myth – just like the mainstream.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> “The mainstream is a myth.” – Kenji Yoshino’s mantra in reference to dominant culture, in his text *Covering: the hidden assault on our civil rights*.

To reconstruct is to both face and embrace “failure,” because the greater possibility of the unknown is worth it. After all, such perceived failure is to what or whose standards? (A key question.)

To reconstruct is to be open-minded to experience a diversity of perspectives, because “when only one type of person is engaged in asking key questions about a specialty ... they miss entire frameworks for identifying and solving problems.”<sup>50</sup> Because when we talk about reconstruction, we are talking about the future.<sup>51</sup>

“Human values are developed through the experience of listening. With practice humanity could be transformed to a flexible culture of listeners. Listening involves a reciprocity of energy flow, exchange of energy, sympathetic vibration: tuning into the web of mutually supportive interconnected thoughts, feelings, dreams, and vital forces comprising our lives — empathy, the basis for compassion and love. Yes, Deep Listening is the foundation for a radically transformed social matrix, in which compassion and love are the core motivating principles guiding creative decision making and our actions in the world.”<sup>52</sup>

I look forward to continuing to construct and reconstruct new, unfinished worlds within my artistic practice and within my communities. My process as an artist, and my participation in society as a human being, are related: both are not about achieving perfection or achieving someone else’s ideal. And as I continue with my own navigations and encounters, I look forward to continuing the conversations.

---

<sup>50</sup> Rose Eveleth, “Why Aren’t There More Women Futurists?”  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/07/futurism-sexism-men/400097/>

<sup>51</sup> “For a long time the future has belonged to people who have not had to struggle...” – Madeleine Ashby, quoted from interview in Eveleth’s article

<sup>52</sup> Pauline Oliveros, “Quantum Listening: From Practice to Theory (To Practice Practice)”



construction

Figure 30: To imagine all and none of what could have happened



APPENDIX A  
PROGRAM

# CONSTRUCTION

CAROLINE PARK

with ALLIE TRIONFETTI  
ASHA TAMIRISA  
CECILIA SALAMA  
DEREK FUKUMORI  
JESSIE LAFARGUE  
KIMBERLY YOUNG  
LUKE MOLDOF  
NINA RUELLE  
PETER BUSSIGEL  
STEPHAN MOORE  
TIM ROVINELLI

12.4 12.5 12.6

6 pm / 8 pm

STUDIO 1, GRANOFF CENTER FOR THE CREATIVE ARTS  
BROWN UNIVERSITY  
154 ANGELL ST // PROVIDENCE RI

All performances are free, with limited seating. Reserve at [tinyurl.com/cparkconstruction](https://tinyurl.com/cparkconstruction)  
Audiences are encouraged to arrive early.

 CREATIVE ARTS COUNCIL

MEME

 DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

Figure 31: Poster

Space is meaningless without  
scale, containment, boundaries  
and direction.

-- Ada Louise Huxtable

# CONSTRUCTION

Figure 32: Program (front cover)

Hello.

This is a relaxed, contemplative space.

Please take a seat on a floor cushion, or on the floor if you prefer. Feel free to adjust yourself to feel comfortable and oriented in the space. You do not have to remain fixed.

There will be two CONSTRUCTIONS, back-to-back.

Each one is a chance-determined combination of curated sound, movement, and light: the three variables in this piece.

There are 3 sound scores, performed by pairs of musicians. All of the sound scores have silence near the middle; a temporal marker to clear the air.

There are 3 animating light scores, projecting different energy structures onto the space.

There is a movement score, performed by different navigators; creating and observing lines through space.

There is a chance that a CONSTRUCTION will have no sound, no movement, or no light, but there will always be two of three.

The variables for each CONSTRUCTION are represented through the light box.

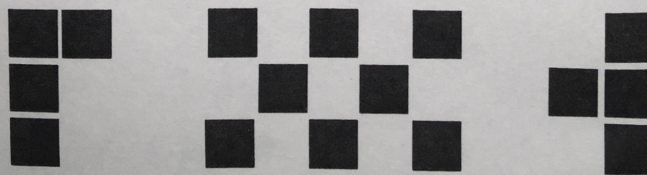


Figure 33: Program (inside)



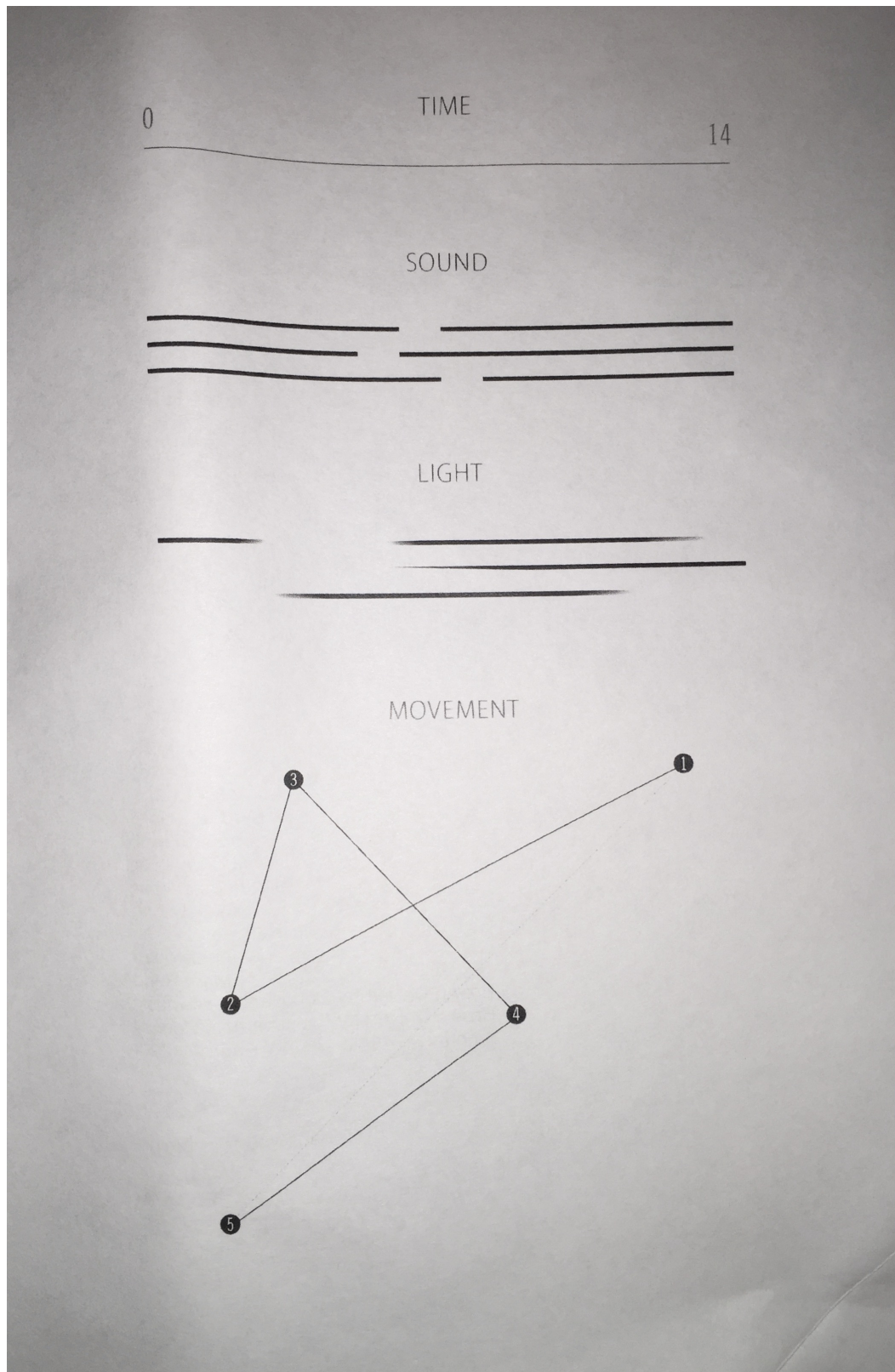


Figure 34: Program (inside)

Many thanks:

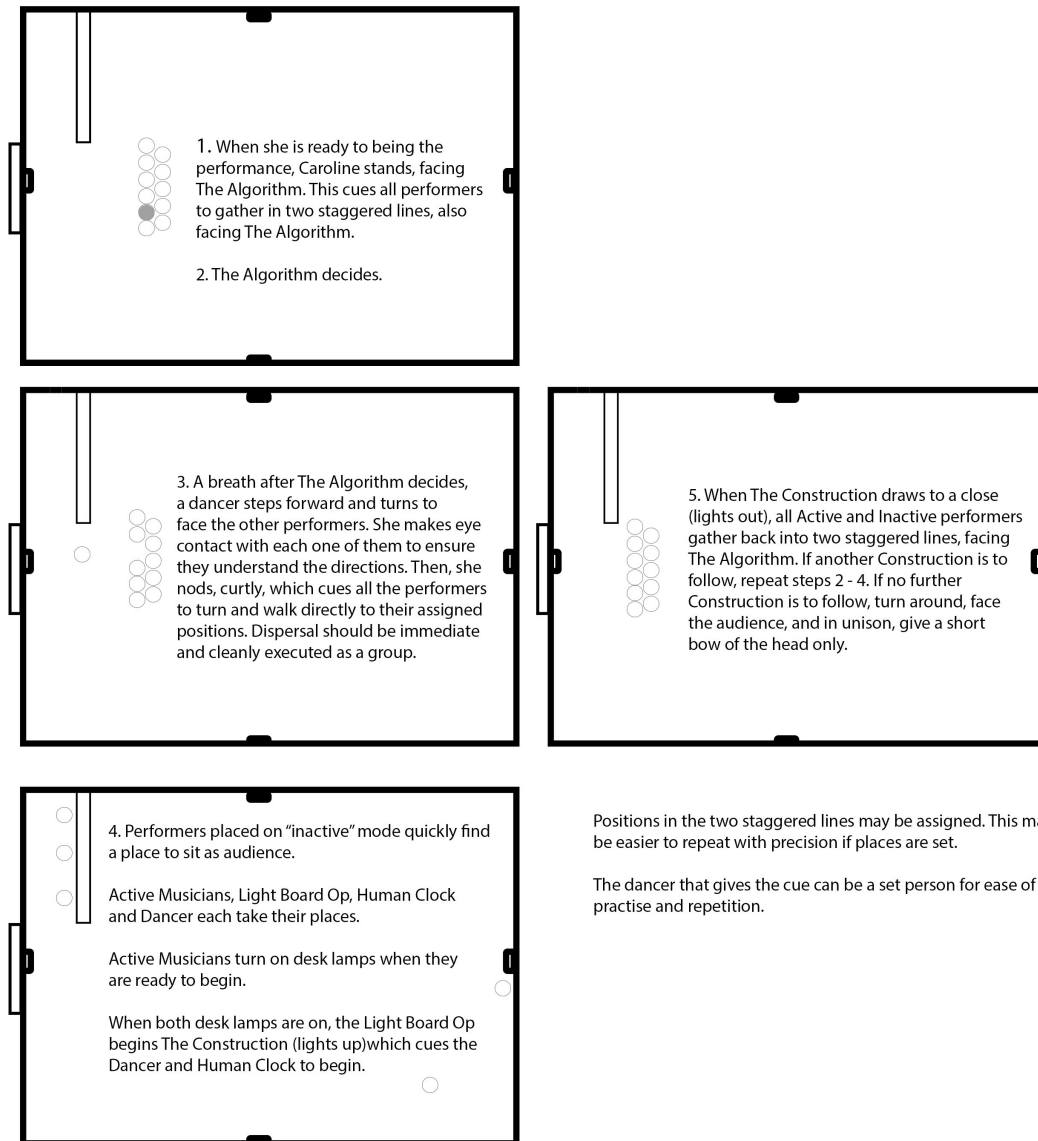
Asha Tamirisa  
Luke Moldof  
Peter Bussigel  
Stephan Moore  
Tim Rovinelli  
Kimberly Young  
Allie Trionfetti  
Jessie LaFargue  
Cecilia Salama  
Derek Fukumori  
Nina Ruelle  
Chira DelSesto  
Greg Picard  
Shawn Tavares  
Kris Kwaniewski  
Sophia LaCava-Bohanan  
Jim Moses  
Akiko Hatakeyama  
Butch Rovin  
Todd Winkler  
Ed Osborn  
John Ferguson  
John Mallia  
Bridget Ferrill  
Nicole Carroll  
Alex Dupuis  
Byrd McDaniel  
Bridget Ferrill  
Sophia Brueckner  
Frances Carpenter  
Ashley Lundh  
Kathleen Nelson  
Jennifer Vieira  
Mary Rego  
Brown University Department of Music  
Brown University Creative Arts Council  
Jennifer, Cynthia, Chung, Anthony Park

Thank you for coming.

Figure 35: Program (back cover)

## APPENDIX B

### MOVEMENT + SOUND SCORES



Positions in the two staggered lines may be assigned. This may be easier to repeat with precision if places are set.

The dancer that gives the cue can be a set person for ease of practise and repetition.

Figure 36: The Protocol, visually organized by Kim Young



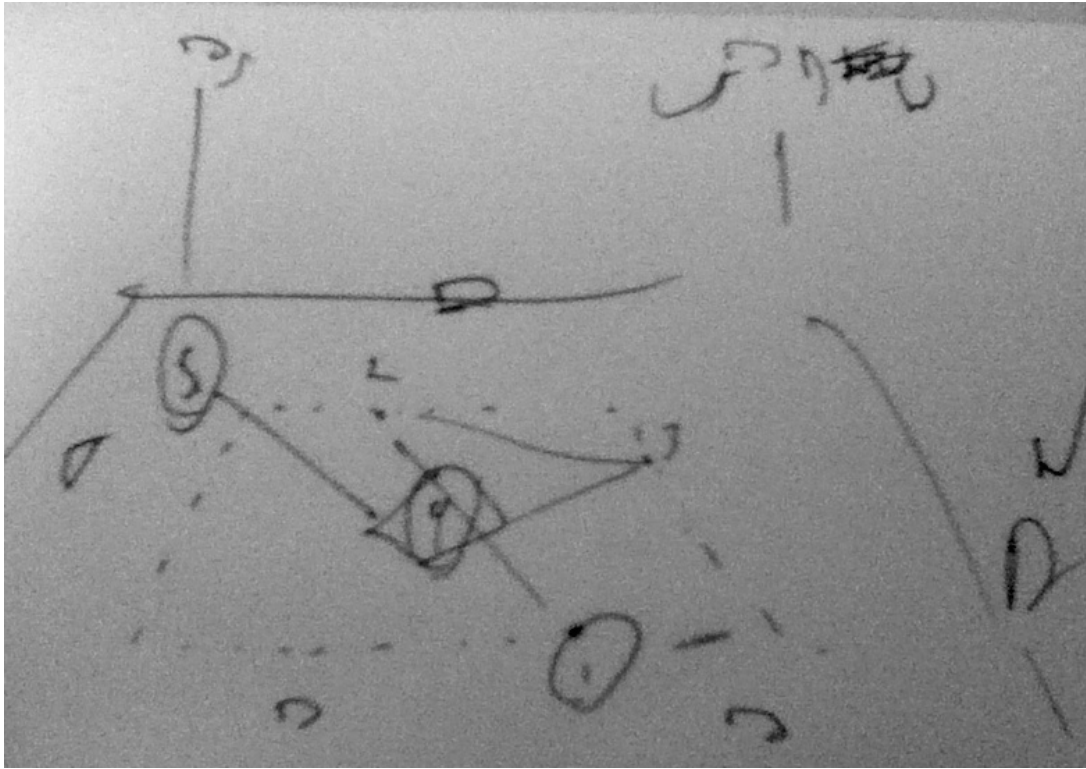


Figure 37: Movement navigation, score 1

MOVEMENT: TEXT-SCORE

enter from point 1

Observe space for 3 minutes

Follow one line,

Follow a second line,

Find a way to the center of the space

Find a way to sit, plainly, with no showmanship

Find a way to stand, plainly, with no showmanship

Observe space for 4 minutes

Turn a direction

Follow a second line

As smoothly and as directly as possible, make exit towards point 2.

Figure 38: Movement navigation, score 2

SCORE 1

Time structure: 0' — 6' — 7' — 14'

Any instrumentation.

—

0:00 — 6:00

Make a drone, using any method, pacing, and materials you would like.

6:00 — 7:00

Silence.

7:00 — 14:00

(Organically shift into a) New drone, that feels in contrast to, or is perhaps the opposite of, the drone you began with. Use any method, pacing, and materials you would like.

14:00

END

Figure 39: Sound score 1

**SCORE II**

Time structure: 0' — 5' — 6' — 14'

Frequency specific: E4 (329.6 Hz) + B4 (493.9 Hz)  
Any instrumentation.

---

0:00 — 5:00

Be a constant signal using pitches E4 and B4 as a  
sonic material frame.

5:00 — 6:00

Silence.

6:00 — 14:00

Be a different constant signal using pitches E4  
and B4 as a sonic material frame. Add/subtract  
as many or as few additional pitch(es) or  
frequency/(ies) of your choosing.

14:00

END

Figure 40: Sound score 2

### SCORE III

Time structure: 0' — 2' — 7' — 8' — 14'

Instrumentation: any and all field recordings, samples, etc.

---

0:00 — 2:00

Using any number of field recordings, samples, etc., create a textural soundscape.

2:00 — 7:00

Create a new textural soundscape in any method suitable to you, using any number of field recordings, samples, etc. The recordings used for this new textural soundscape could be the same ones you used previously, used in a different manner, or they could be new recordings, previously unused.

7:00 — 8:00

Silence.

8:00 — 14:00

Create a new textural soundscape in any method suitable to you, using any number of field recordings, samples, etc. The recordings used for this new textural soundscape could be the same ones you used previously, used in a different manner, or they could be new recordings, previously unused.

14:00

END

Figure 41: Sound score 3

APPENDIX C  
THE LIGHT BOX



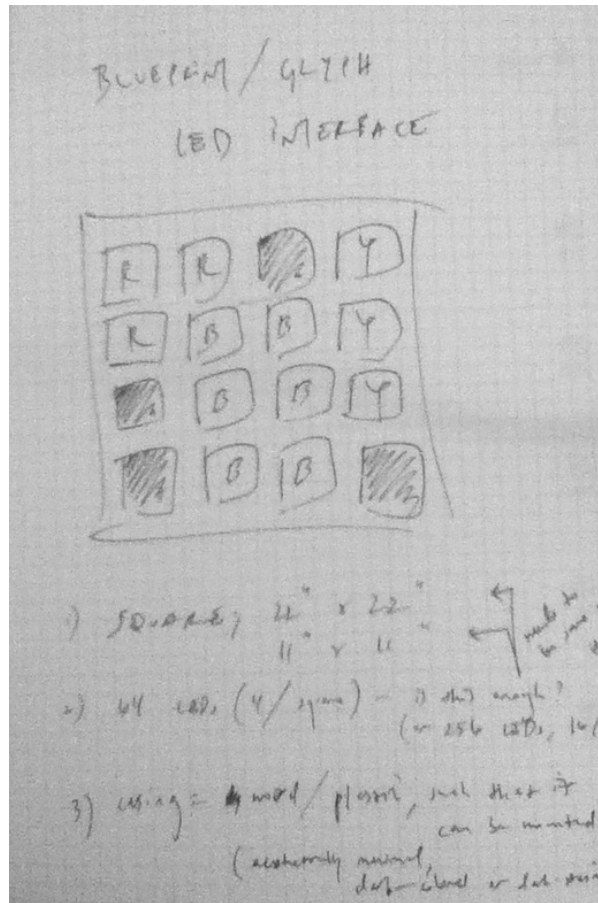


Figure 43: Early draft

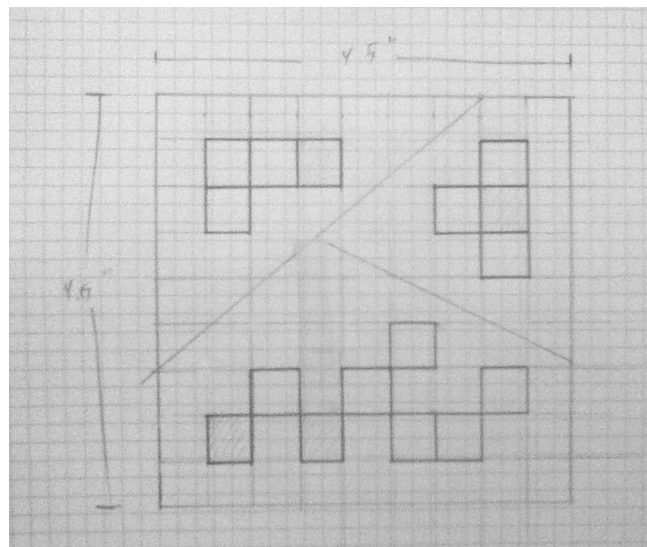


Figure 44: Early draft



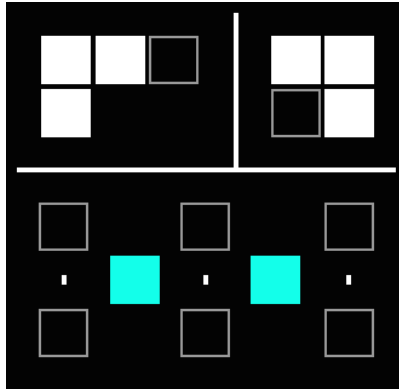


Figure 45: Early digital mock-up

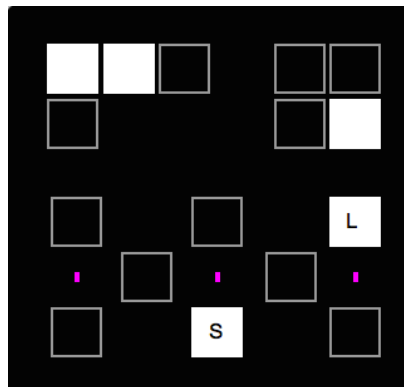


Figure 46: Early digital mock-up

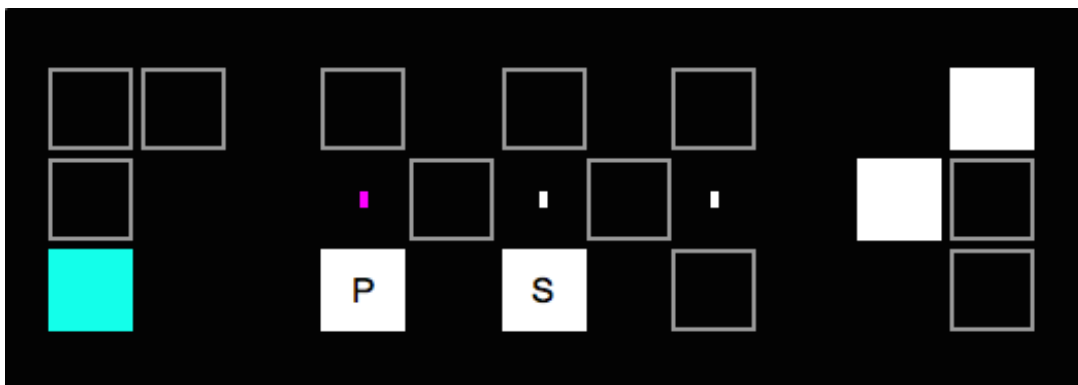


Figure 47: Final digital mock-up

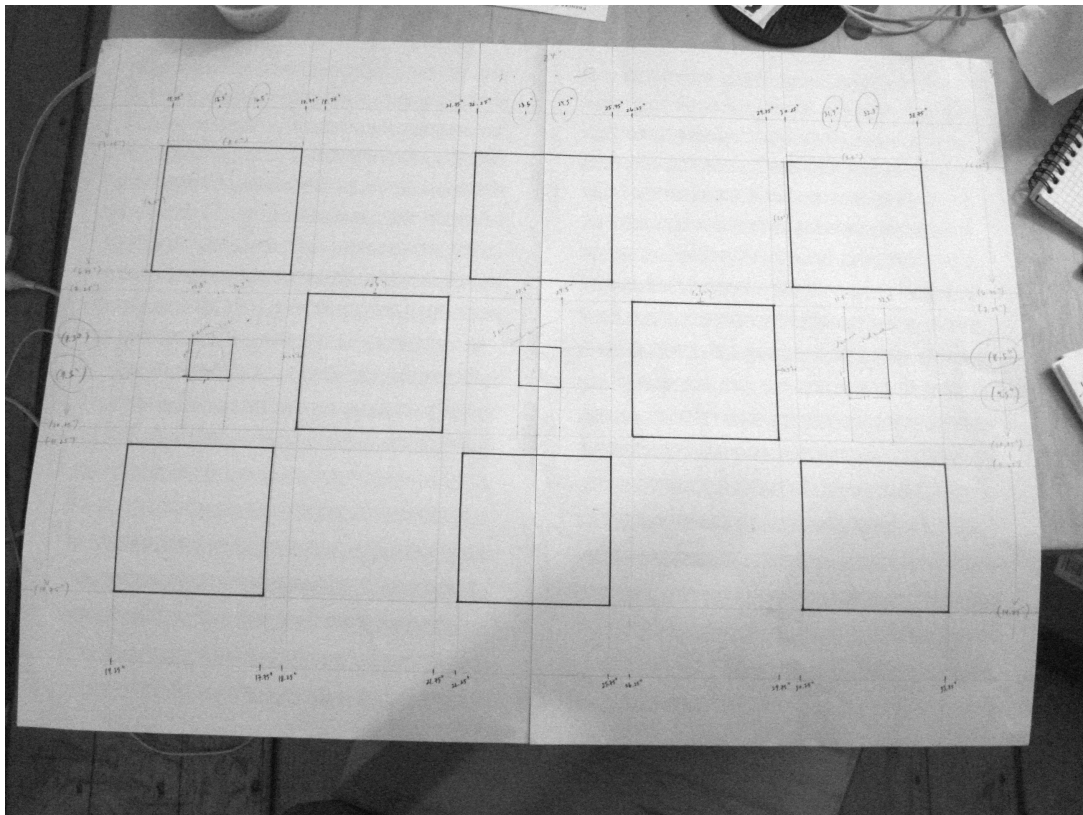


Figure 48: Final blueprint

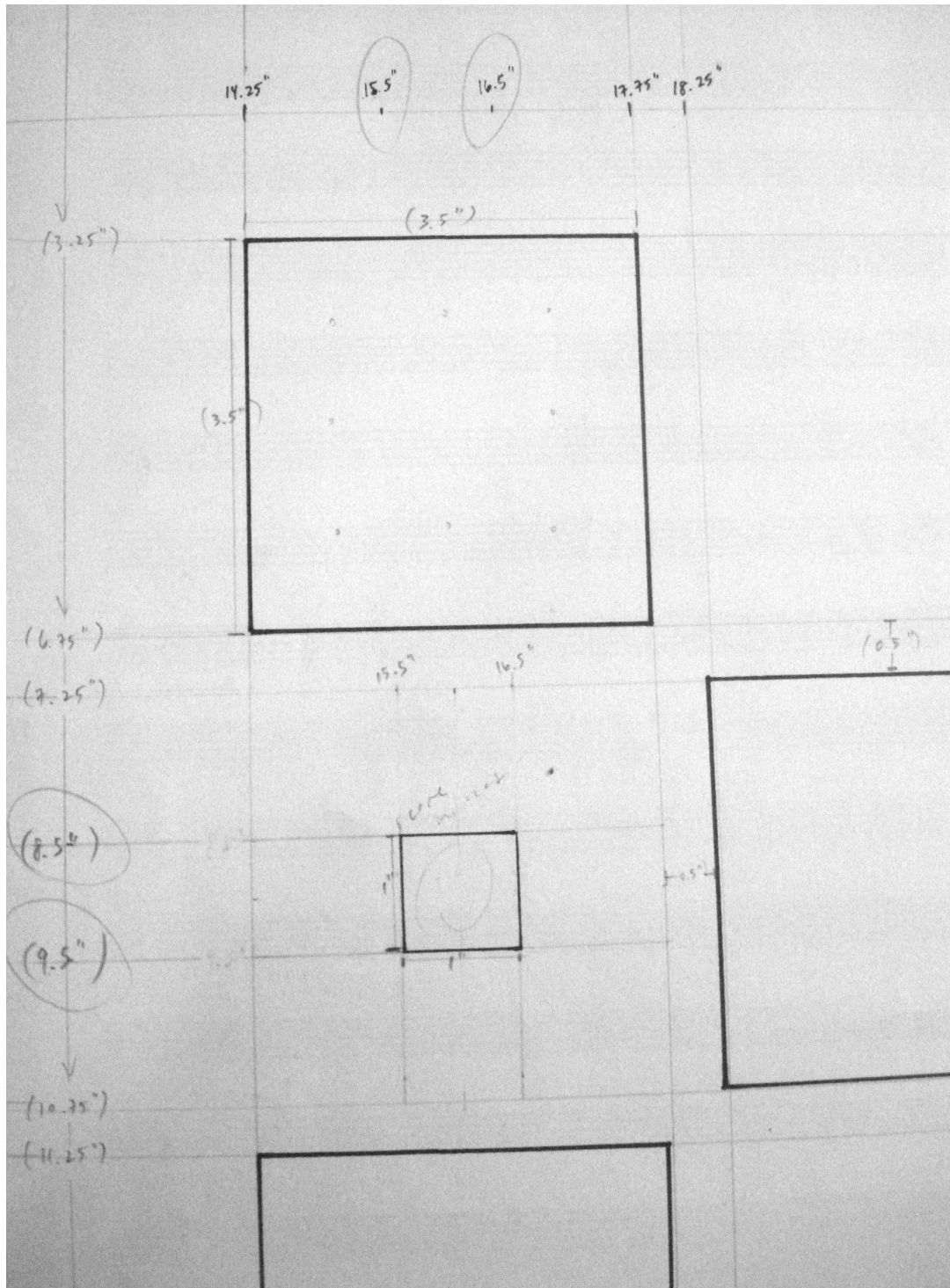


Figure 49: Final blueprint (detail)

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