ACT zeitschrift für musik & performance

Practicing Between Categories: A Hermeneutics of Ritual-like New Music

(James Maher)

ACT - Zeitschrift für Musik und Performance (2021), Nr. 10

www.act.uni-bayreuth.de

Practicing Between Categories: A Hermeneutics of Ritual-like New Music

Abstract
Ritualised music theatre emerged from the music theatre developments of the 1960s. According to the musicologist Anthony Sheppard (2001), within ritualised music theatre, composers draw upon materials derived from specific "cultural, ritual or religious sources" and adapt them compositionally within dramaturgical narratives. The proposed paper will problematise Sheppard's stylistic definition, which lacks a theoretical justification as to why and how composers of this style ritualise their compositions — and, from this, examine two works that exist beyond Sheppard's characterisation, within the *liminal*, in-between stylistic space that emerged from American, and European experimental art music. Pauline Oliveros' *Sonic Meditations* (1971), and Julian Day's *Super Critical Mass Project* (2007-ongoing) are two related works of this nature. Both sit in the intersection of theatre, new music, and performance art, and rely on text-scores, instead of traditional notation. Moreover, rather than the compositions Sheppard examines in *Revealing Masks*, these works bear a closer aesthetic semblance to ritualised experimental theatre forms (such as Jerzy Grotowski's "poor theater") and post-1960s ritualised performance art. This disparity is amplified because Sheppard's characterisation applies to a particular form of larger-scale, aesthetically ambitious music theatre. This is why it is crucial to address this gap and develop a lexicon to better understand both works. Through an inductive, multidisciplinary, hermeneutic methodology, and by drawing upon key performance studies (Richard Schechner, Victor Turner) and ritual studies (Catherine Bell, Ronald Grimes) theories of *ritualisation,* this essay will plausibly demonstrate why the two works are ritual-like, by contributing to an expanded understanding of the ritualised music theatre paradigm.

Zusammenfassung
Musiktheater, das seine formalen und wirkungsästhetischen Charakteristika aus dem Ritual ähnlichen Strukturen bezieht, ist aus den Musiktheaterentwicklungen der 1960er Jahre hervorgegangen. Nach dem Musikwissenschaftler Anthony Sheppard (2001) greifen Komponist*innen im ritualhaften Musiktheater auf Materialien zurück, die aus spezifischen „kulturellen, rituellen oder religiösen Quellen" stammen, und adaptieren sie kompositorisch innerhalb dramaturgischer Erzählungen. Der Aufsatz problematisiert Sheppards Definition, dem eine theoretische Begründung fehlt, warum und wie Komponist*innen dieses Stils ihre Kompositionen ritualisieren. Davon ausgehend werden zwei Werke untersucht, die jenseits von Sheppards Charakterisierung innerhalb des liminalen, dazwischen liegenden stilistischen Raums stehen, der aus der amerikanischen und europäischen experimentellen Kunstmusik hervorgegangen ist. Pauline Oliveros' *Sonic Meditations* (1971) und Julian Days *Super Critical Mass Project* (2007-) sind zwei verwandte Werke dieser Art. Beide bewegen sich in der Schnittmenge von Theater, Neuer Musik und Performance-Kunst und setzen auf Textpartituren anstelle von traditioneller Notation. Im Gegensatz zu den Kompositionen, die Sheppard in *Revealing Masks* untersucht, ähneln diese Werke ästhetisch eher ritualisierten Formen des experimentellen Theaters (wie Jerzy Grotowskis „Armes Theater") und der ritualisierten Performancekunst der 1960er Jahre. Diese Diskrepanz wird dadurch verstärkt, dass Sheppards Charakterisierung auf eine bestimmte Form des groß angelegten, ästhetisch anspruchsvollen Musiktheaters zutrifft. Deshalb ist es entscheidend, diese Lücke zu schließen und adäquate Begriffe zu entwickeln, um Werke wie diese besser zu verstehen. Durch eine induktive, multidisziplinäre, hermeneutische Methodik und unter Rückgriff auf wichtige Theorien der Performance Studies (Richard Schechner, Victor Turner) und der Ritual Studies (Catherine Bell, Ronald Grimes) zur Ritualisierung zeigt dieser Aufsatz auf, warum die beiden behandelten Werke ritualähnlich sind und trägt zu einem erweiterten Verständnis des ritualisierten Musiktheaters bei.

Practicing Between Categories: A Hermeneutics of Ritual-like New Music

1. Introduction

Increasingly since the period of the 1960s, particular artists have created rituals to meet various personal requirements and transcend "social fragmentation" via the form of art.[1] Within Western art music, the idea of ritual has also functioned as an important site of interest for composers – particularly from the early 20th century onwards. In *Revealing Masks*, the musicologist Anthony W. Sheppard identifies a predominant tendency of this variety as 'ritualized music theatre' (referred to henceforth as RMT) – a form of Western music theatre.[2] This is a term which – as discussed by Angela Ida De Benedictis – pertains to "stage works" which "presuppose a scenic, spatial, and visible dimension that interacts with the music [...] in which the audience has a fixed (albeit not precise) constitutive role in the chain developing the 'theatre meaning'."[3] RMT (as a branch of music theatre) is distinctly characterized by ritualistic themes, which are represented dramatically and musically in myriad ways. This is manifest in modernist-era compositions created by composers who have drawn upon materials derived from specific cultural "ritual or religious sources" and adapted them, compositionally, within the dramaturgical narrative.[4] Sheppard cites Harry Partch's *Delusion of the Fury: A Ritual of Dream and Delusion* (1965-66), as an example of RMT. Consistent with other similar approaches which draw upon the

[1] See Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction,* 3rd ed., London 2013, p. 83.
[2] Adlington poses the argument that music theatre can be characterized by the "introduction of practices of the theatre into the sphere of chamber music." Robert Adlington, "Music Theatre since the 1960s," in: *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera*, ed. Mervyn Cooke, Cambridge 2005, (*Cambridge Companions to Music*), pp. 225–243, here p. 228. Further, within music theatre compositions, there is a clear lack of hierarchical distinction among the various musical aspects (such as singing) and theatrical elements, such as "physical movement" Eric Salzman and Thomas Dézsy, *The New Music Theater Seeing the Voice, Hearing the Body*, New York 2008, p. 5.
[3] Angela Ida De Benedictis, "Analysing new music theatre: Theme and variations (from a multimedia perspective)" in: *New Music Theatre in Europe*, ed. Robert Adlington, Milton 2019, pp. 294–318.
[4] Anthony W. Sheppard, *Revealing Masks: Exotic Influences and Ritualized Performance in Modernist Music Theater*, Berkeley 2001, pp. 20–21.

'exotic', this composition is thematically informed by aspects derived from Japanese *Nō* Theatre.[5]

Within RMT, composers approach the framing of 'ritual' in various ways.[6] Symbolic devices such as exotic "masks" are sometimes employed to signify ritual "authenticity."[7] More generally, musical characteristics of RMT include the expression of "musical extremity"; "[s]implicity and repetition"; and the construction of "symbolic systems, styles, and structures of movement, dramatic text, and music."[8] Moreover, forms of spoken text and non-linguistic vocalizations are also common within RMT. Musical techniques may also be employed to shape the temporal experience of the performance through "aggressively repeated rhythms or through unmeasured and amorphous musical sections," which can allude to a "static or metatemporal state."[9] Further, within particular compositions, "transformation" may be signified by the "music itself."[10]

When considering Sheppard's approach to RMT, one motivation behind this study is to better countenance sound-oriented, performance works that can be considered ritualistic. In this context, we seek to move towards a musicological understanding of works which do not fit stringently within Sheppard's classification i.e., works that are not Modernist, nor blatantly derive from exotic sources (real or imagined), but emerge from a cultural and artistic milieu in which the ritualistic qualities of performance were and still are a concern – such as that encountered within experimental music and performance art. Here we are concerned with a type of liminal category, figuratively speaking, betwixt forms or disciplines. To explore this issue, the study will perform a hermeneutic 'reading'

[5] *Delusion of the Fury* requires performers to both enact the drama and play the musical material. Instrumentation includes "three principals, an ensemble of dancer/mime/actors"; 18-20 instrumental players in various costumes; and corresponding characters that perform on instruments (designed by Partch), which constitute a chorus function. The designed instruments also constitute the stage design. There is no libretto for this work; however, physical movements such as "dance and mime" convey the narrative. See Salzman and Dézsy, *The New Music Theater* (see nt. 2), pp. 119–120.

[6] Sheppard, *Revealing Masks* (see nt. 4), p. 21.

[7] Stylistic masks of this nature are associated with the "Orientalist" view, which was prevalent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Sheppard therefore asserts that these masks are connotative of "misogyny, totalitarianism, and the politics of difference." Ibid., p. xii.

[8] Sheppard, *Revealing Masks* (see nt. 4), p. 21

[9] Ibid., p. 22

[10] Ibid.

– through a cross-disciplinary framework – of two such works. These are the *Super Critical Mass* (referred to henceforth as SCM) project (founded in 2007) – co-directed at particular junctures by Julian Day, Luke Janniste and Janet McKay[11] – and Pauline Oliveros' S*onic Meditations* (1974) (referred to henceforth as SM). In these capacities, it is also important to state that the aim here is not to replace the term 'performance' per se, but to offer new possibilities of viewing sound-oriented musical performances of the variety described.

By drawing upon key concepts in ritual studies and performance studies, this project aims to offer a complementary alterative to RMT – in lieu of a currently existing musicological model of experimental, ritualized works. This is pertinent as both SCM and SM are atypical of those which Sheppard explores in *Revealing Masks*, in that they reflect stripped-back participatory models involving just bodies and objects, with minimal or no dramaturgical design.

An enquiry such as this is significant, as both SCM and SM exist between categories of theatre, music, performance-art, and even social practice and there thus lacks a contemporary lexicon to completely encompass works of this nature. For instance, Stephen Miles elucidates the philosophical difficulty of aesthetically situating a work such as SM, stating that the *Meditations* "are unstable as art objects" and that to explain them in terms of the core qualities of Western aesthetics is problematic, because SM "rejects" these – in that, as a work, it "does not offer an ontologically secure object for reception by the subject." The experiential quality of the work bypasses the 'object' of the SM themselves – facilitating "experience of the objective environment" as opposed to just an aesthetic outcome.[12] A similar ambiguity can be remarked of SCM's experiential relationship with sound and sociality, as it distinctly aims to create a participatory experience beyond just musical aesthetics as to "construct and examine forms of community."[13] This explains why, for example, SCM functions as a 'composition' that has also been framed in terms of installation/performance in gallery spaces such as the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, where one project ('Moving

[11] Julian Day, "24 Hour Choir: Towards a Civic Ethics in Improvisation," in: *Contemporary Music Review* 38, no. 5 (2019), pp. 529–532, here p. 531.
[12] Stephen Miles, "Objectivity and Intersubjectivity in Pauline Oliveros's 'Sonic Meditations'," in: *Perspectives of New Music* (2008), pp. 4–38, here pp. 19–20.
[13] Julian Day, "From You to Me and Back Again: Interdependent Listening and the Relational Aesthetics of Sound," in: *Leonardo Music Journal* (2016), pp. 74–76, here p. 76.

Collected Ambience') is now included within the gallery's collection – despite its performative ephemerality.[14]

2. Approaching Ritualization

When considering the compositions discussed, the term ritualization is useful to navigate the nuances of particular processes attendant to ritual-like performances. Ritualization refers to "a particular modification of the normal intentionality of human action,"[15] characterized as differentiated, bodily behavior, enacted within symbolic contexts. It is a form of "repetitious bodily stylization" comprising "the baseline of quotidian human social interaction."[16] Sheppard employs this term to contextualize RMT, stating that ritualization can be signified through the elements of both performance and musical content; however, it is not as "generalizable" as other qualities of RMT.[17] Sheppard cites ritual studies scholar Ronald Grimes' conception of the term 'ritualizing' to query the possibility of whether or not RMT works are indeed real rituals which is, nonetheless, not his primary concern. In doing this, he draws upon Grimes' definition to explain that ritualization encompasses the process wherein new rituals are created without the "authority of tradition" within religious contexts.[18] Although, in saying this, Sheppard does not explain how ritualization might concretely function, musically speaking, within an RMT composition; however, he does make an allusion to the differentiating salience of ritualized acts when he claims that composers of ritualized works were faced with the "challenge" of attempting to "signal difference" in terms of separating the "realm of the ritualistic work and daily life" and, as such, one avenue to remedy this issue was via the referencing of exotic forms.[19]

For our purposes, a term such as ritualization provides suitable context to index a semantic process of meaning making and reception resultant from ritual-

[14] See *Super Critical Mass; Moving Collected Ambience, 2014*, https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/works/201566/ (accessed: 27 October 2020).
[15] Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual: A Theory of Ritual Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship*, Oxford 1994, p. 71.
[16] Ronald L. Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies*, New York 2013, p. 195.
[17] Sheppard, *Revealing Masks* (see nt. 4), p. 21.
[18] Ronald L. Grimes, *Reading, Writing, and Ritualizing*, Washington, D.C. 1993, p. 9; quoted in Ibid., p. 17.
[19] Ibid., p. 22.

like experimental music performances. This is because ritualization can refer to an act that is not "culturally framed as ritual" but can be read "as if it were potential ritual," i.e., as "quasi- […] ritualistic."[20] Interestingly, Grimes also suggests the possibility of an emergent ritual i.e., invented rites, such as constructed feminist rituals, based on "traditional resources" whose output is "the result of spontaneous improvisation and imaginative efforts."[21]

The conceptual applicability of ritualization is useful to circumnavigate the issue of attempting to totalize, define or theorize the notion of ritual because, according to Catherine Bell, such a concept does not require a "universalized or cross-cultural" understanding of such an activity.[22] From this perspective, we can employ concepts such as ritualizing and ritualization to comprehend artistic performances that verge on the ritual-like such as SCM and SM – as to situate both works within a further theoretical subset of RMT; a form of 'ritualized sonic performance' in the capacity that they enable a differentiated and framed experiential embodiment of social and/or environmental relations through sonic and spatial configurations, via the mode of performance.

3. Methodology: Reading Ritual

In justifying a reading of the ritualized qualities of SCM and SM, the methodology employed draws upon Tobias Pontara's model of hermeneutics, which rests on the principle of interpretive plausibility. Here Pontara derives his conception of "plausibility" within interpretation from Margolis' classification of "critical plausibility" – entailing that an interpretation of the qualities of a text should be somewhat consistent with other "historico-contextual" interpretations.[23] Pontara condenses Margolis' arguments, asserting that a text should be interpretively plausible with reference to an ongoing pattern of its interpretive trends within a

[20] Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (see nt. 16), pp. 193–194.
[21] Ronald L. Grimes, "REINVENTING RITUAL," in: *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 75, no. 1 (1992), pp. 21–41, here p. 21, www.jstor.org/stable/41178560 (accessed: 22 June 2021).
[22] Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Oxford 2009, p. 92.
[23] Joseph Margolis, "Robust Relativism," in: *Intention and Interpretation*, ed. Gary Iseminger, Philadelphia 1992, p. 48, quoted in Tobias Pontara, "Interpretation, Imputation, Plausibility: Towards a Theoretical Model for Musical Hermeneutics," in: *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 46, no. 1 (2015), pp. 3–41, here p. 7, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24327325 (accessed: 22 June 2021).

relative cultural context. These "interpretive canons" can be myriad and "related to or grounded within a specific cultural myth."[24]

Regarding said 'interpretive canons,' both SCM and SM can be understood within the tradition of exploratory 'new music,' experimentalism as well as that of post-1960s performance art; a field that is well documented to explore the rituals of performance. When considering an influential composition from this period such as John Cage's infamous *4'33"*, Vriezen asserts that such a work can be politically read as a synthesis of both "ritual [...] with contingency" enacting aspects of discipline, formality with structured participation, such as observing the designated time durations within the 'silent' form of the work, and its resultant ambient "indeterminacy." Additionally, Cage was also associated with other composers who engaged with the ritualistic qualities thought to arise from musical performance, such as Robert Ashley, Christian Wolff and La Monte Young.[25]

The output of Oliveros – long considered a proponent of the 1960s avant-garde – is no exception. Many compositions within Pauline Oliveros' extensive catalogue have explored ritual, or had ritual connotations, as she attests within her various writings.[26] Mockus states that during the period of 1970 to 1974, the large majority of Oliveros' work incorporated "theatrical, meditative and/or ritual elements."[27] It can be argued that this tendency within the composer's output aligns with that of post-1960s ritual-interested artists who have aspired to shift the zeitgeist by aspiring to hasten a change in Western culture "from the state of a prevailingly material culture to a new performative culture."[28] In SM and SCM, this is reflected in the artistic emphasis placed on social relationality via the phenomenology of musical co-experience.

[24] Pontara, *Interpretation, Imputation, Plausibility* (see nt. 23), p. 8.
[25] Samuel Vriezen, "Rituals of Contingency," in: *Theory & event* 17, no. 4 (2014), https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/562829 (accessed: April 6, 2021).
[26] See Pauline Oliveros, *Software for people: collected writings 1963-80*, Baltimore 1984.
[27] Martha Mockus, *Sounding Out: Pauline Oliveros and Lesbian Musicality*, New York 2008, p. 92.
[28] Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Performance art and ritual: bodies in performance," in: *Performance – Critical concepts in literary and cultural studies*, ed. Philip Auslander, London, New York 2003, p. 249.

On the surface, a work with a title such as 'Sonic Meditations' evokes clear ritual or religious connotations.[29] Published in 1974, SM comprises a series of twenty-five scores. These are detailed with various text instructions that denote musical and theatrical actions.[30] In the introduction to SM, Oliveros attests that this collection of performance activities is designated to provoke simple, meditational outcomes for a group of performers, trained or untrained, and that 'music' is not the intended primary outcome of this process.[31] Meditational practices were also incredibly crucial for Oliveros; she was also highly inspired and drawn to aspects of Native American culture, as well as ideas pertaining to that of community.[32]

SCM – while less blatantly framed in terms of ritual – is highly influenced by SM, as founder Julian Day acknowledges.[33] SCM has had many iterations – some more formalized than others. A series of SCM projects involve large groups of participants (often non-musical specialists) 'activating' everyday objects or using the "corporeal, and therefore fallible" quality of their voices.[34] The spatial and architectural dimensions of SCM performances are highly significant – in terms of the relations of bodies, and their affective engagement with the social and acoustic identity of particular spaces; these are "heightened sites for interaction."[35]

As we will come to discover, something of the aesthetic residue of Oliveros' influence is present within the compositional and conceptual design of SCM – due to the fact that the 'scores' within both works comprise simple, repetitive, group-based instructions for non-musician-specific public participants (albeit, some SCM incarnations have included formally trained musicians) within novel performance spaces, such as churches, galleries or even outside. The 'inheritance'

[29] The composer chose to conceive of her musical performances as ceremonies, to avoid the connotations of ritual as "a belief system that maintains established myths." Browner finds such a distinction problematic, stating that this is an issue of "semantics rather than intent." See Tara Browner, "They could have an Indian soul": Crow two and the processes of cultural appropriation," in: *Journal of Musicological Research* 19, no. 3 (2000), pp. 243–263, here pp. 252–253.
[30] Pauline Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations*, Baltimore 1974.
[31] Ibid., p. 1.
[32] See Timothy D Taylor, *Global pop: World music, world markets*, Abingdon, Oxon 2014, pp. 104-6.
[33] See Day, "From You to Me" (see nt. 13), p. 76.
[34] Ibid.
[35] *Super Critical Mass; Moving Collected Ambience* (see nt. 14).

of such qualities from an older work such as SM is not uncommon, as according to Vriezen, the models implicit or explicit within contemporary forms of experimental music can be traced back to earlier forms of avant-garde practices in terms of their "tendencies and ideals [...] their forms and their rhetorics."[36]

4. Approaching Ritualized Acts

When considering unique new music performances of this variety, there currently exists a gap in the broader musicological field, which has generally neglected to engage with the question of new music composition, ritual and performance in a comprehensive way. Carvalho and Marinho explain that, despite musicological investigation into aspects of ritual within 'traditional' music, the actual study of ritual has not been applied to examine relevant Western art music compositions, even though particular works have been presented in a ritualistic manner within specific contexts. There is a clear reason for this disciplinary blind-spot because, preceding the 1980s, musicological analysis was not particularly concerned with how broader contextual elements might inform music composition. The conception of composition as an 'independent entity' has shaped the discipline in this way and has, in turn, limited the enquiry into how ritual has shaped particular composed music.[37] Epistemologically speaking, particular approaches to musicology have tended to insulate music from its broader social entanglements and ramifications, binding it to the "internal, immanent development of the lineages of Western art music" and "the ontological assumption that 'music's' core being has nothing to do with the 'social.'"[38]

Furthermore, there is also a degree of complexity in attempting to countenance the 'ritualistic' aspects of performance[39] and Sheppard's study

[36] Vriezen, *Rituals of Contingency* (see nt. 25).
[37] See Sara Carvalho and Helena Marinho, "Ritual and Transgression: A case study in new music," in: *e-cadernos ces08* (2010), p. 110, https://journals.openedition.org/eces/486 (accessed: 22 June 2021).
[38] Georgina Born, "For a relational musicology: music and interdisciplinarity, beyond the practice turn: the 2007 Dent Medal Address," in: *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 135, no. 2 (2010), pp. 205–243, here pp. 208–209, https://doi.org/10.1080/02690403.2010.506265 (accessed: 22 June 2021).
[39] According to Bell, the term performance encompasses the "deliberate 'doing' of highly symbolic actions in public" (p. 270). Performance generates a "condensed world," as an "ordered totality," characterized by the expression of frames that declare that what is happening is significant. Performance is the necessary or leading component of an activity (p. 272). Catherine M. Bell,

justifiably bypasses this. Indeed, on a fundamental register, ritualized acts are 'performed'; they share qualities with other performance modes, such as "festivals" and "carnivals."[40] As such, the attendant ambiguity that arises from such an enquiry is that music performance (and all artistic modes of performance) can share qualities that are culturally common to ritual, such as formalism, repetition, tradition and so on – not to mention salient framing. Indeed, scholars such as Attali[41] and Small[42] conceive of music as ritual; the latter of which views the symphonic concert as a form of cultural ritual, aimed at preserving a sacralized history of composers, and set-apart, middle-class cultural practices and discourses within the designation of the 'concert' space, which is constructed to obscure the labor and mechanics involved within symphonic performances.[43]

While performance is a crucial part of both ritual and music, overemphasizing this attribute risks neglecting other aspects that constitute ritualized action. The ritual studies scholar Ronald Grimes position is pertinent in this regard, cautioning that the "performance is ritual" conflation argument can place ritual below that of performance – as can be the case in the field of performance studies.[44] For instance, when redirecting this question to that of new music, if we were to categorize a work such as Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Stimmung* (1968) in terms of just performance, we may risk bypassing those extra-musical aspects that allude to (real or imagined) ritualized performance forms, on the registers of the spatial, dramaturgical, affective etc., particularly when considering *Stimmung*'s multimodal aesthetic design, which features a circular arrangement of quasi-pagan dressed vocalists, who sing sophisticated harmonic phonemes in microphones for in excess of seventy minutes – generating an

Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions, Oxford 2009, p. 270–272, ProQuest Ebook Central, https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/lib/usyd/detail.action?docID=472204 (accessed: 22 June 2021).

[40] Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Cambridge 1999, p. 38.

[41] Jacques Attali, *Noise: the political economy of music*, Minneapolis 1985.

[42] Christopher Small, "Performance as ritual: Sketch for an enquiry into the true nature of a symphony concert," in: *The Sociological Review* 34, no. S1 (1986), pp. 6–32, https://doi:10.1111/j.1467-954X.1986.tb03312.x (accessed: 22 June 2021).

[43] See Small, *Performance as Ritual* (see nt. 42).

[44] Ronald L. Grimes, *Rite Out of Place Ritual, Media, and the Arts*, New York 2006, p. 12, Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011. https://doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195301441.003.0010 (accessed: 22 June 2021).

atmosphere wherein, Maconie remarks "the impression of private ritual is deliberate."[45]

So, how does one approach a method of enquiry regarding the potential ritualized aspects of experimental performance(s)? The avenue proposed here is to determine how the qualities of ritualizing are signified via differentiated physical movements coupled with musical behavior within a designated performance environment. Generally speaking, "ritualized acts" are understood to arise from aspects such as "formality, fixity and repetition."[46] From this perspective, this study argues that the qualities of ritualization can be signified through the stylized, repetitious (i.e. invariant) and formalized bodily-action and acoustic movement of musicians in space – a semiotics of sounding bodies. This is pertinent when considering that art music performance is characterized by how and where the information from the musical score is rendered sonically audible – by the way in which it is adapted 'by and through' the corporality of performers.[47]

For when ritual-like characteristics are produced and framed by performing sound-maker's bodies as well as coupled with the extra-musical signifiers present within a given performance environment (such as the "aural architecture"[48]), particular configurations of meaning are generated. This phenomenon arises because sound is notoriously 'sticky' when coupled with other aspects of media or text and cannot be isolated from it. According to David Ceccetto sound is "semiotically parasitic, to take on – and usually intensify – the systems of meaning to which it attaches."[49] For instance, if we were to imagine a performance situation involving a group of musicians arranged in a formation – performing repeated figures for a long period in an intense manner – we may be reminded of ritual tropes; hence why styles of music such as contemporary minimalism have been tacitly referred to as ritual-like.

[45] Robin Maconie, *Other Planets: The Music of Karlheinz Stockhausen*, Lanham Md 2005, p. 301.
[46] However, as Bell claims, these aspects are not "intrinsic" to ritual. Bell, *Ritual Theory*, *Ritual Practice* (see nt. 22), p. 92.
[47] Suzanne G. Cusick, "On musical performances of gender and sex," in: *Audible traces: Gender, identity, and music*, ed. Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley, Zürich 1999, p. 27.
[48] This term refers to the way in which the aural identity of a particular space marks how it is experienced "via listening." See Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter, *Spaces speak, are you listening? Experiencing aural architecture*, Cambridge 2009, p. 5.
[49] David Cecchetto, *Humanesis: sound and technological posthumanism*, Minnesota 2013, p. 1.

What is implied by this brief thought experience is that, within Western culture, there is a prevalent and tacit understanding of ritualization – no doubt, due to the lingering influence of Christianity on its institutions, rites, and cultural performances. In this context, the research of religious studies scholar Catherine Bell is illuminating. Bell summarizes that a cultural event contains one or more ritual-like characteristics. Activities of this nature can be "religious" or "secular," and contribute to how cultures mark what rituals are.[50] Five of these qualities (performance, formalism, invariance, sacral symbolism, and rule-governance) are a convincing model to determine how a cultural activity might be read as ritual-like. By drawing upon such a model, which was first encountered by this author in Christiansen and Vickery's study to interpret the use of call and response structures via instrumental role-play within compositions by Roger Smalley[51], we can employ the characteristics of ritual-like activities to hermeneutically infer meaning(s) from the performative sonic dimensions of SCM and SM.

Following on, this study aligns with Grimes' postulation that the theoretical question is not that of the "ritual" vs. "not ritual" dichotomy, because ritualization has many gradients.[52] For when there is a higher concentration of particular elements, the degree of ritualization is greater."[53] In other words, when a sonic performance possesses multiple ritual-like characteristics, it will 'appear' more similar to a ritual. Such a position negates any questions of the 'realness' of a performed ritual – but, moreover, focuses on how it is perceived and represented via the phenomenological experience of the interpreter within a particular performance space and social terrain.

[50] See Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (see nt. 39), pp. 232–233.
[51] In said study, Bell's model of 'disciplined invariance' was restricted to analyse musical material – and thus differs to the projected use in this study. See Ben Christiansen and Lindsay Vickery, "Role-Play and Invariance –Two Aspects of Ritual in Roger Smalley's Ceremony II," in: *Sound Scripts* 5, no. 1 (2016), pp. 85–96, https://www.australianmusiccentre.com.au/product/sound-scripts-volume-5-2016 (accessed: 22 June 2021).
[52] Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (see nt. 16), p. 195.
[53] These elements can include: "traditionalizing"; repetition; sacralizing; special participants; invocations; formalizing; non-conventional stances; performances within significant spaces; and "rare [...] events. Ronald L. Grimes, "Ritual Studies: Practicing the Craft," in: *Humanities Futures*, 25 March 2015, https://humanitiesfutures.org/papers/ritual-studies-practicing-the-craft/#post-195-endnote-12 (accessed: 22 June 2021).

5. Ritual-like Characteristics of Sonic Meditations *and* Super Critical Mass

5.1 Rule Governance

There are degrees to which the differentiated quality of ritualization is reflected in the compositional design of both SCM and SM in terms of how performers are instructed to generate sound, interact with other participants, and activate the novel spaces in which they perform – atypical of those associated with Western art music. For instance, some of the SM scores instruct participants to perform within distinct physical formations (sometimes with objects) in "outdoor environments," such as is the case with *Removing the Demon or Getting your Rocks Off (VII).*[54] Additionally, the meditation *Teach Yourself to Fly (II)* suggests that participants should perform in a "natural or artificial canyon, forest, or municipal quad."[55] Similarly, multiple incarnations of SCM involve performers arranged into salient formations in environments such as: Central Park, New-York (*Swelter*, 2011), the Library of Birmingham (*Together we Breathe*, 2013),[56] and the decommissioned railway sheds of Sydney's Carriageworks (*Carriageworks*, 2008).[57]

In terms of how musical instructions are communicated through both SCM and SM, comparisons can be made to the process of score-led music performance to that of the ritual-like characteristic of 'rule-governance'. According to Bell, this relates to particular forms of control, and the thresholds within the steps taken for a particular activity, as well as generally shared, agreed-upon forms of behavior that enshrine the legitimacy of the social power of the 'group'.[58] It can be said that rule-governance is typical of most art music performances; however, the scores of both SM and SCM comprise basic text/verbal instructions, which are effective for memorizable internalization, guided improvisation, and embodiment – perhaps more akin to that of a ritual script (associated with ritual performance) than traditionally notated compositions that require the specialized knowledge and ability to read art music notation. There are parallels,

[54] Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations* (see nt. 30), p. 10.
[55] Ibid., p. 4.
[56] *Super Critical Mass; Together We Breathe*, https://www.supercriticalmass.com/together-we-breathe (accessed: 1 July 2020).
[57] *Super Critical Mass; Carriageworks,* (see nt. 56).
[58] See Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (see nt. 39), p. 259–263.

as according to Humphrey and Laidlaw, ritual scripts, in particular, comprise a "stereotyped sequence of actions" that communicate performance instructions to a ritual performer in a comprehensible way.[59]

All in all, within both SCM and SM, the rules attendant to the use of text/verbal notation are necessary to govern performance activities, and these contribute to the primacy of the sonic group above any one individual composer or performer. The degrees of control vary between works but are nonetheless inherited from a Western art music tradition of scoring which enacts control over, and structures performers' bodies.

As pertaining to SCM – an inheritor of the method inherent to SM – rule governance is reflected in learning a "single, memorizable instruction based on the skills of those involved, developed through a series of *in situ* workshops"[60] leading to what Day refers to as a situation of interdependent listening, which engenders social bonds between performers.[61] As Day summarizes, the instructions and sounds allotted to participants are designed to "set aside identities for the duration of the performance." This is attained via "[a]rming the performers with identical sound sources and largely identical instructions [...] intended partly to maximize equity and also to engender the sonic result with both spatial neutrality and complexity."[62] For the duration of SCM performances of this type, this enshrines the totalized sonic identity and behaviors of the performing group.

5.2 Formalism

Within both SCM and SM, the quality of ritualized differentiation is also reflected in the intended physical and spatial arrangements of participants' bodies. This quality has a bearing on how performances of these works are read as ritual-like. According to Bell, when an act or movement has higher degrees of formalism it appears to be further "ritual like."[63] Formalized acts thus appear salient,

[59] Humphrey and Laidlaw, *The archetypal actions of ritual* (see nt. 15), p. 111.
[60] Day, "24 Hour Choir" (see nt. 11), p. 531.
[61] See Day, "From You to Me" (see nt. 13), p. 76.
[62] Julian Day, "Conflict, Contagion and Community: Collective Action Through Sound," in: *Runway Journal*, *Issue 30: Ecologies*, 2016, http://runway.org.au/how-to-build-an-orchestra-from-scratch (accessed: 22 June 2021).
[63] Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (see nt. 39), pp. 236–245.

comparatively speaking, to non-formalized activities. This is because formalism imposes parameters on the enactment of physical action or speech, generating a "code of behavior," which reduces the range of possible things conveyed. These acts can be refined and practiced, and even possess elegance. Formalism instils hierarchical "social values" through "discrete and specific acts," within both secular and religious contexts. Examples of formalism can include particular forms of greetings, and table etiquette.[64]

Various scores in SM instruct participants to enact particular physical formations, and conduct repetitious (invariant) acts within them – such as instructions to sit in circular formations – as encountered in meditations such as: *Teach Yourself to Fly (I)*,[65] *Removing the Demon or Getting your Rocks Off (VII)* (where performers "may repeat mentally, or actually, one body movement as slowly as possible"),[66] *X*,[67] and *Bowl Gong (XI)*.[68] The latter of which instructs participants to sit around a "Japanese bowl gong." Further elaborations of similar formations include the expanding and contracting circular configurations of hand-holding participants in *Zina's Circle (XV)*.[69]

Regarding a work such as SCM, formalized acts are rendered significant by the choreographic proximity of performers to particular architectural features within spaces. This is also reflected in how participants are instructed to perform algorithmic-like directions – producing a 'code of behavior' in terms of the homogenous sound worlds that result. For instance, the first SCM project, entitled *Carriageworks* (2008) is highly formalized in this way; this project comprises eighty flute performers who follow architectural formations that constitute a physical score as Julian Day explains: "[the directors of SCM] gave eighty flautists single sets of verbal instructions that allowed them to articulate the expansive concrete foyer of Carriageworks in Sydney, using the grid of embedded train tracks in the floor, the cavernous acoustic, the players' proximity to one another and the audience as their 'score.'"[70]

[64] See Ibid.
[65] Oliveros, *Sonic meditations* (see nt. 30), p. 3.
[66] Ibid., p. 10.
[67] Ibid., p. 16.
[68] Ibid., p. 17.
[69] Ibid., p. 23.
[70] Day, "Conflict, Contagion and Community" (see nt. 62).

Physical formalism is also reflected in more recent SCM projects such as *Together We Breathe* (2013) in terms of the spatial arrangements of 100 brass players who are stratified across multiple floors of the "circular silo"[71] shape of the architecture of Birmingham Library. In addition, the second component of this project involved professional players from "a virtuosic youth band"[72] performing outside in a courtyard – organized in an outward-facing circular arrangement, along the spatialized vectors of the circular concrete ground patterns.[73] Another similarly designed work is *Shudder Space* (2013), featuring the installation of equidistantly placed rows of snare drums which are agitated by participants in fast patterns within performances that take place inside a small town-hall and outside near the street.[74]

Conversely, other SCM works such as *Voice Fields* (2012), differ from the previous examples because they engage with the materiality of the voice. Regarding the formalized, spatial organization of the fifty vocalists in this project, Day remarks that "[they] stand throughout the unusually wide knave of Manchester Cathedral (U.K.), forming an equally dispersed grid within which listeners can wander."[75] Within *Voice Fields*, participants are required to repeat vocal sounds and are "given only a general contour with no specific pitches," which generates a quivering, and immersive mass of sounds, amplified by the reverberation of the performance environment of the church space.[76] Indeed, many of the SCM projects such as this are oriented around the way in which socio-sonic affordances are engendered through spatial organizations. This extends from Day's interest in the way in which "the possibility that bodies of bodies might form in less hierarchical and more rhizomic modes, and that sound might become an organizing principle."[77]

A similar principle is manifest within *Moving Collected Ambience* (performed at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney), which becomes more 'formalized' as the performance progresses. In this work, musicians are

[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] See *Super Critical Mass; Together We Breathe* (see nt. 56).
[74] See "Super Critical Mass; Shudder Space," Vimeo channel of Hospital Hill, https://vimeo.com/103054235 (accessed: 1 September 2020).
[75] Day, "From you to me" (see nt. 13), p. 75.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Day, "Conflict, Contagion and Community" (see nt. 62).

instructed to memorize instructions and react to each other and the art works in the gallery – as an extended score – responding with a limited set of vocal sounds. For example, the opening of the performance begins in a rather non-conspicuous way; performers appear not dissimilar to gallery attendees before solidifying into spontaneous 'clump' formations. Remarking on this phenomena, Julian Day reflects: "[i]t's only across time that you see people clump and gather in groups of two or three, that you discover that people are, in fact synchronizing or forming an uber ensemble throughout the collection."[78]

5.3 Invariance (repetition)

In addition to formalism, Bell describes the quality of invariance as a further characteristic of ritual-like activities. Invariance is identified as a "physical set of actions marked by precise repetition and physical control."[79] Invariant activities do not emphasize the process of passing time, nor do they reference the "authority of the past" in the sense that traditionalizing practices do. Rather, these activities are concerned with the "timeless authority of the group, its doctrines or its practices."[80] Invariance typifies the type of physical rigor associated with the strictly defined day-to-day activities undertaken by, say, a Zen Buddhist student. It can also pertain to the structured participation of attending groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous.[81]

This study poses, from musicological perspective, that the quality of disciplined invariance can encapsulate rigorous, repetitious activities within musical practices or can pertain to the practice of referencing established invariant cultural processes. Generally, we can identify this as the 'repetitious' quality of ritualization. Within both SCM and SM, participants are instructed on the way in which to perform a coupling of repetitive physical and sonic tasks, and thus a form of provisional discipline emerges throughout the training progress within the group. Disciplined invariant processes are reflected within the visual

[78] MCA Australia, "Super Critical Mass on their work Moving Collected Ambience," YouTube channel of MCA Australia, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oV67beWR8r0 (timecode from video: 4.22–4.35, accessed: 21 November 2020).
[79] Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (see nt. 39), p. 251.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid., 253.

and sonic aesthetic of both works which, at times, are redolent of group meditational practices. This is particularly the case with the SCM project *Vocal Field* which, as mentioned earlier, features equidistantly spaces vocalists within a church space performing with their eyes closed.[82]

Invariant sonic material is also reflected in the SCM project *Moving Collected Ambience*, whereby participants are instructed to repeatedly vocalize sounds that "vary between open or closed mouths, high or low notes, individually sung or in unison, depending on the proximity to other singers and also to the artworks."[83] Invariance is also strongly reflected in *Together we Breathe*, wherein brass musicians perform a limited code of material for sixty-minutes in duration. Performance instructions include: "subtly treating their instruments as held objects (tapping and rapping across their metallic surface, blowing almost imperceptibly across the mouthpiece) into a persistent embellished sustained chord and then back again."[84]

Beyond just repetitious sonic and physical activities, invariance takes on an ontological dimension in Oliveros' SM. Invariance is present in the strict meditational concentration that participants enact in the performance of particular text-scores and alluded to in the introduction notes by Oliveros, who states that the work ought to be performed by a committed group who meet over a "long period of time with regular meetings."[85]

According to Miles' study, SM can be contextualized within Oliveros' (who was a Buddhist) own meditational philosophy.[86] Oliveros defines meditation non-religiously, as "steady attention and steady awareness […] for continuous or cyclic periods."[87] This process can consist of "imagery" contemplation, "action vs. inaction" or the involvement of "sense organs."[88] This dynamic between "attention and awareness" is symbolized by Oliveros' interest in the circular mandala figure[89] – commonly understood as a circular "cosmic model"

[82] Day, "From you to me" (see nt. 13), p. 75.
[83] *Moving Collected Ambience 2014*, https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/works/201566/ (accessed: 22 June 2021).
[84] Day, "Conflict, Contagion and Community" (see nt. 62).
[85] Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations* (see nt. 30), p. 2.
[86] See Miles, "Objectivity and Intersubjectivity" (see nt. 12).
[87] Ibid., p. 7.
[88] Oliveros, *Software for people* (see nt. 26), p. 138.
[89] Ibid., p. 140.

encountered in Buddhism,[90] which is also used symbolically in healing ceremonial contexts such as those encountered in Tibetan Buddhism and Navajo ceremonies.[91]

More pertinently, we encounter the use of the mandala in the SM score "Have you ever heard the sound of an iceberg melting?" (preceded by *Greeting Meditation IX*). In this, Oliveros instructs the manipulation of house lights in tandem with a projection of lights including actual representative "mandalas."[92] According to Bell, the sacred quality of (sacral) symbols (such as these) can indicate something which is set apart and "special" and that the "objects" themselves, direct to "relatively transcendent ideas," in conjunction with other forms of ritual action.[93] Speculatively speaking, Oliveros' aforementioned employment of circular formations within particular SM scores could be a latent allusion to the sacral symbolism of the mandala. This is certainly the case with an earlier work: *AOK* (1969) which features several concentric circles denoting where musicians are placed in the performance space [94]

Returning to invariance, this ritual-like characteristic relates to the performance process of SM, in terms of the strict meditational concentration that participants enact. This contemplative dimension is redolent of particular meditational practices involving mantras. Within meditational traditions such as Acem and Yoga Kundalini, a mantra involves the silent repetition of a limited selection of words; this is employed to induce a meditational state within the minds of participants.[95] Invariant, mantra-like figures are also present within *Removing the Demon or Getting Your Rocks Off (VII)*, whereby participants are instructed to repeat specific words. In this particular meditation, participants are

[90] Within the mandala, the centre of the circle symbolises where Buddha lives, and the external aspects of the circular design indicate the cosmos radiating outwards from this centre-point Ping Xu, "The Mandala as a Cosmic Model Used to Systematically Structure the Tibetan Buddhist Landscape," in: *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 27, no. 3 (2010), pp. 181–203, here p. 184, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43030905 (accessed: 22 June 2021).
[91] See Tom Anderson, "Mandala: Constructing Peace through Art," in: *Art Education* 55, no. 3 (2002), pp. 33–39, here p. 34, https://doi:10.2307/3193998 (accessed: 22 June 2021).
[92] Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations* (see nt. 30), p. 15.
[93] Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (see nt. 39), p. 265.
[94] See Oliveros, *Software for People* (see nt. 26), pp. 222–257.
[95] See Maria Engström, Johan Pihlsgård, Peter Lundberg, and Birgitta Söderfeldt, "Functional magnetic resonance imaging of hippocampal activation during silent mantra meditation," in: *The journal of alternative and complementary medicine* 16, no. 12 (2010), pp. 1253–1258, here p. 1254, https://doi.org/10.1089/acm.2009.0706 (accessed: 22 June 2021).

arranged in a formalized circular arrangement (facing inwards and outwards) around a person in the center. Those on the outside of the circle generate sonic intensity by striking rocks together as they shout a name they have been contemplating. The person in the center of the circle also repeats a chosen word over and over again.[96] Another similarly repeated figure occurs in *One Word (VII)*, whereby the performer is asked to contemplate one word in silence before it is repeated at varying speeds, first slowly, then at "normal speed" becoming faster towards "top speed" continuing "until it stops."[97]

Within particular parts of SM, the length of a breath is used to indicate rhythmic duration; this is also redolent of invariant meditational practices. For instance, meditational practices such as those encountered within Buddhism involve paying close attention to the regulation of breath. Relatedly, as instructed by Oliveros, the performance of meditations *XII-XXV* require an awareness of the "breath cycle."[98] For example, particular glissando gestures in *Tumbling Song (XIV)* are dictated by the length of a breath. In this meditation, a participant sings a single note, and the other participants sing glissandi towards this central pitch before reaching a unison.[99] In *Pure Noise (XXIII)*, the length of breath governs the process of moving from a "pure tone" to a "noise band" composed of a more complex harmonic spectrum.[100] Additionally, Oliveros also states that the SM score *Teach Yourself to Fly* is meditational, requiring "observation of the breath cycle" while remaining conscious of one's perception of an object, while abstaining from "interfering."[101]

5.4 Performer/Audience Dichotomy

As alluded, the conventions associated with audience/performer stratification are undermined within the performance processes of both SCM and SM. This dynamic is considered a characteristic of RMT; a signifier of ritual performance generally; as well as a characteristic of other forms such as performance art. The

[96] See Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations* (see nt. 30), p. 10.
[97] Ibid., p. 18.
[98] Ibid., p. 19.
[99] Ibid., p. 22.
[100] Ibid., p. 31.
[101] Oliveros, *Software for people* (see nt. 26), p. 150.

reason such a dichotomy exists is because ritual and theatre are thought to engender contrasting spectator styles. The anthropologist Roy A. Rappaport considers drama distinct from ritual due to the different reception types. The former has a participatory "congregation," the latter an "audience." Drama has conscious actors, whilst rituals are "earnest," "active," and participatory, as those involved may "sing, dance, kneel, responding to litanies at various times."[102] Sheppard also acknowledges such differences, and summarizes that this dichotomy has been mitigated in various ways within the performance contexts of RMT.[103]

Considering both case-study compositions, the SCM project aims to dissolve the audience/performer dichotomy, as it aspires to "construct and examine forms of community through processes of active listening and sounding."[104] For instance, *24 Hour Choir* (2017) embodies such an ideal in a very direct way. This action took place over 24 hours with the aim "to sustain the human voice, without pause" within the exposed and public space of a public rotunda, located in the diverse geographic and cultural history of The Rocks, Sydney – a "politically fraught area" where "long-standing social housing tenants had recently been evicted." Throughout the duration, more than one hundred "untrained singers" contribute to enacting the communal process of sustaining a note together. To achieve this, participants were asked to "copy, complement or challenge" a neighbor's tone with their eyes shut posing the improvised challenge of finding the vocal means by which to do so.[105] Day remarks on this stating that due to the mix of improvisational and compositional qualities and the way in which civic ethics are mixed with libertarian individualism, that "[s]uch interdependent sovereignty helped dissemble the classic hierarchy between artist and performer."[106]

Porous audience/performer relationships are also a core aspect of SM whose scores often create environments wherein participants perform for and with one another. Oliveros aspired to "erase the subject/object or

[102] Roy A. Rappaport, "Obvious aspects of ritual," in: *Cambridge Anthropology* 2, no. 1 (1974), pp. 3–69, here p. 8, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23816434 (accessed: 22 June 2021).
[103] See Sheppard, *Revealing Masks* (see nt. 4), pp. 18-19.
[104] Day, "From You to Me" (see nt. 13), p. 76.
[105] Day, "24 Hour Choir" (see nt. 11), p. 530.
[106] Ibid., p. 531

performer/audience” [107] duality through the simulation of private performances which were inspired by those associated with the pre-modern period. Within SM, there are also attempts to include spectators (if they are present) in a participatory manner, within the performative congregation. This is manifest in *Pacific Tell (III)*, wherein, following a tuning exercise, performers sing and are physically spatialized within the audience space as well as in *The Greeting (IX)*, where performers are instructed to greet those who enter the space by singing a tone.[108] Overall, the dissolving of said dichotomy is reflected in the scoring process of SM as according to Miles:

> [s]ince performers of the Sonic Meditations are given verbal instructions rather than symbolic notation, “no special skills are necessary.” There are virtually no barriers placed between music and performer, between performer and audience. Like the dissolution of the subject-object duality in meditation, Oliveros’s music negates these dualities as well.[110]

5.5 Efficacy

Due to the boundary dissolving, and more-than-entertainment qualities of SM and SCM, both works enact a type of efficacy. This term pertains to the effectiveness of performance in social contexts, in terms of their “aims and messages.”[111] Schechner argues that when performances are not merely entertaining but efficacious they are ritual, because they ‘do something’, contextually speaking i.e., efficacy within the realm of performance can include outcomes such as “healing the sick,” “burying the dead,” “forming and cementing social relations,” “maintaining cosmic order,” or reconfiguring the existing state of affairs.[112] In terms of the processes attendant to this, scholars discuss the “efficacy of ritual performance” as generated by “the transformation of the meanings of symbols” and “non-discursive” layers of drama or speech.[113] In the

[107] Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations* (see nt. 30), p. 2.
[108] See Ibid., p. 14.
[110] Miles, “Objectivity and Intersubjectivity” (see nt. 12), here p. 20.
[111] Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (see nt. 39), here p. 136.
[112] Richard Schechner, “Ritual and performance,” in: *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology,* ed. by Tim Ingold, Oxon 1994, p. 613.
[113] Edward L. Schieffelin, “Performance and the Cultural Construction of Reality,” in: *American Ethnologist* 12 (1985), p. 707–710, quoted in Bell*, Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (see nt. 39), p. 134.

context of musical performances, this extends to the non-discursive textures of affective musical information.

Both SM and SCM are efficacious in the sense that they were designed with the intention of enacting a type of sociological communalism – of cementing social relations within the performance space by involving participants within the compositional process. As alluded, efficacious meditational outcomes are also explored in SM, as Oliveros' speaks of this work as being able to produce both "healing" and sonic outcomes, "a tuning of body and mind."[114] SM thus operates on multiple registers, as Miles claims, there is: "no exaggeration to say that the [SM] compose social relationships, endowing performers and audiences with the means to connect as musical and meditative subjects."[115] Similarly, SCM also facilitates a "composing of the social"[116] by employing a process that, as according to Day, "allows strangers to commune using enabling gestures that all can learn, master and, potentially, transform."[117]

Parallel to SM, within SCM performer identities dissolve via sonic mediation – and even larger hierarchical social processes are challenged – due to the way in which the SCM, as a type of spontaneous "orchestra" is uniquely "democratized."[118] In these ways, SCM and SM are not concerned with mere entertainment for a traditional receptive audience format. Emphasis is placed on social and phenomenological experiences towards participation reflective of ritualized performance models. In this capacity, both SCM and SM align with the broader movement of participatory performance art, which is motivated by a movement away from "alienation," Capitalism and other such forces – "to restore and realize a communal, collective space of shared social engagement."[119]

Within ritualized performances, efficacy can also pertain to that of the liminal process. Within several SCM projects, we see a quasi-communitas structure reveal itself, at the very least from a sociological perspective – beyond the

[114] Oliveros, *Sonic meditations* (see nt. 30), p. 2.
[115] Miles, "Objectivity and Intersubjectivity" (see nt. 12), here p. 6.
[116] Day, "Conflict, Contagion and Community" (see nt. 62).
[117] Day, "24 Hour Choir" (see nt. 11), p. 531.
[118] Day, "Conflict, Contagion and Community" (see nt. 62).
[119] Claire Bishop, *Artificial hells: Participatory art and the politics of spectatorship*, London, New York 2012, p. 275.

representational abstractions attendant to the "liminoid" of theatre.[120] This concept is particularly pertinent when considering the social implications of SCM and SM to a lesser extent. The term liminality is associated with anthropologist Victor W. Turner who adapted it from Arnold van Gennep's theory of the "liminal phase" pertaining to the transformational processes encountered in rites of passage i.e., "separation, margin, and aggregation."[121] Turner employs the Latin term "communitas" to attend that, throughout the liminal process, social distinctions completely or almost dissolve, resulting in social equality among individuals, before the hierarchy of the "ritual elders" in the community is restored.[122] Brown espouses that the generation of "liminal spaces" produces "indeterminacy" and "dominant cultural values are suspended in a self-reflexive act."[123]

In early examples of performance art, liminal processes are identified in contexts wherein, through the act of co-composition, the audience are treated as socially equal to that of the artist. According to Sonesson within this tradition, one can identify "elements of both rites of passage, and rites of transgression."[124] For example, Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (1964) is a ritualized performance whereby the artist permits spectators to, rather sacrificially, cut away at items of her clothing involving the spectators in a participatory way by revealing the "creative

[120] The liminal process is not strictly religious, because secular performances can be understood in terms of a similar model. In this context, liminality is rather understood as "liminoid" in more "technologically complex societies." This encompasses an array of "cultural performances." For instance, the background processes within theatre also reflect a similar three-phase structure. 1) "Separation" of pre-performance activities, i.e., rehearsal preparations. 2) The actual "liminal" in theatre." Turner refers to this as the "communication of "sacred," "archaic," "mythical," texts as quasi-sacred." This can also include elements such as a chorus, which might function as a "communitas"; and "ludic recombination" such as "clowning." 3) The third phase involves the activities that take place afterwards. This refers to the "reaggregation," i.e., a "cooling down" of the "ritualised behaviour," which can include post-performance meals. See Victor Turner, "Are there universals of performance?" in: *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual*, ed. by Richard Schechner, and Willa Appel, Cambridge 1990, pp. 8–18, here p. 14.
[121] Arnold Van Gennep, *The rites of passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee, London (page number not given), quoted in Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, New York 1995, p. 94.
[122] Turner, *The Ritual Process* (see nt. 121), p. 96.
[123] Gavin Brown, "Theorizing Ritual as Performance: Explorations of Ritual Indeterminacy," in: *Journal of Ritual Studies* 17, no. 1 (2003), pp. 3–18, here p. 16, www.jstor.org/stable/44368641 (accessed: 22 June 2021).
[124] Göran Sonesson, "Action becomes art. 'Performance' in the context of theatre, play, ritual–and life," in: *VISIO* 5, no. 2 (2000), pp. 105–122, here p. 118, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Goeran_Sonesson/publication/259503069_Action_becomes_art/links/02e7e52c57f7b2a403000000.pdf (accessed: 22 June 2021).

process"[125] and including them in it, thus challenging the ritualized rigidity and constraints associated with performances in formalized settings. In this context, we can draw parallels to the performative dynamics associated with traditional art music performance spaces.

In terms of SCM's relationship to this process: prior to performance performers undertake a form of instructional training with their social roles still intact. However, once a performance commences, the sonic configurations produce a shifting of social relations generating a type of liminal space, wherein the dominant cultural values implicit and explicit to performance are dissolved – as the audiences transform to that of performer/composer. This is enabled by the homogenizing and equalizing of sonic and performer identity, through the use of massed single sounds and improvised exploration – within rule-governed limits. In addition, there are degrees of sonic indeterminacy that arise from the varying degrees of improvisational and spatial movement permitted within the verbal instructions. Due to these qualities, transformation is evident within voice-based projects such as *Moving Collected Ambience*, and *24 Hour Choir* wherein performers assume a type of communitas – analogous to Turner's description of the ritual actor who takes on an anonymous quality within the dissolution of hierarchical social structures.[126]

Overall, it is important to note that, within SCM, the de-stratification of audience/composer is not absolute. This dynamic is acknowledged by Day who comments: "[d]espite our relationship to the participants being porous, we still had [the] final say over the creative direction."[127] Albeit, the experience for participants and the transformative social qualities of SCM (and SM) performance outcomes are still very unique, differing from those we typically encounter in traditional music theatre performance (or art music performance generally) of elevated stages and of separated musicians communicating virtuosic music statements. In this capacity, these works do not align with Sheppard's reasoning for ritualized, audience/performer stratification within RMT i.e., to

[125] Deborah K. Ultan, "From the Personal to the Transpersonal: Self Reclamation Through Ritual-in-Performance," in: *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 20, no. 2 (2001), pp. 30–36, here p. 30, https://doi.org/10.1086/adx.20.2.27949150 (accessed: 22 June 2021).
[126] Turner, *The Ritual Process* (see nt. 121), pp. 94–95.
[127] Day, "Conflict, Contagion and Community" (see nt. 62).

inoculate the composition from "potential criticism" by creating an authorial distance between the "composer," and the enacted "ritual" on stage.[128]

6. Conclusion: Towards a Ritualized Sonic Performance

When considering works such as SCM and SM, this study was instigated by the suspicion that not all art music performances are as ritualistic as one another, such as is the case with SM's ontologically explorative, meditative processes, or SCM's dislocated orchestral instruments, or engagement with public participants in salient social spaces. And while it is plausible that both SCM and SM share some musical aspects with RMT such as simplicity and repetition, static temporal states, and non-linguistic utterances, it is ultimately difficult to encompass these works within a characterization of RMT just because they share some superficial musical qualities; there are clearly other factors at play here, particularly regarding the way in which distinct ritual-like actions are reflected – either explicitly or latently.

Similarly, nor is the umbrella term 'experimental performance' entirely satisfactory to explain the acute tendencies within both works. While on the one hand, it may encompass compositions that exploit the rituals attendant-to-performance – albeit, on the other, risks bypassing the particularities of performances that are explicitly ritual-like in more ways than one – which cannot be said of all Euro-American experimental compositions/performances, particularly those of the non-participatory, or non-efficacious variety. Rather, when considering a hermeneutic reading of the performance outcomes of SCM and SM, we have shown it is plausible that they embody significant qualities associated with ritual-like activities and rituals themselves i.e., performance, formalism, invariance, rule-governance, the dissolving of audience/performer stratification, efficacy, and degrees of liminality. Such characteristics constitute a reasonable spectrum towards conceptualizing how we might tacitly interpret exploratory, sound-oriented ritualized performances and how composers might approach them consciously, or via inherited aesthetics.

[128] Sheppard, *Revealing Masks* (see nt. 4), p. 19.

Taking these specificities into account, this study posits that both SCM and SM constitute an emergent, post-disciplinary 'ritualized sonic performance.' RSP is a category which can be employed to refer to compositions that do not belong to one particular art form, betwixt exploratory new music and performance art, and concerned with artistic and sociological exploration beyond just the musical. SCM and SM are examples of RSP because they are undeniably sound-based works that facilitate a ritualizing of participants' bodies and objects towards the phenomenological and transformative experience of sound, space and community. In this capacity, both SCM and SM are simple practices that reveal a core aspect of ritualization, "the simple imperative to *do* something in such a way the doing itself gives the act a special or privileged status," resultant in a frame which makes the activity appear salient.[129] Ultimately, an emergent RSP model can provide context for future hermeneutic readings of similar aesthetically or stylistically 'in-between,' ritual-like works from the periods discussed and beyond – such as those sound-based performances by composers/artists akin to Hermann Nitsch, or Yoko Ono, among others – not to mention the myriad possibilities for exploring experimental sound/music-based practices outside the Euro-American-centric tradition, towards (re)contextualizing new forms of socio-sonic ritualization.

[129] Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (see nt. 39), p. 277.