

SELF-ACTUALIZATION: TRANSCENDENTALIST DISCOURSE IN THE WORK OF
STUART SAUNDERS SMITH

José Augusto Duarte Lacerda

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Committee:

Roger Schupp, Advisor

Timothy Messer-Kruse
Graduate Faculty Representative

Marilyn Shrude

Robert Wallace

Thomas Rosenkranz

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ABSTRACT

Roger Schupp, Advisor

Born and raised in Maine, composer Stuart Saunders Smith (1948) grew up immersed in a milieu that still echoed the influence of the nineteenth-century literary movement known as Transcendentalism. The work of key Transcendentalist figures, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, show the movement's emphasis on autonomy, intuition, pacifism, and social justice. But Transcendentalism also maintains a spiritual focus: a claim that each person is part of a single universal spirit—"Oneness." However, this "Oneness" does not equate to homogeneity of ideas and individual voices. Rather, each person's divine worth grants them autonomy of thought and agency. Both the social and spiritual ideas of Transcendentalism have informed Smith's music, his writings on music compositional process, and his personal life.

Amongst the Transcendentalist notions displayed in Smith's music, pacifism and anti-technologism appear in his use of intricate rhythms. A Thoreauvian anti-materialism can be found in Smith's limited use of instrumentation and in his concept of "percussion ecology." Moreover, the Transcendentalist non-teleological stance is reflected in Smith's tendency to write evening-length pieces that disregard form, his recurring references to New England imagery, and his use of non-sequiturs. Finally, the idea of Oneness is demonstrated through Smith's endeavor to level the roles of composer, performer, and audience, shown particularly in works that Smith categorizes as "trans-media systems," "mobile compositions," and "co-existence pieces."

Other important Transcendentalist notions recurrent in Smith's work and compositional process include: intuition, experience, thought autonomy, isolation, self-reliance, and self-actualization. Smith's focus on these ideas has rendered his overall discourse and much of his

compositions antithetical to musical formalism, which implies focus on technique and systematic development. Instead, Smith understands that a composition should arise from a collaboration between intuition and experience. In other words, in Smith's compositional process, experience "filtered" through intuition is always paramount to pre-compositional systems (such as serialism). This stance suggests that Smith's music is part of a lineage of thought and aesthetic expression that traces back to the Transcendentalists: the idea of facing tradition critically and developing critical thought and free agency (understanding that intuition generates these stances) as the primary sources of artistic creation.

This document is dedicated to the memory of my father, José Eduardo Rebello Lacerda.

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INTRODUCTION

Near the end of the nineteenth century, American author Octavius B. Frothingham argued that New England was a place where “the sentiment of individual freedom was active.”¹ New Englanders, Frothingham added, acknowledged “that it takes all sorts of people to make a world, and the many minds of the many men were respected.”² In this diverse environment, debates around slavery, Christian faith, education, and societal organization effervesced in town meetings, churches, and educational institutions. New England was, therefore, an environment primed for the birth and flourishing of the American literary and philosophical movement known as Transcendentalism, which has arguably helped shape American society since its development in the 1830s.

Born and raised in New England over a century after the apex of the movement, composer Stuart Saunders Smith (b. 1948, Portland, ME) grew up immersed in an environment that exemplified—as it still does—the cultural impact of Transcendentalism. Although the movement flourished a hundred years before Smith was born, its ideas have become part of New England’s consciousness. Smith is no exception. While different literary figures of the region, from Robert Lowell to Anne Sexton, have informed Smith’s work, it is particularly the Transcendentalist authors that inform much of the ethos behind his music, his writings on music, his compositional process, and his notions regarding the social role of the artist.

The term “transcendentalism,” a philosophical attitude, traces back to the beginnings of German philosophical idealism and is frequently tied to philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-

¹ Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *Transcendentalism in New England: A History* (New York: G.O. Putnam’s Sons, 1876), 107.

² *Ibid.*

1804).³ Generally speaking, transcendental philosophy assumes that knowledge is not acquired empirically; rather, knowledge is contingent on a reason that transcends “the limitations of thought imposed by empiricism.”⁴ In Kantian philosophy, reason is the human “supreme faculty,” a development of Descartes’s doctrine of “innate ideas.”⁵ Reason creates human intuition, subordinates all other faculties, and shapes our understanding of the universe, divinity, and reality.⁶ The ideas of Kant and of the German idealists who succeeded him influenced the Transcendentalist ideas about knowledge, humanity, divinity, and the universe.

It is problematic, however, to determine an exact system of tenets developed by the Transcendentalists, because the ideas of each author did not always converge into a coherent system. Attempts to find common characteristics have often produced definitions that are too abstract and broad. Nevertheless, Frothingham, who aligned himself with the movement for a short period of his life, proposed a useful explanation that can help us begin to understand general Transcendentalist motivations. He defined Transcendentalism as “an assertion of the inalienable worth of man,” as well as “an assertion of the divinity in instinct, [and] the transference of supernatural attributes to the natural contribution of mankind.”⁷ His definition implies two characteristics inherent to Transcendentalist discourse: each individual is a free agent and each human is divine (or at least possessor of a divine intuition). These aspects are well exposed in the essays of the movement’s most representative figure Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), such as *Self-Reliance* and *The Over-Soul*. As implied by Frothingham’s definition and by Emerson’s essays, Transcendentalism claimed that each person was a partaker of a single

³ In the present work, “Transcendentalism” or “Transcendentalist,” referring specifically to the New England movement, will always be addressed as proper nouns, with a capital “T. When referring to the philosophical attitude developed in Germany, the term will not be capitalized.

⁴ Art Berman, *Preface to Modernism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 15.

⁵ Frothingham, *Transcendentalism in New England*, 14-22.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 136

universal spirit—“Oneness.” However, most importantly, this “Oneness” did manifest in a homogeneous mass of ideas and individuals. Rather, it meant that each person’s divine worth granted them autonomy of thought and agency.

To further refine these provisional definitions of Transcendentalism, in this document I will refer to an array of notions that recur in the works of the two authors who are still accepted as Transcendentalism’s main pillars: Emerson and his protégé Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). Their works consistently imply or directly refer to keywords such as innate knowledge, intuition, experience, thought autonomy, isolation, self-reliance, self-actualization, universal soul, Oneness, coexistence, pacifism, anti-materialism, anti-technologism, and non-teleology. In Chapter 1, I explain some of these terms so as to provide a basis for my later discussion, which encompasses Smith’s life, music, and musicological writings. In this chapter, I will utilize crucial Transcendentalist texts such as, but not limited to, Emerson’s *The American Scholar*; his above-mentioned *Self-Reliance* and *The Over-Soul*; Thoreau’s *Walden*; and various writings about the Transcendentalists. Because this document is a musicological research project on the music of Stuart Saunders Smith rather than a philosophical or historical treatise, I will frequently use simplified appropriations of philosophical terms. Therefore, terms such as intuition, innate knowledge, and Kantian reason will be used interchangeably. Their application in different occasions will happen for stylistic reasons, in order to not become redundant.

In Chapter 2, I present contrasting notions concerning transcendentalism in Western art and music, related to but not specifically linked to New England Transcendentalism, which will help clarify ideas from New England Transcendentalism as applied to Smith’s music. In music, the term “transcendentalism” has been understood as counter to artistic “formalism.” Leonard B. Meyer has identified “transcendentalism” within music that emphasizes the listening experience

rather than pre-compositional systems. Richard Taruskin has applied the term “transcendentalist” to composers who seek to convey a “maximalist” notion of the individual as a partaker of a universal unity. On the other hand, according to authors such as Leonard B. Meyer and Art Berman, “formalism” implies focus on the technical aspects behind the composition.

After these more general discussions of Transcendentalism and transcendentalism, in Chapter 3, I discuss some of the key Transcendentalist notions as applied to Smith’s life. This chapter reflects only on a small portion of a long interview I conducted with Smith in November 2013, in which we discussed his life stances (political, spiritual, and artistic) as paralleled to Thoreau’s *Walden*. I use this chapter as a bridge into the two last chapters, where I analyze Smith’s biographical details and personal beliefs in relation to his music. Smith’s childhood was marked by constant motivation for what he calls “self-actualization,” a process wherein his surroundings inspired him to autonomously develop personal ideas about reality and society. This, alongside his Quaker faith, has led Smith to understand that there is an aspect of the divine in everyone; hence, spirituality, intellectual autonomy, intuition, pacifism, and social justice are principles that inevitably reflect in his music. The concurrence of these ideas ties Smith’s work to the discourse of the Transcendentalists.

Smith started his music studies at the age of six. His teacher, Charles Newcomb, “a retired vaudeville drummer,” trained the young student in music reading and percussion techniques—especially drumset—and motivated him to improvise and compose music.⁸ As a teenager, he became increasingly interested in jazz music, participating in combos that focused on free improvisation. At this time, Smith and his bandmates were not aware of labels such as

⁸ Stuart Saunders Smith, “Interview with Stuart Saunders Smith,” by Jude Traxler, *Ex Tempore* 14, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2008), <http://www.ex-tempore.org/traxler.htm>.

free jazz.⁹ In 1966, he attended the Berklee College of Music with intentions to refine his jazz drumset skills. Smith was already interested in American modernist poetry, having written “sound poetry, chance poetry, and free verse, although he was never formally exposed to any of these forms and had no context or terminology for the work.”¹⁰ His taste for poetry developed into an interest of using spoken word in a large bulk of his repertoire, starting with his first opus *Poems I, II, III* (1971) for brake drums and narrator. From 1967 until 1972, he pursued undergraduate and master’s studies in percussion performance with Alexander Lepak at the Hartt School of Music. Interested in refining his compositional skills, Smith also studied with composer Edward Diemente while pursuing his master’s degree. This growing interest in composition led him to pursue doctoral studies in composition at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). Headed by mentors such as Salvatore Martirano, Herbert Brün, and Ben Johnston, UIUC’s composition studio was one of the most vibrant in the United States in the 1970’s. In spite of his awareness of different musical trends, such as American experimentalism and Euro-American serialism, Smith developed an idiosyncratic compositional style, particularly aided by his constant philosophical debates with Brün. His compositional identity was already mature when he composed the *Links Series of Vibraphone Essays*, still as a student in Illinois. This widely performed series of three solo pieces was commissioned by Smith’s wife—music publisher and editor Sylvia Smith—and premiered by UIUC’s percussion professor Tom Siwe in 1974. In the next two decades, the *Links* series grew to eleven pieces, some of them featuring other instruments alongside the vibraphone.

Ever since the composition of *Links*, Smith has frequently written for the vibraphone.

Even though the composer’s repertoire is comprised of diverse formations of solo and chamber

⁹ Stuart Saunders Smith and Tom Goldstein, “Inner-Views,” *Perspectives of New Music* 36, no. 2 (Summer 1998), 196-197.

¹⁰ John P Welsh, *The Music of Stuart Saunders Smith*. (New York: Excelsior, 1995), xxvii.

music, percussion music has constituted the largest bulk of his output. In particular, composing for the solo vibraphone has become analogous to writing entries in his life diary. Percussionist Steven Schick compares the *Links* series to the journals of Thoreau.¹¹ I consider this sentiment applicable to Smith's entire work, because each of his pieces is best described as a journal entry that tells memories of his musical experiences. I develop this idea particularly in Chapter 4.

During Smith's compositional process, experience-based aural imprints manifest as melodies and rhythms that arise intuitively, without logical pre-planning. Smith has frequently implied that true art is the result of collaboration between knowledge gained through experience and intuition.¹² Intuition is subordinate to Kantian reason rather than to the compositional systems learned in academia—or from “conditioning,” as he likes to say. Smith has had a long academic career; he taught at the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) from 1975 until 2011. Nonetheless, he has always believed that in the art-making process, the experience gathered in academia has to be rooted by intuition. So I contend that in Smith's compositional process, a kind of “filtered” experience is always paramount to conditioning. His intuition heads this process by letting not only his musical, but also his familial, political, and spiritual backgrounds, come across in the music that emerges from it.

In Chapter 4, I also focus on how Transcendentalist ideas are part of Smith's compositional process and in his music. In order to do so, I will utilize Smith's musical scores, academic writings, interviews, and some of our personal correspondence in addition to Transcendentalist texts. In this discussion, I will expose how his use of intricate rhythms reflects his pacifism and anti-technologism, as well as how his limited use of instrumentation reflects his

¹¹ Steve Schick, “Learning to Fly: A particular Kind of Balance,” notes to *Stuart Saunders Smith: The Links Series of Vibraphone Essays* (New World Records, CD 80690-2, 2009), 5.

¹² Although Smith does not use these very words, this notion is recurrent in his interviews and musicological writings.

anti-materialism. Furthermore, I will address how his recent tendency to write evening-length pieces that disregard form and his frequent references to New England imagery reflect his non-teleological behavior. Finally, I will show how his so-called “trans-media systems,” “mobile compositions,” and “co-existence pieces,”¹³ as well as a piece called *Here and There*, reflect an endeavor to symbolically express the Transcendentalist notion of Oneness.

Finally, I use Chapter 5 to discuss in more detail two of the pieces Smith has kindly dedicated to me: *To Freshen the Moment!* and *The Starving Month*. My discussion of *To Freshen the Moment!* focuses on how Smith’s use of silence and “co-existence” suggests a symbolic expression of the Transcendentalist notion of universal spirit. As for *The Starving Month*, my emphasis is on how the use of repetition, disregard of form, rhythmic and dynamic non-sequiturs, and even incursions of modality suggest a non-teleological attitude.

Through the course of this writing, I have struggled and finally found it impossible to completely dissociate my scholarship with my personal acquaintance with the composer. Because our friendship has allowed us to frequently talk in person, over the telephone, or through correspondence about all the hypotheses discussed here, these hypotheses have become second nature to my understanding of his music. This document is, therefore, my story of searching for examples in Smith’s music and literature to systematize, explain, or provide evidence for matters that I already know intuitively, in a manner akin to that of the Transcendentalist creed of a universal soul.

¹³ This is how Smith spells the word “coexistence,” so whenever I use the term in reference to his music I respect his spelling.

CHAPTER 1: KEY PRINCIPLES FROM TRANSCENDENTALISM

1.1 Experience and the idea of innate knowledge

With the purpose of showing how Transcendentalism is reflected in Smith's work, I will now discuss some of the principles that permeated Transcendentalist writings. Because most of what is known as Transcendentalism stems from a term from Kantian philosophy called "innate knowledge" or "innate ideas," I find it essential to start my discussion by explaining how this concept intertwines with what Emerson refers to as "experience." Because innate knowledge can be more simply described as man's inherited intuition, its discussion will later be useful when assessing Smith's compositional process as fundamentally intuitive.

Transcendentalism began in 1836 in Concord, Massachusetts, with the foundation of the Transcendentalist Club by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Frederic Henry Hedge, George Ripley, and George Putnam. An important motivation for its inception was its members' common disillusionment with the Protestant religion known as Unitarianism. Many Unitarians were Harvard professors or important religious figures that followed the ideas of empiricist philosopher John Locke, who believed that the human mind was a *tabula rasa*—that is, all knowledge originated from the senses or from tutelage. In other words, human knowledge depended on and was limited to sensation and perception alone. According to Art Berman, empiricism was an "epistemological validation of naturalism," which hypothesized that all of nature's "rules, laws, or principles are discoverable through special methods of thought (logic) and scrutiny applied to information."¹⁴ On the other hand, Transcendentalists were strongly

¹⁴ Berman, *Preface to Modernism*, 10-11.

informed by Immanuel Kant's notion of the human knowledge as innate.¹⁵ Berman stated that Kant's postulation was based on what he called "transcendental logic," in which a supersensory realm grounded the "reality known by the senses."¹⁶ Since this idea cannot be confirmed empirically, different "modes of knowing," such as intuition, were essential for a validation of Kant's transcendental logic.¹⁷ Therefore, Kantian transcendental philosophy received this name, because it sought to transcend the boundaries of knowledge imposed by empiricism.¹⁸ For the Transcendentalists, the idea of innate knowledge was not to be understood, as much as it had to be aroused.¹⁹ In the consciousness of the Christian New England, the idealism of Kantian philosophy and its metaphysical implications were, therefore, bound to ferment.

Lawrence Buell describes the Transcendentalists' understanding of Kant's innate knowledge as the notion that "the human mind possesses a higher 'Reason,' or divine intuition, distinct from mere 'Understanding,' or inductive of reasoning, that is capable of direct intuitive perception of Truth with capital *T*."²⁰ On the other hand, the more rigid followers of Locke, known as literate men or rational scholars who occupied prestigious positions at Harvard, were said to belong "to the class which looked without for knowledge, rather than within for inspiration."²¹ Consequently the followers of Locke consequently emphasized "mere 'Understanding,'" which Buell referred to as antithetical to "Reason." This was precisely the idea that Emerson and the Transcendentalists reacted against, defending that men had to "speak from within." Men should rely on the idea that "reason" (here understood as "intuition")

¹⁵ Kenneth S. Sacks "Understanding Emerson: 'The American Scholar' and his struggle for self-reliance" (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2003), 8.

¹⁶ Berman, *Preface to Modernism*, 13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁹ Lawrence Buell, *The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings* (New York: Modern Library, 2006), xxiii

²⁰ *Ibid.*, xix-xx.

²¹ Frothingham, *Transcendentalism in New England*, 109.

perceived and filtered experience, and that the knowledge acquired should be challenged rather than blindly accepted. As Emerson asserted:

The great distinction between teachers sacred or literary,—between poets like Herbert, and poets like Pope,—between philosophers like Spinoza, Kant, and Coleridge, and philosophers like Locke, Paley, Mackintosh, and Stewart,—between men of the world, who are reckoned accomplished talkers, and here and there a fervent mystic, prophesying, half insane under the infinitude of his thought,—is, that one class speak *from within*, or from experience, as parties and possessors of the fact; and the other class, *from without*, as spectators merely, or perhaps as acquainted with the fact on the evidence of third persons. It is of no use to preach to me from without. I can do that too easily myself. Jesus speaks always from within, and in a degree that transcends all others. In that is the miracle. I believe beforehand that it ought so to be. All men stand continually in the expectation of the appearance of such a teacher. But if a man do not speak from within the veil, where the word is one with that it tells of, let him lowly confess it.²²

Emerson and the Transcendentalists reacted against Lockean ideas, because Locke's view of humankind was supposedly “unspiritual.”²³ Their dispute was to some extent religious, because the Transcendentalists viewed themselves as recouping some of the spiritual roots that the empiricist Unitarians had set aside. The Transcendentalists found support in the Kantian doctrine of innate knowledge, because an intuitive perception of “Truth” was more suitable to the strong Christian roots of the region. Like Locke, the Unitarians supposedly spoke “from without,” that is, as “spectators” of the evidences unveiled by others. On the other hand, the Transcendentalists supposedly spoke “from within,” that is, they let intuition function as a filter that translated personal experience into idiosyncratic knowledge.

In the address *The American Scholar*, Emerson coined the term “Man Thinking,” which parallels his idea of a person who speaks “from within” and who relies on his own perception of truth as paramount to the truth presented in books. The term, which describes the ideal condition for the American scholar, also showed Emerson’s concern with how the excess of specialization

²² Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Over-Soul,” in *Essays and Lectures: Nature: Addresses and Lectures / Essays: First and Second Series / Representative Men / English Traits / The Conduct of Life*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1989), 395.

²³ Buell, *The American Transcendentalists*, xix.

in society tended to transform “man into a thing.” In this process, the scholar was relegated as the intellect, the only segment of society that was given the chance to exercise thinking.

Notwithstanding the problems already posed by limiting knowledge to an elite, Emerson had another important concern: the average scholar was becoming a “parrot of other men's thinking,” who merely reverberated principles imposed by academic conditioning:

Man is thus metamorphosed into a thing, into many things. The planter, who is Man sent out into the field to gather food, is seldom cheered by any idea of the true dignity of his ministry. He sees his bushel and his cart, and nothing beyond, and sinks into the farmer, instead of Man on the farm. The tradesman scarcely ever gives an ideal worth to his work, but is ridden by the routine of his craft, and the soul is subject to dollars. The priest becomes a form; the attorney, a statute-book; the mechanic, a machine; the sailor, a rope of a ship.

In this distribution of functions, the scholar is the delegated intellect. In the right state, he is, *Man Thinking*. In the degenerate state, when the victim of society, he tends to become a mere thinker, or, still worse, the parrot of other men's thinking.²⁴

Emerson understands “man metamorphosed into a thing” as a laborer (farmer, tradesman, etc.) who may become alienated from his own life as he becomes a mere tool of his own profession. Scholars who merely reverberated the thoughts of others had also being metamorphosed “into things.” Emerson’s debate does not lie in attacking intellectualism in general. Rather, Emerson defends the idea that knowledge is only valid if it yields to the individualization of the experience from which it originates. Such is the motivation behind *The American Scholar* address. According to Emerson, a book may become an object of alienation if used uncritically as an end in itself: “Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst. What is the right use? What is the one end which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire. I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system.”²⁵ Again, this was a message to

²⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar” in *The Collected works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Alfred R. Ferguson (Harvard University Press. Cambridge: 1971), 53.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Unitarians, who had become for Emerson “parrots of other men’s thinking” rather than free thinkers who used books only for “inspiration.” Finally, this was a message against the Eurocentrism of the education provided in institutions such as the Harvard Divinity School. The American scholar should think autonomously and rely primarily on his personal experience rather than on the European literary production.

1.2 Self-reliance, autonomy of thought, and self-actualization

The Kantian doctrine of men’s innate knowledge inspired Emerson to develop a discourse in defense of self-reliance, according to which men were entitled to individually shape their own character, intellect, set of beliefs, and artistry through personal experience rather than “the adopted talent of another:”

“Insist on yourself; never imitate. Your own gift you can present every moment with the cumulative force of a whole life's cultivation; but of the adopted talent of another, you have only an extemporaneous, half possession. That which each can do best, none but his Maker can teach him. No man yet knows what it is, nor can, till that or can till that person has exhibited it. Where is the master who could have taught Shakspeare? Where is the master who could have instructed Franklin, or Washington, or Bacon, or Newton? Every great man is a unique. The Scipionism of Scipio is precisely that part he could not borrow. Shakspeare will never be made by the study of Shakspeare.”²⁶

Emerson’s call for self-reliance was primarily a demand for the average American to become a free agent and autonomous thinker. And such was the ethos behind the Transcendentalist movement. Most noticeably, his pupil Thoreau deepened the emphasis on free agency and thought autonomy to the point of writing what can be considered a treatise on the practice of these concepts in *Walden*. For over 160 years, *Walden* has been arguably one of the most influential literary statements that placed autonomy as a definer of the American

²⁶ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self Reliance,” in *Essays and Lectures: Nature: Addresses and Lectures / Essays: First and Second Series / Representative Men / English Traits / The Conduct of Life*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1989), 278-279.

consciousness. The work tells the story of Thoreau's personal retreat to Walden Pond, where he built a cabin in which he lived for two years, experiencing nature fully and meditating on the state of nineteenth-century American society.

Throughout *Walden*, Thoreau cautioned the reader that the nineteenth-century American was discouraged from exercising intellectual autonomy and believed that living upon materialistic values was the only choice left: "When we consider what, to use the words of the catechism, is the chief end of man, and what are the true necessities and means of life, it appears as if men had deliberately chosen the common mode of living because they preferred it to any other. Yet they honestly think there is no choice left."²⁷ This context that suppressed thought autonomy left society with a supposedly complete absence of choice. Alienating society from self-actualization, this context also prevented society from questioning whether or not certain values were necessary.

1.3 Isolation

During the Walden experiment, Thoreau discovered that isolation was essential for his self-development. In short, his isolation at the pond facilitated a process of self-actualization that culminated in Thoreau's realization that humanity and nature coexist as one. *Walden* has a whole chapter dedicated to addressing solitude, in which Thoreau often criticizes America's social life for suffocating individual freedom: "Society is commonly too cheap. We meet at very short intervals, not having had time to acquire any new value for each other. We meet at meals three times a day, and give each other a new taste of that old musty cheese that we are."²⁸ On the other hand, solitude, even when it does not mean complete isolation, is essential for anyone who seeks

²⁷ Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 14.

²⁸ Thoreau, *Walden*, 147.

to contribute intellectually to society: “A man thinking or working is always alone, let him be where he will. Solitude is not measured by the miles of space that intervene between a man and his fellows. The really diligent student in one of the crowded hives of Cambridge College is as solitary as a dervish in the desert.”²⁹

For Emerson, isolation also had the same social implications as for Thoreau, as he implied in his criticism toward society’s tendency to alienation: “Society everywhere is in a conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs.”³⁰ Because society tends to foster “conformity,” Emerson understood solitude as indispensable for the development of thought autonomy. But Emerson believed that isolation also had spiritual implications. In his typical mystical discourse, solitude was a necessary path for both self-reliance and Oneness, as it contributed to an awareness of the universal spirit: “All men have my blood, and I have all men’s. Not for that will I adopt their petulance or folly, even to the extent of being ashamed of it. But your isolation must not be mechanical, but spiritual, that is, must be elevation.”³¹ Emerson implied that isolation, which must be “spiritual,” provides access to divine intuition. Due to the spiritual edification that isolation brought, Emerson showed preference for silence in church: “I like the silent church before the service begins, better than any preaching.”³² The parallels with Smith’s Quaker faith are clear, because, in simple terms, a Quaker concept called Inner Light implies that silent isolation leads to the divine.

²⁹ Ibid., 146.

³⁰ Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” 261.

³¹ Ibid., 273.

³² Ibid., 272.

1.4 Quakerism as religious transcendentalism

According to Art Berman, Kantian philosophy was a “natural” version of what he called “religious transcendentalism” of Judeo-Christian faiths since the fifth century.³³ Founded in Britain, Quakerism particularly thrived in America with a model of religious transcendentalism—the concept of Inner Light. Inner Light is the idea that each person possesses a divinity that may manifest itself as God’s message in the worship meeting. Thus, Inner Light is a kind of “divine enlightenment” equivalent to Berman’s idea of non-empirical modes of knowing and, therefore, also parallels Kant’s notion of innate knowledge. However, Quaker Inner Light is expressly a manifestation of the Holy Spirit present in each human being, while the Transcendentalist innate knowledge is “a natural endowment of the human mind.”³⁴ Though both approaches feature an emphasis on the metaphysical, there is a theological emphasis on the Quaker side and a naturalistic approach on the Transcendentalist side. Berman’s discussion of Kant helps us understand Transcendentalism’s transformation of the religious to the natural world.³⁵

Despite the difference in focus (religious or naturalistic), both Quakerism and Transcendentalism featured a fondness for individual freedom and respect for plurality of people, actions, and ideas. Not surprisingly, both traditions have informed Smith’s thinking. This dual background of Quakerism and Transcendentalism has been important as a philosophical basis for Smith. Although Quakerism’s influence on Smith’s work is beyond the scope of this research, the acknowledgment of religious transcendentalism and its strong presence in Quaker faith sheds more light on the dialogue between Smith’s creative process and transcendental philosophy. For

³³ Berman, *Preface to Modernism*, 15.

³⁴ Frothingham, *Transcendentalism in New England*, 115.

³⁵ Berman, *Preface to Modernism*, 15.

Smith, both faith and the arts are catalysts of spiritual transcendence, although they do not replace one another.

In this respect, Smith's attitude seems to differ from both the nineteenth-century Transcendentalist music critic John Sullivan Dwight, as well as the artists of the early modernist era, who understood art as an alternative to religious faith.³⁶ Dwight saw music as a potential tool for "naturalizing" religion: "Music stands for the highest outward symbol of what is most deep and holy, and most remotely to be realized in the soul of man."³⁷ Therefore, as Irving Lowens has pointed out, music's purpose was "to hallow pleasure, and to naturalize religion."³⁸ Dwight even envisioned a substitution of the Psalm Tunes of New England for the Beethoven Symphonies.³⁹ A few decades later in the early modernist period, comparisons between the arts and the sacred were no longer needed. According to Berman, art itself became transcendence and was discussed in terms that made it equivalent to spiritual transcendence. Berman says that even if the term "spirit" is evoked, it is used as a metaphor for "imagination,"⁴⁰ which was not the case for Dwight. For Smith, however, although music is used as a symbol for spiritual connection, it neither substitutes faith (as for Dwight), nor does it invalidate it (as for the modernists). Rather, both music and religion represent spiritual transcendence.

1.5 Inner divinity and Oneness: the universal soul

As previously discussed, the belief in man's divine attributes shaped different manifestations of the New England spiritual consciousness of the nineteenth century, including

³⁶ Berman, *Preface to Modernism*, 33.

³⁷ J. S. Dwight, "Address, Delivered Before the Harvard Musical Association, August 25, 1841," *Hach's Musical Magazine* III (1841): 265, quoted in Irving Lowens, "Writings about Music in the Periodicals of American Transcendentalism (1835-50)," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1957): 77.

³⁸ Irving Lowens, "Writings about Music in the Periodicals of American Transcendentalism (1835-50)," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1957): 77.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁰ Berman, *Preface to Modernism*, 33.

Transcendentalism and Quakerism. Another fundamental notion common to New England spiritual consciousness is the belief in the existence of a kind of unity that bonds every living being in the universe. This notion pervades the writings of Transcendentalists and is especially explicit in Emerson's *The Over-Soul*, which refers to a universal soul composed of all souls:

The Supreme Critic on the errors of the past and the present, and the only prophet of that which must be, is that great nature in which we rest, as the earth lies in the soft arms of the atmosphere; that Unity, that Over-soul, within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other; that common heart, of which all sincere conversation is the worship, to which all right action is submission; that overpowering reality which confutes our tricks and talents, and constrains every one to pass for what he is, and to speak from his character, and not from his tongue, and which evermore tends to pass into our thought and hand, and become wisdom, and virtue, and power, and beauty. We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE. And this deep power in which we exist, and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one. We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul. Only by the vision of that Wisdom can the horoscope of the ages be read, and by falling back on our better thoughts, by yielding to the spirit of prophecy which is innate in every man, we can know what it saith.⁴¹

One striking notion in this passage is that it links “Oneness” to man’s intellect (“Only by the vision of that Wisdom . . . we can know what it saith”). Because the whole and the individual are *a priori* apart, Emerson infers that there is a precedence of the inner over the outer world, as the soul of each man is the emanatory agent of the “Over-soul.”⁴² The acknowledgment of this notion (i.e. precedence of the inner over the outer) is indispensable to the study of Smith’s music later in this research. A second key feature of this passage from Emerson is its mystical implications. The frequent use of proper nouns to refer to universal spirit such as “Supreme Critic,” “Unity,” and “Over-soul” implies that Emerson saw this unity as divine. Because this

⁴¹ Emerson, “The Over-Soul,” 399.

⁴² Christopher Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self: John Cage and the American Experimental Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2013), 11.

divine “Over-soul” was launched from each individual soul, it is not a stretch to infer that each person emanated divinity. Hence, in Transcendentalism, the Christian likeness to God becomes inner divinity. Arguably the most well-known poet influenced by Transcendentalism, Walt Whitman, wrote an ode to such principles in his *Song of Myself*, which reveals how influential they were to the generations that succeeded Emerson: “Divine I am inside and out,” says Whitman, “and I make holy whatever I touch or am touched from.”⁴³

The origins of music’s usage to promote “Oneness” are obviously too old to be precisely dated. However, in the nineteenth century, Dwight was an essential figure in the development of this notion in New England. According to musicologist Irving Lowens, Dwight’s Transcendentalist attitude on music matured after he had contact with Associationism. Associationism was an American version of French Fourierism, which preached that the Universe was created so that man, God, and everything else were harmoniously connected.⁴⁴ According to Associationism, music had the power to help restore such harmony, at least on the social level.⁴⁵ Both Associationism and Transcendentalism encompassed the discourse of divine oneness (“Oneness”); while the former focused on the communal, the latter focused on the individual. According to Lowens, Dwight’s discourse on music was a synthesis of both Associationism (with its focus on universal harmony) and Transcendentalism (with its focus on inner divinity).⁴⁶

In the pages that follow, I will apply the terms Oneness, universal soul, and universal spirit interchangeably.

⁴³ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass the Original 1855 Edition* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2007), 39.

⁴⁴ Lowens, “Writings about Music,” 76.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 77.

1.6 Pacifism

The Transcendentalists saw their movement as pacifist essentially because the idea of Oneness was in itself antithetical to war. In simple terms, you do not harm someone else if you believe, even if metaphorically, that the other is a part of you. Composer Charles Ives, in his arguably late Transcendentalist manifesto *Essays Before a Sonata*, suggests that Transcendentalists understood war as a demand of a “minority” who refused to accept the idea of a universal soul and to trust the innate goodness of mankind. Referring to how Emerson addressed war, Ives states:

He might have said to those who talk knowingly about the cause of war—or of the last war, and who would trace it down through long vistas of cosmic, political, moral evolution and what not—he might say that the cause of it was as simple as that of any dog-fight—the "hogmind" of the minority against the universal mind, the majority. The un-courage of the former fears to believe in the innate goodness of mankind. The cause is always the same, the effect different by chance; it is as easy for a hog, even a stupid one, to step on a box of matches under a tenement with a thousand souls, as under an empty bird-house.⁴⁷

Ives emphasizes that, for Emerson, the cause of war was in the minority’s “un-courage” (or its lack of self-reliance) in trusting the “innate-goodness” of men. Ives was possibly referring to the lecture *War*, which Emerson gave to the American Peace Society in 1838. Emerson relates the idea of reaching peaceful behavior to a “high stage” in which man has realized his condition of Oneness (“common soul of all men”):

War and peace thus resolve themselves into a messenger of the state of cultivation. At a certain stage of his progress, the man fights, if he is of a sound body and mind. At a certain higher stage, he makes no offensive demonstration, but is alert to repel injury, and is of an unconquerable heart. At a still higher stage, he comes into the region of holiness. His passion has passed away from him. His warlike nature is all converted into an active medicinal principle. He sacrifices himself, and accepts wearisome tasks of denial and charity with alacrity. But, being attacked, he bears it and turns the other cheek as one

⁴⁷ Charles Ives, “Essays Before a Sonata,” in *Three Classics in the Aesthetic of Music* (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), 125-126.

engaged, throughout his being, no longer to the service of an individual but to the common soul of all men.⁴⁸

Pacifism for Emerson did not preclude his idea of self-reliance, but rather constituted consequence of honoring the “universal spirit.” This is well stated by Maurice Gonoud: “. . . Emerson proposes as a model to his generation is to be no *less courageous than* his warrior ancestor; he has simply learned to recognize that the universal spirit dwells in every man and needs to be honored and served.”⁴⁹

1.7 Non-teleology

Because this is not a philosophical document, my perhaps reductionist definition of the term teleology will suffice for applying this concept to both the Transcendentalists and Smith. Based on Leonard B. Meyer’s take on the subject, I contend that teleology refers to the human attitude of “purpose, strivings, or goal-directed behavior.”⁵⁰ Conversely, a non-teleological stance implies that “in order to perceive and understand the world as it really is” man should avoid goal-directed behavior.⁵¹ Meyer says that non-teleology was an attitude present in different manifestations of transcendental philosophy,⁵² in which the New England Transcendentalists are inevitably included.

However, Meyer asserts that the transcendental rejection of goal-orientation is actually a consequence of a rejection of “metaphysical frameworks, metaphorical language, and

⁴⁸ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “War,” in *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 11, *Miscellanies*, ed. J. E. Cabot (Boston: Fireside Edition, 1909), 193-194.

⁴⁹ Maurice Gonnaud, *An Uneasy Solitude: Individual and Society in the Work of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, trans. Lawrence Rosenwald (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 214.

⁵⁰ Leonard B. Meyer, *Music, the Arts, and Ideas: Patterns and Predictions in Twentieth-century Culture*. (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1969), 160.

⁵¹ Meyer, *Music, the Arts, and Ideas*, 160.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 161.

psychological theories.”⁵³ However, in the specific case of the New England Transcendentalists, Meyer’s assertion is obviously not applicable. I make this assertion not only because their writings are replete of metaphorical language, but also because they manifested non-teleology precisely as an outcome of a “metaphysical framework:” their belief in man’s divine condition. A belief in man’s divine condition automatically implied that men should avoid living upon the mere achievement of material goals. This was already a concern for Emerson when he cautioned his audience that man was “metamorphosing into a thing.” Mankind’s excess of goal-direction was also an object of Thoreau’s concerns. Working excessively so as to achieve material goals was one example. For Thoreau, excessive labor was an example of an obstacle society posed to a full enjoyment of life. Hence, excessive labor depreciated man’s divinity: “Talk of a divinity in man! Look at the teamster on the highway, wending to market by day or night; does any divinity stir within him? His highest duty to fodder and water his horses! . . . How godlike, how immortal, is he? See how he cowers and sneaks, how vaguely all the day he fears, not being immortal nor divine, but the slave and prisoner of his own opinion of himself, a fame won by his own deeds.”⁵⁴ In this statement, Thoreau refers to man’s divine condition to address a more practical concern: excessive labor in America. It reads almost as a message to his fellow authors, warning them that one who upholds the idea of man’s divinity should also condemn the condition of quasi self-slavery imposed by excessive goal-directed behavior (as it was a denial of man’s divine condition).

Another passage of *Walden* provides an even clearer illustration of how America’s excessive emphasis on labor disagreed with the Transcendentalist non-teleology. Thoreau’s analogy features a practical lesson on non-teleology: he criticizes the average American’s

⁵³ Meyer, *Music, the Arts, and Ideas*, 160.

⁵⁴ Thoreau, *Walden*, 6.

attitude of working for hours and hours only to enjoy the convenience supposedly provided by the railroad. This endeavor was not worthwhile according to Thoreau. While the other person worked excessively only to afford the new “convenience,” Thoreau arrived to the same destination faster and experienced a much deeper enjoyment of the environment on foot.⁵⁵

Paraphrasing Meyer, by going on foot, Thoreau had a better perception and understanding of the “world as it really was.”

⁵⁵ Thoreau, *Walden*, 55-56.

CHAPTER 2: TRANSCENDENTALISM IN MUSIC

2.1 Transcendentalism versus formalism

While the term "transcendentalism" has been defined in various ways and has been applied to a wide array of contexts, its use in relation to Western music has followed two main paths: a general notion of transcendentalism in relation to twentieth-century music (for example, in the work of Leonard B. Meyer and Richard Taruskin) and a more "New England-specific model" of musical Transcendentalism, as developed by scholars such as Christopher Shultis Rosalie Perry, and Jannika Bock. This more focused discussion of Transcendentalism often emphasizes the influence of Emerson and Thoreau on the work and life of Charles Ives and John Cage, respectively.

In Meyer's book *Music, the Arts, and Ideas*, he proposes a pattern for defining twentieth-century Western art in which he often places the term "transcendentalism" in opposition to "formalism." "The difference—and it is a real difference—between transcendental particularism and analytic formalism is that the former minimizes the art-nature distinction by absorbing art into nature, while the latter tends toward a similar result by absorbing nature (the constructs of science) into art."⁵⁶ According to Meyer, formalism (or "analytic formalism") sees the necessity of applying logics, or "the constructs of science," as a mean to understand or produce art. On the other hand, transcendentalism (or "transcendental particularism") sees no distinction between art and nature. In other words, the sensory aspects of art (aural, visual, etc.) have to be merely experienced for what they are: natural phenomena.

However, Meyer's construct to explain the arts in the twentieth century is actually a tripartite scheme composed not only of "formalism" and "transcendentalism," but also of what

⁵⁶ Meyer, *Music, the Arts, and Ideas*, 162.

he calls “traditionalism.” The motivation behind traditionalism is something Meyer calls “content,” which refers to what a work represents, that is, its symbolic meaning. Hence, the goal of a piece of art is to symbolically convey meaning. “End” and “goal” are words that best describe traditionalism. Formalism, which Meyer understands as an intermediary of traditionalism and transcendentalism, focuses on the “means.” “Form” and “process” (the logic behind how a composition unfolds) are some of the words that best describe formalism. The examples in twentieth-century music are abundant, but the post-war works of the composers aligned with the incipient stages of the Darmstadt courses are definitive, such as Pierre Boulez’s *Structure Ia*. Finally, transcendentalism focuses on “materials.” Sensory experiences—aural, tactile, or visual—describe accurately Meyer’s concept of transcendentalism.⁵⁷

The agenda of formalism, according to Meyer, also contemplates objectivity and impersonality: “The concept of art as objective and impersonal is obviously related to the current tendency toward formalism. The artist, like the scientist, ‘discovers’ and he no longer ‘creates’ by expressing himself; he constructs. Music becomes allied to formal logic of mathematics. The novel becomes a kind of research or a species of problem solving.”⁵⁸ On the other hand, Meyer’s concept of transcendentalism implies that sensory experiences should be understood for what they are, without the distortions of logic: “According to transcendentalism, the constructs of analytic formalism—whether in the arts or in the sciences—misrepresent and distort our understanding of the world. What are truly real, and really true, are concrete particular sense experiences. These are what we know. The rest is inference.” In music, Meyer’s “transcendentalism” implies the notion that composer and audience should coexist with aural

⁵⁷ Meyer, *Music, the Arts, and Ideas*, 214-222.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 157.

phenomena, avoiding the imposition of extraneous logics to sound. Composer John Cage in particular argued that sounds should be regarded “just as they are:”

People expect listening to be more than listening. And sometimes they speak of inner listening, or the meaning of sound. When I talk about music, it finally comes to people’s minds that I’m talking about sound that doesn’t mean anything. That is not inner, but is just outer. And they say, these people who finally understand that say, “you mean it’s just sounds?” To mean that for something to just be a sound is to be useless. Whereas I love sounds, just as they are, and I have no need for them to be anything more. I don’t want sound to be psychological. I don’t want a sound to pretend that it’s a bucket, or that it’s a president, or that it’s in love with another sound. I just want it to be a sound. And I’m not so stupid either. There was a German philosopher who is very well known, his name was Emmanuel Kant, and he said there are two things that don’t have to mean anything, one is music and the other is laughter. Don’t have to mean anything that is, in order to give us deep pleasure. The sound experience, which I prefer to all others, is the experience of silence. And this silence, almost anywhere in the world today, is traffic. If you listen to Beethoven, it’s always the same, but if you listen to traffic, it’s always different.⁵⁹

When Cage upholds that sound has to be experienced as “just sound,” he implies that no intellectual inference is needed to interpret them. Rather, we need only to listen to, coexist with, and accept sounds as they are. Cage’s statement is an indication of his coexisting attitude toward aural experience and a confirmation to Meyer’s definition of “transcendental particularism:” artistic emphasis on “materials” (in music, understood as the aural phenomena). As Joaquim Benitez stated referring to Meyer’s construct, “by emphasizing materials (that is to say, the concrete sound experience) [transcendentalism] reacts not only against the 19th century beliefs about individuality, expressivity and goal-orientation of traditionalism, but also against the ‘objectivity’ of formalism.”⁶⁰ On the other hand, artistic emphasis on process and form suggests formalism. Hence, as Art Berman has stressed, the central question of formalism becomes “how.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ John Cage, “On Silence,” YouTube video from an interview realized in New York on April 02, 1991, posted by “javidm,” July 14, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcHnL7aS64Y>.

⁶⁰ Joaquim M. Benitez, “Avant-Garde or Experimental? Classifying Contemporary Music” *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 9, no. 1 (June 1978): 57.

⁶¹ Berman, *Preface to Modernism*, 69.

Nonetheless, considering the specific case of the New England Transcendentalists Benitez's affirmation is partially inaccurate: the nineteenth-century "beliefs about individuality, and expressivity" were still essential in the philosophical idealism of Transcendentalism. However, how can "transcendentalism" be, among other things, a reaction to ideas so intrinsic to a movement that carried that name "Transcendentalism?" The answer is that the Transcendentalist movement was both "transcendentalist" and "traditionalist," because their body of ideas gathered seemingly contradictory notions such as symbolic and sensory experience.

2.2 Emerson/Ives versus Thoreau/Cage

Meyer's ideas of "transcendentalism" and "formalism" imply that these terms represent almost antagonistic attitudes of the human intellect in relation to nature. While transcendentalism implies a kind of non-dualism, in which humanity and nature are viewed as coexisting with no hierarchy between them, formalism implies a kind of dualism, in which man's intellect determines the definition of nature. Musicologist Christopher Shultis, in his book *Silencing the Sounded Self*, utilizes terms such as "coexistence" or "non-dualism" as opposed to "control" or "dualism" to describe a pattern for twentieth-century music that shares resemblances to Meyer's. However, there is a crucial difference between Meyer's and Shultis's constructs: Meyer not only relates formalism to dualism, but also relates it to objectivity and impersonality. Therefore, despite the similarities, while Meyer's "transcendentalism" can be more directly related into Shultis's "non-dualism," Meyer's "formalism" cannot be directly translated into Shultis's "dualism."

For Shultis, the two contrasting attitudes amongst American artists with respect to self and nature can be traced back to the Transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau: Emerson's notion

of self shows a “controlling” attitude towards nature, whereas Thoreau shows a “coexisting” attitude.⁶² According to Shultis, such opposition is also reflected in the American musical experimentalism of the twentieth century, of which Charles Ives and John Cage represent different generations. Emerson’s “controlling” attitude parallels Ives’s views on music, whereas Thoreau’s “coexisting” attitude is equivalent to Cage’s views on music. Using this dichotomy to explain the so-called American experimentalist tradition, Emerson and Ives emphasize a “goal oriented” character in their experiments (musical or literary), while Thoreau and Cage focused on “open-ended” experiments. While the goal-oriented perspective involves a test for pre-conceived truth, the open-ended perspective encourages a discovery of something unknown.⁶³ In other words, the goal-oriented perspective focuses on a purpose, whereas the open-ended perspective focuses on the process.

Before I describe Shultis’s “Emerson/Ives versus Thoreau/Cage” construct, it is important to highlight yet another essential difference between Shultis’ and Meyer’s constructs. Even though, according to Shultis, Emerson and Ives embrace a dualistic view of reality, they are unsuitable to Meyer’s description of formalism. Individual expression, and not process or rational logic, was predominant in their discourses. Moreover, the concept of symbol—what Meyer calls “content” or “representational significance”⁶⁴—is essential to their work and extraneous to formalism, as previously discussed. Therefore, if I used Meyer’s construct to define Emerson and Ives, they would not be formalists but traditionalists.⁶⁵ On the other hand, Shultis’s hypothesis for Thoreau and Cage better suits Meyer’s concept of transcendentalism.

⁶² Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self*, xviii.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁴ Meyer, *Music, the Arts, and Ideas*, 213

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

As quoted by Shultis, Emerson, who called himself an “experimenter,” believed that “thought is always prior to the fact; all the facts of history preexist in the mind as laws.”⁶⁶ This statement testifies to Emerson’s goal-oriented attitude and to his belief of the preeminence of the inner (mind) over the outer (nature).⁶⁷ This “controlling” attitude presupposes a dualistic view of the relation of man and nature. If Transcendentalists generally see that human divinity and universal oneness presume nature and man as unified, there is an important disparity between Emerson and Thoreau for Shultis: for Emerson, the universe is formed by “Nature and the Soul,”⁶⁸ whereas for Thoreau, the fact that soul is part of nature is already granted.

So Emerson believes that man and nature are unified only through symbol, an intellectual act that implies precedence of man over nature. For Shultis, both Emerson and Ives “identify art as capable of unifying both [humanity and nature] via the use of a particular symbolic practice called transcendental correspondence.”⁶⁹ Therefore, for Emerson and Ives, although man and nature are one, man is at the center because it is the human intellect—via the arts, for instance—that unifies man and nature through “transcendental correspondence.” If humanity and nature are not unified a priori, man’s “controlling” self is needed so as to unify them. This “controlling” self can be found in Emerson’s view of nature as a projection of intellect.

Shultis utilizes a variety of excerpts from Emerson’s *Nature* and other essays to emphasize the author’s notion of nature as a phenomenon rather than something concrete.⁷⁰ For instance, man’s intellect is capable of defying natural laws and discerning facts as existent or not.⁷¹ These facts confirm the dualistic idea of man and nature as separate, and nature as a

⁶⁶ Emerson, quoted in Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self*, 10.

⁶⁷ Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self*, 10.

⁶⁸ Emerson, quoted in Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self*, 11.

⁶⁹ Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self*, 9.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

projection of symbols prescribed by the intellect. Hence, Emerson's idea of nature encompasses an idealized view of it, in which the "real" and the idealized become the same only symbolically: "Establishing a symbolical relationship between the real as found in nature and the ideal as experienced by humanity and nature is fundamental to what is known as transcendental correspondence."⁷² Therefore, according to Shultis's take on Emerson, the "goal" of Emerson's "experiment" is the unification of man and nature in a universe that is a priori dualistic. Such was composer Charles Ives's goal as well, as indicated by his *Essays Before a Sonata*, which entails his intellectual impetus for unification.

After *Essays Before a Sonata*, Ives was bound to have his music tied to the New England Transcendentalism. Like Emerson, he is frequently referred to as an early case of American experimentalism, because he tried compositional techniques unique for his time, such as the use of clusters, pervasive quotations, and frequent juxtaposition of various musical styles. Shultis analyzes dualisms found in Ives's discourse, in particular that of "manner" and "substance," as examples of his dualistic understanding of the universe. Ives' supposed a priori dualistic view of reality is also reflected in Ives's insistent use of the main motive from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony with the intention to produce unity in his *Concord Sonata*, according to Shultis.⁷³ There may be an apparent superficiality in using these two examples as evidences of Ives's dualism. However, Shultis deepens the debate by discussing Ives's experimental compositional strategies, especially the use of quotation and program, as means to achieve the Transcendentalist notion of universal unity. Because these strategies make reference to local cultures, which Ives calls "local color" (ragtime, church hymns, and wind bands for instance), it is the composer's job to turn them into "universal color." Referring to the possibility of a Yankee

⁷² Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self*, 20.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

composer (possibly referring to himself) writing music that makes references to extraneous cultures (“Indian or negro”) via program, quotation, or style, Ives states: “If his music can but catch that ‘spirit’ by being a part with itself, it will come somewhere near his ideal—and it will be American, too, perhaps nearer so than that of the devotee of Indian or negro melody. In other words, if local color, national color, any color, is a true pigment of the universal color, it is a divine quality, it is a part of substance in art—not of manner.”⁷⁴ It is, therefore, attribution of the composer to unify the local with the universal, by catching the “spirit” of the referenced culture to the point of “being a part with itself.”

Although Ives’s work is strongly characterized by “local color,” he is critical of its use for the mere sake of audience approval: “It is evidenced in many ways—the sculptors’ over-insistence on the ‘mold,’ the outer rather than the inner subject or content of his statue overenthusiasm for local color—over-interest in the multiplicity of techniques, in the idiomatic, in the effect as shown, by the appreciation of an audience rather than in the effect on the ideals of the inner conscience of the artist or the composer.”⁷⁵ Ives understands “manner” as excessive emphasis on compositional artifices that merely adorn the work, or excessive focus on idiomatic and virtuosic features of the instruments. “Manner,” then, does little but mask the work’s hollowness. Emphasis on local color can also be part of this context when it is tied to reasons extraneous to “the ideals of the inner conscience,” or when it is not grounded in the belief that it is an essential component of an idiosyncratic work of art. Furthermore, because Transcendentalism understands that personal experience constitutes part of the universal soul, “local color” comes out in his music as a “pigment of the universal color.”

⁷⁴ Ives, “Essays Before a Sonata,” 165.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 162-163.

But how would Ives respond to the argument that his pervasive use of “local color” can be considered an indication of emphasis on “manner” over “substance,” to use his own terms? This apparent contradiction could become an obstacle in defining Ives as truly informed by “Transcendentalism.” Nevertheless, Ives does not understand his use of “local color” as mere decoration; rather, “local color” is his means to convey self (“the ideals of the inner conscience”), notwithstanding audience’s reception. An essential message of *Essays Before a Sonata* is that the ethos of a piece of music, or its composer’s intentions, is independent of audience reception. And Ives’s intention in using quotation and program is to convey his aural memories (experience). Thus, he believes that if “local color” is in accordance to his necessity to convey self through music, it conveys substance rather than manner. Ives’s “local color” (for instance, attested in his use of quotations) is never exact, but rather an appropriation of his creative mind or a highly individualized kind of “local color.” As Shultis points out, “Ives’s quotations are not ‘exact’ at all; they are, instead, his memory of those experiences.”⁷⁶ In other words, Ives’s use of quotation is a reflection of his experience filtered through his artistic intuition.

Finally, Ives’s “local color” is evidence of a Transcendentalist attitude because it is an expression of speaking from “within” and not from “without,” to use Emerson’s terms.⁷⁷ Because “speaking from within” is a faculty directly subordinate to reason, it comes from each person’s divine worth and represents the universal shared by everyone. Shultis states that “Ives’s, musical quotations are more than formal or representational.”⁷⁸ He also considers the matter of intentionality as central for understanding Ives’s use of quotation as informed by Emerson’s discourse: “It is content, ‘the substance’ of his quotations, that is of interest here, and his use of

⁷⁶ Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self*, 26.

⁷⁷ Emerson, “The Over-Soul,” 395.

⁷⁸ Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self*, 26.

quotations goes beyond the notion of merely representing outside experience.”⁷⁹ Therefore, for Shultis, Ives’s use of quotation was in service of another symbolic endeavor towards unity: unifying his work with that of the early American “experimentalists” like Emerson.⁸⁰ Similarly Ives’s persistent use of the theme from Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony in the *Concord Sonata* is not a mere attempt to unify the work as whole; it is meant to unify the composer and his work with a lineage of idiosyncratic artists and works of art.

On the other side of the dichotomy proposed by Shultis are Thoreau and Cage, who did not attempt for unification because they understood the universe as unified a priori. In other words, the Thoreau/Cage attitude toward reality understands that no intellectual action or symbol is needed in order to unify man and nature. This is, for Shultis, a “non-dualistic” view of reality. As part of this view, there is a “coexisting” instead of an “imposing” attitude toward nature or natural phenomena for Cage and Thoreau, as Cage states: “. . . I love sounds, just as they are, and I have no need for them to be anything more. I don’t want sound to be psychological. I don’t want a sound to pretend that it’s a bucket, or that it’s a president, or that it’s in love with another sound. I just want it to be a sound.”⁸¹ Using Shultis’ term, Cage’s statements are indications of his “coexisting” attitude toward nature, and that his music does not attend to any goal other than the aural experience. The same could be said of Thoreau’s experiment at Walden Pond: “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary.”⁸² Shultis uses this quote from *Walden* as indication of the open-

⁷⁹ Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self*, 26.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Cage, “On Silence,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcHnL7aS64Y>.

⁸² Thoreau, *Walden*, 97.

ended character of Thoreau's experiment, that is, "the experiment did not begin with a hypothesis, but with a question: What is and what is not life?"⁸³

Man and nature are one a priori. Art and life are also one a priori. Unification does not demand intellectual drive. So, because no goal is set, the experimentalism in Thoreau and Cage is open-ended. However, I must disagree with Shultis' discussion about open-endedness versus goal-direction in general. All Transcendentalists had aspects of both teleology and non-teleology (one needs only to read any of Emerson's addresses to realize that his sense of structuring writing was not very teleological). Therefore, Thoreau and Emerson may be more similar than Shultis believes: both encompass a paradox that Meyer understands as "latent in some versions of the transcendentalist position," in which I believe the Transcendentalists are included: if "on the one hand, by disparaging purposeful behavior, it tends to discourage . . . change; on the other hand, the belief that traditional constructs and categories distort human experience tends to encourage change—because novelty is always becoming 'traditional' and established: today's innovation becomes tomorrow's norm."⁸⁴ So, as I explored in the first chapter, the Transcendentalist movement rejected "purposeful behavior" (teleology) when referring to society's notion of progress. However, their writings do exhibit a vested interest in changing this reality (Emerson and Thoreau included, although I consider that Emerson had a less teleological, more poetic and difficult style of writing than Thoreau). Therefore, it may be slightly problematic to consider the totality of Thoreau's Walden Pond experiment as having no pre-set hypothesis. Thoreau withdrew to Walden with the suggestion to attest that life should be simpler, less concerned with production and free of goal-direction (i.e. oriented solely to the enjoyment of one's surroundings and of the present moment). In other words, Thoreau aimed to testify that one

⁸³ Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self*, 30.

⁸⁴ Meyer, *Music, the Arts, and Ideas*, 161.

did not need to live upon the presumed “benefits” the nineteenth-century American capitalist society. There was, therefore, a hypothesis that motivated Thoreau to conduct his experiment, even though he described his observations of nature without pre-conceived ideas. Similarly Cage showed goal-direction when he used his music as a “metaphor” for how mankind should act.⁸⁵ He sought to set an example to society by attempting to evade any remnants of self in composition (a statement against society’s dictatorial tendencies).⁸⁶

Finally, while Shultis does not argue that Ives or Cage represent a direct continuation of Transcendentalist ideas via Emerson and Thoreau, his work nevertheless places the two composers in an important lineage of American experimentalists who owe a debt to the Transcendentalists. It is this same lineage into which Smith fits. However, like much of the Transcendentalist history, Smith puts his own spin on the ideas of both earlier Transcendentalist thinkers like Emerson and Thoreau, as well as composers like Ives and Cage (who have been informed by Transcendentalism).

2.3 John Cage: converging transcendentalism and formalism

According to the notions of both Shultis and Meyer, John Cage is a distinct example of a composer who embraces a transcendental attitude, as he exhibits an aesthetic that emphasizes aural experience and open-endedness. However, Cage’s uses of pre-compositional systems—including square root formulas, rows, mathematical control of attacks, and the I-ching or other “chance operation” systems—are indications of formalism, as they constitute emphasis on means. In other words, Cage emphasized pre-compositional systems over personal experience, intuition, or idiosyncrasy. Nevertheless, given his constant emphasis on the aural experience, according to

⁸⁵ Larry J. Solomon, *Solomon's Music Resources*, “The Sounds of Silence: John Cage and 4'33,” rev. 2002, <http://solomonsmusic.net/4min33se.htm>.

⁸⁶ I discuss Cage’s evasion of self in the next section (2.3).

Meyer's parameters of definition, Cage gathers notions of both transcendentalism and formalism, because he emphasizes process as much as he emphasizes material.

Smith's own analyses of two pieces by Cage, *Imaginary Landscape No. 3* and *Quartet: 12 Tom Toms*, coincidentally featured in an early article, exemplify Cage's focus on pre-compositional systems. According to Smith's analyses, it was clear for Smith that Cage felt the need to apply pre-compositional systems in order to write the music Cage considered innovative, if not idiosyncratic. In the case of *Imaginary Landscape No. 3*, Cage utilized the previously mentioned "square root formula" in order to define the lengths of sections. Smith stated that Cage "used this formula as the structural basis of his music and as a useful procedure to guard against composition being just another culturally conditioned act. Cage realized that a composer must create a system of obstacles (strictly adhered-to pre-compositional rules) in order to free the composer to be truly creative."⁸⁷ This statement is a testimony to Cage's formalistic attitude: the application of systems is seen as inevitable condition for the composition of unique works. The application of a pre-compositional system is also the main motivation behind *Quartet: 12 Tom Toms*, which utilizes a system for measuring the number of attacks per section "as a method of density or textural control."⁸⁸ Finally, based on Meyer's tripartite scheme, Cage's *4'33"* would fulfill the continuum between formalism and transcendentalism. In spite of the piece's seemingly exclusive focus on materials—the sounds produced during musical silence—Cage's use of chance operations to dictate the lengths of each movement implies focus form and pre-compositional systems (formalist preoccupations).

⁸⁷ Stuart Smith, "The Early Percussion Music of John Cage." *Percussionist* 16, no. 1, (Fall 1978), 19. Quoting Cowell, Smith states that the basic tenet for 'square root formula' is: "The whole has as many parts as each unit has small parts, and these, large and small, in the same proportion!"⁶ In other words, the macro-structure is an enlarged image of the micro-structure, or, the micro-structure is a smaller image of the macro-structure."

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

As a result of Cage's emphasis on pre-compositional systems, his personal compositional imprint is suppressed; that is, the composer's creative autonomy is purposefully inhibited. Emerson's notions of intellectual autonomy, which includes ideas like "Man Thinking" and "speaking from within," are purposefully suppressed. Cage is not alone amongst composers who search for anonymity: compositional currents of the postwar period, noticeably the minimalists and the serialists, join this endeavor. As Michael Broyles has pointed out, "Boulez and Cage could be the every-European and every-American experimental composers of the postwar generation. Experimental composers—whether European or American, whether they were serialists, aleatorics, or minimaliststs—sought to discard any vestige of personal expression to separate any connection (as completely as possible) between composition and expression. They wished to suppress any trace of their personas in their pieces. Anonymity became a prime aesthetic goal."⁸⁹ In fact, although Cage sought for a blurring of the performer/audience binary,⁹⁰ the composer is kept anonymous and apart of this process. Because Cage's self is suppressed, even if there was any attempt to allude to a Transcendentalist idea of unity, it would be thwarted by an equation that excludes the composer.

Thus, as much as Cage's music emphasizes the listening experience, a fact that correlates to the experimental aspects of Thoreau's *Walden*, it is a stretch to consider Cage as directly informed by the Transcendentalist movement as a whole (Cage overtly affirmed to dislike Emerson's writings, although he appreciated Thoreau's⁹¹). I do not intend to imply that Cage did not share any common characteristics with the Transcendentalists or that he was exclusively a formalist. However, his early career's focus on process and pre-compositional systems, as well as his later career's pursuit for the suppression of the "I," put clear differences between how

⁸⁹ Michael Broyles, *Mavericks and Other Traditions in American Music* (Yale: Yale University Press: 2004), 263.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 248.

⁹¹ Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self*, 14.

Transcendentalism affected his and Smith's music. Cage is better identified as a Thoreauvian or a "transcendentalist," according to Meyer's definition of the term.

2.4 Richard Taruskin: transcendentalism in musical maximalism

Musicologist Richard Taruskin utilizes the term "transcendentalism" to identify a group of composers fitting in a larger category of artists from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: the "maximalists." Maximalist composers sought for a "radical intensification of means and toward accepted or traditional ends" ("end" is a term shared by both Meyer and Taruskin when referring to traditionalist art).⁹² Taruskin cites amongst the ends that maximalists radicalized "emotional expression," a "sense of religious awe in the presence of the sublime," and "sensuality."⁹³ The means, or musical parameters, that maximalists intensified included particularly a radical expansion of timbre palette, range of volume, textural diversity, size and variety of performing forces, and work length. Gustav Mahler is identified as one of the early maximalists.⁹⁴

Taruskin addresses musical transcendentalism in three of his chapters about the maximalists of the early twentieth-century music in the *Oxford History of Western Music*. For Taruskin, transcendentalism is addressed as a general philosophical attitude in addition to the more specific New England movement, as it is for Meyer. Taruskin understands transcendentalist music as an attempt to get rid of Romantic individualism, replacing it for a metaphysical ethos that conveys universal unity and human divinity. While Taruskin's ideas are compelling, his notions about New England Transcendentalism are generally less focused than later

⁹² Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Early Twentieth Century. The Oxford History of Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5.

⁹³ Taruskin, *Music in the Early Twentieth Century*, 5.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

commentators (such as Shultis). Taruskin is more concerned with his "maximalist/ minimalist" scheme than in tracing the specific historical or philosophical lineage of New England Transcendentalism in Western music.

Russian composer Alexander Scriabin is the first "transcendentalist" Taruskin discusses at length, not only because of the numerous maximalist aspects of his music, but also because of the important mystical attitude behind his discourse. As participant of the so-called theosophist movement in Russia, Scriabin believed that music conveyed a divine knowledge without the obstacles of "the imperfect and limited human intellect."⁹⁵ This divine knowledge included the concept of universal unity. One of Scriabin's last attempted career endeavors was supposed to be a grandiose work that glorified unification and transcendence: ". . . the composer began to imagine something far more grandiose: not a mere artwork but an all-encompassing ritual enactment, lasting seven days and seven nights, in which there were to be no spectator, only participants; which would be performed once only, in a specially constructed temple in India; and which would so transform the consciousness of the participants to give them – and with them, the entire world – access to a higher plane of consciousness transcending humanly imagined time and space."⁹⁶ The piece had the working title of *Mysterium*, but Scriabin did not live to complete it. His motivations, however, evidence characteristics of traditionalism, as they emphasize symbol. More noticeably, his dialogue with Hindu and Buddhist philosophies led him to develop a notion that music helps the achievement of a "transcendent enlightenment," which exposes man's inner divinity and promotes universal unity.⁹⁷ The connections with New England Transcendentalism are striking, even though there is no evidence that Scriabin had any contact with the writings of the Americans.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 203.

⁹⁶ Taruskin, *Music in the Early Twentieth Century*, 225.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 203.

Similar to Scriabin, tradition and mysticism also coalesce in the work and discourse of Olivier Messiaen, the French composer deeply informed by his Catholic faith and by the natural world. However, his artistic attempt for divine transcendence poses a crucial divide between Messiaen and the Transcendentalists: he searched for music that “may touch upon all subjects without ceasing to touch upon God.”⁹⁸ This statement implies that as much as his music may seek to “touch upon God,” God is still an external entity. Therefore, Messiaen’s dualistic Catholicism features a notion of separation of humanity and divinity extraneous to the Transcendentalist attempt of unification. Furthermore, when one considers compositional process alone, Messiaen also sets himself apart from the American lineage because of his frequent use of pre-compositional systems in pieces such as *Mode de Valeurs at d’intensité*, which inspired Boulez’s formalist *Structure Ia*. Because Messiaen composed not solely guided by his own intuition, it would be problematic to consider Messiaen as fitting in the Transcendentalist agenda.

After his examination of Messiaen, Taruskin discusses Charles Ives, not only due to the fact that Ives took direct inspiration from the New England movement, but also because he fits into Taruskin’s concept of the term “maximalism.” The features that account for Ives’s maximalism are his use of polytonality, polyphony, dissonance, overlapped or alternated with strikingly conservative passages, and quotations of simple popular tunes. The result is an idiom that is extremely idiosyncratic but also popular. Taruskin discusses the contradictions posed by Ives’s conservative side using facts originally discovered by composer Elliot Carter, which problematize Ives’s Transcendentalist discourse. According to Carter, Ives altered his old works by adding dissonances. Works that sounded quintessentially experimentalist and idiosyncratic were actually modified later with the intention to sound innovative. By altering his works, Ives

⁹⁸ Olivier Messiaen, quoted in Taruskin, *Music in the Early Twentieth Century*, 229.

showed a motivation discrepant to the Transcendentalist denial of the search for success, perhaps hoping to be seen as a father figure of American experimentalism. The issue that contradicts Ives's Transcendentalist discourse is his apparent struggle for prestige, which led him to apply techniques extraneous to his experience. Paradoxically, lust for success and emphasis on artifice instead of experience are two matters condemned by both the Transcendentalists and Ives himself.

Finally, Taruskin's insertion of Schoenberg as a transcendentalist maximalist is also plausible, but still problematic if one were to discuss Schoenberg's work under the specific guise of Transcendentalism. Schoenberg did speak to the necessity of idiosyncrasy as a characteristic of the artist: "Art is the cry of distress uttered by those who experience at first hand the fate of mankind. Who are not reconciled to it, but comes to grip with it..."⁹⁹ There is, therefore, a clear separation between the idiosyncratic attitude of the artist and the outer world. On the other hand, Schoenberg claimed unification of "musical space" to be his ideal, which implies an intellectual endeavor towards oneness. In this context, Taruskin implies that Schoenberg's development of a "pantonality," a result of the so-called "emancipation of dissonance," evidences an effort towards conveying universal unity through music. According to Taruskin, Schoenberg got inspiration for this unification of musical space from Honoré de Balzac's novel *Séraphîta*, in which a man and a woman share a love with an androgynous angel. In *Séraphîta*, the man and the woman have the chance to view heaven, a place where "everything" existed "in everything else." *Séraphîta*'s idea of oneness was inspired by the teachings of the philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg.¹⁰⁰

Although Swedenborg was also a direct influence on Emerson, Schoenberg's version of transcendentalism was different from the lineage of American movement I discuss in this

⁹⁹ Arnold Schoenberg, quoted in Taruskin, *Music in the Early Twentieth Century*, 303.

¹⁰⁰ Taruskin, *Music in the Early Twentieth Century*, 337-339.

document. It is true that Schoenberg's concomitant emphasis on artistic introspection and on universal unity could be pointed as evidence of a Transcendentalist attitude, but Schoenberg also flirted with formalism throughout his career. Starting in 1921 (with his opus 23), he relied on a formalist method, the twelve-tone system, to compose. Nevertheless, I have to emphasize that both Schoenberg and Messiaen devised their own methods, which renders unfair any allusion to their attitude as "parroting other man's thinking," to quote Emerson's *The American Scholar*.¹⁰¹ However, the use of pre-compositional systems, representing an imposition of logic over intuition, puts a divide between these composers and the American Transcendentalists. Transcendentalism eschewed the focus on logic and empiricism that, in the arts, formalism carries. Emerson disapproved of pure logic as the act of speaking "from without," that is, thinking not from experience but from tutelage.¹⁰² Emphasis on system is, therefore, an agenda extraneous to Transcendentalism. Rather, in my understanding of the Transcendentalist movement, music that is informed by Transcendentalism should be produced with exclusive reliance on the artist's intuition.

¹⁰¹ Emerson, "The American Scholar," 53.

¹⁰² Emerson, "The Over-Soul," 395.

CHAPTER 3: LIVING A THOREAUVIAN LIFE

3.1 Self-reliance, thought autonomy, and self-actualization: living a composed life

In Smith's discourse, the Emersonian idea of "self-reliance" appears as a quality intrinsic to autonomous thinking. Put in simple terms, Smith believes that the self-reliant artist shapes his own intellect and character by thinking autonomously. "Self reliance" is, therefore, the "courage" to "compose" oneself by building personal experience while eschewing external conditioning. As Smith has stated in a correspondence with me, in an unusual, poetic manner:

being open
to be composed,
conditioned to the off, beat, or,
have courage is born
not learned.¹⁰³

Sylvia Smith—Smith's wife, frequent collaborator, music publisher, scholar, and performer—shares a similar view to her husband. Like the composer, Sylvia has lived a life guided by free agency and thought, and she has used the idea of "composing oneself" to address the importance of autonomous thinking. Guided by the pursuit of personal beliefs rather than status or commercial success, she says: "In high school I was particularly moved by the writings of Thoreau. He offered solutions to a lot of contemporary problems, then and now. He also composed his life. I have always tried to lead a composed life—thinking things through, not giving in to the taste industries, not acting out the scenarios shown to us on television, thinking outside the box, and in music, having another idea—a personal idea—about how it should sound."¹⁰⁴ Because Sylvia has lived a composed life, she has succeeded as a publisher

¹⁰³ Smith, letter to the author, April, 2013. Smith wrote this letter in response to questions sent by the author. He wrote the answers in poem-like form.

¹⁰⁴ Sylvia Smith, interview with Teresa Sauer, in <http://notations21.wordpress.com/interview-with-stuart-saunders-smith-and-sylvia-smith/>

exclusively of the music she believes in: composers of the caliber of Smith, Robert Ashley, Milton Babbitt, Herbert Brün, John Cage, Robert Erickson, Ben Johnston, Pauline Oliverios, Christian Wolff, and many others. Sylvia has thus given her contribution by living in accordance with her ideals, without yielding to commercialism. For Smith, this is the attitude of “making a conscious choice,” and he has compared the idea of living a composed life to the premise of making conscious choices: “You have to, in this world, compose your life. Look at all the elements, like what you eat. For instance, I am a Vegan because it seems to me that it is a healthier way to eat, as well as the least damaging to the environment. You need to figure how much technology do you want in your life. I don’t have cellphone; I don’t have a computer.”¹⁰⁵

Smith’s statement is reminiscent of the Thoreauvian idea of composing a life guided by self-actualization. This attitude and other related Transcendentalist stances are reflected in Smith’s life and work, in particular the ideas of simplicity, isolation, anti-technologism, and his emphasis on silence. In order to live a composed life, it is necessary to exercise autonomous thinking, and to refuse to yield to common sense and to the vicious precepts established by the outer world—society, academia, or any group. Such are the most critical precepts Smith takes into consideration in his compositional process.

Thought autonomy plays a crucial role in Smith’s life and has subsequently guided his artistic attitude, as suggested by his personal background. Having grown up in the 1950’s, Smith’s generation was already inundated by the television, perennially engaged in conditioning viewers to blindly follow values fostered by capitalism, such as financial success and consumerism. Television commercials, Smith says, imposed values such as “smoking cigarettes, eating red meat . . . and people went along with it uncritically.”¹⁰⁶ However, Smith’s family

¹⁰⁵ Smith, interview with the author, November 14-15, 2013.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

encouraged him to question such values, to “compose his life,” so that he could make conscious choices. His father, Smith says, “was very against war because he had been in one: World War Two. He told me he did not think God was on anybody’s side and that the whole thing was immoral—killing each other—and that helped me see that war was not necessarily an inevitable thing. Then, from there I could see that smoking cigarettes was not an inevitable thing. From there I could see that eating meat was not an inevitable thing, etc.”¹⁰⁷ In Smith’s art, such experience translates into a disdain for conventional notions of success—commercial or academic—and an exclusive reliance on what his inner values guide him to do.

During his experiment, Thoreau saw the experience of getting lost in the woods as a metaphor for moving away from the values imposed by society and experiencing novelty. Even though he was familiar with the paths through the woods, he could get lost during the winter at night if the paths were covered with snow. Nevertheless, Thoreau viewed this experience as an allegory for self-actualization: “Every man has to learn the points of compass again as often as he awakes, whether from sleep or any abstraction. Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations.”¹⁰⁸ Thoreau’s message to the reader is key for understanding Smith’s idea of the function of art: if art evades the common sense, it leads one to getting lost, which in turn enables one to find one’s true self (self-actualization), or even to transform oneself according to values rooted in intuition.

Referring to Thoreau’s passage about getting lost in the forest, Smith says that “to find your way in the forest” is a metaphor for thinking autonomously.¹⁰⁹ Hence, just as Thoreau’s experience of getting lost in the woods helped him find his way or to “compose his own self,”

¹⁰⁷ Smith, interview with the author, November 14-15, 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Thoreau, *Walden*, 186-187.

¹⁰⁹ Smith, interview with the author, November 14-15, 2013.

Smith believes that every artist has to find his own true self: “We collectively share our ways, so when I talk about composing, I am not talking just about composing music, I am talking about composing one’s life, and finding your way, precisely to be socially conscious, as well as to be a deeply rooted life—rooted in what is real.”¹¹⁰ Therefore, to be rooted in reality is to lead a life grounded on autonomous thinking.

Being a Christian, Smith finds a direct correspondence of Thoreau’s hypothesis on getting lost with his faith: “This is precisely what Jesus said: You must lose yourself to find your self.” For Smith, composing is about sitting every day with the intention of getting lost: “When you are lost, you have to be self-reliant and find your way. That is what composing is about. Trying to get lost, so that you can find a new path in the woods to arrive home. My fundamental message is: The composer must get lost.”¹¹¹ The expression “getting lost” can be interpreted as the artistic duty of experiencing novelty and moving away from the common sense. In his view, this is the unavoidable condition for contributing to society and inspiring the audience for self-actualization.

3.2 Isolation

The notion of “getting lost” relates to the basic motivations of Thoreau's experiment of living in the woods, “lost” from society (even though not completely separated from it). Getting lost involved the solitude that he considered indispensable for personal growth, estranged of society’s common sense and materialistic impositions. Smith is as conscious of this necessity as Thoreau was. He states that his aesthetical value of composing music that shuns external impositions was ingrained during his childhood through isolation. Smith says that his familial

¹¹⁰ Smith, interview with the author, November 14-15, 2013.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

background, which motivated critical thinking, allowed him “to build the foundation of individualization.” Alongside his familial background, isolation allowed him to develop his own political choices and social awareness: “The best way to become a communist is through self-actualization. By defining the self and composing the self you are more able to help others, and more receptive to them helping you.”¹¹² Although Thoreau could have been accused of individualism, because his experiment was a private endeavor, to isolate himself from a society that was pursuing an immoral path was indispensable to him to think and write autonomously. Similarly, Smith’s solitude has allowed him to think and compose independently and to eschew the materialistic values prescribed by society.

At the young age of fourteen, a time when Smith already composed music, he states to have “felt isolated in crowds:”

I felt isolated in crowds
 the loneliest place was in school which I
 cared little about, because I wished
 From the beginning of self emancipation
 to learn on my own—groups kill—
 the lone person grows¹¹³

The emancipation allowed by solitude was a fundamental condition for Smith to develop an idiosyncratic musical style that he understands as a contribution to society, a fundamental premise of his artistic views. If individual freedom is Smith’s parameter for being socially relevant, he believes that too much social interaction damages one’s capability to contribute to society. Smith mentions other composers to demonstrate this notion. According to Smith, John Cage affirmed that “Conlon Nancarrow did not pay attention to anybody else’s music except Conlon Nancarrow’s music,” implying that this was the reason for Nancarrow’s relevance, “and

¹¹² Smith, interview with the author, November 14-15, 2013.

¹¹³ Smith, letter to the author, April, 2013. Smith wrote this letter in response to questions sent by the author. He wrote the answers in poem-like form.

that Henry Cowell's music was truly great when Henry didn't care about other people's music. Solitude allows you to grow your own garden and make sure that it is your own seed. That is the problem with the composers in New York. They are too close together, and they cross each other's paths so many times, that is hard for them to be themselves."¹¹⁴ Thus a composer's isolation allows him to develop a musical language extraneous to the beaten path of success, so that the only parameter for success is to "be himself."

Finally, Smith's necessity of solitude as means to develop distinctive art also manifests in his avoidance of technology, specifically communication technology. He believes that by overemphasizing new forms of communication, society puts obstacles for self-development: "I think too much technological gear is in the way of self-development because you are always connecting with other people, and doing this and that, and you have very little time for solitude and to silence." In the nineteenth century, Thoreau already showed a concern with the likely superfluity in communication technology: "We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate."¹¹⁵ Reinforcing the idea of how superfluous communication technology may get, Smith interjects: "Look at this thing called Twitter and Facebook: 'I just had dinner today. I had gravy on my meat.' Who cares?"¹¹⁶

3.3 Disregard for success: aspiring rather than affirming

One of the most frequently-quoted passages from *Walden* has become one of Thoreau's most popular sayings: "Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed, and in such desperate enterprises? If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he

¹¹⁴ Smith, interview with the author, November 14-15, 2013.

¹¹⁵ Thoreau, *Walden*, 55.

¹¹⁶ Smith, interview with the author, November 14-15, 2013.

hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.”¹¹⁷ Often used as motto to inspire the Americans to be free agents, Thoreau’s message has been perhaps only partially understood, as the value of succeeding according to capitalism is nowadays stronger than ever. Thoreau, however, despised the concept of success fostered by the burgeoning capitalism of the nineteenth century American society. In another passage that illustrates America’s misleading concept of success, Thoreau tells an anecdote in which a “strolling Indian” made baskets but failed to sell them to the white men. According to Thoreau, the native American failed to sell his baskets because “he had not discovered that it was necessary for him to make it worth the other’s while to buy them, or at least make him think that it was so, or to make something else which it would be worth his while to buy.”¹¹⁸ The “strolling Indian” was, therefore, mistaken in his concept of what success meant. Thoreau says, most likely referring to his past attempts in selling his writings, that like the Indian, he had also “woven a kind of basket of a delicate texture” and “had not made it worth any one’s while to buy them.” However, the author says that his experience helped him to cease struggling with the lack of commercial interest in his writings: “instead of studying how to make it worth men’s while to buy my baskets, I studied rather how to avoid the necessity of selling them. The life which men praise and regard as successful is but one kind. Why should we exaggerate any one kind at the expense of the others?”¹¹⁹ For Smith, Thoreau’s attitude suggests that his disregard for success was indispensable for the longevity of the legacy of his work: “Look at all his journals. They are still being studied; people are reading them. He lives on, through his work.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Thoreau, *Walden*, 354.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

¹¹⁹ Thoreau, *Walden*, 18-19.

¹²⁰ Smith, interview with the author, November 14-15, 2013.

Smith believes that the musician should search for his place in society without lust for success, and so he found a path in professorship to live successfully separated from the standards of success dictated by capitalism. He says that to do his best as a composer, he discovered teaching as a way of making a living that gave him space for self-development: “Teaching is an honorable profession, if done properly.” This profession allowed Smith to “avoid the necessity of selling” his baskets, that is, to develop creatively without longing for success. In his words, professorship gave him “time and encouragement” to do his own work: “So I taught two or three courses a semester, and that would give me plenty of time to develop my work in isolation.” A possible counter-argument to Smith’s statement would be that tenured positions make artists too “comfortable,” hence less creative. However, Smith has proven that this is not true of his work. Rather, his tenure helped him to compose with no pressure for financial success. This parallels Charles Ives’s day job as an insurance dealer, which also allowed him to compose without constraints.

Smith criticizes composers who concern themselves with commercial success because he believes that “too much public ‘success’ attracts the dreaded art consumer.”¹²¹ This kind of consumer will always want more of the same and attempt to restrain the artist to a success formula. Composers, inebriated by commercial success, tend to write music that constitutes a mere “output of society.” This is an expression that, according to Smith, comes from his late mentor Herbert Brün: “There is music or art that is an output of society, and that would be popular music (unquestioned culture) and there is music which is an input to society—and that is original thinking that can add to the wealth of the society, rather than just depleting society. That is what popular art does, it depletes information, whereas art does not deplete information, it

¹²¹ Stuart Smith, “A Composer’s Mosaic.” *Perspectives of New Music* 22, no. 1/2, (Autumn 1983 – Summer 1984): 280.

adds information.”¹²²

Music that is a mere “output of society” is music that does not contribute to knowledge, but is rather a mere product of society. On the contrary, music that is an “input to society,” contributes to idiosyncratic ways of thinking about music. In one of his articles, Smith adapted Brün’s terms to suit his own vocabulary, replacing them with “affirmational” and “aspirational” art: “There are fundamentally two types of art. One reinforces, validates, and perpetuates what was once composition but now has become the status quo. This art is affirmational—it affirms what already is . . . Pop music and the standard symphonic literature are and have become good examples of affirmational art.”¹²³ Affirmational art merely reaffirms the common sense, instead of questioning or “aspiring” to contribute to mankind, with fresh concepts. Conversely, art that Smith considers aspirational “gives us new realities, new modes of perception, new ways to organize the world . . . Aspirational art reflects dissatisfaction with the here and now.”¹²⁴ Paraphrasing Thoreau, whoever composes “aspirational” music does not seek to merely “keep pace with his companions,” but to hear “a different drummer.”¹²⁵

3.4 Inspiring non-teleology

Thoreau’s concern for America’s excessive consumerism encompassed another preoccupation: the centrality that labor had in the lives of the average Americans. Working beyond any necessity, only to sustain consumerism (more money to buy more goods that no one needs), excessive labor prevented Americans from enjoying the kind of life Thoreau considered

¹²² Smith, interview with the author, November 14-15, 2013. A whole discussion on this subject can be found in Herbert, Brun, “A Portrait of Herbert Brun,” interview by Stuart Smith, *Perspectives of New Music* 17, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 1979): 62-63.

¹²³ Smith, “A Composer’s Mosaic,” 280-281.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 281.

¹²⁵ Thoreau, *Walden*, 354.

significant. The whole situation turned into a dead end in which nature was depleted in the name of capitalism and Americans were prevented from enjoying a meaningful life. Examples of how this obsession with labor leads people to live meaninglessly appear frequently in *Walden*. In the following passage, Thoreau exemplifies how farmers may work day and night only to pay for their own farms: “I see young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools; for these are more easily acquired than got rid of.”¹²⁶ Such farmers have become “slave-drivers” of themselves, “serfs of the soil,” who have already begun to “dig their own graves” instead of living a meaningful existence.¹²⁷ The condition of the farmer that lives upon profits is, for Thoreau, one of a prisoner: “As long as possible live free and uncommitted. It makes but little difference whether you are committed to a farm or the county jail.”¹²⁸ A parallel can be directly drawn to Smith’s ideas on the role of the artist: consumerism instills hunger for success in the artist and leads to an obsessive concern for profit so as to afford a wealthy lifestyle. The artist that is committed to producing profitable art is, therefore, a slave, a prisoner of the common sense. On the other hand, to refuse to commit to the production of commercial art opens space for the artist to be intellectually productive, to let experience “speak,” and consequently to share knowledge and contribute to society. This issue leads back to Smith’s idea of providing “input to society” by avoiding teleological behavior: “Thoreau was one of the most productive writers in North-American history, and it was precisely because he did not care about production.” For Smith, Thoreau is only “committed to sharing his insights so that we all can benefit from them. Again it goes back to that point: you individualize your self through self-actualization in order for you to have something to share.”¹²⁹ Smith, as

¹²⁶ Thoreau, *Walden*, 3.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 89.

¹²⁹ Smith, interview with the author, November 14-15, 2013.

already discussed, intends to develop a significant artistic life by constituting an “input to society,” sharing the knowledge built via his intuitive perception of experience through music.

Furthermore, Smith’s music seeks to encourage the audience to actively exercise self-actualization while experiencing it. His music calls for a kind of epiphany, in which the composer reveals himself as someone who contributes to society by writing “aspirational” music, and the audience is also encouraged to “aspire” instead of merely “affirming.” An anecdote told by Thoreau about a man named John Farmer exposes the idea of how art influences one’s existence and instills better existence: After hearing the notes of flute music, John Famer began “to let his mind descend into his body and redeem it, and treat himself with ever increasing respect.¹³⁰ Smith believes that the world calls for “music that has the capacity to give us an epiphany,” like the notes of the flute that became a voice and inspired John Farmer to self-transformation.¹³¹ The composer understands, therefore, that it is the role of the artist to instill the curiosity for novel art in his audience, as art inspires self-development. Smith’s music invites each audience member to “aspire” and move away from the zone of the “affirmational,” to use his own terms. In other words, the audience is invited to experience novelty and distance itself from societal conditioning.

By seeking to inspire non-teleological thinking, Smith exercises the irony inherent in transcendental thought that Meyer discusses: there is always an encouragement akin to teleological behavior for societal improvement, although this improvement is based on questioning society’s very idea of progress (that is, is based on questioning teleology itself). This explains the seemingly contradiction of having the word “aspiration” related to non-teleological attitude.

¹³⁰ Thoreau, *Walden*, 242.

¹³¹ Smith, interview with the author, November 14-15, 2013.

CHAPTER 4: TRANSCENDENTALISM IN SMITH'S MUSIC

4.1 Confronting Transcendentalism and formalism: intuitive art and academic art

The schemes proposed by both Meyer and Shultis provide an effective framework for understanding transcendental thought as applied to the arts, but require adaptation in order to fit Smith's music. Both schemes focus on the opposition of symbolism (goal orientation) versus sensorial experience (open-endedness, coexistence): In Meyer's tripartite scheme, "symbolic" Ives tends towards traditionalism, whereas "sensory" Cage conforms to transcendentalism. Shultis' bipartite construct is strikingly similar, with the exception that it does not contemplate the formalist stance. In order to explain Smith's music, I have adapted the constructs of both authors, proposing a bipartite scheme that features capital "T" Transcendentalism (synthesizing aspects of both traditionalism and transcendentalism) as antithetical to formalism. With regard to formalism, I share the concepts of both Meyer and Art Berman, who infer that formalism seeks to minimize personality and emphasize procedure. According to Berman, each formalist work is intended to be objectively analyzed, or to ratify a system: "To each body of work a formalist theory is appended, which the work is both to ratify and exemplify."¹³² Smith's work, on the other hand, dialogues with Transcendentalism in the sense that it is never intended to be the object of logical thinking, but to be intuitively understood. Consequently, my construct of Transcendentalism as antithetical to formalism will be essential in understanding Smith's discourse (writings and interviews) and music as reflecting important concepts of Transcendentalism while eschewing formalism.

Smith sees the application of pre-compositional systems in writing idiosyncratic music as a kind of self-sabotage, because compositional techniques and charts impede the flourishing of

¹³² Berman, *Preface to Modernism*, 71.

the composer's self. Rather, by relying on intuition, the composer channels individualized experience. This concept is rooted in values of the Transcendentalists, most noticeably Emerson: concepts such as speaking "from within" illustrate this assertion. As Smith has written in his poem-essay *Composing Thoughts*:

Some selves expect
(tragically),
to be mirrored in composing
when using pre-conceived techniques thinking maps.
But all too often we hear just the techniques
and the maps.¹³³

Smith's statement is obviously not a critique to the works of the likes of Schoenberg and Messiaen, as they still managed to convey a sense of unique self through music despite their use of pre-compositional techniques. It is, however, a disapproval of composers who have blindly copied systems such as the ones developed by Schoenberg and Messiaen. Technique was never an end of its own for these composers, but their followers acted as if it was. Inspiring blind followers was never a precept of the Transcendentalists, as corroborated in Emerson's statement: "The imitator dooms himself to hopeless mediocrity. The inventor did it, because it was natural to him, and so in him it has a charm. In the imitator, something else is natural, and he bereaves himself of his own beauty, to come short of another man's."¹³⁴ The absence of formulas renders Smith's music an effective testimony of Transcendentalist attitude. It does not simply discourage imitators; it is incapable of doing so because it is grounded in his intuition rather than in academic formulae (conditioning) that allow for imitation.

¹³³ Stuart Saunders Smith, "Composing Thoughts," in *The Modern Percussion Revolution: Journeys of the Progressive Artist*, eds. Kevin Lewis and Gustavo Aguilar (New York: Routledge, 2014), 241. I have decided to keep Smith's original formatting. Like his poetry, *Composing Thoughts* features short stanzas that are frequently intercalated by dots that are to be read as one second of silence each.

¹³⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Divinity School Address," in *Essays and Lectures: Nature: Addresses and Lectures / Essays: First and Second Series / Representative Men / English Traits / The Conduct of Life*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1989), 89.

Smith's stance on pre-compositional systems parallels that of Emerson's in regard to books. If, for Emerson, "books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst"¹³⁵ then for Smith, when logic is "abused," that is, detached from personal experience it does not constitute worthwhile knowledge: "When man is alienated from his inner world and from living in the senses, then man makes choices only according to logic and reason, which are tools at the service of any point of view. Logic and reason must be rooted in values made in the senses or they become lethal."¹³⁶ The music created with systematic thinking is, therefore, seen as divorced from emotions and from nature, becoming artificial because it is dissociated from one's inner world. In the academic music-making situation, the alienation from one's inner world may reflect specifically in the use of pre-compositional systems, which Smith disproves. It is not difficult to infer that if works such as *Self-Reliance*, *The American Scholar*, and *Walden* were treatises on composition, they would dismiss pre-compositional systems as utterly counter-Transcendentalist.

Smith says that composers who use pre-compositional systems search "to attain a so-called unconditioned music."¹³⁷ The use of twelve-tone technique, or any kind of systematic thinking in composition, aims to create music that is "unconditioned" or supposedly dissociated from the musical tradition of the common practice period; however these methods actually condition the occurrence of musical features such as pitch, dynamics, texture, and articulation to predetermined settings. Smith refers to different currents of academic music as "so-called unconditioned," because they are often conditioned to the historically accepted compositional techniques taught in academia itself. For Smith, the role of the art mentor is quite different:

Education in the arts

¹³⁵ Emerson, "The American Scholar," 53.

¹³⁶ Smith, "A Composer's Mosaic," 277.

¹³⁷ Stuart Saunders Smith, "Against Definition," *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 215.

is merely the surface
of a history –
copying artifacts
without the art.
Search for the history of the human spirit –
not a thing
but its invitation for transcendence –
encourage to seek
what only one
alone can contribute
•
•
Education to actualize
not to outline.¹³⁸

The educator should nurture the student’s intuition and facilitate students’ self-actualization. Because Smith believes that academia frequently tends to suppress self-actualization, his disavowal of academic conditioning is akin to that of Emerson’s in his *The American Scholar* address. Hence, for Smith, the studies of harmony, counterpoint, and other theoretical music features should provide the composer a base for wielding his or her intuition freely. On one hand, “there is the foundation and then the constructed house,” while on the other hand, “there is the foundation and birds flying above it.”¹³⁹ While the former is Smith’s metaphor for how formalist music proceeds, the latter is his metaphorical condition for intuitive music. Smith understands that an artist constitutes Emerson’s “Man Thinking” only by “flying above” the foundation.

It is the composer’s job to be in constant search for new sense. To do so, the composer needs to respond to conditioning by battling against it, that is, by avoiding “agreed upon mind models:”

For some
All that is known
Is known through a known language –

¹³⁸ Smith, “Composing Thoughts,” 237.

¹³⁹ Stuart Saunders Smith, telephone conversation with the author (04/09/2013).

Making sense, commonsense.

-
-

For some
 All that is known
 is the will to know –
 to respond to conditioning ((history)) (((language)))
 with a *lack* of a special set
 of agreed upon mind models –
 rules of handling information
 This *lack* makes things
 Single in mind.¹⁴⁰

But how does Smith reconcile formal knowledge, or the logical academic learning, which might inevitably affect his work with the denial of “mind models?” This contradiction was in fact inherent to the Transcendentalist movement itself: some of the Transcendentalists graduated from the Harvard Divinity School, dominated by Unitarians ready to prepare them to become potential Lockean empiricists. However, the Transcendentalists developed a criticism towards academic erudition that was rooted in a concern with the excessively Eurocentric education that dominated culture and academia in nineteenth-century North America.¹⁴¹ The Transcendentalists broke free of their Euro-centric institutional training by finding their ethos in a variety of sources, including non-European texts like the Vedas. To justify their reasoning, Transcendentalists did rely on Kantian (German, therefore European) philosophy and its idea of innate knowledge. Nonetheless, the influence of Kantian philosophy should not be seen as contradiction, because reliance on an “intuitive mode of knowing,” such as the idea of innate knowledge, precludes external conditioning. It is not unfair to affirm that the Unitarian faculty of the Harvard Divinity School created a “monster” by making the two sides of the coin available to their students—Locke and Kant. It was ironically the study of Kant and other European philosophers that influenced the Transcendentalists to break free from the European tutelage.

¹⁴⁰ Smith, “Composing Thoughts,” 228.

¹⁴¹ Sacks, *Understanding Emerson*, 21-31.

Over a hundred years after the apogee of the Transcendentalist movement, the dispute around Euro-centrism in American culture was still central in the country's musical debate. This was an important motivation for American artists like Morton Feldman in the 1950s. He would often address the concern, using the French composer Pierre Boulez as the target of his disapproval: "I never understood what I was supposed to learn and what I was supposed to break. What rules? Boulez wrote a letter to John Cage in 1951. There is a line in that letter I will never forget. 'I must know everything in order to step off the carpet.' And for what purpose did he want to step off the carpet? Only to realize the perennial Frenchman's dream . . . to crown himself Emperor."¹⁴² Feldman's problem with Boulez was the latter's emphasis on logic over the intuitive creative mind. Disapproval of Euro-centrism and the dichotomy of formalist versus intuitive converge in Feldman's discourse that is similar to the Transcendentalists.

For Smith, who is himself an admirer of Feldman's work, the issue of acquired knowledge versus innate knowledge is not merely debated in the fields of national or compositional school identities. This brings back my previous question: how does Smith reconcile his formal studies with the rejection of conditioning? The answer lies in Smith's attitude toward acquired knowledge (such as notions of form, pitch organization, harmony and counterpoint). In Smith's compositional process, academic knowledge constitutes a mere reference that is distilled through his intuition. He reconciles experience and intuition by, ironically, confronting each with the other and becoming a "bird flying over the foundation." Smith believes that it is a crucial premise of the creative artist to "automatically battle with his history;"¹⁴³ in other words, to avoid conditioning and to rely on his innate knowledge. Hence, the composer's daily experience of sitting down to write music to see where his intuition takes him

¹⁴² Morton Feldman, *Give my regards to Eighth Street: collected writings of Morton Feldman*, ed. B.H. Friedman (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000), 60-61.

¹⁴³ Smith, letter to the author, April, 2013.

is paramount to any formulas learned through his academic studies.¹⁴⁴ Even Smith's first three *Links* for solo vibraphone, written while a doctoral student at the University of Illinois, resist any purely objective analysis. It is true that as a developing composer, Smith did use fairly clear compositional devices such as simple forms, "retrograde technique, pitch construction based on permutations of major and minor seconds and thirds as outlined in the basic intervallic plan," and six somewhat frequent rhythmic gestures.¹⁴⁵ However, as John P. Welsh has admitted, "no matter what some arbitrary system suggests as the next pitch(es) during the compositional process, the final decision ultimately rests with the composer's ear and intuition. The introduction of additional intervallic structures provides the work with both melodic and harmonic unpredictability. Thus, Smith's procedure for determining pitches is flexible. The basic intervallic design functions as the initial point of generation from which Smith shapes and reworks his melodies and simultaneities."¹⁴⁶ Welsh's statement testifies that the young Stuart Saunders Smith already sought to filter his academic tutelage via the reliance on "intuitive modes of knowing."¹⁴⁷

4.2 "Smith, the man" and "Smith, the artist:" bridging Thoreau and Emerson

I have already mentioned that Smith's work shows Transcendentalist attitude because, like Transcendentalism, it gathers aspects of both traditionalism (focus on symbol) and transcendentalism (focus on the sensorial), alongside the aspects of religious transcendentalism discussed in Chapter 1. Therefore, taking the specific example of Emerson and Thoreau, I contend that Smith's attitude toward reality encompasses aspects of both of these pillars of

¹⁴⁴ Smith, letter to the author, April, 2013.

¹⁴⁵ John P. Welsh, "Stuart Smith's 'Links' Series," *Percussive Notes Research Edition* 21, no. 3, (March 1983): 84.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁴⁷ Berman, *Preface to Modernism*, 13.

Transcendentalism. His ideas frequently reconcile dichotomies such as control and coexistence; individuality and collectivity; and dualism and non-dualism. When referring to these apparent dichotomies present in Smith's work and discourse, I have found it useful to label each side in the following way to facilitate the understanding of his complex artistic world: "Smith, the man" is indicative of his Thoreauvian side, and "Smith, the artist," is indicative of his Emersonian side. Whereas I exposed a good deal of "Smith, the man" in the previous chapter, this chapter will keep focusing on "Smith, the artist." However, it is never enough to emphasize that these two attitudes almost always coalesce: "Smith, the man" is indispensable because it informs "Smith, the artist" with life and political stances that are reflected in his music. Therefore, "Smith, the man's" emphases on collectivity, coexistence, openness, and self-abnegation (which echo a trust in a universal spirit) are found in his music and constitute an essential part of his artistic motivations.

However, I have identified in "Smith, the artist" a constant precedence of his creative mind over external conditioning, which to an extent implies a precedence of inner over the external. While "Smith, the man" (with a social sense of collectivity) understands the universe as unity *a priori*, "Smith, the artist" (or the idiosyncratic composer) searches for unity by writing music that symbolically creates this unity. "Smith, the man" is a Thoreauvian who sees intelligence everywhere, follows a vegan diet (an attitude of non-dissociation of humanity and the natural world), and believes in a universal spirit; "Smith, the artist," is an Emersonian who understands that only the artistic mind can be the agent of unification. However, I contend that Smith bridges the supposed gap between Thoreau and Emerson because these two attitudes frequently act in concomitance during his compositional process. The way Smith's listening

operates during the compositional process is an example of how Thoreauvian and Emersonian attitudes coalesce in Smith's ideas about music.

First, Smith shows a kind of Thoreauvian "aural" self-abnegation, as he understands that he needs to listen to the "intelligence of the sounds" in order to let a composition arise. The attitude of recognizing intelligence in the sounds is indicative of "Smith, the man's" non-dualistic attitude because the inner and the outer—the latter manifested as the sound—are acknowledged as part of a unity. Composing becomes a process of waiting in which the composition arises because the sounds "teach" him this new composition:

I compose by composing myself.
 I listen.
 I transcribe listening.
 The sounds have an intelligence all their own; each
 vibrates a story.
 They teach me a new composition.
 Composing is waiting.¹⁴⁸

Smith understands this self-abnegation as an indispensable condition to let the composition arise naturally as it helps in setting the compositional process free from pre-conceived ideas:

When I compose—I work at the piano—I try to be as quiet internally as possible, so that the musical ideas can emerge naturally, organically, from the body, from the spirit, from the mind. One has to get out of the way. This can be learned from *Walden*: if you pay attention, you see the intelligence of ants, you see the intelligence of the fish in the water, you see the intelligence of the trees. Well, it is the same with pitches. If you play a Bb, and you listen. It is a vibration just like water is a vibration, just like the sky is a vibration, or our body is a whole bunch of different vibrations. And we listen to that, and we get one pitch, and then you get another pitch, and another. Then you got three pitches, and they determine another pitch. Before you know, you have phrase. Then little phrases, "phraselets." And that to me is the same idea that one can find in *Walden* time and time again, and that is him [Thoreau] noticing. That is what composing is for me: noticing – and then staying out of the way, just noticing by itself.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Smith, "Composing Thoughts," 246.

¹⁴⁹ Smith, interview with the author, November 14-15, 2013.

This idea—that we can find intelligence anywhere in nature if we pay attention—suggests how Smith’s Thoreauvian side (emphasis on the sensorial and non-dualistic attitude) does affect “Smith, the artist.” Smith has applied this concept while teaching composition lessons. He would play just one note at the piano before asking the student to listen to the sound’s intelligence to determine what the next pitch should be.¹⁵⁰ In one of his scholarly articles, Smith described this same process as applied to his own compositional routine: “I start composing with a single pitch. It can be most any pitch. Then, I listen long and hard to that single pitch until it tells me what pitch comes next. When a series of pitches emerges from my listening, then I hear what the pitches demand for their rhythms and durations. The pitches will tell me how they want to be articulated in time.”¹⁵¹ I have just quoted three stylistically contrasting passages (a more poetic one, an interview, and a scholarly article) in which Smith describes the exact same process: he recognizes the intelligence of the sound, by letting it “tell” him what the next sound should be, and then the composition arises naturally. This kind of aural self-abnegation is what Smith means by “getting out of the way” during the compositional process.

Nonetheless, his self-abnegation is paradoxically joined with “Smith, the artist,” that is, with an artistic stance that places his creative mind as the primary source of composition. Therefore, “transcribing listening” does not only mean listening to the “intelligence of the sound,” but it also means transcribing memories based on personal listening experience (i.e. “inner listening”).¹⁵² When he states that pre-compositional systems ignore “sound’s intelligence manifested in the imprinted corporeal human inner ear to attain a so-called unconditioned

¹⁵⁰ Smith, phone conversation with the author, August, 2015.

¹⁵¹ Stuart Saunders Smith, “Geography of Time: The Links Series of Vibraphone Essays (1974-1994),” *Percussive Notes* 32, no. 1, (April 2005): 58.

¹⁵² José “Zeca” Lacerda, “The Silence... An Introduction to the Inner World of Stuart Saunders Smith,” *Perspectives of New Music* 5, no. 6, (November 2012): 40.

music,”¹⁵³ he gives us an indication that inner listening works concomitantly to the sound’s intelligence. My assertion is based on the fact that he highlights the “imprinted corporeal human inner ear” as an indispensable condition for the recognition of the sound’s intelligence (like Emerson’s Vision of the Wisdom is necessary of the recognition of Oneness). In fact, Smith frequently decides the title of a piece before starting to write it, so that the title helps delineate how the piece will sound: “Once I have a title, then I get out of the way and let the music emerge from that poetic universe.”¹⁵⁴ The process of letting “the music emerge from that poetic universe” suggests that although Smith consciously “gets out of the way,” his creative mind inexorably plays a part on the process, rooted in the words of the title. Based on the “poetic universe” of the title, his “inner listening” inevitably participates on the process of choosing the sounds that will take part in the composition alongside his listening of the “sound’s intelligence.” This enigmatic mode of composing indicates that as much as the unity of humanity and nature happens *a priori* for Smith, the unity of life and art (or at least his life and his art) happens exclusively through symbol, as his intellectual input is always indispensable to the process.

4.3 Symbolizing unity

Smith’s music symbolizes unity in two basic ways. First, his music unifies his own life with his art in two manners: by drawing on “filtered” memories gathered from his aural experience through the process of inner listening and by conveying his life stances (noticeably pacifism, anti-technologism, anti-materialism, and non-teleology) through his musical choices. However, it is important to emphasize that conversely to Shultis’s idea of Cage’s non-dualism, Smith does not see life as an artistic experience. The simple fact that he conveys, for instance,

¹⁵³ Smith, “Against Definition,” 215.

¹⁵⁴ Jeremy Muller, “Amidst the Noise: Stuart Saunders Smith’s Percussion Music,” (includes an interview with Stuart Saunders Smith), in *Percussive Notes* 52, no. 4, (July 2014): 9.

aspects of his political beliefs through music suggests that unification happens through symbol. Second, his music unifies composer, performer, and audience, conveying a unity akin to the Transcendentalist notion of “Oneness.” This is achieved through the musical application of concepts like openness and co-existence, as well as through a discourse that alludes to this unification. It is important to emphasize, however, that the majority of his pieces convey unity in all the ways described (filtering experience, conveying life stances, and conveying Oneness). The reason for my choices of specific pieces to explain each concept is because each of the pieces emphasizes particular aspects that inform for the discussion.

4.3.1 Unifying art and life

4.3.1.1 Filtering and framing memory

Because Smith does not see art and life as *a priori* unified, his music becomes the catalyzer of this unification by conveying his individualized experience, which as he says, “frames” his aural memory. So terms such as “distilling” (or “filtering”) and “framing” experience are essential to understand his compositional process. This process shows a basic contrast of Smith’s idea of symbolic unity of art and life, as opposed to Cage’s idea that art and reality are one. Smith’s exclusively symbolic unification of life and art is well synthesized in the following statement. Here, Smith understands that while experiences may constitute music, life’s hardships, for example, cannot be experienced as art:

With “4’33”” Cage posited that life itself is art—that the traditional frame within which art was originally positioned was no longer valid. Further, when we notice, with an artistic mindset, anything can be art. So, if one were not listening when Beethoven’s music was being played it would be noise; conversely, if one listens to traffic with an artistic mindset it would be music.

I find this position amoral. Is war, AIDS, third-world hardships, with a turn of the mind, to be experienced as art? To use an artistic mindset to experience real-life tragedy is, for me, unthinkable. It is like taking a picture of someone bleeding to death without

intervening. Cage's position leads to extreme passivity in the face of wrong doing and pain. He once said there was just enough pain in the world. Really! I think there is way, way, too much pain in the world.

I once asked John Cage about this issue in a public forum. Our friendship ended. Art is distilled experience in a frame. Distilled experience gives the art work such intensity that it literally holds our attention. The frame contains art in such a way that it heightens the experience by reining it into a small space. I find living in an artistic experience better than living in everyday life. Art's function is to bring us closer to the divine.¹⁵⁵

Because art is, for Smith, experience distilled through artistic intellect, each of his musical works symbolizes his personal aural experience "in a frame." His music is neither a mere output of every day life, nor the portrait of a lifestyle imposed by society. Smith believes that the attitude of facing any sounds as musical constitutes a denial of men's intellectual faculties. Rather, his music conveys intentional sounds—even if these sounds attend to a range of possibilities—so that his "artistic experience" serves as a contribution to mankind. On the other hand, music that provides sounds that merely convey "everyday life" not only constitutes mere output of society, but also does not have the "intensity" to "hold our attention."

Smith's idea of how intuition "distills," individualizes, or filters experience is analogous to that of the Transcendentalists, particularly Emerson's (" . . . that one class speak *from within*, or from experience"¹⁵⁶). He refuses to compose merely from conditioning, because this attitude is indicative of speaking "from without," to use Emerson's term. Rather, by composing through individualized experience, Smith composes "from within." He "hears" inside—the sounds his memory gathered through personal experience—and lets the composition take form naturally, without preplanning:

I compose through experience.
I watch a composition unfold.
Ideas have little space . . .

¹⁵⁵ Rob Falvo, "Stuart Saunders Smith's 'Ground' for Solo Glockenspiel Clear Complexity" (includes an interview with Stuart Saunders Smith), in *Percussive Notes* 49, no. 3, (May 2011): 43.

¹⁵⁶ Emerson, "The Over-Soul," 395.

Hear

Each day I see what will happen¹⁵⁷

The attitude of each day waiting to “see what will happen,” and letting intuition guide the process is what separates Smith from the composers that Taruskin identifies as “transcendentalists” (with the exception perhaps of Scriabin) and from Cage, who applied pre-compositional systems to write their music. In the following statement, Smith makes an allusion to the Transcendentalist notion of experience as compliant to intuition when he affirms that there is music in the human mind prior to any outer conditioning:

There is music,
constituted in the mind before learning.
To find what is constituted there
keep reaching
in the same time.
Then transcribe hearingmind,
Hearingmind a priori.

Look for the condition of the mind

-
-
-
-
-

Let mind
try to see itself

Experience
is the first condition of the mind.¹⁵⁸

Smith coins the neologism “hearingmind” in reference to his creative mind during the process of filtering experience (aural memory, in this case). In order to “transcribe hearingmind,” he relies solely on the reminiscences of his listening memory, “distilled” through his idiosyncratic creative mind. This process is made possible through inner listening, an action that

¹⁵⁷ Smith, “Composing Thoughts,” 226.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 227.

is, like the Transcendentalist innate knowledge, intended more to be “ignited,” than to be logically understood.¹⁵⁹ Through “inner listening,” Smith’s compositional act turns memory into music, in a process that is intuitive. As Art Berman infers, referring to the idealism of Kantian philosophy in terms of art, “art is an exercise and a proof of intuitional knowledge and of its object and, consequently, of the idealist’s general suppositions.”¹⁶⁰ How would Smith, then, define “inner listening?” The composer has applied similar terms such as “listen to the ‘inner’” and “listen inside,” but I believe that the best definition for inner listening he has implied is: “listening that transcends self by consciously letting patterns emerge out of the sound’s demand to take their own shape,”¹⁶¹ in which he expresses with precision his reconciliation of creative mind and aural self-abnegation. As he states:

I aspire to be a witnessing transcriber to a music which makes itself in the medium of listening. A listening that transcends self by consciously letting patterns emerge out of the sound’s demand to take their own shape.

Obviously I am not talking about chance music or serial music. Chance music and serialism mechanically push sounds around, ignoring sound’s intelligence manifested in the imprinted corporeal human inner ear to attain a so-called unconditioned music. Actually, such music is either without condition or merely conditioned. Serialism and chance treat sound as material outside the body-literally disembodied music. In each case the individual’s corporeal sound-imprint is ignored.¹⁶²

By emphasizing the sensorial (aural experience) as a vital part of his compositional process, Smith suggests a kind of Thoreauvian attitude of self-abnegation. But the role listening takes in his compositional process does not downgrade into a non-scrutinized restatement of his listening memory; rather, only the sounds that were capable of leaving imprints in his “hearingmind” are the ones who make them. Nonetheless, he surely does not want his “corporeal sound-imprint” to be ignored. Although the perception of the outer is always conditioned by the

¹⁵⁹ Buell, *The American Transcendentalists*, xviii.

¹⁶⁰ Berman, *Preface to Modernism*, 18.

¹⁶¹ Smith, “Against Definition,” 215.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

inner in Transcendentalist thought, the senses are still indispensable, as they constitute doors from the outer world to the inner world. This explains why Smith frequently highlights the sensorial aspects of his compositional process, although not according to the Lockean understanding of a sense perception that shuns Kantian reason. Smith's "hearingmind" is the result of a Thoreauvian sensorial experience, an experience subordinate to the inner.

4.3.1.2 Pacifism

An important musical outcome of Smith's symbolic unification of life and art is his use of complex non-periodic rhythms. He attributes his refusal to write regular rhythms to his pacifistic stance (which comes from his political and Quaker backgrounds) because regular rhythms recall military marching.¹⁶³ In fact, it would be not only immoral, but also unthinkable for Smith to compose rhythmically periodic music. His anti-war stance has guided him to write music that features an extremely complex rhythmic vocabulary, pervaded with broken figures of non-periodic durational patterns often juxtaposed polyrhythmically. The following example, *As if Time Would Heal by its Passing*, for solo marimba, illustrates this assertion. The bracket of 9/7 in the first system indicates nine consecutive notes with the speed of sixteenth-note septuplets. The polyrhythmic figures of this excerpt include broken figures of 5 against 4, 6 against 4, 7 against 6, and others:

¹⁶³ Smith and Goldstein, "Inner-Views," 188.

Example 4.1—*As If Time Would Heal by its Passing*, sixth page, lines 1 and 2

The image shows two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system consists of two staves (treble and bass clef). The treble staff begins with a dynamic marking of *mp* and features several triplet markings (3:J) and a 5:J marking. The bass staff also starts with *mp* and includes *mf* and *ff* markings. The second system continues the piece, with the treble staff marked *p+* and the bass staff marked *p+*. Both staves in the second system feature various triplet markings (7:J, 6:J, 3:J, 5:J) and a 9/7 time signature.

As If Time Would Heal by its Passing, by Stuart Saunders Smith. Copyright Sonic Art Editions. Used by permission of Smith Publications, Sharon, VT 05065 USA

Because according to Smith repetitive square rhythms evoke military marching, he believes that periodicity suggests war impetus. March-like music, Smith states, “is at the extreme end of a periodic-music continuum. March music is absolutely symmetrical. Its purpose is military or paramilitary. Other music like jazz, rock, various ethnic musics use periodicity each in quite different ways. What they have in common is the surface supremacy of the foot over the head. . . . I find this a dangerous situation. There is a disconnect between our moral center and visceral selves. Therefore, I am not in favor of periodicity any longer in any form.”¹⁶⁴ This statement corroborates that Smith’s music avoids periodicity because periodicity emphasizes violent, animalistic behavior, but also that human intellectual condition is itself incompatible to war impulse (“There is a disconnect between our moral center and visceral selves”). But how does Smith reconcile his love for jazz (and not only free jazz) with his disdain for rhythmic periodicity? The answer is in that he does not try to reconcile them: “I am not in favor of

¹⁶⁴ Smith and Goldstein, “Inner-Views,” 188.

periodicity any longer in any form. This does not mean I am no longer entertained or moved by periodic music, it means I disapprove of it.”¹⁶⁵

In *Walden*, Thoreau recollects an incident in which he is put into jail for refusing to pay taxes to a “state which buys and sells men, women, and children, like cattle at the door of its senate-house”¹⁶⁶ (which he portrays with more detail in *Civil Disobedience*). Smith sees this passage as an evidence of the author’s pacifistic stance, as he manifests his anti-slavery belief through a consciously non-violent stance (namely, refusing to pay his taxes). Smith says: “Civil disobedience is a bigger statement than violent disobedience. If you do violent disobedience against the war, you are starting a war on a smaller scale. It doesn’t make sense. But if you have civil disobedience, by your action you are trying to teach the government what it should do. You should talk to the other, to the perceived enemy. Not shoot, but talk.”¹⁶⁷ Hence, like Thoreau, Smith also believes that one needs to row against the tide when institutions are morally wrong. At once, Smith’s rhythmic intricacy therefore becomes “civil disobedience” against “affirmational” music and against war, because refusing to surrender to society’s belligerent impetuses is a matter of autonomous thinking. Thoreau also considered his anti-war stance as a matter of freethinking, as he implies in this passage:

A common and natural result of an undue respect for law is, that you may see a file of soldiers, colonel, captain, corporal, privates, powder-monkeys, and all, marching in admirable order over hill and dale to the wars, against their wills, ay, against their common sense and consciences, which makes it very steep marching indeed, and produces a palpitation of the heart. They have no doubt that it is a damnable business in which they are concerned; they are all peaceably inclined. Now, what are they? Men at all? or small movable forts and magazines, at the service of some unscrupulous man in power?¹⁶⁸

When Thoreau affirms that man while marching is doubtfully “man at all,” he unveils the

¹⁶⁵ Smith and Goldstein, “Inner-Views,” 191.

¹⁶⁶ Thoreau, *Walden*, 187.

¹⁶⁷ Smith, interview with the author, November 14-15, 2013.

¹⁶⁸ Henry David Thoreau, “Resistance to Civil Government,” in Buell, *The American Transcendentalists*, 259.

same issue as Smith, when the composer stresses that periodic rhythms glorify the “supremacy of the foot over the head.” The similarity of both statements also shows how both Thoreau and Smith advocate for pacifism through non-violent acts, such as writing literature or music.

As discussed in the first chapter, the Transcendentalist anti-war stance was based on the existence of a universal soul. However, for Smith, the principle of Oneness manifests itself as openly anti-nationalistic more than in the case of the Transcendentalists. He affirms that he is longing for the day that “the word ‘war’ is no longer of any language’s vocabulary.” Looking towards the extinction of national boundaries, he affirms that only through the reduction of nationalism “to such a point that it does not matter what country you come from because we are all citizens of the world” that war will become an “obsolete relationship” between humans.¹⁶⁹ In *War*, Emerson gives a pro-peace statement that denotes a similar approach to Smith’s, although applying it to the nationalistic context of the Transcendentalists: “If you have a nation of men who have risen to that height of moral cultivation that they will not declare war or carry arms, for they have not so much madness left in their brains, you have a nation of lovers, of benefactors, of true, great, and able men.”¹⁷⁰ The fact that, if compared to Emerson’s call for peace, Smith’s call for peace is posed in anti-nationalistic terms suggests that Smith’s attitude is a development Emerson’s concept of Oneness. The same could be said about Ives who, proposing a non-violent reaction to society’s emphasis on accumulation of property, says: “That this limit of property be determined not by the *voice* of the majority but by the *brain* of the majority under a government limited to no national boundaries.”¹⁷¹ Both Ives and Smith develop a non-violent, Transcendentalist, stance by merging it with a practical vision of the universal spirit: anti-

¹⁶⁹ Smith, interview with the author, November 14-15, 2013.

¹⁷⁰ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “War,” in *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 11, *Miscellanies*, ed. J. E. Cabot (Boston: Fireside Edition, 1909), 193-195.

¹⁷¹ Ives, “Essays Before a Sonata,” 149.

nationalism.

4.3.1.3 Anti-technologism

Not only a testimony of pacifist stance, Smith also sees his application of complex rhythms as a symbol of his distaste for artificiality and an endeavor to symbolize natural processes in his music. As Thomas Goldstein has stated, “Smith is continually pushing the boundaries of rhythmic complexity, creating a highly personal rhythmic terrain—a synthesis of such fields as jazz, speech patterns, and nature.”¹⁷² In fact, human speech is in itself a natural process, and Smith reconciles it with jazz by affirming that the free rhythmic vocabulary of jazz solos features speech-like rhythms: “If you hear jazz without the rhythm section you hear speech.”¹⁷³ He also connects his use of complex rhythms to a more general concept of nature, as he believes that nature does not feature perfect periodicity. Rather, the rhythms of nature are “organic” and not periodical: “Nature is organically predisposed to what is called irrational rhythms. That is the organic nature that music should try to emulate . . . The assembly line forces a human being at the assembly line to be nothing more than a robot.”¹⁷⁴ Therefore, he applies non-periodic rhythms with the intention to evade industrial-like rhythms in favor of an emphasis on organic or “speech-like” rhythms. Nature does “not repeat sixteenth notes,” whereas industrial assembly lines recall periodical drumbeats, proper of minimalistic and other kinds of music Smith considers “affirmational.” Paraphrasing Smith, industrialization promotes the supremacy of the automated behavior over free agency. The following example, . . . *And Points North*, is scored for solo speaking percussionist playing small instruments and found objects. It illustrates

¹⁷² Smith and Goldstein, “Inner views,” 187.

¹⁷³ Stuart Saunders Smith, “Geography of Time: The Links Series of Vibraphone Essays (1974-1994),” *Percussive Notes* 32, no. 1 (April 2005), 58.

¹⁷⁴ Smith, interview with the author, November 14-15, 2013.

how Smith relates a naturalistic thematic with his use of non-periodic rhythms and free rhythmic writing following the rhythms of the voice. The piece is inspired by the forests of Maine and further North, and “is about a heart in search of the spirit of the North.”¹⁷⁵

Example 4.2—. . . *And Points North*, second page

Movement I 2

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. . . *And Points North*, by Stuart Saunders Smith. Copyright Sonic Art Editions.
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Questioning purposeless technological development, and the depletion of nature that it causes, are attitudes that lead back to Thoreau’s central precept: thought autonomy. The uncritical acceptance of industrialization synthesizes modern society’s tendency for alienation, as Thoreau pointed out: “Men think that it is essential that the Nation have commerce, and export ice, and talk through a telegraph, and ride thirty miles an hour, without a doubt, whether they do

¹⁷⁵ Stuart Saunders Smith, . . . *And Points North* (Baltimore: Smith Publications, 1992).

or not; but whether we should live like baboons or like men, is a little uncertain.”¹⁷⁶ Smith also sees American society’s blind acceptance of superfluous technological advancements as indication of its alienation: “Thoreau,” Smith says, “was very critical of accepting—again I come back to this point—just accepting what technological change comes along, just accepting it. So Thoreau is looking at telegraph, ‘is that something useful or not?’ Maybe it was useful and Thoreau was wrong, but it does not really matter. The important thing was to look at it critically, not just to accept. Time and time again Thoreau asked fundamentally radical questions.”¹⁷⁷ Therefore, for Smith, questioning technological advancements should also be understood in terms of freethinking. Smith assesses the quality of the output of composers of electronic music by questioning whether the capital spent on it is worthwhile or not: “I see all these fancy computers popping up everywhere. Millions are spent on them but to what end? Too much computer composition seems like ‘paint by numbers.’ Does the quality of current computer art warrant the money, time and resources spent on it?”¹⁷⁸ Refusing to write for electronics, Smith would obviously answer this rhetorical question negatively. Both abjuring electronic music (by writing exclusively acoustic music) and eschewing the use of industrial-like rhythms are matters of refusing to submit to the voice of the common sense.

Smith’s focus on questioning the acceptance of technology, more than merely bashing it unconditionally (“The important thing was to look at it critically, not just to accept.”), explains the apparent contradiction that his anti-technological stance may pose in regard to his constant writing for the vibraphone. It does take a massive industrial network to produce musical instruments like the vibraphone. However, the vibraphone has become part of Smith’s background, ever since he used it to improvise in a free jazz combo in Maine. The vibraphone

¹⁷⁶ Thoreau, *Walden*. 98-99.

¹⁷⁷ Smith, interview with the author, November 14-15, 2013.

¹⁷⁸ Welsh, “Interview with Stuart Saunders Smith,” in *The Music of Stuart Saunders Smith*, 322.

has, therefore, left sound “imprints” in his “hearingmind.” When Smith writes for the vibraphone, he “speaks from within.” By exclusively writing non-periodic acoustic music, Smith makes a statement: his music is a contribution to society because it reflects a denial of its pull towards industrialization. As an acoustic instrument, the vibraphone, is also part of this context.

But Smith’s refusal to write for electronics is also an attitude of placing the performance act above the plain experience of sound. He understands human touch as necessary to the experiencing of sound, as music acts not merely as a phenomenon. This perspective is distinctive of “Smith, the artist,” as it is better aligned to the core Emersonian idea of human precedence over natural phenomena—“dualism”— rather than to open-endedness:

Once the listener is acclimated to the sound of an instrument, the focus of the listening experience is in the actual playing (touching) and the ‘music,’ which is far more than the mere sound of an instrument. In general, the construction of instruments like keyboard-computer-synthesizers that offer a seemingly infinity of sound possibilities miss this point. The design of such keyboard-computer-instruments values sound over performance. The very availability of ‘infinite’ instrument sound potentials invariably diverts the attention of the listener from performance and ‘music’ to sound. The finite design of the sound world of acoustical instruments is required to encourage our attention to focus on the human touch as prominent over sound as prominent. It is also a curious phenomenon that unusual sounds become very un-unusual quickly.¹⁷⁹

When in this passage Smith highlights his disapproval for electronic technology, he also speaks for a precedence of humanly produced over electronically produced sounds. When music is intentionally performed (that is, with the input of the human intellect), it may be used as a catalyst of symbols or even simply to convey an abstract concatenation of sounds originated in the creative mind. Although nature provides an infinite palette of sounds, these will only constitute music if it features the intellectual participation of all: composer, performer, and audience. Smith’s stance shows at once disapproval of both: electronic sounds and Cage’s wish that sounds be “just sounds” and not “psychological,” as presented in Chapter 2.

¹⁷⁹ Stuart Saunders Smith, “Thinking on Tools, Touching my Trade, or The Touch in Time is Mine,” *Percussive Notes* 31, no. 8 (December 1993): 74

4.3.1.4 Anti-materialism

Speaking through Thoreau's "voice," Charles Ives affirms that "the complexity of Nature teaches freedom," whereas "the complexity of materialism . . . teaches slavery."¹⁸⁰ In fact, Thoreau advocates for material simplicity but not for intellectual simplicity. But how does Thoreau's advocacy for simplicity reflect in a composer's creational process and in his attitude towards success? In Smith's case, this anti-materialism is displayed in economic instrumentation and fondness of content over mannerism. In other words, his works focus on material rather than on flashiness of orchestration or form. Placing Ives's statement next to Emerson's idea of nature as a reflection of the creative mind, intellectual and compositional complexity means freedom of creation, as well as a disregard for material success. Making a parallel with Smith's compositional process and paraphrasing Ives, Smith's music achieves complexity through the collaboration of both nature and humanity. He allows the "sound intelligence" to inform and "compose" himself as an artist, but he also lets his "hearingmind" dictate the "sound-imprints" that are going to become part of his experience. This two-way process of composition eschews the materialism of instrumental and timbral surplus, because Smith's anti-materialistic nature does not allow for it. Borrowing Ives's aphorism once again, the complexity of nature "teaches freedom" to Smith, because it ignites the process of composition just described. On the other hand, the complexity of materialism "teaches slavery," because it limits a composer's horizons to compositional tendencies.

The essence of much of *Walden* is Thoreau's call for anti-materialism illustrated by his journey, which sought to testify in practice that society's materialistic values were harmful to self-development. Therefore, Thoreau hoped that his experience at Walden Pond served as inspiration for society to eschew over-abundance, for instance, in farming:

¹⁸⁰ Ives, "Essays Before a Sonata," 139.

“Still we live meanly, like ants; though the fable tells us that we were long ago changed into men; like pygmies we fight with cranes; it is error upon error, and clout upon clout, and our best virtue has for its occasion a superfluous and evitable wretchedness. Our life is frittered away by detail. An honest man has hardly need to count more than his ten fingers, or in extreme cases he may add his ten toes, and lump the rest. Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb nail.”¹⁸¹

Thoreau’s disapproval of over-abundance finds parallels particularly in Smith’s music choices of instrumentation. These choices, also based on the composer’s listening experience, have a moral origin: Smith says that over-abundance is the “ripe fruit that can lead to greed,” a statement that concomitantly suggests his pacifist and anti-capitalist beliefs as well as his faith. He continues, “Inequality leads to violence and leads to envy, which is a kind of violence that the envious one perpetrates on their selves. It leads to bitterness, and bitterness corrodes the soul.”¹⁸² Similarly, Thoreau was “convinced, that if all men were to live as simply as I then did, thieving and robbery would be unknown. These take place only in communities where some have got more than is sufficient while others have not enough.”¹⁸³ Because Smith’s social values are inevitably transferred to his art, his moral concern for simplicity has informed his choices of medium and instrumentation. An important example of his use of medium to convey simplicity is found in the works he calls “mini-operas,” which require a solo instrumentalist to act and perform concomitantly. Concerned with the social implications of the music he writes, Smith believes that it is “obscene that we have institutions like the Metropolitan Opera spending millions on productions while homeless people sleep outside, cold in winter. It is like fiddling while Rome burns.” His mini-opera, *Songs I-IX*, calls for a soloist acting and playing household objects, contrasting with the social alienation of expensive opera productions. With *Songs I-IX*,

¹⁸¹ Thoreau, *Walden*, 97-98.

¹⁸² Smith, interview with the author, November 14-15, 2013.

¹⁸³ Thoreau, *Walden*, 188.

Smith says he wanted to write “everything a traditional opera is not: poverty stricken (it uses junk you can find in any flea market), short (ten minutes), no plot, no conventional singing and no expensive costumes.”¹⁸⁴ The following example shows the anti-materialism in *Songs I-IX*.

Smith asks for instruments such as glass jars, frying pan, wooden bowl and jar cover cymbal (a jar cover played like a cymbal):

Example 4.3—*Songs I-IX*, last page

Legend for Song VII

Song VII

High Descriptive, quasi-cursing voice
4 Glass Jars
Frying pan
Wooden bowl

grrrah! Soperately disquiescent
An aroused anti-signed nefariousing whippersnapper,
noxiously ne're-do-welled. A burned out nada mubbin in a hole

A nilliah goose egg scattered
Zzzzzilichingly vacuous
Yet possessed.

INTERLUDE
Metal Container

Song VIII

Jar cover cymbal
Ratchet
Wooden bowl
Metal container

As a curse
A shorn wracked demarked ruinate grr
Its 'pregnant great stuffed gun
Muck a muck whacking gravid grrraah!

Song IX

INTERLUDE
Metal Container

Relaxed, very lyrical
4 Glass Jars
Wooden bowl
Broken glass maraca

Chillsome
Proffer kudo
explused at incessants on a quashed scope to minify whilom enjoin
Lucidity
Smack dab and with allusion that unfocus intermittant taboos whelmed and stood still.
ma (falsetto-match pitch with jar #4)

* Ossia improvise on jars in direct conjunction with words—similar to what is already written.

Songs I-IX, by Stuart Saunders Smith. Copyright Sonic Art Editions.

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For Smith, simplicity, as reflected in his anti-materialist attitude, should direct a composer's choice of instrumentation. By writing pieces for single percussion instruments, Smith seeks to do “more with less,” shunning the material excess of concerts that feature “tons of drums on the stage.” “The amount of material that they had was ridiculous. They had over-

¹⁸⁴ Welsh, “Interview with Stuart Saunders Smith,” in *The Music of Stuart Saunders Smith*, 322.

abundance,”¹⁸⁵ Smith says, referring critically to a percussion concert he attended. He calls, rather, for a “percussion ecology” in which composers and performers are motivated to take advantage of the timbral characteristics of single instruments or small set-ups instead of seeking for this variety in large amounts of instruments: “The future of the development of percussion literature, both solo literature and percussion ensemble literature, is in doing more with less. Since a smaller array of instruments highlights touch differences and touch differences mean enriching timbral differences, our concerts should utilize fewer instruments, and smaller set-ups. An evening of snare drum solos. An evening of triangle, woodblock and cymbal chamber music. An evening of unaccompanied vibraphone. An evening of solo drumset.”¹⁸⁶ He has written for most of the mediums he mentions above, including his entire solo vibraphone output, a suite of three pieces for solo drumset, and his triangle trio *Angels*.

In his music for solo vibraphone and solo drumset, Smith does not attend to the exploration of extended techniques and almost never sees necessity in searching for uncommon timbres. Rather, variety comes through the singularity of the moment in which each piece is written, as well as its purely rhythmic and melodic outcomes. Paraphrasing Smith, his music reflects experience in a frame. That is, this music is imminently a result of what his inner listening “tells” him in the moment, with no space for pre-compositional devices. Because experience is always unique, his music never repeats itself from piece to piece, like ocean waves or fingerprints. Each of his vibraphone pieces, for instance, may be understood as one of Thoreau’s journal entries not only “documenting a personal spiritual quest,”¹⁸⁷ as Steven Schick has said, but also documenting (“framing”) moments in his inner listening. The spiritual quest

¹⁸⁵ Smith, interview with the author, November 14-15, 2013.

¹⁸⁶ Stuart Saunders Smith, “Percussion Ecology - Doing More With Less - Music for a Small Planet,” *Percussive Notes* 32, no. 1 (February 1994): 62.

¹⁸⁷ Schick, “Learning to Fly: A particular Kind of Balance,” 5.

that Schick discusses can be understood as a perennial realization that divinity is found in each individual as part of a universal soul. In this relationship of the inner and outer world, intuition distills perception and forms the experience Smith “frames” in each of his pieces, as previously explained. Therefore, the superficial similarity of his vibraphone pieces, which has to be attributed to his consistent musical language, is actually a consequence of both this fundamental Transcendentalist idea and of his anti-materialism.

Moreover, Smith’s limitation of instruments can be seen as a consequence of his thought autonomy, due to his refusal of yielding to contemporary classical music tendencies, such as exploration of unusual timbres. Referring to Smith’s avoidance of instrumental surplus, Schick has affirmed that the composer’s attitude implies a denial of a dogma in concert percussion music: “that its growth was fueled almost solely by a search for new sounds.”¹⁸⁸

Although instrumental and timbral simplicity are both ingenious signs of Smith’s autonomy, this simplicity, like Thoreau’s, may never be confused with musical simplicity: “We do not have to look for role models. Third world percussionists have been doing more with less for centuries. A wealth of material does not lead to a music of wealth.”¹⁸⁹ The depth and singularity of each of his pieces reside exactly in the complexity of sounds captured in his framed experience, not in the “manner” shown in the superficiality of sumptuous setups and of extended techniques. Smith’s complexity dwells in musical material and not in materialism.

In pieces such as *When Music is Missing, Music Sings* (a duet for percussionists performing found objects), Smith symbolically defies the state of material over-abundance present in a considerable part of contemporary chamber music and its supposed pull toward intellectual plainness. It is a “co-existence” piece, which means that the players should perform

¹⁸⁸ Schick, “Learning to Fly: A Particular Kind of Balance,” 5.

¹⁸⁹ Smith, “Percussion Ecology,” 63.

their parts as soloists without attempting to interact to each other. By calling for found objects, the piece is a shout against material slavery, whereas its complex rhythmic vocabulary and its “co-existence” language teach freedom through rhythmic complexity. The two percussion parts—rhythmically intricate, timbrally diverse, and performed soloistically—teach us that Oneness exists in the diversity of individualities.

Although not an emphasis in his work, Smith does sporadically attend to the exploration of unusual timbres, but only when in service of instrumental simplicity. *Angels*, another co-existence chamber piece, is an example in which a single category of instruments is explored maximally. In this percussion trio, each performer plays a set of three triangles and explores the timbral palette these instruments offer in three different ways. In the first movement, the instruments are set on towels that muffle their sound. Dampened by the towels, the triangles sound dry with quick decays. In the second movement, performers hold the triangles while varying their timbres and pitches by submerging them into buckets full of water at different speeds, as indicated on the score. The action of striking and diving the triangles in and out of the water in different ways produces timbral changes and pitch glissandi. In the third movement, the instruments are finally hung in the more traditional manner, though performers vary their timbres playing with different kinds of implements, including beaters built out of wire coat hangers. The following excerpt presents the second moment of *Angels*. It shows how Smith explores the unusual timbral capacity of the triangles by asking the performers to dip them into a bucket of water in various ways (for instance, down, up, continuously, and rapidly on the surface):

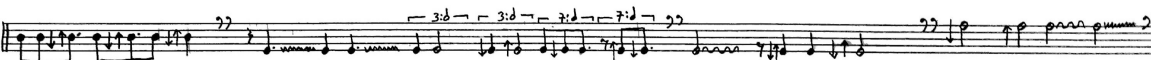
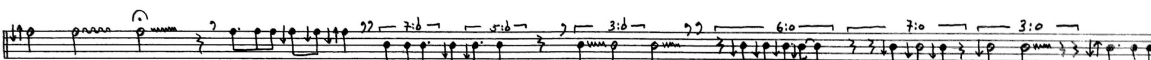
Example 4.4—*Angels*, second movement

Movement II – Players 1 2 3

Player 2 solo



Trio



Notation for Movement II:

If there are no arrows before, or wavy lines after a note-head, strike the triangle while it is suspended in the water.

↑ = move the triangle up in the water per duration, after striking it.

↓ = move the triangle down in the water per duration, after striking it.

↓↑ = make the triangle glissando rapidly down and up once per duration.

~~~~ = after a note means to dip the triangle up and down continuously; the triangle is about 1/3 to 1/2 of its height in the water.

~~~~ = after a note means to play the triangle just above the water (not touching the water), dipping it onto the surface of the water up and down, going from just out of the water to the surface of the water.

⏸ = 0' - 3" pause within an event.

⏸⏸ = 0' - 5" pause between events.

Angels, by Stuart Saunders Smith. Copyright Sonic Art Editions.
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Angels' exploration of extended techniques, however, is not intended to perpetuate the supremacy of "manner" over "substance." Rather, the piece attends to Transcendentalist ideas, firstly because of its emphasis on what Smith calls "co-existence," which means that the three performers play soloistically without attempting to interact. This kind of approach to performance gives rise to intricate polyphonic textures. I will explain this concept in further detail later in this chapter. Secondly (and most importantly for the moment), *Angels* attends to Transcendentalist ideas because, by utilizing a single type of instrument, it implies an anti-materialism akin to that of the mini-operas. It also emphasizes the importance of acoustic sounds produced with human intentionality, even if such sounds interact by chance. So *Angels* shuns

material surplus while it praises a complex unity formed by intricate individual parts: it is simple in its resources and complex in its outcomes. Using Ives's terms, it praises the "complexity of nature" and avoids the "complexity of material(ism)." By applying this "more with less principle," Smith hopes that pieces like *Angels* instill a spiritual, intellectual, and musical enrichment with the use of simple and few instruments: "The more with less principle leads to the spiritual/physical development of the percussionist's touch and musicality, not the frantic acquisition and search for different and more percussion instruments."¹⁹⁰

Finally, *Angels*' request for nine triangles should not be seen as instrumental overabundance, as the piece does not require expensive and consistent-sounding instruments. Rather, timbral inconsistencies are desirable. As a consequence, Smith praises simplicity by considering any inexpensive, even found triangle as an important part of *Angels*' sound world. Moreover, the entire setup of the piece fits in one bag, with exception to whatever devices are used to hang the triangles in the third movement.

Smith believes that pieces that eschew materialism, such as *Angels* and *Songs I-IX*, constitute a testimony against society's unspiritual consumerism. So the only "wealth" that his music seeks to inspire is the enrichment of the spirit: "Music is the human touch resonating, traced in sound by acoustical instruments. Percussion materialism is as spiritually bankrupt as rampant societal materialism."¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Smith, "Percussion Ecology," 63.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

4.3.1.5 Non-teleology

As in Thoreau's non-teleological lesson about going on foot versus using the train, Smith believes that a slower pace ironically allows one to go faster, as it allows one to go deeper. He addresses the subject in the following anecdote:

I was in the library in Vermont, and I thought what would happen if I took the car and travelled 10 mile an hour back home? What would I notice? I would have noticed all kinds of things that I would not have noticed if I were going at the speed limit. . . . Of course, it would have been even better if I walked. I would have noticed things better. I remember being on a horse-and-buggy ride that an Amish took me on—all the things that I could notice by just going slower. That is what we learn from *Walden*. A human irony that is profound. In order to go deeper and faster, we have to go slower. That is *Walden*: he goes slower but ultimately is faster.¹⁹²

What Smith implies by his last statement is that in a process that involves assimilation, slowness allows for a more comprehensive and deep understanding. Therefore, in a music listening experience, “slower is ultimately faster” because it allows for a more in-depth experience which ignores the passing of time. Smith's path for a deeper enjoyment of the moment is seen in his recent emphasis on long (sometimes evening length) pieces, as a result of his utilization of more repetition, variation of material, and lack of form. In his recent repertoire, these characteristics have led to a non-teleological disposition of material that highlights detail rather than form. In other words, non-teleology moves the audience's attention from form to details of Smith's extremely complex rhythmic vocabulary. Consequently, natural processes are more effectively conveyed, not only because nature itself does not encompass the idea of progress implied by form, but also because it highlights the details of the piece's organic rhythms. It is, therefore, reasonable to say that the use of a non-teleological form constitutes a symbolic representation of the unification of his life, his art, and nature. When Meyer deems that “as art ceases (which it should) to be teleological, it will become more like nature – and, like nature, it

¹⁹² Smith, interview with the author, November 14-15, 2013.

will become objective and impersonal,”¹⁹³ he gives a picture of non-teleology that applies only partially to Smith’s music. Impersonality is never an object of the Transcendentalist non-teleology. Likewise, in Smith’s music, non-teleology only highlights the idiosyncrasies of his personal compositional style by drawing the audience’s attention to the present moment. The following example shows the thirty-fourth (and last) movement of *Plenty*. The piece, which is scored for solo vibraphone, does not feature any of the goal-oriented features of traditional music. It has no traditional form or cadences and no functional harmony. The last movement, in particular, finishes with a free retrograde of the melodic material of the beginning. This feature, alongside the non-functional C Ionian inflection gives the piece a meditative character typical of Smith’s non-teleological attitude. This characteristic is reflected in the entire piece, which is a non-teleological journey that takes about one hour and twenty minutes to be performed.

¹⁹³ Meyer, *Music, the Arts, and Ideas*, 161.

Example 4.5—*Plenty*, last movement

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The musical score is presented in four systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system begins with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic and includes slurs and ties over measures 3, 7, and 5. The second system features a forte (f) dynamic, followed by mezzo-forte (mf) and mezzo-piano (mp) dynamics, with a 'dim.' (diminuendo) marking. The third system continues with mezzo-piano (mp) and mezzo-forte (mf) dynamics. The fourth system concludes with piano (p) and pianissimo (pp) dynamics, including a 'ritenuto' marking and ending with a 'fine' instruction.

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Pieces such as *Plenty*, *New England*, *The Starving Month*, *By Hand*, and *The Shapes Beneath the Ground* shun any idea of goal orientation. The listeners of these seemingly long pieces are invited to “experience” music as Thoreau’s studies of nature allowed him to thoroughly experience the environment he described. In fact, some of the pieces I have mentioned, including the solo vibraphone pieces *The Starving Month* and *New England*, have titles that evoke New England imagery. This adds another layer of analogy to Thoreau’s *in loco* descriptions of the New England landscape in works such as *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, *The Maine Woods*, and *Cape Cod*.

Some of Smith's other pieces that evoke the imagery of his childhood in New England include: *Family Portraits: Embden Pond* for flute and two vibraphones ("where I spent summer in central Maine"); *Castine* for marimba and speaker ("the coastal town where Robert Lowell spent his summers"); *Three for Two* for violin and viola ("portraits of three places in rural Maine"); *Two Lights* for solo drum set ("as in Two Lights State Park in Cape Elizabeth"); *In Bingham* (also a town in Maine) for solo speaker; and . . . *And Points North* for solo speaking percussionist.¹⁹⁴ These titles recall some of the pieces in which Ives evoked the landscape of New England, such as the already mentioned *Concord Sonata*, as well as *A Symphony: New England Holidays*, *Three Places in New England*, and some of his *114 Songs*.

In "The Musical Transcendentalism of Charles Ives," Dunja Dujmić cites the following passage by French philosopher Étienne Souriau as philosophical validation for her hypothesis that Ives' programmatic music presents Transcendentalist conditions: "The demands of true musical structure are such that the creator . . . is simply forced to renounce music itself and transgress its basic laws. . . . Even emotional description in music leaves those bounds as soon as it approaches too close to the real movements of the soul, the natural course of physical facts, which do not contain the prescribed repetitions, not the quivering, nor architectonic transitions from one tonality to the other, nor correct cadences, nor the ready, stereotyped conclusions which musical form demands."¹⁹⁵

To my understanding, Dujmić's use of Souriau's statement also suits Smith's New England-related pieces. Smith's pieces do not feature any "prescribed" features or incursions of traditional tonality, do not apply any "architectonic transitions," and do not fulfill any formal

¹⁹⁴ Stuart Saunders Smith, program notes, "The Company to be Alone," concert *At Sixty* (Akron, OH: University of Akron, March 7-8, 2008), 3.

¹⁹⁵ Etienne Souriau, *La Correspondence des arts, Elements d'esthetique comparee* (Paris 1954), 148, quoted in Dunja Dujmić, "The Musical Transcendentalism of Charles Ives," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 2, No. 1 (June 1971), 91. The entire primary source has never been translated to English.

demands of traditional music. Rather, once Smith decides a title like *New England*, he just “gets out of the way and lets the music emerge from that poetic universe.”¹⁹⁶ In fact, in pieces like *New England*, which lasts for fifty minutes, Smith invites the audience to evade the anxiety of today’s teleological world by sitting down and experience the “poetic universe” of New England for the duration of a whole concert. Then the audience member will not hear architectonic features but only the sheer poetry of intuitive music.

4.3.2 Symbolizing Oneness

I will now focus on how Smith’s music may symbolize Oneness. In order to do so, I will utilize pieces from three of the categories of pieces, which I have adapted from Smith’s own categorization (“trans-media systems,” “mobile compositions,” and “co-existence music”),¹⁹⁷ as well as a piece that fits in multiple categories, *Here and There*.

4.3.2.1 Trans-media systems

Due to their openness, Smith’s trans-media systems are compositions that most scholars may consider as an example of American experimentalism. However, they bear an essential difference to the works of experimentalists like Cage, James Tenney, or Alvin Lucier: the trans-media systems always preserve the personal imprint of the composer. In these systems, which include works such as *Return and Recall*, *Initiatives and Reactions* and *Transitions and Leaps*, Smith invites all the performers to be co-composers. He affirms to have gotten inspiration to write these pieces from the Chinese Cultural Revolution, in which the government of China

¹⁹⁶ Smith, interview in Muller, “Amidst the Noise,” 9.

¹⁹⁷ Smith has categorized his music in slightly different ways throughout the years. One example of how Smith categorizes his music can be found in Stuart Saunders Smith, program notes, “Making Sense out of My Music,” concert *At Sixty* (Akron, OH: University of Akron, March 7-8, 2008), 6-7.

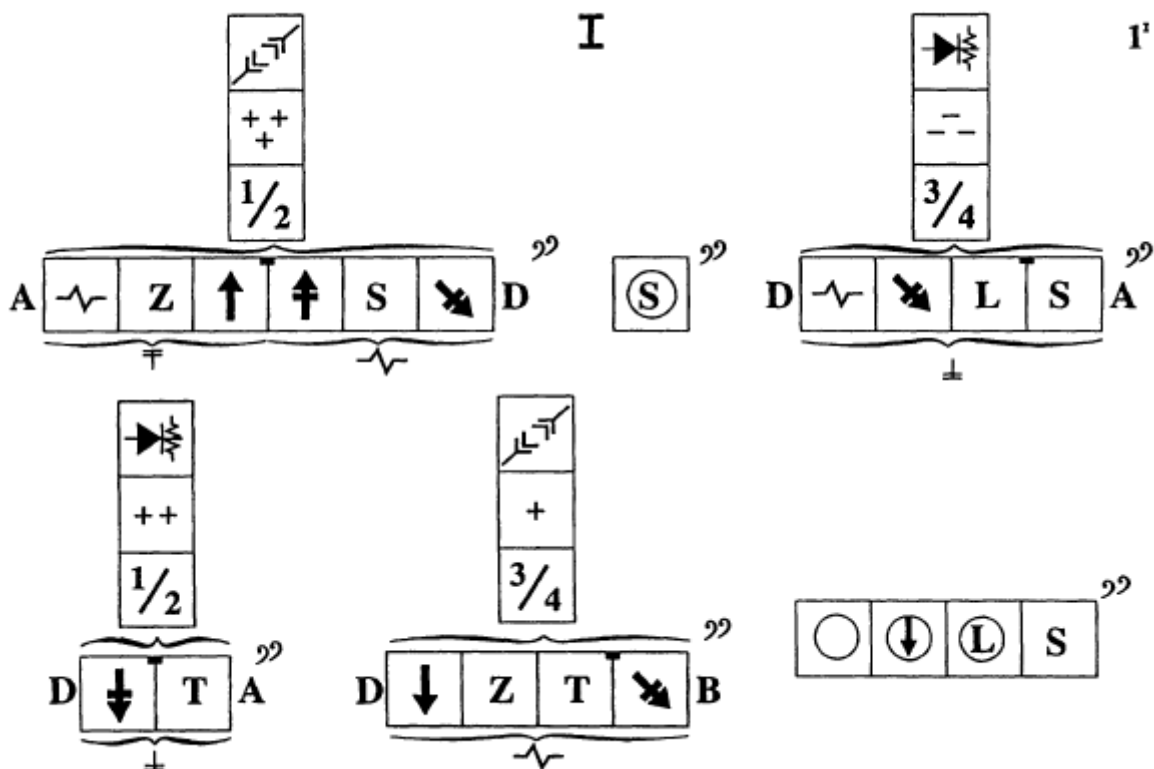
demanded composers to collectively write music. This, according to Smith, turned into a “ludicrous” solution: “one guy would compose the melody, another guy the harmony; one gal would orchestrate.”¹⁹⁸ Interested in the idea of collective composition, Smith found a different solution in the trans-media system.

The score of a trans-media system does not present a finished composition; rather, it consists of graphic schemes—pictograms placed inside boxes—that provide instructions for performers to create their own music collectively or individually. Performers may include artists of different disciplines, such as music, dance, plastic arts, and theater. Therefore Smith celebrates a unified reality by emphasizing the importance of co-composition, by recognizing the creative mind of the other, and by asking performers of any discipline to perform together. The following example shows the first page of *Transitions and Leaps*. Each group of symbols (“sub-systems”) separated by a double breath mark indicates a different category of actions that the participants need to compose and perform. For instance, the first three groups of symbols indicate, from left to right, a “transitions” action, an “and” action and a “leaps” action. The pictograms inside the boxes indicate the characteristics of each action. The solutions for each “transitions” and “leaps” actions have to be separately composed by each performer. The “and” actions are to be composed collectively.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Welsh, *The Music of Stuart Saunders Smith* (includes an interview with Stuart Saunders Smith), 139.

¹⁹⁹ Stuart Saunders Smith, *Transitions and Leaps* (Baltimore: Smith Publications, 1993).

Example 4.6—*Transitions and Leaps*, first page



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The score features process only, which is why the trans-media systems are not completely “open-ended experiments.” There is no attempt to suppress Smith’s input; rather, his input is in the process. He discusses this subject in the following statement:

For me, certain kinds of so-called graphically notated scores have become, over the years, less and less interesting because they possess almost no structural integrity. These systems are so open that such pieces are unrecognizable from performance to performance. Of course in the case of John Cage, he celebrates that situation. He finds the poetry of absence delightful. I, on the other hand, am not looking for absence, but rather a refinement and continual transformation of my taste—the I. So I try to build into my collective compositional works my taste in process. This taste in process takes on the structural characteristic of a recognizable entity regardless of medium. This, at once fixed,

yet always changing landscape is the I—me an infinity within a finite space—the poetry of being present!!²⁰⁰

The attitude of grounding the “I” on a balance between the “fixed” and the “changing” landscape is another suggestion of how Smith reconciles attitudes attributed to Emerson and Thoreau. Whereas the reference to “fixed” denotes an Emersonian attitude of letting his own creative mind guarantee his compositional imprint, “changing” denotes a Thoreauvian call for transformation through self-development (“a refinement and continual transformation of my taste”). Moreover, Smith’s reference to “changing” indicates that he lets his work with performers transform himself. During his years working with the UMBC contemporary music ensemble, Smith had the chance to program the trans-media systems on many occasions. In each performance, a symbolic unity emerged from the equalization of performer and composer roles. And by working alongside the performers, Smith himself believes to emerge as a better artist.

Smith’s creative mind is always the driving factor of the symbolic unification of composer and performers. Connecting with Shultis’ discussion, the “experiment” in the trans-media systems is Emersonian because Smith’s idiosyncratic process constitutes his artistic input in the piece. But the score’s focus on process does not render the work to be formalist. It is true that in these systems Smith only guarantees his compositional imprint by providing process. However, although the process defines Smith’s personal input, it is the performers who compose the final product. This balance of the composer’s self with the acknowledgment of the other as part of a totality gathered in unity is one of the defining attitudes of New England Transcendentalism.

A likely counter-argument of my assertion would be that a trans-media system constitutes nothing but the provision of a pre-compositional system—a formalistic device—for performers

²⁰⁰ Welsh, *The Music of Stuart Saunders Smith* (includes an interview with Stuart Saunders Smith), 140.

to create a piece of music. In fact, this would not only imply a denial of the other's intellectual autonomy, but also constitute a formalist attitude. However, the trans-media system is better interpreted as an endeavor towards unification of the performer, composer, and the arts in general, rather than as an attempt to have the performers "parrot" Smith's thinking. There is no hierarchy; performers and composers are equally essential, and the provision of process is essential in the promotion of this unity.

4.3.2.2 Mobile compositions

Mobile compositions, or "musical mobiles," are works in which Smith grants the performers freedom in handling material in an open-form. This is not only a particularly counter-formalist attitude, as form is disregarded, but also an indication of an equalization of performer and composer (that suggests Smith's unification effort).

In his musical mobiles, Smith provides collections of melodies, often very rhythmically intricate but with no indication of tempi. Players learn the melodies and perform them together as a communal improvisation. In this process, each player decides onstage what melodies they are going to perform, as well as their order, tempi, and dynamics. Smith's self abnegation translates in the openness of these three parameters and of how melodies interact, which is not dependent on chance but on the performer's choices. Smith's imprint is translated in the intricacy of the fully notated melodies (i.e. his choice of pitches and rhythms). The following example shows two musical sections ("A" and "B") of the mobile *Notebook*. Each section is formed by a variety of phrases that are separated by single or double commas. A double comma indicates a longer pause than a single comma. As the composer asks, each performer decides in real time the "dynamics, tempo, articulation, and phrasing" of each event. He states that the notated dynamics

are mere suggestions. Each performer also decides the order and the amount of events he or she is going to perform. The instrumentation of *Notebook* is completely free:

Example 4.7—*Notebook*, first page

NOTEBOOK
for any instruments or voices
in any combination

Stuart Saunders Smith

Any instrument or voice

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Notebook, by Stuart Saunders Smith. Copyright Sonic Art Editions. Used by permission of Smith Publications, Sharon, VT 05065 USA

In *Notebook*, Smith quotes melodies from jazz standards, which is an attitude that could be indicative of “manner” over “substance” if taken out of context. In fact, Smith occasionally suggests “local color” (like Ives did) by manifesting his jazz background through musical material. Therefore, *Notebook* is an example of how unity emerges in the two ways I describe in this chapter: Oneness and the unification of Smith’s life and art. His use of quotation is not justifiable as counter-Transcendentalist, but rather as a Transcendentalist stance of thought

autonomy and anti-formalism for two reasons. First, the quotations cannot be identified and do not constitute a definer of the work's identity or the work's "end." It is true that Smith uses existent melodies, creating his own "fakebook," as he has stated.²⁰¹ It is also true that the use of quotation is part of the chief motivations that led to the writing of the piece. Nonetheless, Smith modifies these melodies so profoundly that they cannot be identified. Second, utilizing pre-existent jazz tunes as a resource is not an anti-intellectual attitude of Smith. Rather, by drawing from an American non-academic tradition, his jazz quotations in *Notebook* parallel Ives's use of "local color" as an indication of a Transcendentalist stance. Establishing an American identity was an important matter for Transcendentalists as a denial of an excessively Eurocentric academia in nineteenth-century America. Smith's attitude continues along similar lines, (not intentionally but intuitively or inevitably), reflecting his experience which is heavily informed by his involvement with jazz.

4.3.2.3 Co-existence music

Smith's musical mobiles have evolved into a sub-genus he calls "music of co-existence." He composed his first co-existence mobile, *Part*, as a response to the daily reality of the music performer. Performers spend hours and hours in the isolation of the practice room perfecting their skills, much like a composer would to enhance his or her creative process. In his traditional mobiles, performers interacted by making the decision of matching or contrasting in tempo, volume, and character with each other. However, in "music of co-existence," performers do not attempt to interact. Each part has to be played as a soloist, so that players are not aware of each other's performances. For this very reason, Smith uses the term "music of isolation" to describe

²⁰¹ Stuart Saunders Smith, *Notebook* (Baltimore: Smith Publications, 1997).

his coexistence pieces.²⁰² Not coincidentally, isolation and co-existence also coalesce in the religious practice of Quakerism. The attendants of Quaker meetings often coexist in a silent isolation, during which the divine takes place.²⁰³ No words are said unless any of the believers feels divinely inspired to do so.

Because each performer disregards the boundaries of conventional chamber music interaction in the music of co-existence, each solo part rhythmically enriches the whole and creates an extremely complex polyphony. This process is analogous to the intrinsic paradox of the Transcendentalist movement: the path to social harmony happens through individual freedom. In other words, the best way to contribute to the universal soul is to be “an input to society” and not to merely follow the common sense.

More recently, Smith has composed co-existence pieces that do not fit in the mobile category. In *A River, Rose*, for violin and vibraphone, each player is isolated in that there is no interaction between the parts. Because there is no score, only individual parts, I have chosen the first 8 measures of each part to illustrate how the material avoids a chamber music-like interaction:

²⁰² Stuart Saunders Smith, “To Suffer Music,” *Perspectives of New Music* 34, no. 1 (Winter 1996), 112.

²⁰³ José “Zeca” Lacerda, “The Silence... An Introduction to the Inner World of Stuart Saunders Smith,” *Perspectives of New Music* 50, no. 6 (November 2012), 44.

Example 4.8—*A River, Rose*, first 8 measures

The image shows a musical score for Violin and Vibraphone. The Violin part is on a single staff, and the Vibraphone part is on two staves. The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp*, *mp*, *p*, *mf*, and *f*, along with articulation marks like accents and slurs. The time signature changes from 4/4 to 5/4 and back to 4/4. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score is annotated with various musical notations including slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Accidentals apply only to the pitches they precede.

A River, Rose, by Stuart Saunders Smith. Copyright Sonic Art Editions.
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In music of co-existence the dichotomy of isolation (expressed as each solo part) and co-existence (expressed as the totality of the parts) is only apparent. Because isolation (as a path for autonomy of thought and agency) translates to contribution to universal unity, isolation also becomes crucial for understanding Smith’s co-existence music, where “each one is equal” and “each person is one:”

Since 1995,
I have occasionally composed chamber music
which I call “music of co-existence,”
where each player has a separate part
and plays it without regard to other players.
There is no score,
just parts.
The music relies more on chance coincidences
than performer choices.
I compose this kind of music
to avoid typical relationships among players,
getting a rich blend of soloistic musical combinations.

-
-

Each one is equal.
Each person is one.
Each plays their part.

Each one moves on.²⁰⁴

As a practical result of his music of co-existence, Smith creates extremely polyphonic music that conveys his real life pacifism which is also part of his Quaker faith. Once again, symbol plays an important role in establishing Smith's unity of life and the arts, though with even more radical results:

Musical mobiles
and music of co-existence
on a detailed level
as well as a formal level are more complex
and organic than through-composed compositions
Complexity in a mobile
or in music of co-existence
is inherently increased
because each takes up more space
with their multiple possibilities
each piece is circumscribed and infinite

-
-
-

This complexity in a mobile
or music of co-existence
gives *both* a surface that can be very dense
and a for that is literally alive
Always moving
always changing

I am not interested in the *idea* of complexity
I am interested in *complexity*.²⁰⁵

In the mobile compositions and in the music of co-existence, complexity comes through a multi-layered coalition of forces: the composer contributes complex melodic and rhythmic vocabulary in particular; performers contribute their choices of "when" and "how." The performers also contribute by joining forces in countless ways, inadvertently or not, hence adding complexity to the polyphony. There is a kind of inevitability present in Smith's discourse

²⁰⁴ Smith, "Composing Thoughts," 236.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 232.

in regards to complexity that testifies to a non-dualistic attitude towards reality. Complexity is not a mere idea, because it does not come through formalism. Rather, it comes intuitively, as it is an inevitable aspect of both his music and the universe. Complexity is brought to his music by his experience and the performers' experience, and it is also present in the unpredictability of the performance act. Smith's music does not merely allude to complexity; in his understanding, his music *is* complexity. It is neither dualistic nor non-dualistic. As often as contradictions happen within the writings of the Transcendentalists, Smith's music bridges the gap between the two sides of this binary construct.

4.3.2.4 *Here and There*

In *Here and There*, a trio scored for piano interior, short-wave radio, and any melody instrument, Smith seeks to inspire audience and performers to transform themselves. In the piece's program notes, Smith proposes an "exploration of inner-outer space"²⁰⁶ in which performers can "transform themselves, others, and the environment into a unified landscape."²⁰⁷ Smith's explanation of how *Here and There* inspires the emergence of a "unified landscape" is partially applicable to his mobiles and co-existence pieces: "*Here and There* levels the relationship of time and space and performer, composer, audience. Different times like far off musics, (a kind of time) played at different times than the performance time and space. Time travels!!! The composer invites rather than dictates. The performer has direction and is relatively free. The audience must make music out of this unusual sound collage, unified and diverse. Common-union-ism."²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Stuart Saunders Smith, *Here and There* (Baltimore: Smith Publications, 1971).

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Smith, letter to the author, July 2015. Smith sent this letter in response to questions sent by the author.

The second half of this convoluted statement implies that *Here and There* inspires unification by leaving choices up to the performers and by inviting the audience to “make sense” out of the polyphony that results from the performance act, like in the mobiles and co-existence music. All the parts are written with ideographic notation, similar to that of the trans-media systems. Additionally, there are seven traditionally written melodies, which are numbered 1 through 7. The ideographic chart for the melody instrument shows not only signs for actions such as “imitate,” “blend,” or “repeat,” but also numbers that indicate the melodies shown. In the boxes that do not contain numbers, the performer has the freedom to improvise melodies. The two other parts are also partially free. Both parts are written exclusively with ideographic notation. However, while the short-wave radio features ideograms that indicate dynamic, repetition, duration or “all parameters left to the performer,” the ideograms of the piano interior direct the performer to “imitate” or “blend” with the other parts. The three instruments feature a sign similar to a colon that designates “all parameters of an event are left to the discretion of the performer.” This freedom of improvisation is indicative of a unification of the roles of performers and composer. The example below shows the ideographic notation:

Example 4.9—*Here and There*, melody instrument part

| HERE AND THERE
STUART SMITH | | | MELODY
INSTRUMENT | | | Copyright © 1994
By SMITH PUBLICATIONS
All rights reserved | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|----|----|----------------------|----|----|--|----|----|----|----|----|
| ↑ | | Z | ○1 | ↓ | | S | | ⊙5 | M | : | L |
| | ⊙2 | S↓ | | ↑7 | ♦ | L | ↓7 | | ○3 | Z | S |
| ○4 | ↓ | | M | | ⊙6 | ↑ | : | ♦ | | ○1 | ↑7 |
| L | ○4 | | ⊙5 | L↓ | ⊙2 | | S | ○3 | : | ⊙6 | |
| ♦ | | ↓7 | ↑ | ○1 | | ○3 | Z | ⊙2 | L↑ | | M |
| | ⊙5 | M | | ↓ | : | ⊙6 | ○4 | | S | ↑ | ○3 |
| ↑7 | L | ○1 | Z | | ⊙2 | ↓ | | ○4 | | M♦ | ↓7 |
| ⊙6 | ♦ | | S | ⊙5 | M | | ↑7 | ↑ | ⊙2 | L | |
| : | | ○3 | ↓ | ↓7 | | ○1 | ⊙5 | Z | ⊙6 | | ○4 |
| | ↓7 | ↑ | ⊙6 | M | S↑ | ♦ | ↓ | | L | ↑7 | |
| Z | ○1 | ♦ | | | ○3 | : | | L | ⊙5 | ○4 | S |
| ⊙2 | M | | ↓7 | ZL | ↑7 | | ↑ | M♦ | | ○1 | L |

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Beyond leveling the roles of performers and composer, how does *Here and There* incorporate the transformation of “the environment” in its performance process? The answer lies especially in the short-wave radio part, as Smith implies: The “far off” sounds caught by the radio may be happening “at different times [and spaces] than the performance time and space.” However, the performance has the power of bringing and merging these different times and spaces onto the environment in which the piece is performed.

Each of the words in the piece's title, as Smith explains, is related to one of the trio's partakers: "here" refers to the melody instrument, "and" refers to the piano interior, and "there" refers to the short-wave radio. The melody is represented by the word "here," because it indicates the most palpable, traditional aspect of the "experiment." The word "and" suggests the piano interior part, not only because it bridges melody and the ambient sounds coming from the radio, but also because it merges tradition (piano) and experimentalism (extended techniques). Because the radio part "picks up cultural found objects out there,"²⁰⁹ it functions as symbol of our condition of unity. As Smith states: "*Here*: the inside God (melody instrument); *And*: the unifier, the connector (piano interior); *There*: the other, the stranger, the far away place (short wave radio)."²¹⁰ Thus, performers and the composer realize their condition of Oneness while the interaction of parts symbolizes a unification of the musical space. Most importantly, however, both of these conditions of oneness are inserted in a landscape that unifies music and the universe (i.e. time and space) via the short-wave radio part.

Finally, in *Here and There*, Smith corroborates his anti-nationalism and pacifism by highlighting these stances as vital for unification: "When performed or studied [*Here and There*] leads to an anti-nationalist universe where all are made welcome in the space of *Here and There*. By analogy, this system of improvisation is a political gesture and creates cells, in this case the trio of revolution, gentle + beautiful; not violent and abusive."²¹¹ *Here and There* is thus a confirmation that Smith's music always reveals different layers of Transcendentalist thought. It is virtually impossible to fit each of his pieces into a single category. *Here and There* not only unifies composer, performer, and audience into a single universal spirit; by conveying his anti-nationalistic and pacifist stances, it also unifies Smith and his art.

²⁰⁹ Welsh, *The Music of Stuart Saunders Smith*, 57.

²¹⁰ Smith, letter to the author, July 2015.

²¹¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5: TRANSCENDENTALIST ATTITUDE IN TWO WORKS

Each of the works that I present in this chapter represents a different approach on how Smith achieves unity through his music. *To Freshen the Moment!*, a co-existence duet for vibraphone and violoncello, symbolizes Oneness by equalizing the roles of composer, performer, and audience. *The Starving Month*, a solo for vibraphone, shows the composer's desire to symbolically unify his life with his art. I have chosen to address these two works in greater depth because they constitute clear examples of the two aforementioned approaches. It is important to remember, however, that both of the pieces bear aspects of both kinds of unification: *To Freshen the Moment!* presents aspects of non-teleology as does *The Starving Month*; *The Starving Month* is pervaded with moments of silence akin to the silence in *To Freshen the Moment!*.²¹²

Another reason for my choice of pieces is that I prepared them with the composer, who kindly dedicated them to me. Ever since then, I have a personal relationship with these works having performed them frequently. In an article published in *Percussive Notes* November 2012, I have discussed the use of silence in *To Freshen the Moment!* I will now give a fresher insight on the subject, focusing on how the use of silence and co-existence echo Smith's belief in Oneness. With regard to *The Starving Month*, I will discuss Smith's attitude of non-teleology shown in the lack of form caused by its frequent and unsystematic repetitions, use of non-sequiturs, and incursions of modality.

This chapter is not intended to be theoretically analytical. At this point in the document, it is more than obvious that Smith's work eschews theoretical analysis. Rather, I will use the pieces as means for demonstrating how Smith's dialogue with Transcendentalism is reflected not only in his ideas, but also in the final product that emerges from his ideas: his music.

²¹² In the manuscript, Smith includes the exclamation mark in the title.

5.1 “The wise silence:” silence and co-existence in *To Freshen The Moment!*

From attending Quaker meetings to his compositional process, silence is constantly present in Smith’s life and work. As he composes, silence constitutes a mediator of intuition, as it gives the composer the opportunity to engage in inner listening. Smith sometimes uses expressions such as listening “to the inner” and “listening to the silence” interchangeably, as he states:

Music centered in listening, regardless of its notational strategies, is the disciplined development and exploration of the corporeal sound-imprint. Listening to the "inner" recognizes that the intelligence of sound leaves imprints-living sound fossils of fibrous roots infixed deep in restless twists, which can be mined by leaving the mind, by listening into the silence. Not the Cage silence of nonintention, but Norman O. Brown's "Silence is our mother tongue"-the silence of the abyss-the nothing. Out of inner silence comes of its own listening.

What is heard in such listening? The act of listening-silence mirrors the will to listen-a music of itself emerges. And all perception is at base listening. Listening is self.²¹³

Smith paraphrased the statement “silence mirrors the will to listen” from philosopher Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. “Silence mirrors the will to listen” implies that silence is a doorway to accessing his inner listening, hence to the reminiscences of his vast personal listening experience: “living sound fossils of fibrous roots infixed deep in restless twists.” His compositions, then, rise solely from a “transcription” of silence. “Listening to the silence” becomes another analogy on how the act of “listening” and framing the sounds that are ingrained in his creative mind are essential for his process.

As a consequence of how Smith “listens to silence” to compose, silence also becomes essential in how the audience listens to his music: in short, the roles of the audience and composer are leveled. What I call Smith’s “silence of intentionality” is key to understanding how his music catalyzes universal unity. John Cage’s silence of non-intentionality in his 4’33” invites

²¹³ Smith, “Against Definition,” 215.

the audience to listen to ambient sounds, whereas Smith's silence invites the audience to listen to their inner sounds. During the silence, the audience members are given the space to actively be part of the musical experience by creating their own music. In the silent action of reflecting and "composing" personal music, the roles of composer and audience become one. On the one hand, Cage's silence is Buddhist; that is, it is a means of perception of the outer world. On the other hand, Smith's silence is Quaker; that is, it is a door of access to the inner world.²¹⁴

Silence has permeated Smith's entire output. Noticeably in his writings, the composer has often utilized signs such as dots to indicate silence, as shown in *Composing Thoughts*. These silences clearly have the same intention as his music's silence. Silence is there to give the audience "the occasion for a time, to create their own music as to connect sounds anew."²¹⁵ In his music, Smith utilizes conventional musical rests or caesuras to indicate the length of silences in seconds or minutes. *To Freshen the Moment!* features both kinds of silences: relatively long successions of quarter-note rests appear for both instruments throughout the piece; the latter type appears noticeably in the last movement of the piece which only consists of a sign indicating eighty-nine seconds of silence.

Because in *To Freshen the Moment!* both parts do not interact (except for two sections in the third movement, which the composer understands as "cadences"), rests are used throughout the piece with the intention of establishing phrases or to add drama. Most importantly, rests deepen the piece's rhythmic intricacy, as instruments will most likely not reach and leave moments of rest simultaneously. Therefore, as a co-existence piece, *To Freshen The Moment!* carries out a kind of Transcendentalist respect of each instrumentalist as a free agent and possessor of divine worth. Except for two sections in the third movement, the piece does not use

²¹⁴ Lacerda, "The Silence..." 44-45.

²¹⁵ Stuart Saunders Smith, letter to the author, March, 2010. Smith sent this letter in response to questions sent by the author.

a conventional score, only separate parts. For the next example, I have picked the first fourteen measures of each part to illustrate how, even though the pitch material shows similarities, the two parts are not meant to rhythmically interact. Rather, an intricate polyphony arises from the two concomitant soloistic performances and the already polyphonic vibraphone part:

Example 5.1—*To Freshen the Moment!*, first 14 measures

The musical score for the first 14 measures of *To Freshen the Moment!* is presented in four systems. The first system shows the Cello part (top) and the Vibraphone part (middle). The Cello part begins with a 6/4 time signature and a key signature of one flat. The Vibraphone part begins with a 6/4 time signature and a key signature of one flat. The second system shows the Cello part (top) and the Vibraphone part (middle). The Cello part continues with a 3/4 time signature. The Vibraphone part continues with a 3/4 time signature. The third system shows the Cello part (top) and the Vibraphone part (middle). The Cello part continues with a 2/4 time signature. The Vibraphone part continues with a 2/4 time signature. The fourth system shows the Cello part (top) and the Vibraphone part (middle). The Cello part continues with a 2/4 time signature. The Vibraphone part continues with a 2/4 time signature. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings (pp, mf, sf, p, mf, sf, p, mf, sf).

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For the entire duration of the sixth and last movement, the performers are asked to silently hold their last playing position. With this request, Smith puts clear boundaries between his silence and the silence of non-intentionality of John Cage. This is a crucial instance of Smith's use of silence: performers are asked not to distract the audience from exercising inner listening to create their own music and participate in the compositional process. The audience becomes just as important as the composer and the performer. This equalization of roles is a typical case of how Smith's music constitutes a symbol of Oneness. Reflected in the work itself, silence becomes important to both parts of the process. Silence is, therefore, important in both

Smith's compositional act and in the act of the performance, because it gives the listeners a chance to create their own music. The next example shows the last movement of *To Freshen The Moment!*. The silence starts after the sounds of the short fifth movement decay completely:

Example 5.2—*To Freshen the Moment!*, fifth and sixth movements

Handwritten musical score for Cello and Vibra Phone. The Cello part is on a single staff with notes and fingerings. The Vibra Phone part is on two staves with notes and fingerings. Below the staves, there are handwritten instructions: "The VI. (Silence...) (Sleep...)" with a bracket pointing to "print the title of Movement VI", and "Each Player holds their Playing Position for 89". The score is signed "SAUNDERS" at the bottom.

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But what if listeners silently reflect on *To Freshen the Moment!* and think that it is about circus clowns? Or what if they fall asleep? The listeners are obviously free to reflect on whatever suits them, but Smith expects the piece's unconventionality to guide them to musically "aspire." He believes that everyone possesses the aural capability to perform such task, as long as the artists are "inviting to our audiences, not just assuming they will never understand . . . everyone can be a creative listener. . . . Invite them to participate. Not to be acted on, but to act. The

audiences, if they have a chance, will love to be their own persons.”²¹⁶ In other words, Smith hopes that the piece becomes an “epiphany” like the flute sounds John Farmer heard in Thoreau’s anecdote. Because *To Freshen the Moment!* “aspires” rather than “affirms,” the audience is asked to do the same when they exercise inner listening to “connect sounds anew.” Therefore, although the listener is free to think or meditate on anything the music suggests to them, he hopes that listeners will feel inspired to “compose” their own idiosyncratic music. Smith’s trust that the audience is capable of actively using creative listening parallels Thoreau’s idea that—being literate already—we need to look for profounder literature: “I think that having learned our letters we should read the best that is in literature, and not be forever repeating our a b abcs, and words of one syllable, in the fourth or fifth classes, sitting on the lowest and foremost form all our lives.”²¹⁷ The silence in *To Freshen the Moment!*, therefore, opens doors not for the “abcs” of listening but for “aspirational” inner listening. In making a comparison to Cage’s silence, *To Freshen the Moment!* guides the audience through the moments of silence, whereas Cage’s music does not intend to do so. Rather, to think about circus clowns or to fall asleep would probably be acceptable during Cage’s silence (in fact, some soft giggling and snoring sounds would most likely be welcome).

When the audience is given the opportunity to aspire and join the compositional act, a symbolic Oneness emerges during the silence. In fact, Emerson relates silence to the idea of a universal spirit by referring to the Over-Soul as “the wise silence.”²¹⁸ Oneness exists after the fact, as it did for Emerson; silence is one of Smith’s crucial paths to convey Oneness. Smith is openly spiritual in his attitude toward musical silence: “Silence in my music gives the listener an opportunity to both imagine their own music in that space as well as give the divine a space to

²¹⁶ Smith, interview with the author, November 14-15, 2013.

²¹⁷ Thoreau, *Walden*, 112.

²¹⁸ Emerson, “The Over-Soul,” 399.

dwell.”²¹⁹ Through silence, not only do the composer and audience have unified roles, but the divine is also manifested in a kind of Emersonian construction (implying that this bondage is also spiritual). Referring to this spiritual bondage, Smith claims that his piece *Links No. 6* “embraces silence so that something spiritual can happen.”²²⁰ This “something spiritual” is symbolized by the unification of audience, composer, and performer who share the universal soul. The attitude of ending *To Freshen the Moment!* with a movement composed entirely of silence shows that Smith intends silence to be spiritual.

5.2 “Yet I feel eternal:” non-teleology in *The Starving Month*

Composer and theorist Kendal Kennison,²²¹ a Quaker who has known Smith through his attendance at worship meetings, has spoken about the influence of Quakerism in Smith’s music. Kennison focused particularly on the relationship between the thought process of the worshipper in a meeting and the way that material unfolds in his music. He sees Smith’s music as contemplative, because its material is “subject to consideration and reworking in the moment, like thoughts in worship.”²²² In fact, Smith’s recent work shows different instances of material reworking, particularly in the occurrence of varied repetition of material. Through non-systematic ways, repetition has appeared in his work like a reflection of thoughts being reworked during the compositional act. This is, to my understanding, one of the clearest outcomes of non-teleological thinking in Smith’s current music. This repetition leads to other outcomes such as absence of form and time lengthening. Nonetheless, there are other important non-teleological

²¹⁹ Smith, letter to the author, March, 2010.

²²⁰ Ron Hess, “Stuart Saunders Smith’s *Links No. 6 (Song Interiors)*: How Can I Tell What I Think Until I See What I Sing?” (includes an interview with Stuart Saunders Smith), in *Perspectives of New Music* 47, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 212.

²²¹ Kendal Kennison is professor of music composition and theory at Goucher College (Baltimore, MD).

²²² Kendal Kennison, email message to the author, April 01, 2013.

outcomes independent from repetition. In particular, I will add his use of nested polyrhythms and his incursions of modality as an indication of non-teleological attitude. *The Starving Month*, for solo vibraphone, features all these outcomes.

The Starving Month avoids the very idea of a musical metanarrative, as reflected in its non-teleological organization of musical material. This kind of compositional attitude is not exclusive to Smith and can be traced back to the Transcendentalists. Compositional processes based on non-teleological thinking have often been thought of as a “stream of consciousness,” a term that is frequently used to define a state of mind that seems discontinuous (but is actually a reflection of a continuous flow of thought). William James, an admirer and younger contemporary of Emerson, was one of the first Americans to theorize on this non-teleological process. James used the term “stream of consciousness” to hypothesize that consciousness is continuous and that the different states forming consciousness are constantly changing, so that consciousness does not necessarily give rise to metanarratives (teleological constructions).²²³ Inspired by James’s use of the term “stream of consciousness,” later scholars used it to describe a mode of writing that mimics this mental process, giving rise to an ever-going flow of non-teleological text. Some examples in American literature can be found in Gertrude Stein’s *Composition as Explanation* and *What Are Master-pieces and Why are there So Few of Them*, as well as John Cage’s *Lecture on Nothing*, *Lecture on Something*, and *Mureau*. There are two noticeable characteristics that mark these works. One is the use of text that flows with very little to no punctuation; the other is the constant use of non-sequiturs, which halt any sense of teleology. Continuity and discontinuity paradoxically serve the same end-result: the evasion of teleology. As an illustration of this procedure, I have selected an excerpt of Cage’s *Mureau*,

²²³ William James, “The Stream of Consciousness,” in *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, ed. Giles Gunn (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 171-190.

since its title is a mix of the word “music” and the name Thoreau: “. . . at one spot only There is more squeak, mew, clear whistle of philosophy. Music soothes the d in and liGHTENS THE heads of all things in the year of a tree sparrow Youand their conque . . .”²²⁴

Tracing back to the Transcendentalists, the avoidance of linearity can be found in Emerson’s writing style (although, not comparable to writings like *Mureau*). Ives attributed to Emerson the quality of preoccupying himself “more with the substance of his creation than with the manner by which he shows it to others,”²²⁵ although Ives understands this more as a virtue than a flaw. In his essays or addresses, Emerson is frequently more concerned with the content than with the formal organization of what he states, due to his emphasis on the “substance” over the “manner.” Frequently, Emerson’s writings lacked the formal organization of traditional scholarly writing: flowing around a subject in poetic prose style, but lacking the logical coherence of traditional writing. Charles Ives has described this condition in Emerson’s writing style:

Emerson is more interested in what he perceives than in his expression of it. He is a creator whose intensity is consumed more with the substance of his creation than with the manner by which he shows it to others. Like Petrarch he seems more a discoverer of Beauty than an impartor of it. But these discoveries, these devotions to aims, these struggles toward the absolute, do not these in themselves, impart something, if not all, of their own unity and coherence – which is not received, as such, at first, nor is foremost in their expression. It must be remembered that "truth" was what Emerson was after – not strength of outline, or even beauty except in so far as they might reveal themselves, naturally, in his explorations towards the infinite . . . Carlyle told Emerson that some of his paragraphs didn't cohere. Emerson wrote by sentences or phrases, rather than by logical sequence. His underlying plan of work seems based on the large unity of a series of particular aspects of a subject, rather than on the continuity of its expression.²²⁶

Paraphrasing Ives, in *The Starving Month*, Smith writes “by sentences or phrases, rather than by logical sequence.” He focuses on the smaller units and not on metanarrative. The

²²⁴ John Cage, “Mureau,” in *M: Writings '67-'72* (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 40. I have kept Cage’s capitalization but not his random changes of font styles and font sizes.

²²⁵ Ives, “Essays Before a Sonata,” 119.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

“manner” in which melodic phrases are presented to the audience are less important than the content of each phrase. The importance of the piece lies in the “substance” presented in the material (i.e., small units such as motives and phrases), not in any attempt to provide an overarching formal construction. Focusing on the smaller units rather than on form, Smith corroborates two aspects of Transcendentalist thought: the preeminence of material over form and the denial of the hierarchical construct of composer over listener. Through non-teleology, the work allows space for the audience’s own appropriation of the piece, because the audience’s capacity for creating is respected as an essential part of the unity formed by composer, performer, and audience. The expression in Ives’s passage “devotion to an end” should not be misinterpreted as devotion to teleology. The only end that Emerson and Smith intend to achieve is to use their works’ lack of metanarrative to evoke the audience’s self-actualization. In other words, evading linearity is a channel to instill thought autonomy by leaving the piece’s meaning open to interpretation. Thus, Emerson and Smith remain timelessly relevant.

At the surface, Smith’s current non-teleological avoidance of form contrasts with his use of simple forms in his earlier music. The organization of material frequently culminated in simple structures, such as ternary forms (the *Links* are a classic example). He says that the reason why form in this music is so simple is because form “is not the point—the point is detail. In order to make detail the point you need to make other things subservient. If you have very complex details and very complex forms, I think one will cancel the other.”²²⁷ This attitude bears a fundamental similarity to the openly non-teleological attitude reflected in *The Starving Month*. Both his previous use of simple forms and his current use of “anti-forms” imply a focus on the material, or on the detail, rather than on form. . In both cases the composer draws the listener’s

²²⁷ Welsh, *The Music of Stuart Saunders Smith*, 324.

attention to the work's "substance," to use Ives' term, rather than to "manner." But Smith seems to have deepened his attitude of emphasizing the small units over form with the passing of time: he has virtually banished form in his more recent work, especially through his frequent use of repetition.

The Starving Month features two types of repetition. The first type, which I call "literal consecutive repetition," appears as repetition marks spanning the length of motives (here understood as short musical gestures of one to two measures) or through one or more phrases (here understood as longer passages that can span over ten measures). The second recurrent type of repetition is what I call "non-consecutive varied repetition." It appears in passages where a musical statement (e.g., the melody of the first two lines of the score) recurs in a non-consecutive moment, often in a freely varied way. Both kinds of repetition do not appear with the intention to fulfill any formal demands, but rather to evade the very idea of form.

Literal consecutive repetition expands the duration of smaller portions to stretch the moment, like phrases or sections—an attitude that parallels Thoreau's idea of living the present fully. Particularly, by "stretching the moment," Smith's use of repetition facilitates a thorough understanding of the complex material that the piece features. This attitude is non-teleological, because the moment is always in focus. Thus, Smith applies repetition to guide the listener to focus on the details of the presented musical material. When I received the first draft of the piece, it was already replete with repetition marks. As we worked on the piece together, the composer added many more. I have the vivid image of going over the piece with Smith in his living room: his eyes carefully looking at his manuscript while I performed to help him feel where the piece asked for new repetitions. This process was obviously intuitive. Because the placement of these repetitions and the decision of including them happened intuitively, there was no architectonic

scheme behind them. The abundance of literal consecutive repetition that resulted from our work together contributed to the avoidance of teleology, because these repetitions were not intended to delay any sort of tonal-like goal. The repetitions simply guided the listeners to re-experience what they had just heard.

Non-consecutive varied repetition is best explained as a manifestation of Kennison's notion that material in Smith's compositional process is "subject to consideration and reworking in the moment, like thoughts in worship."²²⁸ Through non-consecutive varied repetition, material is frequently re-signified. Because material comes back in random moments and in slightly varied ways, the listener is constantly provided with new textures that are simultaneously novel and familiar. This kind of repetition causes the evasion of linear narrative by giving rise to an irregularly cyclic character, or a sense of stillness (i.e. an anti-form). Therefore, even though the piece is always moving, its motion is ruminative, which gives the piece its meditative character. It does not mean, however, that the piece contemplates any arch-like formal structure. On the contrary, the random disposition of the material prevents any sense of reaching a pinnacle and going back "home."

Both kinds of repetition are noticeable in the following excerpt. It is presented to corroborate the idea that repetition is essential for *The Starving Month*'s non-teleological construction. Each phrase is highlighted and labeled with capital letters. You will notice how a moment is stretched through consecutive repetition, as well as how an anti-form is created through the application of non-consecutive varied repetition. The pitch material of the non-consecutively repeated phrases is virtually the same but the rhythms are radically modified.

²²⁸ Kendall Kennison, "Quakerism and SSS" (keynote speech, Wright State University, Dayton, OH, February 2, 2013).

Example 5.3—*The Starving Month*, first 64 measures

The musical score is presented in a standard piano format with two staves per system. It includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings (mf, p, cresc., mf, pp, mp, dim.). The score is divided into sections labeled A, B, C, D, E, and F. Section A covers measures 1-16, B covers 17-32, C covers 33-48, D covers 49-64. The score is complex, featuring many accidentals and intricate rhythmic patterns.

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The use of repetition provides *The Starving Month* with a sense of stillness. This phenomenon happens because each musical event avoids any remnants of goal-achievement: a direct repetition of what just happened, a slightly varied repetition of something that happened in a random previous moment, or completely new material with no superficial connection with the previous material. These characteristics are confirmed in the excerpt shown above, which, like the piece as a whole, indicates no attempt to achieve a goal and bring material back “home.” Smith is critical of the traditional goal-achieving musical thinking both at the compositional level and at the analytical level. Focus on goal achievement leads to a kind of music conditioned to the cause/consequence binary, limiting musical discourse to what is logical. It also tends to emphasize an artificial view of the world, as implied by Smith, making listening unbearable, boring, and “inaccessible:”

Much of music composition is based
on the belief in teleology.
The beginning causes what follows.
Everything has its place
in a line.
This assumes that one always has one’s reasons,
that there are irrefutable facts
which recognize their own limitations.

-
-
-

Teleological listening
leads to a mechanical view of the world
where if a music cannot be broken down
into smaller “logical” units
then there is an implicit critique of the construction
of the music.

This kind of thinking leads to the conclusion
that deviations from rhetoric
are mistakes-
fundamentally inaccessible.²²⁹

²²⁹ Smith, “Composing Thoughts,” 251-252.

Smith makes it clear in this passage that his upholding of non-teleology constitutes a direct criticism to formalism. The term “teleological listening” involves an attitude prone to objective analysis, that is, “formalist criticism.”²³⁰ Smith sees this kind of listening as focusing on rhetoric, which Berman defines as “semantic devices that yield meaning.” Berman affirms that formalism considers construction devices—the “how”—as tenets. Therefore, formalist thinking fails to acknowledge the relevance of music that does not focus on “how” it is constructed. “Formalism assumes the work of art to be an object of study whose properties are objectively discoverable through analysis, like the properties of natural objects investigated by science.”²³¹ Therefore, a stance that thwarts the “how” in favor of the detail, such as non-teleological thinking, is antithetical to formalist listening. Thus, music is not to be broken down into “logical units.” Rather, it is a continuous stream of indivisible musical events originated in the composer’s inner listening.

Another example of *The Starving Month*’s non-teleological narrative is the pervasive occurrence of nested polyrhythms and sudden contrasting dynamic changes that create what Smith calls non-sequiturs. Referring to his first piece for solo vibraphone, *One for Syl*, Smith highlights how this early piece already focused on this characteristic. “*One for Syl* is the prototype for the *Links* series. One can see my concentration on aperiodic speech rhythms, nonteleological developmental ambitions, non sequiturs, and a lack of conventional drama.”²³² In a musical sense, I understand that non-sequiturs involve apparent breaks in the flow of the piece, which halt the piece’s linearity and give it a “stream of consciousness” character (which thwarts teleology). Dynamic and rhythmic non-sequiturs pulverize and attenuate seeming moments of “peak.” This is corroborated in *The Starving Month*’s constant dynamic changes and

²³⁰ Berman, *Preface to Modernism*, 68.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

²³² Smith and Goldstein, “Inner-Views,” 190.

pervasive use of nested polyrhythms. For instance, the fortissimo dynamic explosion of phrase F's first line breaks the dynamic flow of the phrase, only recovered in the second to last measure of the phrase. Pervading the entire piece, the nested polyrhythms constantly halt linearity by changing speed abruptly. Nested polyrhythms are shown as numbered brackets ("tuplets") over parts or entire measures (e.g. the third measure of C)

Smith's pitch choices in *The Starving Month* show an embracing of a modal vocabulary at a level that I had not previously heard in his music.²³³ In spite of the more "familiar" melodic vocabulary, if compared to complete atonality, modality does not entail the teleology of tonality. My assertion rests in the fact that modes do not encompass the functionality of tonal keys; there is no dominant-tonic goal direction. Moreover, Smith's incursions of modality are not untainted modality; rather, they are heavily chromatic modal inflexions. The use of modality in *The Starving Month* is not methodical and should not be understood as the use of a pre-compositional system. Conversely, it is an example of how Smith's aural memories are filtered through his intuition. However, the following example shows a rare case of minimal use of chromaticism, which I picked to illustrate Smith's use of a G Aeolian inflexion:

Example 5.4—*The Starving Month*, tenth page, first 5 measures

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²³³ Even though this feature seems to have already been growing in his recent music, such as in *To Freshen the Moment!*.

Smith also relates non-systematic incursions of modality, as shown in the example above, to a denial of teleology in his life. In fact, he has related other aspects concerning his recent non-teleological music to his current senior condition:

I am in the winter of my life.
 My music has become slower,
 more introspective, and poignantly, afraid of the future.
 This is happening by itself
 of its own
 without any system to make it so.²³⁴

This “fear of the future” accounts not only for his pieces’ longer lengths and focus on stretching the moment — “my music has become slower”—but also to his unsystematic incursions of modality. It seems natural for him to use more modal inflexions for a life that has “more past than future”:

The chromatic music teaches
 the more or less modal music
 how to exist in the world. The
 difference is a kind of weight.
 Having less stretches the moment.
 The modal is deeper in its movement.
 Chromatic music floats easily
 in the clouds. Modal music
 sings of the past. I have more
 past than future. Yet I feel
 eternal. This is an illusion that
 helps us go on in winter.²³⁵

There are different layers of meaning in this enigmatic statement, starting with Smith’s recurrent desire to “stretch the moment.” In this case, Smith implies that because modality has fewer pitch choices, it aids in deepening the listener’s experience in a way akin to his use of repetition. The importance of depth over the ephemeral has been addressed in the parallels of Thoreau’s choices for moving, as well as Smith’s choice of work-lengths, use of repetition, and

²³⁴ Smith, “Composing Thoughts,” 241.

²³⁵ Smith, letter to the author, April, 2013.

consequent lack of form. This is how Smith thwarts teleology, and this is why he “feels eternal.” Letting the past “sing” through the modality gives rise to a sense of stillness that is antithetical to the metanarrative of formalism. Moreover, because past and future are both unknowable, the ambiguity that results from Smith’s use of both modality and chromaticism shuns teleology and allows for different interpretations:

The past and future
have much in common.
They are both, radically unknowable.
The past gives the illusion of stability.
The Future a pipe dream.²³⁶

Because *The Starving Month* obfuscates past and future, it entails the paradox of non-teleological attitude; that is, it points to the future by pointing to the past, so as to avoid societal notions of progress. In other words, *The Starving Month* highlights anti-materialism and musical complexity while society praises materialism and shuns autonomous thinking. Because a future that entails materialism and alienation is “a pipe dream,” *The Starving Month* stretches the moment and “sings the past” to symbolically avoid it. Smith intends his music to be lived in the present moment, perhaps even to render the present moment “eternal.” Yet Smith assumes to have “more past than future,” which explains his modality as a symptom of his reliance on individual experience. Whether or not this modal “past” is a reference to Smith’s involvement with jazz is open to interpretation. Also left for interpretation are the symbolic implications of disposing musical material in ways that deny any remnants of form, pervading music with non-sequiturs, and adding passages of modal inflection to chromatic music. Smith’s attitude of leaving musical discourse open to the appropriation of each listener may be the reason why his music remains timelessly relevant. In my case, I hear non-teleology every time I perform or listen to *The Starving Month*.

²³⁶ Smith, “Composing Thoughts,” 253.

5.3 Conclusion

As idiosyncratic as Smith's music is, it is inserted in a lineage of thinking that traces back to the Transcendentalists: the idea of facing erudition critically while having autonomous thinking and free agency (understanding that intuition generates these stances) as the primary sources of art. The apparent paradoxes posed by being an academic but facing academicism critically are present in both the Transcendentalists and Stuart Saunders Smith. This process dialogues aesthetically with the full spectrum of the Transcendentalist thought: from the sensorial to the symbolic, from self-abnegation to personal imprint, from non-teleology to purpose. All of these attitudes coalesce in his work. Although there is a precedence of his creative mind in the compositional process, he invites the audience to be active listeners and exercise self-actualization. Because his process is primarily guided by intuition, "inner listening" plays the important role of letting his experience speak through itself. On the other hand, "getting out of the way" and "listening to the sound's intelligence" are Smith's approaches to exercising self-abnegation and non-teleological thinking when composing a new piece: "I try to be empty when I create so the message is pure, and not from me."²³⁷ When Smith says that he wants the message not to be from him, he means that he does not want ego or conditioning to speak. Rather, only intuition should "speak," so that the piece arises naturally.

Saying that "the message is pure" implies that Smith considers the message as divine. However, according to Transcendentalism, the divine dwells within each soul, providing each person with innate knowledge. The comparison with the concept of Inner Light from Smith's Quaker religion becomes not only plausible but also inevitable.²³⁸ Therefore, the message is still his, but it is from the divinity that resides within him and is shared with everybody. His music

²³⁷ Smith, letter to the author, March, 2010.

²³⁸ Moreover, Transcendentalism and the advent of American Quakerism shared geographical and ideological matters though the first was a literary and philosophical movement whereas the latter was, and is, a religion.

frequently symbolizes this universal soul. *To Freshen the Moment!*, for instance, uses co-existence and silence to promote Oneness. Such is the way in which Smith hopes to inspire the audience to exercise both self-actualization and “aspiration.”

Smith’s attitude of relying solely on his intuition and his refusal to follow pre-conceived systems of composition—understood via the Transcendentalist idea of self-reliance and thought autonomy—has more recently developed into the formal level. Particularly in *The Starving Month*, the deployment of musical material in non-teleological ways constitutes a radical rejection of formalism and an indication of a Transcendentalist stance. In fact, his recent radicalization of non-teleology deepened his Transcendentalist attitude: when Smith denies goal-orientation, he eschews lust, expectation, or desire.²³⁹ Non-teleology in Smith’s work is, therefore, a symbol of disavowal of anxiety, materialism, and longing for success. To illustrate my assertion, the composer himself has dealt with the fact that long pieces such as *The Starving Month* and other even longer pieces may find a certain resistance toward being programmed. However, getting more performances of his pieces is not his priority. His priority is, rather, to follow his intuition.

Similarly, his use of a modal vocabulary in *The Starving Month* is also done through a non-systematic approach that denies formalism. Therefore, his modality should not be seen as an endeavor to limit music material. Rather, it can be understood via the Transcendentalist discourse of courage. Emerson says: “In self-trust, all the virtues are comprehended. Free should the scholar be,—free and brave. Free even to the definition of freedom, ‘without any hindrance that does not arise out of his own constitution.’ Brave; for fear is a thing, which a scholar by his very function puts behind him. Fear always springs from ignorance.”²⁴⁰ Smith’s courage of

²³⁹ Based on what Meyer states in his *Music, the Arts, and Ideas*, 160.

²⁴⁰ Emerson, “The American Scholar,” 63-64.

relying on the sound's intelligence—and not on pre-compositional systems—may attract destructive academic criticism. I have asked Smith more than once why he has recently written melodies that suggest modes. His reply is always the same: “I just have been hearing that way.” If he has just been hearing like that, it would be a denial of his free, creative mind to write music otherwise. Even if the music accepted in academia as “forward-looking” normally shuns the use of modality, Smith's use of it means that he has deepened his self-reliance to be “free even to the definition of freedom, ‘without any hindrance that does not arise out of his own constitution.’”

For Smith and the Transcendentalists, isolation is an important path for building the personal experience that is so essential to the art making process. However, isolation walks hand in hand with social awareness via the notion that self-actualization leads to universal betterment. As Thoreau said, quoting Confucius: “Love virtue and the people will be virtuous.”²⁴¹ This kind of isolation must not be confused with selfishness. Rather, it leads to self-abnegation, because one who finds completeness in oneself feels no need to exploit. Selfishness, on the other hand, brings lust for exterior approval; that is, success. This longing for success is reflected in values boasted by society such as materialism, overworking, over-consumption, and technological fetishism, which are the result of violence and a depletion of resources. The belief that all life emanates divinity implies the duty of living up to the standards of such a belief, avoiding the world's depletion while adding to the world's knowledge. Such are the values defended by the Transcendentalists that are reflected in Smith's work. He writes music that does not seek to restate the common sense (or to “deplete” knowledge), but to leave a legacy to society by questioning the aforementioned values. This endeavor is seen in his journey to write music that levels his role with those of the performer and audience, both symbolically and practically. Smith's music, at once extremely intricate and extremely lyrical, invites us to “aspire” as much

²⁴¹ Thoreau, *Walden*, 188.

as he “aspires” during the compositional process. When music transforms composer, performers, and listeners into a “unified landscape,” it manifests the universal spirit.

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APPENDIX A: CORRESPONDENCE INTERVIEWS²⁴²**February-June 2015**

1 – Christopher Shultis affirms that, for Emerson, the unification of self and environment is only done through symbol, as opposed to the non-dualist—Thoreauvian—view that men and nature are already one and no action needs to be taken towards such unification. Given your statement in the preface to *Here and There* (through it, performers can “transform themselves, others, and the environment into a unified landscape”), do you believe that you tend more towards the Emersonian view? Why?

Humans are symbol makers. Being awake, self-aware, is so terrible and wonderful that only symbols keep us sane. Without language we have deep unified experiences that we then talk about!!

Further, Thoreau wrote and spoke. If he was silent, then, and only then, would he be a non-dualist. I know this is perhaps extreme, but I think Shultis is wrong to make such a distinction – It is much more complex. Cage also was wrong. Each did not see that Emerson and Thoreau are really a compliment to each other. They both are correct.

I say Nature and Symbol are one. Humans are part of Nature. Symbols are part of Nature. *Here and There* makes unity through diversity.

2 – How does *Here and There* contribute to transformation and unification?

Here: the inside God (melody instrument); *And*: the unifier, the connector (piano interior); *There*: the other, the stranger, the far away place (short wave radio). When performed or studied leads to an anti-nationalist universe where all are made welcome in the space of *Here and There*. By analogy, this system of improvisation is a political gesture and creates cells, in this case the trio of revolution, gentle + beautiful; not violent and abusive.

3 – Given the aforementioned matters, how do you believe *Here and There* affects the tripartite relationship of composer, performer, and audience?

Here and There levels the relationship of time and space and performers, composer, audience.

Different times like far off musics, (a kind of time) played at different times than the performance time and space. Time travels!!!

The composer invites rather than dictates. The performer has direction and is relatively free. The audience must make music out of this unusual sound collage, unified and diverse. Common-union-ism.

²⁴² When typing Smith’s answers, I tried to keep his indention or stanza-like writing style as much as possible.

4 – You have constantly spoken against music that features the use of extended techniques as primary ethos. Rather, the work with melody and rhythm is the basis of your composition process. Would you agree that this is a sign of your emphasis on, using Charles Ives’s terms, “substance” over “manner?” Can you discuss this matter?

Extended techniques are not really memorable. Timbre is the least of music. Timbre is poverty stricken. Pitch and rhythm come from speech and are more deeply rooted in our nature. Timbre tells us who is speaking. Once we know that then we find out what is information. We very quickly get used to new sounds, therefore, they get old very quickly. Very quickly.

5 – In musical formalism, process, technique, and/or the experiment is emphasized over the musical result. On the other hand, in musical transcendentalism there is an emphasis on material or on the sound experience over structure or process. As much as you may dislike categorizing your music, would you agree that your music tends more towards the second category? Do you have any comments on this subject?

Transcendentalism is based on the politics of improvisation, play—serious play in the nature of things. A piece is the trace of that play. My music cares nothing about process or experiment. My music is the moment in nature by nature.

6 – Would you have any comments on your ideas about “percussion ecology,” as parallel to Thoreau’s ideas of simplicity, especially in regards to your pieces that feature instrumental “poverty,” such as *Songs I-IX*, *When Music is Missing*, *Music Sings*, and *By Hand*?

Percussion composers should not expect that the riches of percussion means percussionists are rich!! I ask for invention in poverty so poverty is transformed into a riches.

April-May 2013

1 – Different forms of musical repetition are present in *The Starving Month*. A kind of repetition that frequently comes into play is what I would call a literal consecutive repetition, which pervade the piece and which appear as repetition marks that can spam through short musical gestures of one to two measures, or through long passages of over ten measures (long musical phrase or period). What is the purpose of this kind of repetition for either of these cases?

Art is history relived. As one gets older
the regrets grow. Paths not taken haunt.
Also, we see things come back like fashions
in art. I repeat in hopes of not repeating
Repeating is a way of staying. I am
a Christian in spite of being an agnostic.
I protest the structures of the universe
And the variety of “human nature” through
the ages by protesting Christ as an

answer. Even as I doubt profoundly.
 I repeat as I am repeating now: our
 Foot in the stream over and over
 touches a new stream: repeat no, the
 same that is not yes.

2 – Another recurrent kind of repetition in the *Starving Month* is what I would call a non-consecutive varied repetition. This kind occurs in various passages of the piece, where a musical statement (noticeably, but not limited to the one shown in the first line of the score) reoccurs in a non-consecutive moment of the piece, in a rather varied way in regards to its rhythmic disposition. What is for you the purpose of this kind of repetition?

I “say” something. It cries out
 to exist again in a different garment
 of duration. It cries out to change
 but stay the same all the while
 being a new harmonic rhythm. Oh yes
 music “speaks” to me and I listen
 and change over the years. I have a
 history. My 190 compositions is my history.
 I do battle with my history automatically.
 Change... evolution happens – just happens
 And at certain we are hit hard
 with the fact: we have come here to go.
 What we make and leave turns to dust.
 We continue making, composing because habits
 bring us in touch with the divine.

Notice how I am writing here... from
 Sentence to place. What does it tell you?

3 – The repetitions of the second type show high pitch fidelity if compared to their original occurrences (even in regards to the order in that these pitches were presented in their first occurrence). This fact somewhat contrasts with some of your early pieces, in where pitch material would come back in varied ways (such as with the use of a “free retrograde” technique, in the early pieces Links series). Would you be able to comment on the reasons that lead you to this change of approach?

I do not change approach. The
 music changes approach on its
 own. The “I” sleeps by composing
 or more correctly, by being composed,
 by making space to let, not to be
 anywhere: By being no where special
 while the composing takes place.

Sentence, phrase by phrase it happens
 until it dies of its own making. A
 Composition should be allowed to die.
 I heard Beethoven last night. It is
 so square. It ends. I hear his will to power:
 The will to battle with material is utterly
 boring. Give me Coltrane any time, where
 the moment is glory and breath is the
 key. Do not give me the key. I don't want it

4 – The use of repetition frequently generated simple forms, such as ABA forms, in your early music. In *The Starving Month*, the frequent use of non-consecutive varied repetition of different materials seems to create a rather complex form. Would you comment on this seemingly recent feature of your music?

Form is what happens. Form
 is memory deferred. Form is
 hidden by not thinking about it.
 It is the details we remember: a
 phone call at my dorm from a young
 woman who wants a lover. No, I say.
 What would a yes done? I remember
 that small detail often. It is a form.
 A refrain if you like. But ideas
 about memory is the close relative to
 right now a past. Right now. Again
 now. Memory occupies space.
 use it to saturate the space
 of regret.

5 – Your pitch choices for *The Starving Month* show an embracement of a modal vocabulary in an extent that I had never witnessed in your music, even though this feature seemed to have been growing in your music in the recent years. Would you be able to comment on the process that led you from a more chromatic approach to the frequent use of modal inflexions in your recent music?

The chromatic music teaches
 the more or less modal music
 how to exist in the world. The
 difference is a kind of wieght.
 Having less stretches the moment.
 The modal is deeper in its movement.
 Chromatic music floats easily
 in the clouds. Modal music

sings of the past. I have more
past than future. Yet I feel
eternal. This is an illusion that
helps us go on in winter.

6 – How would you respond to the provocative statement that the use of repetition, as well the more frequent use of a modal vocabulary seem to constitute an attempt on your part to limit material?

I am composed of 190 compositions
The Starving Month is just one
manifestation. My musical path
is one of the most varied of any
living composer. I limit nothing
because I do not plan. I am planned
by experience. By the experience
of sitting each day to see what
happens. I limit nothing. Look at
all my music. Not just a instance of
my foot in a stream, and you
will see how composition has made
me in different differences

7 – When I attended Kendall Kennison’s keynote speech in the Colloquium, I was interested by his comment on the thought process of the worshiper in a traditional Quaker meeting as related to the way that material unfolds in your music. *The Starving Month* came instantly to my mind, especially because its use if non-consecutive varied repetition. Much has been already discussed on the influence of Quakerism in your music, especially in relation to the use of silence and non-periodical rhythms. One considers now how Quakerism may parallel with your use of varied repetition of material. What are your thoughts on this matter?

One must be a Quaker to
See Quakerism clearly. It is
not a silence religion. It is a
religion of action – social justice.
He was born this way: Silence
is the largest part of Sandbox
composed at the age of 14, scored
for woodblocks and cowbell. It
expresses the nature of the Maine
Woods: a few sounds into the nothing.
I felt isolated in crowds
the loneliest place was in school which I
cared little about, because I wished

From the beginning of self emancipation
to learn on my own – groups kill –
the lone person grows.

I am not good enough
or silent enough to be a Quaker

8 – Kennison explains your music as contemplative, so that gestures are "subject to consideration and reworking in the moment, like thoughts in worship." How would you relate this consideration to *The Starving Month*, especially in relation to the use of recurrent varied repetition?

Dr. Kennison has the tools to
speak about Quakerism. He has the
experience.

My music contains no ideas.
It is experience. It is my shame
that I taught ideas in music as
a professor. There is the music. And
music teaches us about music by
being music.

9 – The Philosopher Étienne Souriau affirms: "The demands of true musical structure are such that the creator, as soon as stimulation goes too far and leaves final stylization, is simply forced to renounce music itself and transgress its basic laws. So little are the facts of nature in harmony with those laws. Even emotional description in music leaves those bounds as soon as approaches too close to the real movements of the soul, the natural course of psychical facts, which do not contain the prescribed repetitions, not the quivering, nor architectonic transitions from one tonality to the other, nor correct cadences, nor the ready, stereotyped conclusions which musical form demands." Dunja Dujmić cites this statement as conditions for Ives' music as being transcendentalist. Souriau's statement seems to perhaps apply to *The Starving Month* because its repetitions are not prescribed and occasional incursions through modality do not happen through any architectonic transition or with the intention to fulfill any formal demands. According to Kennison, while Quakerism is different than transcendentalism, both practices share "points of overlap and similarity." Hence, please comment on the applicability of Souriau's statement to *The Starving Month*, and your music in general.

The philosopher Étienne Souriai makes
words like French intellectuals everywhere.
It sounds deep but is finally a
circle with no way up.

10 – According to George Amoss "the Quaker meeting is a place where all opinions are respected and can get a hearing, and that Quaker decision-making is a process of arriving at truth

through attending to each person's expressed opinion." Please comment on how attending Quaker meetings, especially in regards to the decision-making and the search for divine truth, has had an impact on your composition process and your relationship to the performers of your music.

The Quaker connection should be eliminated
 in your essay. The more I think about it
 The less it resonates. Religion,
 at its best, is experience
 without words and ideas. Music, at its best
 confound the mind to find instead
 the ocean we all swim.

Best wishes

April 2013 (two poems sent in advance to the answers of the above interview)

I

We Quakers
 Do not keep the silence
 For Silence –

•
•

We wait:

•

For the moment
 Of revelation –
 Then act.

•
•

This action
 is made
 From a nothing.

•

We wait for nothing
 So something emerges
 as a testimony –
 so that the Gospels
 live.

•
•

Quakers:
 the way
 To stand on the intuition of God.

II

I was born
 In this way:
 The cliffs
 of Two Light State Park in Maine
 where the ocean
 crashes into gaint rocks
 Creating a spray
 like dew drop diamonds
 being hurled.

•

•

It was then,
 A drum song was composed in me
 For anoher time.

•

•

I was born
 In this way:
 All of 7 years
 Marching into deep forests
 Playing my field drum
 Hearing the echoes fill the air
 Making the even become uneven
 In a counterpoint of clattering echoes.
 The uneven composed in me.
 became my rhythm.

•

•

•

•

•

Being open
 to be composed.
 Conditioned to the off, beat, or
 have courage
 is born
 Not learned.

March 2010

1 – Many of the articles you have written are shaped as short essays that meaningfully interconnect, making a single body. Why do you write your articles in small blocks?

Music is memory. We Connect
bits of sound (individual pitches for instance)
into a phrase, phrases into larger units, then
composition to composition. This activity
is through memory

I write prose in the same way

2 – How can the performing artist conciliate affirming for his/her outer survival and aspiring for his/her inner survival? How can the artist deal with the ambivalence?

There is only inner survival. Outer survival is expressed by ideals.

3 – In “Against Definition” you discuss your preference for unbalanced systems because the balanced does not “move.”²⁴³ However in “A Composer’s Mosaic” you affirm that balance between *homo faber* and “homo-riskier” is your goal²⁴⁴:

a) Do you see this as a paradox?

b) Would you extend your aim for the balance toward compositional system? If yes, what would be the reason for your preference for the unbalanced? Would it be to have balance as a goal?

I see no contradiction. The maker must invent tools to realize the various dreams each holds clear. These dreams may risk violating the status quo

3b. Composing with a pre-compositional system creates a note-government. Government creates laws. Composing should be lawless.

4 – Would it be correct to affirm that the silence for you is not the “nothing,” but an opportunity to “listen inside?” Would this be the reason of the importance of silence in your life as a composer?

a) Listening inside, you make familiar become “estranged.”²⁴⁵ Would that be why you can “no longer hear the functions of functional harmony,” hearing “one tonic chord after another tonic chord?”²⁴⁶

b) Conversely, would it be correct to affirm that by listening inside you make “non-sense” become “new sense?”²⁴⁷

Silence in my music gives the listener an opportunity to both imagine their own music in that space, as well as give the divine a place to dwell.

4a. I no longer hear functional harmony as functional. I no longer hear the grammar.

²⁴³ Stuart Saunders Smith, “Against Definition,” *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 1 (Winter 1994), 217.

²⁴⁴ Stuart Smith, “A Composer’s Mosaic,” *Perspectives of New Music* 22, no. 1/2 (Autumn 1983 – Summer 1984), 276.

²⁴⁵ Smith, “Against Definition,” 216.

²⁴⁶ Stuart Saunders Smith, “Geography of Time: The Links Series of Vibraphone Essays (1974-1994),” *Percussive Notes* 32, no. 1 (April 2005), 58.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

4b. The composer can so individuate themselves that what is normal for the composer is abnormal, even chaotic, for the listener, thereby giving the listener the occasion for a time to create their own music as they connect sounds anew.

4c. Silence makes music possible.

5 – Could you discuss a little about the importance of silence in the Quaker meetings you attend?

Quaker meeting is silent worship. We wait for God to speak through us.

6 – You are a pacifist. To your pacifist behavior, you owe the use of non-periodic, speech-like, rhythms. You refuse to write music that would resemble military march, which uses periodic rhythms. March resembles war or belligerent behavior. However, your pacifism has also deep relationship with silence. Do you think there is an ambiguity in relating, at the same time, pacifism to speech (via the non-periodic speech rhythms) and to silence?

Yes I agree.

7 – In your pieces based on speech rhythms, you write silence using precise amount of rests. How does this relate to the importance of silence in your life and in your compositional process?

I try to compose from silence. I try to be empty when I create so the message is pure and not from me.

8 – The last movement of *To Freshen the Moment!* consists of precise 89 seconds of silence. I consider this a deep statement of both peaceful behavior, which leads to life freedom and inner behavior, which leads to a artistic freedom. Could you discuss this affirmation? It seems to have no relation with John Cage's silence of non-silence. How would you compare Cage's silence to yours?

I very much agree with your statements a) + b) one performs silence, it is a prayer.

Cages's silence is meant to focus our attention to what is around us.

My silences are for us to notice the inside

In "To Freshen the Moment" the performer makes time for the audience by performing the silence as if an activity could happen at any time. This movement adds mystery to silence, like the mystery of Jesus.

APPENDIX B: LIVE INTERVIEW

November 14-15, 2013: *Walden* interview²⁴⁸

1 – Please comment on Thoreau’s criticism to the American society and its concern with production, as seen in *Walden*’s first chapter “Economy.”²⁴⁹

Walden was an important cultural edifice and cultural definer of New England. It’s part of the old Yankee New England consciousness.

You have to, in this world, compose your life. Look at all the elements, like what you eat. For instance, I am a Vegan because it seems to me that it is a healthier way to eat, as well as the least damaging to the environment. You need to figure how much technology do you want in your life. I don’t have cellphone; I don’t have a computer. I like to make phone calls so I keep that technology around. I do not watch TV. But I do like picking my own movies and enjoy them very much. I think that people need to make conscious choices. And I think too much technological gear is in the way of self-development, because you are always connecting with other people, and doing this and that, and you have very little time for solitude and to quiet.

Getting back to the idea of composing yourself, people also need to figure out where they are politically, not just say “ok, I am a democrat,” or “I am a republican,” as if these were the only choices. There are many choices one can have. For instance, some people may want to have a king or queen. Myself, I think that the horizon for human development should be towards communism. I think Thoreau’s thinking kind of goes in two directions, which may seem contradictory at first, but not really. I think he was very much leaning to an anarchism, in that he was so socially aware that he was leaning towards a kind of communist situation. If you don’t just consume all time, then you can think about sharing, instead of “I need, I need, I need.” How about the other people, what to they need? They need food, water, shelter, medical care, so and so forth, and something meaningful to do. So it is not always “me, me, me, me, me.” I think if people live their lives where they have some time of solitude, like a year or several months, or whatever, it will lead them into a [life that is] more socially aware. It is seemingly contradictory that when you are alone you can become more socially aware, but [for instance] I see it in Vermont, which is a very sparsely settled state – there are not a lot of people in Vermont. But when we all go to the general store it is like an old home week. People talk to each other: “It is great to see you!” We are always going to some other’s house for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. So if you have less people around, people matter more. Whereas in the cities people can be extraordinarily lonely, in the country I don’t see that.

[misfortune it is to have inherited farms, 3] What he again is talking about is choice. In other words, being conscious, not just simply as Kant said following your inherited tutelage. You

²⁴⁸ All the quotations from this interview are taken from: Thoreau, Henry D. *Walden*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.

²⁴⁹ The remainder of the interview consisted of the author introducing, commenting, and reading passages from *Walden* and asking Smith to comment on the parallels between these passages and his life and artistic stances. The bracketed words and numbers that appear before each answer refer respectively to keywords and page numbers for reference (see *Walden* edition above). Only the author’s comments that are pertinent to understand Smith’s responses were included.

realize that there is an inherited tutelage: “Okay, I have been taught X, is that how I want to live my life, or do I want to go Y and a little X? And the other thing about being productive is that Thoreau was one of the most productive writers in American History--North-American history--and it was precisely because did not care about production. He had some ideas, he wrote them down, and before you know he had volumes of writings, observations, and drawings – beautiful drawings of nature.

[slave-driver of yourself, 6] This reminds me of a parable, that I think about often, that Jesus taught. He talks about this farmer that has many employees. And the farmer finally gets his barns or storage place full of grains, enough for years. So he takes stock of it “wow, now I am secure.” And at night he dies in the sleep. What good did all that do? And then he talks about the lilies of the field. God takes care of birds, takes care of the lilies, well how about humans? I think humans it is a different situation, but I think humans can take care of each other. And should. That is what Jesus was talking about. If you read the gospels carefully, you will read stories of a communist teacher. His name was Jesus Christ.

[divinity, 6] When I compose – I work at the piano – I try to be as quiet internally as possible, so that the musical ideas can emerge naturally, organically, from the body, from the spirit, from the mind. One has to get out of the way. This can be learned from Walden: if you pay attention, you see the intelligence of ants, you see the intelligence of the fish in the water, you see the intelligence of the trees. Well, it is the same with pitches. If you play a Bb, and you listen. It is a vibration just like water is a vibration, just like the sky is a vibration, or our body is a whole bunch of different vibrations. And we listen to that, and we get one pitch, and then you get another pitch, and another. Then you got three pitches, and they determine another pitch. Before you know, you have phrase. Then little phrases, “phraselets.” And that to me is the same idea that one can find in Walden time and time again, and that is him noticing. That is what composing is for me: noticing--and then staying out of the way, just noticing by itself.

If he [Thoreau] imposed his will on the ice he wouldn't see it melt. He got his will out of the way, so he could see clearly – so that he could see seeing, so he could hear hearing, rather than “I am now going to do this on the land.”

[honestly think there is no choice left, 7] That kind of reminds me of growing up in the 50's, and us taught by commercials. We were one of the first generation that were taught by TV commercials about what real man was supposed to do: smoking cigarettes, eating red meat . . . and that was all that TV commercials have to teach, and people went along with it uncritically. But I was very fortunate, my father taught me to think in this way: He was very against war because he had been in one—World War Two. And he told me he didn't think God was on anybody's side, that the whole thing was immoral--killing each other--and that helped me see that war was not necessarily an inevitable thing. Then, from there I could see that smoking cigarettes was not an inevitable thing. From there I could see that eating meat was not an inevitable thing, etc. So that you can build on that small little curdle that you father may have said, or your mother may have said at one point. And then you can build the foundation of individualization. It seems strange, but the best way to become a communist is through self-actualization. By defining the self and composing the self you are more able to help others, and more receptive to them helping you

[philosopher, 14] What is the function of thinking? What is its utility? It is to find your way in the forest. Thoreau found his way, you have to find your way, I have to find my way. And we collectively share our ways. And the only way you have something to share is to find your own way. So when I talk about composing, I am not talking just about composing music, I am talking about composing one's life, and finding your way, precisely to be socially conscious, as well as to be a deeply rooted life – rooted in what is real. What is real is: when you eat a mushroom, it is a way of eating a tree. And when you eat the brassicas, which is a certain kind of vegetable, you are eating the ground. So Sylvia in addition to being my wife for 44 years, in addition to being a performer she is also a publisher, and a farmer. I help her on the farm for about one hour a day – she farms for a lot longer than that. I learned some fundamental things, by watching things grow. One year we don't have any cucumbers, and in the next year we have an abundance of cucumbers but no apples. This year we had apples at the wazoo, and no cucumbers.

[strolling Indian 18-19] It reminds me a way to describe music that Herbert Brun, the great music philosopher and composer, had taught me. There is music or art that is an output of society, and that would be popular music— unquestioned culture—and there is music which is an input to society – and that is original thinking that can add to the wealth of the society, rather than just depleting society. That is what popular art does, it depletes information, whereas art does not deplete information, it adds information.”

[author: how would you connect the passage with your life and your academic career . . . ?] I learned early on as a jazz musician and club player that the better we play, the less the audience seems to like it. So in order to do the best I could as a musician, I had to find a way of making a living – that gave me enough time to develop. As a young man I discovered academia. Then you could teach, which is an honorable profession, if done properly. And, then have time, and encouragement from the university, to do your own work. So after a while I decided to do that instead of trying to make my living as a jazz musician, which seem impossible in a culture that does not value art. This is what America is: is a culture that does not value art, because it is so capitalistic. So I view getting in the classroom as a kind of performance. So I try to perform well, entertainingly, and teach them [the students] new things in their lives. So I do [did] two or three courses a semester, and that would give me plenty of time to develop my work in isolation.

[author's comment on technological advancing] First of all, does technology always have to advance? Why does technology have to . . . its own advance? Shouldn't we, at some point, say “We want this, and not that?”

[Maine and Texas telegraph, 55] Look at this thing called Twitter and Facebook: “I just had dinner today. I had gravy on my meat. Who cares? It is silly.”

[afoot, 55-56] That reminds me of this: I am in the library in Vermont. And I thought what would happen if I took the car and travelled 10 mile an hour back home? What would I notice? I would have noticed all kinds of things that I would not have noticed if I was going at the speed limit. The other thing I notice is that no one else is on the road all the time . . . on the car. Of course, it would have been even better if I walked. I would have noticed things better. Remember being on a horsing buggy ride that an Amish took me on. All the things you notice by just going slower.

That is what we learn from Walden. A human irony that is profound. In order to go deeper and faster, we have to go slower. That is Walden; he goes slower but ultimately is faster.

[goodness tainted, 79] Quakers believe that there is that of God in everybody. The gospel of John talks about light a lot There is a light in every one. So we should offer up whatever we can to everybody: poor or rich. We have some friends in the end of the road. We had surplus of potatoes, and Sylvia made a lot of apple butter, more than we would be able to eat this winter. So we decided “les just give them some apple butter and potatoes.”

We don't have institutional sharing, which is what communism is. So if you don't have that, one thing that we have to do is share, even if is not institutional. So you share when you can. When you have over abundance, you share. There are people that are billionaires and they share some of it, but when is enough enough? Is their time worthier than other's people time on earth? There are homeless people out there. Who is worth more in the eyes of God?

[I have frequently seen a poet, 88] There is a bunch of ways of farming. One is you need to have a bunch of crops. You need cabbage, you need wheat, so and so forth. There is another way to farm, equally important. And that is you walk in the woods and you say: “My goodness, there is an apple tree here. So if you clear away the forest, so that the apple tree can breathe, and have plenty of sunlight. And before you know, you have got a big harvest of apples. So sometimes it is a matter of clearing, in order that the mind can see properly. It is the same with getting apples.

I don't enjoy farming; I don't like manual labor. But it is something that Sylvia likes a great deal. So she has chosen to farm. This is her composition. She figures out, she has maps of what is going to go where in each season, she clears away the land, so that the apple trees breathe.

[“As long as possible live free and uncommitted, 89] He is absolutely right. But again the irony is: what is Thoreau committed to? He is committed to sharing his insights, so that we all can benefit from them. Again it goes back to that point: you individualize your self through self-actualization in order for you to have something to share. If you don't build anything in you life, you have nothing to give. That is why you practice.

[Every morning was a cheerful invitation, 94] What I developed over forty years of composing was this routine: get up in the morning, have some tea, and compose from 9 to 11. Put that away. Do other musical things, correspondence, or proofreading, you name it. And then do some farming, or reading. And there is more free time so you can do whatever; [for instance] I have been writing a book. You have a structure to your day, but is a little bit like a mobile. You have these elements that you want to do in the day, but it is up to you when you do them or if you do them. Thoreau had it right. You retire early. He retired early. He literally retired to Walden. And then in Walden he retired, so that he could be with nature. And nature taught him how to retire, because he was open to watching nature and how it worked.

[how could I have looked him in the face?, 94] The book *Walden* shows a person that is awake and awakening. All the time he is open to learning. You learn it from the outside in order for you to be rich inside.

[live like baboons or like men is little important, 98-99] What I think is important for people to realize about Thoreau is that he was very critical of accepting – again I come back to this point – just accepting what technological change comes along, just accepting it. So Thoreau is looking at telegraph, “is that something useful or not?” Maybe it was useful and Thoreau was wrong, but it does not really matter. That important thing was to look at it critically, not just to accept. Time and time again Thoreau asked fundamentally radical questions.

[railroads, 99] We are running out of resources. The other part of this is that these technological advancements may not necessarily keep up, because if we run out of resources to make them, we will go back in time. And I believe this is entirely possible. Even a solar panel requires an enormous amount of minerals that we may run out of in a relatively short period of time, so we need to prepare for that eventuality.

[. . . but in dealing with truth we are immortal, and need fear no change nor accident, 106] I would say [a few words] as someone who is trying to be conscious. When you are conscious, you can outlive your own time. In other words, you will have something to share to generations that come after your death. And Thoreau certainly did. Look at all his journals. They are still being studied; people are reading them. He lives on, through his work.

[. . . at most astrologically, not astronomically, 111] One of the beautiful things about music and any art form I would imagine is: the first thing that a person sees or experiences is the surface of the work. If the surface of the work is attractive, it will act as a kind of invitation to experience the work more and more. If the work has depth as well as being attractive, the audience will plume in those depths over time. We have to be very inviting to our audiences, not just assuming they never will understand. I don't assume that at all. I assume that everyone can be a composer; everyone can be a creative listener. We just need to invite people to do that, at the earliest ages. Invite them to participated. Not to be acted on, but to act. Adorno, seems to me, sells the audience short. I think that the audiences, if they have a chance, will love to be their own persons.

[. . . my life itself was become my amusement and never ceased to be novel, 109] There is a guy I know who has done some house painting for us. We visited him in his home, which he made out of logs. He has no electricity. He has the running water coming form his pond that he dug himself. He has a tree house that he got just made, so he can watch animals. So will takes meat out there, get up in this tree house and watch the wolves and the bears, eat. It is his own entertainment. This guy invents his own life. He is awake. He does some house painting, and some carpentry. He has his own gardens. He knows how to forage for food. So if his garden does not do well, he can go into the woods and find food. He is a very rich man. Has a very rich life. It is not a question of giving up entertainment. It is a question of being able to see what is right in front of you. Right in front of you there is stuff to notice.

[a vibration of the universal lyre, 132] One thing I notice in my home is how quiet it is. When I go out, of course, I hear all kinds of things; it did in the city as well. If you just pay attention there is always something to hear. But I don't find listening to nature or listening to a city a condition of music for me. It is for Sylvia. She prefers silence over music, because for here, there is always music. So she does not need anyone to play music. It is a Quaker view. If you go move

into a person who was raised as a Quaker you will notice there is silence in the house all the time. Her father was like that he kept silence as his best friend.

While for me I really enjoy intentional music making. I enjoy hearing people do that. (and he also enjoys inner music, which is probably why the ambient sounds do not influence in his music making).

[I find it wholesome to be alone, 146] I remember something Cage said that I remember now fully. He said Conlon Nancarrow did not pay attention to anybody else's music except Conlon Nancarrow's music. (he also said that) Henry Cowell's music was truly great when Henry didn't care about other people's music. Solitude allows you to grow your own garden. And make sure that it'd your own seed. That is what is the problem with the composer's in New York. They are too close together, and they cross each other's paths so many times, that is hard for them to be themselves.

[author's comment on the same subject]In my experience, it is harder for artists who are in dense population centers to truly be in solitude. I understand that that is certainly possible. There is certainly great examples of that. But from my experience a lot of people are let astray by being in too close proximity to each other.

[We are wont to forget that the sun looks . . . , 181] What I learned from Sylvia, who is the farmer in the family, is that you can't control the weather. All you can do is build up the fields so that they are with compost and worms and all kinds of things to make the dirt and soil rich. Then the weather interacts with you and the fields in such a way that you have to accept what is going on. For instance, this season it rained a great deal, which delayed all the crops. So we had to harvest late in the season, because it rained so much. On the other hand the rain seemed to help the apples. We got a huge crop of apples – I got some of the apple cider right here with me. So what I learned, from watching Sylvia, is that you can't go into farming multiple crops and expect everything to do well. So there is a kind of implicit acceptance with the natural world and you are part in it. In Vermont one of the first things that people talk about is the weather. "What is the weather going to be like in the next couple of days?" Because you are living close to the land, it matters.

[As a composer, should you be like the squirrel?, 181] Absolutely [yes]. What I am learning as I get older is to allow the work to change me very deeply. For instance, there is a work called Winter, which is a huge collection of materials from which people make their own parts. At first I wondered what to make of such music. But then I developed ways of appreciating it, rather than me saying "Oh my God, I am disappointed. It is something that I have no way to relate to." Well, over time I find ways to relate to it. So Cage's dictum that art alters the self is true for the composer as well as the performer and the audience. But it comes down to a degree of acceptance, both in farming and in composing.

[. . . not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves . . . , 186-187] This is precisely what Jesus said. You must lose yourself to find your self. Living close to nature, you realize how dangerous it is, and how beautiful it is, both at the same time. If it is 18 below zero and you want to go for a walk, you better dress right. And you better know where you are going, because if you get lost, and it is close to night – is dusk – and then it becomes night and you don't know where

you are you can die. You can die ten feet from your house if it is a blinding snowstorm. You need to know what you are doing. But in the metaphorical sense he is completely right. When you are lost, you have to be self-reliant and find your way. That is what composing is about. Trying to get lost, so that you can find a new path in the woods to arrive home.

[author's comment: getting lost allows you to change yourself. It is about sitting everyday with the intention of getting lost"] Yes that is exactly my message. My fundamental message is "The composer must get lost."

[I did not pay a tax to . . . , 187] He is so correct. "Civil" disobedience is a bigger statement than "violent" disobedience. If you do violent disobedience against the war, you are starting a war on a smaller scale. It does make sense. But if you have civil disobedience, by your action you are trying to teach the government what it should do. You should talk to the other, to the perceived enemy. Not shoot, but talk.

[thieving and robbery would be unknown, 188] Yes absolutely. If everyone has the same access, and the same amount of material goods, and everyone can survive healthily, what is there to steal? Someone bag of beans? "You have one more bag of beans and I need."

I just saw a concert, where there were tons of drums on the stage. The amount of material that they had was ridiculous. They had over abundance. When you have over abundance you have ripe fruit that can lead to greed. And lead to others feeling bad if they don't have access to all that stuff. Inequality leads to violence and leads to envy, which is a kind of violence that envious ones perpetrate on their selves. It leads to bitterness, and bitterness corrodes the soul.

[abstain from animal food, 234-235] Reminds me of the Jain religion and their diet. They only eat those things that they can pick. They won't eat the root vegetables because when they you pull up the root vegetable you kill it. So they eat off the tree or the will have some wheat. It is a very small footprint on the environment.

[author: "has abstaining from animal food has changed your 'poetic faculties?'""] Definitely. It has sharpened them. Gives you more energy. And you feel spiritually lighter because you are not participating in killing animals. Of course, you end up killing vegetables, but the fact of the matter is we have to it. We have to consume food, but it is important to figure out whether you want to have animals killed, and you go to the butcher shop and buy the carcass, or if you want to live a less violent life, where you don't eat animals and fish, and birds.

[music of the harp which trembles, 238] Reminds of Music of the Spheres, musica mundane...

[John Farmer, 242]He is talking about the epiphany that music can help create. I think that we need music that has the capacity to give us an epiphany. And epiphanies instantaneously change our lives. Usually for the better. He is talking about the power of music to transform.

[struggle, the ferocity and carnage, of a human battle, 251-252] I hope [for the day] that [violence] is not part of the human condition. I hope that through human evolution, eventually we come to the point that the word "war" does not even exist more in any language, because we don't do it. We don't hit each other. It is something beyond our imagination to hit. Let alone

shoot, or blow up. It is something humans don't do. And that will happen when there is a reduction of nationalism, to such a point that it does not matter what country you come from because we are all citizens of the world. Then war would be an obsolete relationship between people and peoples.

[partridge, 300] Maybe instead of the eagle, being the United States bird, we would be better off with the partridge.

[castles in the air, 351-352] We are never alone. And if we make a mistake, we can always dig a whole and make a foundation under that mistake, and the mistake becomes whole. Says something about revising in composition. If something does not work, you go back and make it work. It is part of the daily job of the composer. You get lost, and sometimes you get really lost, and you need to revise.

[perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer, 354] I think that different drum will not be playing marches, but will play like nature. If you listen to nature, it does not repeat sixteenth notes. Nature is organically predisposed to what is called irrational rhythms. That is the organic nature that music should try to emulate.

[author: and that is not the drummer of the capitalistic industries with their assembly lines] The assembly line forces the human being at the assembly line to be nothing more than a robot.

APPENDIX C: HSRB INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

**CONSENT FORM:****Informed Consent for Stuart Saunders Smith**

My name is José Augusto Duarte Lacerda and I am currently a doctoral student in Contemporary Music at Bowling Green State University conducting research for my final document. The document focuses on the parallels between the ideas of American Transcendentalist authors and your work and discourse. For this study, I am only interviewing you.

The purpose of my research is to identify how the ideas of New England Transcendentalism helped shape your music, compositional process, writings about music, and attitude towards life and the arts. Through this study, I hope to bring more attention, understanding, and recognition to your work. Moreover, this research will hopefully help identify ideas stemmed from Transcendentalism as ethos behind the work of other American artists. However, there will be no direct benefits to you, such as a monetary award.

In order to identify the musical outcomes of Transcendentalist thought in your work, it will be necessary to interview you. Your direct involvement with this project will be limited to the time to complete the interview. The interview will be completed in no more than two hours.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. You may decide to skip questions or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your relationship with Bowling Green State University or any institution involved in the research.

The data that will result from our interview will be stored in a password-protected computer. During the writing of my document, I will be the only person to have access to your interview answers.

I do not perceive any potential risks to you as a participant in this study. The risk of participation is no greater than that experienced in daily life.

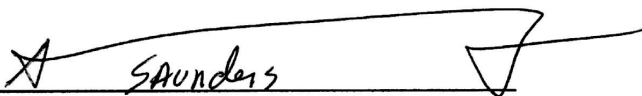
BGSU HSRB - APPROVED FOR USE

IRBNet ID # 734140

The BGSU Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) has approved this project. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or your participation in it, you are welcome to contact me via email jduarte@bgsu.edu or by phone at +55 65 9949-7251.


My advisor, Dr. Roger Schupp, can be reached at rschupp@bgsu.edu or 419 372-7117. You may also contact the Human Rights Subjects Review Board Chair at 419 372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research. Thank you very much for your time, and for participation in this project.

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks, and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.


Participant Signature

Stuart Saunders Smith

Dear Zeca,

I am so happy to get your address. I have missed our weekly talks very much. I will answer your questions this weekend, & send them along. (good questions by the way). I am working on Commune a vibraphone Concerto. It is going well. It is "about" my Communist beliefs.
my very best wishes, Your Friend 

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APPENDIX D: SMITH PUBLICATIONS AUTHORIZATION LETTER

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Sylvia Smith, Owner/Editor

54 Lent Road, Sharon, VT 05065
802-765-4714
sylvias@smith-publications.com

September 21, 2015

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