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Found Objects and Assemblage in *The Health*

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Abstract

In this paper, I analyze a piece of music that I wrote called *The Health*, a 90-minute musical ceremony that comprises speech, action, video projections, costumes, lights, chant, song, recomposed hold music, diagnostic exams, and renaissance magic. I wrote the piece for Mocreep and myself to perform, the initial run of which took place on May 12th and 13th, 2022 at the International Museum of Surgical Science in Chicago, IL. *The Health* enacts a fictional rite centered on a cosmology of health not as a property of individual bodies, but as a life force, an animating spirit that flows throughout time, space, and matter, responsible for the motion and vitality of the universe.

In my analysis, I foreground the process of making *The Health* as an assemblage of found objects. To open the discussion of found objects and assemblage, I review the work of three visual artists, Robert Rauschenberg, Jessica Jackson Hutchins, and Molly Roth. I examine their working methods, artistic motivations, and stylistic choices, and use them as a lens to examine my own work. To reframe assemblage and found objects in musical terms, I engage the vocabulary of polystylism as well as a comparison of the differences between physical and musical found objects. I then detail the found object form of *The Health* at the Macro, Mezzo, and Micro levels. I argue that the found objects of *The Health* are linked together via three thematic clusters—thesis, autobiography, and debris. I then outline compositional techniques used to elicit musical continuity between each of the musical found objects. These techniques include loops, repetition, modal harmony, tempo, orchestration, etc. I conclude with a discussion of collaboration, influence, and extrinsic frictions that shaped the final outcome of the piece.

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I analyze a piece of music that I wrote called *The Health*, a 90-minute musical ceremony that comprises speech, action, video projections, costumes, lights, chant, song, recomposed hold music, diagnostic exams, and renaissance magic. I wrote the piece for Mocreep and myself to perform, the initial run of which took place on May 12th and 13th, 2022 at the International Museum of Surgical Science in Chicago, IL. *The Health* enacts a fictional rite centered on a cosmology of health not as a property of individual bodies, but as a life force, an animating spirit that flows throughout time, space, and matter, responsible for the motion and vitality of the universe.

The ceremony begins with six performers cast in a warm magenta light. They wear handmade costumes that include headpieces made from post-surgical compression wraps adorned with flowers. The setting is funereal, but abstracted and vernal; the headpieces recall funeral bouquets; four small tables are adorned with gold brocade tablecloths; instruments sit atop a long buffet table covered in sage cloth with a rose-pink runner. Behind the performers are four floor-to-ceiling black tulle scrims that intermittently feature ghostly projections. The performers play a loop of hold music on synthesizers, sample pads, and percussion awash in reverb.

Like the ceremonial form of a Catholic Mass, *The Health* moves between many performative modes with diverse functions and affects. One section features a rapid dialogue of dense language between performer Deidre Huckabay and their own pre-recorded voice

set over a test tone. Another moment turns a health diagnostic exam into a set of ritualized actions. At other points in the piece, soloists step into the spotlight to perform hymns. Intermittently, groups of performers chant or intone pseudo-Psalmic readings. Performers stand and hug, point at their own injuries, and tell stories. The global tone of *The Health* is a strange melancholy tempered by humor and warm comradery between performers.

Throughout the piece, performers reference a vital, life-sustaining energy— ‘the health’ —which acts as the center of a religious cosmology. It is both a creative and destructive force that cares not for individual life itself, but exists as a perpetual bubbling, flourishing, and withering through which new life emerges. It is inspired by the forest spirit of Hayao Miyazaki’s *Princess Mononoke*.¹



Figure 1: still of the forest spirit’s footstep from *Princess Mononoke*, 1997, by Hayao Miyazaki

Acting as god-like life force, the forest spirit is responsible for both the life and death of the forest and the creatures in it. In the image above, plants bloom as the forest spirit places its foot

¹ Hayao Miyazaki, dir. *Princess Mononoke*. Tokyo, JP: Studio Ghibli, 1997, DVD. 1:02:54

on the earth and die as it lifts. Life and death are of a piece, represented as a unified process in the forest spirit's stride. Another deep influence comes from Ernest Becker's *Denial of Death*, in which the author describes the life force as a source of violence and upheaval.

“What are we to make of a creation in which the routine activity is for organisms to be tearing others apart with teeth of all types—biting, grinding flesh, plant stalks, bones between molars, pushing the pulp greedily down the gullet with delight, incorporating its essence into one's own organization, and then excreting with foul stench and gasses the residue. Everyone reaching out to incorporate others who are edible to him. The mosquitoes bloating themselves on blood, the maggots, the killer-bees attacking with a fury and a demonism, sharks continuing to tear and swallow while their own innards are being torn out [...]. Creation is a nightmare spectacular taking place on a planet that has been soaked for hundreds of millions of years in the blood of all its creatures. The soberest conclusion that we could make about what has actually been taking place on the planet for about three billion years is that it is being turned into a vast pit of fertilizer. But the sun distracts our attention, always baking the blood dry, making things grow over it, and with its warmth giving the hope that comes with the organism's comfort and expansiveness.”²

Becker's account of the life force foregrounds its brutality. Warmth, hope, and comfort emerge as a mysterious byproduct, a distraction from its true nature. Becker and Miyazaki are but two of the myriad sources, many of which will be discussed later, that shaped my conception of ‘the health’. Overall, ‘the health’ is presented as a ruthless force that yields great beauty and variety, of which humans and other living beings are temporary benefactors.

The idea for ‘the health’ as a life force and a cosmology came to me slowly over several years. Initially, I was interested in how the concept of ‘health’ in the United States encodes religious and moral values. Susan Sontag, in her book *Illness as Metaphor and Aids and Its Metaphors*, asserts a link between not only Christian religiosity and health, but class values as well. In the late 19th century, tuberculosis was seen as a disease of poverty and depravity.

² Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973), 282.

“Tuberculosis, in its identity as a disease of the poor [...] was also linked by the late nineteenth-century reformers to alcoholism. Responses to illness associated with sinners and the poor invariably recommend the adoption of middle-class values: the regular habits, productivity, and emotional self-control to which drunkenness was thought a chief impediment. Health itself was eventually identified with these values, which were religious as well as mercantile, health being evidence of virtue as disease was of depravity. The dictum that cleanliness is next to godliness is to be taken quite literally.”³

While Sontag’s example is more than 100 years old, the link between health, moralism, and religiosity, she argues, continues today, albeit in new and varied manifestations. I felt compelled to reimagine the link between health and religion. If today’s religion of health is a syncretism of Christian mercantilism, what might a spirituality native to a cosmology of ‘health’ look like?

The Health answers this question indirectly through epithets, metaphor, and oblique narratives. The concept of ‘the health’ emerges through an accretion of vantage points rather than through direct explanation. One song in the piece describes the creative destruction of ‘the health’ through the lens of reality home renovation tv shows. Another section describes the cold brutality and beauty of ‘the health’ through an account of the zero sum struggle for survival that creatures on the Earth face as they try to escape death and secure food. *The Health* provides a first-person, lived, and practiced account of religious belief rather than a remote, third person, documentary description. Slowly, a sense of ‘the health’, and the practice that celebrates it, emerges.

So far, I have provided a description of *The Health* as it exists in the world. I have given a sense of the extant structure, performance atmosphere, the motivation and philosophy behind the piece.

³ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor; and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 142.

I could continue to present the work by looking at *The Health* as a finished and bounded whole, arguing for consistencies and throughlines. However, this approach would fail to account for the process and conditions that yielded the work. It presents *The Health* as if it emerged from a clear authorial and goal-oriented vision, where the process was anything but. Rather, the piece accumulated and revealed itself to me over time, a sedimentary process. It changed dramatically, multiple times, without a clear sense of itself until late in the development process. It emerged from collaboration with and inspiration from the ensemble members, both as performers and friends, but also as artists with their own deep practices. Additionally, this piece represents four years of my life, includes my own struggles with chronic illness, a mess of abandoned and repurposed materials, a pandemic, and the residual sadness of the pandemic. Ultimately, *The Health* is an unruly assemblage of materials, experiences, friendship, and friction with the world outside of myself. Therefore, to get inside the piece and understand its final form, it is necessary to look at the piece from the bottom up, from inside the generative mess that I slowly sorted, organized, and shaped into the piece that became *The Health*.

SEDIMENT

The Health is a deeply personal project that has lived with me for more than four years and has undergone many fundamental revisions. It existed initially as a title—*The Health*. During the earliest phases of the project, I let the title act as a center of gravity, accreting materials that related to the topic directly, tangentially, or that ignited a faint spark of family resemblance. Some of these materials survived and made it into the final piece, including both *Diagnostic Exams*—based on health exams, and *Hold Music*—based on recomposed hold music. Much more

abundant, however, are the dead ends, the ideas that disappeared, either actively shed or merely forgotten.

Included here is a partial list of materials that I developed for *The Health*, but ultimately abandoned. I created a sci-fi narrative about a shadow world on the other side of the Nyquist frequency, where doppelgangers populate an aliased world of inverted frequencies. These doppelgangers carry a detectable ‘sickness’ that does not impact their lives, but exists, nonetheless. I made 30 minutes of a 7-disc set of relaxing midi music made for commercial purposes. The CD set was to have the words “7 DISC SET” in oversized font on the cover. I made a rudimentary logo.



Figure 2: an unused promotional logo for *The Health*, by Sam Scranton

I imagined myself as a fictional New Age guru pedaling theories about how ‘everything is sound’ because the earth is an oscillator. Here's a sample:

“Hi. My name is Dr. Scranton and today I’m here to tell you about the mysteries of the oscillator. An oscillator is a very simple and wonderful creature that exists everywhere in the universe. Oscillators can be found in atoms, single-celled organisms, and molds, but they can also comprise vast structures such as our planet Earth, our solar system, and even our galaxy. This tells us something about the ubiquity of the oscillator, but now, you

may ask, what exactly is an oscillator? Ha, well I'm glad you asked. An oscillator is anything that produces a periodic or "oscillating" signal..."

I made 7 battery-powered saw wave oscillators. Early in the development of *The Health*, I considered making it *exclusively* a collection of medical diagnostic exams. I reflected on the I-55 logistics corridor as a hub of energy and a flow of goods and materials. I planned to stage *The Health* in a warehouse in Chicago's western suburbs. I looked for structure—maybe a dawn chorus. I wanted to wheel out a media cart with a CRT TV perched on top and make live videos. I wanted to make cybernetic insect automata. I wanted a disco ball. I still want a disco ball.

While most of these ideas have disappeared from *The Health*, they still exert influence over its final form. They demonstrate the breadth and eclecticism that *The Health* aims to achieve. They also point to concrete engagement with world around us: commercial 'healing' music, real world metaphors of dynamic energy, spiritual practices. They also capture some of the tone of the final work: funny, sad, oblique.

Some of the initial abandoned ideas can still be felt in the final work. During a work-in-progress showing of *The Health* on 2/22/2020, Mocrep and I improvised a section of *The Health* on battery-powered saw wave oscillators that I built. In the improvisation we tuned the oscillators to a set of 7 field recordings and accompanying synthesized drone, drawn from an FFT analysis of the original recordings. After the performance we met up to discuss the successes and failures of the work-in-progress show and agreed that performing on the oscillators was not particularly engaging or legible and added unnecessary bulk to the set up that was not useful in other sections of the piece. While this section was, in most senses, a failure, it achieved the desired effect of a

static, monolithic, contemplative moment. I later translated this idea into the *World Synthesis* sections that now anchor *The Health*. The fluidity and permeability with which ideas shift from useful to forgotten to distant translations of themselves is an important part of my process.

While this creative process may be common—letting ideas accumulate freely, trying them out, seeing what sticks, and revising—I argue that one must engage with the specifics of this process to understand the final form of *The Health*. As mentioned earlier, *The Health* began to take shape not according to a formal plan, emergent musical relationships, or projected totality, but as a slow accretion of discrete objects and materials. These objects did not relate to each other in any obvious form, save an abstract connection to the theme of ‘health.’ Some of these objects were handmade, while others, such as the *Diagnostic Exams* and *Hold Music*, were prefabricated. After I gathered enough of these objects, they began to suggest relationships to me. I could see how they might fit together to create larger arcs. Making the piece felt tactile, like pushing around pre-existing materials and adhering them together, covering up unwanted bits, while enhancing and polishing others. I scraped text from the internet and merged it with my own. I created a rich text file with over 10,000 words of free writing and research. I gathered found objects and musical genres— plainchant, hymn, meditation music. I stitched together mockups in a DAW. Both the process of making *The Health* as well as the resultant work recalls a collage or assemblage. As such, I find it useful to analyze *The Health* by making recourse to visual art, where assemblage, collage, and work with found/prefabricated objects is common practice. Simply by looking at an assemblage or collage, one immediately grasps the constituent materials and art-making process. One sees prefabricated materials, cutouts, art media, brush marks. One sees the artist’s hand and material interventions or lack thereof. One apprehends the global form

as well as the details instantaneously. Furthermore, the immediacy and transparency of visual art make it a useful analog, foil, and reflecting mirror. Visual art, therefore, provides a path to discuss not only the working methods of *The Health*, but the extant form and surface detail as well. In the next section, I will explore the works of three visual artists who helped me reflect on my own work as assemblage, detailing their approaches to the medium. Following that, I will transfer the concepts drawn from a discussion of visual art back to the domain of music. Finally, I will use this discussion as the main framework for an analysis of *The Health*.

FOUND OBJECTS, COMBINES, AND ASSEMBLAGE

In the section that follows, I will situate *The Health* within the language of assemblage, considering the practice of three artists whose work bears a family resemblance to mine in terms of construction, material selection criteria, and affect. Robert Rauschenberg, Jessica Jackson Hutchins, and Molly Roth each use found objects to create large assemblages that encode artifacts of daily life into broad networks of meaning. Their choice of materials is confrontational in its ordinariness, yet also conveys a sense of pathos and intimacy. They each combine art media and prefabricated materials in such a way that showcases the found objects they employ, but also provides new unifying context for the objects, working them into a novel whole.

From 1954 – 1964, Robert Rauschenberg made works that combine elements of painting and sculpture. During the height of modernism, these two disciplines were held to be two radically different, but Rauschenberg brought them into dialogue. “Rauschenberg’s Combines represent the invention of a hybrid form of art that draws from the vocabularies of both painting and sculpture and invests objects with a sense of drama and theatricality as they become part of a

larger whole.’⁴ Neither painting nor sculpture—some hang on walls while others are free standing—the Combines incorporate objects that break the pictorial plane, or themselves are assemblages of surfaces that extend into three dimensions. Rauschenberg’s first recognized Combine, *Minutiae*,⁵ was constructed as a set piece for Merce Cunningham and John Cage’s ballet by the same name.



Figure 3: *Minutiae*,⁶ 1954 by Robert Rauschenberg

That it was designed for use in a performance expands the multidisciplinary implications of the work, amplifying its origin as a true work of multimedia. It is in this context that Rauschenberg develops his hybrid Combines that fuse myriad materials and multiple formal logics into unified compositions.

⁴ Robert Rauschenberg, Paul Schimmel, and Thomas E. Crow, *Robert Rauschenberg: Combines* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005), 211.

⁵ Robert Rauschenberg, Paul Schimmel, and Thomas E. Crow, *Robert Rauschenberg: Combines*, 202.

⁶ Robert Rauschenberg, *Minutiae*, 1954, Combine: oil, paper, fabric, newsprint, wood, metal, and plastic with mirror on braided wire on wood structure, Private collection, Courtesy Hauser & Wirth, accessed October 9, 2022. <https://www.rauschenbergfoundation.org/art/galleries/series/combine-1954-64>

The word ‘Combine’ describes Rauschenberg’s technique on multiple formal levels. At the most basic formal level, a Combine is both a painting and a sculpture. But at levels of greater detail, it also describes the use of assemblage and collage to combine multiple objects of varied source and dimension into a single artwork. This fractal-like formal design also describes the structure of *The Health*, in which nested assemblages operate at each formal level, from the top layer to surface detail.

Rauschenberg’s Combines make use of found objects, mostly physically unaltered from their original state, which gain formal interest through combination and arrangement. *Monogram* includes a taxidermized Angora goat, a tire, the heel of a rubber-sole shoe, a street barricade, a tennis ball, photographs, and signboard lettering.⁷ Rauschenberg makes little attempt to hide the objects’ original forms. The goat is clearly a goat. The tire is a tire. Rauschenberg prefers to leave the objects largely recognizable. Even as he applies paint, creating new surface detail, one can still make out the origins of each found object.

⁷ “Monogram,” Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, accessed October 9, 2022.
<https://www.rauschenbergfoundation.org/art/art-context/monogram>



Figure 4: *Monogram*,⁸ 1955-59 by Robert Rauschenberg

Additionally, the applied paint creates a new formal relationship between the objects. The objects are connected not only by proximity in space, but by art media and the artist's own hand. The subtle alteration of each object embeds it in a network of shared meaning and fuses them together in a singular artistic statement. In *The Health*, I use myriad found objects. They each pose a compositional problem for continuity and consistency within the piece. As Rauschenberg uses paint to elide the surfaces of found objects, I use a series of artistic interventions in my materials to let them speak with a unified voice.

While artists working with found objects select them for many reasons—political commentary, humor, formal relationships, convenience—Rauschenberg's Combines often include objects chosen for their personal significance. "In the early Combine paintings, this relationship [of the

⁸ Robert Rauschenberg, *Monogram*, 1959, Combine: oil, paper, fabric, printed paper, printed reproductions, metal, wood, rubber shoe heel, and tennis ball on canvas with oil and rubber tire on Angora goat on wood platform mounted on four casters, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, accessed October 9, 2022. <https://www.rauschenbergfoundation.org/art/art-context/monogram>

life of the artist to the artwork] manifested itself autobiographically, largely through the incorporation of specific elements that revealed fragments of Rauschenberg's own life story."⁹ In Rauschenberg's *Bed*, he uses his literal bedding material as the foundation for his work. He applies paint directly to his own quilt and sheets. The found object—his bed—is clearly personal and it gives the piece a lived-in quality. In other works, he incorporates family photos, letters from his son, and images that allude to his sexual identity as a queer man.¹⁰ Rauschenberg incorporates found objects that express something of his life. This is not to say that every found object is personally significant, merely that Rauschenberg often inserts points of decipherable autobiography into his works with the objects he chooses. When choosing objects to include in *The Health*, I too draw from personal experience, autobiography, and other objects at hand to insert myself directly into the work.

⁹Robert Rauschenberg, Paul Schimmel, and Thomas E. Crow, *Robert Rauschenberg: Combines*, 211.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 222.



Figure 5: *Bed*,¹¹ 1965 by Robert Rauschenberg

While Rauschenberg coined the term ‘Combine’ to describe a subset of his works, there are many artists that create similar work who simply refer to it as ‘sculpture’, ‘painting’, or do not bother to compartmentalize it at all. Rauschenberg may have used the term Combine because he came from a painting tradition during the height of modernism when the distinction between sculpture and painting was deeply important. In the 21st century, while those distinctions may

¹¹ Robert Rauschenberg, *Bed*, 1965, Oil and pencil on pillow, quilt, and sheet on wood supports, MOMA, New York, accessed October 11, 2022. https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/robert-rauschenberg-bed-1965/

still hold weight, many artists create multidisciplinary work without the need to define their working methods.

Jessica Jackson Hutchins uses found objects that humorously and beautifully conjure an image of displaced domestic life. Unlike Rauschenberg, Hutchins' work is not autobiographical or narrative. She chooses objects from domestic life for their tactility and a sense of immediate connection. In an interview, the artist describes her interest in found objects as follows:

“I think it’s mainly about intimacy and dialogue with the things around me... I use things that have this tactile, intimate relationship to all of us. Not eccentric fancy things—just things that make you think, “I know what my butt feels like in a chair, I have one in my house, I can relate to this.”¹²

One can picture oneself in Hutchins' work. In *Settee*, mottled, patchy ceramic 'rocks' rest upon a crumbling found object settee. One can see the deformations in the couch cushions which recall people resting on a couch. The stones touch each other, which suggests an intimate tenderness. Their bulbous shapes and blotchy colors remind us of the imperfections of human bodies. In *The Health*, I use nakedly referential objects that recall specific encounters with the world: trips to the grocery store, tv shows, hold music, health exams. With these I hope to let the audience into the work, to let their own lived experience mesh with the fabric of the piece.

¹² Karen Rosenberg, “Jessica Jackson Hutchins on Becoming an Accidental Painter & Building a New Art Scene in Portland” accessed January, 13, 2023, https://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews_features/meet_the_artist/jessica-jackson-hutchins-interview-53030.



Figure 6: *Settee*,¹³ 2010 by Jessica Jackson Hutchins

Hutchins' use of humble and familiar household objects evokes familiar and potentially intimate settings that are estranged from their original context and repurposed. In *Convivium*,¹⁴ Hutchins adorns a prefabricated kitchen table and tablecloth with brightly colored, gloopy ceramics. The sculpture suggests a kitchen, maybe a dinner party with earthenware. But the familiar items are abstracted and strange, with colorful alien growths. This mixture of highly referential objects drawn from life fused with purposeful abstraction is a cornerstone of Hutchins' practice.

Hutchins, again:

“It’s all about positioning and specificity, to get down to making a piece that means something but also that evades meaning a little bit too. Transformation, evidence of *work*, accidents, the time contained in the humanity of the objects—all that stuff is crucial to get at what I’m trying to get at, which is ways of connecting to the world, ways of knowing ourselves through the things we encounter.”¹⁵

¹³ Jessica Jackson Hutchins, “Settee”, 2010, ceramic, fabric, settee, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, accessed October 12, 2022. <https://whitney.org/exhibitions/2010-biennial/jessica-jackson-hutchins/wiki>.

¹⁴ Jessica Jackson Hutchins, *Convivium*, 2008, table, linen, papier-mâché, and ceramic, ICA Boston, accessed October 12, 2022. <https://www.icaboston.org/art/jessica-jackson-hutchins/convivium>.

¹⁵ Stuart Horodner, “Jessica Jackson Hutchins,” *Bomb Magazine*, July, 1, 2010, accessed January, 13, 2023, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/jessica-jackson-hutchins/>.

Here, Hutchins describes the balancing act between the meaning that resonates in found objects with the abstraction and mystery of art media. She also underscores the importance of visual “evidence of work.” The assemblage process that she employs contains evidence of her hand, imperfections, and accidents. This results in visual abstraction, but also evokes the presence of human touch. In *The Health*, I balance referentiality with abstraction, and make the presence of human intervention felt at every turn.



Figure 7: *Convivium*, 2008 by Jessica Jackson Hutchins

In Molly Roth’s (my partner) *Poem for Edith*, the artist incorporates our daughter’s outgrown dress, a deflated party balloon, and a clay and stick figurine into a plastic and ribbon weaving. Roth paints on the found objects to blend them into the tapestry, creating a unified tableau from disparate objects.



Figure 8: *Poem for Edith*,¹⁶ 2018 by Molly Roth

While these materials may suggest autobiography, Roth sees her woven sculptures as formal exercises dealing with the debris we create through a life lived. She incorporates materials that may have sentimental attachment to their owners but are not meaningful enough in their own right to keep around. The resulting work embeds a sense of pathos, time, and loss into a network of formal relationships. In *The Health*, form similarly cuts through sentimentality. I gather lost, disposable objects and outright sentimental material but through formal abstraction, I seek to achieve a sense of Brechtian alienation through which the audience can encounter each object at a distance.

¹⁶ Molly Roth, *Poem for Edith*, 2018, mixed media, home of the artist, Chicago, personal photograph.

*boundarymind*¹⁷ is a collaboration between Roth, musician-composers Katherine Young and Linda Jankowska, and video artist Kera MacKenzie. For this project, the artists gathered materials from friends in addition to their own items, amassing a collection of personally significant, but ultimately discardable objects, i.e., a former engagement ring, childhood clothing, and pinestraw. Roth took the collected objects and wove them into three woven sculptures. In *boundarymind*, Roth's sculptures are works of art in their own right, but also serve as a projection surface for video created by Kera MacKenzie. They also act as a companion piece to Young and Jankowska's music. Young and Jankowska perform the music of *boundarymind* on a set of personally significant objects in addition to their own instruments, bassoon and violin respectively.

¹⁷ *Boundarymind*, music by Katherine Young and Linda Jankowska, video by Kera McKenzie, weaving by Molly Roth, 6018 North Chicago, June 3,5, 2022.



Figure 9: *boundarymind*,¹⁸ 2022 by Molly Roth

Roth's woven sculptures become a totem to collective memory. The items in each tapestry appear as if unboxed from a distant attic corner, the audience left to contemplate the history of each. But the scale and intricacy of the sculpture imbues each object with a sense of urgency, care, and tenderness.

The music of *boundarymind* combines personal memories and the sounds of the artists' collection of objects. Young describes how the objects they gathered shape the outcome and content of the piece:

¹⁸ Molly Roth, *Boundarymind*, 2022, mixed media, home of the artist, Chicago, personal photograph.

“Linda and I have built *boundarymind*’s world from objects collected from our childhood homes. In the making of the piece, we have shared stories of our pasts, and our families’ pasts, as we have explored the sound-making potential of these objects. We have found this artistic practice to be extremely rich, creating space for introspection, social connection, relationship formation, musical experimentation, and intense listening.”¹⁹

In *boundarymind*, the potency of found autobiographical objects spills forth and conjures a network of relationships that connect the artists to each other and to their own histories, but also toward deep engagement with the world at large. In *The Health*, I select found objects that project personal narrative and autobiography, but with the hopes of using my own experience as a starting point for broad connection with outsized cosmic forces.

Each artist mentioned above approaches found objects and assemblage in a way that mirrors my own. They use domestic objects, autobiographical ephemera, and debris from their lives. *The Health* uses found objects from encounters with the healthcare system, church services attended as a child, books I’ve read, and films I’ve watched. Many of these objects are personal, even autobiographical, while others are merely debris from my life that formed a useful compositional function. Where some artists that work with prefabricated objects leave them unaltered, the artists above make interventions with paint, glaze, fabric, and ceramics. In *The Health*, I begin with prefabricated forms but edit and adorn as I see fit with the goal of creating a new, singular work that simultaneously shows the edges and shapes of the original constituent parts.

¹⁹ Linda Jankowska and Katherine Young. “The Tender Listener,” *CeReNem Journal* 7, 2020: 147, accessed January, 16, 2023 <https://cerenempostgraduates.files.wordpress.com/2020/12/cerenemjournal-issue7-pdfversion-v5.pdf>.

So far, I have discussed the discourse and practice of artists that use found objects and assemblage in visual art. With the discussion of *boundarymind*, the conversation spilled over from visual art back toward music. Jankowska and Young use found materials both as concrete symbols of autobiography and shared histories, but also as gateways to sonic abstraction. Together, the performers and audience explore the familiar sights and alien sounds of toy cars, pinecones, etc. Through the material of the piece, both the abstract and the concrete emerge from familiar objects. *The Health*, equally interested in the potency of found objects, uses not physical found objects, but musical, textual, formal, and experiential objects. In the next section of the paper, I will move the conversation from the domain of physical found objects toward those of musical origin. I will introduce the concept of musical found objects and discuss strategies for manipulating them within musical composition.

FOUND OBJECTS AND ASSEMBLAGE IN MUSIC

Prefabricated physical objects announce themselves as such immediately. A plastic toy car, a page from a magazine, a car part, each bear the mark of mass production and industrial polish. When incorporated into an assemblage, they can immediately be recognized by viewers and differentiated from handmade elements of the work. The distinction between prefabricated and handmade *musical* objects, however, can be murkier, meriting discussion and a definition of terms.

In the musical domain, audio samples of recorded media are the closest analogue to prefabricated physical objects. Samples can announce their found object quality immediately. When a sample is mashed up with a recording from a different style, time period, and recording fidelity, its

quality as an artifact of recorded media becomes foregrounded. It is precisely this mediated quality that allows it to be isolated from other aspects of a piece of music and recognized as a found object.²⁰ Another type of musical found object is musical quotation, which can appear as a melodic fragment, riff, chord progression, or lyric taken directly from another piece of music. Like sampling, this found object represents direct borrowing from an external source, however, unlike sampling, the object is filtered through the performance of the borrower. The musical fragment is a found object, but the performance of it is not. Borrowed musical genre/style is a third type of found object. This type of found object is more abstract still, since it exists as original composed music made in a borrowed, found object style. In this instance, genre is prefabricated but the musical expression of it is not. Musical found objects, unlike physical found objects, exist as a unique combination of prefabricated elements and reinterpretation or reperformances of them. They are borrowed, but also recreated. Each type of found object presents its own set of challenges, strengths, and questions to the composer interested in using them. How can I make a quotation or musical genre legible as a found object in my piece? Is legibility important? How much do I want to distinguish my own musical material from borrowed found object material? These questions, among others, are a central problematic to polystylist composers, who create musical assemblages from found objects. Since found musical objects are of central importance to polystylist composers, they have developed multiple strategies for composing with them.

²⁰ Sampling is a common and effective practice, but since *The Health* does not use samples, I will not discuss this practice further. I include mention of them here as an example of the most immediately recognizable musical found object.

Composer Alfred Schnittke, one of the early progenitors of a self-conscious polystylist music composition, offers multiple approaches to working with found objects in music. He suggests two main tactics: 1) the “principle of quotation” and 2) the “principle of allusion.”²¹

The principle of quotation is one method available to the polystylist composer. It can be deployed in multiple fashions. An artist can directly quote musical material from a pre-existing piece of music, e.g., when Thad Jones quotes *Pop Goes the Weasel* during his solo on the Count Basie Orchestra’s 1957 recording of *April in Paris*.²² But Schnittke argues that quotation does not necessarily entail exact replication of pre-existing musical material. Instead, an artist can extract stereotypical features from a genre or musical style and place them in a contemporary idiom. For example, Sky Macklay, in *Many, Many Cadences*,²³ uses cadential figures stripped from context to create cascading textures. While the piece does not sound like older works, it quotes their most iconic features. Neoclassical composers such as Igor Stravinsky and Nadia Boulanger use formal devices, affects, and values from the 17th century but map them onto a host of 20th century inventions. This approach to quotation borrows techniques or idiomatic writing from “alien styles”²⁴—a phrase used frequently by Schnittke—rather than recognizable material from a single piece of music.

Another approach to quotation available to the polystylist composer is to adapt themes from an alien style and develop them in their own voice. This is the method of Charlie Parker and other

²¹ Alfred Schnittke, Alexander Ivashkin, and J. D. Goodliffe. *A Schnittke Reader* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 87.

²² “April in Paris,” track 1 on Count Basie and His Orchestra, *April in Paris*, Verve MGV 8012, 1957, LP.

²³ “Many Many Cadences,” track 1 on Spektral Quartet, *Serious Business*, Sono Luminous, DSL-92198, CD.

²⁴ Alfred Schnittke, Alexander Ivashkin, and J. D. Goodliffe. *A Schnittke Reader*, 87.

bebop composers, in which artists take songs from the American songbook, such as *I've Got Rhythm*, and perform them at extreme tempos with extended tertian harmony and chord substitutions.

“Polystylist hybrids” are another implementation of the principle of quotation. These compositions create interest and motion by combining multiple genres and stylistic quotations. Alex Temple’s *The Man Who Hated Everything* is an homage/critique of Frank Zappa that combines evocations of Zappa’s personal style using doo-wop, “sleazy neo-noir jazz”, free improv, modernist abstraction, etc.²⁵ In this approach, the musical material is not direct quotation but an emulation of stylistic attributes.

Schnittke posits a second overarching approach to polystylist composition, which he describes as the “principle of allusion.” Less direct than quotation, music that uses the principle of allusion trades in “stylistic hints” or “the scents and shadows of other times in music.”²⁶ Schnittke says much less about the principle of allusion than his principle of quotation. My gloss is that polystylistic allusion nearly buries its sources. One catches merely “a scent of another time.”²⁷ One may wonder if the allusion is even there. It becomes so earnestly synthesized with the composer’s own voice that one may not discern an alien stylistic referent. For example, I submit the devotional music that Alice Coltrane composed while at her Sai Anantam Ashram. In *Jai Ramachandra*²⁸ one can hear her background as a church pianist, her practice of gospel, blues,

²⁵ Alex Temple, “The Man Who Hated Everything”, Alex Temple (personal website), accessed October, 17, 2022. <https://alextemplmusic.com/2015/08/the-man-who-hated-everything/>

²⁶ Alfred Schnittke, Alexander Ivashkin, and J. D. Goodliffe. *A Schnittke Reader*, 88.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 89

²⁸ “Jai Ramachandra,” Track 2 on Alice Coltrane, *Turiya Sings*, Private Pressing, 1982, Cassette.

experimental jazz, Western classical music, Indian devotional music, and her interest in emerging music technologies.²⁹ The piece contains a repeated plagal oscillation present in both minor blues and church music but does not complete the blues form. The devotional music she creates is *sui generis*, even as it reaches out toward many genres and styles at once. As Schnittke describes the principle of allusion, one can hear in this music shadows of many musics. At the same time, it has a new uniformity of texture and its own complete and standalone identity. The styles are integrated so that one cannot parse an alien style from a style authentic to Coltrane's own voice. As such, Alice Coltrane's devotional music acts as a limit case for Schnittke's theory. How can one mark a meaningful distinction between 'polystylistic allusion' and influence, study, or deep engagement with multiple musical discourses and lineages?

Earlier, I allude to the fundamental difference between physical and musical found objects. Prefabricated physical objects immediately announce themselves as such, where musical found objects recede the more they fuse with the composer's own style and performance. To make legible the musical found objects at play in a polystylist composition, a composer must mark a distinction between the found object and their own music. A composer may achieve a sense of distance from found object musical material through humor/ironic detachment, or hard edits between multiple, wildly contrasting musical styles. However, I will demonstrate that, even when a composer makes recourse to such tactics, the border between alien found objects and authentic individual musical decisions remains murky and difficult to discern.

²⁹ Franya Berkman, *Monument Eternal: The Music of Alice Coltrane* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2010.), 4.

For example, Andrew Tham's *Tutorial Music*³⁰ is a collection of faux audio tutorials "produced by fictitious home tutorial expert GoldenRod."³¹ The tape announces itself as a fictional found object. Tham describes it as "something between a parody and a shadow of an actual tutorial; a series of tracks that feign knowledge while stumbling into personal truth."³² Tham invites his audience to approach the work as if it were a collection of legitimate tutorials but simultaneously lets everyone in on the artifice. In the piece, Tham's music uses generic musical features of tutorial music but merges these features with his own musical voice. On *How to speak French*, Tham creates a propulsive and upbeat synthesizer loop to support a language tutorial. The music recalls that of institutional instructional videos, featuring gentle, non-functional, planing harmonies, meant to be inconspicuous and encouraging. Tham, however, does not remain faithful to the genre, eventually breaking from form by adding chromatic harmonic motion and vocoder. These elements draw attention to themselves and suggest an uncertainty that instructional videos seek to avoid. The movement from certainty to uncertainty mirrors Tham's approach to text.

The tutorial begins as a typical piece of language instruction. "Say, 'bounjour'. Say, 'enchanté'." It quickly devolves into an interior dialogue centered on the awkward feeling of putting basic language tutorials into practice. "Say 'enchanté' to your friend's French boyfriend, and have it be the last thing you say to him, not the first, so he has to correct you. Feel embarrassed about your mistake. Feel embarrassed about trying to speak French to a French person, get on a plane and go

³⁰ Andrew Tham. *Tutorial Music*. Parlour Tapes+, 016, 2021, Cassette.

³¹ Andrew Tham, liner notes for Andrew Tham, *Tutorial Music*, Andrew Tham. Parlour Tapes+ 016, 2021, Cassette.

³² Ibid.

home.”³³ Tham uses the tutorial form to invoke a familiar encounter with a found object—a language tutorial—and then subverts our expectations of it.

Tham’s implementation of a musical and formal found object, at first glance, is clear and legible. He takes advantage of every avenue to announce his material as found object material. The title announces in advance the tropes that a listener may encounter—tutorial music. He uses humor to mark its irreverent deployment. He even telegraphs via liner notes that he is making a parody of the form.

However, discerning the edges of the found object material and Tham’s own style is a more difficult task. As a listener, I can tell the points of departure from the genre—chromaticism and self-doubt. But how can a listener know that the tutorial form, the found object *itself*, is not also an authentic feature of Tham’s own style.

Tham told a friend that his favorite ‘song’ is the theme music to Planet Money on NPR, which bears many of the same musical characteristics as *Tutorial Music*. Similarly, Tham values the upbeat, synthetic loops of *The Sims*. The *Tutorial Music* liner notes read:

“You know what else sounds good? The soundtrack to the hit video game The Sims from 2000. Every aspect of the game has its own little utopian musical score to it; purchasing a plot of land, building a home, buying furniture, learning a skill, starting a family, climbing the corporate ladder at work, etc. The Sims lets you “play life,” and accompanies your simplistic roleplaying journey with the perfect feel-good jams.”³⁴

³³ Andrew Tham. *Tutorial Music*. Parlour Tapes+, 016, 2021, Cassette.

³⁴ Ibid.

Tham's love for synthetic, institutional music suggests that he is also a student of it, that he has learned from it, and has developed it in his own image. This realization forces me to question whether institutional tutorial music is indeed a found object or just Tham's authentic compositional voice.

With *Tutorial Music*, Tham takes perfect advantage of the unique interstitial space that musical found objects occupy. They contain characteristics of prefabricated, externalized objects, yet at the same time are suffused with the performance and personality of the artist that deploys them. Tham shows us that we can have it both ways. We can access musical found objects as remote, inert things ready for incorporation into an assemblage, but also, we can see how these same objects smudge and deform and take on the voice of the composer. In my music, this is precisely how I engage with found objects. I interact with debris and symbols from the real world. I reach out and try to engage these symbols. I manipulate them, empathize with them, and try to draw out the content of latent, personal experiences embedded within them.

Like Tham's *Tutorial Music*, *The Health* uses material throughout that operates at the border of found object and genuine influence. *The Health* borrows liberally from disparate sources. It extracts stereotypical elements of these styles for effect. It attempts to create a new singular language from these objects. The piece gains its energy not from friction between styles, or placing alien styles in new contexts, but from synthesizing broadly and developing a new fiction. It is important to the piece, however, that the visible edges of its constituent parts remain in plain view, that segments are recognizable as artifacts. As such, genre and found object assemblage remain salient features of *The Health*.

So far, I have described how I came to think about *The Health* as a musical assemblage, how the process felt tactile, and recalled the working methods of visual artists that I admire. I then examined their use of found objects and found parallels within my own work. Following that, I discussed the peculiarities of musical found objects, how they differ from physical found objects, and how they occupy different levels of legibility. I asserted my interest in the ambiguous quality of musical found objects, how they can both conjure a real-world referent and act as a vehicle for my own compositional voice.

In the remainder of the essay, I will focus exclusively on the assemblage nature of *The Health*. In the immediately following sections (pgs. 16 – 28), I will discuss the structure of the piece and itemize found objects at each formal level. I will first describe the macroform and demonstrate that, as a totality, *The Health* is both a found object and an assemblage. I will then zoom in to the mezzoform and show how the subsections of each part of *The Health* is itself a found object. Finally, I will itemize found objects that exist at the surface level of the piece. After a thorough examination of the form, I will move on to the conceptual threads and compositional techniques that stitch all of the material together.

MACROFORM: ASSEMBLAGE or CEREMONY

As mentioned earlier, Rauschenberg calls a subset of his works Combines because they are neither paintings, nor sculpture, but a third and separate form that brings together elements of both. *The Health* similarly combines distinct, almost incompatible forms—medical diagnostic exams, religious recitation, hold music—that call for a new container or formal identity.

As I developed *The Health*, I slowly began to describe the form as a “ceremony”. This formal descriptor does not just describe the resultant piece but played an active role in shaping the content and form of the piece. Reflecting on my experience as a child attending Catholic Mass and later Methodist church services, I thought about how they both contain wide ranging modes of expression and content yet maintain a coherent identity and atmosphere throughout. Church services combine everything from somber choral hymns, sing-alongs, weighty sermons, and a moment for members of the congregation to talk about bake sales and provide community updates. Church services are eclectic in the elements that constitute a ‘service,’ yet at the same time are shot through with a unity of purpose and a specificity that binds them into a singular, coherent form. Church services are themselves a form of collage. Hymns written in the 20th century pair with Psalms from the 5th century. Chant written in the 9th century is performed alongside prayers from the 4th century, with concerns voiced about current events from last week, performed in buildings made to look like they were built in 17th century Europe, with yellow bricks reclaimed from a defunct factory in St. Louis, MO. Church services are a form that gathers material from across time and space and entire aesthetic epochs, but fuses them into a consistent texture. As I made *The Health*, I found deep inspiration from and kinship with both this sedimentary process as well as the resultant experience. I also appreciate that the Catholic Mass and church services exist outside of artworld categories. While one can consider them aesthetically, their purpose is not bound purely to aesthetics. The Mass projects a function-forward design, as opposed to a form to be apprehended as theatre or music, though it contains elements of both. One gets the sense that the sequence of events in a Mass is chosen not to create a sense of musical momentum, but because they are arranged to best achieve union with God.

Similarly, I use the term ‘ceremony’ to refer to a function-forward form that accommodates multiple performance modes into a single, coherent form. I borrow the hybrid form of the Mass as an armature to create a piece that feels purpose-built to the cultivation of a reverential atmosphere. Like a Mass, I want *The Health* to feel integrated and coherent, despite a multiplicity of music, delivery, and moods. I want it to have a robust structural logic that prevents the diversity of material from feeling self-consciously eclectic. I want it to push on the boundaries of coherence, imagine the edges of ‘what belongs together’, but avoid pastiche. Like a Mass, I include spoken word, action, song, functional music, and magic, literal magic. I want to create a fiction with *The Health*, in which an audience member might consider whether it exists for aesthetic or devotional purposes. Is it music, or a religious rite? I believe that the ceremonial form of *The Health*, inspired by the Mass, helps to portray the work as if it were a church service from a fictional belief system.

Ultimately, *The Health* borrows liberally from the form of the Catholic Mass, while also abandoning it at will. The result is a piece of music that pushes against its status as such, appearing at times to be a religious service, but always willing to return to the world of music. Therefore, it is a multi-layered assemblage of music and ceremony, itself a hybrid form.

To develop the ceremonial structure of *The Health*, I studied the form of the Catholic Mass, which breaks down into four parts: Introductory Rites, Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of the Eucharist, and Concluding Rites.³⁵ Each of the four parts has its function. The Introductory Rites

³⁵ “Order of Mass”, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, accessed August 16, 2022. <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/order-of-mass>

“have the character of a beginning, an introduction, and a preparation.”³⁶ They are designed to “foster unity of those who have been gathered.”³⁷ They include an entrance chant or song and a greeting from the Priest. The Liturgy of the Word focuses on bible readings and a homily that expands on the biblical passages, sometimes connecting it to contemporary lived experience. This part concludes with a proclamation of faith and an intercession on behalf of congregants.³⁸ The Liturgy of the Eucharist is the center of the Mass, containing the literal magic of the ceremony, with communion preparation, reception and prayer, and gifts to the church. In the Concluding Rites, the church holds a space for announcements, blessings, and dismissal.³⁹

Each of these four large scale divisions breaks down further into a total of more than 20 subsections. As I analyzed each subsection of the Mass for potential analogues in *The Health*, I examined their function and salient features, locating hymns, actions, magic, chants, readings. I ensured that *The Health* contains moments of each. I maintained the four-part structure of the Mass, but ultimately shuffled around the subsections to suit my tastes. Below, I have included a program from *The Health*. It shows a four-part structure, with each part containing 4 to 5 subsections. In brackets, I have listed how each subsection can be mapped onto a particular function or specific subsection of a Mass.

Part I:

Opening (pg. 5) [Entrance, Greeting]

Diagnostic 1 (pg. 15) [Action]

World Synthesis: Winter (pg. 29) [Magic]

A Fire That Consumes: Reading (pg. 30) [Reading, Responsorial]
(after Jorge Luis Borges)

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, "Liturgy of the Word." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified September 19, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/liturgy-of-the-Word>.

³⁹ Ibid.

Part II:

Panic, Motion (pg. 32) [Chant]
 We Are of The Health (pg. 42) [Proclamation of Faith]
 World Synthesis: Spring (pg. 61) [Magic]
 Sediment: Reading (pg. 62) [Reading]

Part III:

Demo Day (pg. 64) [Hymn]
 Diagnostic 2 (pg. 68) [Action]
 World Synthesis: Summer (pg. 90) [Magic]
 An Energy: Reading (pg. 91) [Reading, Responsorial]

Part IV:

We're Having Fun (pg. 93) [Hymn]
 Announcements (pg. 99) [Announcements, Homily]
 World Synthesis: Fall (pg. 102) [Magic]
 Magic Moment (pg. 103) [Magic, Chant]
 Hold Music (pg. 104) [Dismissal]

Part I's *Opening* retains the function of the Entrance and Greeting of the Introductory Rite. Part II's *We Are of The Health* functions as a proclamation of faith. Part III Introduces hymn-like song into the mix. The *World Synthesis* sections, which culminate in the *Magic Moment* of Part IV, act as the magic core of *The Health*. *Announcements*, while performing the role of the homily, contains plainspoken and personal text, which, like the announcements section of a Mass, breaks from the formality of the rest of the piece. *Hold Music* acts as a prolonged dismissal. In *The Health*, no section functions as the Liturgy of the Word, though *Readings* emulate a focal foundational text, and are distributed throughout the structure.

The form of *The Health* is a hybrid assemblage structure. It recalls elements of a purpose-built Mass, though it retains a musical core. It projects a functional logic that answers to a non-musical purpose, though it has also been stream-lined to act as a piece of music. For example, the Liturgy of the Word has been greatly reduced and redistributed throughout the piece. The

structure has been tightened up, speech, action, and music intermingled more thoroughly for an even, musical pace. Much of the speech has been paired with musical accompaniment, as in the *Diagnostics* and *Announcements*. Ultimately, it plays at being a fictional religious ceremony as it maintains its status as a piece of music.

MEZZOFORM: COLLAGE IN THE SUBSTRUCTURE

In the preceding section, I discussed the overarching ceremonial form and structural armature of *The Health*. In the pages that follow, I will turn to the mezzoform, by which I mean the intermediate structural building blocks of *The Health*. Like a Catholic Mass, *The Health* is broken into 4 parts. Each part breaks down into 4 to 5 subsections. These subsections are akin to the ‘numbers’ in a numbers opera. They are discrete performance pieces that project their own identity. Each number or subsection is its own found object. Some of these found objects are akin to Tham’s *Tutorial Music*, in which they exist as a recognizable form, but become a vehicle for my own artistic sensibility. These are found object forms developed in my own voice. Others are more abstract found forms, which are inspired by found objects, but move far enough from their source material that they no longer share an identity. In this section, I will describe and itemize the found objects that comprise each subsection of *The Health*. With this discussion, I want to demonstrate the breadth of found object forms to underscore the assemblage nature of the piece.

DIAGNOSTICS 1 and 2

The form of *Diagnostic 1* and *Diagnostic 2* draw heavily from pre-existing medical diagnostic exams. *Diagnostic 1* begins with a segment of a hearing test that tests for speech recognition

against background noise. The audiologist asks the examinee to repeat a set of spondees—two syllable words with equal weight—against a rising level of white noise. The examiner offers the following prompts to which the examinee must respond:

Say “sailboat”.
 Say “cupcake”.
 Say “hotdog”, etc.

The opening of *Diagnostic 1* begins:

Computer: Say sailboat
 Person: sailboat
 Computer: Say cupcake
 Person: cupcake
 Computer: Say altitude
 Person: altitude
 Computer: Say interstate
 Person: interstate
 Computer: Say toy car
 Person: toy car
 Computer: Say cell phone
 Person: cell phone
 Computer: Say hot dog
 Person: hot dog
 Computer: Say all alone
 Person: all alone
 Computer: Say mattress
 Person: mattress
 Computer: Say feather
 Person: feather
 Computer: Say actress
 Person: actress
 Computer: Say weather
 Person: weather

While I abandon strict adherence to the spondees, I take many words from an actual hearing test.

I also borrow the trope of test administrator and examinee. Eventually, the piece moves away from its origins as a hearing test, but the quotation and prefabricated form will be apparent to audience members who have recently had such a procedure performed.

Diagnostic 2 incorporates into its structure a ‘mini mental exam.’ A mini mental exam is a quick test that checks for cognitive impairment. Below is a sample.

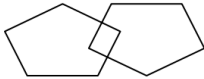
Maximum Score	Patient's Score	Questions
5		“What is the year? Season? Date? Day of the week? Month?”
5		“Where are we now: State? County? Town/city? Hospital? Floor?”
3		The examiner names three unrelated objects clearly and slowly, then asks the patient to name all three of them. The patient’s response is used for scoring. The examiner repeats them until patient learns all of them, if possible. Number of trials: _____
5		“I would like you to count backward from 100 by sevens.” (93, 86, 79, 72, 65, ...) Stop after five answers. Alternative: “Spell WORLD backwards.” (D-L-R-O-W)
3		“Earlier I told you the names of three things. Can you tell me what those were?”
2		Show the patient two simple objects, such as a wristwatch and a pencil, and ask the patient to name them.
1		“Repeat the phrase: ‘No ifs, ands, or buts.’”
3		“Take the paper in your right hand, fold it in half, and put it on the floor.” (The examiner gives the patient a piece of blank paper.)
1		“Please read this and do what it says.” (Written instruction is “Close your eyes.”)
1		“Make up and write a sentence about anything.” (This sentence must contain a noun and a verb.)
1		“Please copy this picture.” (The examiner gives the patient a blank piece of paper and asks him/her to draw the symbol below. All 10 angles must be present and two must intersect.) 

Figure 10: Mini Mental Exam

I use many of these prompts directly and unedited in *Diagnostic 2*. I chose the mini mental exam for its mixture of action, spoken word, and interaction between examiner/examinee, which provides the overall template for the piece. Again, this prefabricated form will be apparent to audience members familiar with the procedure.

OPENING and HOLD MUSIC

Hold Music is a stretched-out recomposition of Walgreens' hold music. At the time of writing this essay, Walgreens' hold music is drawn from the 30-second intro to Alex Bugnon's cover of The Gap Band's *Yearning for Your Love*.⁴⁰

The image displays a lead sheet excerpt for the song "Yearning for Your Love" by Alex Bugnon. It consists of two staves of music in 4/4 time. The first staff contains measures 1 through 3, and the second staff contains measures 4 through 7. Above the notes, chord symbols are provided for each measure. The first staff's chords are Ebmaj7, Fmaj/Eb, Dm7, Gm7(11), Cm7, Fsus7, Bbmaj7, Cm7, and Dm7. The second staff's chords are Ebmaj7, Fmaj/Eb, Dm7, Gm7(11), Eø7, A7(#9), and Dmaj7. The notation includes treble clef, a key signature of one flat (Bb), and various musical symbols such as slurs, triplets, and a fermata over the final note.

Figure 11: Yearning for Your Love – lead sheet excerpt

Across the 10-minute duration of *Hold Music*, the above figures are broken up into short, looped patterns that slowly iterate throughout the piece. When one listens to hold music on the phone, one hears a broken, looped structure that interrupts disjoint phrases from one or more pieces of music. Indeed, institutional hold music is its own form that recomposes pre-existing pieces of music. While an audience member may not have experienced this particular piece of hold music, the disjoint phrases, harmonies, and synthetic instrumentation recall a connection to this category of musical experience.

⁴⁰ "Yearning for Your Love," track 5 on Alex Bugnon, *Love Season*, Orpheus Records CDP-7-75602-2, 1988, CD.

WORLD SYNTHESIS

The *World Synthesis* sections of *The Health* are not found object forms, but rather emerge from a prefabricated philosophical construct. Each *World Synthesis* section is extrapolated from the Renaissance magic of musician and theorist Bartolomeo Ramos de Pareia. Ramos believes that the church modes and their plagal variants invoke planetary motion and bring the planets into a network of human affect and influence. According to scholar Gary Tomlinson:

“Ramos bound together, through structural correspondences and the resulting logic of magic, man’s bodily humors and psychological temperaments on the one hand and the planets that rule the modes associated with them on the other. In doing so, he fully merged musical ethics and cosmology and offered his readers nothing less than a new discursive context for the relations of music, medicine (including psychology), and astrology.”⁴¹

The church modes become a tool for connecting with and implicating human activity within larger cosmic forces. By performing in the mode associated with a particular planet, one can invoke the motion of that planet and increase its affect and influence on an associated ‘bodily humor.’ By performing in the plagal variant of an associated planet, one can decrease the affect, or ‘bodily humor.’ I borrow this concept as a found object in *The Health*, though I play fast and loose with it, even misinterpreting the music-theoretical construct of plagal mode variants.

⁴¹ Gary Tomlinson. *Music in Renaissance Magic: Toward a Historiography of Others*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.), 83-84

Table 1 Correspondences of *musica instrumentalis, humana, and mundana* in Ramos's *Musica practica*

<i>Musica humana</i>			<i>Musica instrumentalis</i>		<i>Musica mundana</i>		
Color and element	Affect or ethos	Bodily humor	Modes	Notes (modal finals)	Planetary spheres	Muses	
				coruph Γ	Earth ♂	Thalia	
	sad, doleful, sluggish	+ phlegm	Hypodorian	proslambanomenos ^a	Moon ♀	Clio	
	fawning, garrulous, flattering, lascivious without beauty	- yellow bile	Hypophrygian	hypate hypaton ^b	Mercury ☿	Calliope	
	pious, tearful	- blood	Hypolydian	parhypate hypaton ^c	Venus ♀	Terpsichore	
	sweet, peevish, morose	- black bile	Hypermixolydian				
<i>crystalline water</i>	<i>rousing, suitable to all affects</i>	- phlegm	Dorian	lichanos hypaton ^d	Sun ☉	Melpomene	
<i>fiery [fire]</i>	<i>severe, rouses anger</i>	+ yellow bile	Phygian	hypate meson ^e	Mars ♂	Erato	
<i>bloody color [air]</i>	<i>delightful, joyful, modest</i>	+ blood	Lydian	parhypate meson ^f	Jupiter ♃	Euterpe	
<i>yellow, semi-crystalline [earth]</i>	<i>pleasant, lascivious, inspires youthful behavior</i>	± black bile	Mixolydian	lichanos meson ^g	Saturn ♄	Polyhymnia	
	sweet, beautiful		Hypermixolydian	mese ^a	Firmament *	Urania	

Figure 12: Gary Tomlinsin's chart outlining Ramos' musical and astrological correspondences.⁴²

Unlike other found object forms in *The Health*, the *World Synthesis* sections do not concretely reference a borrowed form. Ramos did not describe musical features, melodic or formal, associated with the church modes that might influence the planets. Rather than a musical found object, Ramos' magical correspondences are a philosophical or conceptual found object. I use his system of planetary correspondences rather than inventing my own magical correspondences. His pre-existing theories become an opportunity to meditate on season-specific objects, affects, and memories, with the idea that in performance we can make them vivid or concrete,

⁴² Ibid., 81

manifesting them in the room. In this sense, the *World Synthesis* moments are an experiential found object, performers and audience alike immerse themselves in Ramos' magical construct.

SONGS: Panic, Motion; Demo Day; We're Having Fun

Each of the solo songs in *The Health* quote or allude to different styles. *Panic, Motion* while not a direct quotation of any one piece of music is written in a modal, melismatic, plainchant style.



Figure 13: Excerpt from *Panic, Motion*

In *The Health*, it is the first piece of sung music and appears as if drawn from the Proper Mass, a chant serving a particular liturgical function. Eventually, the vocals drop out of *Panic, Motion*, and the instruments take over. I add harmonic support with a synthesizer. I develop the chant in my own style, transforming the chant into a song.

Demo Day is a quiet art song with intricate through-composed melodic and harmonic structures. It opens with a modulating circle-of-fifths sequence. *Demo Day* is the first section of *The Health* to feature harmonic modulation. The free-wheeling harmonic motion of this song, in contrast to the stable, modal harmonies of previous sections, foregrounds its identity as an art song of an alien style. The guitar, beginning in measure 9, plays power-chords, which emerged in American rock n' roll in the late 1950s.

♩ = 70

mf

Voice

Some-thing out of no-thing, new con-struct-ion whipped from air. No-thing out of some-thing, where'd it

Guitar

tune VI string to D:
Dropped D

mf

7

Voice

go?Where ea-gles dare. From be-neath a snow drift, tramp-led pack of cig-a-rettes.

Gtr.

Figure 14: Excerpt from *Demo Day*

The stark contrast between this section and all prior material make it stand out as an outlier. It mimics a pre-existing song worked into a religious ceremony.

We're Having Fun is a basic ABABCA structure. The form is reminiscent of a pop song, with choruses and a bridge. Because pop music is not part of the language of the rest of *The Health*, it appears in *The Health* almost as an aberration, or as a song plucked from a song book.

In the formal totality of *The Health*, these songs stand out, they demarcate themselves as songs, music made for aesthetic appreciation, as set against the rest of a purpose-built ceremonial structure.

READINGS

The *Readings* take the form of Western church-style recitation. *A Fire That Consumes* (After Jorge Luis Borges) and *An Energy* both feature call and response speech that alternates between

a single voice and a larger group, while *Sediment* is spoken by all voices together. The *Readings*, while not drawn explicitly from any pre-existing church doctrine, recall a found object from a Mass or church service. One encounters this type of recitation most readily in large formal group rituals and ceremonies such as church, or in a secular context like school and baseball games during the *Pledge of Allegiance*.

ANNOUNCEMENTS, WE ARE OF THE HEALTH

Both *Announcements* and *We Are of The Health* are inspired by pre-existing forms but stray too far from them to be identified as such. With *Announcements*, I wanted something to function as announcements might in a church service, during which a congregant stands up and speaks informally about an activity or event on the horizon. I had written a collection of health-adjacent stories that use off-the-cuff colloquial speech. While different from the announcement of a bake sale, I saw that these stories could insert a down to earth speech style into something otherwise formal and cosmic in aspiration. I set these to upbeat, repetitive music, which provides contrast and a sense of levity, relative to the rest of the piece. Ultimately, they embody a dramatic shift in tone and text delivery, similar to traditional church announcements, but divergent in content.

I started writing *We Are of The Health* with the intention of creating a proclamation of faith. Subject to the creative process, it became something else entirely. The piece draws inspiration from Buffy Sainte Marie's song *God Is Alive, Magic Is Afoot*,⁴³ which sets Leonard Cohen's poem by the same name to music. In it she creates a mantra that blossoms into song.

God is alive, magic is afoot
 God is afoot, magic is alive
 Alive is afoot, magic never died

⁴³ Buffy Sainte-Marie. "God is Alive, Magic is Afoot." Track 1 on *Illuminations*. Vanguard 79300, 1969, LP.

I used a similar pattern of paired short phrases to propel the piece forward.

We are of the health, the health is of the ocean
 The world is of the health, the health is of the will
 The wind is of the health, the health is of the venom...

But that's where the similarities end. While it bears resemblance to the cadence of the Sainte-Marie/Cohen piece, it is not faithful enough to the original to recall it as a found object.

Interestingly, this recalls the fuzzy boundary between inspiration and alien style. As mentioned earlier, *Panic, Motion* quotes the style of plainchant. Yet it is not drawn from any *particular* plainchant. It features a repetitive synth bass uncharacteristic of the style, and possibly relevant only to me, draws as much inspiration from John Coltrane's *First Meditations* as it does the output of Hildegard von Bingen. However, one recognizes that it quotes the plainchant style. By referencing a generalizable style one can convey found object qualities, while borrowing one or two formal inspirations from a singular piece cannot.

MICROFORM: FOUND OBJECTS ALL THE WAY DOWN

So far, I have discussed quotation and found objects at the macro and mezzo formal levels. I have made the case that the form is a fractal assemblage with found objects appearing at each level of detail. In the following section, I will turn to the level of surface detail, where quotation and found objects appear directly in the texture of the piece.

Earlier, I described *Diagnostic 1* as a hearing test. At an increasingly fine-grained level of detail, I include other formal constructs to complicate the form. I develop the form further by quoting the style of interaction, if not the direct words, from a *Bladerunner 2049* baseline test.⁴⁴

Examiner: Have you ever been in an institution? Cells
 Examinee: Cells.
 Examiner: Do they keep you in a cell? Cells.
 Examinee: Cells.
 Examiner: When you're not performing your duties do they keep you in a little box?
 Cells.

I retain the repetition and pacing of the original but substitute my own words.

Computer: What then is your own? warm breeze
 Person: warm breeze
 Computer: What is it to you by whose hands they who gave it have demanded it again?
 warm breeze
 Person: warm breeze
 Computer: Is a little oil spilled or a little wine stolen? warm breeze
 Person: warm breeze

The words themselves are a mixture of text that I wrote and text that I borrowed from an online translation of Epictetus' *Enchiridion*.

Epictetus' *Enchiridion* features prominently in *Diagnostic 1*. "It is restored" becomes a mantra throughout the section. In its original context the phrase appears as follows:

"Never say of anything, 'I have lost it,' but, 'I have restored it.' Has your child died? It is restored. Has your wife died? She is restored. Has your estate been taken away? That likewise is restored."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Denis Villeneuve et al. 2017. *Blade Runner 2049*. Burbank, CA, Warner Bros. Entertainment.

⁴⁵ Epictetus, "Enchiridion", Project Gutenberg, accessed July, 28 2016.
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/45109/45109-h/45109-h.htm>

Occasionally, the words appear unaltered. More often, however, they are filtered through online search results for the phrase “It is restored.” I searched for the phrase in Google Books, which returned in list form the phrase as part of complete sentences torn from a set of unrelated books.

Here are a few examples from *Diagnostic 1*.

“It is restored to its original semantic meaning.
It is restored to light polarised in one plane.
It is restored, not read.”

The first half of the sentence is original to the *Enchiridion*, the second half of the phrase appears as completed in an unrelated book. This is just a small sample of the quotation and decontextualized material in *Diagnostic 1*. I also quote from my resume, bank websites, business mission statements, etc.

READINGS

A Fire That Consumes: Reading (After Jorge Luis Borges) borrows almost verbatim from the final lines of Borges’ essay *A New Refutation of Time*.

“Time is the substance I am made of. Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river; it is a tiger which destroys me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire which consumes me, but I am the fire. The world, unfortunately, is real; I, unfortunately, am Borges.”⁴⁶

I borrow Borges’ words. I then transform them into a call-and-response format and add new text of my own. The result is as follows:

SAM: The health is a fire that consumes me.
MOCREP: I am also that fire.
SAM: The health is a wave that pulls me under.
MOCREP: I am also that wave.
SAM: The health is a river that sweeps me along.
MOCREP: I am also that river.
SAM: The health is a protein that nourishes my body.

⁴⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths; Selected Stories & Other Writings*. (New York: New Directions.), 1964. 234

MOCREP: I am also that protein.

This section is so close to Borges' own words and structure, that I felt it necessary to include his name in the section title. When I quote the works of others in *The Health*, I fragment and alter the words so much that they become unrecognizable.

Throughout *The Health*, I incorporate a set of repeated phrases or epithets that function as a refrain or mantra to refer to 'the health' (not the piece, but the vital energy that subtends the cosmos). In the *Opening* section of *The Health*, the speaker thanks "the world spirit, the living force, the animal machine, the little cloud, the health" for creating the conditions for participants and audience members to be in the same room together. This same list of epithets, in whole and in part, returns three other times: in *Panic*, *Motion*, *Diagnostic 2*, and *We're Having Fun*. These epithets are drawn from pre-existing works.

I borrowed "animal machine" from René Descartes. Descartes formulated his popular conception of "the animal machine" which considered "the living body to be a machine... fully comprehensible in materialist terms, without recourse to souls."⁴⁷ Bodies, to Descartes, are machines. Like a clock, the movement and vitality of bodies can be attributed to parts that perform functions in tandem with other moving parts. Later in Descartes' career, he came to view animals as machines without souls, as distinct from humans who had souls, a mode of thinking that provided a conceptual basis for the catastrophic treatment of non-human animals and the natural world. But early on, "the animal machine" was meant to be a celebration of the agency and vitality of life and its resemblance to machines.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 55

The “living force” is borrowed from Leibniz’s mathematical principal *vis viva*, or living force. Leibniz’s *vis viva* equation solved practical problems within Cartesian physical models of motion and took the mechanical property of force to be a metaphysical property of matter.⁴⁸ Force to Leibniz is an emergent property of matter, which resonates with the theme of “health” being an energy that emanates from all matter.

“World Spirit” is borrowed from the German philosophical tradition of naturphilosophie championed by Schelling, Hegel, and in England by Erasmus Darwin. This doctrine considered life on a grand scale beyond the boundaries of a single body as a “generalized, circulating living agency, larger than the life of any given organism.”⁴⁹

“The little cloud” comes from biologist William Harvey, who saw chicken embryos as a model for the beginning of life, invoking clockwork and firearm mechanisms in a “cloudy pulse that was the beginning of life: cause and effects happening all at once, together.”⁵⁰

“The Health” is, of course, my contribution to the list, which acts as a summation of these concepts but uses them to reshape our basic associations and context with the word ‘health,’ which often refers to individual wellness. I move the term ‘health’ from the realm of “trying not to eat too much red meat” to a broader concept beyond that exists beyond the boundaries of any individual.

⁴⁸ Jessica Riskin. *The Restless Clock: A History of the Centuries-Long Argument Over What Makes Living Things Tick*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.), 2016. 98-99

⁴⁹ Ibid. 209

⁵⁰ Ibid. 88

While this is not an exhaustive list of the quotation, borrowing, and found objects in *The Health*, I believe it is enough to demonstrate that found objects are present at every scale in the piece. At the highest level, the piece borrows the form of a church service as an armature. At the mezzo formal level, the subsections themselves are found object forms, from diagnostic tests to chants to song forms. And at the level of surface detail of the piece, found objects abound. The preceding section was meant to provide an account of the assemblage form and structure of the piece. The found objects now established, I want to shift course to explain conceptual connections behind them. I want to explain why I selected them, and how they start to accrue conceptual and thematic weight. While each found object is discrete, they all refract a handful of running concepts.

THEMATIC TIES BETWEEN FOUND OBJECTS IN THE HEALTH

Earlier, I described the work of three visual artists that helped me to reflect on themes present in my own work. I located autobiography, domesticity, debris, and evidence of a life lived as thematic clusters. *The Health* consists of many found objects that fill similar roles. However, it also contains another category of found objects—thesis. *The Health* has an underlying world-building conceit, namely, that it is a religious ceremony based on a cosmology of ‘health.’ Many found objects in *The Health* cluster in support of this fictional cosmology as the thesis of the piece. In the section that follows, I will detail the thematic nodes of *The Health* to show how the varied materials form large networks of meaning.

THESIS, AUTOBIGRAPHY, DEBRIS

Thesis

The Health contains many found objects that support its main concept or thesis. Namely: “The Health ... imagines health not as a property of individual bodies, but as a vital, cosmic force that flows through all things.” I have used this idea as a node or center of gravity to pull together found objects into a common conceptual orbit. I use the found objects to project a fictional religious belief system around a vital energy called The Health.

Some found objects in *The Health* begin as concrete references to the healthcare industry, but through structural and textual exploration, become agoraphobic encounters with the cosmos. Each such encounter destabilizes a sense of individual subjectivity.

As discussed earlier, *Diagnostic I* brings together many found objects, but primarily: a hearing test, *Bladerunner 2049*'s baseline test, and language drawn from Epictetus. With the Diagnostics, I attempt to dramatize my own experience as a patient in all medical diagnostic situations; I try to make sense of familiar symbols, which, via the process of the exam, are stripped from their original meaning and reconstituted as symbols known only to the doctor. Through the process, I question my relationship to these formerly familiar symbols and the ground beneath me falls away. In *Diagnostic I*, words such as ‘hot dog’ and ‘cupcake’ give way to sentences such as: “You are but a semblance and by no means the real thing.” The hot dog in a hearing test does not refer to an actual hot dog but its status as an equally-stressed, two-syllable concatenation. By moving from simple words to probing sentences, *Diagnostic I* uses language to move the test from an ordinary health exam into explicit questioning of one’s own autonomous being.

The performer's relationship with the prerecorded tape additionally breaks down the boundary between individual and the world at large. In an ordinary diagnostic exam, the role of the test administrator and examinee remain clear, however in *Diagnostic I*, the roles become confused over time. *Diagnostic I* begins with the examiner ordering a directive to which the examinee responds. For example,

Computer: Say sailboat
 Person: sailboat
 Computer: Say cupcake
 Person: cupcake...

While the sequence of question and response is clear at this point, the examiner/examinee's identities are already murky. The pre-recorded computer voice is a slightly pitched down version of the live performer, Deidre Huckabay's voice. The voices sound nearly identical, but with a subtle, uncanny difference. Later in the piece, the roles become increasingly conflated.

Eventually, the test taker and examinee speak in unison:

Computer/Person (simultaneously): It is restored to factory settings.

This would never happen in an ordinary test, so the identity of the piece shifts. It is no longer an authentic hearing exam, but a metacommentary on the form. Eventually, the test ends with the roles being totally confused:

Computer: Say: "This is an accident of mortality."
 Person: What did you say?
 Computer: Say: "What did you say?"
 Person: I thought you said: "what did you say?"
 Computer: I thought you said: "what did you say?"
 Computer/Person (simultaneously): what did you say?

The test, rather than clarifying a problem or revealing a diagnosis, creates a confounded and destabilized sense of personhood. Additionally, *Diagnostic 1* incorporates elements of the baseline test of *Bladerunner 2049*, which is an exam that questions the most basic tenets of personhood. What is a human? Are we human? Or are we a random set of algorithms and loops that over time have become self-aware?

In *Diagnostic 2*, a prerecorded voice performs the role of test administrator, and 4 performers play the role of test-taker. Throughout the ‘mini mental exam’, the performer and administrator roles shift in identity. Initially, a prerecorded voice asks questions to which individuals respond: “What street are we on?”; “On what floor is the room in which we now sit?” Eventually, the test-takers begin to respond in unison. Prosaic questions about location zoom out to the level of solar system and galaxy. Additionally, new patterns begin to emerge from the test-takers’ behavior. Early on in *Diagnostic 2*, the prerecorded voice asks the performers to “strike the table.” Eventually, striking the table takes a musical turn. The test takers gain agency and self-awareness that they did not have at the beginning; as they strike the table, they begin to initiate rhythmic patterns before the examiner asks them to perform any action at all. Both *Diagnostics* relate back to common healthcare forms but zoom out to dizzying scale to play with a fixed sense of self.

Hold Music relates to the theme of healthcare as it replicates the hold music one encounters while waiting on the phone with insurance companies, pharmacies, hospital billing departments, etc. One can be stuck on hold for hours, occasionally losing oneself in the audio loops. It can even be pleasant at times. But ultimately the trance gives way to rage while waiting to connect to a human. *Hold Music* makes use of loops to lock the listener into a micro-sense of time. 30

seconds of original source material are stretched to more than 10 minutes of music. As such, *Hold Music* plays with scale similarly to *Diagnostic 1* and 2; it takes a prosaic piece of ephemera and expands it to dramatic scale.

The found objects mentioned previously were deployed to take familiar encounters with the healthcare industry and use them to destabilize a sense of the individual. Much of the found text in *The Health* buttresses this concept but approaches it from the angle of a fictional cosmology. I use the found text to illustrate themes of ‘the health’ as a vital energy that flows throughout all organisms. I thought of ‘the health’ as manifesting in all matter, as an energy or potential energy, ready to be figured and refigured, not from without, but from within, and through combination with other life forms. I took inspiration from Jessica Riskin’s *The Restless Clock*, which discusses how automata and clocks spread throughout Europe from the late middle-ages through the early enlightenment. She describes an environment in which mechanized displays of humans, animals, saints, and angels populated city centers and churches throughout Europe. As these elaborate displays came to prominence, the reigning religious world view saw these automata as literally alive. “The automaton icons...confronted their viewers in a medieval Catholic world that held no sharp distinction between the material and the spiritual, earthly and divine.”⁵¹ The icons were manifestations of God’s divine energy, not metaphors for life, but *actually alive* with clockwork mechanisms that had an agency and vitality of their own.

The presence of these automata influenced the course of philosophy and ontology. German Philosopher Gottfried Leibniz, saw clocks as agitated, restless beings. “Mechanical meant

⁵¹ Ibid. 22

forceful, restless, purposeful, sentient, perceptive. Mechanical meant lifelike and vice versa: living beings were the most mechanical things in the universe.”⁵² In this spirit, I use the words borrowed from Descartes (“animal machine”), Leibniz (“the living force”), Schelling (“world spirit”), Harvey (“the little cloud”). Earlier, I mentioned that these words appear as a mantra throughout *The Health* naming and giving dimension to ‘the health.’ To augment connection to the early formations of Renaissance naturalism, I turned to the magical correspondences of Ramos as inspiration for the *World Synthesis* sections.

Ramos and other scientific naturalists worked under a logic founded on “a universe of operative affinities” and “the cosmos of resemblances.”⁵³ He pairs real world scientific investigations with a dominant epistemology of the time, which resulted in “a magical conception of the cosmos as a place pervaded by occult and manifest forces relating its parts to one another.”⁵⁴ With *World Synthesis*, I want the ensemble to use music to conjure the forces that relate planetary motion, earthly seasons, health, and affect. Ramos’ magical correspondences synthesize these forces into a beautiful flowing network of energetic relationships. For me, this acts as a metaphor for ‘the health’ in which vital energy flows through and connects all things.

Aside from incorporating borrowed epithets and language, I also use indirect concepts. In *Panic, Motion*, I write “Slow down the motion, both life and its disease,” which refers to Leibniz’s *vis viva* equation regarding motion. Here, I equate life with motion, which equally allows for temporary flourishing, disintegration, and reintegration. In *We Are of the Health*, I similarly

⁵² Ibid. 7

⁵³ Gary Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic*, 83.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 84

evoke motion and mechanism with the line: “Life is of the dirt. The dirt is of the earthworm. The worm is of the clock, the gears and their vibration. The clock, the spring, the motion of the dirt.” These words try to draw a thread between time, mechanism, and organic matter, suggesting that they are of a piece.

In *An Energy: Reading*, I describe ‘the health’ as “an energy that exists between and through all beings. A life force possessed by no one, but shepherded, cared for.” This description of ‘the health’ is analogous to the notion of the “world spirit,” a depiction of life and vitality not encompassed by individual organisms. The idea that it can be cared for and directed allows for a notion of ‘the health’ that can update its form in response to human action, both individual and political, even as it has its own will and directedness. In some places, *The Health* makes direct intercessions with ‘the health’: “We ask to partake in the beauty and variety of the health, while being spared from its cruelty.” And also: “I ask that you find pleasure in my body. Find purpose in my body. That I may continue to grow and be expansive. That you will spare me from horrors. That my muscles won’t grow old. That my muscles won’t grow old. That you will wait, at least a little while, to find other uses for my vitality and energy.” I include attempts to curry favor with ‘the health’ as analogies to our attempts to eat the right foods, exercise, and buckle seatbelts. There are things that we can do to influence the will of ‘the health’, while at the same time remaining largely at its whim.

I have included above a partial list of found objects that support the theme and thesis of *The Health*. Some cluster loosely around the theme of healthcare. Others are more focused attempts to name and give texture to the vital energy I call ‘the health.’ Many other found objects,

however, do not fit into this category. Instead, they are included to bolster an autobiographical portrait embedded into the piece.

Autobiography

The two health diagnostic exams, the hearing test and mini mental exam, are both drawn from my experience trying to diagnose a chronic illness. Indeed, everything from concept to the initial musical material is rooted in my experience with chronic illness which formed the generating impulse for the work. This is not to say that *The Health* is *about* my experience. Rather, it set the groundwork for a research agenda, the development of a worldview, and a direction for musical materials. As the piece grew, I moved further afield from my own experience, trying to generalize and abstract it. The arc of the piece's development moved from "my body is frail" to "every body is frail".

The section titled *Announcements* features two short stories drawn from my own life. One is an account of waiting in line at a Whole Foods, in which a man purchases a large quantity of chicken and yoghurt. In this story, I also talk about my exercise routine and memories of the food pyramid as a child. The other story recounts an experience watching a nature program on TV with my daughter. The exact program is fictionalized. In *The Health* we watch a cheetah kill a zebra, but in reality, we watched a baby bird get stuck to an accumulating mass of oozing seed pods that bound the bird's wings until it died. She cried and I tried to console her. While details differ, the essence of the story is the same; I try to help my daughter feel OK about the brutality of nature and fail to do so.

World Synthesis asks each performer to “find one image or sensation that inspires a strong connection to sound, melody, or micro-chord progression.” In rehearsal for these sections, we each discussed a sensation/memory that would guide our performance. While explicit autobiography was not telegraphed through the sound, it centered the improvisations on repeated, vivid loops that tried to communicate something unspoken. This section also included seasonal-item themed projections. I included a stock photo of an orange hat that I have worn for 5 years.

In addition to these large, looming pieces of autobiography, smaller or more discrete elements filter into *The Health* as well. As mentioned earlier, *Diagnostic 1* borrows from my resume. I reference other music that I have made. The phrase “a warm breeze blows over the interstate” which appears in *Diagnostic 1* was drawn from *High Quality Final Days*.⁵⁵ *Diagnostic 1* uses a recorded drone from my piece *Detritivore*, which Deidre Huckabay, Andrew Tham, Bill Frisch and I performed in 2014. In *We Are of The Health*, I write “In the health, I like my friends.” *I Like My Friends* is the title of Mocrep’s 2019 album. *Hold Music* comes from my experience of listening to hours of Walgreen’s hold music in my life. *Panic, Motion* includes the names of a variety of medicines I have taken.

This is not an exhaustive list of autobiographical details include in *The Health*, but hopefully it is enough to demonstrate that autobiography is a core element of the work at both higher formal levels and at the level of surface detail. Autobiography and thesis/concept are the largest networks of found objects included in *The Health*, but I did not limit myself to those categories. I included many which cannot be accounted for in these tidy categories.

⁵⁵ Sam Scranton, “*High Quality Final Days*,” Parlour Tapes+ 12, 2018, Cassette.

Debris

There are many, many found objects in *The Health* that make themselves felt as points of departure from the main themes. Some may tie in autobiographically or conceptually but mostly filter in as a residue, a kind of pop culture debris drawn from the world around me. They represent an intuitive approach to material gathering that cannot be fully accounted for. *Demo Day* is a song about the show *Fixer Upper*, a home improvement reality show. In every episode, Chip Gaines, who renovates the homes, gears up for “demo day,” or demolition day. He loves to destroy old houses. The show presents passé interior decorating styles as objects of objectively bad taste that must be destroyed and replaced. When it is time to rip up the old interiors, Chip giddily exclaims his excitement for demo day. This thrill of destruction and the pleasure brought on by the ‘new’ resonates with my ideas about *The Health* as a force of creative destruction. *The Health* repurposes the old and dying as new sources of life and energy. Though this connection is never made explicitly. It is left as a dangling suggestion. The listener is left to square a song about home renovation with a ceremony about health.

Additionally, *Demo Day* includes power chords as a harmonic found object foundation upon which the guitar accompaniment is built. Power chords are a readily identifiable feature of heavy-riffing guitar music, uncharacteristic of the rest of the work. It is the only section where the guitar is featured (though the bass guitar plays at the beginning and the end). As such, the guitar itself appears as a found object because it is never integrated into the ensemble. Its presence is an anomaly. This section stands out from the rest in theme, musical material, and instrumentation. This section represents the limit of coherence in *The Health*. I wonder if it fits.

It tests the elasticity of the piece, temporarily eliciting a moment of alienation from the experience of the work. It sets the content of the piece at a remove and provides a moment for reflecting on the continuity of the whole.

The Health incorporates still other found objects that are complete throw-aways: bank mission statements, lists of common English words, and others like phrases such as “Operate a fast-paced stamping machine to meet and exceed production outputs,” the source of which I do not remember. Trying to draw a coherent through-line to connect all the content is not possible. There are many loose ends that cannot be tidily wrapped into clear conversation with thematic material in *The Health*. This is both an acquisitive bad habit—as I cannot help but bring in new material that brings pleasure and resonates personally and intuitively—and a compositional strategy. My favorite art spills beyond itself and its container. It is sloppy, not out of uncaring or lack of discipline, but from joy and a desire to exhaust all possible connections. It is a broken kaleidoscope. Rather than make a crisp and precise artistic statement, it creates a multiplicity of images that refract, moving further and further from a sensible center. It is ambitious and unwieldy; it defies concise analysis. It attempts to make an exhaustive statement and achieves exhaustion by breaking coherence. As such, found objects that break from the concept and autobiographical elements of *The Health* are important to convey scope. I want the piece to feel abundant. I want to send the audience home with little plastic containers of leftovers.

The three conceptual categories of found objects—thesis, autobiography, and debris—help to bring the disparate materials of *The Health* into focus. Whereas the borrowed form of the Mass acts as a structural armature to unite *The Health*'s many formal found objects, the three

conceptual categories bring the content of the work together into a network of significance and meaning. These are but two strategies that I employ to join varied found objects together into a consistent compositional voice. In the next section, I will discuss a set of compositional tactics that I employ to further increase unity between musical materials of *The Health*.

ELIDING THE FOUND OBJECT EDGES

In *The Health*, the sheer number of found objects and prefabricated materials from varied sources creates a challenge for continuity. While some polystylist composers use friction between found musical objects as the material of their work, I want to ensure that the many objects of the piece speak with a singular voice. One of the major challenges of *The Health* was to make sure that the piece acts as a unified whole, while also leaving room for the found objects to be identified as such. Therefore, I work carefully to achieve a balance of continuity and discontinuity.

Concept and large-scale ceremonial form are the main high-level guiding principles I use to elicit continuity between sections in *The Health*. At a scale native to the musical material itself, I employ consistent musical development techniques to unite the found objects. In the visual art context, we can recall an artist's use of art media like paint, ceramic, fabric to physically cover or blend together the objects into a unified work. Indeed, the artist's hand and signature mark-making technique or color palette emphasize intervention into the found objects, infusing them with a single authorial voice. Similarly, I intervene with my own tastes and predilections. Even as the materials come from far-flung realms, many sections develop musically using nearly identical techniques. The consistent deployment of development techniques helps to create a

uniform voice, no matter the musical material to which it is applied. Throughout *The Health*, I use loops and extended repetition to develop musical material. I also employ a consistent approach to modal harmony and drone, which unites the musical material harmonically. Furthermore, instrumentation, amplification, tempo, space, and affect all thread the varying found objects into a coherent tapestry.

REPITITION, LOOPS

At the largest formal scales, repetition unites each subsection into a consistent and even form. *The Health* is divided into four parts, each of which follow a basic pattern. Each part contains 4 subsections (4+ in the final section): a solo, a large group performance, a reading, and modal group improvisation. In each of the four parts, one subsection is less music and more ‘action’ or ‘theatre.’ Each of the four parts is roughly similar in length. The large-scale groupings pull the smaller found object forms into larger forms that project similarity despite the varied nature of their content. This large-scale repetition smooths the material into uniform blocks. Repetition and Loops operate at smaller formal scales as well.

While the musical material in *The Health* changes dramatically from section to section, each of them uses a shared method for creating and iterating on patterns. The consistent recourse to loops and repetition as a development strategy creates a resonance between sections. In the below excerpt of *Demo Day*, one can see that the piece begins with direct repetition of an ascending scalar pattern. The scalar pattern itself contains within it lower-level repetition—four whole steps followed by a half step. Without accompaniment, the pattern is ambiguous; is it a synthetic quasi-Lydian scale, or is it a modulating sequence? Either way, it contains an open repetition that

quietly moves away from its point of origin. In the pattern's 3rd and 4th iteration, the guitar accompaniment changes. The 3rd iteration harmonizes the melody with power chords outlining a circle-of-fifths pattern. The 4th iteration makes use of similar bass motion but breaks from the circle-of-fifths pattern with a surprise chromatic arrival via tritone movement in the bass. When the 5th iteration begins, the melodic pattern breaks the larger scalar pattern into smaller blocks to create motion and difference. The piece slowly moves far afield from what, in the beginning, appears to be stable repetition.

$\text{♩} = 70$

mf

Voice

Some-thing out of no-thing, new con-struct-ion whipped from air. No-thing out of some-thing, where'd it

Guitar

*tune VI string to D:
Dropped D*

mf

7

Voice

go?Where ea-gles dare. From be-neath a snow drift, tramp-led pack of cig-a-rettes.

Gtr.

13

Voice

Home in my a-part-ment I leave o-pen cab-i-nets. Warmth and va-por tell the o-thers,

Gtr.

64

Figure 15: Excerpt from *Demo Day*

Panic, Motion also begins with a phrase that contains subphrases that iterate, recombine, and grow to form new patterns.

The image shows a musical score for voice in 9/8 time, with a tempo marking of ♩=60. The score is divided into five systems, each with a measure number (1, 5, 9, 12, 16) at the beginning. The lyrics are: "Ro-bi-tus-sin, ty... len - ol... slow... down the change, pre-vent the fall. Bro-ken arm, bro - ken mind, bron - - chi - tis, cold, and chro-nic lyme. The health, you are the pa-nic of the world. Mel-low sun, mel - low breeze, slow down the mo-tion both life and its dis-ease... The moon in-side the o-cean, me-cla". The score is annotated with colored boxes: red, green, blue, and purple. The first system (measures 1-3) has a red box around the first phrase, a green box around the second, and a blue box around the third. The second system (measures 4-6) has a blue box around the first phrase, a red box around the second, and a green box around the third. The third system (measures 7-9) has a green box around the first phrase, a blue box around the second, a purple box around the third, and a blue box around the fourth. The fourth system (measures 10-12) has a blue box around the first phrase, a red box around the second, and a green box around the third. The fifth system (measures 13-15) has a green box around the first phrase, a blue box around the second, and a purple box around the third.

Figure 16: Excerpt from *Panic, Motion*

I've broken down the opening phrase that concludes with the first fermata into three subphrases (red, green, and blue). This pattern repeats a second time unaltered. The third phrase begins with a new phrase (purple) that is a recombination of a subsegment of the green phrase. The fourth phrase picks up the original pattern again. But shortly after, a new variation on the blue phrase emerges, which recalls the patterning, though transposed, of the earlier purple phrase. Again, loops beget smaller loops to be recombined and reformed in an ad hoc generative process.

Diagnostic 1 is based on text, rather than musical loops but employs similar development strategies. The opening repeats the following text 3 times.

Computer: Say sailboat
 Person: sailboat
 Computer: Say cupcake
 Person: cupcake

Computer: Say altitude
 Person: altitude
 Computer: Say interstate
 Person: interstate
 /////
 Computer: Say toy car
 Person: toy car
 Computer: Say cell phone
 Person: cell phone
 Computer: Say hot dog
 Person: hot dog
 Computer: Say all alone
 Person: all alone
 /////
 Computer: Say mattress
 Person: mattress
 Computer: Say feather
 Person: feather
 Computer: Say actress
 Person: actress
 Computer: Say weather
 Person: weather

Within this macro ‘repeated pattern’ are smaller rhyme schemes that constitute micropatterns.

The macropattern contains 3 groupings of 4 words (separated above by /////
). The first 2 subgroups of 4 words rhyme the 2nd and 4th words. In the 3rd group, the 1st and 3rd words rhyme, and the 2nd and 4th words rhyme. The macro-pattern is perfectly stable, since it is repeated verbatim, but within it are imperfect variations that suggest a way out. Again, this pattern is broken, altered, abandoned, reshuffled with new patterns, and ultimately moves far from its origin.

These strategies play out all over *The Health*: establish a pattern that contains smaller patterns, break them up, recombine them, add new patterns, shuffle, etc. Thematically, this ties into the *Restless Clock* and “The Animal Machine”. Simple, mechanical building blocks that contain

their own vital energy combine to create complex and unwieldy organic wholes. Even if the conceptual tie-in is opaque in the performance, the iterative loops of each section are a felt, pervasive quality of the piece that ties its disparate sections together.

In addition to repeated musical development strategies. I use repeated textual material throughout. I already discussed the string of epithets, “The World Spirit, The Animal Machine, The Little Cloud, The Health”, which appears multiple times. But other phrases appear as signposts placed throughout the work. “We Are of The Health” appears throughout. Text from *Panic, Motion* appears in *Diagnostic 1*. Language from *We’re Having Fun* appears again in *Hold Music*. Some of these instances were premeditated where I planned to use repeated material in multiple section. Others were cut-and-paste collage, in which, after the completion of a section, I returned to it and pasted in repeated text to assert continuity where it did not already exist.

DRONES/MODES

Much of the harmonic material of *The Health* can be tied to modal harmony and drone. While some sections venture far from their original key sources, they are usually surrounded by stable and prolonged modal material. Below are the sections that contain harmonic content in *The*

Health. They are listed to the right of their opening modes.

Eb (Lydian): Opening
 Eb (single note drone): Diagnostic 1
 C (Mixolydian): World Synthesis: Winter
 Db (Mixolydian): Panic, Motion
 C (Mixolydian (kind of)) We Are of The Health
 C (Phrygian): World Synthesis: Spring
 G (Lydian): Demo Day
 E (Mixolydian (kind of)): Diagnostic 2
 B (Dorian): World Synthesis: Summer
 D (Ionian): We’re Having Fun

Eb (Ionian): Announcements
 B (Lydian): World Synthesis: Fall
 Eb (Lydian): Hold Music

Some of the material is explicitly modal. Forming a modal core for *The Health*, each *World Synthesis* section is a modal improvisation. Since they appear in each of the 4 parts of *The Health* they assert a return to modal logic, to musical modes as a lived environment, atmosphere, and planetary motion. They are both independent, but also act as a refrain, infusing the rest of the music with a sense of stable harmonic space.

Panic, Motion takes the form of plainchant. The first half is a modal melody in Db Mixolydian over an Ab bass. This creates tension without ever leaving the mode. About halfway through the piece, the bass disappears and it resolves fully into Db Mixolydian. The piece introduces chord changes at this point, but they never leave the prevailing mode.

We Are of The Health and *Diagnostic 2* are not exactly in a mode, because neither introduces the third that could define the mode's quality. However, both use the flat 7 scale degree, and the major third is included by default in the harmonic series. *Announcements* also maintains an unchanging harmonic base that comfortably propels the spoken elements forward without drawing attention to itself.

At first glance, the other sections of *The Health* are not modal. As mentioned earlier, the material in both *Opening* and *Hold Music* is drawn from a piece of music called *Yearning for Your Love (YFYL)*. It uses functional harmony, including ii-V-I patterns to move around harmonic space.

Figure 11: Yearning for Your Love – lead sheet excerpt

But I use loops and repetition to break down the motion. In *The Health*, this material appears isolated and repeated. The harmonic motion is frozen and as such, much of it feels modal, non-functional, and drone-like. I harmonize the opening bar of (*YFYL*) in *Opening and Hold Music* as follows.

Figure 17: Excerpt from *Hold Music*

The original moves through these chords on its way to other key areas. I however repeat these two chords breaking down the harmonic motion of the original. One can hear this as vacillating between Eb maj. 7 and F maj./Eb. Or with extended repetition, the two may smear together in the listener's mind to create one sustained Eb Lydian sonority. After 8 repetitions, the piece moves on from this material, but it is long enough to establish the sense of a stable, unchanging harmony.

There is a section in *Hold Music* where the bass player solos over traditional ii-V-I style changes.

The image shows a musical score excerpt for 'Hold Music'. It consists of three staves: Prpht. (Piano Right Hand), E. Bass (Electric Bass), and a bottom staff for chords. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The time signature is 6/4. The Prpht. staff shows a sequence of chords: Bbmaj7, Cm7, Fsus7, and Bbmaj7. The E. Bass staff shows a sequence of notes: Bb, C, F, Bb. The bottom staff shows the chord symbols: Bbmaj7, Cm7, Fsus7, and Bbmaj7. The Prpht. staff has rests in the first and last measures, and the E. Bass staff has rests in the first and last measures.

Figure 18: Excerpt 2 from *Hold Music*

This references the functional harmony of the original tune but severs it from its larger role in the song's harmonic motion. The repetition and the rests on either side of the figure create a new locked pattern that isolates it from the rest. Much care has been taken to make *Hold Music* feel like a queue of stable tonal areas rather than a piece with a long, dramatic harmonic sweep.

Another piece that escapes modal logic is the song *We're Having Fun*. It feels more like a pop song than anything else in the piece. It outlines a song form with verses and a bridge that visits chromatic key areas. It represents a departure from the modal theme of *The Health*. However, it contains elements of chant and drone that paper over the boundaries, allowing it to converse with other sections of the piece.

more spoken than sung
rhythms should be that of
natural speech.

mf

Voice

Li-ter-al-ly the most un-im-ag-in-able thing in the world

II, III
top line on III string
fermatas = the length of one
full draw of the bow

sustain underneath the text, try to maintain bow-length phrasing

Violoncello

mf

Figure 19: Excerpt from *We're Having Fun*

Each section of *We're Having Fun* returns to an oscillating plagal figuration over a sustained D in the cello. The verses blend into the figuration. The song form could be outlined as follows:

A (verse): DRONE
 B (chorus): DEPARTURE
 A (verse): DRONE
 B (chorus): DEPARTURE
 C (bridge): DRAMATIC DEPARTURE
 A (verse): DRONE

Even while it departs from the drone, it consistently returns to and ultimately reaffirms the drone.

Demo Day is another song that displaces modal logic but begins with them as a point of departure. As mentioned earlier, the song begins with a loop that puts forth a quasi-modal logic. It begins to outline a G Lydian scale. The first seven notes put the piece in familiar modal territory. The appearance of the G# signals that the mode has been broken, and that either the piece is modulating or that the music employs a synthetic scale.

$\text{♩} = 70$
 Voice *mf*
 Some-thing out of no-thing, new con-struc-tion whipped from air. No-thing out of some-thing, where'd it
 Guitar *mf*
 tune VI string to D:
 Dropped D

Figure 14: Excerpt from *Demo Day*

Ultimately, the harmonic sequences and bold chromaticism of this section make it the most harmonically adventurous of *The Health*. It defies the reigning logic of the piece. The relentlessly scalar melodies give it a consistency that relate back to modal logic, while letting it move to distant territory. This piece represents a balancing act that defines the entire challenge of *The Health* and the use of assemblage techniques; how can each found object retain its own identity while also submitting to a governing logic of the whole?

ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

I have employed many other continuity strategies that do not merit their own deep analysis but bear mentioning. Consistent tempo and use of space are salient features of *The Health*. Overall, *The Health* has a relatively heavy, pesante tempo and affect. All but one section has a quarter note tempo between 48 and 70. Sung and spoken phrases include pauses between them that feel heavy and ponderous. The heavy air is congruous with the theme of a church service or Mass-like ceremony. It infuses each of the sections with a united sense of purpose and weight.

Additionally, uniform instrumentation and amplification bind each section together. The ensemble is equal parts synthesizer, amplified acoustic instruments, and amplified voices. While

the balance shifts from piece to piece—*We're Having Fun* and *Demo Day* are fully amplified acoustic solos, *Diagnostic 2* is mostly prerecorded synthesizers—the uniform amplification and frequent blend of synthesizers and amplified acoustic instruments gives *The Health* a consistent, if shifting, sound world.

Finally, *The Health* maintains a consistent authorial voice and affect present in both music and text throughout. This may be difficult to pin down, but *The Health* tries to be fun and funny in the same breath as it is sad and reflective. This is achieved by blending found objects, absurd real-world referents, and unpoetic objects with reflections on the frailty of human life and the impossible scale of our hostile universe. In my experience, much art that tries to conjure a heavy, introspective air about the punishing human condition shies away from concrete ‘real world’ referents. This art often aims for universal tragic sentiments. *The Health*, on the other hand, combines concrete, absurd, real world objects with cosmic, human tragedy. *Panic, Motion* begins “Robitussin, Tylenol, slow down the change, prevent the fall.” It is sung in a somber tone. In the performance, I noticed that the beginning of the line “Robitussin, Tylenol” gets a laugh. I think it is because of the dissonance between the plainchant atmosphere and the modern-day concrete drugstore referents. They are boldly unpoetic in a work that projects a somber mood. The second part of the line “slow down the change, prevent the fall” pulls it back into a more familiar poetic and reflective space. I employ this device musically and textually throughout. *Hold Music* is itself an unpoetic object—literal hold music. It contains within it a broken bass solo that immediately calls attention to itself. For me, it is both fun and funny. But it is also surrounded by alienated and bare percussion, synth drones, and stilted repetitive patterns. The two affects are bound together. The emptied quality of the alienated and bare percussion is contingent on the

strength and clarity of the real-world referent ‘bass solo.’ They are two sides of the same coin. Similarly, *Announcements* moves textually between humor and lament. It begins as a humorous account of a weight trainer making a large grocery purchase consisting of only two items: chicken and plain yoghurt. But the text quickly turns toward heavier themes.

“I pray to The Health. I ask that, if I eat a perfect diet of just chicken and just yoghurt, you will grant me strength and youth. I ask that you find pleasure in my body. Find purpose in my body. That I may continue to grow and be expansive. That you will spare me from horrors. That my muscles won’t grow old. That my muscles won’t grow old.”

This affect, that plays on the edge of humor and sadness, is present throughout in both musical and textual material. The sad/funny affect is a characteristic feature of the authorial voice of *The Health* and acts as a glue between materials no matter the found object source.

Affect, loop and repetition-based development, modal harmony, drone, instrumentation, and amplification all work together to infuse the found objects of *The Health* with a high degree of consistency. As such, the material has a dual pull. In one direction, the objects yearn toward the world, toward common experiential categories and musical references. And in the other direction, they reach inward toward a unified artistic fiction, a religious ceremony based on a cosmology of ‘the health.’

CONCLUSION

Ideally, I have made a coherent and useful argument that makes sense of *The Health* as an assemblage of found objects. I have described it as such because I believe it best accounts for the working methods and compositional strategies that yielded its final form. I worked with the material of my life and encounters with the world around me. I let this material accumulate freely and suggest structures, shapes, and associations. Slowly, the piece emerged; equal parts skill, luck, and magic. Beyond my own intentions and attempts to wrangle musical material, there exist unquantifiable dangling threads yet unmentioned that shaped *The Health*. At the beginning of this paper, I mentioned how much *The Health* became the piece that it did not because of choices and decisions that I actively made, but out of friction with the outside world. I would like to enumerate a few factors outside of myself that molded *The Health's* final form.

Foremost on this list, is my ongoing collaboration and friendships with the members of Mocreep. I wrote *Demo Day* for Andrew Tham after hearing his song “*Battle of the Bands Registration is Open*”⁵⁶ on an album he wrote with The Neo-futurists called “*Attack of the Fellowship of the Battle of the Bands*.” His piece uses the extremes of his vocal range. It is funny and direct. I wanted to write a song for Andrew that mixed plainspoken language and the vulnerabilities at the edges of his vocal range. With *Panic, Motion* I was inspired by a karaoke performance of Chris Wood’s in which he sang the Carpenter’s *Superstar* played back at 75% speed. It blew my mind, and I used the range and pacing as a template. Also, in *Panic, Motion*, I incorporate a pulsing bass line because Chris felt that the rhythm would help ground him as he sung. The instrumental

⁵⁶ “Battle of the Bands registration is OPEN,” track 1 on The Neo-Futurists, “*Attack of the Fellowship of the Battle of the Bands*”, 2021, streaming audio. Accessed February 21, 2023. Bandcamp.

section of that song exists because Molly, my partner, thought that the plainchant should emerge into something new, but related. She was right, and that's my favorite part of the whole piece. Other inspiration comes not from pinpointable moments but from long-term friendship and collaboration. I knew Deidre Huckabay's performance focus and voice would make *Diagnostic I* feel like a vivid dream. Deidre has performed a lot of text that I've written including a piece from 2014 called *DETRITIVORE* and a guided meditation that I wrote for the release party of my album *High Quality Final Days* in 2018. I pictured Deidre performing *Diagnostic I* as I wrote it.

The bass solo in *Hold Music* exists because I knew that Zach Moore would "lay it down," and it inspired me to include a feature section in the piece. I wrote *We're Having Fun* for Lia because I could picture the exact energy she would bring to the stage. I picked the key of the song based on the range of her speaking voice. I play music in a band called *Honestly Same* with Zach Moore (ZM), Lia Kohl, Zach Good (ZG), and Mabel Kwan. We play a blend of improvised/ambient music that informs the *World Synthesis* sections. Because Lia, ZG, and I have a shared improvisational language, this music came together instantly in rehearsal. This is to say nothing of the profound, unknowable ways, in which mutual friendship and influence manifest without consciousness in creative choices.

I also want to mention the importance of concrete collaboration and critical feedback. Deidre Huckabay, Chris Wood, Andrew Tham, and I worked together on costume and video ideas that set the tone for the whole piece. We talked about American funeral parlors as a palette and design theme for the costumes. Deidre Huckabay ran with the ideas, took them to places we could not imagine ourselves and handmade all of the clothes. We talked about projected ghosts

and magic. We projected video onto tulle, which resulted in the black tulle video scrims that we used in the performance. Molly Roth had also used video and tulle projections in a previous iteration of *boundarymind*. Deidre had previously used fans to animate fabric in their piece *Words For Words From*.⁵⁷ The four of us devised a set of actions together. Chris and Andrew recorded them and mocked them up in a video version. These became the *Magic Moment* of *The Health*. Additionally, after the first in-progress showing of *The Health* in February 2020, Mocrepe and I had a long debrief (which also included Jenna Lyle and Ryan Zerna) about what worked and what did not in that show. It dramatically changed the shape that the final piece took.

Additionally, the global COVID-19 pandemic dramatically shaped the piece. I began *The Health* before the pandemic. At that point, it was going to be, I think, very silly. I planned to involve a lot more New Age health conspiracy theory. But when the pandemic hit and New Age health conspiracy theory flowed readily amongst other dangerous misinformation, it did not seem fun or interesting to include those elements anymore. Some may notice that a piece called *The Health* written during a pandemic contains a conspicuous lack of reference to COVID-19. Instead of direct inclusion in the piece, it acts as a silent companion in tone. As the world worked its way through the devastation of the pandemic, I felt a sense of gravity, heaviness, isolation, that changed the texture of the piece.

In the end, all works of art are a blend of artist intention, real world friction/energy/artistic influence, collaboration, performance practices, and other incalculable influences. My work is not unusual in this regard. Indeed, *The Health* is not only a product of intentional construction

⁵⁷ Diedre Huckabay, Jessica Anne, Mabel Kwan, Jasmine Lupe Mendoza, Depaul University, Chicago, IL, October 1, 2021.

and artistic decision making, but also, equal parts accidental encounter with the world, with other artistic forms, and with dead-end versions of itself. For me, the process of making this piece is hard to fully articulate. It recalls an architectural palimpsest, a building “being ripped down and built up at the same time.”⁵⁸ Encounters with the world have left their physical imprint on the final form. Art objects, garbage, art turned into garbage, garbage reconstituted into new artistic forms, paint, glue, putrefaction, disintegration, recombination. This is the process of *The Health* but also the vital energy of ‘the health.’ To quote myself quoting The Misfits, quoting a western, quoting Shakespeare.

“Something out of nothing, new construction whipped from air. Nothing out of something, where’d it go? Where eagles dare.”

⁵⁸ Smithson, Robert. “Insert Robert Smithson - Hotel Palenque 1969-1972”, Parkett, Vol.43, 1995: 3.

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