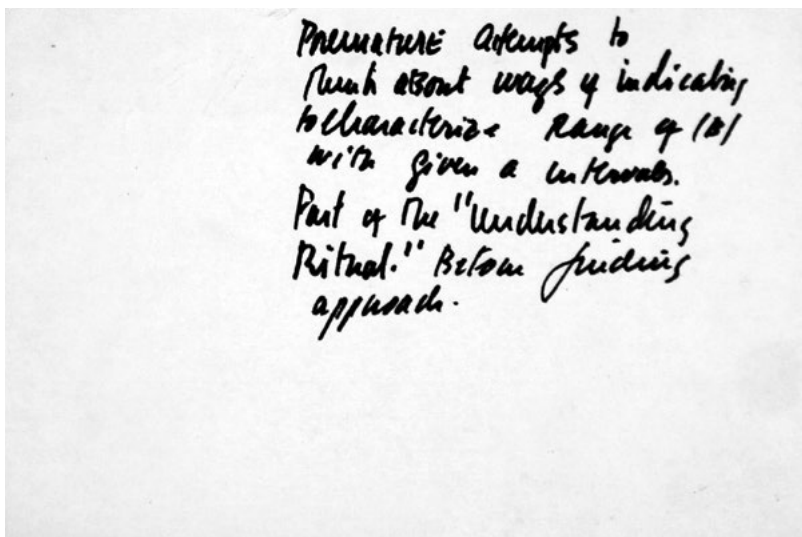


Introduction

“Premature attempts to think about ways of indicating [. . .] range of (B) with given A intervals. Part of the ‘Understanding Ritual.’ Before finding approach.”

Amy
Cimini
by
and
Bill
Dietz



A notecard found in one of Amacher's metal suitcases, likely dating from the mid-1970s

1. PREMATURE ATTEMPTS

Over the years, whenever I considered making a "record," I had to reject the idea. [. . .] Since all of my work is about the sensitivity human beings—biological intelligences—really have, but may not be conscious of, why should I make 40 minutes of sound, to be thrown on a turntable, while any number of automatic activities are being performed (by the listener)? [. . .] Totally compelled to give attention to these discoveries about mind, perception, and the physical nature of sound, rather than to accommodate ideas to *MUSICAL* or *RECORDING FORMATS*, I went ahead and developed these sound worlds, even though there were only limited ways at the time—performances and installations—to communicate them. I decided not to let thought or investigations be dominated by constraints of what I knew to be nearly terminal technologies. What has resulted is really a "new music," where many "ways of hearing" and "being with sound" can exist—experienced up to now only by audiences attending performances/installations I've created.¹

¹ "Letter to Wies Smals and Josie van Droffelaar," 253.

We have to start with her refusals. Because we still don't understand them. Maryanne Amacher's work cannot be experienced on a CD or on YouTube. Maryanne Amacher's work never happened in one-off festival slot performances. Maryanne Amacher's work is not music, if you assume that music is a discrete live or recorded stretch of audio transmitted through the air to be listened to attentively or distractedly in a concert or domestic setting. As vivid as the experience of some aspects of her work mediated by those formats undoubtedly is for admirers around the world, she vehemently refused those formats throughout her life. Now, for the first time since her passing in 2009, with the placement of her archive at the New York Public Library, we can finally begin to understand her work as she herself conceived it. This move toward approaching her work on her own terms is not a matter of fidelity (everyone is as free as ever to mishear and misunderstand), but one of intensity—of excitement. That is: as vivid as the second-hand or compromised experiences of her work might be, what sounds, ideas, sensations, and relations have remained inaccessible until now are drastically stronger and more urgent. The 100+ boxes of materials soon to be processed in the library contain not just "great music," but an oeuvre that demanded an expansion of the very notion of music—of art—itself, an oeuvre still poised to demand a revision of both music and art history. This volume understands itself as a celebratory peal marking the arrival of Amacher's corpus in the public sphere.

Do we perceive the sound in the room, in our heads, a great distance away, or do we experience all 3 dimensions clearly at the same time? Is the sound barely audible? Seeming to touch skin receptors only—the cochlea seems to "feel" untouched. Is the sound we perceive just enough stimuli to trigger patterns and melodies created within neural sensitivities, shaping our deepest responses? [. . .] In the room, does the sound drift, float, fall like

rain? Does it make such a clear shape in the air that we seem to 'see it' in front of our eyes? Is there no sound—no music in the room at all—but we continue to 'hear' sound as our minds process 'after-sound' from music perceived minutes ago? Is the apparent sound volume "larger than life," e.g., is it as powerful as a gigantic sounding house? Energy circulating through many rooms and floors. Some people say they "feel" their bodies grow out—expand—with this sound. [. . .] These descriptions refer to actual results—real effects of music I have made—not simply metaphors for possible experiences. However, there has been no way to reproduce these experiences other than in the performance/installation situation.²

- 2 "Dynamic Range: 'The Head Stretch,'" 266.
- 3 "About *The Mini Sound Series*," 246.
- 4 "Living Sound (Patent Pending)," 223.
- 5 *Sound House*, created for the Capp Street Project in 1985.
- 6 *A Step Into It, Imagining 1001 Years*, created in the Minoritenkirche for "tuned matters into sound," put on by the Kunst.Halle. Krems in 1995.
- 7 *Synaptic Island: A Psybertonal Topology*, created for the 21st Century Information Center's CyberSound Week in 1992.
- 8 "About *The Mini Sound Series*," 243.
- 9 Consider, for instance, her suggestion of using digital/laser disc in "Dynamic Range: 'The Head Stretch,'" 255; VHS HiFi in "Selections from a National Endowment for the Arts application for the publication of *Empty Words/Close-Up*," 199; and emerging virtual reality and gaming technologies in "Rare and Unusual Atmospheres," 359.

In the full version of the preceding passage (written in 1980 and published for the first time here), Amacher cites specific works and occasions in which each of the listed effects was achieved. Her work, as she envisioned it, however, may never have fully been realized in her lifetime. Large, architecturally "staged"³ works in St. Paul,⁴ San Francisco,⁵ Krems,⁶ and Tokushima⁷ are among the precious few that she would recount with affection. But what even to call such works? Where to place these works, in light of her emphatic rejection of both museum-oriented installation formats and concert-oriented recital formats?⁸ How even to begin thinking about works that occurred as developing serial occasions across multiple "sound-joined rooms," filled not only with structure-borne and air-borne sound, but with texts, videos, 3-D-projections, and props? The paucity of Amacher materials published in her lifetime in no way reflects the amount of work on hand, nor a fundamental impossibility of publication. On numerous occasions that turn up in this volume, she points toward potential ways to publish and distribute her work⁹—none of which, however, was ever supported such that it came to be.

This volume is chock full of traces of unrealized projects and unfunded initiatives. Though there is a pragmatic dimension to the horizon of (im)possibility that is almost omnipresent throughout her career (put bluntly, the work was too smart for the music and sound worlds, and too music and soundy for the art world), there is another dimension to this as well. In the wildy unbounded fancy of her imagination, there is a fundamental resistance to "realization" itself. One simple way to account for this: the work she was fabulating was paradigmatically incompatible with the world as currently structured along gendered, racialized, temporalized, capitalized fault lines. Or put another way, as she does in the 1988 interview with Jeffrey Bartone that opens Chapter IV of this volume:

Someone said that they really questioned whether it was such a good thing to have music like this,

- 10 "Interview with Jeffrey Bartone," 221.
- 11 See, for example, Bill Dietz, "Rare Decays" in *Blank Forms Magazine* 1, no. 2, and Amy Cimini, *Wild Sound: Maryanne Amacher and the Tenses of Audible Life* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

*because maybe you wouldn't need anything else if you could just live in this experience. And maybe that wasn't really so good socially. [laughs]*¹⁰

But how then to address a body of work that exists in the gap between idea and manifestation? This is a question each of us (your two authors) has variably contended with in our writings on Amacher.¹¹ It is also a question further compounded by the limited access to archival materials that has heretofore been possible—i.e., how to think a practice that affirms incompleteness with incomplete information? As broadly descriptive of the current state of Amacher research as that question may be, it is all the more central to the compiling of this volume, one which itself is profoundly partial—nowhere near (nor attempting to approximate) definitiveness nor comprehensiveness. If this book has a purpose beyond simply announcing the multiple forms of research that can now finally begin, it would be to also offer a sketch of the range and richness of unseen documents to be explored.

But, as a partial object based on partial knowledge ("before finding approach," as Amacher puts it in the notecard from which we take the title of this introduction¹²), a recent methodological intervention ("A Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography")¹³ proposed by Gökçe Günel, Saiba Varma, and Chika Watanabe seems helpful as a conceptual tool. Günel, Varma, and Watanabe write:

*By patchwork ethnography, we refer to ethnographic processes and protocols designed around short-term field visits, using fragmentary yet rigorous data, and other innovations that resist the fixity, holism, and certainty demanded in the publication process. Patchwork ethnography refers not to one-time, short, instrumental trips and relationships à la consultants, but rather, to research efforts that maintain the long-term commitments, language proficiency, contextual knowledge, and slow thinking that characterizes so-called traditional fieldwork [. . .], while fully attending to how changing living and working conditions are profoundly and irrevocably changing knowledge production. [. . .] [I]t expands what we consider acceptable materials, tools, and objects of our analyses. [. . .] Patchwork ethnography helps us refigure what counts as knowledge and what does not, what counts as research and what does not, and how we can transform realities that have been described to us as "limitations" and "constraints" into openings for new insights.*¹⁴

Our engagement with "A Manifesto" roots our introduction in time and place (the present) and takes chances on methodological divergences and interdisciplinary

- 12 The exact referent of this notecard is unknown. It presumably refers to the range of possible resultant otoacoustic tones ("B") elicited by a given acoustic interval ("a"). The notecard was found in a metal suitcase containing innumerable pages of "tone study" calculations likely dating from the mid-1970s.
- 13 Gökçe Günel, Saiba Varma, and Chika Watanabe, "A Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography," *Fieldsights* (Society for Cultural Anthropology), June 9, 2020, <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/a-manifesto-for-patchwork-ethnography>.
- 14 Günel, Varma, and Watanabe, "A Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography."

fault lines. Drafted amid the pandemic and uprisings across the United States in Spring 2020, “A Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography” calls for a research ethics that foregrounds how “intimate, personal, political and material concerns” mediate epistemic legitimacy and underpin the conditions of possibility for research in the first place. It calls us to read Amacher as herself a researcher who envisioned and embodied her own such ethics in different epistemic circumstances and in the tangles of other precarious historical conjunctures. What we’re implying here is not only that our approach to Amacher is undertaken as a kind of patchwork knowledge but that there is a latent or nascent or perhaps blindingly apparent aspect of this approach already at play in Amacher’s work and research. In making that claim, we at least hope to tether the form of our thinking and research to the radicality (absolutely also in the political sense of that word) of Amacher’s own.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

“Some idiot composers can’t write about their work,” Amacher explains to her parents in the mid-1960s letter that appears in this book’s first section. “I can and have,” she states flatly.¹⁵

- 15 “Letter to parents,” 23.
- 16 See Joe Auner, *Music in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* (New York: Norton, 2013); and Robert P. Morgan, “On the Analysis of Recent Music,” *Critical Inquiry* 4, no. 1 (1977): 33–53.

Amacher was aware at an early stage that the figure “composer-theorist” would mediate her legitimacy in some Euro-American modernist circles and cultivated a striking written voice whose epistemic standpoint intersected crystalline conceptual and technical expositions with a poetics that shimmers with wonder and exhilaration amid transforming acoustical interventions.¹⁶ Amacher’s letters suggest that she could be funny, sardonic, and unflinchingly direct in turns. Together with other documents from the period, they illuminate a younger contemporary of John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Lejaren Hiller who wove her original understandings of their work and musical thought into new audiovisual logics, mediatic worlds, and social configurations. From the beginning, she cast an x-ray eye upon institutional and epistemic hierarchies that could expose their limits on technical, aesthetic, and social terms at once. Amacher was adept at navigating these interstices. Notes that illuminate precise technical arrangements point toward abiding concern with listeners’ embodiments as well as joy, desire, anxiety, and frustration at the limitations posed by institutions and presenters. To approach new knowledges, Amacher applied a ferocious autodidactic sensibility to the epistemic edges at which physical, acoustical, and psychophysical knowledges seemed poised to shade into something else—be that compositional horizons, inter-subjective narrative formats, new mediatic environments, and other virtual transports.

Having announced the patchworked gambit that underpins this book, readers might be surprised, then, to discover that this volume also takes a chronological path through Amacher’s life and work. “Premature Attempts...” welcomes this tension. This book takes shape between the early 1960s through the late 2000s and unfolds in

six chronological chapters that move within decade- or half-decade-long timeframes. Only scraps of information about Amacher’s early life have been thus far pieced together. She was born in 1938 and raised in the far western Pennsylvania Wilds to a deeply Catholic mother and a father who worked for the railroad. A state-wide Senatorial Scholarship program funded her undergraduate degree in music at the University of Pennsylvania between 1955 and 1960. Chapters I and II chronicle an artist in her mid-20s whose focus and seriousness moved her earliest collaborators (as WBFO station manager William H. Siemering put it in a 2019 interview, “[It was] as though her life were her music”).¹⁷ In Chapter I, letters, unpublished notes, and score fragments touch upon early experiences at the University of Pennsylvania and University of Illinois, as

- 17 Interview with Amy Cimini, August 2019.

well as a formative fellowship as Creative Associate at the University of Buffalo between 1966 and 1967. It was in Buffalo that Amacher worked through her penultimate concert pieces like the electroacoustic *Adjacencies* and unrealized multi-format *Audjoins*, the experiences and frustrations with which led to her subsequent abandonment of concert settings as such in favor of broadcast and idiosyncratic formats to come. The working notes, sketches, photographs, and unrealized proposals that appear in Chapter II illuminate Amacher’s work with multi-sited situations and transmissions. The myriad articulations of remote audio connections that are the basis of the *City-Links* series (which unfolded in 21 parts between 1967 and 1988) are exemplarily traced in documents from *City-Links #9* to *City-Links #11* at the Walker Art Center in Fall 1974. This cluster of “links” suggest how Amacher conjured spectral audiovisualities by weaving transmission technology and environmental sound into one another, and extrapolated her insights as civic interventions in the unrealized and unfunded proposal “Anywhere City.” Chapters II and III both span Amacher’s time as a fellow in MIT’s Center for Advanced Visual Studies—a crucial period of interdisciplinary dialogue and exchange. Chapter III also chronicles projects with John Cage between 1975 and 1984 and the Merce Cunningham Company in the mid-1970s through statements, notebooks, and unrealized proposals that detail embodied sensitivities that Amacher called “perceptual geography” and describe mediatic circumstances that she created in order to bring them into being for listeners. In parallel with the public work documented in this chapter is an extensive and rigorous research-based practice examining these perceptual geographies and what are commonly known as psycho-acoustic phenomena (a term she had a conflicted relation with), as documented in selections from her *‘Additional Tones’ Workbook IV*.

These themes blossom in Chapter IV, devoted to the episodic sound projection events that made up *Music for Sound Joined Rooms* and the *Mini Sound Series*, begun in 1980 and 1985 respectively. Project notes, letters, and another in the long list of unfunded and unrealized proposals follow Amacher as she deepened a highly original approach to sound, audiovision, and architectural staging that provided listeners’ bodily awareness with dramaturgical supports in order to redouble their listening as also a transport into a story or virtual world. Chapter IV documents a unique period of confluence between institutional support and imaginative bloom—ideas as well as

materials generated in this period will remain a presence in Amacher's work and thought for the rest of her life. As Chapters V and VI move through the 1990s and 2000s, readers will see these methods and concepts proliferate across new social, technical, and presentational coordinates. The notes, proposals, reading list, and correspondence that make up Chapter V chronicle how Amacher developed approaches to working in virtual reality that in many ways build on gestures toward virtual transport that had been nascent in *Music for Sound Joined Rooms*, the *Mini Sound Series*, and *City-Links* since the early 1970s. In the "Concept Summary" for the unrealized Levi-Montalcini Variations, one glimpses a working method for composing perceptual geographies that accommodated deep and systematic collaboration with traditional instrumentalists (in this case, this would have been the Kronos String Quartet, who commissioned the work) as well as a profound reconception of the role of the listener. If realized, the work would have reinvented the architectural and experiential methods that Amacher had developed in *Music for Sound Joined Rooms* and *Mini Sound Series* as a new form of electroacoustic music that could have signaled a return to the concert hall, but on terms entirely her own.¹⁸

18 Selections from "Concept Summary: 'The Levi-Montalcini Variations for the Kronos String Quartet,'" 301.

In the final chapter, further correspondence, another unrealized and unfunded proposal, and a memorializing text alluding to Amacher's notions of the posthumous elucidate Amacher as a teacher and mentor. These fragments underscore that her soundworlds, enthusiasms, and ways of producing knowledge are also archived in the ears, practices, and lives of so many others.

A glance across these sections reveals a second organizational scheme at work. In addition to short informational editorial introductions to each of the documents throughout the volume, we open Chapters II–VI with interview transcriptions in which Amacher discusses ideas, projects, and working methods that illuminate the selected writings that follow. These dialogues introduce each section in Amacher's voice and suggest conceptual and thematic links that traverse variable and even unruly timelines. Some interviews are contemporaneous, others not. For example, Chapter III begins with her 1974 dialogue with WMFT station manager Norman Pelligrini that coincides with material traces that make up Chapter III's mid-1970s-focused selections. In contrast, Amacher's rare reflections on her childhood and early work in a 1985 interview with Barbara Golden on Bay Area Public Radio appear alongside the 1960s and early 1970s selections that make up Chapters I and II. Weaving together Amacher's spoken and written voices is another way to meditate on how memories, conjectures, and other partial gestures resonate across this text. Imagine this book's patchworked chronology as their fantastical sounding boards.

3. FINDING APPROACH

Although readers can certainly search out causal logics germane to a more traditional historical gambit, this book invites us to experience how sonic material and conceptual strategies interweave and

overlap between seemingly distinct projects. One gets the sense that many of Amacher's projects don't ever end so much as reestablish their conditions of audibility in another material intervention that unexpectedly finds new registers of analysis at play in her work and musical thought. To create a guide to the performances, exhibitions,

and participatory events that made up *In City, Buffalo* between October 20 and 22, 1967,¹⁹ for example, Amacher repurposes the symbols that she had used to represent percussion instruments and spatialization protocols in her earlier concert piece *Adjacencies* (1965/67).²⁰ These projects reappear in Chapter III, in a 1974 application to the NEA's City Options grant program as components in research on musical language and environmental sound.²¹ Complex histories emerge in these relays and continuations—histories entirely misunderstood in responses to Amacher's work that expected ever "new" audio materials as the basis for public presentations. To paraphrase Kalindi Vora, this calls us to reflect on what

forms of sociability and support would have been necessary to move Amacher's conceptualizations of sound and listening into future connections that she entangles with new spaces of social life.²²

The unrealized proposals that appear throughout the book catch Amacher's challenges to realization and realizability in action. In the 1974 proposal to the NEA City Options program, Amacher imagines technical scenarios that flouted the grant's timeline in the most basic sense: "This will be more efficiently and transparently be accomplished [. . .] as soon as the reproduction of sound other than loudspeaker reproduction is available. I think this will be soon—at most 2 to 3 years.

Many extraordinary possibilities will then become available."²³ Quibbling about practicalities would miss the point. What these proposals also propose is their own ceaseless rebeginning at another limit. And of course this rebeginning is not something that happens in a vacuum or out of sheer artistic stubbornness: consider the institutional addressees and relevant historical coordinates around which all of this unfolds. Amacher joined the Creative Associates at SUNY Buffalo in 1966 amid a post-Kennedy boom in U.S. foundation culture that worked in tandem with expanding public and private universities that opened new faculty lines as well as fellowship positions at interdisciplinary centers like the Creative Associates and Center for Advanced Visual Studies. In the letter to her parents, Amacher educates them about this moment in U.S. cultural policy. "The one place where a composer can get money without teaching a bunch of idiots and getting involved with stupid politics, is at Buffalo. They have a Ford Foundation grant for just these purposes; more schools will have this in the future."²⁴ Amacher was both wrong and right about this future. Between these two formative fellowships,

she mediated the Creative Associates' focus on music composition and performance in relation to the Center for Advanced Visual Studies' commitment to civic interventions and data-rich visual environments. She coordinated an exchange that brought CAs to CAVS and vice versa in 1975, one result of which was a performance

19 "In City" 49.

20 "Adjacencies," 37.

21 "Anywhere City," 125.

22 Kalindi Vora, *Life Support: Biocapital and the New History of Outsourced Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 21.

23 "Anywhere City," 132.

24 "Letter to parents," 23. CAs were supported by the Rockefeller Foundation, not the Ford Foundation.

- 25 Renée Levine-Packer, *This Life of Sounds: Evenings for New Music Buffalo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 150.
- 26 Toby Miller and George Yúdice, *Cultural Policy* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 49.
- 27 George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 31.

and tape composition with flutist Eberhard Blum titled *City-Links #13: Incoming Night*.²⁵ It's not hard to imagine Amacher as ever betwixt and between, as Keiko Prince illuminates in the afterword to this book.

Amacher lived out the institutional scenario that she described to her parents between 1966 and 1967 with the CAs and again between 1972 and 1976 at CAVS. Neither led to a permanent university appointment or another comparable period of stable institutional support. At the same time, the NEA budget increased by hundreds of percent throughout the 1970s.²⁶ This was an extension of the Johnson administration's use of social programs to manage crisis and route economic and political demands away from material redistribution and toward discourses of cultural membership.²⁷ This historical conjuncture intersected expressive culture with the biopolitical management of difference, dissent, and social value. Consider that among the projects that City Options funded were museum exhibitions, boosterish plans that thematized the upcoming U.S. bicentennial, and two art centers tied to the Alaska Pipeline on which construction began in 1975. Amacher proposed conceptual and sonic worlds whose social imagination pointed elsewhere, and raised questions that we can ask as much of our own historical moment as hers. How might Amacher's unfunded proposals serve as a partial and situated field guide to other power-differentiated configurations that music, sound, and auditory culture play various roles in holding together? How might they gather up other material interventions that register the impacts that this reactionary 1970s historical conjecture has left on spaces of life? How does her approach to the very task of proposing also suggest ways to reimagine conditions in which we research, work or collaborate? An unfunded proposal also produces something new and leaves behind a remainder that is at once productive and foreclosed. This remainder performs the unrealized proposal as something that is provocatively still ongoing.

Amid an efflorescence of large-scale work in the 1980s (as traced in Chapter IV), Amacher crystallized a stunning range of conceptual formats that paralleled her increasing distance from the institutional frameworks that she had ardently sought in the 1960s and 1970s. Formative initial stages in *Music for Sound Joined Rooms*, *Mini Sound Series*, and *Intelligent Life* were produced or proposed with project-based support from New Music America, Capp Street Gallery, the DAAD, De Appel, and other private and public sources. These intermedial and episodic projects had little precedent in music and art world contexts and in them, Amacher created conditions that empowered her to realize her own formats. Her break with both the proscenium-bound concert and continuous sound installation took up eclectic reference points located less in avant garde lineages than in a collage-like approach to popular forms.

I wanted the kind of engaging format television has developed—with all the “readymade mind stuff” a mini-series form implies—an evolving sound work “to be continued” as distinguished from

- 28 “About *The Mini Sound Series*,” 245. *a continuous installation or traditional concert genre. As a form, the mini-series is powerful and challenging, yet up to now, only television develops it.*²⁸

She found in mass media relatable and capacious forms that could be carefully reconfigured to address a listener's bodily awareness in a genre- and media-specific sort of alchemy. Amacher chose as reference points popular narrative forms through which stretches of heightened musicality could be woven into a diegesis that also revealed new social arrangements and technical knowledges coming into being. While this 1985 description references the immersive TV blockbuster miniseries that crested in U.S. media markets in the mid-1980s, she also forged this original format in dialogue with science fiction literature, news articles, 1930s Hollywood musicals, educational science television shows, and even opera.²⁹

- 29 Amy Cimini, “In Your Head: Notes on Maryanne Amacher's *Intelligent Life*,” in *The Opera Quarterly*, Volume 33, nos. 3-4, (Summer–Autumn 2017).

- 30 Untitled, unpublished note in the Amacher Collection.

- 31 “Maryanne Amacher: ‘Intelligent Life’ - Exhibition, Workshop, Concerts, Performances,” July 14–August 15, 2012, at the daadgalerie and various additional venues in Berlin.

By configuring structure-borne sound, ear-tone music, and other compositional prerogatives in relationship to these ready-made generic crucibles, Amacher created experiences that invited listeners to “walk in” to a story that was in complex ways “about” the speculative technical and social conditions that underpinned its telling in the first place. In an untitled and handwritten note, she summarizes, “I want to make a music that becomes popular. I want to make people cry because it touches too sensitive areas.”³⁰ Amacher had indeed created a format within which visitors could experience listening on the edge of materiality and fiction.

In conversation toward the daadgalerie's extensive 2012 Maryanne Amacher program,³¹ curator Axel J. Wieder noted the destructive consequences that the institutionalization of “sound art” as a siloed field brought with it for an artist like Amacher. For a practice already precariously situated between artistic disciplines (in a way that, at least at times, allowed Amacher to reap

the benefits of interdisciplinary funding streams), the emergence of this additional field into which her work could be miscategorized more often than not led to conceptual conflict with presenters and funders, as well as conflicts around the financial and presentational limitations of this amorphous and under-funded “genre.” Before the term—sound art—the lack of language allowed Amacher to maneuver her practice adroitly between visual art, “new music,” and academic research. With the term, the burden of constantly navigating her practice in and out of relation to the genre (as benefited a given project at given time) became an additional challenge, and more often a *boundary*, to realizing her work as she fully conceived it. Though sound art, in the sense we're pointing to here, emerged at the turn of the 1980s (insofar as it makes sense, we're gesturing toward the full gambit of institutional positionings of “sound in the gallery”), the fuller consequences of its institutionalization seem to be something Amacher would more and more be forced to contend with starting in the 1990s, and then for the rest of her life.

- 32 "Living Sound (Patent Pending)," 223.
- 33 "Selections from a Woodstock '94 folder," 323.
- 34 This remarkably underpaid presentation was a source of deep frustration for Amacher as her work was misunderstood as being incorporatable into a standardized listening presentation framework—a curatorial assumption essentially nullifying the core tenets of her practice.

Those consequences most often meant smaller budgets and the imperative to vie with sound art curators' variously specific (and restricting) assumptions about the field. Large-scale works (of *Sound House* or *Living Sound*³² magnitude) would be all but nonexistent in the United States from the 1990s on. Exceptional and prominent presentations in the U.S. did of course occur—for instance, the mysterious case of her performance at Woodstock '94³³ and her contribution to the 2002 Whitney Biennial³⁴—but as high-profile and visible as some of these might have been, none provided the infrastructural support to accommodate her full-scale work as she had at that point already been imagining it for decades. The discrepancy between public prominence and institutional support (a discrepancy brought to a new pitch following the release of the first Tzadik anthology of her "Sound Characters" in 1999) is a dynamic she was forced to negotiate for the rest of her career. Art world figures and rock stars swooned over her, and yet venues (galleries and music-spaces alike) offered her the same conditions they might have offered a singer-songwriter doing a one-off performance. In the last two decades of Amacher's life, her work—conceived of as a multi-modal investigation into mind and sensation—was realized almost exclusively in Europe, as well as in Mexico and Japan, or not realized at all.

Readers eager to glean insight into the boxes that comprise the Maryanne Amacher Collection can expect a rich but also recalcitrant introduction in these pages. In a book focused on writings and interviews, each selection makes this introduction in its own partial and situated way. One will read about enclosures, photographs, proposals, bibliographic references, and other audiovisual traces that do not appear in this book but at the same time index the Archive's mediatic complexity and point toward other written materials that could undoubtedly also appear in it or another book like it. Our selections can only gesture indirectly toward Archival materials like Amacher's annotations in scores, books, and articles, the photographs, letters, and paperwork that she kept, how and when she wrote notes to herself or how she created magnetic tapes and handled electronic instruments, and other media. We bring together selections that are in different degrees complete, polished, or fragmented, and we court an electric charge that holds research and uncertainty together in media res. This indistinct thrill raises methodological and ethical questions. Our selections do not summarize the Archive in miniature nor do we

cast the book as a representative part in relation to the Archive's putative whole. Conceptualizing the Archive in this would flout the patchworked ethics of narration that we imagine this volume to embrace. As Ann Laura Stoler writes, "[T]he archive has a capital 'A,' is figurative and leads elsewhere. It may represent neither a material site nor a set of documents. Rather, it may serve as a strong metaphor for any corpus of selective forgetting and collections."³⁵ We imagine the selections in this book to

- 35 Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form," in Carolyn Hamilton et al., eds., *Refiguring the Archive* (Dordrecht: Kulwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 87.

- 36 A clip from this speech that includes this statement is included in Elisabeth Schimana and Lena Tikhonova's 2013 video portrait of Amacher.
- 37 The formats of each of these seminars and listening seminars differed, but in essence, they have been a means to publicly (we as facilitators in dialogue with a public) and speculatively explore the parts of the Amacher we've had access to. In certain cases, these efforts have also been in tandem or a part of various attempts to present Amacher's work posthumously—as in, for instance, the cases of Amsterdam and Philadelphia, where the discursive occasions were a part of establishing a shared ground for thinking toward questions of realization.
- 38 The portion of the conversation in which this is said was removed in the editing process of "—even monsters need sleep," 385.
- 39 This specific term lifted from early Donna Haraway, though never quoted directly by Amacher herself, was very much a part of her conceptual vocabulary as attested not only by the presence of *Simians, Cyborgs, and Woman: The Reinvention of Nature* in Amacher's 1992 Mills College reading list ("Partial VR / Cyberspace Reading List," 298), but by Maryanne's own copy of that 1991 volume which contains her penciled-in marginalia throughout.

themselves comprise an "Archive" in this strong figural sense. Impasses, refusals, elisions, and partly-unrealities are subjects of knowledge in their own right and their disarticulations are also what holds this book together.

4. THE "UNDERSTANDING RITUAL"

Put another way, though we imagine the "patchwork" Archive of texts that make up this volume as an announcement of the work now possible in approaching the Amacher materials, the "weave" of our selection is not imagined as an announcement of a whole to come. We can probably look forward to something like a "Collected Writings of Maryanne Amacher" emerging at the hand of future researchers who will ask after the Archive in ways that we cannot foresee. The work this volume hopes to perform, however, is to underscore Amacher's critical and idiosyncratic approach to knowledge production per se, and thus preemptively fend off forms of normativizing canonization and hagiography. Which is to say: any volume that would fail to register the fundamental resistance of Amacher's work and thinking to the notion of comprehensivity itself would do a major disservice to that which she spent her life endeavoring to articulate. In 2005, in a speech given in Linz, Austria, upon receipt of Ars Electronica's highest prize (the Golden Nica), Amacher says, "I just like learning more, because I don't understand this. And so if I can associate my stupid sound work [with] learning more about the reality of the world—of my existence."³⁶ In this sense, our hope is that this book not only demonstrates, but also invites readers into, "the 'understanding' ritual" alluded to in the quotation that is our title—and further, that the space of "before finding approach" might remain perpetual.

How specifically this can happen need not emulate Amacher's own approach, nor our own. (Here, we're referring to the series of public seminars and listening sessions we've offered since 2016 in the United States and Europe.³⁷) Keiko Prince signals as much in her enthusiasm for "what would come out of each of [us],"³⁸ in terms of approaching Amacher's work without her. Appreciation and recognition of Amacher's radical insistence on situated knowledge,³⁹ on operating as much as possible from and with attention to her own emergent subjective specificity in listening and thought, should not be confused with recognition and appreciation for the specific qualities of her specificity—of her "listening mind"⁴⁰—per se. To take her approach seriously is to take ourselves seriously—to likewise operate in accordance with our awareness of and attention to the specificity of our own situatednesses. Günel, Varma, and Watanabe explicitly echo this early Donna Haraway moment when

- 40 See "Interview with Eliot Handelman," 286, and "Selections from 'Concept Summary – *The Levi-Montalcini Variations for the Kronos String Quartet*,'" 303.
- 41 Günel, Varma, and Watanabe, "A Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography."
- 42 Named after the fictional "top secret" lab featured in the unpublished treatment for Amacher's unrealized "media opera" *Intelligent Life*. See "Letter to Wies Smals and Josine van Droffelaar," 253.
- 43 This phrase and concept comes from a working document toward the unrealized series, "Rare and Unusual Atmospheres" (359), but seems to date back to ideas likewise found in the unpublished *Intelligent Life* treatment. See "Letter to Wies Smals and Josine van Droffelaar," 253.
- 44 To date, Supreme Connections has presented at the Berlin Funkhaus, Tate Modern, in the Bienal de São Paulo, the Stedelijk Museum, and in the Holy Apostles and The Mediator Church in Philadelphia.
- 45 A selection of the shifting members thus far has included Kabir Carter, Sergei and Stefan Tcherepnin, Nora Schultz, Keiko Prince, and Woody Sullender, as well as the authors of this text.
- 46 Chapter IV in this volume outlines the rough model the group is drawing on here.

writing, "[t]he methodological innovation of patchwork ethnography reconceptualizes research as working with rather than against the gaps, constraints, partial knowledge, and diverse commitments that characterize all knowledge production."⁴¹ In that sense, continuing Amacher's project without her, without her living ears, is as in keeping with that project as it is fundamentally opposed to any closed, complete, whole notion of a "her" herself.

Some form of this understanding has also been the guiding principle of the variably populated collective Supreme Connections in their (our) attempts at posthumously presenting Amacher's work. Since 2012, Supreme Connections⁴² has mounted large-scale "hearing as if"⁴³ installations that speculatively apply Amacher's working methodologies to sites she herself never visited or worked in.⁴⁴ No attempt is made by the collective⁴⁵ to reenact or restage given "works" by Amacher, and as such in a strict sense (one measured in accordance with still hegemonic notions of the autonomous art work and its work-concept) no claim can be made that the public outputs of the group's process are Amacher's work at all. The hope of the collective is instead that what it can offer is more in keeping with the spirit of Amacher's work and project than any blindly faithful reconstruction could hope to be. Based on personal experience working with Amacher as well as on extensive time spent with the Amacher archival materials, the members of Supreme Connections turn their attention in a given situation to their own "listening minds" in relation to extant Amacher materials that might become part of an installation (audio, video, images, text) and the space itself (its architectural idiosyncrasies and potential to become a structure-borne substrate⁴⁶ for the transmission of the Amacher materials). As participants in the group, we are of course in no position to judge the ultimate success of any of these attempts, but what we can say is that this approach at least stands as that most in keeping with the material and conceptual practices (in all their undigested distance from contemporary art and music orthodoxies) as best we can trace them in the Amacher collection today.

The invitation, or perhaps the *necessity*, for you, for us, to enter into the work of "listening mind" and "the 'understanding ritual,'" to approach and fully appreciate Amacher's project, is not suggested lightly. That such an understanding would imply fundamental "recombinations of [notions of] 'home' and 'field,'"⁴⁷ as the authors of "Patchwork" put it, is something Amacher understood implicitly. Their intervention on ethnographic protocols, in other words, invite us to see clearly how Amacher moved knowledge across and

- 47 Günel, Varma, and Watanabe, "A Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography."

- 48 "Email to Micah Siver," 371.

- 49 Unpublished treatment for *Intelligent Life*. See "Letter to Wies Smals and Josine van Droffelaar," 253.

against power-differentiated coordinates in her own historical moment. A document like her 2007 email to Micah Silver,⁴⁸ in its energy and enthusiasm for late-night at-home deep-dives into the websites of scientific research institutions, captures a trace of the texture of her home research-based practice (which should not be confused with widespread notions of "artistic research" in their scientific dimension), of her porous and joyful interaction with ideas and their mediation. One of the most important "missing objects" in this volume (the letter to Wies Smals and Josine van Droffelaar gestures toward it) is the already alluded-to, unpublished treatment for Amacher's unrealized "media opera," *Intelligent Life*. Written in the first years of the 1980s, this 100+ page treatment exists in various versions and volumes, themselves confounding attempts at definitiveness. In this treatment, she

imagines a future (in 2021) in which music as we currently know it has in part been replaced by "The Home Composing Teams": "adventurous symbiotic partnerships between biological and silicon intelligences."⁴⁹ This imagined future paradigm is based entirely on engaging with the latent capacities of the sensorium—on the latent intelligences of "listening mind."

If in 2020 we're far from realizing the "BIO-MUSIC scores" and "MAD [Modulating Auditory Dimension] Scores" that she imagines in her text, perhaps engaging with Amacher's writing, in the interface of a book like this, in full awareness of its radicality, is at least a step toward this project. Or as she puts it,

- 50 Unpublished treatment for *Intelligent Life*. See "Letter to Wies Smals and Josie van Droffelaar," 253.

*This fresh, IMAGINATIVE sensitivity for "seeing and hearing" was yet another way THE VITAL ARTS enhanced conscious attention to human perception and response. We cultivate the growth of NEW SYNAPSES CONSCIOUSLY, through our music and sound, and call this NEW SONG.*⁵⁰