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Gender construction and American 'Free Folk' music(s)

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0 Introduction

What is dangerous about this conception of thinking, according to Bergson, is precisely the privilege it accords to solutions to the detriment of problems, the denial of the power of *problems as problems*. A problem defines a field of possible experience, it sets out the meaning of the questions one can ask and prefigures the cases of its solution. Answers necessarily derive from the form of the problem, but the problem is not given in advance; it must be constituted. The freedom of thinking thus consists in the elaboration of problematic fields, and it depends on a critical attitude towards what is given, on our ability to experiment, to open up the limits of that which presents itself as necessary.¹
(Paola Marrati)

My diploma thesis is an exploratory attempt at mapping and tracing an interconnected set of heterogeneous music scenes (conceptualized as primarily constituted through their social relations) and the role of gender (conceptualized as multiply relational) through the conduct and analysis of interviews. Its main question thus has two parts: How can this field of research, of ‘psychedelic’, often improvised underground music be conceptualized, and what role does gender play therein? But these two parts are not entirely distinct, as gender in this wider sense is considered intrinsic (but not essentially so) to these social relations. Heterogeneous as these scenes are, it is to be expected that no definite conclusion about *the* role or place of gender in these scenes can be drawn; however, that very heterogeneity and inconclusiveness can be anticipated, even assumed hypothetically, feeding (into) the thesis’s exploratory approach.

In chapter 1, I will outline my own access to and interest in the musical and academic fields relevant to this thesis. This is an attempt at making my own project more easily traceable.

In chapter 2, I will present the thesis’s theoretical framework, drawing on philosophical models that attempt to handle that which is dynamic and heterogeneous as well as on anti-essentialist concepts of gender.

In chapter 3, I will first discuss useful concepts of music ‘scenes’ (a dangerous but redeemable term) and then introduce the actual field of research.

In chapter 4, I will present methodological literature on qualitative interviews and their analysis. My own practice will be described along these texts’ lines.

In chapter 5, I will analyze the material gathered in these interviews by discussing, comparing and connecting interviewees’ narrations.

¹ Marrati, Paola: Time and Affects. Deleuze on Gender and Sexual Difference, in: *Australian Feminist Studies* 21, 51 (2006), 313. (Emphasis in the original text.)

In chapter 6, I will look back at this text and the project as a whole, summarizing and discussing important aspects to be taken from my analysis and hinting at potential future work in these fields.

1 Impetus

I don't know Johnny Rotten, but I'm sure he puts as much blood and sweat into what he does as Sigmund Freud did.²
(Iggy Pop)

I consider my diploma thesis a manifestation, even culmination of some of the most involving interests I have been developing throughout my adult life. In this chapter, I will trace my own access to the musics whose production this paper's research question interrogates. I will then connect these interests, or emphasize their connections, to my academic trajectories and formulate some basic thoughts feeding into the project documented here.

1.1 Listening

My interest in music connected to the fields of research mapped in this paper first manifested around 2004, the year I started my studies in *Geschichte* (history) and *Politikwissenschaft* (political science). Scottish band Mogwai, themselves no strangers to noisy, 'psychedelic' excursions, were and are fans (and collaborators) of Philadelphia-based band Bardo Pond³, whose own sound I was – at that point – not entirely sure whether to feel attracted to or somewhat repulsed by. It was my Mogwai fandom that had gotten me interested in Bardo Pond's music, and my fascination grew and led to the purchase of *Lapsed* (1997). A while later, I bought the then-recent album *On The Ellipse* (2003), a very dear and special album to me to this day; by that point, I had already found out about (but not yet heard) *4/23/03* (2004), Bardo Pond's collaborative album with Tom Carter of Texan band Charalambides, which had received an appetite-whetting 12/12 score on the (now inactive?) *fakejazz* website⁴. The then most recent Charalambides album, *Joy Shapes* (2004), was their second for Kranky

² Punk Rock Comes to Canada. Gzowski interviews Iggy Pop. Broadcast Date: March 11, 1977, in: *CBC Digital Archives*. http://archives.cbc.ca/arts_entertainment/music/topics/102-761/. Last accessed: December 30, 2011.

³ For example, the website of Matador Records, a label that has released albums by both bands, mentions (in an entry from April 24, 2000) that Mogwai "like to consider themselves Bardo's biggest fans" (Bardo Pond, in: *Matador Records*, http://www.matadorrecords.com/bardo_pond/. Last accessed: September 2, 2011); Bardo Pond had just played the All Tomorrow's Parties festival in Camber Sands, UK, curated by Mogwai. For some further words on the connections between Bardo Pond and Mogwai, see Powell, Michael C.: "Artist Profile: Bardo Pond", in: *ALTERED ZONES* (May 24, 2011). <http://alteredzones.com/posts/1398/artist-profile-bardo-pond/>. Last accessed: June 6, 2011.

⁴ cf. Hammond, Sean: Bardo Pond + Tom Carter - 4/23/03, in: *fakejazz.com* (May 7, 2004). <http://www.fakejazz.com/reviews/2004/bardopondcarter.shtml>. Last accessed: May 25, 2011.

Records⁵, a label I was somewhat familiar with mostly through its affiliation with Godspeed You! Black Emperor, another band central to my listening habits around the start of my studies. Unlike many of these newly discovered groups' more limited releases, Kranky albums were and are relatively easy to get ahold of in Vienna, a city I had moved to in early 2004 and that, in comparison to my hometown of Dornbirn, seemed to offer amazing opportunities in terms of record shopping.

Thus, I purchased *Joy Shapes* at Substance, a nearby independent store, without having actually *heard* any of Charalambides's music. These recordings, released by the trio line-up of Christina Carter, Tom Carter and Heather Leigh Murray, were of a style almost alien to me, and of an incredible intensity. I may not have loved them immediately – whereas nowadays, this is one of my very favorite sonic artefacts – but they certainly helped give me an idea of what was possible in terms of unconventional sounds and structures. What at first seemed fascinatingly strange went on to become a – very unique – example of the creation of dense atmospheres, of intensities, of musical freedoms I would be looking for.

Further discoveries followed, among them the music of Fursaxa (Tara Burke's *nom de plume*), who had worked with members of Bardo Pond and released on the same label, ATP Recordings⁶. It was mainly through use of the Internet that I found out about more and more artists from these scenes that seemed to be connected through labels, festivals, collaborations, joint touring, musical coverage or, obviously (but, for this thesis, not necessarily crucially), musical style. Websites like the aforementioned *fakejazz*, *Brainwashed*⁷, *Tiny Mix Tapes*⁸ or *Pitchfork*⁹, which was at that time developing into the much-discussed and -influential entity it is today, served to point me towards further discoveries that I suppose I would then (and maybe even nowadays) have tagged as 'psychedelic', itself a very vague term and heterogeneously used concept. *Tiny Mix Tapes'* glowing review of Islaja's *Palaa Aurinkoon*¹⁰ probably helped point me towards related musical activities in Finland.

⁵ For more information on Kranky Records' discography, including albums by Charalambides and the band's two constant members, Christina and Tom Carter, visit the label's website: <http://www.kranky.net/>. Last accessed: January 2, 2012.

⁶ For the label's artist roster and discography, see its website: <http://www.atpfestival.com/recordings.php>. Last accessed: January 2, 2012.

⁷ *Brainwashed*. <http://www.brainwashed.com/>. Last accessed: May 25, 2011.

⁸ *Tiny Mix Tapes*. <http://www.tinymixtapes.com/>. Last accessed: May 25, 2011.

⁹ *Pitchfork*. <http://pitchfork.com/>. Last accessed: May 25, 2011.

¹⁰ Kobak, S.: Islaja – Palaa Aurinkoon, in: *Tiny Mix Tapes*. <http://www.tinymixtapes.com/music-review/islaja-palaa-aurinkoon>. Last accessed: May 25, 2011. (The review date is incorrectly listed on the website's search page as December 14, 2006; it must have been posted far earlier.)

At the time I was participating in discussions in the music section of Radiohead fansite *At Ease*'s message board¹¹. While only few users seemed interested in these then-recent psychedelic underground musics around early 2005, the number appeared to grow, and by the end of 2006 and into 2007, what could almost be considered a small community within the community followed developments in these fields. For my own taste / listening habit trajectory, the Radiohead connection appears obvious: I had been an enthusiastic Radiohead listener since about 2001, while Radiohead themselves were influenced by, connected to or even could be considered gateway drugs to more decidedly unusual or experimental musics, especially the 'intelligent dance music' of labels like Warp Records or the 'post-rock' associated with bands like the aforementioned Mogwai, Godspeed You! Black Emperor (and the label most associated with that band, Montreal's Constellation Records) or Sigur Rós. Additionally, in retrospect, a band like Mercury Rev – whom I have been listening to regularly and passionately since around 2001 – with its early feedback-heavy psychedelic noise pop and connections to experimental musicians from earlier generations like Tony Conrad or Alan Vega now seems much closer, much more related to this thesis's field of research than it might have from my point of view a few years ago.

However, it would be dangerous to proclaim a linear taste development in terms of affect or sound. More importantly, the information available through these diverse Internet sources opened up whole (seemingly) new channels, even got me into contact with similarly interested people who would go on to become friends of mine. At a point when the number of message board users interested in these artists was still relatively small, I found out about the Terrastock festival's sixth edition, to be held in Providence, Rhode Island, in April 2006¹²: its line-up featured Bardo Pond, Charalambides and Fursaxa as well as the likes of Black Forest / Black Sea (including festival director Jeffrey Alexander), Cul de Sac, Larkin Grimm, Lightning Bolt, MV & EE with the Bummer Road, Jack Rose, Spires That In The Sunset Rise, Urdog (whose last ever concert this was going to be) and Windy & Carl; these US-based acts were joined by international artists like Avarus and Kemiälliset Ystävät from Finland, Brothers Of The Occult Sisterhood from Australia, Sharron Kraus and Thought Forms from England, or Ghost from Japan.

¹¹ music - ateseweb.com. <http://board.ateseweb.com//index.php?showforum=44>. Last accessed: May 25, 2011. This is the most recent incarnation of the message board, which has undergone various changes and database losses / reduction over time.

¹² For information on Terrastock 6, see the *Terrascope* website's section thereon: <http://www.terrascope.co.uk/TerrastockPages/terrastock6DP.html>. Last accessed: January 2, 2012.

At the festival, I met up with a fellow *At Ease* user, who would, approximately eight months later, also be one of several friends I shared a chalet with at a British festival (ATP: The Nightmare Before Christmas, curated by Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore¹³). All members of the same message board (beyond the four of us, various other online friends attended), we were facing difficult decisions when choosing from the festival's program, a dense selection of artists filling a timetable that saw many painful clashes take place between sets we would have liked to attend and enjoy. With Terrastock 6, the festival shared Bardo Pond, Charalambides, Fursaxa, Major Stars and MV & EE with the Bummer Road. Other artists included Double Leopards, Inca Ore, Leslie Keffer, Magik Markers, No-Neck Blues Band, Six Organs of Admittance, The Skaters, Sunburned Hand Of The Man, Sun City Girls, Wolf Eyes and Wooden Wand. Sonic Youth themselves, Iggy and The Stooges and Gang Of Four were among the festival's better-known acts. Islaja was present as were The Dead C from New Zealand, Nurse With Wound and Richard Youngs (representing different strands of the British experimental underground) as well as Taurpis Tula: the latter was a band consisting of former Charalambides member Heather Leigh Murray, Scottish writer David Keenan and drummer Alex Neilson. Murray and Keenan run the Glasgow-based record store and mailorder service *Volcanic Tongue*¹⁴, which not too long before Terrastock had started to become a particularly important gatekeeper for my musical journeys, supplying me with releases, some of them limited edition CD-Rs, from Avarus, Charalambides, Islaja and others. I myself have tended to avoid illegal downloading but, no doubt, benefited from others' downloading practice and the broad knowledge engendered thereby. As a result, I usually did not get to hear releases limited to vinyl until my purchase of a USB turntable in late 2008. However, my orders from Volcanic Tongue and other online stores at least granted me access to music that was often released in very limited quantities, even coming with handmade artwork, often on CD-R or cassette tape.

These festivals and the connections and communication developed at and in relation to them probably played a crucial role in my interests' development – and helped shape my perceptions of what would become my field of research: eight of my interviewees played at / were involved in Terrastock in one way or another, (at least) ten played at Moore's ATP.

¹³ For information on Thurston Moore's edition of ATP, see the All Tomorrow's Parties website's section thereon: <http://www.atpfestival.com/events/nightmare2006.php>. Last accessed: January 2, 2012.

¹⁴ *Volcanic Tongue*. <http://www.volcanictongue.com/>. Last accessed: January 27, 2012.

1.2 Studying

Parallel to my growing exposure to these artists and their work, my own approach towards my main disciplines at university increasingly became shaped by interests in cultural studies and gender studies, both of which were practiced and encouraged by lecturers in either of these main disciplines. I had chosen the interdisciplinary module *Kulturwissenschaften* / Cultural Studies as an elective field of concentration for my history studies. Often enough, information on and work in cultural studies and gender studies intersected. Anti-essentialism, awareness of contingency, a decidedly political outlook (already one of the main basic elements to be taken from my *Politikwissenschaft* studies) and interdisciplinarity were encouraged. I encountered the work of writers like Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler, Stuart Hall, Joan W. Scott and Raymond Williams during this period. While my familiarity with their writings varies, their ideas certainly differed from anything I had been aware of before starting my studies. It is difficult to properly trace these developments. However, it seems the newly encountered intellectual tendencies, in combination with and inseparable from general values and viewpoints relating to decidedly political and critical as well as historicity-aware approaches, impacted on my own perception of and approach to these scenes in numerous ways. Of relevance to this particular paper might be a short exchange (via private message on the aforementioned Radiohead message board) I had with the friend I met at Terrastock on the presence of a relatively large number of women (in comparison to other musical fields we were aware of) in these musical scenes. This was not based on any quantitative data, but rather on our knowledge of the presence of the likes of Tara Burke, Christina Carter or Heather Leigh Murray, whom we probably considered important figures therein already. Further connections were made in discussions (for example about the role of machismo in noise performances) and university papers (discussing Inca Ore's blog¹⁵ and a Hijokaidan t-shirt in papers written during my ERASMUS year in Dublin).

None of these taste- and studies-related developments were entirely linear. Emphases shifted (for example, my love for Double Leopards' studio work blossomed only relatively recently), new discoveries shed unexpected lights on familiar ideas (for

¹⁵ Inca Ore's blog used to be located at <http://www.urbanhonking.com/incaore/>; at the time of writing (June 5, 2011), it is not available.

example, my interest in Deleuzian thought only really developed starting with my purchase of *A Thousand Plateaus* in the summer of 2008), but my choice of diploma thesis topic / title was a conscious effort to combine these already somewhat intertwined strands of interest or passion and form a diploma thesis out of them: by default the most demanding endeavor of my studies up to that point. This paper attempts to harness those aspects of my studies *and* my daily interests that have been important to me – also to make use of the lack of boundaries between those. My choice of interviews as the defining tools for my approach to the field in question was not related to past passions, however. Here, a conscious effort to try and learn something new (to me), to question and, hopefully, overcome familiar limitations like shyness or hesitation about / fears of organizational aspects, and an interest in talking directly to the musicians in question was involved. Thus, my diploma thesis project, at the same time as being dedicated to its very topic, was an attempt to sum up important aspects of my life at, around and outside of university as well as one to try out practices thus far not accessed by me.

Am I, as a listener, album buyer and concert attendant able to write a suitably critical and reflective paper on this field of research? I don't think this point of view is necessarily an obstacle to the work expected from a scholarly or academic project. The writing of a fan's report, hagiography-like and devoid of critique, is an (undesirable but tempting) option when in this position. Still, I think fandom (which is undeniable in this case) and critical, complexity-aware analysis are not mutually exclusive. As someone interested – and, as I will go on to show, involved by default – in these musics while hoping to espouse decidedly political, emancipatory attitudes towards the world, I do want these scenes to be engaged with critically and honestly, because they deserve it. It is, however, all the more necessary for the researcher to make obvious her / his perspective and position in relation to the field of research.

1.3 Writing

My studies' various strands have all fed into this thesis. Still, it is the paper that is meant to close my *Politikwissenschaft* studies: its relation to said discipline may not be obvious to some at first, as it certainly is not a project you would expect (or find) among the discipline's core interests. A few points need to be brought up here:

- One aspect to be taken from my *Politikwissenschaft* studies is a tendency to consider everything, any social phenomenon, any cultural artefact, political, insofar as they all can be considered manifestations of social relations, and thus necessarily struggles, conflict, questions of emancipation, day-to-day as well as specifically set up negotiations for various forms of capital, for potentials of how to live one's life.
- Similarly, cultural studies as it developed especially in Britain is a decidedly political project.¹⁶ In some of this project's manifestations, the political may be encountered as a potential for subversion and / or empowerment in any mode of cultural production¹⁷: a reduction to these aspects is not the aim of the paper at hand. While emancipatory potential is certainly searched for, the political is there in power relations but not necessarily in predetermined, specific forms that need to be recognized and picked out. It is useful to quote Christina Lutter and Markus Reisenleitner here:

Cultural studies in its widest sense can be regarded as an intellectual practice and strategy that aims to find out how people make sense of their daily lives through and within cultural practices, how people find opportunities for individual agency within the particular economic and political structures that govern their lives, and how these can be made use of. Thus, it is crucial to investigate the mechanisms and structures that favour or open up spaces for such agency (empowerment) or, conversely, limit or forestall them (disempowerment), and, at the same time, find out how specific conditions of life can be shaped and changed. In such a view, cultural studies is always looking at specific forms and relations of power within which realities are constructed and lived, and at their – often contradictory – effects.¹⁸

- Like Lutter's and Reisenleitner's cultural studies, this paper "is consequently not looking for fixed, unchangeable elements or modules of society and their origins. Rather it is interested in social relations and their effects."¹⁹ As will be shown especially in chapter 2, the thesis is entirely constructed with dynamic relations, conceived of as political, in mind.
- Throughout my studies, I have attended numerous seminars and lectures at the Institut für Politikwissenschaft that more or less explicitly dealt with questions of gender relations, gender theory et cetera; it appears that gender theory and the

¹⁶ cf. Lutter, Christina / Reisenleitner, Markus: Introducing History (in)to Cultural Studies: Some Remarks on the Germanspeaking Context, in: *Cultural Studies* 16, 5 (2002), 613–617.

¹⁷ As suggested, for example, by Christina Lutter and Markus Reisenleitner in *Cultural Studies. Eine Einführung* (Wien 2005), 39. Lutter and Reisenleitner see this, alongside a digression from the political, as a potential problem of concentration on practices of popular culture and their readings.

¹⁸ Lutter / Reisenleitner: Introducing History (in)to Cultural Studies, 616.

¹⁹ Ibid.

politics thereof are one of the institute's specialties. This emphasizes that questions of gender, ethnicity, class and, crucially, their various intersections all can and need to be considered decidedly political. I would not want to place a barrier between a paper like this one and political scientist approaches to questions of gender equality / theory: they are in many ways part of the same project, and certainly so for me, as framed by my own studies.

- Ideas of emancipation and equality don't run counter to scholarly ideals, except where the latter manifest as ideals of immaculate (and unrealizable) neutrality. That I am stating these ideas as important for my work is, I believe, a positive step to be taken as it offers further hints at my interests and approaches. To produce knowledge, and to do so creatively, is an act that benefits from fully realizable potentials. Jeremy Gilbert, criticizing reforms in the United Kingdom that "seek to individualise and commodify the relationships which make up the process of higher education", argues that "education is a process which in truth can only ever be joyful as long as it is creative and can only be creative as long as it is collaborative."²⁰ If arts, research and other ways of producing knowledge, different as their rules may be, are conceived of in such terms, striving for the emancipatory and for the egalitarian is at least an attempt at opening possibilities, actualizing potentials for others and thus a contribution to heterogeneous and, ideally, pluralistic communities of research and creativity.

²⁰ Gilbert, Jeremy: Sharing the pain? Why the coalition's cuts agenda draws on a masochistic streak in English culture, in: *New Statesman*. Cultural Capital (December 7, 2010). <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/cultural-capital/2010/12/pain-collective-coalition-uel>. Last accessed: January 2, 2012.

2 Contingency and perspectivity: towards a minor cultural sociology of gender

The American singer Patti Smith sings the bible of the American dentist: Don't go for the root, follow the canal...²¹
(Gilles Deleuze / Félix Guattari)

Writing a diploma thesis or conducting any other type of academic / scholarly study, I am not neutral or objective in my research and writing. This is not a bad thing, but it requires self-reflexive and self-contextualizing processes of research. If I want others to be able to situate my findings and ideas, and if I want them to be able to follow up on and connect to them, I need to give an idea of 'where I am coming from' (as I have attempted in chapter 1), how I conceive of my field of research (and of my research itself), what my prior assumptions relevant to this project are, which ideas have fed into my work. Total transparency is impossible, but any hint suggesting a researcher's own perception can be useful.

As a starting point for this chapter, I will use a text by Michel Foucault that has been very present and extremely useful in my studies. Foucault's criticism of traditional historiography and his focus on contingency will serve as an introduction to Branden W. Joseph's concept of a 'minor history' that is similar to and very influential on my own work. Joseph's work implicitly and constantly puts categories into question and positively engages research fields' contingency and dynamism. Joseph refers to concepts by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, whose 'rhizome' model supports complexity-aware research, just as their distinction between 'mapping' and 'tracing' enables the conceptualization of one's own research process.

While my text's subsequent change in subject may be an abrupt one, the explicit and separate presentation and discussion of gender concepts is simply an analytical one that does not imply a separation of gender from a supposedly gender-unrelated main thesis body, or thesis rest. With historian Joan W. Scott, I will point out how gender, conceptualized as contingent, is implicit and relevant to social fields just as it is constituted therein. Gender is never the same; it is interwoven with and indivisible from other (similarly contingent) aspects. This makes it an invaluable, never neglectable category that needs to be handled carefully. Texts by Andrea Griesebner, Candace West / Don H. Zimmerman, Judith Butler and Jeremy Gilbert (again harnessing Deleuze and Guattari) will help me develop and emphasize anti-essentialist ideas in this thesis's

²¹ Deleuze, Gilles / Guattari, Félix: *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London / New York 2004), 21.

context; via Angela McRobbie, I will bind these back to the chapter's earlier preoccupations with mapping and tracing the contingent field of research.

2.1 Genealogy / history

In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"²², Michel Foucault harnesses tendencies and specific quotes from throughout Friedrich Nietzsche's work for a critique of traditional forms of historiography. As an alternative, he proposes – via Nietzsche – a '*wirkliche Historie*' (effective history), a genealogy that opposes traditional historiography's preference of the linear, the supposedly objective / neutral, its search for an *Ursprung* (origin) as opposed to the *Herkunft* (descent) and *Entstehung* (emergence) favored by Nietzsche and Foucault. Foucault's genealogy or effective history is anti-essentialist and can be understood as affirming a creative discussion and inclusion of rifts, fissures and disruptions (whereas an ideal traditional historiography would be keen on constructing linear, even teleological histories). Crucially, and as discussed by Christina Lutter and Markus Reisenleitner in their article "Introducing History (in)to Cultural Studies: Some Remarks on the Germanspeaking Context"²³, Foucault's genealogy and Nietzschean remarks on history can be considered pleas for context- and complexity-aware, self-reflexive and meticulous scholarly (or: non-scholarly?) work. Foucault himself – again, via Nietzsche – offers three uses of the 'historical sense', of effective history against the shortcomings of traditional historiography:

The first is parodic, directed against reality, and opposes the theme of history as reminiscence or recognition; the second is dissociative, directed against identity, and opposes history given as continuity or representative of a tradition; the third is sacrificial, directed against truth, and opposes history as knowledge.²⁴

I don't want to neglect the issue of parody entirely – for example, every genre denominator, even when constructed in as complexity-aware a way as (hopefully) in this paper, can quite obviously be seen as (self-)parodic, failing to offer anything approaching the heterogeneity and impact of the affects and percepts of importance here but sometimes playfully handling specific terms. However, the affirmative use of parody might in this case result in what could be considered obscurantism. This might

²² Foucault, Michel: Nietzsche, Genealogy, History, in: Lawrence Cahoone (ed.): *From Modernism to Postmodernism. An Anthology* (Malden / Oxford / Carlton South / Berlin 2003), 241–252.

²³ Lutter / Reisenleitner: Introducing History (in)to Cultural Studies, 611–630.

²⁴ Foucault: Nietzsche, Genealogy, History, 249.

hinder forms of critique, possibly tending towards the reactionary. Foucault's / Nietzsche's two other uses are of greater adequacy to this project.

As will be seen, describing my field of research in linear, homogenizing ways would imply an ignorance of its (not just – supposedly – inner) workings, a regrettable oversimplification. These scenes cannot be described as monolithic, coherent, and certainly not in teleological ways, suggesting they are heading towards a determined, definite future. The latter claim could only be made on a level of historiographic analysis not relevant to my study: while different levels of time certainly play a role, and while an awareness of the field's, artists' and other aspects' historicity is very much necessary, the paper does not focus on writing a history of the field in question. However, contingency remains central. These scenes did not have to become the way they are, and their future can't be easily predicted. Every single artist interviewed for my thesis may serve as an example for the many coincidences and choices shaping these scenes and connections.

Following on from Foucault's / Nietzsche's third use of the historical sense, I do not want to claim objectivity, even truth for my thesis and its results; at the same time, this does not imply utter arbitrariness. As a researcher into this field, I position myself in relation to it, even inside of it. "Effective history studies what is closest, but in an abrupt dispossession, so as to seize it at a distance (an approach similar to that of a doctor who looks closely, who plunges to make a diagnosis and to state its difference)."²⁵ Also, "Nietzsche's version of historical sense is explicit in its perspective and acknowledges its system of injustice."²⁶ Being aware of, or trying to make traceable, one's own trajectories, (fluid) positions, points of view and their manifold relations to the field of research in question is just one (particularly important and easily neglected) means of avoiding the field's homogenization. As the writer of my diploma thesis, I am not in a stable position, observing from the outside with unimpeachable authority. At the same time, I am not simply an organic part of the field of research, indivisible from any of its agents. This peculiar position needs to be reflected on, and while anything resembling true transparency is impossible, I want, or need, to offer information as to how I arrived at certain conclusions, why I chose certain directions to head into – how and why I drew my map, and then traced it (see below). Thus, it is important to me to have discussed my own pre-thesis approach to and interest in these musical-social fields in chapter 1.

²⁵ Ibid., 248.

²⁶ Ibid.

The use of 'I' instead of 'we' is the most obvious signifier of such an approach (and hopefully not merely the payment of lip service). However, this is not an entirely stable 'I', as has been shown already in said introductory chapter on my musical and academic tastes. My views on certain issues pertaining to my thesis have shifted over time. Certain realizations may have caused me to head into directions different to those planned. I may have found myself questioning at some points, most notably during the intense phase that was my interview journey, whether I sabotaged certain aspects of my work that are meant to supply coherence; and yet it is important to enable a certain dynamism, face these questions head-on while, of course, avoiding the careless switching of approaches and intentions. Thus, the construction of a paper like this one, the performance and realization of a project like this diploma thesis asks for a certain degree of trust in one's abilities – another challenge for myself, and (only seemingly paradoxically) a constant source of questioning and doubt. I hope that the model of research described here, and especially over the next paragraphs, is one that allows for, even encourages an adequately complex and self-aware mode of work.²⁷

2.2 Minor history / minor cultural sociology?

An interesting example of how to deal with questions of research fields' contingency and conception in a cultural history context is Branden W. Joseph's *Beyond the Dream Syndicate. Tony Conrad and the Arts after Cage*²⁸. Drawing on Foucault's writings on history and authorship as well as Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's ideas on the 'minor' (*littérature mineure, science mineure...*), Joseph's concept of a 'minor history' is closely related to musician and filmmaker Conrad's own thought as well as that of Conrad's associates Mike Kelley and Tony Oursler. His book, however, is not a biography of Conrad's that posits the artist as a central and unrecognized figure of his fields / scenes / histories. Instead, Joseph uses Conrad as what could be considered a guide through the artistic fields Conrad worked in and was related and relating to in the late 1950s and 1960s. Heterogeneous relations and a genealogy of artistic practice are at

²⁷ Also see, for example, Froschauer, Ulrike / Lueger, Manfred: *Das qualitative Interview. Zur Praxis interpretativer Analyse sozialer Systeme* (Wien 2003), 18–19. In their book on qualitative interviews, which will be discussed extensively in chapter 4, Froschauer and Lueger emphasize that a researcher's findings are "Konstruktionen" from a specific scholarly point of view. It is thus important to ensure the research process's quality and elaborateness. Also see the same book's pages 83–84 for remarks on the matter of perspectivity in an (interview) interpreter's case.

²⁸ Joseph, Branden W.: *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts after Cage* (New York 2008). Of particular importance here, and the source of the next few pages' discussions, is the book's first chapter, "What Is a Minor History?" (particularly pages 47–58).

least as important as the individual persons mentioned in the book, and Joseph sometimes purposefully digresses from Conrad's path for longer passages. He focuses on issues of power, on artists' approaches to power relations through their art.

Also referring to the integration of minor history in Kelley and Oursler's multimedia installation *The Poetics Project*, Joseph discusses the uses of 'major' and 'minor':

According to Deleuze and Guattari, "major" and "minor" are not simply quantitatively opposed, nor are they qualitatively opposed, when quality is judged on a commensurate scale: higher or lower, better or worse, more or less significant. The major is rather what can be made to serve as an idea, category, or constant against which, whether explicitly or implicitly, other phenomena are measured. As an ideal, form, or standard that arises out of concrete phenomena, the major doubles and is therefore never entirely coincident with any manifestation from which it is derived or to which it is applied.²⁹

In Deleuze and Guattari's examples, the major tends to be associated with sovereignty, with political and institutional power. The minor, on the other hand, "is marked by an irreducible or uncontainable difference."³⁰ A 'major history', comparable to the traditional history opposed by Foucault / Nietzsche, "is told according to the constants, even temporally changing constants, that it can extract: authorship, movement, period, style, genre, medium, discipline, and so on."³¹ Minor history, on the other hand, is not to serve (as) a category. Joseph points out its connection to "the gray meticulousness of Foucault's genealogy"³² also emphasized by Lutter and Reisenleitner. A complexity-aware approach to the research material is needed. Minor history is opposed to assimilation through categories, but it is far from arbitrary. Via Mike Kelley, Joseph argues that it is in a "parasitic" relation to categories.³³ "Against both extreme antinomies and homogeneous leveling, a minor history poses a field of continual differentiation: specific networks and connections."³⁴ Minor history, while nominally opposed to major history, should be understood as creative and positive, realizing that heterogeneity and contingency are to be faced and made use of, not reduced to static categories. The requirements of the minor are also challenges to the writer, who will always have to work with categories of language or otherwise in her or his work.

Conrad, in Joseph's view, is a minor artist – not according to any standards of quality, but irreducible to categories, indiscernible (a term important to Deleuze and Guattari),

²⁹ Ibid., 48.

³⁰ Ibid., 50.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.; cf. Lutter / Reisenleitner: Introducing History (in)to Cultural Studies, 626.

³³ cf. Joseph: *Beyond the Dream Syndicate*, 51.

³⁴ Ibid., 52.

exerting “unceasing pressure”³⁵ upon major categories. “Appearing at the fringes of major movements or styles, [‘minor’ figures’] relation to them is one of deterritorialization, opening these categories up to heterological connections and interactions.”³⁶ The very complexity and heterogeneity of Conrad’s trajectory has impeded the reception of Conrad’s work. Joseph himself uses the word ‘trajectory’: the term ‘minor’ is an “indicator of a certain trajectory through and within an artistic and historical milieu.”³⁷ Thus, his book deals with “the particular network of interactions and developments to be traced through and around Conrad”³⁸. As indicated above, Conrad “will serve less as the monographic subject of this book than as the Orpheus guiding our return to minimalist prehistory and a certain facet of the New York underground”³⁹, while his “work has to be understood through the situations and dialogues, the networks and interconnections, of which it was a part.”⁴⁰ It is important for me to point out Joseph’s methodological interest in the relations of Conrad’s trajectory. As this thesis faces specifics of a field of research that is, as I will elaborate on in chapter 3, heterogeneous and hard to grasp, somewhat related – although not identical – approaches will be taken.

Quite possibly, what is the historical to Joseph’s work is cultural sociology as cartography to mine. I only encountered *Beyond the Dream Syndicate* when I was already working on my thesis, but it helped shape ideas that I had worked with but may not have been able yet to connect and apply the way I hoped. This project is different from Joseph’s in many ways but can be considered analogous to some extent. Joseph’s minor history avoids feeding ‘major’, hegemonic categories but exists in a parasitic relation to them. Similarly, this thesis is very much concerned with questions of how to avoid homogenizing categorizations, most notably the pigeonholing according to genre terms common in writing about music, especially once genre signifiers are introduced. Instead, the aforementioned “specific networks and connections” will be constructed through the conduct and analysis of interviews. The field of research is constituted by these networks and connections. As I will show via Joan W. Scott and other authors, a

³⁵ Ibid., 51.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 53.

³⁸ Ibid., 54.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 57.

category like gender is to be seen as immanent (and not essential or timeless) to these networks and connections, (co-)constituting them while itself being constituted.

Tony Conrad, one single but in his actions irreducible person, acts as a guide through Joseph's fields of research. In this paper's case, the interviews conducted for my thesis or, notably, my interview partners themselves serve a similar function. They help construct / trace a map of the field of American underground music this thesis analyzes, with questions of gender relation and constitution relevant for the particular focus of research. This focus equals the gaze that is crucial for the map's tracing, referring to an interwoven category (gender) that is in many ways a primary category to the social. Still, as my choice of interview partners is based on conceptions of the field through my own observations and knowledge, my tracing is probably more fragile than one constantly able to refer to one single person. This, again, needs to be tackled through constant self-reflection and making visible one's own trajectory: to make oneself traceable.

2.3 Rhizome

Joseph's work refers to and applies a variety of concepts found in Deleuze and Guattari's work. Certain concepts put forward in *A Thousand Plateaus* have been of great import to this paper, indirectly through Joseph's and others' work as well as through my own reading of the book; it might be useful to list the seven principles listed in its first plateau, "Introduction: Rhizome"⁴¹.

- "1 and 2. Principles of connection and heterogeneity: any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be."⁴² The rhizome is a model that is of great importance both to Deleuze and Guattari's work (of that particular phase) and to its subsequent reception. As a model, a tool and type of imagery for certain types of thought, it is opposed to (although certainly combinable with) the more linear and / or still (to, again, use Foucault / Nietzsche's terminology) *Ursprung*-based models of roots and radicles. Here, a focus on connections and relations becomes obvious.
- "3. Principle of multiplicity: it is only when the multiple is effectively treated as a substantive, 'multiplicity', that it ceases to have any relation to the One as

⁴¹ Deleuze / Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus*, 3–28.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 7.

subject or object, natural or spiritual reality, image and world.”⁴³ Multiplicities “are flat, in the sense that they fill or occupy all of their dimensions”⁴⁴, and they are defined by the outside, by lines of flight or deterritorialization that entirely change their nature, transform them and thus allows for that supplementary dimension’s availability. I cannot write a thesis on a rhizomatic field of research considered in these terms without impinging on its multiplicity. A particularly obvious connection to my thesis can be seen in discussions of pigeonholing through genre terms and simplistic uses of scene concepts. How to describe a field of research, to emphasize why it can be considered a field of research without robbing it of its multiplicity or failing to convey said character? I will discuss this in relation to principles 5 and 6, using the terms ‘mapping’ and ‘tracing’. Also, it is tempting to write of agents’ *positions* in a field, and this type of wording is, indeed, bound to be applied in this paper; Deleuze and Guattari’s insistence that a rhizome consists only of *lines* (and not points or positions) is an excellent reminder of the dynamism and contingency of fields like the one(s) to be discussed here – there is no such thing as a truly fixed position. As will be seen, a knowledge of the role of labels and festivals is of great use to this thesis – can they be considered “knots of arborescence in rhizomes”⁴⁵, can this understanding help analyze these scenes?

- “4. Principle of asignifying rupture: against the oversignifying breaks separating structures or cutting across a single structure.”⁴⁶ Using ants as an example, Deleuze and Guattari claim that “[a] rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines.”⁴⁷ Rhizomes sprawl. They are not static / ever staying the same. They can be discussed in terms of processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, but cannot be reduced to a dualist take on these concepts. It could be argued that rhizomes are always contested, never lacking conflict. As Joseph writes, “a minor history opens categories to their outside, onto a field of historical contingencies and events that is never homogeneous and that is always political.”⁴⁸ The very fact that such a minor history, or any other minor project,

⁴³ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Joseph: *Beyond the Dream Syndicate*, 52.

is carried out hints at the questions of deterritorialization and reterritorialization: writing a paper consisting of chapters, involving research questions and summaries, certainly involves deterritorialization (defining a field from the outside), but a text may actually be in danger of bringing about particularly rigid, hierarchy-bolstering reterritorialization. Here, too, sober awareness and self-reflection are needed so as to permit the paper a certain openness without full dissolution. Earlier, referring to “the possibility and necessity of flattening all of the multiplicities on a single plane of consistency or exteriority, regardless of their number of dimensions”, Deleuze and Guattari argue that “[t]he ideal for a book would be to lay everything out on a plane of exteriority of this kind, on a single page, the same sheet”⁴⁹ – an ideal that is very much unattainable here, which is where cartography comes in.

- “5 and 6. Principle of cartography and decalcomania: a rhizome is not amenable to any structural or generative model.”⁵⁰ A thesis of this type is necessarily a *tracing* as opposed to a *map*: a map is made, performed, whereas a tracing adheres to certain categories, “begins by selecting and isolating”⁵¹ and involves dangers associated with its reductionism – whose effects may be brutal (for example in the case of psychoanalysis, which Deleuze and Guattari attack for its inhibition of patients). My interview partners draw these maps in their daily lives, as do I through my interests in these scenes. Confined to a certain format and to the necessary answering of research questions, this paper has to be a tracing, even though the project of exploring these scenes may be considered map-like. Said exploration is always different, is not perfectly reproducible. Whenever a tracing is constructed, it is bound to be different to what it would have been like even a moment earlier. “It is a question of method: *the tracing should always be put back on the map*.”⁵² Tracings, with all their limitations, may be necessary at times. “But these impasses must always be resituated on the map, thereby opening them up to possible lines of flight.”⁵³ It might thus be best to consider a project like this diploma thesis’s, with its contacts, travels,

⁴⁹ Deleuze / Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus*, 10. Also see page 26 about how books carry cultural baggage with them: “[t]he cultural book is necessarily a tracing”, and “[e]ven the anticultural book” has to deal with that set of problems.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁵¹ Ibid., 14.

⁵² Ibid. (Emphasis in the original text.)

⁵³ Ibid., 16.

interviews, doubts, mistakes, breakthroughs, texts an example of “map-tracing, rhizome-root assemblages”⁵⁴.

The process of “selecting and isolating” mentioned here is easily neglected but unavoidable, returning this text to the subject of the researcher’s perspective, which has already found its way into this paper through the “Impetus” chapter’s very existence, has been referred to in this chapter’s discussion of Foucault as well as Lutter / Reisenleitner and will be reiterated in my discussion of gender theorists’ constructionist texts and my unfolding of the interview process. Acknowledgement of perspectivity is a necessary element of the text’s ‘opening up’ and connectivity.⁵⁵

The ideas presented here may act as reminders, hints and, more than that, a tool box applicable to the field of research⁵⁶. This is not a paper that will be able to focus on and refer to these explanations throughout, but their influence on the paper’s and project’s conception and conceptualization is great and needed to be stated here to facilitate an understanding of the chapters to follow.

Before continuing by discussing conceptualizations of gender, I want to point out this thesis’s connections or similarities to the work of Lawrence Grossberg. I think its approach allows reference to his Deleuzian “wild realism”⁵⁷ as encountered in *We Gotta Get out of This Place*, a decidedly positive approach he pits against a distinction between language and reality. Discussing a quote by Félix Guattari, Grossberg writes:

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Andrea Griesebner’s book *Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft. Eine Einführung* (Wien 2005) will be referred to numerous times over the next pages. Griesebner emphasizes perspectivity as opposed to any type of assumed objectivity, not least by opening the book with a short discussion (pages 11–15) of 18th century historian Martin Chladenius’s concept of the ‘*Sehepunkt*’, one’s point of view. Feminist historiography, according to Griesebner, can be defined by reference to its perspective as opposed to a canon or common theory / methodology.

⁵⁶ This would match Deleuze’s own characterization of a concept as quoted in Brian Massumi’s foreword to *A Thousand Plateaus*. For Massumi’s discussion of the book’s character as one “the reader is invited to lift a dynamism out of [...] entirely, and incarnate it in a foreign medium”, see Massumi, Brian: Translator’s Foreword: Pleasures of Philosophy, in: Deleuze / Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus*, xv. Also see Griesebner: *Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft*, 139. Griesebner calls for an eclecticist approach towards the use of theories (depending on research questions and available materials), considering them “*Denkangebote und wissenschaftliche Werkzeuge*” – offers for thought and scholarly tools.

See McRobbie, Angela: The Es and the Anti-Es. New Questions for feminism and cultural studies, in: Reitsamer, Rosa / Weinzierl, Rupert (eds.): *Female Consequences. Feminismus, Antirassismus, Popmusik* (Wien 2006), 111–136, and its discussion in this paper’s chapter 2.6 for an inquiry into whether “feminist post-structuralism in cultural studies [can] go beyond its function as a critique, as a warning device, a cautionary practice” (page 128).

⁵⁷ cf. Grossberg, Lawrence: *We Gotta Get out of This Place. Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York / London 1992), 47–52.

“Reality here is a structure of effects, marked by a multiplicity of planes of effects and the ways they intersect, transverse and disrupt each other.”⁵⁸ Pointing out connections between Deleuze / Guattari and cultural studies to construct an anti-essentialist mode of approaching “the structure of the relationships within which cultural practices and effects have to be located”⁵⁹, Grossberg introduces the concept of articulation⁶⁰ (via Stuart Hall’s and Ernesto Laclau’s elaborations on Antonio Gramsci’s concept):

Articulation is the production of identity on top of difference, of unities out of fragments, of structures across practices. Articulation links this practice to that effect, this text to that meaning, this meaning to that reality, this experience to those politics. And these links are themselves articulated into larger structures, etc.⁶¹

Grossberg further elaborates on this useful concept, arguing that “the practice of articulation reworks the context into which practices are inserted. It involves real historical individuals and groups, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously or unintentionally [...]”. Crucially, he also links it to Deleuze and Guattari’s not identical but similar ‘line of articulation’, one of two types of lines of effectivity – the other being the deterritorializing ‘line of flight’ – whose struggle constitutes a rhizome. While Grossberg goes on to further detail his own approach – “a cartography of daily life”⁶² – I will, here, mostly appropriate the concept of articulation as it is bound to be useful for the discussion of certain phenomena encountered in the field of research.

2.4 “Gender: A Useful Category of [any] Analysis”

There are many ways to analyze and discuss gender in relation to an artistic / social field like the one I have been mapping and tracing over the course of my diploma thesis project. A particularly obvious (and certainly interesting) option would be an analysis of musical performance: how does gender play into the artistic strategies encountered here? Or: how is gender constituted through musical performance? It might also be possible to access the field of research by means of collecting existing ideas of gender relations that appear to play a role therein. This could itself be an interesting way of accessing varied forms of information on a social field’s structure and inner workings. One could also opt for the conduction of a quantitative study based on a (specified)

⁵⁸ Ibid., 48.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 52.

⁶⁰ cf. *ibid.*, 52–61.

⁶¹ Ibid., 54.

⁶² cf. *ibid.*, 63.

traditional gender dichotomy, interpreting the results and attempting to deduce important structural information from these.

Elements from all of these options play into the study I have been undertaking. However, the main idea behind this thesis's handling of gender is that gender is multiply relational⁶³, intersecting with other categories, best understood in a wider social context. This is not meant to belittle the importance of gender – quite the opposite: I consider gender (in many varied ways) implicit to the everyday, a diffuse and contingent, variable category. As part of this thesis, I am tracing the scenes in question while attempting to recognize the roles and meanings of gender therein. The journey through these scenes is undertaken with a gender-interested researcher's gaze. In her text "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis"⁶⁴, historian Joan W. Scott offers useful hints as to how gender can be conceptualized and harnessed for research.

This paper doesn't focus explicitly on a history of the scenes in question; it retains, however, an awareness of their historicity, their becoming. Even beyond that, I consider a text like Scott's useful for work in other disciplines. Scott doesn't rely on concepts of an objective, usually politics-oriented historiography⁶⁵ but instead emphasizes the importance of the social and cultural, the importance of a researcher's theoretical approach. This enables connections that bypass or ignore disciplinary borders to be made. In my own studies, I tend to consider lessons learned in *Geschichte* and *Politikwissenschaft* (and any other disciplines) each other's equals, as tools for the production of knowledge that are, in many cases, compatible and needn't be constricted by disciplinary borders: historiography can be sociology too, but, if taken seriously in its disciplinary tagging, may dedicate itself more decidedly to questions of historicity; approaches usually considered historiographic may just as much dedicate themselves to the (historically contingent) present, but may then – due to conventions academic or otherwise – be tagged sociology, cultural theory or something similar. But even when

⁶³ cf. Griesebner: *Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft*, 153–158. I encountered numerous texts mentioned here in university courses taught by Andrea Griesebner; consequently, the book referred to here has been particularly relevant to the writing of this chapter, especially the parts discussing Scott, West / Zimmerman and Butler.

⁶⁴ Scott, Joan W.: Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis, in: *The American Historical Review* 91, 5 (1986), 1053–1075.

⁶⁵ cf. Griesebner on the "historistisches Paradigma": Griesebner: *Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft*, 23–29.

disciplinary constrictions are shunned, research doesn't have to be indiscriminate. Integrating Scott's ideas into this text, I am convinced of their use for my own research. In her text, Scott initially interrogates various approaches towards gender in historiography, starting with descriptive modes often used to conceptualize new fields. Scott argues that these approaches tend to be (self-)limited to fields that

involv[e] relations between the sexes. [...] The effect is to endorse a certain functionalist view ultimately rooted in biology and to perpetuate the idea of separate spheres (sex or politics, family or nation, women or men) in the writing of history. Although gender in this usage asserts that relationships between the sexes are social, it says nothing about why these relationships are constructed as they are, how they work, or how they change.⁶⁶

Causal, more decidedly theory-based modes have addressed these issues. However, Scott points out problems in the three positions she goes on to discuss. Theories of patriarchy run the risk of being reductive (to "the single variable of physical difference"⁶⁷) and thus ahistorical. Marxist approaches, while aware of historicity, have reduced potentials of research by treating gender "as the by-product of changing economic structures; gender has had no independent analytic status of its own."⁶⁸ Scott also presents various strands of psychoanalytic theory: the Anglo-American school (focusing on object-relations theory), in Scott's view, reduces gender to realms of the domestic, lacking connections to other social systems and questions of representation, while the French school (focusing on language) gives clues as to the subject's construction but overly concentrates on the selfsame category while also tending to "reify subjectively originating antagonism between males and females as the central fact of gender."⁶⁹

Scott proceeds to call for a more reflexive, fluid, historicity- and complexity-aware conceptualization of gender. Referring to Foucault, whose complex, heterogeneity-aware concept of power she calls upon, and matching his ideas on history and genealogy as discussed above, she argues that "[i]nstead of a search for single origins, we have to conceive of processes so interconnected that they cannot be disentangled." Scott's approach isn't meant to advocate indiscriminate research: "Of course, we identify problems to study, and these constitute beginnings or points of entry into

⁶⁶ Scott: Gender, 1057.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 1059.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 1061.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 1064.

complex processes. But it is the processes we must continually keep in mind.”⁷⁰ At her text’s core, she proposes a definition matching these criteria:

My definition of gender has two parts and several subsets. They are interrelated but must be analytically distinct. The core of the definition rests on an integral connection between two propositions: gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power.⁷¹

Griesebner points out the relevance of the term ‘perceived’ in this segment. Biological differences are not to be presupposed: that which is perceived as a difference needs to be researched.⁷²

Scott adds four interrelated elements to her definition’s first part:

- “culturally available symbols that evoke multiple (and often contradictory) representations”. These involve, for example, various myths throughout history that need to be contextualized.
- “normative concepts that set forth interpretations of the meanings of the symbols, that attempt to limit and contain their metaphoric possibilities.” These can be located in “religious, educational, scientific, legal, and political doctrines”; it is through these that male and female, masculine and feminine are defined and “alternative possibilities” are blocked while the dominant concept (usually a binary model of gender) is reinforced. This needs to be exposed by historiography.
- The role of politics, “social institutions and organizations”: Scott argues that “[g]ender is constructed through kinship, but not exclusively; it is constructed as well in the economy and the polity, which, in our society at least, now operate largely independently of kinship.”
- “subjective identity”: “Historians need [...] to examine the ways in which gendered identities are substantively constructed and relate their findings to a range of activities, social organizations, and historically specific cultural representations.” This differs from universalist claims about the constitution of gender identity.⁷³

⁷⁰ Ibid., 1067.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² cf. Griesebner: *Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft*, 128–131.

⁷³ This section’s quotes were taken from Scott: *Gender*, 1067–1068.

The definition's second part – about gender being “a primary way of signifying relationships of power” – once more points out the significance of gender to an analysis of power relationships. The gender dichotomy, supported by perceived biological differences, is, in the words of Pierre Bourdieu, “the best-founded of collective illusions.”⁷⁴ This is not an essential role that gender plays in human existence – a claim that would contradict Scott's own criticisms of other approaches – but one that can be encountered in research again and again over time. “Established as an objective set of references, concepts of gender structure perception and the concrete and symbolic organization of all social life.”⁷⁵ Scott conceives gender and society (as well as politics) as reciprocal. Historians need to “look for the ways in which the concept of gender legitimizes and constructs social relationships”⁷⁶. This matches the earlier call (via Lutter and Reisenleitner) for context-awareness.

As I will show in chapter 4, the approach of researching gender in its contexts, indivisibly related to the social, has also, and most obviously, been manifested in the way I have conducted interviews: the first (and, arguably, main) part usually consisted of relatively open questions and, on the interviewees' side, narrations of how they accessed these scenes, how they have been moving through them. I attempt to connect and open up these texts in varied ways, discussing them in relation to gender's many facets. More direct questions related to gender, indeed including quantitative ones, usually were asked in the second part (if they had not been integrated into the earlier, more open exchanges); but even before those, I usually asked the interviewed what their associations and connotations regarding the thesis's title (*Gender construction and American 'Free Folk' music(s)*) were. These interview tactics served to keep the vast thematic field of gender as open as possible and not to excessively predetermine the exchanges. One particular danger was the potential reification of a binary model of gender – a reification that would then take place with the posing of questions asking for the interviewed's impressions of the scenes' demographics. On another level existed and exists the danger of mistaking gender studies for an inquiry into women's role⁷⁷, or even women's discrimination or disadvantages, inherently recasting men as a field's primary agents⁷⁸. Both of these dangers are also addressed by the choice of title:

⁷⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, quoted in Scott: Gender, 1069. This appears to be Scott's own translation; in footnote 41, she refers to Bourdieu's *Le Sens Pratique* (Paris 1980), 246–247, 333–461, especially 366.

⁷⁵ Scott: Gender, 1069.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 1070.

⁷⁷ Scott remarks that “[i]n its simplest recent usage, ‘gender’ is a synonym for ‘women.’” (Ibid., 1056.)

⁷⁸ On androcentrism, see for example Griesebner: *Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft*, 93–97.

“gender construction” may be a vague term but implies a certain instability to (and the active doing of) categories of gender while also avoiding the connotations of phrases like ‘gender issues’.

In the end, the thesis’s scope doesn’t necessarily allow for an in-depth analysis of the very constitution of gender identity and subjectivity: a more detailed deconstruction of a smaller number of texts may be necessary for that. However, Scott’s text makes obvious (and asks for an investigation of) the many and complex ways in which gender can manifest in social contexts. It is important to keep the thesis open for potential further inquiries into the actual constitution of gender. Not least to achieve this, the interviews were kept open to enable analyses that go beyond the binary model to connect. The more direct, quantitative questions certainly reified that binary system but aimed to extract knowledge as well as patterns that could best be accessed via everyday language that itself is very much a manifestation of that dichotomy’s presence. Ideally, the thesis will be able to show gender’s workings and manifestations within *and* constitutive of the field’s social relations and functioning.

2.5 Doing and performing gender

In order to be able to question and criticize standard assumptions of what gender is or means, it appears useful to approach the field with the help of and by developing / harnessing a theoretical framework relating to gender. This should allow for a fundamental critique of seemingly hardcoded approaches and perceptions, structures and practices, thus potentially paving the way for emancipatory (transient) conclusions that touch on what could be considered very basic levels of everyday practice.⁷⁹ Scott situates gender in a multifaceted theoretical context and sets the stage for a few further ventures into concepts of gender and sex over the course of the next few pages. As Scott suggests, it is worth questioning such familiar assumptions as the existence of a binary, biologically determined system of gender. The act of putting essentialist conceptions of gender into question is itself not a stable process resulting in any kind of predetermined outcome: approaches have differed according to, among others, contexts temporal and related to discipline and / or field of research. I will now discuss several contributions to

⁷⁹ See, for example, Butler, Judith: *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution. An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*, in: Sue-Ellen Case (ed.), *Performing Feminism* (Baltimore / London 1999), 280–282 – the text’s final part – for a discussion of political implications of various essentialist and anti-essentialist conceptualizations of gender. Also see Griesebner: *Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft*, 167–173.

gender theory that, like Scott's although with less explicit focus on the category's 'usefulness', are particularly relevant to my work on this thesis, to how I conceive of gender.

Whereas Scott's text tends more towards questions of gender's discursive constitution, Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman's concept of gender veers closer to questions of its constitution in daily life; in Judith Butler's work, both tendencies feature strongly (without being separated as such).⁸⁰ The title of West and Zimmerman's article⁸¹ is also its central phrase: "doing gender". They distinguish between three analytical categories: sex (perceived biological differences, socially agreed upon); sex category (the actual application of the sex category, reified in daily life, not necessarily congruent with the expected sex criteria); gender ("the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category"⁸²). For West and Zimmerman, interaction in daily life is crucial to the understanding of gender. Gender is done in everyday interaction, it is reproduced by "engag[ing] in behavior *at the risk of gender assessment*."⁸³ This doing can't be avoided; the differences constructed thereby "reinforce the 'essentialness' of gender."⁸⁴ Questions of "the allocation of power and resources not only in the domestic, economic and political domains but also in the broad arena of interpersonal relations"⁸⁵ relate to one's sex category and its "performance as an incumbent of that category (i.e., gender)"⁸⁶. Doing gender is to be considered social: while it is unavoidable due to its manifold social consequences, it also helps naturalize and legitimize what is based on sex category distinctions.

West and Zimmerman's mention of doing gender as 'performance' and their reference to the consequences of doing gender properly or improperly suggest similarities to Judith Butler's work. Butler argues that gender is constantly performed and thus re-enacted. Taking ideas from phenomenology as well as Simone de Beauvoir's writings as a basis for her own elaboration on and construction of the subjects dealt with, she proposes a theory of "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" (as mentioned in the

⁸⁰ cf. Griesebner: *Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft*, 131, 139.

⁸¹ West, Candace / Zimmerman, Don H.: Doing Gender, in: Lorber, Judith / Farrell, Susan A. (eds.): *The Social Construction of Gender* (Newbury Park / London / New Delhi 1991), 13–37.

⁸² Ibid., 14.

⁸³ Ibid., 23. (Emphasis in the original text.)

⁸⁴ Ibid., 24.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 32.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

title of the essay referenced here). As Butler herself notes, there are limits to metaphors of theatre / performance. She opposes theorizations of gender as expressive of a prior self, and simultaneously, her concept of performativity does not imply that gender is something fully individual, chosen, performed. However,

[i]f the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style.⁸⁷

Butler explicitly mentions transvestism as one example of such subversion. Butler's thought is anti-essentialist: for her, the body is contingent, "not merely matter but a continual and incessant *materializing* of possibilities."⁸⁸ The "gendered body" could be conceived of "as the legacy of sedimented acts rather than a predetermined or foreclosed structure, essence or fact, whether natural, cultural or linguistic."⁸⁹ Butler breaks up and denies the sex / gender distinction⁹⁰ – the former cannot be known ("from within the terms of culture"⁹¹) separately from the latter if the latter is "the cultural significance that the sexed body assumes"⁹², reified through the aforementioned stylized repetition. The framework in which this everyday repetition takes place is a "system of compulsory heterosexuality"⁹³, but, as alluded to earlier, Butler conceives of these acts neither as entirely determined nor as entirely individual.

Similarly, for West and Zimmerman, "gender is created through interaction and at the same time structures interaction."⁹⁴ While differing in certain aspects, the texts discussed here also share an anti-essentialism and anti-foundationalism as well as an awareness of contingency. Further connections are possible, not least to other names encountered thus far in this text. Jeremy Gilbert considers Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'becoming-woman' "quite compatible with an anti-essentialist feminism which would be close to that associated with writers such as Judith Butler, or even

⁸⁷ Butler: *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*, 271.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 272. (Emphasis in the original text.)

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁹⁰ On the distinction between sex (as a biological category) and gender (as a social or psychological category), see Griesebner: *Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft*, 116–125.

⁹¹ Butler: *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*, 275.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ West / Zimmerman: *Doing Gender*, 18. Griesebner (*Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft*, 134–135) compares their ideas to Bourdieu's.

Jacques Derrida.”⁹⁵ Gilbert uses two Deleuze / Guattari quotations that I will include here:

[...] all becomings begin with and pass through becoming-woman. It is the key to all the other becomings.⁹⁶

[Sexuality] is badly explained by the binary organization of the sexes, and just as badly by a bisexual organization within each sex. Sexuality brings into play too great a diversity of conjugated becomings; these are like *n* sexes [...] Sexuality is the production of a thousand sexes, which are so many uncontrollable becomings.⁹⁷

Gilbert goes on to explain the concept of becoming, which “designate[s] a kind of vector of transformation which, properly understood, has no point of departure and no final destination. Becoming thus conceived is never ‘pure’ flux: it always has direction, but direction is not the same thing as destination.”⁹⁸

A term like ‘becoming’ is useful in many ways when going beyond a model of gender as expression. It is related to the above-discussed notion of the minor, and it “occur[s] always at the ‘molecular’ level at which matter (which means everything) is always in flux”⁹⁹. The molar level, on the other hand, refers to fixed identities – notably man. Explaining Deleuze and Guattari, and similar to Scott’s above-quoted Bourdieu reference, Gilbert denotes the binary gender model as one extremely strong “in western, and perhaps all human, culture”¹⁰⁰ and thus a primary means of categorization. Here, (heterosexual European) man is a dominant category, major and fixed. Anything else is minor; thus, if becoming is connected to the minor and molecular, “to some extent, any ‘becoming’ whatsoever must involve participating in something of this ontological status of being not-man which must in turn pass through becoming-woman.”¹⁰¹ Brian Massumi actually links Deleuze and Guattari’s project to that of feminist theorists Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray and the associated term ‘phallogocentrism’.¹⁰² Gilbert harnesses Deleuze and Guattari’s concept to discuss political questions of gender and dance / music aesthetics, thus particularly alluding to the performative; I myself will return to notions of becoming at multiple points in this text at which I will elaborate on this as needed.

⁹⁵ Gilbert, Jeremy: *More than a Woman. Becoming-woman on the Disco floor*, in: Reitsamer / Weinzierl (eds.): *Female Consequences*, 185.

⁹⁶ Deleuze / Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus*, 306. Gilbert’s use of these quotations can be read in Gilbert: *More than a Woman*, 181–182.

⁹⁷ Deleuze / Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus*, 307. (Emphasis in the original context.)

⁹⁸ Gilbert: *More than a Woman*, 184.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² cf. Massumi: *Translator’s Foreword*, xii.

Finally, I want to emphasize Andrea Griesebner's conceptualization of gender as "mehrfach relational"¹⁰³ (multiply relational). Gender always needs to be considered in relation to other categories of difference, many of which have been taken up as fields of research over time. As gender itself is historically contingent, its status / importance / role is too, dependent on historical, social, cultural contexts. "Denk-, Wahrnehmungs- und Handlungsmuste[r]"¹⁰⁴, patterns of thinking, perception and action, may differ and contradict accordingly. This puts any notion of identity as stable into question. Griesebner sees this as positive, allowing for an understanding of persons as constantly becoming. Similarly, Angela McRobbie states in her text on "The Es and the Anti-Es" that "[Butler] and others have argued that difference can be understood in politically positive terms rather than signalling the end of feminism", referring to fears of the "fragmentation" of feminism's political project often countered by attempts to "achiev[e] an uneasy, unhappy unity, just for the sake of it."¹⁰⁵ Here, once again, theory and politics are indivisible. McRobbie theorizes anti-essentialism with a view to making its intersections with empirical research politically viable. Anti-essentialist approaches may be fragile, but new alliances and coalitions can be formed. I want to take up some implications of McRobbie's text here and bind them back to other ideas discussed in this paper.

2.6 Anti-essentialism in contingent fields of research

Anti-essentialism, as in the refusal to refer to an essential core of identity, is one of the 'anti-Es' Angela McRobbie refers to in the aforementioned text's title, the others being post-structuralism and psychoanalysis. In the title, they are juxtaposed with the three 'Es': the empirical, the ethnographic, the experiential. Anti-essentialism here doesn't just encompass notions of gender but decidedly asks for the implications of other categories' interrogation as well. McRobbie refers to her own earlier argument

that a return to more sociological questions, particularly where these have a relevance for policy, should not be shunned by cultural studies' scholars for whom the politics of meaning have recently taken precedence over the need to intervene in political debates armed with data, facts and figures and empirical results.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ cf. Griesebner: *Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft*, 153–158.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁰⁵ McRobbie: *The Es and the Anti-Es*, 117.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

In this text, she wants to harness the Es in combination and exchange with the Anti-Es. She wants to open channels that, due to post-structuralist thought's perceived incompatibility with empirical research (and what McRobbie calls "resistance to looking outside theory and asking some practical questions about the world we live in"¹⁰⁷), were often left to essentialist feminists.

McRobbie brings up examples of this new, implicitly inter- and transdisciplinary harnessing of the Anti-Es for "more applied or practical feminist cultural studies"¹⁰⁸, for example proposing an empirical study of how the diverse and complex representations of the category of the 'single mother' affect self-representations of women subjectivised in these terms. Referring to "Butler's work on the compulsive repetitions of normative heterosexuality, which resonate through the field of culture"¹⁰⁹, she also suggests an examination of the category of 'girl', a reevaluation of "the field of girls' culture". Studies tended to neglect the exclusionary aspects of "commercial cultures of femininity" against "Black and Asian young women, disabled teenagers and of course young gays and lesbians." Notably, studies aware of these tendencies still need to question the 'girl' category's often implied "regularity of subjectivities"¹¹⁰. Here, again, gender is conceived of as multiply relational; the Anti-Es are used for inquiries into everyday practice and change the parameters of empirical research, always questioning the absolute.

The particular authority of the empirical mode can be occupied now with greater complexity. It can be both used where appropriate and deconstructed elsewhere for its narratives of truth, its representation of results. Research can therefore be rewritten and rescripted according to the politics of its location. Empirical work can still be carried out even if the feminist researcher no longer believes it to be a truth-seeking activity. Indeed, awareness of this and of the structures and conventions which provide a regulative framework for doing cultural studies' research brings not just greater reflexivity to the field, but also demonstrates cultural studies to be a field of inquiry that is aware of the power which its competing discourses wield.¹¹¹

Ethnography's perspectivity and potential exoticism is elaborated on; a self-reflexive ethnography, "allow[ing] many voices to mingle so that the authoritative voice of the ethnographer is dislodged"¹¹², may be able to tackle research fields' complexity, not colliding with but even supporting and illustrating anti-essentialist claims. The category of experience is put into perspective via Foucault, "whose writings permit [it] to

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 112.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 125.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 126.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 127.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 129–130.

¹¹² Ibid., 130.

reappear in post-structuralist feminism by showing agency to be part of the practice of discursive incitement to do or to act”¹¹³ – experience is not absolute, it is context-dependent. But McRobbie argues that being aware of the ways in which experience can function is of use for the public debate, for the transmission and connectivity of academic feminist thought. Indeed, in her text’s conclusion, McRobbie warns of the dangers of too specialized / complicated language, and of the uncritical, unreflected use of anti-essentialism.

I am using McRobbie’s text here to once again deepen and concentrate the complex of empirical research and contingency-aware, self-reflective and anti-essentialist understandings of the research process and field. Foucault and McRobbie’s respective texts serve as inspirational brackets to a chapter in which I have attempted to make obvious the benefits of a research process that doesn’t cling to, let alone serve categories. The alternative proposed here is comparable to Branden W. Joseph’s ‘minor history’: conceive of a field of research as contingent, dynamic and heterogeneous, irreducible to ‘major’ categories, and trace its relations. These relations are always political, and as Joan W. Scott shows, social relations can be considered gendered in many ways, on several levels, never resulting from an identity core’s expression. If the field of research in its constant, daily flux is a map, then the research process – despite its own map-like character – is dissected to a tracing in its written form. This tracing always needs to be put back onto the map to ensure its openness and accessibility, making obvious its own construction and allowing readers and other researchers to follow up on the thesis and renegotiate and question its findings, which are never objective but hopefully traceable.

If I analyze and constitute a field by (mapping and then) tracing its social relations, and if social relations are gendered, then there doesn’t necessarily have to be anything resembling a separate gender theory / gender sociology chapter denoting that questions of gender are being analyzed at that particular moment. If gender is irreducible to fixed identities but constantly being negotiated, aspects of gender construction can be alluded to at any given point of the thesis. I am not trying to suggest that gender notions and constructions are primary to every single aspect of the thesis; and I have tried to keep the research process suitable nondeterminist (see chapter 4). Also, the empirical part closes, indeed, with a sub-chapter that more directly discusses gender and its perception

¹¹³ Ibid., 131.

and reception in the field of research. However, gender as multiply relational can at least be alluded to and searched for in its many variations throughout the field of research. This is what I will try to do, based especially on the interviews I have conducted with musicians related to these scenes. How do gender constructions manifest in the field of research, how are they being constructed therein, what (if anything) do they help constitute? As hinted at by McRobbie, empirical research can be much more complex and complexity-aware if these types of questions are taken seriously, and if the research process is structured accordingly.

At this thesis's beginning, I have quoted Paola Marrati's paraphrase of Henri Bergson according to which problems "must be constituted" and "[t]he freedom of thinking thus consists in the elaboration of problematic fields, and it depends on a critical attitude towards what is given, on our ability to experiment, to open up the limits of that which presents itself as necessary."¹¹⁴ I want to return to this for one last paragraph: in the same text, Marrati goes on to discuss Deleuze's "attempt to change the way in which we understand the problem of the body, the very way in which we ask our questions about bodies."¹¹⁵ She continues by explicating Deleuze's Spinozist ethics. His / their anti-essentialist conception of the body (whose individuality is defined by "the *relation* that establishes itself between its parts", and which "also has a power to affect and to be affected"¹¹⁶). A significant question for this type of approach is thus "What can a body do?" and not so much "What is a body?"

Each body is traversed and constituted by biological, institutional, technological, and social lines whose relations are complex and variable. Each of these layers has its degree of rigidity, a tendency to immobilize, to freeze, but they also have an intrinsic mobility, a possibility of becoming.¹¹⁷

Similar concepts are present in Grossberg's *We Gotta Get out of This Place*, too. Analogous to this, I hope my thesis can make obvious certain potentials, fulfilled or inhibited, and I hope to do so through an approach to the field of research that is experimental and exploratory. The field itself is not perfectly constituted in advance, its relations and affects are not obvious. The same goes for gender as a category. Consequently, the thesis involves (careful and sober) speculation and certain dangers, but will itself (hopefully) be traceable itself and connectable to further research.

¹¹⁴ Marrati: *Time and Affects*, 313.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 314.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 315. (Emphasis in the original text.)

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 319.

In the next chapter, I will first access the field of scene research to present suitable tools for the field's conceptualization, and then suggest an early tracing of the scenes discussed here that will prepare for the multifaceted discussion in the thesis's dedicated empirical part (which itself will be preceded by an explication of my research process, notably the use of qualitative interviews).

3 Scenes

Following the last chapter's presentation of theorists and how their work fits into my thesis project, I will introduce concepts useful for research into music scenes, notably by Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson, whose distinction between 'local', 'trans-local' and 'virtual' scenes is very instructive for studies dealing with musical-social fields. I will then continue by giving a short and necessarily abstract overview of the scenes I am writing about, mostly based on other writers' observations and impressions.

3.1 Rhizomes and scenes

In her article on "*Zehn Jahre Ladyfest*"¹¹⁸, discussing the networks from which Ladyfests in the riot grrrl tradition materialize, Elke Zobl combines the rhizome model (as well as Manuel Castells's notion of the network as a model describing contemporary society) with a theoretical approach towards music scenes put forward by Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson. The resulting combination allows her to conceptualize these networks and their (political) potentials as multi-levelled and complex.

Bennett and Peterson go beyond a limited colloquial use of the term 'scene': "Typically, this everyday usage of scene has referred to a particular local setting, usually a city or district, where a particular style of music has either originated, or has been appropriated and locally adapted."¹¹⁹ In his article "Consolidating the music scenes perspective", Bennett situates this opening up of 'scene' within theory strands that, since the early 1990s, have harnessed the term for academic writing. This use can also be seen as standing in opposition to or stemming from criticisms of other approaches, some of which appear reductive in comparison. For example, the concept of 'subculture' has come under scrutiny for its implication of "a relatively fixed relationship between specific aspects of post-war style and music with the class background of those who appropriate it" and its shortcomings as an "ethnically 'white' construct"¹²⁰. "Scene, on the other hand, offers the possibility of examining musical life in its myriad forms, both

¹¹⁸ Zobl, Elke: *Zehn Jahre Ladyfest*. Rhizomatische Netzwerke einer lokalen, transnationalen und virtuellen queer-feministischen Szene, in: Reitsamer, Rosa / Fichna, Wolfgang (eds.): "*They Say I'm Different ...*". *Populärmusik, Szenen und ihre Akteur_innen* (Wien 2011), 208–227.

¹¹⁹ Bennett, Andy: Consolidating the music scenes perspective, in: *Poetics* 32 (2004), 223.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 225.

production- and consumption-oriented, and the various, often locally specific ways in which these cross-cut each other.”¹²¹

Bennett and Peterson propose the use of three scene types, which Bennett introduces here by presenting examples of research applying to his typology¹²²:

- Local Scenes: studies discussed by Bennett exemplify the ways in which music performance and production are interconnected with and manifesting in local contexts. Dense studies of “small-scale, local music-making practices”¹²³ understand their respective scenes’ social backgrounds / relationships as relevant while also showing that this doesn’t necessarily preclude internal contradictions. Styles that were first performed elsewhere can be (re)introduced into new local contexts and gain relevance and meaning there. Despite the focus on certain areas, discussion of local scenes can deal with a large variety of dimensions, from music’s involvement in cultural practices to identified scenes’ importance for tourism.
- Trans-local scenes: studies interested in this second scene type tend to investigate the manifold ways in which the local and the global relate, in which various media play into the development of music scenes and styles beyond specific single local contexts. According to Bennett, a study by Holly Kruse

uses the term *trans-local* to describe the way in which young people appropriate music and stylistic resources in particular local contexts while retaining a sense of their connectedness with parallel expressions of musical taste and stylistic preference occurring in other regions, countries and continents.”¹²⁴

New technologies as well as media like fanzines (notably in the case of riot grrrl, Kristin Schilt’s study on which Bennett mentions) help enable scene development beyond the local. Also, local scenes may remain distinctive but influence others on a global level. Individual protagonists may also contribute to scenes’ trans-local character through their own personal mobility.

- Virtual scenes: the increasing importance of the Internet has allowed scenes to be virtual, less based on aspects related to the physical and material (like attendance or personal style / image), instead “depend[ing] upon other displays

¹²¹ Ibid., 226.

¹²² cf. *ibid.*, 226–232.

¹²³ Ibid., 226.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 229. (Emphasis in the original text.)

of competence, notably articulation and musical knowledge and information.”¹²⁵

Bennett himself has conducted research into the construction of a virtual, myth-imbued Canterbury scene and sound. He also points out a study by Steve S. Lee and Richard A. Peterson that suggests virtual scenes may often be more accessible as well as more demographically diverse than local scenes.

Bennett and Peterson’s typology makes use of a much more complex notion of ‘scene’ than its everyday use may suggest. As Elke Zobl’s article shows, it is possible for these scene types – which, as models for research and analysis, are themselves constructed categories – to be applied within the same study. Multiple types of scenes and dimensions thereof are interwoven and rely on each other; in fact, within the respective fields’ contexts, they are indivisible. They are not mutually exclusive: Zobl identifies local Ladyfest scenes as unique while at the same time stating their trans-local (or, as Zobl writes, trans-national) character and the role of virtual media. Their identification as local, trans-local and virtual scenes is a useful analytic construct that can be applied most adequately when its artificiality is kept in mind.

3.2 Tracing the ‘New Weird America’

In spite of the constitutive importance of music, its performance and reception for the social fields to be discussed here, it seems impossible to define it / them on musical terms only, let alone on the basis of genre names (which terms like ‘New Weird America’ or ‘free folk’ themselves can be considered). The issue of actual musical styles will be dealt with in short later on, but taking into consideration these genre names in all their instability and relativity while considering relevant texts can result in various pointers towards a complexity-aware construction and analysis of these scenes. There are many ways to conceptualize ‘free folk’ or the ‘New Weird America, but the scenes’ web-like character, present in some literature¹²⁶, hints at a conceptualization that might be of particular use here as it points out the complex and heterogeneous structures to be dealt with.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 230.

¹²⁶ cf. for example Adam, Holger: Brattleboro – Hasselt – Krefeld. Internationale Begegnungen im Plattenladen: Unrock-Instore-Gigs, in: *testcard. Beiträge zur Popgeschichte 19. Blühende Nischen* (Mainz 2010), 82.

One particularly well-known article and a good starting point here is David Keenan's *Wire* cover story on the 'New Weird America'¹²⁷. In it, Keenan reviews the Brattleboro Free Folk Festival that took place that year (2003), organized by Ron Schneiderman and Matt Valentine, and discusses and interviews some of its participants. It soon becomes obvious that what Keenan writes about isn't limited to classically 'folk' modes of music. Instead, it "draws from mountain music, Country blues, HipHop, militant funk and psychedelia as much as free jazz."¹²⁸ Keenan continues:

The past few years have seen an explosion in the sort of genre mangling grassroots activity that Sunburned Hand Of The Man, Flaherty/Corsano and Scorses represent. Mostly based outside of the major US cities, disparate, culturally disenfranchised cells have begun to telegraph between each other, forming alliances via limited handmade releases and a vast subterranean network of samizdat publications, musician- and fan-run labels and distributors like Apostasy, Child Of Microtones, Eclipse, Ecstatic Yod, Fusetron, Qbico, Seres, Siwa, Soundatone, Spirit Of Orr, Time-Lag, U-Sound, Vhf and Wholly Other.¹²⁹

This DIY tendency also came out of necessity – these musics may be hard to publish – and it was enabled not least by technological developments: home publishing and CD burning have become relatively affordable and accessible, and the Internet has played its role in people connecting with each other. Social aspects are present in Keenan's article: there is a familiarity between the festival's participants, an aspect of care and sociality. Keenan argues that there are connections to "American folk and roots", but also that

improvisation and the application of the drone open up these new folk musicians to the roar of the cosmos. In the process, they have stripped improvisation of its jazz-informed reputation as a cerebral discipline and rebirthed it as *the* original, primal musical gesture, reminding us that it was always folk music's most natural mode of expression.¹³⁰

Also particularly noteworthy is a quote of festival co-organizer Matt Valentine's, for whom "the Free Folk Fest was all about free thinking folk"¹³¹. Keenan doesn't limit the article to a capsule based on the festival's line-up (which already included musicians from outside the New England area) but also branches out to related musicians from elsewhere in the USA. And thus, various levels are apparent: local scenes (as will be discussed in chapter 5.4, there had been local events involving many of the Free Folk

¹²⁷ Keenan, David: The Fire Down Below, in: *The Wire. Adventures in Modern Music* 234 (August 2003), 34–41.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* (Emphasis in the original text.)

¹³¹ Matt Valentine, quoted in *ibid.*

Festival's participants for years), trans-local scenes (the festival involved groups like Scores from Texas and Pelt from Virginia, and Keenan also mentions West Coast-based artists like Jackie-O Motherfucker and Six Organs Of Admittance) and, arguably, virtual scenes through the Internet's importance for the communication between these local pockets – and the very connection and tagging that occurred through the article's publication and reception.

A few years later, in a talk called “Both Sides = Now: the Aesthetics of Free Folk”¹³², Keenan further elaborates on his understanding of the concept of ‘free folk’. I consider this a key text for my thesis, as it goes into further detail on many of the points mentioned above, again starting out from the Brattleboro Free Folk Festival. Keenan again emphasizes that the folk aspect is to be found in the involved artists doing it themselves, not seeking legitimization. He also, again, emphasizes the cottage industry aspect and that the festival hosted the “sound of a community”¹³³. Importantly, artists Keenan's discussion encompasses include not just those mentioned in his original article but also ones like Grouper or The Skaters whose connection to the festival or the New England scene may not be as immediate and / or immediately apparent and whose work mostly wouldn't remind listeners of what is associated with folk music, often relying on loop / delay pedal technologies whose “massed voices” and “vocal magic” remind Keenan of ritualistic past musics (he contrasts these recordings with Gaelic psalm singing), but who still are connectable here musically as well as socially.

A few months after Keenan's original *Wire* article, Olaf Karnik published an article¹³⁴ in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* that emphasises the values of autonomy, collectivity and indeterminacy in these scenes. In terms of aesthetics, Karnik argues that the musical pieces are usually as long as the band names (and thus: comparatively long, as names like No-Neck Blues Band and Sunburned Hand Of The Man are listed). Improvisation, here, is seen as processual fathoming, collective experimentation as opposed to virtuosic individuals' group playing. To Karnik, this music, in its “*anschlussfähiges Nicht-auf-den- Punkt-Kommen*” (a connectable not-reaching-the-point), resembles poetry's

¹³² Keenan, David: Both Sides = Now: the Aesthetics of Free Folk. ExploreMusic talk (MP3), in: *Gateshead CLC Webradio*, http://www.ictgateshead.org/radio/2007/02/david_keenan_aesthetics_of_fre.html. Last accessed: March 14, 2011. Unfortunately, the download link doesn't appear to be active any more.

¹³³ Keenan: Both Sides = Now.

¹³⁴ Karnik, Olaf: Free Rock, Free Folk, Free USA. Rockmusik im Zeichen von Autonomie und Gemeinschaft, in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (October 23, 2003). <http://www.nzz.ch/2003/10/23/fe/article96DAG.html>. Last accessed: December 13, 2008.

ambivalence or “*wuchernden Diskursen ohne publizistische Repräsentanz*”¹³⁵ (sprawling discourses without publicistic representation). I think this is a crucial point: while this isn’t necessarily the case for every artist in these scenes, there doesn’t appear to be a grand focus on representation therein (despite the often elaborate limited edition artwork many releases arrive in). Sprawling rhizomes instead of tree-like structures, improvisatory immanence instead of transcendent ideals of genre and technique?

I also want to point out that Karnik mentions Animal Collective in the same breath as the other bands already mentioned in this paragraph. While their success far exceeds that of most other bands discussed in this thesis and has propelled them to what could be considered Internet stardom, the social and musical relations are very much in place (emphasized by the band’s choice of support acts on tours, including the likes of Axolotl, Grouper and Islaja). Animal Collective also act as a particularly obvious reminder, not least for Karnik, that while analog and acoustic instruments may be used in this research field, they are very much informed by developments in electronic music – a factor that has been reified in recent years through the increasing popularity of more beat-based musics¹³⁶.

At this point, it is of use to refer to Diedrich Diederichsen’s highly interesting review¹³⁷ of Animal Collective’s *Strawberry Jam*, in whose introductory paragraph Diederichsen differentiates between two different uses of the term ‘New Weird America’. On the one hand, it is applied to musics that match the contents of the two articles discussed thus far in this chapter (exemplified in this case by No-Neck Blues Band, Sunburned Hand Of The Man, Pelt, Jackie-O Motherfucker and others), which Diederichsen – certainly not as a putdown, but unfortunately – sees as usually performed “*von jungen Männern mit eigenwilligen Knoten und Verschlingungen im Haar und nicht immer der allerbesten Körperhygiene*”¹³⁸, suggesting the typical musician in these scenes sports idiosyncratic hairstyles and dubious bodily hygiene. By quipping about the hippie cliché evoked by the beards and long hair that, indeed, can be encountered quite often in my field of research, Diederichsen arguably paints the field as more male-dominated than it actually is and, crucially, overlooks female players like those mentioned in Keenan’s article – which are of great importance to the scenes.

¹³⁵ Karnik: Free Rock.

¹³⁶ cf. for example Keenan, David: The Sedition of Song, in: *The Wire. Adventures In Sound And Music* 335 (January 2012), 40–41.

¹³⁷ Diederichsen, Diedrich: Raus aus dem Kuscheluniversum, in: taz.de (September 8, 2007). <http://www.taz.de/!4343/>. Last accessed: January 3, 2012.

¹³⁸ Diederichsen: Raus aus dem Kuscheluniversum.

On the other hand, the second use of ‘New Weird America’ refers to artists like Devendra Banhart and CocoRosie, whom Diederichsen describes as individualist songwriters, pampered personalities with connections to polysexual queer metropolitan lifestyles. (Diederichsen locates Animal Collective at the intersection between these tendencies and goes on to discuss their then-recent albums in terms of sexuality – one of the most interesting and lucid texts that have been written about the band.) Here, too, he certainly quips, and this type of contrasting can be unhelpful as it may obscure the contributions of female artists to the first-mentioned variant. Nonetheless, the differentiation can be illuminating as it hints at the tension that pervades the use of genre names, sometimes resulting in the creation of virtual scenes that can be quite unrelated to musicians’ actual social and artistic lives. Amanda Petrusich, too, points towards this and further genre messiness when she claims:

Following Keenan’s article, most of the artists and albums included in his piece were tucked under the umbrella of “New Weird America,” which flowed into the slightly more descriptive “free-folk,” which became “freak-folk,” and subsequently devolved, as more and more diverse artists were swept up in the wave, into the catchall “indie-folk” – even though the differences between psych-infused free-folk like MV & EE and acoustic indie-folk like Iron and Wine generally seem profound enough to warrant at least two distinct, hyphenated prefixes.¹³⁹

Here isn’t the space and place to further untangle and discuss the use of various ‘folk’ terms that have been appearing in various media over the years. What remains useful here is the ‘free folk’ term’s hint at the social aspect, as opposed to ‘folk’ as a more or less rigid genre denominator.

Martin Büsser’s *testcard* article “befreite klänge”¹⁴⁰ picks up where Karnik left off. Büsser discusses Karnik’s statement that a “*spirituelle Wertegemeinschaft*”¹⁴¹ (a spiritual community of values) in the widest sense may be found here: this doesn’t necessarily imply an emancipatory approach on the musicians’ part, citing reactionary or fascistoid neofolk as counter-examples; however, these free folk fields’ protagonists are closer to the “*libertären Freak-out-Konzept[e]*”¹⁴² of the 1970s – here, artists like Amon Düül, Anima, AMM and the Scratch Orchestra are cited.

Büsser explicitly widens the field by including Black Dice and Load Records and thus protagonists emerging from a hardcore or post-punk context. As he points out, these

¹³⁹ Petrusich, Amanda: *It Still Moves. Lost Songs, Lost Highways, and the Search for the Next American Music* (London 2009), 239.

¹⁴⁰ Büsser, Martin: Befreite Klänge. Die neue Lust an Experiment und Kollektiv – Von BLACK DICE bis Load Records, in: *testcard 14. Discover America* (Mainz 2005), 24–33.

¹⁴¹ Karnik: Free Rock.

¹⁴² Büsser: Befreite Klänge, 26.

overlap with the artists discussed thus far in this chapter. Büsser suggests that ‘free’ music, understood as an oppositional model, isn’t reducible to one style or movement, is influenced by multiple sources and in flux. Connecting Black Dice to Animal Collective and Wolf Eyes, he argues they treat styles like sounds and instruments, open-ended and unpretentious.

In an overview on ‘free folk’¹⁴³ for a *De:Bug* magazine special on folk tendencies, again emphasizing collectivity and even a pack- or swarm-like character, Büsser makes further interesting points. Again differentiating these musicians’ approaches from reactionary, purist tendencies, he suggests that a certain essentialism is to be found here as well as a Deleuzian becoming-animal, anti-consumerist but not escapist: the music isn’t purist but contaminated by noises, field recordings and many different styles. Here, Büsser finds an interest in freeing the form and the hope that this may impact on one’s mind – an inherently political approach.

More recently (in fact, in summer 2009, around the time I visited the USA to conduct interviews for this thesis), David Keenan published a much-discussed article on what he calls ‘Hypnagogic pop’¹⁴⁴, a set of tendencies in the “post-Noise underground”¹⁴⁵ that sees musicians work past musics, notably New Age and pop modes and especially so from the 1980s, into highly personal, skewed aesthetic worlds. This concept is particularly useful to discuss the respective solo projects of Spencer Clark and James Ferraro, the duo constituting the aforementioned Skaters. Beyond that, I think it may serve as a starting point to elaborations on, or an example of, the availability and usability of a large amount of different sounds and styles that has further widened the heterogeneous sonics not just of these scenes. Among the musicians discussed in Keenan’s hypnagogic pop article are Pocahaunted, a now-defunct project featuring Not Not Fun records co-owner Amanda Brown (whose main musical project is now L.A. Vampires); in his review of Not Not Fun associate Sun Araw’s *Ancient Romans*, Nick Southgate states that the album is inspired by “the concept of the concept album”, and that Sun Araw is “creating the *idea* of a musical career”. Southgate puts this approach into context by referring to the framework of “a digital age”: “This strategy of

¹⁴³ Büsser, Martin: Free Folk: Kollektive Improvisation. Kollektivimprovisation und Naturmystik, in: *De:Bug Magazin* (February 2, 2007). <http://www.de-bug.de/mag/4662.html>. Last accessed: December 12, 2008.

¹⁴⁴ cf. Keenan, David: Childhood’s end, in: *The Wire. Adventures in Modern Music* 306 (August 2009), 26–31.

¹⁴⁵ Keenan: Childhood’s end, 30.

becoming an eclectic sound factory has been adopted by labels like Not Not Fun and reflected by artists who adopt a welter of collaborations and identities.”¹⁴⁶

By referring to these various articles, I hope to have pointed out important attributes of the field of research. Most importantly, and constitutively for this thesis, David Keenan’s conceptualization (via Matt Valentine) of ‘free folk’ as a concept not primarily referring to or signifying a certain sound or musical style will be harnessed in this paper. Diverse, often improvisatory, experimental modes are performed by friends, with friends, and there are networks fostering these activities¹⁴⁷.

3.3 Webs and / or multiplicities: further thoughts on the scenes’ constitution

While genre names generally tend to be arbitrary, terms like ‘free folk’ or ‘New Weird America’ can be considered particularly fluid and unstable, used by different agents in different ways, sometimes replaced by other, related terms. But while it is possible to find vastly differing definitions, uses or conceptualizations of these terms, it seems likely that these diffuse discourses’ very existence is unthinkable without ‘their’ scenes’ lack of cohesiveness, the missing formal structures and the absence of musical as well as geographical boundaries. In order to (re)construct or trace the scenes in an attempt to make them useful for the studies to be undertaken, let alone to even show *why* they can be considered scenes of their own to some extent, it is necessary to see this heterogeneity as a constitutive factor. To give an idea of channels to follow, means of tracing the musical-social fields this paper analyzes, I will list various factors and attributes that appear central to my understanding of these fields:

The thesis deals with a vast array of musicians from different (bio- and geographical) backgrounds. Connections on a micro-level might enable one to talk of local ‘scenes’ in some cases – like the Southern Californian drone and psych / dub strategies of artists related to the Not Not Fun label, New York’s connections between acts like Double Leopards and Mouthus – , but they do not necessarily form a stable greater whole, and they themselves certainly cannot be considered ‘fixed’ and monolithic.

¹⁴⁶ Southgate, Nick: Sun Araw. Ancient Romans, in: *The Wire. Adventures in Modern Music* 332 (October 2011), 60. (Emphasis in the original text.)

¹⁴⁷ Also see, for example, Holger Adam’s remarks on the last point: Adam, Holger: Brattleboro – Hasselt – Krefeld. Internationale Begegnungen im Plattenladen: Unrock-Instore-Gigs, in: *testcard. Beiträge zur Popgeschichte 19. Blühende Nischen* (Mainz 2010), 82.

However, these single acts, or even local connections, are often perceived as a ‘greater whole’ – something this particular thesis arguably does as well, although on the basis of attempted constant (self-)reflection. While the connections drawn in articles, band descriptions and the like are not to be considered definite or essential, they are not necessarily random either (although, possibly, chosen randomly in some cases due to the complexity of relations between acts).

Thus, beyond mere references to perception in the media and geo- and biographical backgrounds, moments and realms of connection include (among others):

- Record labels: many of the artists to be dealt with here are not exclusively tied to specific companies. Even acts like Philadelphia’s Bardo Pond, who were released numerous albums through large independent label Matador Records and, later on, the label branch of successful festival and concert organizers All Tomorrow’s Parties, release (often limited) recordings either on their own, through associated label three lobed or on prolific and internally varied labels like Time-Lag or Camera Obscura in between their higher-profile releases.¹⁴⁸ Labels of varying sizes and differing output strategies and modes tend to share artists between them. The aforementioned labels could be used as examples here: Time-Lag Records has released recordings by the likes of Davenport, Fursaxa, GHQ, Matt Valentine and Erika Elder, Six Organs Of Admittance, Wooden Wand and The Vanishing Voice and others¹⁴⁹, artists from quite different parts of the USA; three lobed’s discography, too, includes releases by GHQ and Six Organs Of Admittance, Valentine and Elder in various guises and various projects related to Wooden Wand and The Vanishing Voice¹⁵⁰; Camera Obscura, like Time-Lag Records, has released albums by The Iditarod¹⁵¹, and Fursaxa has released three albums on ATP Recordings thus far¹⁵² – and, to strengthen the point, it might be worth pointing out that the long list of releases by Last Visible Dog Records includes material from Davenport, Fursaxa and Black

¹⁴⁸ cf. Bardo Pond Discography, in: *Bardo Pond. Hummingbird Mountain*.

¹⁴⁹ <http://www.threelobed.com/bardo/discography/>. Last accessed: January 24, 2012.

¹⁵⁰ cf. *Time-Lag Records*. <http://www.time-lagrecords.com/>. Last accessed: January 24, 2012.

¹⁵¹ cf. *three lobed recordings*. <http://www.threelobed.com/tlr/>. Last accessed: January 24, 2012.

¹⁵² cf. Iditarod, The. <http://www.secreteye.org/theiditarod/>. Last accessed: January 24, 2012.

¹⁵² cf. Fursaxa, in: *ATP Recordings*. <http://www.atpfestival.com/recordings/artist/fursaxa/view.php>. Last accessed: January 24, 2012.

Forest / Black Sea, a band featuring The Iditarod's Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg¹⁵³.

- Bands sharing members: while observing the fact that many bands discussed here share members might appear like stating the obvious or seem rather banal, at least when discussing smaller, locally based 'cells', these exchanges are important enough for 'free folk' conceptualizations to render the concept of 'supergroups' and its idea of collaborations by members of different bands being somewhat 'extraordinary' relatively unimportant or even redundant. Not only do the aforementioned GHQ feature prolific New York-based artist Marcia Bassett, but another frequent member is Pete Nolan, drummer of originally Connecticut-based noise rock group Magik Markers. The latter band's singer, Elisa Ambrogio, has been playing in Six Organs Of Admittance, whose sole constant member, originally California-based Ben Chasny, has also contributed to Magik Markers releases and concerts. Together, Ambrogio and Chasny have recently released an album under the moniker 200 Years.¹⁵⁴ While all these musicians are quite well-known for their various projects and new collaborations certainly can be met with plenty of enthusiasm¹⁵⁵, there seems to be nothing out of the ordinary about these exchanges.
- Collaborative releases: this factor certainly overlaps with the aforementioned one; but beyond GHQ-style (seemingly) 'mixed' bands and rare collaborations (the many guest appearances of Charalambides core members Christina and Tom Carter come to mind), and thus the various occasions on which these musicians actually *perform* together, it is worth noting the many 'split' releases and compilations that play their own part in these scenes' ways of networking: Six Organs Of Admittance and Charalambides, Charalambides and Pocahaunted, Pocahaunted and Robedoor, Robedoor and Leslie Keffer, Leslie Keffer and Inca Ore, Inca Ore and Axolotl, Axolotl and The Skaters: long (and arbitrary) chains of association show that the split release format – particularly on vinyl, but also on cassette and sometimes

¹⁵³ cf. *Last Visible Dog Records*. <http://www.lastvisibledog.com/>. Last accessed: January 24, 2012.

¹⁵⁴ cf. 200 Years, in: *Drag City*. <http://www.dragcity.com/artists/200-years>. Last accessed: January 24, 2012.

¹⁵⁵ Indeed, seeing what appears to have been the first ever performance of the Ambrogio / Chasny duo line-up at 2007's Donaufestival in Krems (Austria) without prior knowledge still is something of a formative experience for me, regardless of the retrospective appropriation of an analytical gaze.

nonetheless on CD – is a popular one among many of the acts discussed here. In addition, connections can manifest in compilation releases; they can reinforce the spectrum of festivals (like the Terrastock festival compilations¹⁵⁶), print publications (like the *Golden Apples Of The Sun* compilation Devendra Banhart compiled for Arthur Magazine¹⁵⁷), labels or general connections (with intricately arranged and curated releases like *The Jewelled Antler Library*¹⁵⁸ and *The Invisible Pyramid: Elegy Box*¹⁵⁹ offering EP-length space for contributors' tracks) (also see chapter 5.6).

- Festivals, concerts, tours: in his aforementioned “Both Sides = Now” talk, David Keenan alludes to the importance of live shows for the field of research.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, festivals are popular meeting points, nodes of connection (see chapter 5.6).
- Publications: as the very presence of articles, and especially David Keenan's much-discussed *Wire* articles, suggests, it is also through publications that scenes are constituted – on a virtual level, especially once genre terms are removed from the very vicinity of primary articles directly discussing certain phenomena. Virtual and trans-local or even local aspects can certainly interact and overlap; through the continued use of phrases and concepts, real life is influenced, certainly on economic levels, in how musicians' work is covered and discussed and thus included in festival line-ups et cetera. Also, publications like *Arthur*¹⁶¹, *Forced Exposure*¹⁶² or *The Ptolemaic Terrascope*¹⁶³ are or were read by numerous interviewees and thus sources of information.
- It is also worth noting that, despite this paper's focus and the sometime use of the term ‘New Weird America’, these fields are not limited to the United

¹⁵⁶ cf. Terrascope Merchandise, in: *Terrascope*. <http://terrascope.co.uk/Merchandise/Merchandise.htm>. Last accessed: January 24, 2012.

¹⁵⁷ cf. “Golden Apples Of The Sun” cd curated by Devendra Banhart, in: *Arthur Magazine*. <http://store.arthurmag.com/product/back-in-print-%E2%80%9Cgolden-apples-of-the-sun-%E2%80%9D-curated-and-designed-by-devendra-banhart>. Last accessed: January 24, 2012.

¹⁵⁸ cf. Jewelled Antler Library, The, in: *Porter Records*. <http://www.porterrecords.com/id35.html>. Last accessed: January 24, 2012.

¹⁵⁹ cf. Invisible Pyramid, The: elegy box. 6 CD compilation, in: *Last Visible Dog*. <http://www.lastvisibledog.com/080.htm>. Last accessed: January 22, 2012.

¹⁶⁰ cf. Keenan: Both Sides = Now.

¹⁶¹ cf. *Arthur Magazine* R.I.P. 2002-2011. <http://www.arthurmag.com/arthur-has-departed/>. Last accessed: January 24, 2012.

¹⁶² cf. the mailorder of the same name: *Forced Exposure*. <http://www.forcedexposure.com/>. Last accessed: January 24, 2012.

¹⁶³ *Terrascope*. <http://www.terrascope.co.uk/>. Last accessed: January 24, 2012.

States; taking a closer look at the various “moments and realms of connection” discussed above, it becomes obvious that geographical boundaries, while certainly influential, are constantly broken down. Particularly obvious connections could be those to artists, festivals, labels and/or publications in the United Kingdom, Finland, Japan or Belgium, but singling these out appears somewhat reductionist; surprising connections constantly become visible.

3.4 Exploring dynamic, heterogeneous scenes

Earlier on, I have discussed the usefulness of Deleuze and Guattari’s complex thought models. The fluid, multiple, hard-to-grasp connections discussed here suggest that any linear, limited approach based on ‘tree’ models or searching for ‘roots’ might not be sufficient to allow me to work towards an adequate, sound conceptualization of the scenes in question. It might thus be useful to consider the connections between these diverse acts and their surroundings as rhizomatic. This particular approach would also be a constant reminder that even the smallest ‘units’ discussed here – and in the end, this thesis *does* discuss questions of musicians’ gender– are not fixed even beyond their gender identities, which have already been discussed as fluid and arbitrary. A rhizome consists of lines: to illustrate the points discussed above and the usefulness of a rhizomatic model, picture 1990s band Un, which featured, among others, Marcia Bassett and Tara Burke. Un only issued a small number of releases, including an LP and a 7-inch on Siltbreeze Records¹⁶⁴. Bassett went on to be a member of New York drone ensemble Double Leopards while also establishing herself as a solo artist (as Zaïmph) and a member of GHQ and the duos Zaika and Hototogisu, the former with Tom Carter of Charalambides, who now lives in New York too, the latter with UK-based Matthew Bower of Sunroof! and Skullflower. Bower, under his Sunroof! guise, has released a split single with Finnish collective Kemiälliset Ystävät¹⁶⁵; Kemiälliset Ystävät shares members with Avarus and ES; Tara Burke has appeared on Avarus’s *Vesikansi* live album and recorded, now under her Fursaxa guise, with Sami Sänpääkilä of ES¹⁶⁶. The

¹⁶⁴ cf. *Siltbreeze Records*. <http://www.siltbreeze.com>. Last accessed: January 25, 2012.

¹⁶⁵ Kemiälliset Ystävät / Sunroof! split, in: *Fonal Records*. Shop. http://www.fonal.com/shop/kemiallisetystavat_kemiallisetystavatsunroofsplit_lp. Last accessed: January 25, 2012.

¹⁶⁶ cf. Fursaxa – Alone In The Dark Wood, in: *Second Layer Records*. <http://www.secondlayer.co.uk/index/p3933.htm>. Last accessed: January 25, 2012.

Siltbreeze label, in the meantime, is not just known for its various Charalambides releases but also put out *Introducing*, the debut album of noise-pop singer U.S. Girls (Megan Remy); in 2009, Remy released a single on Not Not Fun Records, which has also issued split singles by Pocahaunted with Charalambides and the latter's Christina Carter, respectively; in addition, its discography includes a split single between Axolotl and Skullflower, the former of which has also participated in 2008's collaborative "Approximately Infinite Universe" UK tour that also featured, among others, Kemiälliset Ystävät, ES and Fursaxa¹⁶⁷.

While this game of free association could be prolonged approximately infinitely, be it to annoy or delight the reader, this should be enough to show the complexity of the connections at hand (or not at hand): everything is connected to each other, and there are no fixed dots, just lines – an important factor that could be graphically enhanced by picturing band members' mobility (which again became obvious during my interviews: many interviewees have moved between decidedly different parts of the USA) or line-up changes within bands, both factors that have been mostly ignored in the list above.

I have presented Bennett's and Peterson's concept of local, trans-local and virtual scenes above. The field researched here cannot be reduced to any single one of these three types, but the typology can help understand the field's workings. As relations between acts on a local level have shown or will show, activities on a small geographic scale can be described and could be analyzed in detail: the connections between artists and their small festivals in Brattleboro, VT and / or in Western Massachusetts, the activities of a label like Not Not Fun in its native Los Angeles, the musical activities of Fishtown compound residents in Philadelphia can be conceptualized as those of local scenes, working on the level of personal meetings in living places, venues and / or towns all located within a small geographic radius. However, reminiscent of some of the criticisms of the local scene perspective Bennett has pointed out¹⁶⁸, it is important to see even these geographically defined circles' connections, influences and activities beyond the local.

¹⁶⁷ cf. Kemiälliset Ystävät & Axolotl + Es & Fursaxa + Islaja, Blevin Blectrum & Samara Lubelski + Dream Triangle, in: *Capsule*. <http://www.capsule.org.uk/event/kemiälliset-ystavat-axolotl-es-fursaxa-islajablevin-blectrum-samara-lubelski-dream-triangle>. Last accessed: January 25, 2012.

¹⁶⁸ cf. Bennett: Consolidating the music scenes perspective, 228.

As the empirical part (chapter 5) will show, these examples cannot be reduced to the 'local' aspects of the practice. All the artists and labels mentioned here and, usually, elsewhere in this thesis have worked with others outside of their own surroundings, even beyond setting up concerts elsewhere. The thesis's very title mentions the geographical focus on the United States, which serves both as a limitation to a border- and limitless topic and, on a different level and from a different viewpoint, as a widening, or keeping-wide of the project's focus. Within this paper, I will be referring multiple times to interviewees' (and other protagonists') international connections. Five interviews even took place in Europe, with interview partners living in Europe (at the time). Most of my interview partners have lived and worked on music in different parts of the country, or even in other countries, and worked with people from other countries on various levels (musical collaboration, label work, tour booking...). As Bennett points out, presenting certain studies on trans-local scenes¹⁶⁹, protagonists' own mobility adds to scenes' trans-local character.

My own position within the field of research, my own mapping thereof points towards virtual aspects of these scenes' workings and practice, just as interview partners' remarks on, for example, the role of the Internet do. As I have described in the introductory chapter, my own entrance into these scenes has very much been one through virtual channels. Mailing lists, message boards and more immediate access to music via the Internet have helped artists make their own ways through the field of research. The virtual level may also be encountered in the genre term dilemma hinted at above: to what extent do such terms pigeonhole superficially related artists?

I will return to the question of scene typology throughout the paper, pointing out aspects relatable to the categories of local, trans-local and virtual scenes and their manifold intersections. At this point, I would like to point out the reasons for and consequences of the topic's geographical limitation to the United States. The choice was somewhat arbitrary insofar as there are international connections just as there are local accumulations: the nation state USA doesn't appear to be (directly / primarily) constitutive for these scenes. At the same time, concert tour itineraries suggest that country borders (and continent borders) still remain relevant. What is taking place outside those borders is not ignored: interviewees living outside the USA were asked about their respective travels to Europe as well. Various interviewees talked about friends and fellow musicians from outside the USA and thus didn't necessarily reduce

¹⁶⁹ cf. *ibid.*, 228 – 230.

their own interview performance to a discussion of scenes defined according to national borders. My own interest in the English language and my greater familiarity with artists from the USA in comparison to British ones also contributed to my decision. Focussing on the USA allows for the imposition of certain limits onto a topic that is simultaneously very broad and very specific. As the part of the paper dedicated to the interviews and their analysis will show, geographical differentiations within the USA have to be taken into consideration so as to avoid homogenization.

I will state the obvious countless times throughout this paper. That is because I attempt to conceptualize that very banal and yet so inspiring aspect best summarized as “it’s just friends playing music”. At the same time, many aspects of this field of research are not obvious at all. One instance of discrepancy to fields studied by others can be found when reading a text like Mary Ann Clawson’s “Masculinity and skill acquisition in the adolescent rock band”, where “[t]he electronically amplified guitar band stands at the centre of rock music as it has been understood since the mid-1960s”, a status that extends to “rock’s social organisation and cultural identity.”¹⁷⁰ This holds true for Clawson’s field of research, but one of the possibly not so obvious aspects to my own field of research is its tendency to explode the band format through forms like those emerging from aesthetics of collectivity, the “massed voices” of solo projects or drone groups that don’t have to rely on classic instrumental band structures, or through the constant practice of collaboration and multi-band activity that may in other rock contexts provoke the use of a term like ‘supergroup’.

¹⁷⁰ Clawson, Mary Ann: Masculinity and skill acquisition in the adolescent rock band, in: *Popular Music* 18, 1 (1999), 101.

4 Interview methodology

Meeting people from Finland through the mail, I don't recall emailing that much early on, you'd just kinda mail a package to someone and they'd send you a letter back or something, that was (laughs) still happening, which is almost dead now, which is weird to think, that's only like five years ago (MS: Yeah) (GD and MS laugh). It's ridiculous, that you're here is even weird, because, yeah, most people just email interviews around the globe, but you're actually going around, you're kind of dinosaur style, actually here taping me (both laugh)¹⁷¹
(Glenn Donaldson)

My main tools to assess the field of research as presented in the last chapter were interviews. Interviews can never be perfectly pre-planned (and human interaction's very spontaneity and unpredictability can be a good thing, as I hope this chapter will show), but they can be prepared and conceptualized in order to make the best possible use of what they offer. In this chapter, I will present the considerations that went into my preparation phase, discuss my actual interview activities and explain how I dealt with the interview contents, leading to this paper's creation. My main source here is Ulrike Froschauer and Manfred Lueger's *Das qualitative Interview*, whose preferred paths I will diverge from in some ways, but whose conceptualization of (qualitative) interviews and whose hints for their conduct have guided me throughout this project. I will close the chapter by describing the steps leading up to the text's completion.

4.1 "Das qualitative Interview"

I chose interviews as a means of accessing the field of research for a variety of reasons, all of them methodological as elaborated on below but also, to a certain extent, personal as well as political in a wider sense. Not only is this a very interesting set of skills to learn, but being able to access this field in person, to talk about my thesis in an (ideally) relaxed setting, was more than tempting an idea. It probably served to heighten a sense of personal responsibility for the material and its human sources. As Lutter and Reisenleitner write, "a connection with personal, 'lived' experience has been maintained and included in the academic writings and discussions that came out of this [British cultural studies', MS] tradition."¹⁷² This claim is situated within the anti-elitist academic (yet anti-disciplinary), social and political field manifested, or attempted to manifest, by cultural studies.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Glenn Donaldson (San Francisco, July 24, 2009).

¹⁷² Lutter / Reisenleitner: Introducing History (in)to Cultural Studies, 614.

It can be argued that this thesis was written in exchange, even negotiation, with those agents it is supposed to research. The researcher's gaze is privileged by default, but not necessarily more correct. To access the field of research at eye level is also to take responsibility for a critical, possibly sympathetic but not unquestioningly affirmative approach and sober analysis. Qualitative interviews seemed ideal for an access to the field that would not forsake the field's complexity but would instead allow tracing the field and asking for constant creative self-reflection. (Also compare McRobbie's aforementioned comments on the ethnographer's changing role and reconsidered voice.¹⁷³) The following paragraphs will outline aspects of qualitative interviews that have been central to my work on this thesis and describe the process of preparing, conducting and analyzing the interviews.

Before conducting the interviews processed as part of my diploma thesis, the only (methodologically grounded) ones I had participated in had been markedly shorter exchanges as part of a university course on interview methods. Interviews had also been central to a friend's diploma thesis¹⁷⁴, adding to my interest and confidence in using them as (an increasingly central) part of my work. Ulrike Froschauer and Manfred Lueger's *Das qualitative Interview*, which had already been an important source for said friend, served as a methodological guide to my first (and most of my further) considerations related to the form these interviews should take. Froschauer and Lueger discuss the type (or: types, manifold as they are) of interview alluded to in the book's title and emphasize that qualitative interviews should not be reduced to an easy source of knowledge merely in need to be summarized. Instead, the "*analytische Potential*"¹⁷⁵ ideally offered by qualitative interviews needs to be harnessed through careful analysis. On the continuum of interview styles proposed by Froschauer and Lueger¹⁷⁶, whose poles are, on the one hand, genuinely qualitative and, on the other hand, genuinely quantitative interviews, my own approach tended towards the qualitative pole. However, it did so while not permitting the entire range of freedoms ideally found in a decidedly qualitative interview, owing to the field's size and my own interest in mapping its social relations, rather than focusing solely on an in-depth analysis of

¹⁷³ cf. McRobbie: *The Es and the Anti-Es*, 130–131.

¹⁷⁴ Ertl, Lukas: *Vom "Gastarbeiter" zum Millionär? Ein Blick auf "Erfolgsgeschichten" und Capabilities im Berufsleben der zweiten Generation von Menschen mit türkischem Migrationshintergrund in Wien und Vorarlberg* (diploma thesis, Wien 2008).

¹⁷⁵ Froschauer / Lueger: *Das qualitative Interview*, 8.

¹⁷⁶ cf. *ibid.*, 33–35.

patterns of perception and acting. Here, thoughts brought forward by Andreas Witzel to outline the problem-centered interview¹⁷⁷ have been of use; I will go on to describe these in greater detail over the following sub-chapters, adding to Froschauer's and Lueger's work as well as contrasting these approaches.

According to Froschauer and Lueger, the basis for empirical analysis and for their own explanations is threefold¹⁷⁸:

1. *forschungspragmatische methodologische Ausgangsposition*: a basic understanding of the (possible) composition of the social system¹⁷⁹ in question. As discussed in chapter 3, observation of media coverage as well as artists' trajectories (releases, tours, festival appearances, collaborations...) led to my adoption of certain ideas on the heterogeneity, dynamic character and contingency of the musical-social fields or scenes discussed in this paper. The project's first interview (as discussed below) dealt explicitly with these questions of the field's composition or construction.
2. *flexibles Verfahrensrepertoire*: following on from 1., the researcher's tools need to be suitably flexible. The very question of how to approach these scenes, how to conduct these interviews, how to map the field of research, was central to the research process from the very beginning. The avoidance of a strict Questions & Answers (Q & A)-like structure for the interviews' largest parts helped interviewer and interviewees construct texts that were, while certainly not pure, essential or objective, not entirely determined by clear-cut questions and expectations. As mentioned in chapter 2, imposition of binary models of gender and the idea of specific presumed gender 'issues' was to be avoided.
3. *reflexive Forschungsstrategie*: both the basic understanding of the social system in question and the tools used to approach it need to be modifiable. From the very beginning, the expectations for and ideas on the social fields have been kept flexible, emphasizing an inherent heterogeneity and dynamism beyond paying lip service. This can also bring with itself fragility, (self-)reflection tending towards (self-)doubt. However, I believe the adjustments made to my

¹⁷⁷ cf. Witzel, Andreas: The Problem-Centered Interview, in: *Forum: Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 1, 1 (2000), Art. 22, 26 paragraphs. <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0001228>. Last accessed: January 15, 2012.

¹⁷⁸ cf. Froschauer / Lueger: *Das qualitative Interview*, 11.

¹⁷⁹ Froschauer and Lueger tend to use the term '*soziales System*'; in order to stay close to the original text, I am using its Anglophone equivalent here while, due to personal preferences and for greater coherence with big parts of the research process, using 'social field(s)' elsewhere.

tools and my unavoidable changes of perspective were adequate and not detrimental to the project. Ideally, they are integrated into the analysis and seen as an opportunity for a suitably complex tracing of the process and the fields.

Froschauer and Lueger describe the claim central to their explanations: “*Qualitative Forschung widmet sich der Untersuchung der sinnhaften Strukturierung von Ausdrucksformen sozialer Prozesse.*”¹⁸⁰ The role of qualitative research is thus to investigate the structures of meaning of social processes’ forms of expression. While facts and what can be considered data (in this thesis’s case: mostly names of fellow artists, labels, places...) can certainly be collected through qualitative interviews – as has been the case here, too – these interviews allow for an analysis of what is relevant to the interviewees. Its logic and developmental dynamics are to be analyzed in their relationality and sequentiality – matching this project’s interest in relations that constitute the field of research. My thesis’s focus may not always be on the aspects particularly important to Froschauer and Lueger, but their conceptualization of what can be done in and through interviews remains relevant and influences my ways of asking questions: my interviews remain open to different types of analysis in the future.

Interview partners are “*nicht bloß ExpertInnen ihres Systems, sondern repräsentieren in ihren Aussagen das System und ihre Beziehungen zu diesem*”¹⁸¹ – not just experts, but representatives of their system and their relations to the system. Froschauer and Lueger emphasize the need to not consider the interviews’ obvious contents primary.¹⁸² “*Im Zentrum stehen kommunikative Prozesse der Generierung von Informationen, die, in einen lebensweltlichen und organisationalen Kontext eingebettet, zu einer geordneten Wissensstruktur zusammengefügt werden [...]*”¹⁸³ An interview (or *Forschungsgespräch* – research exchange or conversation, as Froschauer and Lueger prefer to call it to distinguish their approach from markedly different interviews relating to quantitative research¹⁸⁴) generates information. Contextualized, said information needs to be assembled into an ordered structure of knowledge. Qualitative interviews vary from approach to approach, project to project, but they tend to concentrate on interviewees’ own means of structuring their surroundings, their world. They provoke

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 17.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 20.

¹⁸² cf. ibid., 15–21.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 35.

¹⁸⁴ cf. ibid., 14.

“Selektionsleistungen”¹⁸⁵ – selection efforts: an interview is never the perfect narration and / or explanation of something easy to grasp, and thereby pictured.

Even in the case of radically ‘free’ interviews, the mere presence of an interviewer cannot be subtracted from the interviews’ results to reveal an immaculate original voice. This doesn’t have to be a hindrance to the interviewer’s project. Instead, her or his own position must be constantly reflected on. As Froschauer and Lueger argue, it is important for the interviewer to work towards a beneficial interview situation or ‘*Gesprächsklima*’. The interviewer needs to be a learner, curious and attentive, avoiding prejudice and confrontation.¹⁸⁶

This once again relates to the question of perspectivity. An interviewer can always be considered the resulting text’s co-author¹⁸⁷ – not just for the obvious reason of having posed questions or simply participated verbally in the interview, but because the interviewed’s reply is usually related to what the interviewer said (and, ideally / in an open exchange, the other way round). Froschauer and Lueger emphasize that conversation is negotiation, “*interaktive[r] Aufbau sozialer Verstehensweisen im Sinne von Ko-Konstruktionen*”¹⁸⁸ – social modes of understanding are established, constructed by all the participants. This is unavoidable and not just reducible to the actual recorded exchange – it is important to keep in mind (or: in a notebook) how contact with the interviewed was established, and what was discussed before and after the interview. It also impacts the analysis, both in terms of the necessity to read the text as co-authored and in terms of the interpreter’s own perspectivity. This is aggravated in my thesis’s case by the fact that I am both interviewer and interpreter.¹⁸⁹

Before I go on to discuss Froschauer and Lueger’s elaboration on the types of expertise encountered in one’s research, I want to deepen the understanding of my own approach by referring to Andreas Witzel’s aforementioned category of the problem-centered interview¹⁹⁰. Like Froschauer and Lueger, Witzel refers to Grounded Theory in his deliberations on the interview type. However, Witzel’s interests only partially match

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 34.

¹⁸⁶ cf. ibid., 58–64.

¹⁸⁷ The notion of co-authorship has been quite present during my work on this thesis and was suggested to me in this form by my supervisor, Roman Horak.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 51.

¹⁸⁹ cf. ibid., 83–84. Froschauer and Lueger suggest not reading interviews before the interpretation, thus implying the need for adequate distribution of different research process steps within a research team.

¹⁹⁰ I am following Witzel: The Problem-Centered Interview here for its first few chapters ([1] – [4]) and will then insert additional ideas by Witzel at later points in this text, matching and depending on this chapter’s own structure.

those of Froschauer and Lueger. “The principles guiding a problem-centered interview (PCI) aim to gather objective evidence on human behavior as well as on subjective perceptions and ways of processing social reality.”¹⁹¹ This matches my paper’s interest in actual social relations: who met whom, how, why where, when? What are agents’ means and ways of accessing and traversing these scenes? And yet – separable in writing but not in the networks’ constitution: what are their perceptions of their surroundings, what is it they emphasize (and why), how do they conceive of their surroundings, what can their selection efforts (or, to return to Deleuze and Guattari’s terminology: the “selecting and isolating” their tracing begins with) tell the researcher about the field of research?

Witzel demands for the interviewer to be flexible to keep her or his view from being imposed upon the material. The PCI involves

an inductive-deductive mutual relationship. The inevitable previous knowledge which must thus be disclosed serves in the data collection phase as a heuristic-analytical framework for ideas for questions during the dialogue between the interviewer and respondent. At the same time, this principle of disclosure is manifest in that through narration what the observed subjects determine to be relevant is stimulated.¹⁹²

Witzel proposes three basic principles:

- problem-centered orientation. Working with PCI involves the two aspects to the research field that Witzel considers objective and subjective: “Action-related contexts of education, occupational and labor-market organization, gender, class or regional specifics are objective to the extent that individual action is a precondition and that they can not be altered by individual actors.” This type of view, decontextualized and shortened as it is here, runs the risk of reifying these categories, of being deterministic. However, Witzel points towards the different levels of experience, different types of category that may be accessed as part of the same process. The researcher needs to handle “the production of broad and differentiated data material” as well as “understan[d] the subjective view of the respondent while gradually making communication more precisely address the research problem.”¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Witzel: The Problem-Centered Interview, [1].

¹⁹² Ibid., [3].

¹⁹³ Ibid., [4].

- object-orientation: like Froschauer and Lueger, Witzel wants the interviewer to be flexible in her / his methods and interview style. One of the instruments he mentions as being potentially of use in a research design this flexible is “[t]he biographical method [which] points for instance to developing patterns of meanings in the process of an individual’s confrontation with social reality.”¹⁹⁴ As this implies, the interviewed’s biographies and narrations based thereon are of interest on multiple levels, not just either on the level of factual data or on the level of interview partners’ perception of their worlds. Considering (auto)biographic narration contingent (and not just a collection of facts), I have tried to make use of these perceptions and tracings of trajectories to trace the social field in question, the field of research.
- process orientation: “If the communication process is focused reasonably and acceptably on the reconstruction of orientations and actions, the interviewees respond with trust and thus open up; they feel they are being taken seriously.” Witzel thus emphasizes the link between the research process and the *Gesprächsklima* and goes on to point out the cooperation between the interviewer and the interviewed, a cooperation that continuously produces “new results”. These results are manifold and not necessarily unambiguous. “Story-telling as an original form of reflection” ¹⁹⁵ is preferable to forced, isolated answers.

I will be referring to Witzel’s interview type again at later points.

4.2 Expertise

To Froschauer and Lueger, the interviewed are “*ExpertInnen ihrer Lebenswelt*”¹⁹⁶. As experts of their own life’s environment, they carry different forms of expertise that a researcher can activate depending on her / his research question and approach. Froschauer and Lueger differentiate between three forms of expertise¹⁹⁷:

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Froschauer / Lueger: *Das qualitative Interview*, 36.

¹⁹⁷ For this list, I am referring to three different parts of Froschauer and Lueger’s book, all of which present and discuss the three forms of expertise, their implications and relevance for the research process and different phases thereof: Ibid., 37–39, 52–53, 91–92.

1. *systeminterne Handlungsexpertise*: the expertise related to action within a system involves sedimented knowledge resulting from experience in activities relevant to the social system. It is implicit to agents' "*Wahrnehmungs-, Denk- und Handlungsweisen*"¹⁹⁸, their modes of perception, thought and action (compare to the contingent patterns mentioned via Griesebner in chapter 2.5). It thus shapes and renders possible their social practice within the field and, as Froschauer and Lueger suggest, is crucial to a researcher's understanding of the field's logic. Here, they argue, the manifest content is less relevant than the expressive form, the articulation, influenced by a system's praxis. Thus, they suggest keeping interviews open and using forms that implicitly ask interviewees to determine a topic's / aspect's relevance, and that are "*erzählgenerieren[d]*"¹⁹⁹, generating narrations. Thus, structuring efforts are demanded from the interviewed. These efforts are expressions of the system's structures and processes. Interviewing multiple people at once (and thus accessing their interactions) can be beneficial; topics discussed usually include the everyday. The selection of interview partners should be broad so as not to generalize one-sided perspectives. Analysis of such interviews should be able to handle latent structures of meaning. Discussing this type of expertise, Froschauer and Lueger also refer to the uses of analyzing interviews' modes of articulation as opposed to manifest content; it is not least via Witzel's PCI that I hope to show how manifest content can be of great use for my thesis.
2. *feldinterne Reflexionsexpertise*, reflection expertise internal to the field, is, in comparison, "*stärker relational geprägt, reflexiver und abstrakter als konkretes Handlungswissen*"²⁰⁰ – more informed by relationality, more reflective and abstract. This reflection and abstraction is to be understood in relation to how agents carrying this expertise are situated at a social system's nodes. Froschauer and Lueger conceptualize this form's activation through interviews as similar to the activation of *systeminterne Handlungsexpertise* but propose a focus on the rules of action at the system's nodes which are represented by the respective interview partners. Analysis of such interviews should be able to focus on the

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 37.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 52.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 38. The original text included an emphasis on on the adjectives that could have been misleading here and was thus removed.

way a system's borders are drawn, "*welche das System zu einer Einheit in der Differenz integrieren*"²⁰¹ – which integrate the system to a unity in difference.

3. *externe Expertise* involves theoretical knowledge on the social system in question that may be particularly important for early conceptualization of the research field. The activation of this form of knowledge goes beyond a reiteration of the knowledge already available in literature on the fields, allowing the exchange to go further in-depth, access background information, discuss gaps in one's analysis. Conducting and analyzing these interviews are less demanding processes than in the other expertise forms' cases. Here, the manifest content (usually background information on the fields) can be summarized, analyzed in its structure and put into context.

Agents' expertise is inherently social, needs to be considered socially acquired ("*sozial angeeigne[t]*"²⁰²); thus, interview material can be thought of as manifestations of differentiation within the social system. In the context of qualitative research, fields' protagonists can themselves actively use their expertise – here, open interview questions are needed. This also relates to my experience of having interviewees help me with the setting up of further interviews. According to Froschauer and Lueger's writings, interview material can have three interlocking functions in qualitative studies: description of a specific phenomenon; contextual inspection of a social phenomenon; reflection of specific topics. Depending on the material's functions, different modes of analysis may be required.²⁰³

Two types of expertise can be encountered in the interviews I have conducted: *feldinterne Reflexionsexpertise* applies most obviously to those two interviewees (David Keenan and Phil McMullen) who are active as journalists and have been writing about these scenes for many years; of course, they also personify *systeminterne Handlungsexpertise*: for example, writer David Keenan has also been active as a musician; and as I interviewed him at the same time as his wife, musician Heather Leigh Murray, the interview's structure was close to that performed in most musicians' cases. On the other hand, Sharon Cheslow, who has been active as a musician in many different musical fields in distinct-seeming undergrounds over the years, publishes the *Interrobang?! Magazine* whose most recent edition is an *Anthology on Music and*

²⁰¹ Ibid., 92.

²⁰² Ibid., 39.

²⁰³ cf. *ibid.*, 39–41.

*Family*²⁰⁴. Her approach to these scenes results in a type of *feldinterne Reflexionsexpertise* different to Keenan's and McMullen's. Accordingly, and also owing to the somewhat different character of her *Handlungsexpertise* in comparison to most other interview partners' (and a limited timeframe, owing to circumstances), the interview structure differed from other interviews'.

But it should also be noted that *Reflexionsexpertise* is not just related to writing: as mentioned above, it can be encountered at a social system's nodes and relates to "größere Zusammenhänge"²⁰⁵, larger contexts. Many of the interviewees are active as label owners and / or have been involved in concert booking; Keenan and Murray also operate the Volcanic Tongue store already mentioned in chapter 1, McMullen's *Ptolemaic Terrascope* magazine begat the Terrastock festival series, and with Chris Moon of Last Visible Dog, I have interviewed at least one person more active and probably better-known as a label owner than as a musician. Generally, variations between interview approaches were rather minute, usually owing just as much to the specific interview situation as to any comparative assessment of interviewees' expertise. Exceptions to be noted here were the very first interview with Phil McMullen, which I will elaborate on below, and, as mentioned, the interview with Sharon Cheslow. *Externe Expertise* has not been accessed through any of my interviews; it could be argued that hardly any expertise of that type is available in relation to these scenes, with the exception of selected articles.

4.3 Planning and access

Froschauer and Lueger, discussing the research process's *Forschungsdesign*²⁰⁶ and its required openness and flexibility, divide said process into four phases. An introductory phase of planning sees researchers familiarize themselves with their field, keeping the basic research question open and vague, learning about the competences necessary to access the field. As seen in chapters 3.2 and 3.3, I used material from various media in order to structure the scenes, to achieve an early understanding of its agents' movement. That most of these musicians are available for contact through relatively straightforward means, not least in comparison to better-known musicians who might only be available

²⁰⁴ cf. *Interrobang?! Anthology on Music and Family*, in: *Interrobang?!*

<http://www.mindspring.com/~acheslow/AuntMary/bang/bang5.html>. Last accessed: September 7, 2011.

²⁰⁵ Froschauer / Lueger: *Das qualitative Interview*, 38.

²⁰⁶ cf. *ibid.*, 21–33.

for contact through management levels, granted me comparatively easy access. However, the details of how I contacted the interviewed changed over time due to considerations discussed below. Even after a reassessment of one's competences, there's no unrivalled, clear-cut form of contacting the interviewed and accessing the field. "*Welche Erwartungen, die mögliche AnsprechpartnerInnen an die ForscherInnen herantragen könnten, sind antizipierbar und welche Konsequenzen hat das für den Zugang zum Feld?*"²⁰⁷ is one of the questions Froschauer and Lueger ask: the researcher needs to ask her- / himself about contacted persons' expectations – can they be anticipated and what are the consequences for the researcher's access?

A second phase serves the researcher's orientation in the field, making her / his relations to the field more stable while also presumably resulting in the field's agents starting to consider the project. This phase can involve interviews with experts or gatekeepers. Gatekeepers in the social field are of interest "*um im Verlauf der Eröffnung des Zuganges eine erste Orientierung für den Gegenstandsbereich zu bekommen*"²⁰⁸: an exchange with a gatekeeper does not just open the field to the researcher's approach, it also helps structure the field. Central questions for this phase include how to identify different forms of expertise within the fields, how to make use of and stabilize one's access to the field, how to describe one's project to the field's protagonists in order to achieve mutual trust and a positive atmosphere. Early interview material should already be analyzed, the research question(s) need(s) to be revised. Matching this, the first interview's somewhat different character and the second interview's designation as a test for further interview work (for both: see below) helped me find my footing in the field.

The third phase is the main phase of research. Froschauer and Lueger emphasize its cyclical character. Investigation and interpretation are indivisible and need to remain flexible; constant reflection is of importance both for the research's content and for the project's methodological approaches; early results need to be reassessed constantly; Froschauer and Lueger suggest introducing cycles of partial analysis and discuss the importance of theoretical sampling for this phase. However, due to various circumstances that made my thesis work differ from the processes proposed in said text (the lack of a research team, the interviews' realization within a relatively short time span), I did not introduce dedicated cycles of partial analysis (similarly, there was no dedicated analysis of early interview material as suggested for the second phase beyond

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 25.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 26.

reflection on early interviews' character and success). However, constant reflection always remained part of the process. (See chapter 4.4 for information on interviews themselves and chapter 4.5 for information on the material's analysis.)

The fourth phase consists of the study's presentation. Who are a paper's potential / expected readers, what are its contributions? How can the presentation help connections be made, how can a study ensure its reliability? There is no particularly elaborate plan behind my thesis's presentation, but I hope constant references to and explanations of my research process and concepts help make it more understandable, even though its various chapters can be very different in how they deal with their respective contents.

My first attempt at contacting potential interviewees and thus accessing the field for my thesis dates back to January 2009, when I combined an order from the Volcanic Tongue store in Glasgow with remarks on my plans, sent by email. While there was exchange with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray related to my thesis, my interview with them ended up being the last one conducted for this paper, taking place in November 2009. The first one, with *Ptolemaic Terrascope* editor and Terrastock festival founder Phil McMullen, took place in London in May 2009. While some interview partners were obvious choices as they live(d) in Europe and / or played a festival in Austria at the right time, choosing interview partners for my planned US interview journey – and thus planning the actual journey in the first place – was a more challenging but ultimately very satisfying task. Beyond the issue of having to organize an exhaustive but not personally exhausting research-based journey with a feasible itinerary, the geographically, musically and otherwise heterogeneous and dynamic character of the field of research posed the problem of how to choose interview partners with that complexity in mind. This was aggravated to some extent by the fact that I was (and still am) more knowledgeable regarding certain regions on the musical map than others. I therefore tried to keep the sample varied in terms of gender, age, aesthetics, associations, geography et cetera while being aware that no selection could be truly representative.²⁰⁹ In addition to this, questions of availability and thus coincidence

²⁰⁹ Also see *ibid.*, 54–55, for remarks on the selection of interview partners. This also refers to the principles of theoretical samples (29–30), according to which both agents who may likely contradict assumptions already present *and* agents who may likely support these assumptions should be involved. The authors argue that the selection should refer to criteria of relevance resulting from the field's analysis, as opposed to statistics-based selection. Of course, this thesis's focus on gender requires a certain involvement of statistical factors; it was thus important to make sure there is no grave imbalance between men and women in the project's sample, but this is primarily a result of the thesis's focus, less a

played an important role. My choice of July as the month during which to travel the USA brought with itself the danger that potential interview partners might be on holidays; however, this proved to be an obstacle only in a small number of cases. Assuming and ultimately deciding that I would first arrive in New York, I started by contacting musicians living in the northeastern United States (New York, Vermont, Pennsylvania). When my first attempt at contacting a musician living on the West Coast (Eva Saelens / Inca Ore) proved successful and presented me with the opportunity for a particularly interesting interview, this helped structure my itinerary, which developed in mutual exchange with the opportunities presented by the responses received. Knowing I would be able to conduct an interview in a specific town, I would attempt to find further interview partners in the same area; realizing an interview in a specific area would be doable, I would construct my itinerary accordingly. While geographic diversity was achieved, and even more so thanks to some interviewees' great mobility as reflected in their narrations, certain areas were obviously excluded. Most notably, the Midwest appears as a large gap on my map, although my interview partners' trajectories ensure that there are at least certain connections to this area. I only conducted one interview in Texas, but numerous other interview partners have lived there; I didn't visit Portland, OR, but was lucky to meet numerous interview partners who have lived there. My itinerary can be found at the beginning of chapter 5.

While a certain grid of already confirmed interviews shaped my journey through the USA, I approached some interview partners whose whereabouts matched my route and schedule while the journey was on its way. In a few cases, interviewees even tried to help me get to talk to friends and associates of theirs, sometimes successfully so. Details of when and where exactly to meet were often clarified by phone, and the interviews took place in a variety of different surroundings, including parks, cafés, bars or musicians' own houses or apartments. Thus, interview circumstances and atmospheres differed from case to case, as did the time spent talking outside of the actual interview and the opportunities outside the actual interviews – whether I would join the interviewed for a meal, attend a concert of theirs and / or leave with a large number of releases I had been presented with or sold. Even beyond the endeavor's apparent fruitfulness, I am in awe of the generosity and openness encountered throughout my journey, all of which made what might have seemed like an impossible task only a few years earlier a lot easier.

concession to statistics. (However, it is generally interesting, although not unproblematic due to issues of reification, to connect questions of intersectionality to statistics.)

Most of the interviews were organized through various means of online communication – mostly through email and, in the rare cases that I was unable to find any such address, through social networking sites (last.fm, MySpace). As Froschauer and Lueger suggest, first attempts at contacting potential interview partners should include information (on the researcher, her / his project and the contacted person's place therein, expectations...) based on which they may decide whether to participate or not.²¹⁰ Aware of my tendency to write cluttered, overlong messages when attempting to explain my motives, interests et cetera, I feared that adhering to my habits would complicate communication. As explained earlier, I was hoping to learn from the research process even beyond the composition of an actual paper; thus, I decided to keep introductory messages relatively simple:

Dear Erika and Matt,

I'm working on my diploma thesis in Political Science at the University of Vienna -- current title: 'Gender construction and American "Free Folk" music(s)' -- and will visit the US for a few weeks, probably from early-to-mid-July to the first week of August. I am currently trying to find interview partners so I'll be able to set the general time frame for my visit and would be delighted to interview you; thus, I wanted to ask whether you know right now whether you'll be in Brattleboro (or, alternatively, in the NY area) around that time (particularly early-to-mid-July) and whether it would be possible to interview you then.

Thanks a lot and best wishes!
Maximilian Spiegel²¹¹

At the same time, the approach of hardly disclosing any information on first contact beyond the study's nature, its title and the reason for my inquiry entailed the risk of the project appearing particularly simplistic, or at least of me appearing to have a simplistic grasp of how these scenes work. I received various positive replies early on, but two potential interviewees declined, one objecting to being considered part of the 'free folk' scene or any scene, the other arguing along similar lines while also emphasizing friendship among musicians as opposed to a 'movement' or 'scene' characterization of these social relations. As Froschauer and Lueger write, interview rejections can point towards certain aspects of the fields in question, too, and should be reflected on.²¹² While I had, from the project's very beginnings, worked towards avoiding the pitfalls of pigeonholing and towards only using adequately complex concepts of 'fields' and / or

²¹⁰ cf. *ibid.*, 66–67.

²¹¹ Personal email correspondence with Matt Valentine (April 30, 2009).

²¹² cf. Froschauer / Lueger: *Das qualitative Interview*, 67.

‘scenes’, there was and still is many a reason to be wary of such simplifications. Those writing in an academic or journalistic context risk blocking and endangering opportunities for insight and understanding in the first place by using simplistic scene definitions, or even simplistic terminology. Musicians and other protagonists of the scenes in question are certainly well aware, in some cases presumably even tired of ‘scene’-related generalizations that arguably rob the artists of some of their freedom. For my further attempts at contacting potential interviewees, I tried to address these issues on first contact already, albeit still in a relatively simple manner.

Dear Samara,

I’m currently writing my diploma thesis in Political Science at the University of Vienna, titled “Gender construction and American “Free Folk” music(s)” (I’m using “Free Folk” as a helpful term for decidedly dynamic and heterogeneous fields here -- I don’t want to expand this particular mail with all kinds of details right now but I’m trying my best to avoid pigeonholing and genre essentialism, instead focussing on the actual connections between artists, labels etc.); to do research and conduct interviews for said thesis, I’m planning to spend a few weeks in July in the US and it would be fantastic to get to interview you as well.

Thus, I wanted to ask whether it would be possible to interview you while I’m in NY between the 8th and the 11th. The interview itself wouldn’t be a standard Q&A one most of the time, it should instead be more of an open conversation, dealing with your experiences with(in) the fields discussed in my thesis. It’s hard to tell how long the interview would take -- maybe around two hours, going by my experiences thus far. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask!

Thanks a lot and all the best,
Maximilian Spiegel²¹³

All in all, there were only three outright rejections (one not stating any reason), in addition to a few musicians being interested but unable to do their respective interviews due to clashing timetables, holidays et cetera, although certain potential interview partners offered to remain in contact through the Internet and / or to conduct an interview at a later point. Various potential interviewees never replied, but the overall response and number of opportunities for interviews was remarkably and unexpectedly positive – unexpectedly insofar as it would have been presumptuous to expect a large number of musicians to be able and willing to take the time to participate in what is probably a relatively unusual project, conducted by someone who was a stranger to almost all of the contacted. In addition, I feel very lucky to have been able to even fit such a large number of interviews into my schedule for a journey through eight cities lasting less than a month. As mentioned earlier, I had been afraid that July, the month that, at the time, matched my own opportunities and interests best, might see a lot of

²¹³ Personal email correspondence with Samara Lubelski (June 28, 2009).

potential interview partners leave for their holidays. However, it is possible that what appears to be a general lack of concert touring during the summer months made up for that. The types of reply sent by those who would later be interviewed varied, including enthusiastic and interested confirmations, easy-going suggestions for how to proceed with the organization, and friendly but skeptical reactions requiring further clarifications from and negotiations with me. The latter type of answers was often related to the rightfully pervasive question to what extent one's own position as a musician would even be compatible with the 'free folk' field / term alluded to in the thesis's title.

In Froschauer and Lueger's view, conversations with multiple persons are particularly interesting, as their dynamics reproduce social relations.²¹⁴ I attempted to mix conversations with single individuals with conversations with multiple ones; however, only a few of the latter took place, in no case involving more than two interviewees. These constellations included artistic and private partners (David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray, Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg) as well as spontaneous combinations (the spontaneous setting up of an interview with both Labanna Bly and Paul LaBrecque, whom I had contacted separately from each other, at a festival in Graz; Matt Valentine calling his friend Ron Schneiderman, who joined us for one segment of the interview). In some cases, I had contacted bands (or, in the last of the following cases, a label) and then interviewed single members (MV & EE's Matt Valentine, Barn Owl's Evan Caminiti, Magik Markers' Pete Nolan, Not Not Fun Records' Britt Brown), usually due to circumstances relating to the specific time or place of the interview. Some discussion of the differences between these interview constellations will be included in the next sub-chapter, in which I will elaborate on the actual practice of conducting this thesis's interviews.

4.4 Interview guide and process

Froschauer and Lueger's book includes a chapter²¹⁵ serving as a guide – not a fixed set of rules – to open up exchanges of the type(s) they propose. I will follow this chapter here and then proceed towards my own interviews' specifics. Generally, interviewers, as mentioned above, are supposed to be learners, show interest and curiosity, avoid prejudice, never consider the interviewees' utterances 'wrong', be attentive and questioning, and avoid discriminating participants. Whenever possible, the field should

²¹⁴ cf. Froschauer / Lueger: *Das qualitative Interview*, 55–57.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 51–79.

be allowed to accomplish structuring efforts of its own even outside the actual interviews – for example, interview partners would point me towards other potential interview partners and even help me in approaching those. Within the actual interviews, it is important to apply an open framework. On a basic level, questions asking for ‘yes’ / ‘no’ answers should be avoided. Further tools include contributions that aren’t questions but further the conversation, short reiterations and summaries to reify and secure one’s understanding, as well as requests for elaboration and explanation. A non-standardized opening question is required that needs to be relevant to the interviewee’s world and should generate a narration, ideally letting the interviewee structure the conversation as opposed to an interviewer determining the conversation’s start. The opening question, and the interviews in general, should be context-specific. While I am aware that, as Froschauer and Lueger suggest, qualitative interviews are not really comparable, the necessity to touch on certain subjects for my thesis required my use of a loose guide, which I will elaborate on later.

Froschauer and Lueger distinguish between six phases of the exchange, implicitly emphasizing the importance of pre- and post-interview phases to the researcher’s understanding.

- The first of these is the interview planning phase. Here, the required information needs to be identified and opportunities of access to the field of research need to be analyzed. I have already discussed aspects of my own access to the scenes above. Also, interviews’ settings need to be contemplated. Various forms of adequate preparation are proposed, including role play (which, in my case, took place once with a friend’s help).
- Contacting the interview partners: this is another phase I have already discussed. The act of contacting the potential interview partners always needs to be considered within the research process’s context and is relevant to further steps into and within the field. The information used to represent the project during this contact phase needs to be contemplated and permit the potential interviewee to consider the interview inquiry. As has been mentioned before, rejections should be reflected on as well; confirmations should lead to further exchange setting the interviews’ respective details.
- The conversation’s opening: Froschauer and Lueger list clarifications that should be repeated and added. This includes information on the interview

processes and on what is expected from the interviewed; the means of recording the interview should be mentioned and explained, as should what will happen to the interview material. In my case, the latter information included my own transcription work and that I would send the interviewed their respective transcripts as well as drafts of the actual thesis so as to let them comment on my contextualization of any quotations of theirs I may have used (as well as to let them voluntarily provide me with feedback) – as elaborated on at the end of the chapter, the actual procedure ended up somewhat different. As quoted in my second email example above, I would introduce the interview process as one that “should [...] be more of an open conversation” or similar; I will refer to how this manifested within the interviews later on. In their discussion of this particular phase, Froschauer and Lueger also elaborate on how to devise an opening question, which should both be suitably open and specific to the research question. I would usually start interviews by asking about musicians’ initial impetus and access to music, thus opening space for interviewees’ narrations. The second part of my interviews (as I will discuss below) usually opened with an inquiry into interview partners’ connotations or associations relating to the diploma thesis’s title and topic, allowing for a comparatively undetermined dedicated discussion of gender-related questions before the introduction of more quantitative questions that, while useful, risked reifying binary gender models.

- The fourth phase, the actual interview’s main phase, involves narrations and inquiries and should follow and build on the various offers encountered within the conversation. Froschauer and Lueger suggest that an interview’s early phase already gives an impression of the spectrum of topics an interview partner may discuss. This may be less so in my thesis’s case as the opening question usually tended to generate a narration following interviewees’ own life and, specifically, path through musical-social fields. The authors distinguish between two – ideal, non-rigid – interview parts, one exploratory and the other clarificatory.
 - The exploratory part is more open and shouldn’t involve major intervention on the interviewer’s part, thus allowing, even forcing the interviewed to find an adequate form for her / his utterances, to condense information and to go into detail where necessary. Questions in this interview part should be immanent to the discussed topics, and the interviewer should attempt to keep the conversation flowing. In my

interviews' case, the more open part involving interview partners' personal narrations can be considered similar or analogous.

- The clarificatory part allows the interviewer to pose questions on topics that have yet to be touched upon. Here, the actual research project's central themes may be discussed more specifically. These questions are obviously imposed by the interviewer and, as Froschauer and Lueger suggest, may have more to do with the relevant scholarly system of thought than with the actual social system's processes and structures. My own interviews included, as mentioned, a second part that was mostly used for the posing of more specific, often quantitative questions related to my research topic.
- The fifth phase is the conversation's closing section. Here, follow-up steps may be considered – further questions that may need to be asked, further meetings that may need to be arranged. Conversations following the interview may still be of great interest to the research process and should be documented in a protocol. It should also be noted that this phase does not mark the end (apart from closing that specific meeting and conversation) but remains open to connections, owing to the research process's and field's dynamics.
- The sixth phase listed by Froschauer and Lueger is the interview context's documentation. Beyond the interview's recording, an interview protocol is needed that includes information on how the interview was arranged; on its setting and context; general impressions of the interview process, dynamics and peculiarities, as well as of the social situation's influence on the interviewed's remarks; information on conversations led before and after the interview; theses relating to the interview (directly after the interviews, I only worked on such theses in the vaguest sense, not least because most of them took place in close temporal proximity of each other). The interview context can have quite diverse influences on the actual conversation that need to be considered, and this context can itself be relevant to the analysis.

Also of interest is Froschauer and Lueger's guide to interview question types contained within the same chapter. The interviewer is meant to keep interviews open to allow the interviewed to develop their own perspectives on what is relevant. The required openness can be achieved through various means: unspecific question wording, phrases

that are not questions (or that achieve their question status through one's intonation). In the end, conversation atmosphere rather than question technique is primary. Froschauer and Lueger distinguish questions according to their degrees of openness: open questions enable greater reply opportunities, whereas closed questions tend to reduce these opportunities as well as the interviewed's structuring efforts. Even though I may not have followed Froschauer and Lueger for certain aspects of how to handle interviews, working on a more basic level of analysis (for now), I think the interviews' first parts in particular made good use of such recommendations. Questions may have favored certain types of chronology and interviewees' answers may have been influenced by their knowledge of my thesis topic and interest in social relations, but within this framework, much was left open.

Froschauer and Lueger also give hints on how to deepen an interview without artificially changing topics: the interviewer may ask the interview partner to elaborate on social relations, factual aspects or temporal aspects. Further potential types of questions include ones on events and facts, interrelations, functions, opinions and explanations, as well as hypothetical questions. These hints should help the interviewer enable a fluid conversation while still adequately exploring the field. Often asking interviewees to elaborate and explain or to comment on specific connections, I used some of these question types within my own interviews, which I will go on to describe and discuss on the next pages.

Before doing so, I want to contrast the phases and hints elaborated on by Froschauer and Lueger with the four instruments Andreas Witzel proposes for the conduct of a PCI²¹⁶ and his thoughts on its structuring:

- short questionnaire: here, the interviewer collects data on the interviewed's "social characteristics (age, parents' occupation, education etc.)"²¹⁷. This can be beneficial to the research process as well as the actual interview situation, helping the interviewer avoid Q & A style questions. However, I decided not to hand out anything of that kind, hoping to gather relevant information within the actual interview process, or, if needed, via further email questions. This seemed like an adequate option to me so as not to formalize the interview process too much. I ended up mainly using material gathered during the interviews.

²¹⁶ cf. Witzel: The Problem-Centered Interview, [5]–[9].

²¹⁷ Ibid., [6].

- guidelines: unlike Froschauer and Lueger, Witzel advocates their use alongside “conversation strategies”. Questions may be preformulated. “Ideally, they accompany the communication process as a sort of transparency of the background, serving to supervise how individual elements in the course of the discussion are worked through.”²¹⁸
- tape recording: this is a much more convenient type of documentation than a handwritten protocol, also leaving greater freedom and resources for the interview’s actual conduct.
- postscripts: these are reminiscent of Froschauer and Lueger’s phase six, the interview’s documentation beyond what has been captured by the audio recording, although Witzel doesn’t mention conversations before or after the interview. These, however, were important to me and were documented as far as was possible: conversations would often touch on many different topics and, of course, could be difficult to document beyond rudimentary sketching due to the usual contingencies of daily conversation.

Discussing the PCI’s process and structure²¹⁹, Witzel conceives it as twofold, generating both story-telling and understanding – using different types of exploration, in the former case general, in the latter specific. The latter refers to the former though, connecting more specific explorations with utterances encountered earlier on. First, Witzel goes on to suggest communication strategies for the interviewer, who needs to be flexible, trustworthy and open about her / his research interests. His remarks on opening questions resemble Froschauer and Lueger’s, yet allow preformulating the question. I would not necessarily consider my own opening question(s) preformulated; however, a certain type of opening – as mentioned, asking for interviewees’ access to music – proved useful for my interviews and was thus reused, often consciously referring back to earlier use thereof. Repeated questioning, sequenced according to the interviewee’s own narration, enables a detailed exploration of the topic in question; Witzel also advocates “[a] sort of ‘luring out’ of concrete examples of experiences or biographical episodes”²²⁰ so as to add further detail and clarity to the interview. He also recommends using ad-hoc questions so as to fill gaps and “secure comparability of the

²¹⁸ Ibid., [7].

²¹⁹ cf. *ibid.*, [10]–[18].

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, [14].

interviews”²²¹. This points towards a major difference between Witzel’s and Froschauer / Lueger’s respective approaches. Froschauer and Lueger’s focus on structures of meaning does not allow for comparability indeed. Biographic details, on the other hand, allow for comparison. However, even here, it is necessary to avoid a unification of experience²²², to resist the idea of quantifying experience and biography. I would like to refer back to chapter 2.3 and the rhizome’s characteristic of consisting of lines, not points: fields this dynamic and heterogeneous are not properly or conclusively quantifiable. So while there is a degree, a certain idea of comparability attached especially to what usually amounted to my interview’s second, more Q & A-like part, it is a comparability that needs to be constantly questioned and disposed with or put into context – a step that is particularly necessary considering the field’s size. Even the supposedly objective facts are to be situated in what Froschauer and Lueger would consider interlocking systems and subsystems²²³.

Witzel’s second set of strategies is “aimed at generating comprehension”²²⁴. As opposed to the “principle of openness or induction”²²⁵ employed in general exploration, specific exploration involves deduction: here, the knowledge acquired before or during the interview is the basis for questions posed. This may also involve questions for elaboration and clarification, thus “disrupt[ing] that which is self-evident in daily life.”²²⁶ Confrontations, another potential strategy, can be useful but need to be employed on a basis of trust.

Witzel’s suggestions for an interview’s conduct require concentration and an open mind towards the interview partner and process:

The assigning of single aspects of the stories to previous patterns of interpretation of meaning which the interviewer brought into the discussion (deduction) is supplemented by the search for new patterns of interpretation for which the preceding patterns do not offer an explanation of single phenomena expounded upon by the interviewee (induction).²²⁷

At the very least, Witzel’s elaborations offer alternative approaches that enable me to face my thesis interview conception’s discrepancy between a desired openness and the

²²¹ Ibid., [15].

²²² On this issue, see Scott, Joan W.: The Evidence of Experience, in: *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991), 773–797.

²²³ cf. Froschauer / Lueger: *Das qualitative Interview*, 98–99. I will return to this in chapter 4.5.

²²⁴ Witzel: The Problem-Centered Interview, [16].

²²⁵ Ibid., [14].

²²⁶ Ibid., [16].

²²⁷ Ibid., [18].

need to acquire certain information more boldly. I will now go on to discuss my interviews' actual structures and processes.

As has been elaborated on earlier, it appears useful to construct these scenes primarily through social aspects for the purposes of this study. This should not imply a shedding of the crucial aesthetics and diverse concepts employed by the research field's protagonists. Instead, this is an attempt at using (concepts of) the social as a means of traversing, even finding channels to follow. Such an approach allows for a suitably complex and dynamic mapping that avoids the essentializing and taking for granted of the concepts employed over the course of that (constant re)mapping and, ultimately, tracing. It allows for the flexibility and reflexivity championed by Froschauer and Lueger, and it allows for an understanding of gender as immanent and not essential. My own approach towards gender theory, or certain assumptions found in some of its modes, can be considered relatively specific (gender as constructed, performed, contingent as opposed to essential or determined) and arguably excludes a large variety of other approaches filed under gender theory. This did not have any strong, direct bearing on the interviews I conducted with musicians. The interview style and the contents of the actual interviews certainly are not unrelated to this approach: they do not constitute or form part of an entirely different, methodologically unrelated form of thought separate from my thoughts on gender. However, the questions posed were meant to allow for the discussion of many different aspects of the social that do not refer directly to matters of gender constitution.

By letting the interviewees talk about their experiences²²⁸ in how they move through the fields in question, how they connect with other musicians, with labels, organizers and other agents and knots of relevance, these interviews made it possible for me to gather information on how they perceive their fields, their surroundings, which channels they follow, capital needed (or not needed), and other aspects of relevance. While these bits of information cannot be considered neutral or representative, let alone objective, an analysis of these forms of expertise and their communication on its own would not

²²⁸ Somewhat analogous to Froschauer and Lueger's perspective, Joan W. Scott emphasizes the construction and relativity of the category of experience and its implications. Identities are not to be taken as "self-evident" (*The Evidence of Experience*, 777) and need to be historicized. At the end of this text, Scott also refers to Foucault's concept of genealogy as mentioned in chapter 2.1. For an overview of debates on the category of experience in the context of feminist historiography, see Griesebner: *Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft*, 143–153.

necessarily point towards a study framed by gender theory. This would even (potentially) enable me to head into other directions, focus on other points, for example a study of hierarchies of relevance on and between different levels like the music's performance, its production, the organization thereof, labels et cetera. In fact, this study's particular approach towards interviewing (coupled with more helpfully, if misleadingly, specific questions that were usually posed during the interviews' later parts) might lead to the impression that the study consisted of a general tracing of the field(s) with a tacked-on (token) gender theory part or aspect. In the worst case, this might manifest as a careless, implicitly paternalistic adoption of gender theory approaches considered separate from the study's supposed main part.²²⁹ In opposition to taking a direction of this type, and matching what I elaborated on earlier referring to Scott's complex concept of gender, I considered it important to work *with* and in awareness of gender relations' and gender identities' immanence. The aim is to discuss them as interwoven, inseparable aspects, maybe contingent manifestations of a (not 'the'!) bigger picture. By writing this thesis, I construct (or: those analyzed aspects constitute) a hitherto unconstituted, not yet academically traced field of research while focusing on these integral, not exclusive topics (gender relations, gender identities...) that potentially shape other aspects of the scenes just as much as they themselves are potentially shaped by these other aspects. At the same time, I wanted to avoid pushing the interviews into specific directions by shaping them in their entirety according to a gender-theoretical focus – that is, pushing them further into such a direction than they would already be pushed by the interviewee's knowledge of my thesis's topic, a factor that certainly can't be ignored when discussing the interviews themselves. The extent to which interviewees referred to my actual thesis topic on their own during the interviews differs from case to case. What sometimes became obvious was that interviewees tried to focus on social relations, not least because I had emphasized their importance for my research and often added to that emphasis by directly asking about ways of meeting people related to the scenes or about specific connections' geneeses.

Large parts of my interviews can be considered narrative in character. Here, I also want to refer once again to the aforementioned 'story-telling' mode proposed by Andreas

²²⁹ As Joan W. Scott shows (cf. Scott: Gender, 1055), there have been tendencies to acknowledge but exclude questions of gender in historiography, for example relegating them to a separate women's history. This could then be reminiscent of tendencies to, for example, relegate women to separate chapters in studies, thus homogenizing them, like, for example, Andrea Griesebner (*Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft*, 93–97) shows.

Witzel, which allows for a certain openness as opposed to closed, isolated questions. In most cases, they primarily followed a linear timeline, focusing on interviewees' access to music and relations to fellow musicians, labels, festivals and the like over the years. Such a focus was usually encouraged both through descriptions of my thesis's approach and through questions alluding to such relations (again emphasizing the question of co-authorship). Mentions of tours and specific connections provided opportunities for further elaboration. Comparisons between temporal phases, cities lived in, artistic milieus and institutional aspects (release process, tour organization...) could be made, giving shape to the narrations and aspects to hold onto when writing.

As the interviews' second part consisted of specific, quantifying and thus also categorizing questions that would gravely reduce the interview's openness, I also included a question that usually served as a bridge between the two sections, although it could also be considered an introduction to the second part. I asked the interviewed about any associations or connotations of theirs related to the interview title or topic, which I often reiterated at this point. This way, a certain openness could be preserved; as some interviewees didn't include any explicit references to topics of gender during the first part, this association / connotation question could enable a discussion of gender not necessarily and immediately according to specified concepts (like quantifiable gender relations). Answers to this question varied, referring, for example, to quantitative aspects, to constraints or to aesthetic aspects associated with gender.

The second part itself, comparable to the clarificatory part discussed above via Froschauer and Lueger, included questions about interviewees' impressions of gender ratios on various levels (musicians themselves, labels / audience / organization...) and similarly specific or quantifying questions about other categories potentially intersecting with gender. These included race²³⁰ / ethnicity, sexuality, social backgrounds and social / political ideals. I usually asked the interviewed to elaborate on their impressions, knowing well that these were not (necessarily) statistics-based or authoritative discussions but that they could suggest interesting, maybe unexpected directions.

²³⁰ The term 'race', while highly questionable and (as '*Rasse*') unusual in Germanophone literature, with good reason, was used – in combination with the less burdened but certainly problematic and yet influential 'ethnicity' – because of its everyday use, in which it differs quite markedly from '*Rasse*' in German language countries.

Certain studies of music scenes helped me figure out which levels and aspects of musical lives I should include in my interview guide.²³¹ The guide I used on my US interview journey and thus for the biggest part of my interviews, sometimes including handwritten remarks (like “labels”, as a reminder of my intention to pose explicit questions about these) was as follows:

- Getting into music?
- Various cities?
- Personal background and its relation to “scene(s)” (if any)?
- Own position within the field?
- Interview partner’s contacts – men / women? Function?
- (Others’) social background?
- Instruments and gender? Line-ups?
- Role of collectives? Personal relationships?
- How to keep in touch? Sources for info?
- How to position “Free Folk” (seen separately? Historical context?)
- “Free Folk” – freedom to / from what? Useful term?
- Matt Valentine: “Free Folk”: “Free-thinking folk” / liberated people
- Changes / new quality in recent years?
- Role of the internet / new media / revival of “old media”?
- Specific aspects of American scene(s)? Any geographical aspects of importance? International connections?
- Title: “Gender Construction and American “Free Folk” Music(s)” – associations?
- How to describe gender situation?
- Personal experiences in relation to topic?
- Views / reflection on gender roles within the fields? Own views / reflection?
- Musician’s / label owners’ / ... role in starting festivals / organising tours...
- Political / emancipatory spirit to field? Festivals? Magazines?
- DIY ethos?
- Punk – Prog / High Art – Low Art divide?
- New Weird America / Old Weird America? Tradition?
- References to musician’s own work...
- Performance?
- Musical freedom?
- Lyrics?
- Reception / audience reaction?
- Festivals: how many men / women?
- Audience gender? Label heads, organisers, media, promoters, agents, studio staff...
- Other forms of inequality? Hierarchies? Possibilities for changes?

This guide did not serve as a straight list of questions but rather as a guide, even a reminder of topics to be touched upon over the course of the interview. It doesn’t mirror the actual interviews’ exact structure(s) in terms of length and weighting. Certain points were mostly neglected (like “Punk – Prog / High Art – Low Art divide?”), while others (like the introductory “Getting into music?”) represent aspects that I always asked about, although not necessarily using the same wording every single time. Some aspects

²³¹ See, for example, Bayton, Mavis: *Frock Rock. Women Performing Popular Music* (Oxford / New York 1998); Cohen, Sara: *Men Making a Scene. Rock music and the production of gender*, in: Whiteley, Sheila (ed.): *Sexing the Groove. Popular music and gender* (London / New York 1997), 17–36.

that were important for one interview could play an entirely different role in other interviews, although the general resulting interview progressions usually were relatively similar to each other. There were occasions on which I realized I had been neglecting certain aspects and then proceeded to include them more forcefully, asking directly (for example about interviewees' impressions of gender-related aspects of musicians' performances).

The aforementioned introductory approach discussed by Froschauer and Lueger – the multiple benefits of interviewing a gatekeeper during a phase of orientation – was of particular importance to the first interview I conducted, with *Ptolemaic Terrascope* editor and Terrastock organizer Phil McMullen. In addition, and unlike the other 21 interviews, it can be considered an actual 'expert interview' as Michaela Pfadenhauer describes it²³², as an exchange between an expert (McMullen) and a quasi-expert (me). An expert carries knowledge, and, as Pfadenhauer elaborates, offers solutions to problems and is thus also responsible – in this case as an organizer as well as the writer of a publication that is of importance even beyond the sharing of information. Pfadenhauer, similar to Froschauer and Lueger, emphasizes the benefits of a not determined or Q & A-like, but instead open and familiar atmosphere. The crucial difference between the expert and the interviewer, the quasi-expert, is that the latter does not carry the same responsibility while ideally having acquired a large amount of knowledge that the interviewed expert may have acquired through a process of socialization over the years. This shared knowledge allows for a situation resembling an actual conversation between experts, as an understanding of relevant meanings can be presumed, while also lacking certain other aspects like the (presumed) social consequences related to experts' responsibility following on from such a conversation. (I would argue that this particular situation is very distant to the standard case implied by Pfadenhauer: while McMullen is an expert, carries responsibility and certainly has to deal with finances, he is not in the same business situation as, for example, interviewed experts with a background in company management would be; there might thus be less of a rivalry situation.) Of interest, too, are Pfadenhauer's elaborations on how the quasi-expert is to achieve this status: on the one hand by researching available knowledge on the field in question, on the other hand through ethnographic research – moving into the

²³² Pfadenhauer, Michaela: Auf gleicher Augenhöhe reden. Das Experteninterview – ein Gespräch zwischen Experte und Quasi-Experte, in: Bogner, Alexander / Littig, Beate / Menz, Wolfgang (eds.): *Das Experteninterview. Theorie, Methode, Anwendung. 2. Auflage* (Wiesbaden 2005), 113–130.

field. In my case, the latter approach was mainly manifest in my interview work, although I certainly carried (not decidedly scholarly) experience in the field by having attended festivals et cetera.

To return to Froschauer and Lueger's terminology, I decided, more explicitly than elsewhere, to activate knowledge²³³ that can be described via the aforementioned term *feldinterne Reflexionsexpertise*: the interviewee's position as both a journalist and an organizer in my thesis's field of research allowed me to test and exchange my early ideas on the field's composition. While at the time I was somewhat in doubt of this particular approach to the interview, wondering about its compatibility to ideas on how to conduct further interviews, I now see it as an important source of confidence for my approach to scenes that almost seemed daunting – in terms of my own social and geographical distance to them, in terms of their size and heterogeneity, and in terms of how my interview style and thesis approach would be accepted by my interviewees. My interview partner does indeed reside at what could be considered a node of the field in question, with the *Ptolemaic Terrascope* and the Terrastock festivals arguably serving as, in Deleuzian terms, the “knots of arborescence” discussed earlier, giving institutional shape to heterogeneous phenomena. (Nonetheless, festivals like these remain very much unfixed. As McMullen's elaborations in chapter 5.6 support, some of these festivals' most crucial factors are to be located in the moments when they, through collaboration, friendship and spontaneity, go beyond the level of a capturing of connections or similarities). Conducting this interview as a type of expert interview, focusing on this exchange between expert and quasi-expert, allowed me to test some early assumptions and ideas by presenting them to someone who has been working in and reflecting on these scenes for many years, not least helping me get more assured about how to conceive of and access the field of research.

Before the interview with McMullen, I had conducted a somewhat shorter test interview with a friend who offered creative answers to my questions. The first interview conducted with an actual active musician, Eric Arn of Primordial Undermind in June 2009, was announced as a potential test interview: as the interviewee lived (and still lives) in Vienna and plays a very interesting role in my field of research, even a (seemingly) failed interview could have still yielded interesting material for my thesis due to the opportunities offered by the interviewee's availability in the same town and

²³³ Froschauer / Lueger write of the importance “*unterschiedliche Perspektiven des Reflexionswissens zu aktivieren*” (*Das qualitative Interview*, 53.) – to activate differing perspectives of reflection knowledge.

through contact even outside the confines of dedicated thesis work. This first interview with a musician (and second overall interview, not counting the test interview conducted with a friend) is still one of those that went smoothest – most flawless, even, not in terms of any unrealizable correctness of questions and / or answers but in terms of a lack of stumbling blocks to its flow, in terms of avoided misunderstandings, in terms of the interview partner's responsiveness and extensiveness of narration. I perceived a certain mutual understanding and rapport that left me with the impression that my approach to interviewing as well as my general ideas on the interviews' progress were adequate. Thus, the interview has been worked on and analyzed just like later ones for which I may have been more experienced already.

Interviews involving two interviewed persons instead of just one required different approaches than interviews involving just one interviewee, but like the latter, they also need to be differentiated from each other. Froschauer and Lueger suggest, “*den kommunikativen Austausch zwischen den beteiligten Personen anzuregen*”²³⁴, to stimulate the communicative exchange between participants. The extent to which this happened differed from interview to interview, and different constellations provoked different interview processes: for example, the conversation with Labanna Bly and Paul LaBrecque included a greater amount of exchange between the participants about their respective backgrounds and anecdotes than the other interviews involving more than one interviewee as Bly and LaBrecque, while knowing each other and sharing mutual friends, were not as familiar with each other as the other interview pairings' protagonists. This was extremely interesting as it showcased dynamics internal to the field, while at the same time complicating the mere collection of more immediately and obviously thesis topic-related material.²³⁵

Interview lengths differed, although most interviews – that is: the actual recorded interview parts – tended to take around two hours. Some interviews were cut short by time constraints; most notably, the spontaneously set-up interview with Mike Tamburo was supposed to be prolonged the next day – and, when schedules turned out to be incompatible, online. However, this never took place due to time constraints on my part, although I hope to pick up these threads for future projects. I did use what had been discussed already in the thesis though, useful as it was.

²³⁴ Froschauer / Lueger: *Das qualitative Interview*, 56. The original text includes emphasis on most of the quoted words that is not of import here.

²³⁵ On this topic, see *ibid.*, 70–72.

In many cases, it was my impression that the interviewed, just like me, felt more comfortable during the interviews' first, (arguably) main part, in which they usually discussed their own life story, their everyday activities and relations. The second, usually shorter and more Q & A-centered part's introduction sometimes had an impact on an interview's flow, with certain interviewees seeming less assured of how to react to my questions, while I myself at least felt less desire to pose these: while their inherent limitations were important to the interviews' structure and results, I was aware of how they made for less 'free' conversation and were in greater danger of implying what could be considered deficits in the field of research (especially, but not exclusively, along the lines of gender equality) while reifying everyday use of a binary gender model.

However, in some cases, these more direct questions inspired provocative answers that were able to add new qualities to interviews that might otherwise have been in danger of becoming repetitive. Here, criticisms or complaints could be aired, as well as political observations (although none of these were necessarily limited to the second part).

4.5 Interview analysis

Following on from their explication of qualitative interview approaches, Froschauer and Lueger dedicate two chapters of their book to the process of interpreting interview material: one on the process's basics²³⁶, another one on the interpretative praxis²³⁷. A thorough analysis is required in order to derive information and knowledge on social systems from interview material beyond the level of the apparent, obvious meaning. *Sinnzusammenhang* – context of meaning – and the not necessarily apparent system of rules relevant to communication (which is the “*Fundament aller sozialen Systeme*”²³⁸) are to be analyzed and researched. It is the *Sinnstruktur* (structure of meaning) that allows analyzing the collective dynamics engendered by the connection of modes of seeing and acting.²³⁹ The hermeneutic interpretation proposed by Froschauer and Lueger is meant to be “*die methodische Praxis zur verstehenden Erschließung des Sinnes von Objektivationen menschlicher Aktivitäten, wie dies eben auch*

²³⁶ Ibid., 80–106.

²³⁷ Ibid., 107–165.

²³⁸ Ibid., 81.

²³⁹ “*Erst diese Sinnstruktur ermöglicht den Blick auf die verschiedenen Sicht- und Handlungsweisen, deren Verknüpfung eine kollektive Dynamik erzeugt, die sich den Zugriffen einzelner Personen potentiell entzieht.*” (ibid., 82. Emphasis in the original text.)

*Gesprächsmaterialien sind*²⁴⁰ – interview material manifests human practice; by analyzing and interpreting these texts, researchers attempt to access and understand these ‘objectivations’. Froschauer and Lueger emphasize that interpretation is construction – of constructions. As has been suggested earlier via Foucault, Deleuze / Guattari or Griesebner, perspectivity can’t be ignored, needs to be faced. The authors list a series of basic components for the analysis: prior knowledge needs to be included, an inclusion that needs to be reviewed and challenged; deconstruction is of importance to avoid spontaneous, superficial interpretation, to question even that which appears obvious; comparative differentiation – exploring the potential contexts of the deconstructed materials; communicative selectivity – interpreters actively handle and negotiate the text, need to analyze how the interviewed connected to communication. The interpreter needs to familiarize her- / himself with the field of research. Interpretation alternatives need to be diverse; the texts need to be considered in their social contexts, manifesting latent structures of meaning as they do: what are utterances’ conditions and consequences? Another aspect important to keep in mind is sequentiality, how and why these utterances are possible and actualized.

Unlike what Froschauer and Lueger propose as ideal, even necessary, my thesis is a one-person project and thus sometimes takes paths somewhat divergent from what they tend to suggest²⁴¹; for example, I analyzed all the available interview material (but also chose an analysis type ideal for that, see below, I didn’t divide the texts into smaller segments, I was aware of the transcripts’ content before starting the proper analysis. Decontextualization and the avoidance of prior knowledge weren’t possible. However, I took necessary precautions for this, constantly asking for “*möglichst vielfältig[e] Lesarten eines Textes*”²⁴² – interpretations as diverse as possible – and testing and questioning my own interpretations. staying aware of my own co-authorship and other important factors, like those emphasized by Froschauer and Lueger. They explicate how a variety of factors influences the utterances in question, most notably social factors (the relations between interviewer and interviewed, also depending on one’s attributes and their perception), factual factors (which topics can be included in a conversation, how are they compatible?) and temporal factors (both in terms of the actual interview’s point

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Also see Froschauer and Lueger’s chapter on “*Formale Anforderungen an die Interpretation*” (ibid., 104–106), the interpretation’s formal requirements.

²⁴² Ibid., 106.

in time, duration and continuity and in terms of the various temporal levels touched upon by the conversation).

Froschauer and Lueger's further presentation of analysis types is based on three perspectives of analysis:

- The world can be conceived of as interlocked, interdependent systems and subsystems. As a result, an utterance's context is multiple. This once again reifies earlier discussions of the need for a context- and complexity-aware research process and is very much related to assumptions such as the field of research's heterogeneity and dynamic character as well as gender being multiply relational.
- The social surroundings can only be accessed indirectly, and this access is limited. As mentioned earlier, for Froschauer and Lueger, interpretation is a construction of constructions. Importantly, and to reuse the terminology introduced in chapter 2.3, "the tracing should always be put back on the map."
- Interpretation needs to take place step by step. As mentioned above, I did not apply this formally, dividing the individual texts; however, my analysis did involve reflection even during individual texts' analyses. The texts and their interpretation need to be interrogated for redundancies, possible predictions, unexpected aspects, as well as related to other texts or even matching (or: non-matching) aspects of the field beyond the available texts.

As discussed by Froschauer and Lueger²⁴³, the *Themenanalyse* (theme analysis) is a comparatively simple type of analysis, useful to attain an overview of large amounts of texts, summarize their central information and analyze the context of its appearance. It is useful for analyses that focus on interview material's manifest content rather than for research into the background of a text's genesis or its latent *Sinnstrukturen*. This paper certainly relies on interview material's manifest content but tries to go beyond that and at least retain an awareness of aspects beyond that content. However, due to the large amount of interview material, the arguably more superficial approach of the *Themenanalyse* presented by Froschauer and Lueger can be of great use here, both for

²⁴³ cf. *ibid.*, 158–165. Another very interesting part of Froschauer and Lueger's book is their short discussion of "*Basisannahmen der Gesprächsanalyse*" (pages 100–103) – basic assumptions for the conversations' analysis. Also see pages 107–111 for a comparison of the three types of analysis presented by the authors.

this particular paper's aims as well as for the preparation of future projects: Froschauer and Lueger themselves suggest that this approach is an apt one for the sighting and selection of interview material for further *Feinstruktur-* or *Systemanalysen*.

Froschauer and Lueger elaborate on two *Themenanalyse* strategies:

- *Textreduktionsverfahren*: this variant summarizes interview material. This should not be reduced to a mere textual summary; instead, characteristic elements of themes' presentation and differences in presentation between various texts can be worked on, as well as the context of argumentation (*Argumentationszusammenhang*). This strategy's five components are:
 - Identification of important themes (plus noting the details of their emergence: when, who, in what context?)
 - Characteristics and contexts of important themes (internal heterogeneity; how and by whom was the theme introduced?)
 - Sequence of themes' emergence (particularly important for the analysis of decidedly open interviews, less so for interviews involving guides)
 - Differences within themes in or between interviews (comparative analysis of themes, further focus on contexts)
 - Integration of themes' characteristics into the research question's context (while avoiding a homogenization of the various findings)
- *Codierverfahren*: this is used to conduct a deeper analysis of the "*begrifflich[e] Struktur von Themen und deren Zusammenhänge*"²⁴⁴ – the notional structures of themes and their contexts – and deduce categories relevant to the study. Hierarchies of terms are constructed and theorized. Froschauer and Lueger list six steps to be taken:
 - Introduction of thematic categories – coding passages of text.
 - Introduction of subcategories, who themselves may be searched for further subcategories; these networks may include latent structures of meaning. What are a theme's central terms and components, which attributes and assessments are of relevance to these terms?
 - Structuring the thematic categories – of what importance are themes to the full text (interview material) and to the research question, how do the categories relate?

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 163. The original text includes emphasis on all of the quoted words that is not of import here.

- Conceptualizing the text as a hierarchic network of categories and subcategories.
- Interpretation of the hierarchic network, resulting in theses for the research question. Theoretical conception of the text relating to the research question.
- Comparative analysis of the various texts / interviews, aiming for theory generation. Variants include the comparison of texts' themes and structures; (key) categories for the entire body of texts can be formed; analysis of key categories and subcategories across the entire body of texts (substructures, relations between categories); comparisons of interviews' manifest content; use of text analysis software; preparation of quantitative content analyses.

Witzel's remarks on the analysis of problem-centered interviews²⁴⁵ are, in the case of the article used here, not far removed from Froschauer and Lueger's, referring to the role of key words, coding, main topics and case comparisons, and will not be discussed in detail here. However, I want to point out his suggestions that a "case description or biographical chronology"²⁴⁶ can be of use to contextualize the text along biographic lines. I ended up not following through with this suggestion (feeling, perhaps dangerously so, that by the end of my thesis work I knew my interviewees' stories by heart) but it's another manifestation of the importance of life stories here

For my own work on the interviews, I had to consider aspects like the collected material's quantity, as opposed to a diploma thesis's relative limitations in terms of length and time to be used. As my thesis met with difficulties after my return from the US interview journey and, later, I finally managed to get it back on track facing an increasingly closer deadline resulting from my diploma program running out to be replaced by a Bachelor / Master system, these necessities became more obvious. I thus decided to employ a relatively basic mode of analysis, applying a *Themenanalyse* to the collected interview material. Before I discuss *ATLAS.ti* and its role as well as the procedures leading up to the thesis's completion, a few words on the transcripts the recordings manifested as might be in order. One of the reasons my thesis work took much longer than I had hoped / expected was my insistence on a very detailed mode of transcription (including "every fart and every burp", as one interviewee remarked). This

²⁴⁵ cf. Witzel: The Problem-Centered Interview, [19]–[26].

²⁴⁶ Ibid., [23]. The original text includes emphasis on most of the quoted words that is not of import here.

can be very useful for more detailed types of analysis – like the *Systemanalyse* and *Feinstrukturanalyse* proposed by Froschauer and Lueger – but usually isn't necessary for a *Themenanalyse*²⁴⁷. Considered this way, there is an imbalance between these phases of my work, not least caused by my own relatively late definite decision on a mode of analysis. However, I hope to be able to continue working on this material, this field of research, these scenes. This small archive's sustainability benefits from a detailed mode of transcription, even though it might have impeded my analysis's progress and fluidity at times.

As network-like structures have been of great import to the entire diploma thesis project, using the *ATLAS.ti* software to analyse and harness the collected interview material may seem like a logical step, but I hadn't initially planned to use software for the analysis phase. However, I realized that, given the sheer amount of material, my own predilection for digital means of working and the thesis's focus on network structures, the work / research process would benefit from my use of this software. Its manual describes *ATLAS.ti* as “a powerful workbench for the qualitative analysis of large bodies of textual, graphical, audio, and video data.”²⁴⁸ This workbench character facilitates work on projects like the one at hand: analyzing the 22 interviews would have been a much more complicated task otherwise.

The manual's remarks on *ATLAS.ti*'s main modes give an idea of its use and function:

The *Textual Level* includes activities like segmentation of data files; coding text, image, audio, and video passages; and writing memos. The *Conceptual Level* focuses on model-building activities such as linking codes to networks. A third and equally important aspect is the management of projects and the data.²⁴⁹

The software allows for the integration and management of various types of 'Primary Documents' – in this case, mainly the files storing the interview transcripts. The relevant information is managed primarily from the so-called Hermeneutic Unit; opening one project file automatically loads the information necessary to access both the Primary Documents and the 'Conceptual Level' aspects of the work that the software imposes on the text without modifying the actual documents themselves. The opportunity to select and collect quotations, to activate network views and add

²⁴⁷ For transcription guidelines, see Froschauer / Lueger: *Das Qualitative Interview*, 223.

²⁴⁸ *ATLAS.ti User's Guide*. User's Manual for *ATLAS.ti* 5.0, 2nd Edition (Berlin 2004), 1. Download from <http://www.atlasti.com/manual.html>. Last accessed: August 24, 2011.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 25. (Emphasis in the original text.)

comments emphasizes the software's workbench character. I expected to, alternatively, have to use large amounts of paper to assess the text, possibly to draw networks, to mark and comment on text segments, presumably without arriving at the same level of complexity – or at least overview – the use of *ATLAS.ti* permits.

In the end, it was mostly the fact that the software is easy to handle that helped. The very large amount of material that I dealt with, in combination with the limited time and space (and research 'team' size!), made me use the software's coding function in relatively simple, arguably superficial ways. Reading through the transcripts, I assigned codes to its various segments ('quotes'), usually entire paragraphs. Some of these codes were based on the interview guide as it had certainly exercised great influence on the interviews' structures, others were created while I was reading the transcripts so as to represent the conversations' dynamics in the coding process and not just resort to the expectations I had prior to actually conducting the interviews. I used a total of 84 codes, one of which I never used: "New / Old Weird America" – as I mentioned earlier, this potential topic, referring to specific music history and music journalism lineages, was neglected in the actual interviews. This is not to say its contents – connections to older types of American folk music as designated by Greil Marcus²⁵⁰ – were never talked about, but the terms themselves didn't feature. A code named "'New Weird America' article", however, was used 25 times denoting interview parts that mentioned David Keenan's article that popularized the term. The code "social connections", on the other hand, was applied 454 times, rendering it almost unusable but at least making obvious my thesis's understanding of the field of research.

4.6 Wrapping up the thesis

The research steps that followed were implicit to the creation of the text: I returned to my thesis supervisor's early suggestion that the interviews should be analyzed internally, carving out their own dynamics and characters, as well as compared to each other. Based on my experiences in preparing, transcribing, reading and coding the interviews, I decided on a rough chapter structure, according to which I carved up the material: I applied codes that appeared relevant to the preliminary chapter topics and collected the material, not least via *ATLAS.ti*'s 'Families' system (in this case: collecting codes into one single family) and query tool (allowing for the display of all

²⁵⁰ On this connection, see Keenan: Both Sides = Now.

quotes within such a code family). As a result, the codes became subcategories to the chapter topics' main categories: the 'hierarchical network' discussed above manifesting as implicitly interconnected islands of texts. The output received via *ATLAS.ti* was first summarized through the compilation of notes, which then helped me construct my chapters. I tried to choose interview parts that appeared to support each other, but also ones that contradicted others or that offered different views of a discussed topic.

Having transcribed the interviews in great detail²⁵¹ and used those somewhat unwieldy texts when working on my analyses, I then 'streamlined' the quotes selected for inclusion in the final text so as to increase their readability and keep any peculiarities arising from the detailed transcription of everyday language (repetitions, frequent use of terms and phrases like 'like' or 'you know', sounds like those transcribed as 'erm' or 'err') from stealing readers' attention; also, I wasn't sure whether interviewees would be particularly happy with the use of these extremely detailed transcripts. At the same time, I wanted to preserve the very same everyday character and thus kept some of these elements in the quotations used, at least where they seemed to have a certain degree of relevance for a sentence's 'vibe'. Due to time constraints and to facilitate easier work progress, I only sent the interviewed their own quotes as opposed to a full draft as initially suggested, remarking that the sending of a full draft would still be possible at a later point if needed. As some interviewees did (mildly) object to the use, or relatively frequent use of 'like', 'you know' and similar terms, I further edited their quotes accordingly. I then edited others' quotes in similar ways and subsequently sent them the new versions. Like in the original transcripts, I have avoided closing the quotations with full stops: in most cases, these quotes were removed from a conversational flow that would be impossible to reconstruct in such a context but that I am hinting at this way. Also, what results from that conversational flow is bound to be different from written replies longer elaborated and reflected on; using the quotes in this slightly more vague format hints at how these ideas are always suspended, arguably spontaneous and incomplete (but no less correct).

During the months preceding the thesis's completion, I also sent the interviewees follow-up questions, asking them to reply at any length they want. I mostly used the same three questions for all interviewees, adding some further clarification questions if necessary:

²⁵¹ It was transcription work that I got stuck in and received help for by a translation agency.

1. The interview was conducted in July 2009. If you consider your own musical (-social) surroundings, relations and trajectory, how have things been since?
2. Considering the thesis's topic, "Gender construction and American 'free folk' music(s)", gender relations etc. in American underground fields, is there anything you want to add, anything (especially gender-related) you have contemplated or witnessed during those two-and-a-half years that you think may be of interest to the thesis?
3. Did the interview / thesis project or its topic inform any conversations with others or other activities of yours?²⁵²

This could enable me to tie up loose ends and get at least rudimentary impressions of developments in the research field since my interviews had taken place. The third question was asked so as to investigate whether my interaction with the field of research had had any obvious effects – not so as to boost my thesis's importance, but out of methodological considerations, as a research project isn't constituted of clean, objective probing. In some cases, I used email quotes for my text; they are designated accordingly. Spelling (including rare obvious typographical errors) and format were adjusted so as to match this thesis's form. Emphasis in interview quotes always is the interviewees' as transcribed by me.

²⁵² Personal email correspondence with Christina Carter (November 20, 2011).

5 Into the field

The ability of a practice to produce specific effects, to produce this effect rather than that, is precisely what has to be constantly made and remade. Although the connections or identities are never intrinsic or guaranteed, they are always – at least temporarily – real and effective. There are no necessary correspondences in history, but history is always the production of such connections or correspondences.²⁵³
(Lawrence Grossberg)

In this chapter and its sub-chapters, I will trace the field of research according to my research interests by arranging the collected materials – an arrangement that in itself is already a type of analysis as the various topics, the various ‘problems’ (via Maratti) are constituted that way. I will then relate them to concepts already encountered, to further literature and to each other. Contradictions between quotes will emerge, but those are crucial parts of the research and its presentation and will be addressed directly where necessary.

Before I go on to do my selective tracing of the field of research, I want to include a list of interviewees. It isn’t the most precise of lists in that it lacks demographic data, as discussed earlier, but it should serve as a useful overview and give an impression of the interviewees’ activities.

1. London, UK, May 19: Phil McMullen, editor of the UK-based *Ptolemaic Terrascope* magazine that spawned the Terrastock festivals.
2. Vienna, Austria, June 21: Eric Arn, former member of Crystalized Movements, member of Primordial Undermind, active solo under his own name and in various collaborative / improvisatory contexts.

Two interviews took place at the Karneval im Land der Cetacean festival²⁵⁴:

3. Graz, Austria, June 26: Spencer Clark, member of The Skaters, active solo as Monopoly Child Star Searchers, Fourth World Magazine et al.
4. Graz, Austria, June 27: Labanny Bly, former member of Orgiaztech, active solo as P.A.R.A.; Paul LaBrecque, former member of Bright et al., member of Sunburned Hand Of The Man and The Other Method, active solo as Head Of Wantastiquet.

²⁵³ Grossberg: *We Gotta Get out of This Place*, 53.

²⁵⁴ Karneval im Land der Cetacean, in: *Absolutely Free*.
<http://af.g03.net/output/?e=240&page=index&a=prog&b=programm&c=b0e92a50>. Last accessed: December 20, 2011.

Most interviews took place on a journey through the USA:

5. New York City, NY, July 8: Samara Lubelski, former member of Hall Of Fame, Tower Recordings et al., plays with Thurston Moore, MV & EE et al., member of Metabolismus, Metal Mountains, active solo under her own name.
6. New York City, NY, July 8: Karl Bauer, former member of Windsor For The Derby et al., active in various collaborative / improvisatory contexts and (mostly) solo as Axolotl.
7. Brattleboro, VT, July 12: Matt Valentine, former member of Memphis Luxure and Tower Recordings, member of MV & EE, active solo, runs the Child Of Microtones and Heroine Celestial Agriculture labels with Erika Elder. During the interview, Ron Schneiderman (see below) joined us.
8. Brattleboro, VT, July 13: Ron Schneiderman, former member of Pudding Maker, member of Coal Hook, Green Hill Builders, The Other Method, Sunburned Hand Of The Man et al., plays with MV & EE, active solo and in various collaborative / improvisatory contexts, runs the Spirit Of Orr label and Surefire Distribution.
9. Doylestown, PA, July 15: Natalie Mering, former member of Jackie-O Motherfucker, active solo as Weyes Blood.
10. Philadelphia, PA, July 16: Eric Carbonara, active as a solo acoustic instrumentalist.
11. Orwigsburg, PA, July 17: Tara Burke, former member of Un et al., member of Anahita, Tau Emerald, The Valerie Project, active solo as Fursaxa.
12. Pittsburgh, PA, July 18: Mike Tamburo, former member of Meisha and Arco Flute Foundation, active solo under his own name and as Brother Ong, runs the New American Folk Hero label.
13. Pittsburgh, PA, July 19: Jeffrey Alexander, former member of The Science Kit and The Iditarod, member of Black Forest / Black Sea and Dire Wolves, artistic director at AS220 and festival director at Terrastock 6 in Providence, RI; Miriam Goldberg, member of Black Forest / Black Sea; both interviewees ran the Secret Eye label.
14. Oakland, CA, July 21: Eva Saelens, former member of Alarmist and Jackie-O Motherfucker, member of We Like Cats, active solo as Inca Ore.
15. San Francisco, CA, July 22: Evan Caminiti, member of Barn Owl and Higuma, active solo.
16. San Francisco, CA, July 24: Glenn Donaldson, former member of Mirza, member of The Blithe Sons, Horrid Red, The Skygreen Leopards, Thuja et al., active solo under

various guises (The Birdtree, The Ivytree). Runs the Jewelled Antler label with Loren Chasse.

17. San Francisco, CA, July 24: Sharon Cheslow, former member of Chalk Circle, Bloody Mannequin Orchestra et al., founder / member of Coterie Exchange, active solo and in various collaborative / improvisatory contexts. Runs the Decomposition label and publisher, publishes the *Interrobang?! anthology*.

18. Los Angeles, CA, July 26: Chris Moon, former member of MCMS, formerly active solo as Yermo. Runs the Last Visible Dog label.

19. Los Angeles, CA, July 26: Britt Brown, former member of Pocahaunted and Weirdo Begeirido, member of L.A. Vampires, Robedoor, Topaz Rags et al., runs the Not Not Fun label with Amanda Brown.

20. Austin, TX, July 28: Christina Carter, member of Charalambides and Scorses. Runs the Many Breaths label.

21. New York City, NY, July 30: Pete Nolan, member of GHQ, Magik Markers, Valley Of The Ashes, The Vanishing Voice et al., active solo and with others as Spectre Folk. Runs the Arbitrary Signs label.

22. Glasgow, UK, November 4–5: David Keenan, former member of 18 Wheeler and Telstar Ponies, member of Taurpis Tula and Tight Meat, writes for *The Wire* and as a book author; Heather Leigh Murray, former member of Charalambides, member of Jailbreak, Scorses and Taurpis Tula, active solo under her own name; both interviewees run the Volcanic Tongue store and label in Glasgow.

This diploma thesis is a qualitative one that traces its field of research mostly through material collected in qualitative (problem-centered) interviews and said material's analysis and interpretation. While it relies on certain facts established (not least through selection) in the interviews, its goal is not to quantify the field. Reliance on quantification would risk reducing and misinterpreting these heterogeneous scenes, hard to grasp as they are. Nonetheless, it is interesting for this thesis to consider the field in terms of gender ratios. I decided, however, to only commence work on statistics after the interview material's evaluation. As I faced difficulties that delayed the thesis work process, this also had an impact on how I handled statistics.

The inclusion of useful statistics is complicated by the scenes' irreducibility and multiplicity: if at all, these scenes are only quantifiable by sorting specific festival line-

ups and label rosters according to gender. This, again, is hampered by the dearth of specific information on a lot of artists / bands: line-ups at specific moments can be extremely hard to find out about, resulting in a certain unreliability of reductive attributes like female / male / mixed. If the researcher doesn't have the time or opportunity to contact individual artists (which would certainly result in workload that should be avoided in the case of a study like this one), it's hard not to resort to the study of resources like discography website Discogs²⁵⁵, which is remarkably useful but at the same time, editable by anyone as it is, arguably doesn't meet the standards set by, for example, an actual encyclopedia and expected from scholarly work.

Throughout the thesis, I have thus avoided declaring the definite presence of an actual noticeable quantitative imbalance. I have attempted to create statistics: like the material collected in interviews, these statistics suggested that 1. there are many women present in music, but 2. quantitative equality is only encountered in specific cases, depending on contexts. Even in the case of the Terrastock festivals' documentation on the *Terrascope* website, there still remain contingencies (for example: the dangers of guessing a performer's gender based on her / his name). I have decided that including a quantitative analysis on the level of sophistication I am expecting from myself isn't doable without an (impossible) extension of the time taken to work on this thesis – which, after all, is a diploma thesis and not a PhD dissertation or full-length book. I hope to be able to dedicate time to a 'proper' quantitative analysis at some point. For now, I will only include a comparison of Terrastock 1 (Providence, Rhode Island, 1997) and Terrastock 6 (Providence, Rhode Island, 2006). These festivals aren't representative of the field as a whole – no single festival could be. However, these line-ups are still relatively diverse, and the Terrastock 6 line-up has had an impact (as mentioned in chapter 1.1) on how I have been conceiving of these scenes. I have mostly used the *Terrascope*'s Terrastock Nation page²⁵⁶ as my source for festival / band line-up information. Solo artists and bands are counted identically; in some cases, concerts that were nominally solo sets (Sharron Kraus, Bridget St. John) were counted as mixed due to the presence of other performers on stage.

²⁵⁵ Discogs. <http://www.discogs.com/>. Last accessed: January 24, 2012.

²⁵⁶ Terrastock Nation, The, in: *Terrascope*.

http://www.terrascope.co.uk/TerrastockNation/Family_Tree.htm. Last accessed: January 24, 2012.

	female	male	mixed
Terrastock 1	2	22	10
Terrastock 6	4	11	19

Tab. 1: all-male, all-female and mixed acts at Terrastock 1 and 6

What does this little statistic tell me? Not much, certainly, as the scenes' heterogeneity isn't simply suspended by merely presenting one table. At the same time, what is noticeable here is an increased presence of female musicians. Does this hint at a general increase in the number of women active in these scenes over the years (as some interviewees would suggest) or is it a matter of curatorship (see chapter 5.6)? At the very least, I hope the numbers for Terrastock 6 in combination with an actual consideration of women's contributions there show that women's presence beyond that of bassist and / or seemingly tacked-on singer for an otherwise male band at an important, arguably scene-defining festival should be considered normal, especially nowadays, even though in these (and many other) examples, the majority of musicians certainly still are male.

While big parts of the following eight sub-chapters consist of juxtaposed, contrasted and connected interview fragments, I hope to have used them in ways and in contexts that enable them to be connectable, and that don't misuse their contents for anything that was far from implied by the interviewed; I hope I have sufficiently "put [the tracing] back on the map." What certainly connects all these utterances is that they were stated in interviews I conducted. These interviews could never be identical, but general knowledge of my thesis's topic and my focus on social relations as constitutive of the field of research was present and is often reflected in the interviewed's own structuring of the field.

The individual sub-chapters should be seen as interrelated islands of text, or as text intensities gathered around certain specified topics. Short conclusions will be drawn, which I will sum up and attempt to reconnect or flesh out in the conclusion (chapter 6.1).

5.1 Getting into music / Interviewees' backgrounds

I "usually started those interviews by asking the interviewed people how they initially got into music, what [...] might have been the initial impetus, ways of accessing

music”²⁵⁷, thus opening up space for (potential) narrations that would trace interviewees’ paths through their musical-social fields in more or less chronological order. Some of these narrations started with interviewees’ childhoods, some even integrated earlier elements, discussing whether interviewees’ families were interested and active in music or not. Family life and childhood experiences do not necessarily determine later musical-social trajectories; and indeed, interviewees’ positioning of these experiences within their respective narrations varies from case to case. However, as the very idea of ‘getting into music’ requires reflection on earlier, usually long-passed life phases, there are bound to be instances of connections to childhood and upbringing being mentioned. In this sub-chapter, I will present and compare various different early experiences and refer to interviewees’ respective backgrounds. While there isn’t a lot of *explicitly* gender-related information to focus on amidst this sub-chapter’s material, the concept of gender is to be considered in its multiple relationality. Gender is only analytically distinct or separable from education, class or ethnicity – but also doesn’t necessarily determine those.

When parents or family members appeared in interviewees’ narrations, it was usually – due to the interviews’ focus as reiterated in the chapter introduction – in relation to musical or generally artistic practice and socialization. Some parents helped their children get into music by buying them instruments: when Britt Brown’s friends were getting guitars, Brown, who had become increasingly interested in music following a “Nirvana epiphany”²⁵⁸ in high school, decided he wanted to learn guitar. His father bought him one for his birthday and got him lessons (which were unsuccessful; he instead followed a DIY route and continued using his instruments in unschooled ways). Evan Caminiti, too, received a guitar as a birthday present from his parents. His musical trajectory “started with the love of playing guitar and being very into the guitar”; he would go on to listen to a variety of “guitar-centered”²⁵⁹ music, first being interested more in skilful performances, then in music that was focusing rather on atmospheric aspects. Some musicians received classical training at an early age: Karl Bauer and Samara Lubelski commenced learning the violin at ages four and five, respectively. For a few years, starting in his teens, Bauer ceased playing the instrument, but the

²⁵⁷ As the project progressed, this or a similar phrase would become a standard conversation opener, as mentioned in chapter 4.4. Here, I am quoting my opening question to the interview with Christina Carter (Austin, July 28, 2009).

²⁵⁸ Interview with Britt Brown (Los Angeles, July 26, 2009).

²⁵⁹ Interview with Evan Caminiti (San Francisco, July 22, 2009).

knowledge acquired over the preceding years helped him pick up various other instruments.²⁶⁰ Some other interviewees mentioned playing instruments at early ages that were not, at least immediately, relevant to them.

Musicians' families' own interests and involvement in music differed. Parents' record collections and listening habits could inform their children's musical socialization; not necessarily directly so, however, as parents' tastes could certainly differ from interviewees'. Few interviewees mentioned parents' tastes as directly inspiring an interest in experimental music. Still, family tastes could help develop interesting artistic frameworks: Sharon Cheslow grew up listening to the folk and protest music her parents loved. Fans of rock and jazz music, they also took her to concerts.²⁶¹ Labanna Bly has artists for parents who also tried to encourage their daughter's artistry, a tendency against which she rebelled at first before discovering DIY arts for herself. In the interview, Bly talks about her mother's artistic milieu, which differs markedly from some of the other interviewees' suburban backgrounds.²⁶² Natalie Mering is from a musically active family and had instruments and equipment (including a broken 4-track recorder once belonging to her father) at her disposal.²⁶³ Coming from a family that included various musicians, Mike Tamburo recounts a trick his father played on him as important for his interest in recording:

I think I was probably five years old, it was my birthday, and my father had made a recording, like he'd got me a tape recorder, and I didn't know what it was basically like he'd made this recording of his voice going (knocking sound), "won't you let me out of here? (knocking sound) Let me out of here (knocking sound), let me out of here", and I was just like running around the house, looking for this voice that was doing this, and then I eventually found this box that had the tape recorder in it, and so, pretty much from then on, I started recording myself doing various things²⁶⁴

Matt Valentine grew up in a family that was particularly interested in music:

[T]here's some musicians in the family, record collectors, a lot of electronic enthusiasts, like my grandfather would build radios and have reel-to-reel tape machines, things like that and, I was encouraged to use those things as often as possible, for stimulation as a child, and also encouraged to use the record player, learn how to change reel-to-reel tapes, record records, when I was [...] four or five years old²⁶⁵

²⁶⁰ cf. interview with Samara Lubelski (New York City, July 8, 2009); interview with Karl Bauer (New York City, July 8, 2009).

²⁶¹ cf. interview with Sharon Cheslow (San Francisco, July 24, 2009).

²⁶² cf. interview with Labanna Bly and Paul LaBrecque (Graz, June 27, 2009).

²⁶³ cf. interview with Natalie Mering (Doylestown, July 15, 2009).

²⁶⁴ Interview with Mike Tamburo (Pittsburgh, July 18, 2009).

²⁶⁵ Interview with Matt Valentine (Brattleboro, July 12, 2009).

Valentine would soon construct his own tape loops and has remained interested in DIY music ever since; alternative approaches to life would also figure in his education (see below). In his interview, Valentine emphasizes the importance of openness and how some people's artistic potentials remain unrealized because of their parents' lack of understanding for or even distrust of artistic or otherwise (arguably) alternative practices:

[w]hen they were younger it was like, their parents didn't want them making noise in their garage [...], "you can't hang out with that person because that dude's pretty weird, you know (MS laughs), he's into, he's got some esoteric interests" or, "he's definitely a druggy" is a big thing when you're a kid here in the States, like, "he smokes a lot of herb" so, or the parents think that you smoke a lot of herb, 'cause you have long hair or you wear, whatever, so there's just this kind of separation and then ideas can't blossom, [...] someone can't live to what their potential is, [...], and it's almost like you're encoded with it²⁶⁶

Valentine's thoughts showcase important and potentially crucial factors. As will probably become traceable over the course of this text, creativity is valued in these circles, and an open-minded upbringing that doesn't impact negatively on children's potentials is likely to support such tendencies. Still, some musicians grew up in families in which artistic practice wasn't particularly present or encouraged and yet became dedicated and idiosyncratic musicians, taking different and unexpected paths. One example here is guitarist Eric Carbonara, whose dedication to learning his instruments was the result of decisions that very much were his own to make. However, Carbonara reckons he applied his working class family's hard work ethic to his own musical path. Devoted to intense musical study, he has familiarized himself with Indian musical culture, studying with Indian teachers – even in India itself, with Debashish Bhattacharya in Kolkata. In the interview, Carbonara emphasizes India's vastly different societal approach to music in comparison to the USA, hoping that certain community-building projects furthering alternative lifestyles could (not just) lead to a different role of artistry in American society: "our children's children could possibly be growing up in musical families not having to have jobs", an idea not restricted to a plea for greater respect for artists in American society but to be seen as one element of a call for a revolution in values in a country that is "repairing from cultural bankruptcy and from a spiritual bankruptcy"²⁶⁷, terms that Carbonara differentiates from any similar but politically conservative concepts.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Interview with Eric Carbonara (Philadelphia, July 16, 2009).

Eva Saelens is from a background appearing not dissimilar to Carbonara's. In her case, what is contrasted to her loving but culturally conventional upbringing is the decidedly creative community she encountered when moving to Portland, Oregon, and meeting the likes of Pete Swanson (Yellow Swans). Saelens, while taking a musical path decidedly different from Carbonara's more technically dedicated one and not chiefly considering herself a musician, also calls for creative scenes to develop "communities and lifestyles outside of capitalist failures, outside of mainstream life"²⁶⁸. I think the ideas brought forward here connect quite easily with the countercultural, collectivist stance outlined by Büsser and Karnik (see chapter 3.2). What is very much noteworthy though is that Carbonara is a solo musician, and Saelens's primary musical activities take place outside of groups too, although she has been active in various group contexts. Carbonara and Saelens place importance on help or care in social contexts but don't necessarily need to be active in a band context to do so.

The examples mentioned here show very different influences (or non-influences) family childhood life may have had on musicians in these scenes: unsurprisingly, there is no common trait this specific topic is reducible to. However, they at least make obvious the very contingency of how an early life may play into later developments and how early experiences may – directly or indirectly, positively or negatively – inspire ideas important to people's creative paths. An unconventional, open-minded lifestyle does not automatically lead to unconventional artistic practice, and a lack of alternatives does not automatically block an artistic life, but for some of these musicians, openness, curiosity and eclecticism are values to be inspired by and to inspire with. As some of these examples may also show, personal upbringing and childhood are not values in a vacuum but rather embedded in, though not necessarily determined by, wider society and culture. Gender is the main category to be discussed here, but it always intersects with other categories.

What interviewees' social backgrounds are is a question that is hard, probably impossible to answer conclusively without more explicit, detailed surveying of individual life stories. Indeed, I decided to avoid confronting interview partners with a list of prepared questions that could have shed some statistically valid light on their (initial) social milieus, indicators for which could have been parents' jobs or more detailed information on the interviewed's own job(s). Instead, I hoped that information

²⁶⁸ Interview with Eva Saelens (Oakland, July 21, 2009).

on these aspects would be generated within the interviews themselves as parts of a conversation's flow rather than formalized inquiries to be imposed on the interviewees before or after the interviews – a technique that certainly has many benefits and that has been discussed in chapter 4.4 already, but that I felt could have been obstructive here, challenging the un-conventional conversational atmosphere I wanted to build.

I also asked interviewees for their impressions of the social backgrounds of other participants in their musical-social fields. Replies differed, but the impression remains that these fields are dominated by artists from middle class backgrounds. Some replies suggest that the fields are very diverse in terms of class, with people from various backgrounds being active. Interviewees who singled out specific sectors of society as being particularly present were usually referring to the middle class, which itself is certainly a very vague and broad construct that is hard to handle without statistical data. Possibly more useful is that many interviewees recognize protagonists in these fields as being from privileged backgrounds, the music itself being more accessible to those privileged. As alluded to earlier and as developed later in this paper, through reference to musicians' listening and influences, musicians usually aren't born into these scenes but rather find out about more experimental, lesser known music over time and through a variety of sources. To Britt Brown, it seems that

[...] people that have the economic situation that's lenient enough that they can be so dilettantish as to toy with these esoteric un-financially rewarding (laughs) musical realms tend to be middle class, white, straight, dudes and anything outside of that is the exception of the rule, always²⁶⁹

Martin Büsser, writing on the ceaseless thriving of tiny niches in recent years²⁷⁰, suggests that most of today's interesting music is performed by musicians aged 18 to 25, younger people who can afford to do so before having to deal with greater financial ballast. Most of my interviewees were beyond that age already at the time I conducted the interviews, but in a world where by far the greatest part of those active as musicians have to be considered outsiders in relation to the small number of extremely successful artists, there is hardly a chance of achieving greater or sustainable success in the music business. Büsser certainly exhibits a positive attitude towards the huge amount of "*undogmatischer, nonkonformer Musik*"²⁷¹ available now but emphasizes the peculiar

²⁶⁹ Interview with Britt Brown (Los Angeles, July 26, 2009).

²⁷⁰ cf. Büsser, Martin: Das Ende der Pop-Relevanz und das Wuchern der Nischen, in: *testcard. Beiträge zur Popgeschichte 19. Blühende Nischen* (Mainz 2010), 6–10.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

economic conditions that sabotage theses uncritically diagnosing a freedom unknown before.

Another topic I asked about and that was often connected to questions of social background was the category of race / ethnicity: audiences as well as musicians themselves seem mostly white to the interviewed, with some exceptions. In a recent email, Tara Burke notes:

For example the Woodstock Music Festival had artists such as Richie Havens, Ravi Shankar, Carlos Santana, Sly and the Family Stone, and Jimi Hendrix. Whereas the Brattleboro Free Folk Fest, which started the whole 'free folk' moniker, had mostly white musicians (if I remember correctly).²⁷²

While numerous explanations were offered, including demographics, cultural differences and, most convincingly but not without its dangers, the ethnic aspects of economics in the USA, it is extremely hard to tackle this topic here without having relevant material at hand, resorting to clichés or dubiously reducing the topic's complexity. Considering that statistics generally suggest that affluence is more common among 'white' Americans²⁷³, it is no surprise to not find many African Americans in scenes that may be seen as a playground of the privileged, but the framework allowing for definite statements on this matter appears exceedingly shaky until further dedicated research into this is conducted. Also, Mary Celeste Kearney writes that

the number of middle-class people of color has increased substantially in the United States since the 1950s, thus challenging the common conflation of wealth and whiteness, and, with specific regard to the realm of culture, subverting media production's domination by white writers, filmmakers, and musicians.²⁷⁴

This does at least put that "common conflation" into question and preclude easy answers, but Kearney herself writes that nonetheless, there remain imbalances according to class, gender and race in cultural production. Kearney mentions that "punk scenes continue to be dominated by hegemonic ideologies of race and gender despite criticisms of such dynamics by some of their participants"²⁷⁵. There is simply not

²⁷² Personal email correspondence with Tara Burke (December 19, 2011).

²⁷³ cf. Murswieck, Axel: Gesellschaft, in: Lösche, Peter / Loeffelholz, Hans Dietrich von (eds.): *Länderbericht USA. Geschichte, Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft, Kultur* (Frankfurt / New York), 604–616, 643–648.

²⁷⁴ Kearney, Mary Celeste: *Girls Make Media* (New York / Abingdon 2006), 14.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 14. Also see how Mary Ann Clawson calls "rock music" a "racially specific art world" (Clawson: Masculinity and skill acquisition, 100).

enough material available to me to compare this research field's situation with that of the punk scenes Kearney mentions: I haven't encountered any obvious modes of exclusion, let alone racist bias; musical influences certainly include African American musicians, most obviously from free jazz contexts. And yet, I also haven't encountered a lot of effort to keep these scenes ethnically diverse. The very idea, of course, is questionable too – how would such effort manifest, what do such thoughts suggest about these musics' appeal (or lack thereof)? Here, we have another potential thesis topic for a paper that would have to go way beyond the descriptive and certainly question its own normativity.²⁷⁶

It does, however, make sense to continue dealing with questions and forms of privilege. To quote Eric Arn,

if you're coming from a very urban or very poverty-stricken environment, you're probably not gonna be exposed to this kind of music, and you're probably not gonna have time or inclination to get involved, so, most of the people involved tend to have some education, some higher education, and have had the means or the opportunities to pursue it, even if, you know, a lot of it is on your own, DIY, I mean people go out and try to make a living off these things, they don't have a lot of money, but they usually, their origins are in strata of society where you didn't have to worry, you know, as a youngster about where the next meal was coming from or something, but they probably weren't super-posh, rich people either, who were trained in classical music all their lives or something (MS: Yeah), but they were somewhere in the middle [...], and a lot of it happens through university²⁷⁷

Interviewees' narrations usually included references to education – sometimes referring directly to courses taken and subjects studied in school or at university, sometimes using these institutions and one's own involvement therein as a backdrop for specific life phases. I will also discuss education as an aspect of individuals' social backgrounds and one important to their access to information that ends up relevant to their musical-social trajectories. Connected to this, although not deterministically so, the topic of

²⁷⁶ Kandia Crazy Horse has written a polemic on "race, rock and the New Weird America" which discusses the supposed movement's gated community character, tendency to "[map] a new aesthetic terrain of whiteness to attain privilege via sound" and appropriation of perceived freak-ishness that, to the privileged (white bourgeois), is easy to not suffer consequences from. She makes some very interesting points especially on this issue of appropriation that arguably tie in with this thesis's hope for greater awareness and reflection (see chapter 6.1). However, her focus on a supposed 'freak-folk' movement and on artists whose connection to my field of research does exist but isn't that strong, *and* in whose work I would argue questions of representation and signification are more explicitly present, make it difficult to construct direct connections here. (Crazy Horse, Kandia: Freak Show. Race, rock and the New Weird America, in: *Perfect Sound Forever* (February 2007), <http://www.furious.com/perfect/freakshow.html>. Last accessed: January 11, 2012.)

²⁷⁷ Interview with Eric Arn (Vienna, June 21, 2009).

musicians' work and jobs within and outside music is just as important to how the field of research can be conceived of.

Junior high / middle school and high school often serve as backdrops, sometimes vaguely so, for interviewees' early musical activities: brass bands, school and church choirs as well as cover bands feature in their narrations. In some cases (like Crystalized Movements band mates Eric Arn and Wayne Rogers attending the same high school and madrigal singing group)²⁷⁸, important connections were forged, but often, the groups interviewees were involved in are merely mentioned in passing. However, for many this was a time when they at least found out about unusual musics and attended inspiring shows. Natalie Mering took the train from her native Doylestown, Pennsylvania, to witness shows in nearby Philadelphia.²⁷⁹ Matt Valentine attended a school that left him a lot of freedom, allowing him to leave campus when teachers were absent during the day and thus granting him time to, for example, buy records. His "high school side life"²⁸⁰ saw him, who grew up an hour outside of New York City, take the train for that same metropolis where he would attend shows by the likes of Sonic Youth. Pete Nolan and Mike Tamburo set up shows and music festivals, respectively, while in high school.²⁸¹ Generally, most interviewees had notable music-related experiences in or around school. Here, a remark by Glenn Donaldson that in the 1980s, "there was a lot of music programs in schools in America and that's slowly declined over time"²⁸² may be of interest for further evaluation of musical activities in school and their impact for later music-making beyond this paper's boundaries. However, these experiences differ vastly. Some interviewees hardly had anything to do with music until after school, while others had been learning their instruments for more than a decade by the time they finished high school. Within the group of interviewees encountered here, there appears to have been only a small amount of women actually committed to playing music in bands in school. This arguably matches Mary Ann Clawson's observation (in her survey on alternative rock music in Boston) that, in contrast to men's involvement, "[f]or these young women, rock musicianship was more frequently a phenomenon of young adulthood than a product of early adolescence."²⁸³ In the context of Clawson's topic,

²⁷⁸ cf. *ibid.*

²⁷⁹ cf. interview with Natalie Mering (Doylestown, July 15, 2009).

²⁸⁰ Interview with Matt Valentine (Brattleboro, July 12, 2009).

²⁸¹ cf. interview with Pete Nolan (New York City, July 30, 2009); interview with Mike Tamburo (Pittsburgh, July 18, 2009).

²⁸² Interview with Glenn Donaldson (San Francisco, July 24, 2009).

²⁸³ Clawson, Mary Ann: When Women Play the Bass: Instrument Specialization and Gender Interpretation in Alternative Rock Music, in: *Gender and Society* 13, 2 (April 1999), 200.

this means that to women, who were “often denied the years of teenage apprenticeship and skill acquisition experienced by male counterparts”, some instruments’ (in this case the bass’s) appeal as being easier to learn is a potentially important factor in their musical development. My thesis’s sample certainly is a small and heterogeneous one though, and thus not necessarily representative (except in that very heterogeneity). Additionally, may the relative lack of female quotes thus far be a result of unreflected bias on my part, subconsciously expecting males to be more involved in or competent about these aspects? Or simply a result of the sample’s demographics: 17 women, eight men? Nonetheless, it is interesting to encounter these correlations. What does appear in my sample is the trope of boys picking up guitars at high school age – around the time their friends did; however, musicians’ developments here are fragmentary and not necessarily to “the men’s almost teleological accounts of their early musical activities”²⁸⁴ as heard by Clawson.

Is it crucial or beneficial to start doing music at an earlier age? There certainly are obvious upsides to doing so, a greater ease at which one may move through scenes, the early building of networks, musical experience, certain opportunities on the level of technique. And yet, the field of research is open to musicians starting musical performance at relatively late points. Karl Bauer has collaborated with many unschooled musicians and shares his impressions:

I’ve met a lot of women who started playing music, and Elaine [Kahn] for example, or Eva [Saelens], or a lot of people who started playing music in their late teens or early twenties and didn’t play music before that and were able to come at it with a freshness and a rawness that a lot of, that I sometimes don’t see [...] from men²⁸⁵

Bauer relates this to the “very freeing experience for women that had never played music before to be part of like a musical organism where there is no subject really, where everybody becomes this one thing” as opposed to the “spectacle nature” of what is often expected (especially) from female performers, which can thus be “subverted entirely”²⁸⁶ through improvisation. I don’t think I am in the position at all to comment on whether it is in any way easier for women to start playing music at later points, but Bauer’s points about improvisation and its lack of subject appear compatible with, for

²⁸⁴ Clawson: Masculinity and skill acquisition, 111.

²⁸⁵ Interview with Karl Bauer (New York City, July 8, 2009).

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

example, Jeremy Gilbert's thoughts on "the rhizomatic moment of improvisation."²⁸⁷ In the various cases Gilbert discusses, "musics are produced according to processes which defy ordinary notions of intention: no-one can say who is truly the 'author' of a DJ-mix, of a Can improvisation, even of one of [Evan] Parker's pseudo-polyphonic solos."²⁸⁸ And: "[i]n each of these cases, a continuous experience of trans-personal intensity – a body without organs – is generated by the deliberate subversion of any simple process of composition, expression and interpretation."²⁸⁹ In addition, in the case of the scenes discussed in this thesis, these artistic processes that go beyond authorship and signification²⁹⁰ (usually) aren't based on the exchanges of virtuosos but, as I hope to be able to show and as I will elaborate on later, are relatively easily accessible for unschooled musicians.

After this short excursion whose contents I will be picking up on later, I want to return to questions of education. The role (or, potentially, lack thereof) of higher education is possibly more interesting for this thesis than that of earlier forms of education, also due to its greater implications for a study of interviewees' social backgrounds. The majority of interviewees mentioned having access to some form of higher education. Here, too, social connections could originate: the members of Barn Owl, Evan Caminiti and Jon Porras, met at an American Indian Studies class at San Francisco State University.²⁹¹ Attending Michigan State University, Pete Nolan "had some friends that were really deep, deep record collectors"²⁹² like John Olson (Wolf Eyes), then in Universal Indians, whose musical knowledge he benefited from. Karl Bauer started studying at New York University in 1997; his freshman year also saw Andy Adler (Crystal Stilts), Eric Copeland (Black Dice), Dave Portner (Animal Collective) and Liam (Cause Co-Motion!) commence their respective studies, all of whom went on to become established musicians.²⁹³ Natalie Mering only spent a relatively short time studying in Portland, Oregon, and may not have been particularly active there as a musician, but encountered a busy scene.²⁹⁴ Tara Burke didn't mention her anthropology studies at

²⁸⁷ Gilbert, Jeremy: *Becoming-Music: The Rhizomatic Moment of Improvisation*, in: Buchanan, Ian / Swiboda, Marcel (eds.): *Deleuze and Music* (Edinburgh 2004), 118–139.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 120.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 121.

²⁹⁰ cf. ibid., 122–126.

²⁹¹ cf. interview with Evan Caminiti (San Francisco, July 22, 2009).

²⁹² Interview with Pete Nolan (New York City, July 30, 2009).

²⁹³ cf. interview with Karl Bauer (New York City, July 8, 2009).

²⁹⁴ cf. interview with Natalie Mering (Doylestown, July 15, 2009).

Temple University as leading to direct musical connections, but it was at that time that she moved into a house with five musicians in Philadelphia.²⁹⁵

Beyond the obvious social connections, high education institutions could provide opportunities and information crucial to musicians' outlook. Eric Carbonara, another anthropology student in Pennsylvania (State College, where he also met his later housemate Norman Fetter of Niagara Falls / Honeymoon Music), enjoyed the insight into other cultures and, eventually, their music:

I spent a lot of time in the music listening libraries of my college and just checking records out and finding out about all kinds of stuff, like that's how I stumbled upon John Cage and Stockhausen and (MS: *Mhm*), Ravi Shankar and, you know, all those things like just Indian music and, Balinese and Javanese gamelan music, and African music, just going through records and just kinda picking stuff out, and just spending nights, you know, doing that²⁹⁶

Carbonara considers the "blending of different styles"²⁹⁷ that is his own music a result of the privilege of being able to attend college. Glenn Donaldson, who attended college in Santa Cruz with his collaborators Rob Reger and Steven R. Smith, with whom he had grown up in Orange County, recalls how his time there expanded his knowledge:

College was really my education in avant-garde music, [...], Orange County is a very kind of small-minded place, it's known for being conservative [...] and then you go over to college and you get people from Canada or something, which is, seems so exotic, and they know about European music and stuff, which Americans somehow don't have access to, you know, Can or some like, [...], I only knew about punk and certain things like that, but then you go to college and people are telling you about Ornette Coleman and stuff like that, so, you're expanding your palate, what you can listen to and learn about²⁹⁸

Higher education and / or the social relations it helps generate thus could be a factor in the opening up of people's worldviews to sounds and practices different to those encountered in earlier daily life.

While not all interviewees were particularly influenced by radio listening experiences, college radio figures in some of the narrations – as a source of (musical) information or even as an employer. Eric Arn has operated his Primordial Undermind project from various different towns over the years, adapted to and been active in these towns' respective local scenes while maintaining trans-local contacts. In some of the towns in question, listening to and / or getting involved in college radio was an important means of gathering knowledge, making contacts and practicing other essential activities.

²⁹⁵ cf. interview with Tara Burke (Orwigsburg, July 17, 2009).

²⁹⁶ Interview with Eric Carbonara (Philadelphia, July 16, 2009).

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Interview with Glenn Donaldson (San Francisco, July 24, 2009).

Having moved to Pasadena, California, in 1988 to attend grad school and thus left his earlier band, Crystalized Movements, Arn soon found Pomona College's KSPC station:

I was in my apartment shortly after moving there when I found this station, started listening and then at some point I heard them play a Crystalized Movements song (EA and MS laugh), that's how I knew, "I need to get in touch with these people", and so I called them up and met a DJ there and she invited me to come out and sit in on a DJ session and I became a DJ. So that was my main entry into the music scene there, and that's how I learned about the whole Shrimper [Inland Empire-based label / scene, MS], it was just starting at that time, based around the same radio station, so when I became a DJ there I met other DJs who happened to be in other bands and that's how I hooked up with that whole scene²⁹⁹

Arn had already been a DJ at college in Worcester, Massachusetts, and considers college radio stations important scene hubs for his subsequent (work-related) destinations, Boston and San Francisco, too. In San Francisco, KFJC's Steve Taiclet even became a musical collaborator.

Miriam Goldberg ran Brown University's folk music department at one point, ordering not least the entire catalog of Texas-based musician Jandek (about whom she had found out through tour mate Christina Carter). Jeffrey Alexander found out about bands like Pearls Before Swine when working as his college's radio station's record librarian³⁰⁰; he would later release tribute albums³⁰¹ to Pearls Before Swine and their singer Tom Rapp on his Magic Eye and Secret Eye imprints. Rapp played a comeback concert³⁰² at the Terrastock 1 festival in Providence, Rhode Island, whose line-up³⁰³ also included Mary Lou Lord – whom Karl Bauer met at a time when he (not yet in college, which he would attend in New York) and a friend were hosting a college radio show in Salem, where she lived. Bauer states that "that radio station was pretty big for me too, I mean I got, could play anything from their collection and I [...] got to meet some college kids when I was like 15 that were, you know, exposing me to things"³⁰⁴. Matt Valentine, doing college radio shows in Burlington, Vermont, enjoyed his exposure to "a lot of way, way underground music" as well as as "the opportunity to *meet* some of the people in the live on air sessions or something"³⁰⁵. Natalie Mering's narration of her getting into "weird" music interweaves Princeton radio station WPRB, and specifically the DJ Dr.

²⁹⁹ Interview with Eric Arn (Vienna, June 21, 2009).

³⁰⁰ cf. interview with Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg (Pittsburgh, July 19, 2009).

³⁰¹ cf. VARIOUS – For the Dead in Space, Volumes II & III (tribute to Tom Rapp + Pearls Before Swine), in: *Secret Eye*. <http://www.secreteye.org/se/a05.html>. Last accessed: January 15, 2012.

³⁰² cf. Leech, Jeanette: *Seasons They Change. The Story of Acid and Psychedelic Folk* (London 2010), 326–327.

³⁰³ For information on Terrastock 1, see the *Terrascope* website's section thereon:

<http://www.terrascope.co.uk/TerrastockPages/T1Providence.html>. Last accessed: January 2, 2012.

³⁰⁴ Interview with Karl Bauer (New York City, July 8, 2009).

³⁰⁵ Interview with Matt Valentine (Brattleboro, July 12, 2009).

Cosmo, with her increasing interest in alternative rock bands, work at a record store and her prior understanding of composers through high school choirs.³⁰⁶

Closing the section on education, I want to mention that it wasn't often talked about as actually having a direct bearing on interviewees' aesthetics. David Keenan remarks, replying to a question about musicians' social backgrounds, that

if I could say one thing, I would say that I think the majority of people are kinda self-educated (MS: Yeah) (Heather Leigh Murray: Yeah, yeah, I [agree with] that), rather than products of universities and colleges and things like this (HLM: Mhm, even if they went), even if they've been there, but they seem, they have sought out their own culture and taught themselves and read and educated themselves culturally, on their own, and have discovered that themselves, when I say self-educated that's what I mean by that (MS: Yeah, yeah), you know, I don't think any of them go to workshops, musical workshops, or go to like improv weekends [...]³⁰⁷

This ties in with Pete Nolan's remark, like Keenan replying to a question about his impressions of musicians' social backgrounds, that most people he met "have had to like find their place for themselves and I think are all the more interesting for that reason"³⁰⁸. Amanda Petrusich, writing about "free-folkers" (mostly discussing musicians connected to the Brattleboro Free Folk Festival and David Keenan's article thereon), refers to them as "intellectual eccentrics, removed from the working-class everyman-ness of more 'down-home' acts like the Carter Family or Woody Guthrie."³⁰⁹ There is a strange tension, another hint at irreducibility identifiable here: education and knowledge are beneficial, but there is also value to be found in individuals going their own way, being creative according to their own means (also see chapter 5.2, where similar questions are discussed in relation to instruments). Maybe it generally isn't institutionalized knowledge that is of interest to these musicians; various interviewees have esoteric interests (and, indeed, are active in esotericism) or extend the music's DIY ethos to other spheres.

Earlier, I hinted at the economic context of musicians' activities. The general impression left from these interviews is that only few musicians don't have to do jobs. However, those who do don't necessarily follow a set career path (be it in or outside of music). Phil McMullen, asked for his impressions of the professions that musicians he knows pursue, claims that "I don't think anybody does particularly exciting unusual

³⁰⁶ cf. interview with Natalie Mering (Doylestown, July 15, 2009).

³⁰⁷ Interview with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray (Glasgow, November 4–5, 2009).

³⁰⁸ Interview with Pete Nolan (New York City, July 30, 2009).

³⁰⁹ Petrusich: *It Still Moves*, 240.

jobs, nor really demanding jobs I think, I think you need to be somebody who can hold down a regular job but also have enough free time”³¹⁰. I don’t have statistics at hand of the jobs interviewees have taken over the years, but the interview material mostly hints at a heterogeneous distribution of jobs that matches what McMullen suggests in the quote above. Some musicians have gone through periods without jobs but ended up returning to work. There isn’t much money to be made with these musics. Chris Moon tellingly remarks:

Most of the bands are poor, [...] and I don’t know whether the poverty comes first or whether the decision (CM and MS laugh) to be a musician has created that situation, probably there is some of both, but yeah, most musicians aren’t making much money³¹¹

Numerous interviewees have worked at record stores at one point or another. This does not just fit Byron Coley’s assertion (again, in the context of Amanda Petrusich’s text mostly dealing with the New England meeting grounds) that free folk is “record collector music, in a way”³¹², but also denotes another type of node for the networks in question. Eric Arn moved from San Francisco to Austin, Texas for a few years before leaving the continent for Vienna and identifies record stores as important hubs for communication between musicians in the Texan capital.³¹³ Indeed, the founding members of Charalambides, Christina and Tom Carter, for a while Arn and his wife and band mate Vanessa’s neighbors, have worked at record stores both in Houston and in Austin. As Christina Carter says, asked about how Charalambides started:

Yeah, I was working in this record store, at the time it was called Record Exchange, and it was a sort of like a meeting place through, I mean, no one really articulated it but it seemed to be a meeting place, for people who were playing music as well as listening to music, Tom worked there, and it had a history of employing musicians and, so through working there I started to meet mostly I guess a lot of Tom’s friends³¹⁴

Carter isn’t the only female interviewee to have worked in a record store, but hints at gendered aspects of record store life:

One of the reasons why I got the job at Record Exchange was because, it was a very small place that had very few employees, and one of the reasons why I got the job was because they told me when I came into the store, with my boyfriend, he and I split off, he went to go look at stuff over

³¹⁰ Interview with Phil McMullen (London, May 19, 2009).

³¹¹ Interview with Chris Moon (Los Angeles, July 26, 2009).

³¹² Byron Coley, quoted in Petrusich: *It Still Moves*, 246.

³¹³ cf. interview with Eric Arn (Vienna, June 21, 2009).

³¹⁴ Interview with Christina Carter (Austin, July 28, 2009).

there and I went to go to look at stuff over there independently and I bought my own records, and I was obviously into records myself³¹⁵

It is important to add that Carter doesn't narrate this as a passive reception of a job but relates it to her own active interest in seeking out music. Record stores can be a stereotypically male world: Sarah Cohen, in her study about an indie rock scene in Liverpool, describes that city's independent record shops as important to the scene and tending to be run / staffed by men; this is used as an example for the shaping of gender relations in said (male-dominated) Liverpool scene by institutions and organizations.³¹⁶ Carter's activity here matches her further involvement in music: through her very activity, she defies expectations and misperforms the role of the female hanger-on – which is not an inherently female trait at all, but an expectation in some circles that may have an impact on how a 'female' life is lived, not least in music. Introducing the same study, Cohen states that “[w]ithin Euro-American cultures” the roles women are associated with in rock music tend to be “marginal, decorative or less creative”³¹⁷. Going even further it is possible to connect this to Mary Celeste Kearney's exploration (via Kathleen Kent Rowe) of female youth's unruliness in “insist[ing] on their authority to create and control their own representations”³¹⁸ in a patriarchal society. Similar expectations manifested, for example, in press Carter would encounter in Charalambides' earlier years. Discussing how media coverage has “become more sophisticated” over the years, Carter tells how earlier,

over and over and over it would be presented as if it was Tom Carter's group, and, you know, sort of the implication was that I was some vocalist that came in on the end and added some stuff on the top to kind of like, the icing on the cake of Tom Carter's creation, there's very little of that happening now³¹⁹

Performances (in the widest sense, as they actually are everyday activities) like those mentioned here, notably the record store episode, risk at least indirect punishment in the context of the “system of compulsory heterosexuality” discussed by Butler (see chapter 2.5); however, in a context where active interest in music is highly valued, such activity is appreciated. On the one hand, the remnants of female otherness in the story leading

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ cf. Cohen: *Men Making a Scene*, 23.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 17.

³¹⁸ Kearney: *Girls Make Media*, 12. It should be noted here that Kearney is referring to a society that is patriarchal and adultist. Kearney is focusing on girls aged between 12 and 21; I would argue that these observations are relevant for Christina Carter's (and others') case even beyond that age.

³¹⁹ Interview with Christina Carter (Austin, July 28, 2009).

up to that very hiring may constitute a less direct type of everyday sanctioning. On the other hand, Samara Lubelski's impression that this world very much "relies on a certain headspace and a certain openness"³²⁰ is arguably emphasized here. Her activity and interest and an encountered appreciation of such activity and interest coupled with a lack of hurdles related to professionalism (see chapter 5.2) made Carter follow her path. Heather Leigh Murray, for a few years part of a Charalambides trio line-up, was a customer at Sound Exchange (Record Exchange's new name), as was her fellow Ash Castles On The Ghost Coast member and then-partner Shawn McMillen. Murray says that her contact with the Carters "opened up a whole new area of music"³²¹ for her. She now runs Glasgow store and mailorder Volcanic Tongue with her husband, writer and musician David Keenan, which they see in relation to the mailorder catalogs and fanzines that some interviewees mentioned, especially when talking about the times before the Internet became the seemingly all-encompassing networking tool it is now. Mailorder catalogs like Ajax Records, the K Records catalog or Forced Exposure were brought up by some interviewees as places to order and get information from; Forced Exposure in particular, as a catalog, zine, and label, was quite present during these interviews. Forced Exposure's Byron Coley also appears in different contexts throughout this diploma thesis and has been active in the field of research for many years. Another magazine read by numerous interviewees and published by one was *The Ptolemaic Terrascope*. Jeanette Leech – in *Seasons They Change*, her survey of acid and psychedelic folk – writes about the *Terrascope*'s unconventional coverage choices. To many musicians, it served as an introduction to underground folk music.³²² Writing about the trans-local, virtual community revolving around the *Terrascope*, Leech asserts that "[t]he Terrastock nation was a knowledgeable, taste-making community, and a good indicator that something was stirring."³²³

To return to Volcanic Tongue, it is interesting to note here that Keenan and Murray also highlight perceived gender-related differences in some customers' ways of dealing with the store's co-runners: Keenan points out that sometimes, "if Heather writes an email (HLM: Oh yeah (laughs)), you get a different response than if I write an email." Some customers, encountering Murray in the store, will "ask for me or they won't take a recommendation from Heather":

³²⁰ Interview with Samara Lubelski (New York City, July 8, 2009).

³²¹ Interview with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray (Glasgow, November 4–5, 2009).

³²² cf. Leech: *Seasons They Change*, 206.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 242.

Murray: Yeah, or assuming that working at VT like, David's really running it all and I'm just some sort of helper or something, you know
Keenan: Which is so far from the truth, it's not true³²⁴

"Provision and use of public spaces reflects the inequality of leisure between men and women",³²⁵ Mavis Bayton writes. The same goes for public spaces in rock music, an observation she uses music (equipment) shops as an example for.³²⁶ The story of Christina Carter's initial hiring can be situated in that context. But in the case of Volcanic Tongue, a strange inverse of that situation manifests, whereby a superior male competence is assumed. Keenan, as a writer and store owner, is in a key position and, being male, matches gendered expectations for that role³²⁷; but Murray, just as much the owner of Volcanic Tongue, is considered unusual for that role, or simply not registered in this role due to gendered assumptions.

Jeffrey Alexander and Matt Valentine worked in various record stores over the years. Alexander – who has been "always around music and collecting records ever since I guess 1985, and then until today"³²⁸ – was approached by the members of one of his favourite local bands, Helikopter, at the Baltimore record store he worked at. The resulting band, Science Kit, was another act found on the Terrastock 1 line-up. At The Vinyl Solution in Port Chester around 1993, Valentine got into contact with fellow interviewee Ron Schneiderman through the latter's distribution work; they are friends and musical collaborators to this day, now both living in and near Brattleboro, Vermont. Over the years, people Valentine worked with at record stores included Dan Brown (Hall Of Fame), James Toth (Wooden Wand)³²⁹ and, notably, his partner and collaborator Erika Elder, whom he met at The Vinyl Solution. Like at the aforementioned radio station, Valentine would meet musicians there in person, meeting and getting into contact with the likes of Sean Lennon and Yoko Ono, Thurston Moore (Sonic Youth), Davey Graham, Genesis P-Orridge (Psychic TV, Throbbing Gristle) and Robert Quine.³³⁰ Natalie Mering worked in a store, where she had access to earlier

³²⁴ Interview with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray (Glasgow, November 4–5, 2009).

³²⁵ Bayton: *Frock Rock*, 30.

³²⁶ cf. *ibid.*, 30–33.

³²⁷ Also see *ibid.*, 2–3 on the lack of women in key positions in the music industry.

³²⁸ Interview with Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg (Pittsburgh, July 19, 2009).

³²⁹ cf. Wooden Wand: contributor column, in: *Volcanic Tongue*, <http://www.volcanictongue.com/columns/show/10>. Last accessed: January 22, 2012.

³³⁰ cf. interview with Matt Valentine (Brattleboro, July 12, 2009) + personal email correspondence with Matt Valentine (January 14, 2012).

avant-garde music.³³¹ Numerous musicians both interviewed and not interviewed have worked at Record Stores in New York: Samara Lubelski knew Mark Morgan of Sightings, a band she went on to record, from working at record store Kim's³³², where Karl Bauer, too, has worked. Having moved to New York to study, the store was an important node for his social network, with co-employees including Dan Matz (Windsor For The Derby), Eric Copeland (Black Dice) and Igor Vlasov (Psych-O-Path Records). Bauer met musical heroes like Pavement and Thurston Moore at the store, and he helped friends and band members get involved at the store. It seems very significant that Bauer narrated this when asked about how he has managed to release music, stay in touch with labels over time; "I've been really lucky that I've never had a problem getting music released because I've been very involved in the music world for my whole life"³³³. This doesn't imply that his musical life is very easy in terms of finances – but many contacts are in place, facilitating the release of music. When Bauer worked at the City Lights record store in San Francisco, having moved there for a few years, one of his co-workers was Elaine Kahn (50 Foot Women), with whom he has also gone on to collaborate.

With these various examples or even topics of interest, I hope to have given ideas how social background and education can intersect with gender, *can* play a role but in manifold and unpredictable ways. Or: at the very least, they do not determine musicians' choices and paths, but they are influential. (Social / educational) privilege is not a must for an entrance in these scenes, but appears very beneficial. This is one of the main intersections with gender to be kept in mind here. One particularly interesting aspect, the tension between information, history-aware activity on the one hand and the low hurdles approach of DIY activities, I will return to in chapter 5.4.

5.2 Instruments

The manifold tools that musicians use in their daily practice obviously played an important role in many of the interviews I conducted. They appeared as parts of musicians' narrations and were asked for within those interview parts that dealt with interview partners' impressions of quantitative ratios within their musical-social

³³¹ cf. interview with Natalie Mering (Doylestown, July 15, 2009).

³³² cf. interview with Samara Lubelski (New York City, July 8, 2009).

³³³ Interview with Karl Bauer (New York City, July 8, 2009).

surroundings: who plays which instruments? Consequently, I will have to discuss the question whether or to what extent instruments are gendered in the scenes in question.

As I have mentioned earlier, some interviewees were classically / formally trained. This had varying effects on their ways into and through psychedelic underground musics: feeling able to adapt more easily to other instruments (as in Karl Bauer's case) is an example of the benefits of a musical education. Every now and then, the question of formally trained musicians needing to adapt to free, improvised styles came up during interviews. Having finished her formal education, Samara Lubelski spent time in Europe where she met German band Metabolismus for whose more improvisation-based, DIY style she feels she had to "lose a lot of aspects of my training, you know, especially if you're a violinist 'cause there's this solo mentality that doesn't really work with the group creating mentality"³³⁴. This is connectable to the last chapter's short discussion of improvisatory modes but takes a different angle: coming from a different musical background, Lubelski faced a different set of challenges, or at least walked a different path than an unschooled / self-schooled musician would. And yet, there is common ground to meet on.

Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg, too, played in The Iditarod and then in their duo project Black Forest / Black Sea despite vastly different musical backgrounds. Alexander started playing the guitar when in college without ever receiving formal training; Goldberg took piano lessons from early childhood and also spent time playing cello and oboe. Having stopped playing music when she attended college, she started missing it, took lessons again and even studied music for a while. It was then that Alexander contacted her, asking her whether she was interested in joining The Iditarod on cello.³³⁵

Eric Carbonara's dedication to solo acoustic instrumental music was not based on childhood learning. While Carbonara had played guitar and joined bands in his teens, it was only later that he felt he wanted to devote himself to a "higher calling", not least due to his studies of other musical cultures in and around university, finally taking lessons from Indian teachers and rearranging his life so as to be able to follow this interest. This devotion and its associated lifestyle, far removed from his earlier experiences in bands, leads him to claim that "it's not a very social thing for me any

³³⁴ Interview with Samara Lubelski (New York City, July 8, 2009).

³³⁵ cf. interview with Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg (Pittsburgh, July 19, 2009).

more”³³⁶. His path is thus very singular – and yet intersects with those of, for example, the Fishtown scene – or, more precisely, a compound and its inhabitants – in Philadelphia (see chapter 5.5) as well as, more recently, that of other solo instrumentalists, whose dedication he shares, for whom he books shows and with whom he tours.

Natalie Mering was a “pretty serious alto” in choir ensembles in high school, but she feels more idiosyncratic aspects of her instrumental interests made it harder for her to access local bands in her native Doylestown:

I had built some instrument in high school, too, that was, made very strange sounds and, that immediately made me not really be able to be in bands in my area, [...], I really wanted to be in bands here, but I couldn’t find anybody I related to, it was almost as if my ideas about music were too ambitious and most kids just wanted to be in either like hardcore bands or post-rock bands, and I would show up and wanna do other things³³⁷

Leaving Doylestown for nearby Philadelphia and, for a while in college, Portland, Mering encountered musicians whose outlook may have been closer to hers. The self-built instrument recurs in the interview when Mering talks about meeting Nick Bindeman of Jackie-O Motherfucker, a band she was part of for a while. At the time of the interview, however, Mering had relocated to Doylestown, focussing on the recording of her first solo LP (*The Outside Room* was released in 2011 on Not Not Fun³³⁸).

Jeffrey Alexander wasn’t the only musician to fully get into playing music only after his childhood. Tara Burke (Fursaxa) had “played piano back when I was a youngster but (laughs) I’d always hated it”³³⁹; she had also used the acoustic guitar but didn’t play for years. With friends, she began listening to a greater variety of musics and first joined them on bass, playing by ear rather than reading notes like she had done when playing piano years before. She also went on to sing and her interest in organ sound led her to buy numerous instruments (chord organ, Farfisa...) over time. Despite her earlier training, her later performative trajectory was an experimental one, DIY, teaching herself.

Christina Carter had been interested in the piano as a child already, playing various relatives’ pianos, but never attended lessons. It was only after high school that she

³³⁶ Interview with Eric Carbonara (Philadelphia, July 16, 2009).

³³⁷ Interview with Natalie Mering (Doylestown, July 15, 2009).

³³⁸ cf.: PAST, THE. NNF201–251, in: *NOT NOT FUN*. <http://notnotfun.com/past250.html>. Last accessed: January 15, 2012.

³³⁹ Interview with Tara Burke (Orwigsburg, July 17, 2009).

realized her idea of joining a band, singing in a group with friends. As mentioned earlier, she went on to work at a record store and meet people like her Charalambides band mate and record store co-worker Tom Carter, starting to play more seriously.

It just was a thing where, it was very easy if you had any sort of desire to do it, sort of all the means were there for you, people who were willing to set up shows, a venue that was very easy to get shows at, and... it was a very unprofessional atmosphere, there weren't... you know, hoops to jump through, qualifications, you had the desire, there's the means, just do it³⁴⁰

Carter mentions being interested in record store customer and soon-to-be band mate Jason Bill's description ("in less than glowing terms") of his own playing:

Houston's a strange place, and the people that we knew, there is the whole culture of self-deprecation and, you know, you *never* wanna play with somebody who's like, "yeah, I'm a badass", "I'm great, I'm the best ever", you know, that would be like, "who the fuck are you kidding", there's no way, you just didn't wanna be around people like that, so yeah, we just invited Jason over and we played together, and it worked, so...³⁴¹

Generally, in the interview conducted for this thesis, Carter appreciates the greater fluidity in performance, styles etc. that she has encountered in recent years, a shift in expectations (as opposed to more rigid times, also elaborated on by Carter's friend Heather Leigh Murray³⁴², when a band's lack of drummer could disturb audiences). "[A]nd that fluidity and all of that I consider to be a very feminine trait", in the sense of "what's socially (MS: Yeah), culturally associated with feminine"³⁴³, which is experienced by many women but may also be experienced by men. However, in recent personal correspondence (also see chapter 5.8), Carter also implies downsides to greater fluidity: "This whole idea of de-centralization is problematic, with its suspicion of the original voice, and embracing of empty popular culture."³⁴⁴ Increasing fluidity – and maybe increasing marketability of almost all cultural production can make a musical-social life all the more unpredictable and precarious. Earlier, I have referred to Martin Büsser's argument about almost everyone being an outsider in the music business these days. In terms of success, it could be argued that there doesn't necessarily remain any distinction in terms of time / originality invested – there may well be in specific cases, depending not least on curatorship (also see chapter 5.6)

³⁴⁰ Interview with Christina Carter (Austin, July 28, 2009).

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² cf. interview with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray (Glasgow, November 4–5, 2009).

³⁴³ Interview with Christina Carter (Austin, July 28, 2009).

³⁴⁴ Personal email correspondence with Christina Carter (December 12, 2011).

Sharon Cheslow fondly remembers that in David Keenan's "New Weird America" cover story for *The Wire*,

Christina Carter and Heather Leigh Murray were written about as just going wild and crazy with their music (MS: Yeah, yeah), and I was like, "yeah, girls can go wild and crazy with music, too" (SC and MS laugh), and it doesn't have to be about theory, you know, it can just be about being in, really what it was all about was being in the moment, and just being spontaneous, and being in your body, and I think that's something a lot of girls are not encouraged to do³⁴⁵

Cheslow has experienced reactions after some of her own more free noise-based performances suggesting that "it's almost as if I was giving these younger girls permission (MS: Yeah) to be free with their bodies"³⁴⁶. For Cheslow, one earlier example for such an approach to one's body is the musical practice of Harry Pussy drummer and singer Adris Hoyos. This example actually intersects with the ones listed here: Charalambides and Harry Pussy were label mates on Siltbreeze and did numerous joint tours in the 1990s. Heather Leigh Murray, travelling to the first Siltbreeze festival, saw Harry Pussy in concert numerous times³⁴⁷. She writes about experiencing Harry Pussy live, and especially a show in Austin, Texas, in a contributor column on the Volcanic Tongue website, making obvious the influence Hoyos and guitarist Bill Orcutt had on her. In the interview I conducted with Murray and him, David Keenan describes Hoyos as "one of the most incredible technical drummers of all time" who "drove people mad"³⁴⁸. Earlier, he had referred some thoughts both on musicians' technique and how it is often underdiscussed, even denied in reviews of female musicians' performances:

[S]o it affects the way people analyze women's music as if it is irrational or flowing direct from some place which is unmediated (MS: Yeah) by technique or idea, or conception, or any form of deliberation, you know, and so, when [...] Heather's playing the guitar it's almost like... everything she plays is kinda accidental, you know, even though her playing is deliberate, she plays pedal steel all the time and it's powered through an absolute deliberate aesthetic, when she's making a sound on the pedal steel, she means to make that sound (MS: Yeah), you know, it's not completely random [as if] she's just like flailing and expressing herself like that, you can only analyze her playing as well as you could analyze any male guitarist's playing, you know³⁴⁹

There are aspects to be found here that are connectable to Cheslow's points about women's physicality on stage. Murray relates her impression that decidedly physical

³⁴⁵ Interview with Sharon Cheslow (San Francisco, July 24, 2009).

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ cf. Leigh, Heather: contributor column, in: *Volcanic Tongue*, <http://www.volcanictongue.com/columns/show/14>. Last accessed: December 25, 2011; interview with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray (Glasgow, November 4–5, 2009).

³⁴⁸ Interview with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray (Glasgow, November 4–5, 2009).

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

performances by women may be described in terms different to those used for men's: her performance may be emotionalized as cathartic, dealing with negative energy, whereas she feels a similar performance by someone like her collaborator Chris Corsano may be described as him being "just really into it, he rules"³⁵⁰. Indeed, this physicality generally may not be what is expected from women in a rock context. "It is difficult to stay 'feminine' in a rock band precisely because 'femininity' is an artifice: it is assumed that women do not sweat, that their noses do not go red and shiny, and that their hair stays in place"³⁵¹, as Mavis Bayton writes, who then reiterates this in terms of Butlerian gender maintenance. She later adds that as electric guitar skills are seen as 'male', "[a] woman playing a rock instrument is breaking the gender code."³⁵² A performance that counters this – however the 'freakout' may be conceptualized by the artist herself – then may lead to "a set of punishments both obvious and indirect"³⁵³ or at least to bewilderment on the part of others.

Keenan and Murray also narrate instances where stage crew interfered, not meaning ill but ignorantly, with Murray's sound. As Keenan says, "no one's gonna put a phase on Derek Bailey's guitar (MS laughs) and start doing wah-wah or reverb on it, you know?"³⁵⁴ Murray's experiences may be compared to another interviewee's. In Tara Burke's experience, sound engineers usually are men: "Every once in awhile I get one that intimidates me and makes me feel like I know nothing about sound set-up, etc., which compared to them I don't, but it's the attitude that I get that bothers me."³⁵⁵ Bayton writes about rock's technological and thus (according to learned association, not essence) masculine coding: "'[f]emininity' involves a socially manufactured physical, mechanical and technical helplessness, whilst 'masculinity' involves a display of technical competence."³⁵⁶ If in rock music contexts technology is male-dominated and coded as masculine, such strange and potentially disheartening encounters are bound to happen³⁵⁷ – maybe especially where unrelated sound engineers are met who aren't necessarily familiar with these musics and their performers. Indeed, it should be noted

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Bayton, Mavis: *Women and the Electric Guitar*, in: Whiteley, Sheila (ed.): *Sexing the Groove. Popular music and gender* (London / New York 1997), 40.

³⁵² Ibid., 43.

³⁵³ Butler: *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*, 279.

³⁵⁴ Interview with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray (Glasgow, November 4–5, 2009).

³⁵⁵ Personal email correspondence with Tara Burke (December 19, 2011).

³⁵⁶ Bayton: *Women and the Electric Guitar*, 42. Bayton has also written about sound engineers in relation to gender (*Frock Rock*, 8–9), and so has Marion Leonard as part of a discussion of touring in indie rock contexts (*Gender in the Music Industry. Rock, Discourse and Girl Power* (Aldershot / Burlington 2007), 56–60).

³⁵⁷ Also see *ibid.*, 41–43.

that Keenan argues that technique is handled insufficiently even in texts on male performers due to their art being “not really legitimized by the cultural police, the cultural guardians at large”³⁵⁸. This ties in with his thoughts on free folk as mentioned in chapter 3.2: if in these fields, improvised music is performed in contexts that make it conceivable as a folk art, it may lack the cultural capital necessary for a more serious, less stereotype-based reception.

Texas-based musician Jandek³⁵⁹, who had spent years releasing music anonymously but started playing concerts in 2004, has collaborated with Keenan and Murray. During the interview with Keenan and Murray, we also discussed Jandek’s reception by media and audiences, which Keenan had written on³⁶⁰ a while before, a discussion that was fed by my own then-recent Jandek concert experience in Vienna³⁶¹. Jandek attracts accusations of musical ineptitude and randomness, and we agreed that “it’s interesting how he is kind of treated almost like a female musician (DK: Uh-huh) in that way” (Murray). Keenan argues that “as soon as you go beyond technique, beyond a technique that you can like break down and analyze according to a certain formula, it almost becomes female”³⁶², an idea that resembles Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming-woman as discussed via Jeremy Gilbert in chapter 2.5. If the male is the hegemonic, molar, given category and thus the one in relation to which performance and technique are measured, then the underground’s deviations and irreducibilities may be considered as always going through a becoming-woman; and it shouldn’t come as a surprise that such approaches are then treated and dismissed in ways similar to how women’s contributions are not taken seriously. This could also be connected to Christina Carter’s observations on fluidity, Britt Brown’s remarks on one’s abilities shaping the band’s sound (see below) and not the other way round, as well as certain other interview bits on approaches to the tools at hand: Paul LaBrecque discusses how “we’re all being true to what’s inside of ourselves and playing with what we have, and the talents that we have and the ability that, you know, the physical things that are in front of us (MS: Yeah) that

³⁵⁸ Interview with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray (Glasgow, November 4–5, 2009).

³⁵⁹ On Jandek, see, for example, Leech: *Seasons They Change*, 205 or Seth Tisue’s *Guide to Jandek* (<http://tisue.net/jandek/>. Last accessed: January 2, 2012).

³⁶⁰ One example is Keenan’s review of Jandek’s *Glasgow Sunday 2005*, also featuring Murray, on the Volcanic Tongue website (Tip of the Tongue 14 September 2008. <http://www.volcanictongue.com/tips/show/116>. Last accessed: December 25, 2011.)

³⁶¹ Interviewee Eric Arn was part of the band that evening; cf. my review: Spiegel, Maximilian: Jandek’s “Vienna Wednesday”, October 14, 2009, in: *Slow as a glacier makes its way down to the Rhine* (October 16, 2009). <http://slowasaglacier.blogspot.com/2009/10/jandeks-vienna-wednesday-october-14.html>. Last accessed: December 19, 2011.

³⁶² Interview with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray (Glasgow, November 4–5, 2009).

make the noise that can express ourselves”³⁶³. Spencer Clark points out how The Skaters “kinda tried to just use things that weren’t instruments, you know (MS: Yeah), and so we weren’t like dictating a sound by using the instruments”. Clark says, “and there’s no thought process behind that except for being really hesitant to identify with anything other than this vision or something like that”³⁶⁴.

“Fuck it, however I can play guitar, that’s how this band’s gonna sound”³⁶⁵ is an expression of the type of mindset Britt Brown brought to music, following the example of other unschooled bands he had heard. The various interviewees’ interests and sound may differ, but in quite a few cases, it appears possible to encounter an approach towards music that can be conceptualized as immanent rather than following a transcendent ideal of how an instrument is supposed to be used. And yet, it is important here to use a concept like becoming-woman as constantly suspended, non-identical. The field of research may at times allow for great fluidity and enables greater / easier access and even instrumental and technical empowerment, but these concepts and tendencies should not be seen as decidedly female or even feminine. An all-too affirmative or representational use of becoming-woman could serve to further essentialize gender attributions. There is no reason why certain playing styles or aesthetics should be inherently female or male³⁶⁶. If they are seen as feminine or masculine at all – certainly very influential concepts that do have an actual impact (also see chapter 5.7) – or if they are conceptualized via the molar / molecular distinction of Deleuze and Guattari’s becoming-woman, these uses may serve the questioning of dominant categories that reduce musical practice according to gendered attributes, but then also need to put themselves into question.

Matt Valentine’s narration already included an unusual access to instruments very early on (learning from family and friends, approaching the guitar through other instruments rather than lessons and cover band routines). His and partner Erika Elder’s approach to their instruments is elaborately gender-aware, and he actually anticipated my question about instruments:

[O]n the *Gettin’ Gone* record for example, [...] a lot of times people will think a certain solo or some kind of crazy pyrotechnic thing that’s happening is me, but it’s actually Erika, like the solo on “Hammer” is all Erika on that, so, when you see it live, it’s like a wild role reversal, [...] one

³⁶³ Interview with Labanna Bly and Paul LaBrecque (Graz, June 27, 2009).

³⁶⁴ Interview with Spencer Clark (Graz, June 26, 2009).

³⁶⁵ Interview with Britt Brown (Los Angeles, July 26, 2009).

³⁶⁶ Also see, for example, the basic arguments of Mavis Bayton’s texts cited here (for example *Frock Rock*, 1, and especially 198–202; *Women and the Electric Guitar*, 39, 48).

of the things which she plays is this four-string mandolin, electric mandolin, [...] it screams, you know, and she can get above the top note of what I can play on guitar, I'm playing guitar, so you get these harmonics that would be impossible with two guitars and also, the idea that she's soloing in a song is not typically like what you would relate to in a classic rock type of environment or whatever, even though people say that's like a classic rock record, that's pretty funny for us (MS and MV laugh)³⁶⁷

Valentine goes on to elaborate that there may be a “more strict breakdown”³⁶⁸ in their Indian music according to its traditions, but on then-recent releases like *Drone Trailer*, even that distinction had been exploded through different uses of harmony, through various combinations of lead instruments.

One stereotype in indie music is that of the female bassist³⁶⁹. Here, it appears less common. Samara Lubelski, for example, has played bass with Metabolismus and is aware of the stereotype but certainly isn't limited to that instrument.³⁷⁰ The closest thing the field of research has to a comparable stereotype is the lack of female solo guitar instrumentalists, which may also be the area of my research field most closely associated with virtuosity – at least when it comes to solo acoustic instrumentalist performance. According to Mavis Bayton, that the *electric* guitar usually isn't selected as an instrument for girls to learn has to do with a socialization that proceeds according to certain standards of femininity and masculinity. “Playing the flute, violin and piano is traditionally ‘feminine’, playing electric guitar is ‘masculine’.”³⁷¹ However, according to Bayton, the acoustic guitar isn't coded as ‘male’.³⁷² Introducing her article on “women and the electric guitar” with remarks on the lack of female electric guitarists, Bayton notes that women have played the acoustic guitar as singer-songwriters³⁷³: indeed, similar performance forms are present in these scenes, but different from the more classically technique-based solo instrumentalist styles.

Beyond these solo performances, there are many female musicians who play guitar in one context or another, not least among this thesis's interviewees. Another aspect worth investigating here is the electric guitar's phallic connotation. Bayton points out that this is present not just in the instrument's shape (designed, as she argues, by men for men, and not imperative any more with today's technological possibilities), but also its

³⁶⁷ Interview with Matt Valentine (Brattleboro, July 12, 2009).

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ As studied, notably, by Mary Ann Clawson in her already-cited text “When Women Play the Bass. Instrument Specialization and Gender Interpretation in Alternative Rock Music”.

³⁷⁰ cf. interview with Samara Lubelski (New York City, July 8, 2009).

³⁷¹ Bayton: Women and the Electric Guitar, 39.

³⁷² cf. *ibid.*, 43.

³⁷³ cf. *ibid.*, 37.

volume and potentially aggressive character.³⁷⁴ Again, this is a matter of connotations: there is nothing inherently male about volume and aggression. Regarding this supposedly phallic character, it is worth quoting Elisa Ambrogio (Magik Markers) who, in a video interview mentioned by various interviewees, talks about “guitar politics of, you know, like wankery or whatever”, contrasting that gendered stereotype with the suggestion “what if you play guitar the way a girl jerks off?”³⁷⁵ Ambrogio thus suggests, as emphasized by the video cutting to a Magik Markers performance immediately after the quote, a performance style that is oppositional to virtuosic posture but maintains an ecstatic, dionysian element.

Interestingly, David Keenan’s *Wire* review of a set of guitar improv releases on the Another Timbre label accuses the strands of improvised music represented by these CDs of stasis and of abandoning sexuality, or rock’s sexual character, through politeness and dissection. He contrasts this to how “far-reaching modern guitar innovators – Keiji Haino, Jandek, Lydia Lunch, Bill Orcutt, Christina Carter, Rudolph Grey – have never had to deny the instrument’s bawdy aspect, its phallic character.”³⁷⁶ What Keenan argues for and against here are first and foremost questions of aesthetics as well as (inherently political) taste: how to improvise joyously and in inventive ways, to avoid stasis, to allow pleasure to set in. Also, it is important to note that Keenan doesn’t equate ‘masculine’ with ‘male’ and ‘feminine’ with ‘female’, all the while including two women (one of them a thesis interviewee) among the listed guitar innovators. At the same time, his argument itself runs risk of solidifying and reducing sexuality by tying masculinity to volume and aggressiveness and, as an example of “female sexuality” being abandoned by these strands of free improvisation, writing of “[t]he feminising effect of the saturation use of FX”³⁷⁷ being frowned upon. This issue is very much connected to the dangers of certain uses of ‘becoming-woman’ discussed earlier. Maybe effects can suggest a suspension of gender and / or subjectivity and can be considered enablers of fluidity, but to tie these aspects too closely to female sexuality can reify or help bring about other rigidities.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁴ cf. *ibid.*, 43–46.

³⁷⁵ “Magik Markers-Flywheel”. March 31, 2005, in: *Ecstatic Peace!*

<http://www.ecstaticpeace.com/qtdisplay.php?id=3>. Last accessed: December 19, 2011.

³⁷⁶ Keenan, David: review of various Another Timbre CDs, in: *The Wire. Adventures in Modern Music* 316 (June 2010), 49.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁸ Also see Bayton: *Frock Rock*, 198–202 on these dangers.

Interviewees were asked about potentially gendered distribution of instruments. Sharon Cheslow comments:

One of the things that I really loved about seeing women perform in the 1990s, is that women were more confident in utilizing technology, in utilizing electronics, in playing guitar, in playing drums, there was this groundswell of women who were just *really* confident in playing these instruments³⁷⁹

Note that Cheslow explicitly mentions “technology” and “electronics”. In these fields, where virtuosity is not necessarily detrimental but also not a prerequisite (at least depending on context), there also exists a multitude of different instruments and approaches to these that extends beyond the acoustic. This insight may be even more relevant today, or at least more emphatically stated at a time when a particularly large amount of beat-centered releases is being released on the rosters of labels like Not Not Fun. This, again, may be relatable to what I discussed earlier when quoting Paul LaBrecque: instruments, here, often are tools to be approached creatively and not (necessarily) ones to be played according to certain rules, to master so as to reify one’s genius. Referring to the editing process applied to certain Miles Davis records in his article on improvisation conceptualized as rhizomatic, Jeremy Gilbert asserts that “[w]hile Romantic ideology maintains that art must be the original product of a singular genius, be it that of a Great Man or a homogeneous ‘people’, this production process entirely undermines any such possibility.”³⁸⁰ This, and Gilbert’s remarks on Evan Parker’s “pseudo-polyphonic solos” putting authorship into question (via John Corbett), also point to one specific type of tool whose role I want to emphasize here. Maybe more so than ‘classic’ instruments, what is very interesting for a discussion of access to these scenes is the success of the loop pedal. Chris Moon, talking about his early days as a musician, recounts that

there was actually this fellow who was into building circuits [...], at the time you couldn’t get really long delay pedals, [...] this is way before the Line 6 pedals or whatever else, not without spending a *lot* of money, and I actually had him build me this thing I could do like one minute loops on, so I was trying to do these gigantic loops and just messing around, what you could do with sound, with electronics³⁸¹

³⁷⁹ Interview with Sharon Cheslow (San Francisco, July 24, 2009) + clarification edit via personal email correspondence with Sharon Cheslow (December 28, 2011).

³⁸⁰ Gilbert: *Becoming-Music*, 123.

³⁸¹ Interview with Chris Moon (Los Angeles, July 26, 2009).

Talking about musicians from more recent generations (who, as she notes, are usually aware of the relevant histories), having been asked about generational differences, Samara Lubelski states that “the difference is usually that they have a loop pedal (MS laughs), that’s the big difference, but most, almost everyone I know has a loop pedal, and no one had a loop pedal 15 years ago”³⁸². It is Glenn Donaldson who makes that point most forcefully, pointing out these tools’ potential and influence on various artists:

[T]he advent of the loop delay pedal has enabled people, men and women, to make their own one man show, because you can, it’s very easy now, they built some great pedals that enabled you to loop effectively live, and layer sounds, so you have someone who’s singing or playing guitar or other instrument and they create a whole sound world, without having a band, [...] on those two pedals [Line 6 and Boss], you can really control the loops, so you can create *live* something that normally you had to do in the studio, [...] and also it’s a way for people that frankly don’t have a lot of traditional musical skills to create a whole world of sound with loops, [...] it’s men and women³⁸³

And thus, new tools like these pedals, used by numerous interviewees, play a quasi-democratizing role. This manifests, as pointed out by Donaldson, in musical opportunities both broader and more easily accessible; at the same time, as Donaldson remarks as well, this potentially fuller sound is reached while avoiding the pitfalls of band politics. Like the musical aspects mentioned here, this is not an effect that is exclusively relevant to female musicians. However, it may well be in some cases, potentially offering an alternative to overly masculine or simply male-dominated contexts. As Mary Ann Clawson points out, rock bands can resemble sports teams that have to rely “on the formation of a group identification that can override individual differences”³⁸⁴, a tendency that can easily go hand in hand with gender segregation. In a recent email, Britt Brown observes “that I know almost zero women in music anymore – that is, in the realms of weirder music – who actually play or perform WITH other people (be it men or women). They are all strictly solo artists. This isn’t new, but the trend has definitely increased distinctly. I can’t claim to know why.”³⁸⁵

Mavis Bayton has written about difficulties young women may have in joining a band, even being excluded by men in various ways and on various levels.³⁸⁶ Clawson claims that “ensemble instrument playing is both the principal site of musical authority in rock

³⁸² Interview with Samara Lubelski (New York City, July 8, 2009).

³⁸³ Interview with Glenn Donaldson (San Francisco, July 24, 2009).

³⁸⁴ Clawson: Masculinity and skill acquisition in the adolescent rock band, 108.

³⁸⁵ Personal email correspondence with Britt Brown (December 20, 2011. Emphasis in the original text) + clarification edit via personal email correspondence with Britt Brown (January 13, 2012).

³⁸⁶ cf. Bayton: *Frock Rock*, 38–39.

music and the activity from which women have been most fully excluded.”³⁸⁷ Female solo musicians mentioned here didn’t necessarily face any outright rejection that made them ‘go solo’ – and indeed, helpful male musicians, who are actual or at least potential collaborators, often appear in these interviews. It is thus difficult to write of any exclusion of females on a specific level, maybe less so on the level of a probable general imbalance / ‘male’ dominance. If there still are greater obstacles for women than for men, being able to start a full musical project while avoiding these hurdles seems like an interesting alternative. It remains important here to assert a certain *general* democratizing effect of the aforementioned pedals’ introduction, and it seems like one manifestation of what Mary Celeste Kearney writes about when listing “the increased availability of inexpensive, user-friendly media technologies for amateurs” as one of the main reasons – alongside “the development of entrepreneurial youth cultures” and “a renewed focus on young people’s media education”³⁸⁸ – for the grown number of girls active in cultural production in the USA. However, Kearney also argues that the number of girls interested in performing music has actually decreased for a combination of reasons – see chapter 6.1.

Interestingly, all my female interviewees sing or have sung in one context or another – but none of them are exclusively active as vocalists. Vocal performance appears slightly less common among the interviewed males. This may certainly suggest a bias on my part, be it in terms of musical taste impinging on knowledge of the research field or in terms of having chosen more obvious, ‘bigger’ female names which may often be vocalists. However, it may also be a manifestation of vocals’ great acceptance and variable use in these scenes.

“The *female* voice is unreplicable. It is the only ‘instrument’ possessed solely by women which is why singing is one of the few rock spaces into which women have been allowed.”³⁸⁹ Bayton criticizes “biologically reductionist assumptions”³⁹⁰ that pit learned instrument skills against supposedly natural voices, and she analyzes traditional roles for female singers: the “female folk-singer/singer-songwriter”³⁹¹ and the “chick singer”³⁹². Performers comparable especially to the former certainly are present in these scenes, but often go beyond that classification’s restrictions. Here, loop pedals certainly

³⁸⁷ Clawson: *Masculinity and skill acquisition*, 99.

³⁸⁸ Kearney: *Girls Make Media*, 2.

³⁸⁹ Bayton: *Frock Rock*, 13. (Emphasis in the original text.)

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 15.

are of help – witness a musician like Fursaxa whose one-woman quasi-multi-instrumentalist performances are based not least on loops. Some of Fursaxa’s recorded material also serves as an example for how the voice is used as an instrument rather than as a ‘classic’ conveyor of lyrics (although a lot of Fursaxa’s work certainly features those). This is not restricted to females, of course, and returns me to Keenan’s “massed voices” and “vocal magic”. As mentioned in chapter 3.2, Keenan has discussed the loop-centered musics of artists like Grouper or The Skaters in these terms, not least by comparing them to Gaelic psalm singing³⁹³. As Clawson writes, “the traditional restriction of women to the role of vocalist, while found in most American pop genres, is especially disempowering in rock music”³⁹⁴. Maybe in these scenes, the use of vocals can, depending on context, serve the dispersal of stereotypes and an inherently empowering function. Here, I want to return to Gilbert’s above-mentioned points: authorship, too, may be dispersed, and the music appears rhizomatic and multi-gendered regardless of the actual number of people contributing to its production.

As these scenes’ aesthetics are heterogeneous, so are its uses of instruments. I think this chapter has shown that even though the social relations constituting the research field are real and material and not necessarily based on shared styles, instruments’ accessibility (not least according to arguably archaic gendered ascriptions and matching socialization) differs according to context and, indeed, style. Instrument appropriation ranges from dedicated quasi-virtuosity to accessible DIY experimentation, from fluid band dynamics to (only seemingly paradoxically) authorship- and gender-subverting solo choirs.

5.3 Social relations: friendships and relationships

The social connections and relations this thesis focuses on are not just abstract lines, contacts reducible to convergences or accumulations on label rosters, festival line-ups or album credits; they certainly are all of these, but they are also much more, involving the contingencies of everyday contact and acquaintance, potentials for conflict as well as friendship or even romantic relationships. In this sub-chapter, I will attempt to deepen the understanding of how these manifold interpersonal relations and connections manifest in the lives and artistic practice of the musicians in question.

³⁹³ cf. Keenan: *Both Sides = Now*.

³⁹⁴ Clawson: *Masculinity and skill acquisition*, 101.

Throughout my work on this project, I encountered numerous references to these fields, these accumulations being ‘just’ about people or friends playing music together, not a movement or a scene. However, here the term ‘scene’ is approached as suggested via Bennett and Peterson in chapter 3.1. It doesn’t signify a homogeneous, let alone one-dimensional group necessarily self-identifying as a scene and certainly isn’t used as a pejorative term denoting necessarily exclusive, maybe superficial tendencies exhibited by not so dedicated, maybe careerist protagonists (“sceny weenies is what I call ‘em”³⁹⁵, as Natalie Mering says). Here, scenes are local, trans-local or virtual connections, conceptualized as social, through musicians’ (and others’) meetings, crossing paths, joint releases and other traceable aspects. Thus, the idea of friends playing music together without (necessarily) exhibiting any greater aspirations or pretension towards scenedom doesn’t exclude, contradict or invalidate research into scenes, or musical-social fields. Quite the contrary: if the connections I’m trying to trace here can be considered scenes, then friendship and personal relations are elements particularly crucial to the research field’s analysis.

This is not to say that all musicians discussed and quoted know, let alone like each other. There may be utopian views to be found in some interviewees’ worldview, but they aren’t necessarily actualized through everyone loving each other, and every now and then remarks implying this tension would find their way into interviews. However, the importance of personal relations and friendship was apparent in interviews, implicitly as well as explicitly. Interviewees would refer to other protagonists of these musical-social fields as friends, as people they are fond of, as people they obviously spend a lot of time with, be it directly through musical activities or otherwise. Additionally, friends that may or may not be musicians would be mentioned as otherwise important to interviewees’ (musical) developments, for example by introducing the interviewed to certain other artists’ work. At the same time, some interviewees explicitly referred to and reflected on the importance of networks, support systems and mutual help.

As I mentioned earlier, Eric Carbonara has been going his own way artistically, devoting himself to his instrument, even leaving the set of houses inhabited by musicians in Philadelphia’s Fishtown area – and thus an artistically fertile and very

³⁹⁵ Interview with Natalie Mering (Doylestown, July 15, 2009).

active local network – to be able to focus on his own path. He is thus irreducible to particularly oppressive scene definitions. And yet, examples from his narrative serve well to illustrate those personal, social connections that constitute the webs in question. He had met and become friends with Norman Fetter (Niagara Falls / Honeymoon Music) at college and helped Fetter work on a house he had bought in Fishtown, which he also moved into. During the following years, the musicians living in this house and adjacent ones lived communally, put on house shows, shared spaces, art or food. Various other interviewees lived there at one point or another, including David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray. Taurpis Tula, their band and at that point a duo, released the LP *Sparrows* on Eclipse Records³⁹⁶, which Carbonara recorded:

Heather lived next to me and then moved, when David moved here from Glasgow, they moved into a house, but, you know, Heather knew that I had stuff and she asked me to record them and, I recorded them in a bunch of different ways and edited their album together, and I just did that as a favor, just ‘cause I really like both of them a lot³⁹⁷

In recent years, not living in Fishtown any more, Carbonara has focused on connections to other solo acoustic instrumentalists like Mike Tamburo or Nick Schillace. He calls Tamburo, who encouraged him and made him aware of the many (trans-local) pockets of people who may be interested in hearing his music, “the real reason that I got into touring”³⁹⁸. How did they meet? Tamburo narrates:

I ended up meeting a lot of *those* [Fishtown-related, MS] people through Niagara Falls, who live in Fishtown, I don’t know if you’ve ever heard of the Compound, Tara Burke used to live there (MS: Yeah), so, I’m really good friends with Norm at this point, so I’d met them and, they pretty much, you know, we just became friends just like that and they really opened up the world of Philadelphia to me, which is how, I actually met Eric in State College, they had gone to school with Eric and grown up with Eric and, there was a solstice festival going on out there and Eric played and I played, Niagara Falls played [...] ³⁹⁹

At this point, Tamburo was already an established musician. One example of ‘friendly’ connections that led to someone immersing her- / himself in musical activities in the first place, to a musical-social field being opened up, is Eva Saelens’s encounter with Pete Swanson (Yellow Swans) and his milieu in Portland, Oregon, where she had moved a while earlier. Saelens’s earlier exposure to music as well as alternative

³⁹⁶ cf. Eclipse Catalog, in: *Eclipse Records*. <http://www.eclipse-records.com/catalog.html>. Last accessed: January 22, 2012.

³⁹⁷ Interview with Eric Carbonara (Philadelphia, July 16, 2009).

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Interview with Mike Tamburo (Pittsburgh, July 18, 2009).

lifestyles had been relatively limited up to that point, and she describes her own milieu at the time as “eccentric” but not “artistic”:

[...] I met Pete and went to his birthday party, [...] I don’t remember how I met Pete, but he *instantly* said, “you have to be a musician, you have to do something creative”, and he *blew my mind* when I met him, [...] he had *hundreds*, maybe thousands of records, *so* many books, he knew *so* much stuff, all this like hippie food was around his house, [...] it was the first time I ever smelled that health food smell and, there was just like it was a mind-blowing thing for me to meet Pete, and for to watch Pete over the years become such an important player, even internationally as a musician and what he does with sound and stuff, you know, doing mastering and stuff, I feel so lucky to have met him and be his friend (ES and MS laugh)⁴⁰⁰

Another example of friendship’s importance to Saelens’s musical trajectory is a split release she (as Inca Ore) and her friend Liz Harris (as Grouper) put out, which had originally been asked for by a label owner but which also had an impact on the two friends’ mutual appreciation: “we were just trying to become better friends and we thought that would be a really good way to do it”, an aspect further emphasized when they went on to self-release a vinyl version as well. In the interview, Saelens also discusses the difficulties of friends – in addition to Harris and Saelens: Honey Owens (Valet, Jackie-O Motherfucker) and Megan Remy (U.S. Girls) – being lumped in with each other (and thus inherently competing for coverage and space) and that girls “need to stick together because [...] there’s not that many of them”⁴⁰¹. Here, she arguably echoes Natalie Mering’s remark that for women, it’s “lone wolf territory”⁴⁰².

Through touring, through meeting at concerts, through discovering music together, dynamic and heterogeneous networks develop. Discussing how people’s trajectories keep intersecting, Samara Lubelski mentions that “there’s just this commonality that’s running through and someone whose name you heard ten years ago then becomes a part of your life”⁴⁰³. Eric Arn recalls a Primordial Undermind tour with Japanese band Up-Tight that saw them visit Brussels around the time of the kraak festival (which Up-Tight played at) and play a show with Tom Carter (Charalambides), who had been staying at Paul LaBrecque’s place and recording with Vanessa Arn... “we were there playing that gig and who shows up at, all the Bardo Pond kids, [...] ‘cause they were playing kraak that year, so, just like old home week, old friends (EA and MS laugh)”. Arn himself has been actively seeking out connections to other people interested in and performing these musics over the years, helping with shows, bonding over these idiosyncratic musical

⁴⁰⁰ Interview with Eva Saelens (Oakland, July 21, 2009).

⁴⁰¹ Interview with Eva Saelens (Oakland, July 21, 2009).

⁴⁰² Interview with Natalie Mering (Doylestown, July 15, 2009).

⁴⁰³ Interview with Samara Lubelski (New York City, July 8, 2009).

interests: “We’ll have a lot of touch points together and things in common, even though we’ve never ever contacted them before, so, it’s a really strong way of building friendships and relationships”⁴⁰⁴. kraak’s activities also constitute one part of the axis “Brattleboro – Hasselt – Krefeld”⁴⁰⁵, which for Holger Adam – in his article on concerts taking place at Krefeld’s Unrock record store – exemplifies an international niche culture that enables creative activities for those involved (in his article including the likes of MV & EE or Sunburned Hand Of The Man). In other words: these connections, Arn’s “friendships and relationships”, can be conceived of as trans-local scenes and need to be understood in social / personal as well as artistic terms.

The interview I conducted with Labanna Bly and Paul LaBrecque took place at a festival⁴⁰⁶ in Graz, Austria, curated by Lieven Martens (Dolphins Into The Future) which predominantly featured musicians from Belgium or based in Belgium at the time (James Ferraro, Ludo Mich, Monopoly Child Star Searchers, Orphan Fairytale, Dennis Tyfus...). LaBrecque elaborates on “our own natural network” without hierarchy or organizational plan that had developed “over the last ten years”⁴⁰⁷:

[...] like Eric [Arn], he’s one of those guys, he’s been around for a long time and you know, everybody, people know him and we just trust him, we all put each other up, that’s our, we all support each other, no matter what the other person does, and there’s this kind of comfort when we all get together or when we’re all in the same room, whether it’s like three or four of us or, or 50 of us like this, that we’re not being judged by anybody else, I mean, yes, there’s some cynical people and people always say stupid things about other people (MS laughs), and there’s always, you know, little things, but [...] nobody’s trying to hurt each other, you know what I mean, [...] they do nothing but push you to do bigger and better things, and their energy interacts with yours and makes you wanna do bigger and better things⁴⁰⁸

Elsewhere, Britt Brown mentions that “these days me and Amanda always joke that half of the point of having a band is to get to have a relationship with the people in that band”⁴⁰⁹, a way of securing a certain amount of time per (busy) week for friends. In a recent email, Ron Schneiderman, elaborating on an interview bit that had seen him talk about the relations between making music and making friends, writes about realizing

⁴⁰⁴ Interview with Eric Arn (Vienna, June 21, 2009).

⁴⁰⁵ Adam, Holger: Brattleboro – Hasselt – Krefeld. Internationale Begegnungen im Plattenladen: Unrock-Instore-Gigs, in: *testcard. Beiträge zur Popgeschichte 19. Blühende Nischen* (Mainz 2010), 78–84.

⁴⁰⁶ Further information on the festival can be found on a website dedicated to the event series it was part of (Karneval im Land der Cetacean.

⁴⁰⁷ Interview with Labanna Bly and Paul LaBrecque (Graz, June 27, 2009).

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Interview with Britt Brown (Los Angeles, July 26, 2009) + clarification edit via personal email correspondence with Britt Brown (January 13, 2012).

that the limits of what I could do musically would be determined by the limits of my openness for who I would play music with. When that happened, I recognized that it was the same thought-process used when we meet anyone, and this is how we create community. So I ended up becoming very open to collaboration with the intent of getting to know more people. And I have met some amazing friends, and played some very wild music with them.⁴¹⁰

Samara Lubelski, discussing the closeness of relations in these little pockets especially in the past, remarks (in reference to Charalambides) how “you’ve never met them before but you know you have a sympathy and a resonance”⁴¹¹. This resembles Christina Carter’s illustration (after I had mentioned my thesis’s focus on social connections) of her idea that “personality affinities”⁴¹² may be of greater weight to these scenes than stylistic similarities:

Jack [Rose] as it turns out was best friends with Jason Bill that we played with, and, when we met him, it was just like this instant click, personalities, we like each other, we, you know, like to drink beer together, we like to talk about stuff, Jack and I went on a tour together, we tour together really well, and I think people have those experiences and I think, it’s almost... the more salient thing, it’s like this... it’s just like a thing inside the people where you kind of see things in the same way, even though what you’re doing outwardly may not be that similar, and I think *that’s* something that people, the musicians, find to be important⁴¹³

Rose, a solo guitarist and member of Pelt, died in late 2009, and a lengthy download compilation⁴¹⁴ released in his honor, curated by Cory Rayborn of three lobed Recordings, exemplifies these affinities in musical form.

In how far is this question of affinity gendered beyond what has already been said, on a basic level? I believe this is not answerable on a ‘merely’ musical-social level, (potentially) has everything to do with so many different types of affinity and sympathy, with socialization beyond the musical.

As Bayton writes, “bands arise from friendship groups”⁴¹⁵ (itself a topic deserving of further gender-aware investigation, as exemplified by Bayton as well as Clawson⁴¹⁶). If friendship and personal connections are the fabric of these musical-social scenes, if they are understood as very much part of artists’ everyday (and thus ‘folk’?), it makes sense to briefly extend this discussion to relationships going beyond friendship. Among the interviewed and their friends, there are many instances of musical partners also being or

⁴¹⁰ Personal email correspondence with Ron Schneiderman (December 30, 2011).

⁴¹¹ Interview with Samara Lubelski (New York City, July 8, 2009).

⁴¹² Interview with Christina Carter (Austin, July 28, 2009).

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Honest Strings: A Tribute To The Life And Work Of Jack Rose, in: *fina. MP3 Digital Download Store*. <http://www.fina-music.com/catalog/index.html?id=104712>. Last accessed: December 20, 2011.

⁴¹⁵ Bayton: *Frock Rock*, 81.

⁴¹⁶ cf. Clawson: Masculinity and skill acquisition, 106–108.

once having been romantically involved. Erika Elder and Matt Valentine, certainly examples of music and general lifestyles interweaving, have integrated both types of partnership for many years. Having discussed their performative breaking of traditional musical gender roles (see chapter 5.2), Valentine adds:

So I guess we broke down those roles, and I guess it came through the lang-, the music and the harmony, which is I think where we break down those roles in love anyway, it's like, there is no imbalance when there's a union of two people and there's that kind of love there, and when it's equal and it's working, that's an equals trading system, so, we do (laughs), you know, we did it for music, what a surprise, and what a surprise it was Indian music filtered through our Appalachian and rural and urban (MS and MV laugh) folk musics⁴¹⁷

Eva Saelens and her future husband and fellow musician Michael Whittaker (as Inca Ore with Lemon Bear's Orchestra) recorded an album called *The Birds In The Bushes*⁴¹⁸ after meeting.⁴¹⁹ Interviewed couples Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg as well as David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray met through music.⁴²⁰ Vanessa Arn hadn't been musically active before meeting her future husband Eric and became increasingly interested through that connection:

[A]fter we moved to Austin, she wanted to be involved, but she didn't know how she could pick up an instrument [...], so I ended up buying her for a birthday present her first electronic instrument (MS: Ah, that's cool (laughs)), and err, she took to it *really* amazingly well and she started doing stuff with it immediately that just amazed me and other folks around, so, she was a natural act but she had never given it a chance, so I was glad to be able to help, get it started with that⁴²¹

Natalie Mering argues that “there's definitely a lot of secret tumultuous business between men and women in the music scene, and there's also a lot of effort to avoid that, too, to compensate, make sure that it is like, you know, the real thing”⁴²². She is, here, referring to the role crushes may play in musical-social relations, but also generally to questions of attraction and attention:

[A]s long as it gets to a certain level of creativity that's somewhat intriguing, the fact that they are a woman might propel them that much further, especially if they're an attractive woman, I mean, that's really my theory and it also, I mean, if you play a lot more too, and if you meet a lot

⁴¹⁷ Interview with Matt Valentine (Brattleboro, July 12, 2009).

⁴¹⁸ Inca Ore & Lemon Bear's Orchestra – The Birds In The Bushes, in: *Boomkat*. <http://boomkat.com/cds/23342-inca-ore-lemon-bear-s-orchestra-the-birds-in-the-bushes>. Last accessed: January 24, 2012.

⁴¹⁹ cf. interview with Eva Saelens (Oakland, July 21, 2009).

⁴²⁰ cf. interview with Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg (Pittsburgh, July 19, 2009); interview with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray (Glasgow, November 4–5, 2009).

⁴²¹ Interview with Eric Arn (Vienna, June 21, 2009).

⁴²² Interview with Natalie Mering (Doylestown, July 15, 2009).

more people, and do get involved, that also helps, but I think there is [...] something novel about female musicians, and the novelty's kinda wearing off, because there's so much more now, and that's really interesting to witness, but I still think there's a strange novelty to having women in music⁴²³

Mering has tried to build a support system of her own based on contacts of her own rather than on crushes others may have had on her or on knowing more established musicians. It is important to Mering that her music and practice is sustainable. A scene can have its own

mythos, where like the scene has its vibe (MS: Yeah), and you can slip right into it and fit really well and obey the laws or the rules or the whatever, and you could get an instant, you know, gratification from it, but you might not make it very far, 'cause it's not that original⁴²⁴

Eva Saelens has taken a similar path and arguably echoes some of these sentiments:

This was a part of my, my early involvement in it was, it was really enchanting because there was a lot of boys with crushes on me, you know what I'm saying, I was like inspiring a lot of male musicians just by being an *awesome* dancer and being always just like the only women around and being like the *really* cool woman around, you know, I'd really strive toward that, I liked being that, but that was just not a sustainable role⁴²⁵

Part of that unsustainable role was the anxiety to lose some of that appreciation by making "music that wasn't extremely feminine" or "music that wasn't sexy or cute", which points towards expectations for female musicians' performances and performativity that some interviewees feel can be present. Indeed, Saelens felt that "the dudes that had once given me so much support, once I got married and started making more difficult music I didn't really feel like a lot of them came along with me"⁴²⁶. This is one manifestation of how, to quote Bayton, "[t]he status 'woman' seems to obscure that of 'musician'"⁴²⁷ in some cases. But whereas in the contexts Bayton writes about, this denotes women *obviously* not being taken seriously as musicians (present in this thesis in the examples discussed by David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray in chapter 5.2), the not taking seriously here takes place on a more subliminal level, with romantic attention potentially taking the place of more substantially helpful support, care and connection.

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Interview with Eva Saelens (Oakland, July 21, 2009).

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Bayton: *Women and the Electric Guitar*, 47.

Lastly, and certainly feeling tacked-on, the question besides the dominant heterosexuality that has been constantly implied is even harder to tackle than that of race / ethnicity had been in chapter 5.1. I wouldn't argue that homosexuality is excluded aesthetically in any way; some musics here appear to work with heterosexually coded traditions, involve mens' songs to women and the other way round, but a lot of these scenes' musics don't rely on such traditional codes. The aforementioned "vocal magic" of some of these artists also dissolves such dichotomies; in some cases, a more explicit queering (see James Ferraro's *Body Fusion* series⁴²⁸) or interrogation of concepts of sexuality and music (see Heatsick's *Intersex*⁴²⁹) takes place – explicit rather through artwork, titles and descriptions than through discussion in lyrics. Socially, it is hard to say anything at all. Beyond contradicting discussions of homophobia and homosexuality in the 'noise scene', I haven't noticed obvious forms of discrimination mentioned or implied in these interviews either.

In this sub-chapter, I hope to have clarified the importance of social networking, of friendship, like-mindedness and mutual support for these scenes while at the same time extending that topic to include the very present question of the role closer, romantic relationships play. Consequently, questions of attention and sexuality were raised and sometimes led back beyond the heterosexual, monogamous model to the wider theme of support structures. Further chapters will be able to build on this denser description of this thesis's musical-social fields.

5.4 Influence

While this thesis resembles a snapshot, tracing a map that is very much of its own time, it is not ahistoric. Many different layers of historicity can be discussed here: individuals' personal narrations were traced through interviews; musicians' practice is informed by other musicians' past activities; the many musical and organizational elements relevant to the field of research did not arrive fully formed but can be traced genealogically; the thesis itself has a story of its own, has somehow become the tracing, the text it can be read as now. The very notion of contingency discussed in chapter 2,

⁴²⁸ cf. Keenan, David: FERRARO, JAMES ~ BODY FUSION 1 ~ cdr (new age / summer headrush), in: *Time-Lag Records*. <http://www.time-lagrecords.com/shop/products-page/distributed-items/ferraro-james-body-fusion-1-cdr-new-age-summer-headrush/>. Last accessed: January 22, 2012.

⁴²⁹ cf. Sabbaghzadeh, Darius: Breaking through: Heatsick, in: *Resident Advisor*. <http://www.residentadvisor.net/feature.aspx?1355>. Last accessed: January 22, 2012.

while denying the possibility of a linear history heading towards an ultimate goal or based on a specific purpose, implies complex lines, sedimentations, developments that are hard to grasp. Gender itself is not fixed, can be historicized – for example, as “the legacy of sedimented acts” (see the discussion of Judith Butler in chapter 2.5). Similarly, its relevance to these scenes may be put into historical and chronological context, analyzed as something that has become. This sub-chapter’s aim is thus to focus on and point out some of these elements, notably those of influence and example.

There is a long history of musics that can be considered experimental, free, psychedelic or underground; none of these terms are particularly specific. Depending on who is asked, different lineages may be traced. Some interviewees may be more specific in their ideas on this: David Keenan suggests that those who ended up meeting at Brattleboro’s Free Folk Festival

were slowly beginning to realize, a realization that came later for everyone else thanks to the Internet, that the idea of the traditional rock canon was a complete construct, and was not really actually true, and the idea of this linear development of rock music wasn’t even true⁴³⁰

According to Keenan, rock’s “revolutionary trajectory” in the late 1960s and early 1970s was interrupted by major labels’ dominance, “went underground and it kept going”⁴³¹ – he cites the likes of Charalambides, Fushitsusha and MV & EE with the Bummer Road as examples of where said revolutionary trajectory has led to. In his first reply after I contacted him for an interview opportunity, Phil McMullen wrote that to him, ‘free folk’ “was always just one musical facet of a movement which the Terrascope was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time to reflect on, report on and in some ways instigate – as the success of the Terrastock festivals actively demonstrates.”⁴³² Keenan and McMullen uncover relevant connections, opposition or even minoritarian tendencies that I think need to be conceptualized genealogically, along the lines of a minor history rather than as genuinely apparent series of musical descent. Often enough, these connections to the past are virtual (see, for example, Byron Coley talking to Amanda Petrusich about free folk not being “part of the folk tradition”,

⁴³⁰ Interview with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray (Glasgow, November 4–5, 2009).

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Personal email correspondence with Phil McMullen (March 30, 2009).

instead being “like a fabulous simulation”⁴³³) and diffuse, even though they may have been emphasized by the artists themselves.

Locally, scenes may benefit from pasts to connect to or be based on. In Austin, Eric Arn not only encountered Charalambides – who themselves had moved there not much earlier – but also musicians from different generations like King Coffey (Butthole Surfers) or George Kinney (The Golden Dawn). Here and, to a lesser extent, in San Francisco, Arn found it easier to discuss music’s conceptualization with peers, possibly because “both of those places have a long history of psychedelia” (which, as Arn insists, is a “really dangerous word to use” due to its many different meanings), with ideas “of a different state of mind, right, however it’s induced (laughs), and what the potential of it is, and [...] how that can improve a person’s life or outlook or, and through them, society in general or who knows what else (laughs)”⁴³⁴ being more established or present there. Moving to San Francisco, Evan Caminiti encountered “the influence of the history of folk music here”⁴³⁵. Punk music, ethics and aesthetics from his native Orange County, California, became an important influence on Glenn Donaldson, even though most of his music may not sound like what is expected from punk rock. Indeed, Donaldson and his peers even adapted certain influences’ approach to local everyday surroundings to their own milieu:

[W]e had that idea, “let’s do that for California, let’s”, you know, what would Einstürzende Neubauten sound like in San Francisco, they would probably go out to the beach instead (MS laughs), it would be this very different thing, but we had this idea that it was like industrial music, but it’s like in the forest, so, it’s more gentle, open and spacious, and almost folky kind of music⁴³⁶

Historicity can also be made obvious through curatorship. Matt Valentine narrates how he and Erika Elder ran the Consanguinity Series of shows at Manhattan’s Tonic venue:

[W]e would have the older generation artists play with a contemporary artist on the same bill, so that would be the evening’s program, so we would have a woman like Amy Sheffer, who was a jazz musician who privately put out a bunch of records, [...] we’d have her on the bill and we had Hall Of Fame play (MS: Yeah) on the bill, [...] because we felt like what Hall Of Fame were doing was tangential to this kind of lost New York kind of free loft scene sound, somewhat where Tower [Recordings] was, but they had more of a Moondog thing going which I thought somehow connected with Amy Sheffer’s music, so we would do things like that⁴³⁷

⁴³³ Byron Coley, quoted in: Petrusich: *It Still Moves*, 246.

⁴³⁴ Interview with Eric Arn (Vienna, June 21, 2009).

⁴³⁵ Interview with Evan Caminiti (San Francisco, July 22, 2009).

⁴³⁶ Interview with Glenn Donaldson (San Francisco, July 24, 2009).

⁴³⁷ Interview with Matt Valentine (Brattleboro, July 12, 2009).

The series also presented films, including ones by Yoko Ono (another record store connection of Valentine's). Similarly, they curated Monday nights at another Manhattan venue, The Cooler, where free jazz musicians like Charles Gayle and Rashied Ali or experimental band Caroliner would play. Valentine, himself a passionate record collector, emphasizes an understanding of these historical connections and awareness of "people who had already paved a lot of way, and that's what made it possible for us to do certain things, and still does, and hopefully *we're* making it possible for people to do certain things, you know, [...] I think that's the idea"⁴³⁸. The element of artists' awareness of history was also brought up by Samara Lubelski, a companion of Valentine's since the days of Tower Recordings.⁴³⁹ Talking about his connection to Sunburned Hand Of The Man, Ron Schneiderman lauds that

a lot of the guys in Sunburned are just, they're talented, unbelievably talented, musical geniuses, and understand the history of the art that they're working with intuitively, and from early childhood have been listening to these records, and they understand where they fit in that history, [...] and they also understand that, why things have to stay free, and they're able to keep it free and go anywhere at any time, musically⁴⁴⁰

This matches Diedrich Diederichsen's conceptualization of Sunburned Hand Of The Man⁴⁴¹ as being successors of a type of musical-social organization he calls the *Horde*. Diederichsen historicizes that concept, seeing artists' collectives as the *Horde*'s predecessors. Performances here are an extension of daily life. Diederichsen then differentiates between two *Horde* types: first, sprawling hippie collectives like The Grateful Dead, Amon Düül and Amon Düül II or Gong. Not all of these collectives' members were musicians. In the second type's case, they were, and this type could include strict rules of coexistence: Diederichsen lists the Sun Ra Arkestra and Phil Cohran's Artistic Heritage Ensemble. Newer collectives like Sunburned Hand Of The Man but also Acid Mothers Temple, No-Neck Blues Band, Jackie-O Motherfucker or Vibracathedral Orchestra – all of which are connected to / part of this diploma thesis's field of research – don't necessarily live as *Horden* but appreciate their aesthetics. There is a certain patience, generosity and "*radikale Offenheit*"⁴⁴², a radical openness to the musics of these groups who, in their long-form music, avoid ready-made styles. Their patience doesn't aim for the definite statement; Schneiderman's "musical geniuses"

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ cf. interview with Samara Lubelski (New York City, July 8, 2009).

⁴⁴⁰ Interview with Ron Schneiderman (Brattleboro, July 13, 2009).

⁴⁴¹ cf. Diederichsen, Diedrich: Die Horde, in: *Musikzimmer. Avantgarde und Alltag* (Köln 2005), 156–159.

⁴⁴² Ibid., 158.

don't need to state the romantic point of being the creating subjects. And yet, solo projects, or projects involving band leaders, exist – but they don't hold control over the musical-social field, the field doesn't tend towards that goal of confirming solo genius.

Between psychedelic rock groups formed in past decades, free jazz musicians, industrial experimenters and multimedia artists, numerous very diverse influences have already been mentioned; the list could be expanded to include, for example, the diverse German experimental musics often subsumed under the banner of krautrock, Indian classical music, electronic music composers, drone minimalists, solo guitarists like the ubiquitous John Fahey (Eric Carbonara, while appreciating that Fahey's status has grown, was baffled by how references to Fahey constantly appeared in early reviews of his work – even just to state he and Fahey didn't sound alike⁴⁴³)... the list could be expanded indefinitely, but at least it should be easily discernable that many of these musics are, or were, relatively hard to acquire or even find out about. Here, various generations differ: where in the past, these potential influences were first and foremost available to record collectors and those dedicated to deeper research, there is now far greater and easier access through the Internet, as pointed out by some interviewees. In chapter 3.2, I used Nick Southgate's comments on Sun Araw's *Ancient Romans* and on Not Not Fun Records as an "eclectic sound factory" as exemplary for recent tendencies in the reception and handling of the countless potential influences available now to anyone with a suitable modern Internet connection. As some interviewees point out too, a certain gatekeeper element may have disappeared.

So, where is the (?) record collector located in these scenes, or in this thesis? As mentioned earlier, Byron Coley, interviewed by Amanda Petrusich about the New Weird America phenomenon, talks of "record collector music"⁴⁴⁴. Eric Arn, having mentioned that obscure music is a lot easier to get ahold of now, says that

I think hearing different influences and different things that you can draw on and that give you an idea of different range and modes of expression is important but, that was the only way you *could* do that (MS: Yeah) was through record collecting ten, fifteen years ago, now it's not so vital⁴⁴⁵

This quote includes references to a spreading of information through recent changes in media, most notably the Internet, whose importance, while controversial in its

⁴⁴³ cf. interview with Eric Carbonara (Philadelphia, July 16, 2009).

⁴⁴⁴ Byron Coley, quoted in: Petrusich: *It Still Moves*, 246.

⁴⁴⁵ Interview with Eric Arn (Vienna, June 21, 2009).

consequences among the interviewees, can't be underestimated. Arn also hints at a mindset of exploration, or at least one of openness to a vast variety of (unconventional) musical styles, connectable to this chapter's earlier comments by Lubelski, Schneiderman and Valentine as well as to the emphasis on activity encountered in chapter 1 via Christina Carter's narrations. In various ways, knowledge and its acquisition are beneficial, and there are examples to be found of musicians for whom that knowledge enabled, or helped enable, own creative activities. At the same time, there can be a downside to record collecting when it amounts to an exclusion of women through insider knowledge⁴⁴⁶. Karl Bauer, himself certainly very knowledgeable about obscure musics and friends with many record collectors, mentions having

had a *lot* of conversations with *so* many different women in music who feel really really frustrated by the male environment (laughs) that it can be very often, where it can be like a pissing contest about how many records you have or blah, blah, blah⁴⁴⁷

Miriam Goldberg has always enjoyed playing music but, talking about specific genres, remembers being turned off by what she perceived as the

expectation that you will like align yourself with this sort of music and you will dress in a certain way, you will know all these things, you'll own all these records, and I don't know if that sort of like deep geekiness (MS laughs) about a subculture really appeals to women in general the way that it does to men, like the need to exclude people based on the music they have or they haven't heard or the 7-inches they may or may not own, this seems sort of stupid and like a waste of time, I mean at least that's how I always perceived it and I never thought I would ever play in a band because I sort of associated doing that stuff with like this, these inane pursuits⁴⁴⁸

Samara Lubelski points out particularly positive sides to others' record collecting, having "always hung around with record collectors", mentioning "really cool" ones happy to share like Matt Valentine and "the Metabolismus guys, they really kinda blew that open as well because they were really, really intense record collectors, three of the members especially and they were, the mixtapes never really stopped, you know, so it was a constant education in that way"⁴⁴⁹.

Will Straw has researched the intersections and interconnections of gender and connoisseurship / record collecting. In his article "Sizing Up Record Collections", he situates record collecting "among the more predictably male-dominated of music-

⁴⁴⁶ cf. Cohen: Men Making A Scene, 19–20, and her references to Straw therein.

⁴⁴⁷ Interview with Karl Bauer (New York City, July 8, 2009).

⁴⁴⁸ Interview with Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg (Pittsburgh, July 19, 2009).

⁴⁴⁹ Interview with Samara Lubelski (New York City, July 8, 2009).

related practices.” The article as a whole, then, tries “to determine what might be said next.”⁴⁵⁰ There are numerous conflicting images of the record collector, and these include hipness and nerdishness, both of which “begin with the mastery of a symbolic field; what the latter lacks is a controlled economy of revelation, a sense of when and how things are to be spoken of.”⁴⁵¹ Potentially limiting aspects of record collecting are, here, associated with hipness:

If the worlds of club disc jockeys or rock criticism seem characterised by shared knowledges which exclude the would-be entrant, this functions not only to preserve the homosocial character of such worlds, but to block females from the social and economic advancement which they may offer.⁴⁵²

Other aspects include forms of connoisseurship in which historical knowledge feeds musical activities, and which Straw also connects to questions of canon-building; if seen in connection with what Keenan said earlier in this chapter about established rock narratives, it can also serve to question established canons. As Straw points out by referring to Nick Hornby’s *High Fidelity*, there is a political dilemma to record collecting. Valorizing the obscure may be considered an oppositional moment, yet at the same time, this valorization’s own strictures may emerge – and it is, at least when taken on its own, not particularly potent as an oppositional stance. Another very interesting and connectable aspect of record collecting and musical consumption is brought up later in the same text during a discussion of how canons are established, contested and contrasted, using the example of punk rock:

One way to hear punk, of course, was as the centre of new relationships between the cultural spaces of art, fashion and music, and to pursue these threads of dissemination and influence outwards to their respective destinations. As a means of building a context for punk, this road was highly likely to encounter female figures or feminist practices, and offer a diminished view of the importance of specifically musical ancestors.⁴⁵³

This is contrasted to an approach that mainly looks for purely musical lineages and “canons of forebears”⁴⁵⁴. What I want to point out here is that these decidedly positive aspects of record collecting may be found in the circles Byron Coley is talking about: there is a dissemination taking place, and not least so in concert series such as Erika

⁴⁵⁰ Straw, Will: Sizing Up Record Collections. Gender and connoisseurship in rock music culture, in: Whiteley, Sheila (ed.): *Sexing the Groove. Popular music and gender* (London / New York 1997), 4.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁵² Ibid., 10.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

Elder and Matt Valentine's as mentioned above, which went beyond the construction of purely musical (let alone purely male) canons. There is, at least in the example I have been writing about here, a will to 'enable' others to play music. This doesn't necessarily preclude the manifestation of male-dominated connoisseurship structures and their hierarchic rigidities, which may exclude others, but the focus and use of this historical knowledge is located elsewhere.

Already established musicians from earlier generations may be more than influences – they may be friends, collaborators, and they may also play a role in the development of people's tastes. One group that appeared particularly often throughout these interviews is Sonic Youth. The band and its members have been influential on various levels: Thurston Moore has worked with numerous of these musicians, both as a musical collaborator and as the co-owner of Ecstatic Peace! Records, releasing music by many artists from the field of research. At the time I am writing this, Moore has just finished a European tour; his band⁴⁵⁵ consisted of musicians that can all be considered potential interviewees for a thesis like this one, and violinist Samara Lubelski is, indeed, among the interviewed, as is tour support act Head of Wantastiquet (Paul LaBrecque). When I attended Moore's Dublin concert in late 2007, Lubelski was part of the band too, and support came from interviewee Heather Leigh Murray. Moore performed at the original Free Folk Festival⁴⁵⁶, was part of the North England festival activities leading up to said event (see chapter 5.6) and has championed many an artist in one way or another, not least through his *Bull Tongue* column with Byron Coley in *Arthur* magazine⁴⁵⁷; I have already mentioned his curatorship of ATP: The Nightmare Before Christmas 2006 in the chapter detailing my own impetus. Kim Gordon is less present in terms of direct collaboration but still has been active in these circles and is one of the relatively rare examples of female musicians already active before the 1990s who were present in alternative / underground rock and thus potential role models⁴⁵⁸ – or not even necessarily role models but examples of practice and potentiality. Sonic Youth were one of Tara Burke's first interests in "different kinda music", and she "used to listen to

⁴⁵⁵ cf. MOORE, THURSTON in: *Münchner Kammerspiele*. <http://www.muenchner-kammerspiele.de/programm/thurston-moore/>. Last accessed: January 16, 2012.

⁴⁵⁶ cf. Brattleboro Free Folk Fest: May 3-4, 2003, in: *Apostasy Recordings*. <http://www.apostasyrecordings.com/sonofearth/shows/sonofearthshow34.html>. Last accessed: January 16, 2012.

⁴⁵⁷ *Arthur* has ceased publication, but the column has been archived on its website: Coley, Byron / Moore, Thurston: *Bull Tongue*, in: *Arthur Magazine Archive*. <http://www.arthurmag.com/contributors/bull-tongue/>. Last accessed: December 20, 2011.

⁴⁵⁸ cf. Raha, Maria: *Cinderella's Big Score* (Emeryville 2005), 133.

Sonic Youth and try to learn Kim Gordon's bass lines 'cause (laughs) they're not super-difficult to try and learn"⁴⁵⁹. Britt Brown mentions Gordon alongside the likes of Kathleen Hanna (Bikini Kill) as a role model for his wife and music / label partner Amanda. Later during the same interview, he goes further, talking of "worshipping Sonic Youth":

Thurston Moore and Ecstatic Peace! and, Kim Gordon and that whole sort of aura was a huge defining thing for us so *he's* always made a *huge* case about women in music, *extra* supportive, like, any time you can support women in music that should be an extra bump, step you take⁴⁶⁰

Like Eva Saelens⁴⁶¹, it was through Nirvana that Brown found out about Sonic Youth. Nirvana, too, served as guides both musical and ethical. Brown says:

I feel like that was a huge deal in all the (laughs) Kurt Cobain lore, of all his biographies and his taste, were just, was very anti-macho, so it was very like "I'm extra pro being into like The Raincoats and The Vaselines and Bikini Kill and L7 and The Breeders and any band with women, it's like doing something a little more offbeat or weird, that's so much radder than just a guy doing weirder music"⁴⁶²

Before engaging in DIY practice herself after meeting artists like Pete Swanson in Portland (see chapter 5.3), Eva Saelens was mainly aware of independent labels K Records and Kill Rock Stars through her Nirvana fandom as a teenager:

I just got into it all because of Kurt Cobain, at first music, for like the first three years I was into it was all about the cult of the personality of Kurt Cobain, so, if Kurt Cobain liked Sonic Youth, I was like, "I *love* Sonic Youth", but I did not like what Sonic Youth liked, and if Kurt Cobain liked Kill Rock Stars, then I had a Kill Rock Stars catalog that I cut and paste all over my wall, even though I, the only band I really got into on Kill Rock Stars was Bikini Kill, which is an *awesome* band⁴⁶³

Her further trajectory would put these labels and their DIY work, which had seemed like local phenomena to her, into different contexts. It was Saelens who suggested interviewing Sharon Cheslow, a collaborator and friend of hers, who has been active as – among other things – a musician, organizer and writer in the 1980s Washington, D.C. punk scene, riot grrrl in the 1990s and, in most recent years, noise / free improv contexts. Her artistic practice has always been informed by political and especially gender-related questions and thus puts her in a unique position in relation to my thesis topic. Starting to perform more decidedly experimental musics from the late 1990s

⁴⁵⁹ Interview with Tara Burke (Orwigsburg, July 17, 2009).

⁴⁶⁰ Interview with Britt Brown (Los Angeles, July 26, 2009).

⁴⁶¹ cf. interview with Eva Saelens (Oakland, July 21, 2009).

⁴⁶² Interview with Britt Brown (Los Angeles, July 26, 2009).

⁴⁶³ Interview with Eva Saelens (Oakland, July 21, 2009).

onwards, Cheslow got into contact with Yellow Swans (via musician and label owner George Chen, who was among those starting the Spockmorgue mailing list) and met further people involved in noise / improvised music circles:

There was *so* much energy, everyone was *so* creative, and, you know, putting out their own cassettes, making their own little cassette packages, like, really creative, you know, fur-covered cassette packages (laughs) and you know, starting their own labels and, you know I thought the email mailing lists were similar to fanzines, erm, so there was this real conflux of people coming together, supporting one another creatively, trying to create community, and so that reminded me a *lot* of punk and hardcore, but what was *different* about it was that there was *more* emphasis on being experimental, and *more* emphasis on improvised music, and incorporating electronics⁴⁶⁴

As mentioned in chapter 5.2, Cheslow talks of a “groundswell of women”⁴⁶⁵ playing drums, guitars and utilizing technology and electronics; she relates this to the influence of riot grrrl. Eric Arn who, like Cheslow here, had been asked about the (potentially) gendered distribution of instruments, referred to riot grrrl too, arguing that maybe, “folks now couldn’t recite the creeds of the riot grrrls back then but I think they were definitely, they’re definitely following in the footsteps (MS: Mhm), working in an environment that is influenced by them”⁴⁶⁶. For Heather Leigh Murray’s trajectory, riot grrrl was relevant because “it was just really interesting to me that there was a collection of women, girls, whatever, that were doing their own thing, and it extends more from a DIY aesthetic again, and the fact that I was like ‘oh wow, this is DIY and it’s all girls’”. However, while she and David Keenan single out and praise Kathleen Hanna, they also argue that riot grrrls “had their own rules and their own strictures”⁴⁶⁷ (Keenan), an argument to be seen in the context of a general impression that there are different constraints in different fields (see 5.8). Kathleen Hanna, Bikini Kill and Kill Rock Stars were already mentioned in earlier interview quotes as being present, being examples. Karl Bauer, too, mentions riot grrrl’s influence on him when he was in his teens – crucially, it is in his reply to a question of mine about DIY aspects that he brings up said movement.⁴⁶⁸ Mary Celeste Kearney theorizes riot grrrl’s “networked media economy”⁴⁶⁹:

Indeed, I would argue that in order to comprehend Riot Grrrl’s sociopolitical significance more fully, we need to understand networking not only in the traditional sense – as a social and

⁴⁶⁴ Interview with Sharon Cheslow (San Francisco, July 24, 2009).

⁴⁶⁵ Interview with Sharon Cheslow (San Francisco, July 24, 2009).

⁴⁶⁶ Interview with Eric Arn (Vienna, June 21, 2009).

⁴⁶⁷ Interview with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray (Glasgow, November 4–5, 2009).

⁴⁶⁸ cf. interview with Karl Bauer (New York City, July 8, 2009).

⁴⁶⁹ cf. Kearney: *Girls Make Media*, 68–82.

communicative practice that brings human beings together (the privileged meaning for this term in other studies of Riot Grrrl) – but also in the sense the broadcasting industry use – as an infrastructural system and set of practices that use communications technology to connect consumers with a variety of media producers and their texts.⁴⁷⁰

While zines and film work certainly are present in the scenes I am writing about, they are less present here than they are in riot grrrl – Kearney’s discussion of riot grrrl’s economy includes sub-chapters dedicated to their part therein. However, a proudly and decidedly DIY scene focusing on women’s participation can be influential on so many levels: DIY approaches⁴⁷¹ enable cultural production to take place with far fewer hurdles to take; riot grrrl and subsequent related developments act not just locally but trans-locally and virtually, going hand in hand with technological developments while not just passively internationalist. Riot grrrls could act as role models (for men, too!) and simply as examples, as diffuse influences – living examples of female participation in and creation of alternative musics.

While individual impacts may have differed, it seems clear that riot grrrl had an important influence in terms of setting the scene for further alternative musics, not least as one of the “entrepreneurial youth cultures” that, as mentioned earlier, Kearney considers co-responsible for the increased number of girls engaged in cultural production. Riot grrrl wasn’t the first such youth culture, but its specific feminist negotiations are of course particularly interesting to this thesis. With the influence of psychedelic rock and folk and even certain fashion aspects associated with the hippie movement in mind, it is also necessary to look to earlier “entrepreneurial youth cultures”: in Kearney’s elaborations, the hippie counter culture plays an ambiguous role. Here, aspects like earlier activists’ “DIY ethos, the practice of self-representation, and the formation of an alternative media economy”⁴⁷² were appropriated and spread. However, women were often marginalized through the reaffirmation of “patriarchal ideologies of sex and gender”⁴⁷³. Sheila Whiteley has written about “[t]he counter culture’s marginalisation of women in rock”, accusing these supposedly emancipatory scenes of reductively “positioning them as either romanticized fantasy figures, subservient earth mothers or easy lays.”⁴⁷⁴ Hippie counter culture’s influence on these

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 70.

⁴⁷¹ Also see Spencer, Amy: *DIY: The Rise of Lo-Fi Culture* (London / New York 2005) for an overview of DIY modes and their “celebration of the amateur” (page 12).

⁴⁷² Kearney: *Girls Make Media*, 56.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁷⁴ Whiteley, Sheila: *Women and Popular Music. Sexuality, identity and subjectivity* (London / New York 2000), 23. See the book’s pages 22–43 for Whiteley’s elaborations on this topic.

scenes can often be considered immense, but gender parameters appear to have shifted over time.

Despite the comparative lack of focus on age in this thesis, the age range among interviewees is quite wide (more than 20 years) and thus allows for mutual influence of the type older interviewees may have felt from earlier musicians. For example, Evan Caminiti recalls first hearing Six Organs Of Admittance on the radio, which was “pretty awesome, that was a revelation, after listening to so much metal, hearing this psychedelic folk music, I was like, “what *is* this?”⁴⁷⁵ Among the first occasions Caminiti heard drone were Axolotl concerts he saw in San Francisco. The youngest interviewee, Natalie Mering, “did go through a phase maybe once in high school, where I went on the Internet and just bought a bunch of shit, like from Hanson Records and from... I bought Eva [Saelens]’s LP in high school”. Referring to the latter album, Inca Ore’s *Brute Nature vs. Wild Magic*, Mering states she “definitely nourished that record for a long time, so, that was one of my first proper like weird records that I fell in love with, for sure”⁴⁷⁶. One important moment for Labanna Bly was seeing the group Dreamhouse live in Florida. Ali Dennig’s intense performance inspired her to participate and appears to have been a particularly empowering experience, helping enable creativity. Bly was attending art school at the time:

I think it was just like, “this is all boring, this isn’t what I wanna do, I wanna do something that everyone can *participate* in, and it lightens like, I wanna bring back fire into people, remind them that they are alive and that they can do freaky things like (Paul LaBrecque: Yeah) *with* their bodies and *with* their voices” [...] ⁴⁷⁷

In her aforementioned Volcanic Tongue contributor column on seeing Harry Pussy in concert, Murray, who had mostly been active playing music in private contexts, recalls: “So to see a woman doing this live, Adris totally validated my own desire to have the confidence to go live as a woman musician, just being completely true to your own personal vision.”⁴⁷⁸

Glenn Donaldson mentions fellow interviewee Cristina Carter as a potential influence on younger female musicians:

⁴⁷⁵ Interview with Evan Caminiti (San Francisco, July 22, 2009).

⁴⁷⁶ Interview with Natalie Mering (Doylestown, July 15, 2009).

⁴⁷⁷ Interview with Labanna Bly and Paul LaBrecque (Graz, June 27, 2009).

⁴⁷⁸ Leigh: contributor column.

[S]he's just doing her own thing and she kind of has Charalambides, but now she's as known as a solo artist too, and I think probably, she's inspired a lot of women to do some more thing, kinda take it upon themselves to get interesting gear and experiment with effects and different things and do their own thing⁴⁷⁹

It is Carter herself who most forcefully presents the argument that a diversification has happened through what could be described (as Tara Burke does in her interview⁴⁸⁰) as a type of snowball effect. What she considers a feminization, described as a movement towards greater fluidity (as mentioned already in chapter 5.2), has taken place “through women *doing* it, and through *men playing* with those women”⁴⁸¹. Talking to Carter after the interview, I mentioned that one of the possible theses to be gathered from the material was that the scenes discussed here are very open and liberal, allowing easy access or many freedoms; Carter's answer, in line with what she had said during the interview, exposed the danger of an overly ‘passive’ conception of women's paths inherent to a thesis of that type: she referred to a “sense of entitlement” that may be present. Asked to elaborate in an email a while after the interview, she writes about “musicians being used to feeling that they should be able to do whatever they feel they want to do because of being brought up with these type of expectations. I guess that is basically it – the idea of the music being fostered by a certain amount of privilege.”⁴⁸²

Leaving it at this, in comparison to how I had originally envisaged this sub-chapter, it turned out relatively short or thin. Many aspects of historicity were left out (and may be turned into a thesis of their own – see chapter 6.2), but I believe viable conclusions were drawn, presenting the multifaceted and sometimes contradictory influence various scenes, generations or individuals may have on how gender works in the field of research.

5.5 Musicians' lives

Following on from elaborations on musicians' access to the field of research and on their social relations therein, the past few sub-chapters have deepened an understanding of the tools, media and influences relevant to the field's inner workings. In contrast, this

⁴⁷⁹ Interview with Glenn Donaldson (San Francisco, July 24, 2009).

⁴⁸⁰ cf. interview with Tara Burke (Orwigsburg, July 17, 2009).

⁴⁸¹ Interview with Christina Carter (Austin, July 28, 2009).

⁴⁸² Personal email correspondence with Christina Carter (August 19, 2009).

sub-chapter will hone in on various aspects of musicians' daily lives, particularly emphasizing the musical use of living spaces and touring.

For my research field's protagonists, music may in many ways be an everyday activity practiced with friends, but at the same time – as chapter 5.1 should have made clear – it does not take over their entire lives. This is another reason that a thesis like this cannot be complete: interviews focused on musicians' lives *as* musicians. Aspects that may be seen as entirely outside of or not directly related to music certainly featured, can hardly be analyzed, and the focus was on how the interviewed move on music-related paths. One aspect where the integration of music into daily life becomes obvious is musicians' homes. Matching the DIY ethos so important to these scenes, a lot of recording is done not in professional studios but at home. In her overview of girls' cultural production in the 20th century, Mary Celeste Kearney also includes theorizations of girl' bedroom culture, which still tends to be seen as “consumer oriented”⁴⁸³, at least in US society. As Kearney criticizes, even texts that discuss bedroom culture in inherently positive terms may fail to include productive activity: for example, Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, in their groundbreaking studies of girls' culture, “unwittingly reproduced an adultist and patriarchal construction of cultural activity wherein adult men are media producers and young females are media consumers.”⁴⁸⁴ Overlooked activities of girls' bedroom culture, according to Kearney, include the production of letters, scrapbooks and newsletters. My interviews add to this: the bedroom may indeed be a popular place for the creation of music – and certainly for females and males. On the start of Axolotl, Karl Bauer recounts that

when I moved to California after my house burned down was when I really started pursuing a solo project (MS: Yeah), being Axolotl because I had no one to play with, I didn't know anybody there, and then I started playing with somebody there, this guy William for a while, but mostly Axolotl started as just me making music alone in my bedroom in San Francisco after I'd moved there when I was working two jobs in order to afford to, err, buying new equipment 'cause I'd lost all (laughs) my equipment in the fire and I was just alone in California, not really knowing what I was doing, and that's how I started my sort of current incarnation, but it's been a long strange journey now (MS: Yeah) since then⁴⁸⁵

Indeed, the bedroom both as a space in interviewees' narrations and as a signifier of DIY activities features multiple times throughout the interview series. Britt Brown

⁴⁸³ Kearney: *Girls Make Media*, 23.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Interview with Karl Bauer (New York City, July 8, 2009).

claims that “there’s so many bedroom distributors just like there are bedroom labels”⁴⁸⁶. In her conclusion to *Girls Make Media*, Kearney points out the importance of new technologies (explicitly mentioning Apple’s *GarageBand* software) to new opportunities of making music at home, “thus avoiding the male-dominated networks, spaces, and jargon typically affiliated with popular music production.”⁴⁸⁷ Again, bedroom production is not inherently female and is quite obviously practiced by many females, but Kearney’s explanations make obvious these tendencies’ potentially gendered aspects.

The bedroom may be a stereotypical but very useful space especially for solo musicians (or distributors or label owners), but it’s not nearly a house’s only adaptable part: living in Louisville, Kentucky, Pete Nolan formed the band Valley Of The Ashes

that was way more focused, you know, would be rooted out of like, we’d play a song, and then it would go very, very far out, but the instrumentation would be stuff that you could play in your living room, you know (MS: Yeah), and get away with it and not have the cops or (MS laughs) anyone come, not piss off the neighbors⁴⁸⁸

The situation of having a large living room at his disposal matched Nolan’s aesthetic interests at the time. Playing at home, here, is not necessarily a sign of a lack of professionalism – in fact, it may well be, in the sense that a professional studio is not available, but professionalism may not be required here. Instead, an accessible DIY situation is constituted, to which even interested neighbors could contribute.⁴⁸⁹ Of course, louder bands may run into different problems: but Eric and Vanessa Arn very much enjoyed the opportunities their living situation in Austin offered them. With Christina and Tom Carter of Charalambides and a funk band member living in adjacent houses, there was no danger of neighborly complaints about noise from the room they had set up as a practice room, a remarkable change from having to find practice space in other towns. Indeed, Eric Arn mentions witnessing performances by Ben Chasny (Six Organs Of Admittance) and Jack Rose in the Carters’ living room.⁴⁹⁰ Heather Leigh Murray explicates,

⁴⁸⁶ Interview with Britt Brown (Los Angeles, July 26, 2009).

⁴⁸⁷ Kearney: *Girls Make Media*, 303.

⁴⁸⁸ Interview with Pete Nolan (New York City, July 30, 2009).

⁴⁸⁹ Nolan continues: “the one time a neighbor knocked on my door, she was like, ‘oh, I was listening to your music, I play viola, can I jam with you’” (Interview with Pete Nolan (New York City, July 30, 2009)) and she instantly became a part of the band.

⁴⁹⁰ cf. interview with Eric Arn (Vienna, June 21, 2009).

I mean, that's one thing that's very different in the States versus here [Glasgow / UK] of course is the kind of house show culture (MS: Yeah) versus, you know, of course there's a lot of tenements, apartments and stuff here, people don't do that as much here, so in some ways that can feel less of a community than it does in the States, of course the difference in Europe can also be that, there's a bit more money involved (laughs) versus playing the States, but then the tradeoff of course is that community feel, people putting on house shows, making food for everyone⁴⁹¹

For a while, Murray and her partner David Keenan lived in the Fishtown part of Philadelphia, where, as mentioned in chapter 5.3, a small community had developed involving the Honeymoon Music compound and the band Espers. Other interviewees staying there for differing periods of time included Tara Burke, Eric Carbonara and Christina Carter; Jack Rose lived there, and while Bardo Pond were living in the Kensington part of Philadelphia, Burke mentions them as being part of that community. This is one of numerous contexts in which Burke refers to the organization and connection skills of Brooke Sietinsons of Espers, who set up house shows as well as shows at dedicated venues (even before the Fishtown gathering) and convinced numerous people to move to Philadelphia.⁴⁹² Keenan recounts that “we were putting on shows in our house and in the back garden (MS: Yeah), so it was a totally DIY scene” and adds, crucially so, that “it's easy to live there very cheaply and you get access to New York easy as well”⁴⁹³. Similarly, one area of San Francisco, which, as Glenn Donaldson says, is “kind of a cheap neighborhood, ‘cause it's a little bit dangerous” became populated by “musicians who are generally broke”. Other musicians living in the same house or area included Donovan Quinn (Skygreen Leopards), Karl Bauer (Axolotl), Spencer Clark and James Ferraro (The Skaters), Elisa Ambrogio (Magik Markers), Ben Chasny (Six Organs Of Admittance), Noel von Harmonson (Comets On Fire)... Donaldson narrates,

yeah, definitely people would hang out and you'd walk over and someone would be working on, “listen to this song I'm working on”, you know (MS: Yeah), [...] it doesn't really happen a lot, where you all live in the same area with all these people, but now those people have all since moved away really (MS: Yeah), except for a few people, but, there was this brief window where, yeah, you'd walk down the street and there'd be, I think, yeah, fans of this kind of music imagine all these people hanging out and for a while there that was actually true⁴⁹⁴

This would also, of course, result in musical collaborations. One shouldn't, however, deduce that this necessarily engendered a vibrant local scene outside these areas. Karl

⁴⁹¹ Interview with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray (Glasgow, November 4–5, 2009).

⁴⁹² cf. interview with Tara Burke (Orwigsburg, July 17, 2009).

⁴⁹³ Interview with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray (Glasgow, November 4–5, 2009).

⁴⁹⁴ Interview with Glenn Donaldson (San Francisco, July 24, 2009).

Bauer, who had finally found a group of people in San Francisco that he felt kinship with, claims that

it was funny, 'cause, you know, all of us would end up playing shows together in Europe at these big festivals and stuff and then, [...] we would all play together in New York when there'd be like 4- or 500 people there, we'd all play together in San Francisco where we were from and there'd be like twenty people there, (laughs) you know, [...] you *had* to be doing it for yourself there [...]⁴⁹⁵

Like bedroom recording, musicians' communities have to be considered within the context of musicians' financial situations, but are also much more than that, ideally enabling and fostering mutual creative support and inspiration. Simultaneously, the interviewed's references to financial considerations are important reminders that their living situations, despite the creative opportunities and activities encountered therein, shouldn't be romanticized.

Lastly, it seems useful to also point towards another type of room whose importance may even exceed the classic, genre-signifying garage in these fields: Pete Nolan set up shows in the basement of the Hartford, Connecticut house he and his Magik Markers band mates Elisa Ambrogio and Leah Quimby inhabited; the band initially formed for a party therein.⁴⁹⁶ Spencer Clark suggests that The Skaters' music is not particularly suited for larger venues:

When we play as a band we're supposed to be like in a basement, or in a small room (MS: Yeah), it's not like I'm into that, but it's obvious that we need to be in a small room where we can play kinda loud but not too loud [...], I mean, that sorta situation [larger shows / venues] is like, if it's good, it's lucky⁴⁹⁷

The interest in house shows points towards a certain interest in the social, even friendship, in intimacy and exchange on a smaller level, matching the impressions collected and discussed especially in chapter 5.3. This doesn't imply that there is necessarily a categorical dislike of large and / or professional stages: Nolan, while certainly championing the DIY experience, appreciates being able to use professional sound systems.⁴⁹⁸

Thus far, this subchapter's focus has been on living spaces as performance spaces, even concert venues. Indeed, most musicians in these scenes do go on tour, some rarely,

⁴⁹⁵ Interview with Karl Bauer (New York City, July 8, 2009).

⁴⁹⁶ cf. interview with Pete Nolan (New York City, July 30, 2009).

⁴⁹⁷ Interview with Spencer Clark (Graz, June 26, 2009).

⁴⁹⁸ cf. interview with Pete Nolan (New York City, July 30, 2009).

some constantly. Live performances and touring life featured throughout interviewees' narrations although in varying ways, on varying levels. Increased media coverage and exposure allowed international tours, as Ron Schneiderman praises; he and interview partner Matt Valentine argue that this, however, was a "choice" (Valentine) or "a commitment on our part to engage that way" (Schneiderman). Talking about the realization that "people are curious about what's going on", Schneiderman continues:

RS: "...I wanna go see it, you know, I wanna go be part of what they have going on, I wanna share it (MV: Absolutely) and share it, and like *this*, not like (MV: Yeah), you know, not like I wanna play in front of 5,000 people all the time, you know, it's like I wanna go and play it for like 30 and..."

MV: Yeah, and meet people by hands

RS: "...eat the food, drink the beer and, and (MV: Yeah) trade records and do, as long as I can possibly do it before reality comes crashing back down in other ways"⁴⁹⁹

Schneiderman here emphasizes that touring is not just about creating further exposure and advertising one's work (although this aspect manifests in numerous interviews as well, not least in reference to the promotion cycle of releases on larger labels). It is also about meeting like-minded or at least friendly people – and having fun. Asked how she met Marcia Bassett (Double Leopards, Zaïmph), Heather Leigh Murray mentions performing in New York with Charalambides: "yeah, through touring basically, which is how I made so many connections initially (MS: Yeah) was touring before even contacting email or anything like that, was just meeting people, playing shows in different cities"⁵⁰⁰. Pete Nolan fondly recalls Magik Markers' first US tour:

I wrote to people like, I would have some cool tape or something, or a video or whatever, and I was like, "oh, these people are doing stuff in this town, I'm gonna write to them, these people are fucking weird, they might be into having our band come", so that's how I did it, I just wrote to them and (MS: OK), you know, ended up in those places, it was cool, it was *fun*, it was one of the funnest tours I've ever done, [...] definitely felt like there was a real sort of vibrant like underground communication happening⁵⁰¹

Later tours were "way more institutionalized, but maybe that was our approach too"⁵⁰² – Nolan misses the aforementioned type of touring activity but, as mentioned earlier, appreciates the benefits of more professional setups. One interviewee who has toured

⁴⁹⁹ Interview with Matt Valentine (Brattleboro, July 12, 2009); additional quotation marks added according to the conversation's context (Schneiderman 'quoting' his own realization).

⁵⁰⁰ Interview with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray (Glasgow, November 4–5, 2009).

⁵⁰¹ Interview with Pete Nolan (New York City, July 30, 2009).

⁵⁰² Ibid.

particularly extensively is Mike Tamburo who, in 2005, embarked on a “mammoth tour”, performing “nine months worth of shows”⁵⁰³ throughout the country:

You know, so once you’re touring and then you play with a band like whoever the band is in town that will play with this type of music then, hopefully you get along with them, and maybe you meet a couple of their friends that come out to the show and, you know, then you help *them* out when they need a show, you have them come and stay with you, you give them hospitality and, you know, put on a good show for them and tell them where else to play within the country⁵⁰⁴

Just as these examples illustrate the social components, the personal exchange and friendship relevant to the interviewees’ musical lives, they also give an idea of how trans-local scenes are constituted. However, while touring can be described in these inherently positive terms, life on the road isn’t devoid of downsides, ruptures and ambivalences. It can be difficult for musicians on this level to fund their own tours. As illustrated particularly forcefully by Heather Leigh Murray’s example in chapter 5.2, musicians may encounter prejudiced (or even unsympathetic) venue sound engineers. While the chance to get to know other people on tour is certainly enjoyed by many, the sometimes relentless partying in groups of touring musicians can be difficult to sustain – or to avoid without risking one’s standing in a group.

Touring experiences certainly are dependent on a multitude of factors; according to one’s milieu, musical context and specific context, one may not necessarily encounter the very same people while on tour as others have, for example overseas. Tour reports are not necessarily referring to the same people and places, experiences are contingent and unpredictable. But it is worth noting that due to the general impression that most people involved in the business are male, touring experiences can be thought of as gendered. Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg recall a European tour on which they hardly met any women at all – especially outside of Finland.⁵⁰⁵ One female interviewee recounts a (professionally organized) European tour that to her felt like a “very female experience”⁵⁰⁶: touring with male and more established musician friends, she felt her performances on the tour were underpublicized. Crucially, not only did she encounter people who considered her a fellow musician’s boyfriend instead of a musician partaking in the tour on the same level as her touring partners, she also “wasn’t meeting that many women, and the audience was just so masculine that I just really, I didn’t feel

⁵⁰³ Interview with Mike Tamburo (Pittsburgh, July 18, 2009).

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ cf. interview with Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg (Pittsburgh, July 19, 2009).

⁵⁰⁶ Anonymized interview part.

like I could be me”⁵⁰⁷, feeling her performance style wasn’t accepted. The episode would be hard to analyze on the level of intentions and people’s attitudes and isn’t necessarily representative of touring life as a whole, but it certainly shows how, depending on circumstances, imbalances and asymmetries on various levels (organization, audience, personal experience...) can result in experiences that are perceived as gendered – with good reason.

It is impossible to include statistics on audiences’ gender ratios here. Nonetheless, it can be interesting to investigate interviewees’ impressions thereof. First and foremost, the collected impressions suggest that audience demographics differ according to numerous factors, likely including geography, musical style or venues. Some interviewees were of the impression that the number of female audience members had increased over the years, but generally, audiences appear to be male-dominated – although to varying extents. Glenn Donaldson emphasizes the differences in styles:

[...] I think for, certain groups, yeah, that are definitely in the more experimental side of things and drone-based stuff [it] is probably definitely more men, but, definitely on the West Coast, I noticed a lot of women here, like, 60:40, but when Skygreen Leopards play, it’s half and half men and women, I don’t know, but maybe in the more ponderous music, the more like (makes growling noise sounds) (MS laughs), that maybe attracts more men, but something like a show that Inca Ore or Fursaxa might do along with The Skaters, I mean, there’s definitely women that come to that, I’d say 60:40, more⁵⁰⁸

Further interesting points on audiences’ relations to musical styles were made by interviewees and will be touched upon in chapter 5.7. Natalie Mering puts her own impression that audiences mostly consist of circles of male friends with “token ladies”⁵⁰⁹ into context by mentioning that concerts she visits are usually her own, at which she will meet fellow musicians – most of whom are male:

So in terms of audience, maybe there are more women that I don’t know about, but maybe it’s just because I’m hanging out with bands that I only see the token girl, but just looking out into the audience, I mean, sometimes it’s half and half, for sure, I’d say it’s always a little bit more men than women, but, in terms of the *hang out*, what I was talking about before it’s token ladies (NM and MS laugh)⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ Interview with Glenn Donaldson (San Francisco, July 24, 2009).

⁵⁰⁹ Interview with Natalie Mering (Doylestown, July 15, 2009).

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

To conclude, I will add a decidedly international element: the Finnish connection⁵¹¹. As this thesis is focusing on the United States, international elements that are indivisible from these scenes are somewhat neglected. Many connections to other countries exist, suggesting that the scenes here are not just ‘trans-local’ but also ‘trans-national’⁵¹². Out of these various connections, the Finnish ones were particularly present, although this is caused by my own specific trajectory to some extent: Finnish bands were among those drawing me to 2006’s Terrastock festival, and I ended up interviewing four musicians who had participated in 2008’s Approximately Infinite Universe tour, joining Finnish acts on stage for collaborations. Where exactly did the Finnish connection come from? It certainly is multidimensional and involves various different types of media and communication. There is a mutual appreciation of aesthetics: Samara Lubelski mentions fandom of her own work with Hall Of Fame and solo among her Finnish friends, saying that “they had done that work, you know, they were the guys who were going to record stores every week, and really were hungry, and so they knew”⁵¹³ about Hall Of Fame. Tara Burke and Glenn Donaldson mention finding albums by Kemiälliset Ystävät and The Anaksimandros, respectively, in records stores and being attracted by the artwork.⁵¹⁴ Burke has developed a deep connection to Finland, at one point spending a few months there. She hadn’t met Sami Sänpääkilä (Es, Fonal Records) during her first Finnish trip but then met him through Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg, who were particularly important for her Finnish connections. She played a few American shows with Es:

So, that’s when I first met Sami and just kinda hit it off with him, and he’s, like, “you should come to Finland, you should come to Finland”, and I was like, “how am I gonna come to Finland, where am I gonna stay”, and he’s like, “I know five people that you can stay with, you can just circulate (laughs) around”, and I was like, “well, why not?” (TB and MS laugh), you know, so I quit my job, went over there, and stayed for like two and a half months I think?⁵¹⁵

Spencer Clark, too, gets along very well with the Finns: he prefers not to consider himself a collaborator or improviser, focusing on his own aesthetics, but took part in the aforementioned joint tour. “I think that that Approximately Infinite Universe tour is

⁵¹¹ For further information, see for example: Dux, Gianni: New Weird Finland. Eine Zuschreibung. Ein Porträt, in: *testcard. Beiträge zur Popgeschichte 19. Blühende Nischen* (Mainz 2010), 47–54.

⁵¹² A term also used by Elke Zobl in Zobl: *Zehn Jahre Ladyfest*.

⁵¹³ Interview with Samara Lubelski (New York City, July 8, 2009).

⁵¹⁴ cf. interview with Tara Burke (Orwigsburg, July 17, 2009); interview with Glenn Donaldson (San Francisco, July 24, 2009).

⁵¹⁵ Interview with Tara Burke (Orwigsburg, July 17, 2009).

cool, that it's an extension of us being like, having met people like Jan Anderzén and making musical connections (MS: Yeah) through hanging out and not doing music”⁵¹⁶.

This sub-chapter's contents have helped shape the results outlined earlier regarding the role of networks of mutual understanding, support and like-mindedness. Simultaneously, they themselves have been shaped by these results presented earlier. Friendship and care are crucial to musicians' touring opportunities and experiences. But that care is not always in place, or can't always be administered. Touring life tends to be intense and precarious, and the fun to be had with friends can take its toll as well as it can involve staying up late, the consumption of alcohol and other substances – all potentially joyful activities important for socializing but difficult to sustain... Bayton writes on rock touring:

If physical escape is impossible in the temporary total institution of the tour, so is escape from the pervading rock value system. The masculinist lifestyle of rock becomes even more apparent on tours which, according to the archetype, involve partying and high levels of indulgence in alcohol, sex, and drugs. Undoubtedly, some women musicians throw themselves into this lifestyle as much as any man and it is easy to become a victim of the whole mythology, for trying to live up to the expected lifestyle can be fatal. Yet, interestingly, many I interviewed told me they had chosen to limit their involvement and that, amongst the sea of drink and drugs, the one thing you really needed and could never get on a tour was a simple cup of tea.⁵¹⁷

There are bound to be differences between archetypal rock tours and tours on the levels my diploma thesis deals with, but the intensity and totality of touring experiences may be comparable, making tours precarious scene-building machines.

By first delineating the creative uses of domestic space in these scenes (which may be less obviously gendered here than elsewhere), this sub-chapter was able to build on past segments' emphasis of commonality and friendship and, at the same time, on earlier elaborations on the presence of easily accessible technology facilitating solo work. Leaving those spaces, touring's intensity, scene-building potentials and potential gendering were discussed, not least fleshing out the research field's trans-local character.

⁵¹⁶ Interview with Spencer Clark (Graz, June 26, 2009).

⁵¹⁷ Bayton: *Frock Rock*, 174.

5.6 Organization / scenes' structures

As the other sub-chapters have already implied, these local, trans-local and virtual scenes do not just consist of musicians themselves and the immediate manifestations of their artistic practice, and they don't just float without constraints. Concerts, tours and festivals need to be organized, albums are often released by dedicated labels, distributors distribute releases, stores sell them. This thesis segment will deal with organization, especially discussing festivals and labels, ask who can be located in which positions – and whether these various levels are gendered in any way.

In chapter 5.5, I have discussed numerous topics connected to musicians' touring. Beyond standard touring activities, festivals are popular nodes and meeting points in these networks. Festivals do not determine how these scenes work, and some musicians may be less present at festivals than others; but they can serve as examples to make obvious some connections and inner workings of the research field, and sometimes they may even have an ordering function.

The Terrastock festivals, originally started as fundraisers for British music magazine *The Ptolemaic Terrascope*, have been taking place since 1997. As mentioned in chapter 1.1, I attended the festival's sixth edition in Providence, Rhode Island, curated by Jeffrey Alexander of Secret Eye Records who at that point was program director of AS220, one of the two venues that hosted the festival. Alexander recounts that "it was a fun experience, and it was a way to get a lot of friends that we'd met over the years and bands that we really enjoy from different parts of the country and the world to all come together and play"⁵¹⁸. After I had explained that my thesis was an attempt to capture the dynamic and heterogeneous connections of these scenes, *Terrascope* founder Phil McMullen replied that "people have said that the Terrastock festivals are an attempt to capture that and bring people together" but also insists that this hadn't been the plan. Explaining the festivals' special role and status, McMullen refers to the so-called third stage, a schedule-less stage available at some Terrastock editions at which impromptu sets would take place. Reacting to my remark that it's difficult to use a term like 'side project' when referring to the many different bands musicians from these scenes tend to be in, McMullen agreed that "it's not really side projects, it's just that network coming together, isn't it, the Terrastock Nation as we call it"⁵¹⁹. The *Terrascope* website contains a list of the same name, referred to in chapter 5's opening, including all bands

⁵¹⁸ Interview with Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg (Pittsburgh, July 19, 2009).

⁵¹⁹ Interview with Phil McMullen (London, May 19, 2009).

that have played the festival's seven editions thus far, some of which (Bardo Pond, Damon & Naomi, Windy & Carl) have played all of them, and some of which are not actually from the USA (or the UK). I am counting nine interview partners that have performed at least at one of the festivals, and many other connections exist. Sharon Cheslow, whose photography was featured in the accompanying exhibit at Terrastock 2 (San Francisco, 1998), suggests that "those fests were the precursor to a lot that happened later"⁵²⁰. Eric Arn's Primordial Undermind were on the first two festivals' respective line-ups, and he recalls that "by the time the second one happened in San Francisco, it felt like family reunion"⁵²¹. While many – though not all – interviewees have mostly encountered males on the organizational level, it is worth noting that, as McMullen recounts, numerous women have been involved in the setting up of Terrastock festivals over the years⁵²²: Windy Chien and Kathy Harr at Terrastock 2, Tracy Lee Jackson and Kate Saunders at Terrastock 3, Erica Rucker at Terrastock 7. McMullen tries to keep his event management teams diverse according to Belbin team roles, involving different characters, and argues that "women invariably fill one or two of those roles, because they have skills that men do not have"⁵²³.

In chapter 3.2, I referred to David Keenan's article on the Brattleboro Free Folk Festival which took place in two venues in the Vermont town mentioned in its name and at the Hampshire College Tavern in Amherst, Massachusetts. Organized by interviewees Ron Schneiderman and Matt Valentine, it involved numerous musicians living and playing in the area (Joshua Burkett, Dredd Foole, MV & EE, Sunburned Hand Of The Man...) as well as peers from other parts of the country (Tom Carter, Glenn Jones, Jack Rose...). One collaborative performance by Paul Flaherty and Chris Corsano with Scorces (Christina Carter and Heather Leigh Murray) became the focus of a discussion during my interview with Keenan and Murray. For Keenan, the festival played a great role in American underground music's recent history. It resulted in people interested and invested in DIY culture meeting or deepening their relationships, and it served as a model:

That was such a powerful and incredible moment, 'cause all these disparate people suddenly all came together into one space and it provided a blueprint for *so much* of what's happened since, even the way you present underground music, the idea of the underground festival, I mean tha-

⁵²⁰ Personal email correspondence with Sharon Cheslow (August 18, 2009).

⁵²¹ Interview with Eric Arn (Vienna, June 21, 2009).

⁵²² cf. Terrastock!, in: *Terrascope*. <http://www.terrascope.co.uk/terrastockpages/terrastock.html>. Last accessed: January 22, 2012; interview with Phil McMullen (London, May 19, 2009).

⁵²³ Interview with Phil McMullen (London, May 19, 2009).

it was Brattleboro, basically, and I think all those people who'd been working in isolation suddenly came together that one weekend, and it felt mind-blowing⁵²⁴

Murray also points out the presence of different styles at the festival; like Keenan, she remembers the Flaherty / Corsano / Scorses performance particularly fondly as it represented the stylistic mixture at hand.

Numerous interview partners also referred to and narrated the Free Folk Festival's back story: according to Valentine, "that whole Free Folk thing was kind of a culmination of probably five, six years of an underground kind of bubbling"⁵²⁵. The Stone For festivals, co-organized by the already cited writer Byron Coley, had been meeting and collaboration points for a few years already in Western Massachusetts. Discussing how he got involved with Sunburned Hand Of The Man, Paul LaBrecque talks about a Halloween party in Western Massachusetts in 2001:

[L]ike all these bands, like Matt and Erika, MV & EE, local bands, Thurston played, there was, you know, Dredd Foole, we all made these bands and then did covers of hardcore bands and punk bands (MS: Yeah) (Labanna Bly and MS laugh), and it was a fucking awesome night, I mean it was like this *really* kind of binding experience and, Sunburned was the Bad Brains and that night Rob from Sunburned stayed at my house, you know, and, we had met each other just a little bit earlier, it was right after September 11, there was this one of the Stone Fors on the Common in Amherst [...]⁵²⁶

The integration of the Stone For festivals into these narrations hints at or exposes different historical levels: the festivals were named after earlier musicians (like Lee Crabtree or David Crosby); with musicians like Joshua Burkett, Dredd Foole or Thurston Moore, they featured artists who had been active since the early 1980s; and set in relation to the Brattleboro Free Folk Festival, they signify its own historicity and development.⁵²⁷

Other, less publicized festivals were included too, notably the De Stijl / Freedom From festivals in Minneapolis (mentioned by Heather Leigh Murray and Samara Lubelski, both of whom performed there in 2002 with Charalambides and Hall Of Fame, respectively) and the Pasture Music Festival and Jubilee in rural Wisconsin in July 2004⁵²⁸. I had first heard of the latter, at which eight interviewees were present, from

⁵²⁴ Interview with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray (Glasgow, November 4–5, 2009).

⁵²⁵ Interview with Matt Valentine (Brattleboro, July 12, 2009).

⁵²⁶ Interview with Labanna Bly and Paul LaBrecque (Graz, June 27, 2009).

⁵²⁷ Also see Leech: *Seasons They Change*, 230–240 on the scene these festivals emerged out of.

⁵²⁸ Pasture Music Festival and Jubilee. <http://www.23productions.net/pasturefest.html>. Last accessed: January 11, 2012.

Spencer Clark (in the context of The Skaters' early developments, getting to know other musicians...), and it was pointed out again by Glenn Donaldson after I had asked him about the role of festivals and tours:

Clay Ruby in Madison threw a great festival, Pasture Music it was called in Madison, that was a few years back, maybe five years ago, and that was a really important festival, because that was where a lot of people met, from that, that's where I first met the Skaters guys and where I first met Wooden Wand, [...] it's where I first met all those people, Clay Ruby's like a total, he's like a P. T. Barnum of [...] Wisconsin music, you know, he kind of is really motivated and creative and is always trying to just put on shows, especially back then [...]⁵²⁹

In an interview with webzine *Foxy Digitalis*, Kathleen Baird (Traveling Bell, Spires That In The Sunset Rise) mentions getting into contact with Secret Eye Records at Pasture:

The Spires met Black Forest Black Sea at the Pasture Festival outside of Madison, WI last summer. This was our first date on an east coast tour, we played at AS220 in Providence [the venue at which Secret Eye's Jeffrey Alexander was program director, MS] a few days later. I handed them cdrs of Traveling Bell, a few weeks later they wrote to me and asked if I would be interested in a record deal. It was really as simple as that! I like the idea of supporting a record label that is trying to get its feet off the ground and run by such approachable, friendly people as Miriam and Jeffrey are!⁵³⁰

Before, indeed, turning toward labels, I want to close this section with a few further thoughts on festivals. In her interview, Samara Lubelski makes an interesting point, asked, like Donaldson, about festivals' roles:

The really good ones, it's, it'll be all these subtle connections, where you realize again like everyone's connected on a certain level, it just makes sense even though it's noise stuff and maybe freer stuff (MS: Yeah), it's still like the same headspace that creates the stuff, and someone like Clint [Simonson, De Stijl Records], who's really sharp, you know, he's really, really aware of music, he's gonna see the connections and bring it all together, yeah, those are the really good ones, of course⁵³¹

There is an important element of curatorship to how a festival works. Tastes and personal connections and knowledge play decisive roles. Generally, the specific attention women receive in (rock) music circles is also likely to play into booking decisions – writing of a “continuing novelty status”, Mary Ann Clawson notes that

⁵²⁹ Interview with Glenn Donaldson (San Francisco, July 24, 2009).

⁵³⁰ Kathleen Baird, quoted in Rose, Brad: Traveling Bell, in: *foxy digitalis* : features (July 1, 2006). <http://foxydigitalis.com/foxyd/features.php?which=140>. Last accessed: January 11, 2012.

⁵³¹ Interview with Samara Lubelski (New York City, July 8, 2009).

many of her interviewees spoke of club bookers' interest "in engaging bands with women."⁵³²

Musicians act as release publishers / label owners on various levels in this field of research. Many musicians release their own recordings, often in limited editions and on formats like cassette tapes or CD-R that are relatively easy to handle and cheap. To what extent this type of release activity can be likened to organized label work differs; labels don't necessarily need to be established as such. Tara Burke remarks on her own label (Sylph), its first release (*Kobold Moon*) and her own prior tour CD-R releases:

I did [...] a bunch of live CD-Rs, like when I would do these tours (MS: Yeah), and I don't know why, just because I'm not a very, I don't think like this a lot, [...] I always realize these things *after* the point, like, "oh yeah, I should've actually had a label, like when I was releasing this stuff (TB and MS laugh) or an official name but, I didn't", so, I mean, it's not like I'm, like this is something new for me (MS: Yeah), releasing my own material, on my own kinda thing, but, I also, I mean this is an actual CD which I kind of decided that I wanted it to be a CD and not a CD-R⁵³³

One particularly active label that has grown over the years but was founded as a purely DIY operation is Amanda and Britt Brown's Not Not Fun Records⁵³⁴. The label has published releases by numerous other interviewees; active since 2004, it has worked with artists local (the scene surrounding L.A. venue The Smell and bands like Foot Village was particularly important for its early steps and continues to be present) and international (recently including High Wolf from France, Maria Minerva from Estonia / now Portugal, and Cruise Family from Austria). The label now finds itself in an interesting situation, releasing and caring about⁵³⁵ limited edition physical versions of albums while being very present on websites like online store *Boomkat*⁵³⁶, *FACT Magazine*⁵³⁷ or now-defunct, Pitchfork-founded blog cooperation *Altered Zones*⁵³⁸, all of which feature(d) musics emerging from a socially graspable psych / drone / 'free folk' underground as well as musics whose background is more dance-oriented, hinting

⁵³² Clawson: When Women Play the Bass, 202.

⁵³³ Interview with Tara Burke (Orwigsburg, July 17, 2009).

⁵³⁴ While working on my thesis, I wrote a text on Not Not Fun for the website of 2011's Elevate Festival which includes points similar to those listed here. Spiegel, Maximilian: Rad Rhizomes: An Introduction to Not Not Fun Records, in: *Elevate Festival* (October 16, 2011). <http://2011.elevate.at/en/detail/news/rad-rhizomes-not-not-fun-records-eine-einfuehrung/>. Last accessed: December 26, 2011.

⁵³⁵ See, for example, Simon Reynolds's *Wire* article on the label: Reynolds, Simon: New Age Outlaws, in: *The Wire. Adventures in Modern Music* 327 (May 2011), 36–43.

⁵³⁶ *Boomkat* - Your independent music specialist. <http://boomkat.com/>. Last accessed: January 11, 2012.

⁵³⁷ *FACT magazine*: music and art. <http://www.factmag.com/>. Last accessed: January 11, 2012.

⁵³⁸ *ALTERED ZONES*. <http://www.alteredzones.com/>. Last accessed: January 11, 2012.

at an emergent stylistic pluralism. As Simon Reynolds writes, maybe Not Not Fun's "contradiction of being digi-phobes dependent on the net isn't a contradiction so much but a productive tension. Or even a strategy."⁵³⁹ It would be easy to chiefly associate Not Not Fun with very recent tendencies, poster children of a new generation of DIY artists. It is nonetheless important to note that with releases by Christina Carter, Heather Leigh Murray and Scorses, their duo project, as well as sometime Jackie-O Motherfucker members like Jed and Nick Bindeman (Eternal Tapestry), Honey Owens (Valet) and interviewees Natalie Mering and Eva Saelens, the label has notable connections to earlier psychedelic underground activities from way before its own start. The Browns' own projects, like Pocahaunted and Robedoor, have often released on friends' labels, both domestic and international. The exposure a release may receive certainly is related to a label's own capacities; musicians thus may distinguish between releases' sizes according to and based on formats and labels. Britt Brown likens musicians' different approaches to release activity on varying production and exposure levels to an actor's roles and film choices.⁵⁴⁰ Similarly, Pete Nolan, who has experience both in self-releasing on various scales with his Arbitrary Signs label and with recordings for larger indies like Ecstatic Peace! and Drag City (and who, with Magik Markers, once released an album on Not Not Fun⁵⁴¹), enjoys that bigger releases also involve more art on various levels (also talking of, for example, photo sessions); this includes the actual music's level:

'cause for instance if I'm gonna put out a CD-R, it's gonna be like whatever I was thinking of in the last two months, [...] I pick the best of what I even thought about in the last two months, but if you're gonna make a vinyl record, [...] you're probably gonna be more like, "OK, this is what I was thinking about the last six months", but if you're gonna make a record for a label, that is gonna fucking push it out to *everyone* in America (MS: Yeah), then you're gonna be like, "OK, I'm gonna go into a studio, I'm gonna have a producer, I'm gonna spend a *good* amount of time in the studio, I'm gonna think of *only* my very best ideas, I'm gonna put every single one of my best ideas into this, [...]"⁵⁴²

Interviewees like Tara Burke and Eric Carbonara, too, mentioned the benefits of greater exposure through labels like ATP or Locust.⁵⁴³ On the level of labels, hierarchies may be encountered. Labels themselves may release artefacts in varying editions, depending

⁵³⁹ Reynolds: *New Age Outlaws*, 39.

⁵⁴⁰ cf. interview with Britt Brown (Los Angeles, July 26, 2009).

⁵⁴¹ *Feel The Crayon* is listed on the Not Not Fun website: PAST, THE. NNF001–NNF050, in: *NOT NOT FUN*. <http://notnotfun.com/past50.html>. Last accessed: January 22, 2012.

⁵⁴² Interview with Pete Nolan (New York City, July 30, 2009).

⁵⁴³ cf. interview with Tara Burke (Orwigsburg, July 17, 2009); interview with Eric Carbonara (Philadelphia, July 16, 2009).

on artists' prior stature and thus according to expected demand – although this applies to physical releases to a greater extent than to their download versions which, if available at all (in stores like *Boomkat* or *Diogenes* but also *Amazon* or *iTunes*, and more recently through *Bandcamp*), usually remain available indefinitely. At the same time, as illustrated by quotes like Pete Nolan's above, labels themselves vary according to size and context, with label owners like Andrew Kesin and Thurston Moore of Ecstatic Peace!, which has a distribution deal with Universal⁵⁴⁴, “almost hav[ing] this Robin Hood kind of... grandeur”⁵⁴⁵ (Matt Valentine). It was through discussing communication in underground circles and in particular between labels with Britt Brown that the differentiation power of artists' and labels' backgrounds, context and histories became particularly obvious. In comparison to other social categories (race / ethnicity, sexuality, social background and, of course, gender), age was somewhat neglected in the original research design. My plans may have allowed for an awareness of the research field's historicity, but subsequent research may have to take greater care of differentiation according to agents' age or (used loosely) generation. Brown narrates how Not Not Fun, as an unestablished, young label, faced “closed doors and unanswered emails and things like that”⁵⁴⁶ from some older labels and may now occasionally play the opposite part in comparable situations, workload and business situation impeding an equal exchange with younger and less established labels (who, like Not Not Fun before them, may have closer ties with labels that started around the same time). Chris Moon / Last Visible Dog's example also hints at the importance and role of ties and mutual support between labels:

[O]nce I decided to start the CD label, we did make contacts with Drunken Fish and got a little support from them, and that was very encouraging, they got us in contact with Campbell Kneale, obviously Birchville Cat Motel, and he helped us out tremendously, and a lot of the early New Zealand releases on the label are because of his assistance with that⁵⁴⁷

According to Jeffrey Alexander, “small labels across the world” constitute a “pretty close-knit community”⁵⁴⁸. Alexander's example also serves to emphasize the crucial role of the opportunities offered by the Internet for making contacts and touring:

⁵⁴⁴ cf. Lampert, Eva: Thurston Moore's Ecstatic Peace Joins Forces With Universal, in: *CHARTattack*. <http://www.chartattack.com/news/40676/thurston-moores-ecstatic-peace-joins-forces-with-universal>. Last accessed: January 24, 2012.

⁵⁴⁵ Interview with Matt Valentine (Brattleboro, July 12, 2009); for Moore's role, also see chapters 5.4 and 5.8.

⁵⁴⁶ Interview with Britt Brown (Los Angeles, July 26, 2009).

⁵⁴⁷ Interview with Chris Moon (Los Angeles, July 26, 2009).

⁵⁴⁸ Interview with Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg (Pittsburgh, July 19, 2009).

Again, that Bruton Town mailing list on Yahoo! Groups, that was more responsible for many European shows than anything else (MS: Yeah), I mean like that's where I met Mats Gustafsson (MS: Yeah) in, in Sweden and he introduced me to so many people through *The Broken Face*, and, that's when I met the Finns, and that's where I met a lot of people in Scotland, like John Cavanagh and Gayle Brogan, and also people in Norway, [...] the first tour that I did with Iditarod was a purely Scandinavian tour, it was Norway, Sweden and Denmark, and that was almost entirely booked by people on the Bruton Town mailing list, but, yeah, that's pretty cool⁵⁴⁹

Mailing lists / newsgroups may not be as important now as they were ten years ago, but they appeared in numerous interviews – the likes of Chugchanga, DroneOn and Spockmorgue were mentioned. They could facilitate touring and organization, initiate friendships, help promotion and allow for the collection and dissemination of knowledge.

Not Not Fun, like Erika Elder and Matt Valentine's Child Of Microtones / Heroine Celestial Agriculture, Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg's Secret Eye and David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray's Volcanic Tongue, is run by a husband and wife duo. It generally appears easier to encounter male label owners, at least beyond the level of DIY home publishing: many of the interviewed female (but also male) musicians have self-released music of their own at some point, or still do so. Most interviewees seem to share the impression that most label owners are male; numerous times, examples were searched for during interviews and hard to find – not just on the interviewees' side.

Bayton writes of "horizontal and vertical gender differentiation within the record industry"⁵⁵⁰ – there is a lack of female label owners, at least in the British fields analyzed by her. Bayton also refers to Keith Negus's mention of gender imbalance in the music industry⁵⁵¹; however reading his points emphasizes that I didn't interview many actual label owners beyond the cottage industry level and that higher management levels generally are hard to compare to these DIY activities.

Beyond the question of label owners' genders, that of gendered label rosters can be asked. Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg realized at one point that they had released a lot of female artists' work on their Secret Eye label. At the time, this relative

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ Bayton: *Frock Rock*, 3.

⁵⁵¹ cf. Negus, Keith: *Producing Pop. Culture and Conflict in the Popular Music Industry* (London / New York / Sydney / Auckland 1992), 125–127.

balance was not necessarily a conscious decision on their part but reflected their own musical preferences. Goldberg explains:

I think most of the good music that we came across was being made by women, like, you know, Spires That In The Sunset Rise, and (JA: Auto Da Fe), Tara Tavi from Auto Da Fe, Larkin Grimm, it's a lot more interesting than the stuff that men were sending which for the most part was sort of like fanboy stuff, like, "oh, I really heard this band that I really liked, so I'm gonna go home and buy a bunch of pedals and try and recreate it and then record it onto a CD-R and send it to you and hopefully you will put it out" (JA: Yeah), [...] I think that the stuff that was more innovative and sort of more singular and original and creative, that people were sending to *us* at least, was coming from women⁵⁵²

Chris Moon of Last Visible Dog Records relates his Last Visible Dog label's roster's demographics to aesthetic choices, too⁵⁵³; as most of the music he releases is instrumental and, as he feels, more men seem to be involved in instrumental music, this perceived imbalance could be traced back to varying gender presence in different musical styles and approaches. It may thus be connectable to some of the points discussed in chapter 5.2.

Some artists or labels have made conscious efforts to work with female artists. Here, Not Not Fun comes in again; Simon Reynolds quotes Amanda Brown as saying: "Yesssss! I would love to have more. I get very viciously angry if I check our release schedule and it looks like we're not going to have a woman for a while. I'm like, 'What is this? Let's go out and find some women!'"⁵⁵⁴ In 2009, the label released a vinyl compilation called *My Estrogeneration*⁵⁵⁵ which solely featured music by female artists or, in the case of the Browns' own Topaz Rags project, more females than males, among them interviewees Eva Saelens (as Inca Ore) and Samara Lubelski (with Islaja and Blevin Blectum). Compilations generally are interesting indicators and gathering points of artists, comparable to festival line-ups. Festival and compilation curators are in central positions in these cases, arguably assuming hierarchic roles but at the very least constructing nodes. Here I want to name just a few to illustrate certain ideas: Last Visible Dog has released numerous compilations over time including *The Invisible Pyramid* and *The Invisible Pyramid: Elegy Box* as well as the first two instances of the *Crows Of The World* series⁵⁵⁶. *The Invisible Pyramid: Elegy Box* contains EP-length

⁵⁵² Interview with Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg (Pittsburgh, July 19, 2009).

⁵⁵³ cf. interview with Chris Moon (Los Angeles, July 26, 2009).

⁵⁵⁴ Amanda Brown, quoted in: Reynolds: New Age Outlaws, 42. (Emphasis in the original text.)

⁵⁵⁵ cf. PAST, THE. NNF101–NNF150, in: NOT NOT FUN. <http://notnotfun.com/past150.html>. Last accessed: January 24, 2012.

⁵⁵⁶ cf. *Last Visible Dog Records*.

contributions from 31 acts over six CDs, not limited to artists from the US, instead emphasizing connections to Finland (see chapter 5.5), Italy, Japan or the UK. Chris Moon had established various connections through earlier label work and notably through his own friendship and work with Secret Eye's Jeffrey Alexander:

I'd be talking to someone, I'd be like, "hey, you have the email for this person?", and they'd be like "yeah, sure", so I mean I guess it's just going back to email again, you know one person, that'll point you on to someone else, [...] a lot of times, if you look at these comps, you'll see [...] "OK, this person was touring with this person was touring with this person was touring with this person". So I mean they were all in contact with each other (MS: Yeah), so obviously this was all before MySpace and all that, but it wasn't that hard to get contact, and most band were really excited to do it [...]⁵⁵⁷

There are many other noteworthy examples that relate to tropes and agents already discussed: when Twig Harper and Carly Ptak's Tarantula Hill space burned down, Ecstatic Peace! released *Less Self Is More Self*⁵⁵⁸, a double-CD including artists as sonically diverse as Chris Corsano, Leslie Keffer, Lee Ranaldo, Jack Rose, Jessica Rylan, Talibam! and Trebville Exchange (interviewee Sharon Cheslow's duo project with Neil Young of Fat Worm Of Error), as well as various Wolf Eyes-related projects. Die Stasi's *XXperiments*⁵⁵⁹ compilation (2008) gathered numerous female musicians (Buckets Of Bile, Cro Magnon and their solo projects Bird and Circuit Des Yeux, Luxury Prevention, U.S. Girls and Zola Jesus) and tends to be associated with the gendered and apparently short-lived genre term 'crimson wave'⁵⁶⁰. Sometimes compilations will be released on the occasion of festivals: when Jeffrey Alexander of Secret Eye curated the Terrastock edition mentioned above, the label released an accompanying *Terrastock Six*⁵⁶¹ compilation.

Phil McMullen reflects on *The Ptolemaic Terrascope*'s joining of dots between seemingly disparate styles:

[A]nd that's why I feel strongly that these things don't exist in bubbles, there are always these cross-references and cross-paths and it all depends on who's holding the telescope, who's looking at it (MS: Yeah), and which way round you're holding the telescope, you can hold it and err, the narrow end to your eye and just see a, a broad spectrum of everything or you can hold it

⁵⁵⁷ Interview with Chris Moon (Los Angeles, July 26, 2009).

⁵⁵⁸ *Less Self Is More Self* 2CD set (Tarantula Hill Benefit), in: *Ecstatic Peace!*, http://www.ecstaticpeace.com/store/index.php?products_id=87&main_page=product_music_info. Last accessed: January 22, 2012.

⁵⁵⁹ cf. Keenan, David: Tip of the Tongue 30 November 2008. Various Artists. *XXperiments*, in: *Volcanic Tongue*. <http://www.volcanictongue.com/tips/show/127>. Last accessed: January 25, 2012.

⁵⁶⁰ On 'crimson wave', see for example an interview with Cro Magnon: Johns, Jamie: Freak Scene #35, in: *The Fader*. <http://www.thefader.com/2009/04/13/freak-scene-35/>. Last accessed: January 25, 2012.

⁵⁶¹ V/A - TERRASTOCK SIX COMPILATION, in: Secret Eye. <http://www.secreteye.org/se/t6comp.html>. Last accessed: January 22, 2012.

the wrong way around and just (MS laughs) hone in on one narrow little point, so that's kind of why we called it the *Terrascope* because we wanted the picture of a telescope on the front⁵⁶²

Here, again, aspects of perspectivity and curatorship can be read. As Leech writes, the magazine “preferred looking for invisible threads between artists rather than following established cues.”⁵⁶³ It was thus involved in the mapping of these scenes, in the articulation of these manifold relations (see Grossberg's concept in chapter 2.3), contributing on many levels through the setting up of unexpected connections and the affective influence it had on its readers, but also in its tracing through its publication activities.

There are no grand, objective conclusions to be drawn from the mere existence of compilation or festival line-ups, but I hope to have shown that these context-dependent instances of curatorship have consequences of their own relevant to musicians' image and perception as well as their actual connections – especially if these elaborations are seen in relation to earlier chapters on friendship and musicians' lives. Label connections are likely to function through friendship and personal sympathy too; Heather Leigh Murray elaborates:

So I mean always in choosing labels it's definitely a personal relationship (MS: Yeah), [...] I mean even like Chris [Corsano, duo partner in Jailbreak] and I doing something on Family Vineyard, I've known Eric [Weddle] who does Family Vineyard for a *really* long time, and it's really about a personal relationship in choosing labels rather than choosing a label for any other reasons, really, [...] and it feels like a mutual thing as well (MS: Yeah), like even in sending our music at the beginning to Ed [Hardy, Eclipse Records], knowing that he would love it and he'd be really happy to put it out and, almost a thing where I would just like, at least wanna offer it to him first at that time [...]⁵⁶⁴

Murray goes on to add that “certainly choices so far have always been a personal relationship coupled with appreciating their aesthetic”⁵⁶⁵: personal connections aren't the sole factor here, but they are indivisible from how the research field in all its heterogeneity works on this level.

In an email, Britt Brown reflects on recent developments:

So, people are as educated as ever, if not more so, but the rituals of music making/loving are transforming pretty heavily. I can see it in the way the world's responded to our label the past

⁵⁶² Interview with Phil McMullen (London, May 19, 2009).

⁵⁶³ Leech: *Seasons They Change*, 206.

⁵⁶⁴ Interview with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray (Glasgow, November 4–5, 2009).

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

couple years: there's more interest than ever (blogs emailing, guest mix requests, etc), but the same amount of sales as always.⁵⁶⁶

Interviewees like Chris Moon and Ron Schneiderman have been involved in the music business for quite a while on various levels (making music, releasing music and, in Schneiderman's case, distribution work). It was in these interviews that the economic fluctuations that can have a great impact on musical lives became particularly obvious, not least through Moon's mention of the consequences of the collapse of the Tower Records chain and through Schneiderman's reference to the economic difficulties the music business faced after 9/11.⁵⁶⁷ Labels' fortunes are automatically intertwined with musicians', but this may manifest in different ways. Artists tend to release on many different labels, and thus, a label may not be as focussed on musicians' careers and promotion. Talking about his early label work, Schneiderman recounts his relation to musicians: "let's put out a little record, you know, hopefully it will be a stepping stone somewhere else, but I don't wanna be responsible for your careers or feel like I need to find a way to make promises there's no way I could keep". His LP label Records was dedicated to documenting the late 1980s / early 1990s Boston underground, "trying to look at the very very recent past (MS: Yeah), but archiving it for [the] future"⁵⁶⁸. Prior to playing in Sunburned Hand Of The Man, Schneiderman released *Headdress* through Records. Chris Moon's label started in similar ways, wanting to fill a vacuum while making potentially rare / obscure music available through then-recent CD-R technology. Moon has also experienced and witnessed the difficult financial situations musicians can find themselves in:

[A]nd at least in the US, I've seen a lot of bands do shows and "oh, not enough people showed up, you don't get any money". You know, often that's pretty ironic, when you have often a bar attached to the whole thing, and the bar made a lot of money, but they're not gonna help the bands out at all. So the bands walk away with no money, so unless they're selling merch, maybe they don't have anything, maybe they can't afford to eat breakfast, I've had *that* happen, I bought breakfast for a band, or in fact, I had a band come through, I let them sleep on my couch and then I bought 'em breakfast the next day, you know, they had enough gas money to get to the next town⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁶ Personal email correspondence with Britt Brown (December 20, 2011).

⁵⁶⁷ cf. interview with Chris Moon (Los Angeles, July 26, 2009); interview with Ron Schneiderman (Brattleboro, July 13, 2009).

⁵⁶⁸ Interview with Ron Schneiderman (Brattleboro, July 13, 2009).

⁵⁶⁹ Interview with Chris Moon (Los Angeles, July 26, 2009).

As a label owner, Moon thus faces the question of how to help artists, how to publish their music – physical formats can serve as merchandise to sell, promos can increase their exposure.

Lastly, another interesting, harder to grasp aspect or form of organization that I want to point out was formulated by Karl Bauer. As mentioned in chapter 5.5, it took Bauer a while to find a group of people he felt a kinship with after moving to California; he contrasts San Francisco to New York in order to be able to explain the difficulties encountered in the former town:

There's no exchange, people like find their five friends and then they hang out with their five friends, and they don't wanna meet anybody else, and I'm *sure* there are so many truly fascinating people in San Francisco that I would have loved to have met that I just never met because there was no organizing principle like in mu-, with New York, there's so many people here that the music scene was an organizing principle up-, around which you could meet people⁵⁷⁰

Add to this Bauer's explanations on how the East Coast benefits from its larger towns' proximity to each other, and the embeddedness of local and trans-local scenes in their respective geographical and wider social surroundings becomes particularly obvious. The scene as an "organizing principle" itself may be encountered in some places like the ever-busy New York, but it may be more difficult to encounter like-minded artists in smaller, less dense or less busy places.

Maybe labels and festivals can serve to articulate these scenes' connections, their practices – Lawrence Grossberg's use of 'articulation' leaves enough space to consider curatorship in these terms. At the very least, this sub-chapter should have given an idea of curatorship's potential, not least for (implicitly) political agency – although label and festival activities shouldn't be reduced to curatorship: this aspect may be inherent to such work but can't be disconnected from social and financial factors, thus matching Grossberg's own anti-essentialist, context-aware approach.

5.7 Aesthetics

From the very beginning, this thesis has attempted to describe its field(s) of research – local, trans-local and virtual scenes – more through heterogeneous and dynamic social

⁵⁷⁰ Interview with Karl Bauer (New York City, July 8, 2009).

relations than through aesthetic similarities and genre terms in the classic sense. As I hope to have shown, this approach is supported by the importance of, for example, personal friendships to the ways these musical-social fields exist. However, the intention was never to block out the question of aesthetics. As should also have become obvious in the past sub-chapters, the social relations are indivisible from the actual sonics, even though these may be extremely diverse. There are great differences in musical style between the various interviewees' performances or recordings, and some of them have, over the course of their own musical life, released and performed music of remarkable stylistic breadth. While lack of both space and expertise will keep me from including a dedicated musicological study with this thesis, I want to use this penultimate sub-chapter to trace some intersections of gender and aesthetics relevant to this thesis and its field of research.

Aesthetics are touched upon on numerous levels, sometimes discussed directly, sometimes implied. Quite a few of the interviewed referred to the musics encompassed by this thesis as 'weird' or 'esoteric', and awareness of the differences between these musics was often encountered. Eric Arn's elaborations on psychedelia were quoted in chapter 5.4 already. Spencer Clark, while not interested in genre terms, points towards the idea of psychedelia as a relatively apt term. However, he also insists that the focus is not on music itself, and certainly not on a musician's expected activities and schedules:

I'm really interested (MS: Yeah) in recording and building a world that exists outside of like, the music, it's not music, it's like brain juice, you know what I mean (MS: Yeah), it's like imagination, it's not, it should be more than that even, it should be more radical⁵⁷¹

Clark also offers a take on the topic of improvisation that differs from many others' takes and should be included here not least to counter a potential homogenization of the field of research according to perceived intention:

I don't wanna speak for anyone else (MS: Yeah), but the way I perceive it is when I play with other people, they all have a very specific language, and I think combining a specific language is sometimes super unnecessary, and it's really good to just go for what you're going for, and James and I's music was us interacting with each other, but it wasn't us really improvising, it's like an interaction, it's like a conversation, it's not some sort of thing that has historical value in academia or something like that (MS: Yeah, yeah), it's nothing to do with that, it has more to do with the imagination, you know what I mean?⁵⁷²

⁵⁷¹ Interview with Spencer Clark (Graz, June 26, 2009).

⁵⁷² Ibid.

Maybe it is possible to refer back to points like Paul LaBrecque's remarks in chapter 5.2 about playing with that which is at hand, in front of the artists, as well as Britt Brown's decision to let a band sound the way he can play his guitar – and David Keenan's remarks about Albert Ayler, a major influence on some musicians discussed here and by Keenan: strictures are left behind, the sound is expressed “according to your own terms and according to your own technique”⁵⁷³. A lot of the music that is being made in these scenes can be conceptualized as improvisatory, as relying on one's musical potentials in specific moments or phases. This may be extended to the aesthetics of ‘hypnagogic pop’ or of Southgate's eclectic sound factories – what is at hand is not just the instrument, but certain forms of knowledge that enable an extension of tastes and styles, yet according to one's own approach, even own world. What is at hand, too, is friendship: I want to emphasize again that none of this thesis's points about improvisation are purely aesthetic ones. Reminiscent of Keenan's ideas about free folk's restoration of improvisation to its status as what could be considered a folk art, an everyday type of music-making, Gilbert argues that

[t]he very notion of ‘improvisation’ as a definable, circumscribable element of musical practice, rather than as a tautologous synonym for musicianship as such, is in fact the product of a specific history whereby improvisation was rendered marginal to hegemonic musical practices in Northern Europe.⁵⁷⁴

Elements of improvisation, elements of psychedelia, however manifold, can be encountered, as can be elements of abstraction (elements that in some cases can lead to frustrating, unsolvable questions about affect and representation – what are the up- and downsides of abstraction?), and, of course, various manifestations of a DIY ethos. Interviewees like Glenn Donaldson or David Keenan point out the affective role of (one's perception of) release artwork in these fields.⁵⁷⁵ On the topic of improvisation and ‘free’ music, it should be noted that while such elements can be found in some of the work of every interviewee, its conceptualization, its use and place in interviewees' art can vary considerably. Samara Lubelski sees movements between free and structured elements not only at work within individual musical work but actually constructed parts of her narrative around their respective use and popularity in the

⁵⁷³ Keenan: *Both Sides = Now*.

⁵⁷⁴ Gilbert: *Becoming-Music*, 127. Also see Keenan: *Both Sides = Now* on a conversation with Keiji Haino alluding to similar aspects.

⁵⁷⁵ cf. interview with Glenn Donaldson (San Francisco, July 24, 2009); interview with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray (Glasgow, November 4–5, 2009).

musical-social fields she has moved through, suggesting fluctuation from decidedly ‘free’ times to more solo-based activities serving individual personal visions. It is worth pointing out here that Lubelski also emphasizes “the individuality and the personal creative vision” that is “really highly prized, at least in this scene”; as she adds later, people are drawn to these musics “by a particular headspace and particular aesthetics”⁵⁷⁶ on which they rely, rather than on training.

Some interviewees approached the topic of gender in their musical-social surroundings with references to what they perceived as music’s feminine and masculine aspects and the balance thereof. Take Evan Caminiti’s quote:

When I play with Lisa [McGee] as Higuma, there’s this sort of alchemical theme that’s reoccurring in the sort of combination of the opposite sexes into this whole, the idea of, the opposites creating a greater whole and the sort of alchemical obsession with the hermaphrodite and, just the transfiguration of different elements, and I think that’s a very powerful thing, musically, when you take feminine and masculine energy and then merge it into this entity⁵⁷⁷

In Barn Owl, with his band mate Jon Porras, “there’s definitely more of that masculine influence of like that *heavy* sound”, qualifying this statement by inferring that said masculinity is “stereotypically” or “traditionally” so; but Caminiti also refers to the “luminous” sounding high singing that he is interested in and that plays a role here as well. He sees “a lot of blurred lines” in these experimental musics and talks about the influence of “the cultural programming that I guess many Americans might have”⁵⁷⁸ on how these musics are then perceived. Talking of male and female energies, Pete Nolan refers to Indian music and the idea that

if you’re really balancing the world, there’s like a male and a female energy, and there has to be a steady flow between the two, you know, that the ongoing perpetuation of the universe comes about from this balancing act, which is sort of a sacred thing between male and female energy [...]⁵⁷⁹

Whether these ideas of male and female energies, or generally of masculinity or femininity, are related to social / cultural construction or to any inherent essence (or to a combination of biological and social factors) differs from case to case. When writing about the mysticism often noticed here, it is, either way, of interest to refer to Martin

⁵⁷⁶ Interview with Samara Lubelski (New York City, July 8, 2009).

⁵⁷⁷ Interview with Evan Caminiti (San Francisco, July 22, 2009).

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ Interview with Pete Nolan (New York City, July 30, 2009).

Büsser: essentialism found in these scenes is contaminated essentialism that doesn't tend towards any supposed purity.⁵⁸⁰ The (post-)*Horde*, the “vocal magic”, it all may be seen as messy and tending to put purity, singularity, authorship, essence into question. At the same time, it is dangerous to project these aesthetic questions onto interviewees' spiritual views of gender. However, these ideas tended to come up in discussion of the role of gender in music – they are indivisible from questions of aesthetics, and there generally isn't any reason to suspect that musicians in these scenes constantly treat each other according to supposed demands of a mystical essence.

It is of use to refer to reception of musicians' performances (or: musicians' impressions of these receptions) here. Of course, musicians do not always adhere to the same sound. Natalie Mering recounts impressions from a European tour:

Here's a big one for you, [...] when I was on tour, I immediately noticed that sets that I played, where I was more aggressive and freaked out and kinda let the whole feminine freak-out thing completely take over, there were like five times more men and people that were down and into it (laughs), and when I played a quiet set, there was only like a, maybe three people that were *really* into it, you know, but I think for the most part more people came up to me, and more people were intrigued by the abrasive feminine presence⁵⁸¹

This hints at different, gendered receptions of music as alluded to in chapter 5.5 already. It was also interesting to hear David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray reminisce about the Chris Corsano / Paul Flaherty / Scorces performance at the Brattleboro Free Folk Festival (as mentioned in chapter 5.6), where they felt some attendees were wondering how the expected / perceived “balls to the wall high energy free improvisation” of Flaherty and Corsano could be combined with Scorces' supposedly “sirens”⁵⁸²-like approach, or even expecting: “well, are Scorces going to be providing like a background sound (MS: Yeah) or something to what Paul and Chris are doing?”⁵⁸³, as Murray recounts the felt expectation.

Earlier, I alluded to David Keenan's idea that there are different constraints on sexuality in various different artistic cultures. In an interview part much later than the just quoted exchanges, he argues that “there's almost like a de-feminization of women in underground music, where women are supposed to look like boys, act like boys, rather than be strong women”, a tendency that results in “the full expression of certain aspects

⁵⁸⁰ cf. Büsser: Free Folk.

⁵⁸¹ Interview with Natalie Mering (Doylestown, July 15, 2009).

⁵⁸² Interview with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray (Glasgow, November 4–5, 2009), as mentioned by David Keenan

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

of female sexuality” not being allowed for. According to Keenan, “a lot of the males in underground music are looking for females who are versions of them rather than actually, women, a different sex”. He also suggests that underground culture’s perceived need to be oppositional to mainstream culture can result in a “negative reflection”,⁵⁸⁴ of the mainstream’s rules. This could be considered a hint at tensions reminiscent of those surrounding identity and minoritarian politics – and at the dangers of lazily tying representation to certain politics.⁵⁸⁵

Models of femininity may be criticized: To Miriam Goldberg, “what’s really arresting about Spires That In The Sunset Rise is that they are a very ragged, raw female voice and projection of femininity and female power” as opposed to “fey forest nymph bullshit”⁵⁸⁶ which runs risk of being a dubious ideal for femininity.

Both Murray’s information about audience’s expectations and Goldberg’s comments on femininity ideals are, in different ways, reminiscent of the regressive description of female musicians as ‘sirens’ or ‘folk elves’ as written about by Holger Adam⁵⁸⁷, himself active in the organization of concerts in the Rhein-Main area⁵⁸⁸ and thus another one of many examples where analysis of and reporting on these scenes are connected to actual activity therein. Indeed, his own experience in attending and organizing concerts and thus experiencing artists’ very mundane, unglamorous but, in the inspiration it can offer, creatively contradictory and fascinating musical work adds to his plea: rather than querying artists’ supposedly regressive folk elf-ness (as suggested by the call for papers he answers), the stereotypical reception often afforded to artists’ work should be investigated self-reflectively. To Adam, this reductive type of reception is first and foremost an effect of the culture industry, meant to result in (fleeting) attention. One recent example showcasing similar tropes can be found among Boomkat’s *14 tracks* selections, which group pieces available for download in its store according to different themes, thus generating attention that can doubtlessly be useful but also risks reifying stereotypes. One of these sets, titled *Strange Angels*, compiles pieces by diverse (but certainly often connected), mostly female musicians Skirt, Chelsea Wolfe, Zola Jesus, Fursaxa, Bridget Hayden, Kuupuu, Motion Sickness Of Time Travel, Murralin Lane, Common Eider & King Eider and, indeed, the quartet of friends referred to by Eva

⁵⁸⁴ Interview with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray (Glasgow, November 4–5, 2009).

⁵⁸⁵ On similar issues (for example, the politically informed but one-dimensional questioning of musicians’ decisions to wear dresses), see Adam, Holger: *Der Ruf der Sirenen. Zur (regressiven) Rezeption der „Folk Elfe“*, in: *testcard. Beiträge zur Popgeschichte 18: Regress* (Mainz 2009), S. 99–103.

⁵⁸⁶ Interview with Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg (Pittsburgh, July 19, 2009).

⁵⁸⁷ cf. Adam, Holger: *Der Ruf der Sirenen*.

⁵⁸⁸ cf. *Phantom Limbo*. <http://dothephantomlimbo.blogspot.com/>. Lat accessed: January 22, 2012.

Saelens in chapter 5.3: Grouper, U.S. Girls, Inca Ore and Valet. This compilation was “[i]nspired by the near ineffable beauty of new albums by Grouper and Motion Sickness of Time Travel”: “[w]e’ve honed in on the ghostly vocal tones which thread through these 14 pieces”, resulting in “a bewitching, mystical set”⁵⁸⁹. On the one hand, exposure for female artists can doubtlessly be beneficial – and was practiced by Not Not Fun’s *My Estrogeneration* compilation (see chapter 5.7) – but in the description and conception of *Strange Angels*, female artists (some of which may toy with similar attributions, some of which don’t) whose work and life are very real and located in the physical realm⁵⁹⁰ are once again described in terms suggesting mystic, ethereal, ghostly currents. These descriptions aren’t necessarily invalid, but they can become overbearing. This isn’t always necessarily an attempt at selling music; sometimes, as Adam suggests, this type of reception may result from lack of interest of writing space. Even Spires That In The Sunset Rise, Goldberg’s example for strong representation of femininity, have dealt with similar stereotyping – an interview excerpt about which is worth quoting at length:

Splendid: You know, the term “witchcraft” comes up a lot in your reviews. My first reaction is that that’s really sexist, because if it was a bunch of guys making extreme music, they wouldn’t call it “warlocky”. How do you feel about that? Do you think you get perceived differently because you’re women?

Taralie Peterson: I never thought about that... but I suppose everything is sexist.

Kathleen Baird: I guess when I see that maybe there’s a part of me that’s a little bit annoyed. I don’t know why exactly. The whole history -- I don’t know a lot about witchcraft. It’s not as though I’m against certain types of witchcraft...

Taralie Peterson: What? What are you saying? You’re against witchcraft?

Kathleen Baird: No, I’m not against witchcraft. Even though I don’t even know what I’m saying. What am I saying?

Taralie Peterson: Well, I kind of like it when people say that. I can see why people would say it.

Kathleen Baird: I think it’s a little bit of a cliché.

Taralie Peterson: Well, right, but that’s what sexism is. It’s not always hateful. Sometimes it’s stupid clichés.

⁵⁸⁹ 14tracks: *Strange Angels*, in: *14 tracks*. http://14tracks.com/selections/160-14_tracks_strange_angels. Last accessed: January 12, 2012. Also see another compilation (14tracks: *Touching Buttons*, in: *14 tracks*. http://14tracks.com/selections/173-14_tracks_touching_buttons. Last accessed: January 12, 2012.) that showcases the work of women “who sing and produce in the sphere of electronic dance pop and the avant garde”, including Not Not Fun artist Maria Minerva, but ends up referring to the “eternally affective quality of the female voice and psyche in the music we love so much”, thus naturalizing or biologizing these women’s work. Ironically, this selection also includes music by the duo of Julianne Barwick and Ikue Mori, whose earlier “thrash and pulse drumming” Paul Hegarty describes as “most unfeminine but also unmasculine” (*Noise/Music. A History* (New York / London 2007), 99). I will admit: I purchased the Barwick / Mori album (*FRKWYS Vol. 6*) immediately after finishing work on this footnote.

⁵⁹⁰ Also see Natalie Mering’s comments in a recent interview: “Weyes Blood is of this earth. I occupy my own archetypal sphere of ideas, information, memories and dreams, and this sphere is so tightly woven into my experience of everyday reality that I can’t call it ‘otherworldly.’” (Göttert, Michael / Schneider, Uwe: All bloodlines in the human race eventually, back through time, converge at some point: Interview with Weyes Blood, in: *African Paper* (December 10, 2011). <http://africanpaper.com/2011/12/10/all-bloodlines-in-the-human-race-eventually-back-through-time-converge-at-some-point-interview-with-weyes-blood/>. Last accessed: January 12, 2012.)

Kathleen Baird: I was more unhappy when we were described as Charles Manson-esque.
Taralie Peterson: That annoyed me. Those girls were just followers. That's annoying.⁵⁹¹

Via Diedrich Diederichsen, Adam calls for a professional reception on the critic's part, one that makes obvious its own perspective and position – a work ethic that resembles what I worked towards especially in chapters 1 and 2 and that I hope to have carried into these later thesis parts (presenting alternatives even where my own interpretation may be lacking or superficial).

My list of interviewees doesn't include many people who are particularly closely associated with harsher noise music. There are many connections to be found, not least through noise activities from the Midwest (notably Wolf Eyes and their many related projects), Portland-based Yellow Swans (see chapter 5.8) or Carlos Giffoni's No Fun label and festival. However, delving deeper into the 'noise scene', as exemplified maybe by the No Fun⁵⁹² festival, the International Noise Conference⁵⁹³ tours or the Troniks / Chondritic Sound⁵⁹⁴ message board (where, of course, musicians very much related to this thesis's research field have been active), would probably have lessened the density of the research field discussed here: greater degrees of separation would have been introduced (the same goes, for example, for musicians like Devendra Banhart and Joanna Newsom, for whom relations to the scenes discussed here can certainly be found, including a particularly large number of virtual (press) ones). Here, it will be interesting to focus on these connections as they appeared in the interviews and pertaining to this sub-chapter's topic. Karl Bauer, saddened that, in his experience, many women get discouraged from making music, sees the perceived "masculine energy" at play in the "noise world" as a factor of such discouragement:

And a lot of the specific people are nice people, and I, you know, like them as individuals, but when all those dudes get together, it [...] can be really unpleasant and really kind of violent and, the sort of fascistic underpinnings to noise can be teased out more⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹¹ Kelly, Jennifer: Spires That In The Sunset Rise, in: *Splendid*. Features. <http://www.splendidezine.com/features/spires/>. Last accessed: January 12, 2012. Later, during the same interview, Baird jokingly refers to tour mate Tara Burke as a witch.

⁵⁹² NO FUN FEST, brooklyn new york. <http://nofunfest.com/>. Last accessed: January 25, 2012.

⁵⁹³ INTERNATIONAL NOISE CONFERENCE. <http://squelchers.net/inc.htm>. Last accessed: January 25, 2012.

⁵⁹⁴ Troniks. Chondritic Sound. <http://www.chondriticsound.com/forum/>. Last accessed: January 25, 2012.

⁵⁹⁵ Interview with Karl Bauer (New York City, July 8, 2009).

Recounting a Skaters show he witnessed where the audience's aggressive behaviour appeared to contradict the band's softer sound, he adds that

that kind of masculine energy I think is such a dark and oppressive thing, I feel like it pushes a lot of women away (MS: *Mhm*) from music that shouldn't be and make them afraid to perform and to enter into that because they're afraid they're gonna get punched or, that, you know, it's just like such a fucking dude vibe⁵⁹⁶

Labanna Bly has encountered "the overt masculinity" of some noise as well, talking of having a "small crew"⁵⁹⁷ of women amidst male performers at the International Noise Conference; elsewhere, she experienced that overt masculinity in disturbing ways. She relates this to her own music:

[A]nd that's I guess where the Orgiaztech stuff came from, [...] I mean that's what P.A.R.A. is like *overtly* feminine, sometimes it can get pretty dark but (Paul LaBrecque: Yeah) really like (high-pitched, 'angelic' tone) pretty and the mask [that Bly uses on stage] and I try to be pretty, it gets pretty like demented a lot of times but...⁵⁹⁸

Shortly afterwards, fellow interviewee Paul LaBrecque says that doing his music, "I tend to come from more from my feminine side", and Bly argues that there has been "a definite change": "it's way better now, [...] like a lot of the guys that I know that were doing harsh noise are playing the synth now (PL: Right) and making pretty stuff",⁵⁹⁹

Tellingly, LaBrecque suggests that in these fields, "nobody makes girls' music and nobody makes boys' music". This is not to say that there are no elements coded as feminine or masculine to be found, but rather that these musics aren't created on that basis, aren't reducible to such ascriptions or even intentions. Bly, who had earlier talked about "how everyone really creates their own worlds", relates this – after LaBrecque's just-mentioned claim – to these musics appearing "genre-less"⁶⁰⁰. Somewhat echoing this thesis's approach to what 'free folk' may mean, Bly narrates her discussion with a fellow musician on that term and its application:

I'm like, "well, think about it, folk back in the day, like, when America first started and, it was just like this impression, visceral kind of outcast thing at that time, so I mean and that's kind of what noise and (PL: Yeah) that whole genre has become, [...] not going with the flow, going against it",⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁷ Interview with Labanna Bly and Paul LaBrecque (Graz, June 27, 2009).

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

Bly is one of numerous performers in whose case a strict distinction between more folk- or psych-ish modes doesn't make a lot of sense; her own trajectory suggests that any such distinction couldn't be upheld beyond an exclusion, as mentioned above, based on perceived degrees of separation.

To return to the topic of noise's perceived masculinity one last time, I want to refer a somewhat different take on noise's position: Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg consider "the noise guys", who "break it open a little bit more"⁶⁰², more diverse in terms of social background and sexual orientation than more folk-oriented musics. Heather Leigh Murray talks about one of the best-known bands associated with noise:

Heather Leigh Murray: I've never really felt so much in playing underground music from other musicians, I mean even like, we toured with Wolf Eyes, sometimes Wolf Eyes can have a stigma where they're somehow macho that I think comes more from their audience

David Keenan: Well, their audience can be...

MS: Yeah (laughs)

DK: ...it's probably due to them

HLM: ...rather than them, and so people can think, "how can you be on the same bill, on the touring bill with these macho guys?", and it's like, well, there wasn't that, you know, Olson sat in with us a lot, [...] I don't have a feeling from them that I can't pull my weight or something⁶⁰³

As the example of Yellow Swans (see chapter 5.8) shows, it is important to remember that noise doesn't necessarily have to transport and reify masculinity; there is no reason why it should. Noise can interfere and disturb but also is bound to dissipate⁶⁰⁴: it would be sad to see the music's and concept's potential be mistaken for tactics merely enabling inherently exclusionary and thus anti-emancipatory practice.

The fields' diversity may warrant the creation of several separate theses on its aesthetics. This chapter couldn't go nearly as far but at least attempted to politicize and theorize those aesthetics, reconnecting them to the thesis's topic and thus adding depth to aspects that had been present before but likely lacked depth. Femininity and masculinity are concepts that are aestheticized on various different levels and remain contradictory on all of them: both useful and detrimental, depending on context.

⁶⁰² Interview with Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg (Pittsburgh, July 19, 2009).

⁶⁰³ Interview with David Keenan and Heather Leigh Murray (Glasgow, November 4–5, 2009).

⁶⁰⁴ See Paul Hegarty's *Noise/Music: A History* for a discussion of noise in music along similar lines.

5.8 Gender / Politics / Gender politics

In chapter 2.4, I have outlined the idea that gender is an integral part of the social relations analyzed here and can and should thus be discussed as immanent to the field of research instead of being tacked on as an individual gender chapter / gender study. In keeping with this, I have thus far attempted to interrogate various traceable aspects of that very field for gender's role(s) and function(s) therein. In this final sub-chapter, however, I want to discuss gender as a topic on the same level as the other seven sub-chapters' respective core concepts: what can be said, using the material at hand, about how gender is consciously approached or negotiated in these scenes – or about the question whether it is consciously approached at all? How do musicians deal with questions of gender (or even politics in the wider sense), how do they conceive thereof, how can empowerment be practiced?

Questions of gender generally don't appear to be discussed particularly often in these scenes. Depending on context and interviewee, impressions included that the topic is taken for granted or that the subject is one that may be difficult / that peers may be uncomfortable to discuss. Chris Moon says, referring to questions of gender ratio in these scenes, that he has "heard this conversation come up a few times"; talking about gender imbalance in audiences, he claims that "this is kind of the elephant in the room that you never hear *that* many people discussing anyway, [...] if you go to shows, you should notice this, and I've never heard any real explanation for it"⁶⁰⁵. (However, in a recent email Moon adds that in Los Angeles, the imbalance is less apparent than it had been in Providence, and that "often the gender ratio is pretty much 50/50."⁶⁰⁶)

Impressions of musicians' gender ratio vary, too. Some interviewees considered the fields relatively balanced in terms of gender:

Paul LaBrecque: I think it's pretty healthy, I think there's a lot of really fucking strong women, [...] there are super feminine males and there are super masculine males and there are super male females, and there are feminine females

Labanna Bly: Everyone's just like super, sometimes⁶⁰⁷

Miriam Goldberg thinks there may be a notable discrepancy between musicians' and audiences' demographics:

⁶⁰⁵ Interview with Chris Moon (Los Angeles, July 26, 2009).

⁶⁰⁶ Personal email correspondence with Chris Moon (January 1, 2012).

⁶⁰⁷ Interview with Labanna Bly and Paul LaBrecque (Graz, June 27, 2009).

There are a lot of women who play in this music (Jeffrey Alexander: Yeah), it just sort of seems like the fan base is, is largely male (JA: Yeah), but I don't have numbers or any- (MS: Yeah), 'cause it's all just my (JA: ...conjecture), yeah, anecdotally (JA: Anecdotally) (JA, MG and MS laugh)⁶⁰⁸

Karl Bauer feels there are many women doing music “and so many *less* than there should be”⁶⁰⁹, referring to men's discouragement of women that he has witnessed in many cases and touched upon, (here) in the context of noise music, in chapter 5.7.

Samara Lubelski acknowledges a demographic imbalance but has hardly experienced anything negative on that basis / in that context and doesn't mind,

because also, I was always very hungry to learn, and I've always hung around, or tried to hang around musicians who I thought were better than me in order, and there just weren't that many women in that field particularly, erm... I say you get a little bit more attention if you're the only girl (MS laughs), there's nothing wrong with that, I didn't have a problem with that... in terms of creative stuff, [...] I mean everyone obviously has different talents and different perspectives but no one was more important than anyone else, surely, no, not really, I mean some people dictated situations more than others 'cause of ego but it didn't have anything to do with gender⁶¹⁰

That additional / special attention can manifest in numerous ways, perceptible as positive and negative, as already discussed in various other chapters from crushes to underestimation of skills.

Phil McMullen, asked in a recent email about anything he might want to add related to the thesis topic (see chapter 4.6 for information on the emails I sent when the thesis approached completion), writes he “get[s] the impression that gender is increasingly unimportant in free-folk or even wider rock musical circles.”⁶¹¹ Christina Carter, reacting to the same question, writes:

Yes, I think the gender question is largely irrelevant at this point, and the economic and technological questions are much more important, I have the feeling that things are quickly becoming unrecognizable, Art itself is being eclipsed; the new crop of musicians have no relationship to what has come before.⁶¹²

A quote by Britt Brown is particularly interesting in that it combines multiple strands, even multiple chapter topics thus far dealt with in this paper – labels and changing media, the intimacy and DIY opportunities of basement and bedroom, and a take on underground aesthetics:

⁶⁰⁸ Interview with Jeffrey Alexander and Miriam Goldberg (Pittsburgh, July 19, 2009).

⁶⁰⁹ Interview with Karl Bauer (New York City, July 8, 2009).

⁶¹⁰ Interview with Samara Lubelski (New York City, July 8, 2009).

⁶¹¹ Personal email correspondence with Phil McMullen (December 1, 2011).

⁶¹² Personal email correspondence with Christina Carter (December 12, 2011).

Surely there's a ton of women artists that have been able to, I think, have musical careers in this sort of underground they might not have before just because... the Internet and micro labels and the whole community lends itself towards people that don't really tour and just basically have a weird basement, bedroom project that's very private and it's just, being able to share that privacy with other people, and that's almost been a unifying aesthetic for a lot of that music in a certain way, is like it's so personal, because it's so raw and unpolished and sort of, simple or weird or unique⁶¹³

Indeed, it appears that these musics enable forms of access and exude a certain openness, while also rewarding unique, creative activity. Additionally, it became obvious over the course of my interview series that women's participation is very much wanted, not least for aesthetic reasons, for the creation of balance or plurality – a tendency that, of course, is not per se immune to amounting to the mere payment of lip service. Past chapters have included examples of imbalance, examples of novelty status being assigned, examples of women not being taken seriously and examples of implicit exclusion. I have defined, or articulated, these scenes with the help of various tools and in reference to certain heterogeneously spread traits. They are, however, neither disconnected from wider society nor from musical history. It seems likely that these scenes, as open as they often seem and certainly are, nonetheless can house what could be considered archaisms, or at least have yet to manage to neutralize certain strictures – although, as some of the opinions cited above suggest, they might be on a good path. Riot grrrl, which featured prominently in chapter 5.4, directly tackled questions of structural gender inequality. What political opportunities can be found in these scenes?

Asked about their impressions of fellow musicians' political ideals, interviewees usually agreed that people involved in these fields are liberals and / or left-leaning; these terms are very vague and worldviews usually weren't discussed in detail, but there appears to be a consensus that these artists tend to be open-minded, tolerant and egalitarian, an impression that matches the psychedelic, 'weird' aesthetics discussed especially in chapter 5.7. Having been asked about Matt Valentine's concept of 'free folk' as "free-thinking folk", Samara Lubelski emphasizes that openness and "the desire to dig deeper and find the things below the surface" are relevant for the connections in the fields she moves in: "I mean, most of the people in these worlds are less political, I find on the

⁶¹³ Interview with Britt Brown (Los Angeles, July 26, 2009).

whole, but in terms of literature, sometimes art and especially music, you know, everyone's hungry"⁶¹⁴.

Punk's oppositional stance had an important influence on Glenn Donaldson: it countered both conservative suburban lifestyles and the business side of music.

[A] lot of this reason why I was doing things, was in more the punk idea of just being in the opposition to things, so, it was strange for me when people started to be interested in what I was doing and connecting with it, 'cause I was always like, "I'm doing the opposite of what you would like", you know, that was always my approach to (GD and MS laugh) music⁶¹⁵

Donaldson wonders about younger artists' approaches, which may be less oppositional not least due to the effect of the Internet's potential to further certain forms of success.

However, this combination of esoteric musical tastes and progressive politics should not be taken for granted, and leftist, liberal or progressive attitudes can manifest in vastly differing ways. Releases are rarely defined – and artists rarely define themselves – through overt political statements or agendas. This is not to say that an oppositional stance isn't to be found, but it rather manifests through what is being done and how it is done than through explicit political references. As Eric Arn argues,

I think it's inherent, when you see a band that's gender mixed and people from different genres and different methods of making music can come together and create things together, that's the statement right there, and so I think that's how these ideas are propagated, through this, err, not in a very explicit verbal way⁶¹⁶

Tara Burke comments on ideas that were prevalent about the "New Weird America" being "a reaction against what was going on in this country":

I mean, to me, music is more about emotion and feeling and if, but it's kind of, at the same time, [...] maybe it reflects what's going on at the time but [...] it's more like a... ... subconscious thing, [...] like I remember, after 9/11 happened and all that, I mean, I was emotionally distraught but I never *consciously* said like, "oh yeah, I'm gonna write (MS: Yeah, yeah, yeah) this *protest* song" (TB and MS laugh), you know what I mean⁶¹⁷

Eva Saelens connects artistry to a structure of feeling⁶¹⁸, to the USA and its citizens' complex situation:

⁶¹⁴ Interview with Samara Lubelski (New York City, July 8, 2009).

⁶¹⁵ Interview with Glenn Donaldson (San Francisco, July 24, 2009).

⁶¹⁶ Interview with Eric Arn (Vienna, June 21, 2009).

⁶¹⁷ Interview with Tara Burke (Orwigsburg, July 17, 2009).

⁶¹⁸ cf. Williams, Raymond: *Theorie und Verfahren der Kulturanalyse*, in: *Innovationen. Über den Prozeßcharakter von Literatur und Kultur* (Frankfurt am Main 1983), 45–73. A succinct description of

I feel like there, in these abstract ways, in these very honest ways, the musicians of America on these small scales are communicating this, erm, spiritual complexion that would be utterly vaporized if it wasn't for our efforts at documenting it, yeah, I just think about people around the world that hate America, but crave it at the same time, they crave it because of how cool it seems, but they hate it for how we suck the resources away and for how we are so judgmental and condemning of people who are so poor and so fucked and trying so hard, and I just really feel that these small movements of music are really efforts at letting people, helping people understand each other and, because the channels of bureaucracy are really like making apocalypse imminent⁶¹⁹

Throughout these interviews, lyrics were hardly ever discussed; this may have to do with omissions or bias on my part, but, I believe, nonetheless hints at a general lack of manifest meaning. 'Lack' may even be the wrong word here: there is something else in the place of manifest meaning, or maybe a "hypnotic, inspiring mirror for you to sort of get out of it what you want"⁶²⁰ (Britt Brown). In this aesthetic vagueness, the greatest mind-changing, psychedelic empowerment resides close to indifference.

As mentioned by Eric Arn earlier in this sub-chapter, musical practice may also serve as an example. Ron Schneiderman points out that in the loosely organized group that is Sunburned Hand Of The Man, there is "a strong dudes' gang thing going on" which in his view is understood and not exclusionary, a "male clubhouse type... energy"⁶²¹. While Sunburned are not a feminist band per se, Schneiderman makes some points about his own approach that are very relevant to any gender-related research:

[S]o I decided that at one point I was gonna have a subconscious agreement with myself that my efforts would be towards this one cause, but without any sort of actual plan or operational focus, but I would say basically, it is the interest of dismantling paternity, the paternal order, it's pretty much where I sit on it⁶²²

The day before, joining Matt Valentine and me during our interview, Schneiderman had already talked about mechanisms of communities "not aligned with a larger sort of control mechanism that seems to be afflicting us in some way"⁶²³. Schneiderman knows that

there is no way I can measure whether that's what I'm actually doing or accomplishing, but I find that there *is* something to be gained in, by resisting controls, or not resisting control-, when I say resisting, that sounds like an action, but I'm actually saying like, not acting on, on things that

the concept by Lawrence Grossberg calls this analytical tool "a description of experience, of what it felt like to live at a particular time and place." (Grossberg: *We Gotta Get out of This Place*, 62)

⁶¹⁹ Interview with Eva Saelens (Oakland, July 21, 2009).

⁶²⁰ Interview with Britt Brown (Los Angeles, July 26, 2009).

⁶²¹ Interview with Ron Schneiderman (Brattleboro, July 13, 2009).

⁶²² Ibid.

⁶²³ Ron Schneiderman, in: interview with Matt Valentine (Brattleboro, July 12, 2009).

are set, that are controls, so it's actually an in-action that I'm trying to discuss, about, trying to create some sort of demonstration that can inspire people to access, that can inspire whoever is witnessing or observing, whether it's visual art or music or performance, something that can bring a sense of "I need to express my freedom", not do what I'm doing, but as a, as a demonstration can in some way inspire that kind of reality, and that's my thing⁶²⁴

Following the example of the *Horde*, or at least, some manifestations thereof, Sunburned are hard to pinpoint, not searching for endorsement. Maybe the band-collective's sprawling connectability can indeed serve as one alternative model to more rigid band structures – and to rigidities beyond music.

Collectives can also serve specific political purposes that match this thesis's focus. In Providence, Rhode Island, feminist art collective and space Dirt Palace⁶²⁵ fosters art in various media and is very much connected to the local underground music scene. For example, members of the collective have released music as Bonedust⁶²⁶; among the past Dirt Palace members / residents is Erin Rosenthal, drummer for Secret Eye Records / Terrastock 6 artists Urdog, while labels Corleone Records and Load Records are included in the website's links list.

Sometimes, explicitly political action is taken: in 2003, Byron Coley and Thurston Moore "led a revolving tour of poets and musicians ranting against the Bush administration, dubbed 'More Hair Less Bush.'"⁶²⁷ As participants of a show at Montreal's Sala Rossa, a blog⁶²⁸ lists Christina Carter, Byron Coley, Chris Corsano, Erika Elder, Dredd Foole, Thurston Moore, Charles Plymell, Matt Valentine and Valerie Webber. On January 20, 2005, the day of the presidential inauguration, an event dubbed Noise Against Fascism⁶²⁹ took place in Washington D.C.. Organized by Chris Grier and Thurston Moore, it featured – among others – 16 Bitch Pile-Up, Corsano / Flaherty, Double Leopards, Monotract, Nautical Almanac, Magik Markers and Moore himself as a duo with Kim Gordon (Mirror/Dash). Coley's No More Bush follow-up tour in 2008⁶³⁰ included 50 Foot Women, Axolotl, Jack Rose, Marcia Bassett (mostly as Zaika with Tom Carter), writer Valerie Webber, Coley himself as well as appearances

⁶²⁴ Interview with Ron Schneiderman (Brattleboro, July 13, 2009).

⁶²⁵ dirt palace. <http://www.dirtpalace.org/>. Last accessed January 8, 2012. I am grateful to interviewee Chris Moon for telling me about this project.

⁶²⁶ BONEDUST!!!! <http://www.dirtpalace.org/bonedust/>. Last accessed: January 8, 2012.

⁶²⁷ Masters, Marc: Byron Coley / No More Bush Tour. Q+A, in: *Baltimore City Paper* (August 6, 2008). <http://www2.citypaper.com/arts/story.asp?id=16108>. Last accessed: January 8, 2012.

⁶²⁸ Oeidecravan: Fête bénéfice de l'Oie (1), in: *Des nouvelles de l'Oie*.

<http://oeidecravan.blogspot.com/2003/07/fte-bnifice-de-loie-1.html>. Last accessed: January 8, 2012.

⁶²⁹ cf. Masters, Marc: Noise Against Fascism, in: *The Wire. Adventures in Modern Music* 253 (March 2005), 85.

⁶³⁰ No More Bush Tour 2008, in: *Ecstatic Peace!* (July 9, 2008),

http://www.ecstaticpeace.com/news_html/070908_update.html. Last accessed: January 7, 2012.

by MV & EE, Sunburned Hand Of The Man and others at individual shows. These examples show that explicitly political activity can take place in these scenes. Here, experimental / underground art is posited in opposition to politics that are perceived as authoritarian or restrictive, and artists from scenes that usually aren't particularly invested in representation or even try to avoid pigeonholing were happy to join in. At the very least, this illustrates a leftist / liberal consensus and may ideally help raise awareness and creative involvement. What is also particularly obvious here is, once again, the importance of curatorship (Moore's focus on gender has been brought up by Britt Brown in chapter 5.4 already⁶³¹) for line-ups heterogeneity and openness: all the line-ups listed here prominently feature women whose work isn't reducible to classic folk, rock or indie tropes.

Sharon Cheslow, discussing the fields' greater openness and lesser hardness in comparison to earlier underground activities, argues:

I think it was a reaction to what was going on in this country, I mean you have to keep in mind, 9/11 happened, and I really do feel a lot of what happened was in reaction to 9/11, to Bush, to the war in Iraq, I mean that was really what brought us all together, was that we were all anti-Bush, we talked openly about it, we were anti-war and anti-Bush (SC and MS laugh)⁶³²

One of Cheslow's own ways of dealing with these topics was the inception of Coterie Exchange, a collaborative project contrasting the Bush-era's ruling elite with "a small group of people who were coming together to open people up to exchange in the, the free exchange of ideas". Later, having talked about meeting drummer Chris Corsano, Cheslow adds that "I think a lot of people would just bond because we were thinking about how to experiment with sound practice... at the same time we were interested in creating radical culture outside of the mainstream"⁶³³. Cheslow has worked with Yellow Swans who were mentioned both by her and Christina Carter as active in terms of integrating political and gender-related questions into their performances:

I think a lot of what happened in noise is that gender was heightened, so, for example, you would have Yellow Swans doing these, like, *hyper macho* postures to make you really aware of what it

⁶³¹ Moore also contributes the foreword to the Her Noise event series' main publication: Moore, Thurston: Foreword, in: Dzuverovic, Lina / Neset, Anne Hilde (eds.): *Her Noise* (Newcastle upon Tyne) 2005, 5–6. Also see Neset, Anne Hilde: Her Noise Kartet. Mapping Her Noise, in: Bjurestam, Maria / Hägglund, Maria / Petersson, Mona / Strand, Liv (eds.): *LARM. från munhåla till laptop: ljud i nordisk konst. from mouth to cavity to laptop: the sound of Nordic art* (Stockholm 2007), 122–128 for information on a map of female avant-garde musicians including numerous interviewees.

⁶³² Interview with Sharon Cheslow (San Francisco, July 24, 2009).

⁶³³ Ibid.

meant to be a man doing a performance (MS: Yeah), or you would have, you know, some of the women being *completely* free and crazy with their bodies to make you aware, “why is it taboo for women to do this with their bodies in a performance?”⁶³⁴

Yellow Swans’ album *Psychic Seccession*⁶³⁵ features appearances by three interviewees – Karl Bauer, Christina Carter and Eva Saelens all contribute to closer “Velocity Of The Yolk”. In a *Wire* article⁶³⁶, the band (Gabriel Mindel Saloman and Pete Swanson) discusses the process that gave the album its title, itself part of Mindel’s concept of Psychic Anarchism. Jon Dale quotes Mindel:

My feeling is that to establish a real world, working social democracy, where people are granted actual autonomy, each individual must first go through a process of self-liberation. In order to achieve that, they can’t simply break rules, or create new variations of them. They have to literally change their mind, and in so doing, begin conceiving of relationships with themselves and others that have no pre-existing structure. From this place of limitless possibility, they can begin to manifest a world that actually functions according to constant and positive change.⁶³⁷

There is a quasi-individualist element to Psychic Anarchism that could be seen as relegating the social, a certain risk of getting stuck in one’s own mind when larger social connections and issues need to be engaged with. But, as in many examples in these scenes, it is important to connect that which is said to that which is done, or to leave enough space for the latter’s expression: Yellow Swans’ own activities very much are social ones, most obviously through their many collaborations and through their Collective Jyrk label’s activities, through their engagement within communities of support and care – and certainly by being among those members of such communities whose making-obvious of decidedly political questions is particularly forceful. There are strong potentials of empowerment to be found in such scenes, but they require reflection in order to be actualized.

As this sub-chapter has only been able to rudimentarily suggest, politics – and gender politics – are, unsurprisingly, present in the field of research. However, their explicit form, their articulation doesn’t appear central to the scenes’ functioning: are politics, social issues, equality and inequality just understood or are they neglected? In the thesis’s conclusion, I will try to build on these thoughts.

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

⁶³⁵ cf. Yellow Swans, in: *Load Records*. <http://www.loadrecords.com/bands/yellowswans.html>. Last accessed: January 25, 2012.

⁶³⁶ Dale, Jon: A joyful noise, in: *The Wire. Adventures in Modern Music* 268 (June 2006), 26–27.

⁶³⁷ Gabriel Mindel Saloman, quoted in: *ibid.*, 27.

6 Conclusion

In this final chapter, I want to summarize and reflect on the thesis's process, findings and implications and then consider various possible avenues for future research in this field and / or following on from this thesis, including my own plans for the near future.

6.1 Gender construction and American 'Free Folk' music(s): concluding thoughts

Over the past eight sub-chapters, I have tried to offer a complexity-aware tracing of the dynamic, heterogeneous and contingent – indeed, rhizomatic – webs of these simultaneously local, trans-local and virtual scenes. I have focused on the social relations that constitute these scenes, tracing them mostly through the use of 22 qualitative interviews, and attempted to make obvious and discuss manifestations of gender (thought as multiply relational) in these scenes. By making choices throughout the entire research process, by selecting interviewees and personally engaging with them (thus assuming co-authorship of the interviews) and, of course, by actually writing the thesis, I have constructed a web that is not neutral or objective but that is, hopefully, itself traceable. The interview type and approach I chose – (problem-centered) qualitative interviews focusing on interviewees' narrations – has endowed me with great amounts of material that probably exceeds what is reasonably processable within a diploma thesis. In the long run, I hope to be able to continue using this and further related material in subsequent projects (see chapter 6.2) – not least the many articles looked at and collected for this thesis but, ultimately, excluded from the finished paper for reasons of space, length and density. For now, the material's quantity has shaped the final thesis's form on various levels. By far the greatest amount of time that has passed since the initial planning and interview conduct stages was used for the handling and processing of the interviews; and through the choice, arrangement and discussion of many dozens of quotations and interview paraphrases, the text itself has taken shape as a varied collection of material generated mostly in and following these conversations.

The consequences of taking this approach are, I think, ambiguous. The resulting text is much more web-like than I had expected, an aspect that I think can be seen as positive despite possibly leading to a more complicated reading experience. As a colorful and dense web, the text (the tracing) can suggest the heterogeneity and complexity of the field of research (the map). The text can't possibly 'mirror' the field or equate to its

dynamics – the text *isn't* the field, although it contributes to the field through its mere existence. It is connected to the field in complex ways which themselves need to be traceable and reconnectable to the field. “It is a question of method: *the tracing should always be put back on the map*.”⁶³⁸ What might be seen as negative, however, is that the sheer amount of collected material kept me from taking a truly in-depth look at its structures of meaning or structures of feeling. This is reflected in the choice of the *Themenanalyse* approach as opposed to more detailed *Feinstrukturanalyse* and *Systemanalyse* approaches. I think that even *Themenanalyse* can be used more elaborately than I have done in this thesis. At the same time, I think this basic approach to the material has allowed me to order and process it so as to facilitate numerous types of future analysis and research: the thesis also serves as a beginning.

The decision to not just hone in on local scenes was in itself an experiment, one of whose main results is that, as could be expected, it is relatively hard to draw any conclusions equally relevant to every single corner of the field. Interviewees' experiences differ according to context, and these contexts are manifold, emphasized by the remarkable mobility exhibited by some interviewees. I think an approach like this thesis's that considers trans-local (and virtual) connections as just as relevant for the research field's constitution as local connections (though they certainly differ in quality) is valid, but the consequences have to be considered and dealt with. It could possibly have been easier to achieve strong conclusions by mainly working on the level of individual (?) local scenes; greater variations and contradictions, or simply a greater number of connections, need to be taken into account in a thesis like this one. This, again, emphasizes the thesis's exploratory character: how is it even possible to write about these scenes beyond the locally specific? I think setting up the thesis's web-like structure, while far from perfect, is one possible way of tackling this issue. Similarly, conclusions drawn here remain fragmentary or suggestions, pointers in various directions, but this doesn't make them random: in their connectedness, they can offer valid conceptualizations of how the field of research works.

I have in many ways risked focusing on the situation of women alone, a risk that involves the potential reification of stereotypes of men being that which is normal in a rock context, as well as stereotypes of what women can (or can't) do and that I've already discussed in chapters preceding the empirical part.⁶³⁹ I hope my work on

⁶³⁸ Deleuze / Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus*, 14. (Emphasis in the original text.)

⁶³⁹ Introducing her studies, Mary Ann Clawson mentions this danger she acts against or in awareness of in her own work, thus discussing men as well as women: cf. Clawson: *Masculinity and skill acquisition*, 99.

masculinities and males' roles (and: what sometimes appeared to be a *relative* absence, or lesser importance, of gendering) has countered any such risks adequately. While my thesis isn't a quantitative study, a lot of the material points towards a general quantitative imbalance, a greater amount of male musicians being present (depending on contexts – geographic, aesthetic – and curatorship). This potential context-dependent but not ahistoric imbalance can be discussed in fluid but dedicated ways, a strategic invocation matching Butler's and McRobbie's ideas.

While the quotes used in this thesis are only selected fragments of interviews which themselves are manifestations of specific situations and contexts and thus not a perfect image of the field of research, their use "allow[s] many voices to mingle so that the authoritative voice of the ethnographer is dislodged"⁶⁴⁰. Of course, through their very arrangement within the text, they tend to serve certain points / impressions / hypotheses, as contradictory as they may be, but I hope to have used them in ways that will also allow for the critical questioning of my own interpretations.

The empirical part's various sub-chapters all included numerous small conclusions of their own which are interrelated. Starting according to typical interview structures and thus according to the chronologies of interviewees' lives, the thesis first investigated musicians' backgrounds, specifically centering on the topics of family, education and jobs while also integrating further factors. The further the text moves from the dense connections that make up the ever-shifting field, the harder it is to write without resorting to mere speculation. It would thus be absurd to present a full-fledged thesis on interviewees' childhoods and family backgrounds (not least in terms of gender: how and to what extent interviewees' upbringing was gendered isn't a question the collected narrations offer fully conclusive material for). Family interests in music or other artistic practices differed and a family's investment into music isn't a requirement for successful connection to these scenes, but some examples (from different generations, involving, for example, Natalie Mering and Matt Valentine) showed how families' own interests or the musical frameworks they provide can influence musical life stories. This possibly suggests that a general, open (and open-mindedness-fostering) upbringing that leaves options aplenty (instead of limiting according to gender stereotypes) but feeds creative curiosity easily connects to what is constantly taking place in these scenes. Still, numerous interviewees ended up partaking in these activities despite lacking

⁶⁴⁰ McRobbie: *The Es and the Anti-Es*, 130.

family backgrounds supporting ('alternative') creative interests. These experiences may, however, instill ideas in musicians like Eric Carbonara or Eva Saelens, who both call for networks of support to be created – albeit in different terms, focusing on different aspects: musicianship as a concentrated, devotional practice is of greater importance to Carbonara than to Saelens, but both artists' ideas suggest positive conceptions of society and community in opposition to hegemonic values.

Interviewees' impressions of their peers' social backgrounds vary, but the overall impression tends towards a quantitative middle class dominance. Carbonara's and Saelens's working class backgrounds show that this isn't the entire story, but many interviewees are aware of the role privilege may play in access to these scenes. Sometimes, privilege was related as a possible factor in the perceived lack of non-'white' musicians in this field. An aspect that is more easily graspable is education. While high school featured in interviews to varying degrees (possibly supporting Mary Ann Clawson's claim that women's involvement in music tends to start at later points), most interviewees have had access to some type of higher education. Their experiences differed as did their fields of study, but in many interviewees' cases (and opinions), their time at college served to open up their respective worldviews and / or allowed them to make connections crucial to their further trajectories. Sometimes, college radio could play a role – as a source of information or even as a node relevant to scenes' constitution. Higher education can thus be seen as an indicator of a certain privilege and as a general factor of connecting and enabling. Its influence usually wasn't a predictable or linear one that directly informed artistic practice. This is connectable to some interviewees' emphasis on their peers' individual creativity and paths: even though I often referred to the commonality and collectivity so important to these scenes, there also are references to the value of artists' individuality, even the own worlds they create.

Esoteric / underground music isn't a particularly lucrative business. Most interviewees work jobs besides doing music, although some have managed to go for some time without jobs – phases that are hard to keep up. Musical activities themselves can consume money (gear, touring) and time. Remaining active as an artist may preclude successful careers outside of music; activities and time need to be balanced. Some musicians work jobs that are related to the field, or at least the music business. Notably, record stores are interesting spaces that can serve to illustrate numerous aspects of the field of research. They are social spaces where musicians can hang out, or meet each

other in the first place; crucial networking takes place there. At the same time, stores partake in the negotiation of musical / historical knowledge, not just through the conversational exchange inherent to such meetings but also because they are sources, for customers and for staff, of that very knowledge, of actual records. They are thus connected to questions of record collecting. Numerous female interviewees have worked or still work in record stores, but some stories suggest that stores are still associated with male presence and competence.

Less immediately connected to social relations but at the same time indivisible from narrations chronicling musical trajectories are musicians' instrument choices. Interviewees' musical backgrounds differ vastly: classically trained musicians are present, as are entirely self-trained / untrained musicians, in either case both male and female. This doesn't mean that musical background is of no import – prior knowledge, skill or technique isn't left at the door upon getting involved in these DIY-centric scenes. However, as interviewees like Christina Carter and Samara Lubelski suggest, connections here may be based more on like-mindedness, mutual sympathy and understanding rather than on stylistic grounds (or, indeed, on the grounds of musical skill). Some interviewees' elaborations also suggest that musicianship in these scenes can often be characterized in terms of immanence, a decidedly material dealing with what is at hand rather than aspiration towards a transcendent ideal of skill. Many musicians play numerous instruments. If technology's and instrumental skill's association with maleness has often excluded females from participating in rock music contexts, there may be fewer hurdles and blockades to be encountered in these scenes. Remnants of these quasi-archaisms can still be encountered, however – arguably so in the lack of female solo instrumentalists, an area of underground music that is still very much associated with elaborate technique and skill and a separate investigation into which would doubtlessly turn out fruitful. This doesn't mean, however, that women in these scenes are unskilled – although audience or media reception sometimes may expect them to be. A certain projected emotionalization of technique isn't just encountered in the reception of female musicians' work though. David Keenan criticizes that underground music activities lacking the cultural capital of more accepted / established musics are taken less seriously despite being just as elaborate – 'minor' musics irreducible to established categories (which tend to be associated with

maleness)? In many ways, this minor, fluid, irreducible character that can be ascribed to so many of these musics is constitutive of the field's openness.

Approaches to and uses of improvisation in these scenes vary massively, and not every performance or record emerging from them can be considered improvised, but it is nonetheless a particularly present set of potentialities for musical performance particularly, but not only, in group contexts. According to Keenan's line of thought, improvisational approaches here are everyday musical activities; following on from that, and considering the unconventional, exploratory techniques (easily conceived of in terms of immanence) present as well as the aforementioned thoughts on like-mindedness, access to these scenes has more to do with social factors than with questions of skill. Aesthetics do play into both of these topics, but rather than specific aesthetic markers, what makes these connections and mutual interests work are (mind)sets of aesthetic potentialities. Sometimes, these can be actualized, consciously or at least in later conceptualization, as challenges to stereotypical ascriptions (Matt Valentine and Erika Elder's allocation of instruments, Elisa Ambrogio's guitar technique evoking 'jerking off'...)

These potentials are easier to actualize thanks to technological developments of recent years and decades. I don't want to claim that loop / delay pedals are the single most important devices for these scenes' inner workings, but their success and frequent use makes obvious how technological innovations and greater affordability can democratize artistic fields. While these pedals' benefits are not exclusive to female musicians, knowledge of gendered conventions in wider rock music contexts suggests that it is females who particularly may benefit from loop / delay pedals' availability: by using these pedals, a full, multi-layered sound can be achieved relatively easily without having to rely on skills that have to be honed for years (often a male privilege in rock circles) and without having to gather / access a full band (an entity with its own politics, potentially harder to access within masculine rock worlds?). Somewhat speculatively, I would also like to add that these scenes' aesthetic preferences for "vocal magic", for "massed voices" (David Keenan) may connect easily to societal tendencies that make the voice an 'instrument' (or sometimes, conventionally, a non-instrument, supposedly natural instead of learned) often used by women, in that a vocal-based music may be more attracted and attractive to women who have grown up in a world that considers them potential vocalists. This may also make vocal-based music a practice of potential empowerment, and moments of "vocal magic" also can be moments of great (and

potentially emancipatory) gender ambiguity, by putting into question or disturbing what sounds are associated with males and females, respectively, by inherently highlighting the arbitrariness and construction of gender coding, and by dismantling authorship.

While the practice of playing music is usually structured (at least temporarily) by organized activities like the publication and public performance of music, it is certainly true that these complex scenes often consist of, are constituted by and through friendship. This is one aspect of why these musics, via Keenan, can be considered in ‘folk’ terms, although, as Grossberg points out, the conception of a “dichotomy between folk and mass culture, between a pure and spontaneously oppositional culture and an externally produced and repressive culture”⁶⁴¹ should be avoided: indeed, here, any such differentiation is exposed as quite obviously questionable by the very practice of performing music that, while not always and necessarily a replication of past musics, is informed by many different modes (of varying popularity and obscurity).

Connections based on or engendering friendship are forged at different points of musical-social lives and have different impacts. It is through friendly connections that some may even be introduced to the performance of music, a factor facilitated or made possible by the scenes’ reliance (mostly) on DIY modes of performance and on like-mindedness rather than on virtuosic technical skill adhering to specific performative ideals. It is difficult to establish temporal or practical hierarchies of friendship and music beyond the specific: they are intertwined, unconsciously (in the manifold day to day modes of interacting with one’s milieu) and consciously (joint performance or publication as a means of furthering one’s friendship) so. That very differentiation may be broken up too, as many musicians have recognized these utterly unmythical quasi-everyday connections as a helpful network worth sustaining as it furthers creativity and the social. Not only is such a network worth sustaining, it is what makes musical practice outside of professional musician work sustainable. Even musicians who take decidedly ‘solo’ routes are likely to connect and relate to fellow musicians, investing in structures of support and creativity beyond the band format. These connections go well beyond the local, crucially involving trans-local (and trans-national) as well as virtual levels, thus enabling or facilitating touring activities.

Gender is more obviously present or easier to grasp in the tracing of connections that go beyond friendship. Very often and quite unsurprisingly so, musical partners are

⁶⁴¹ Grossberg, *We Gotta Get out of This Place*, 77.

romantic partners too (seemingly heterosexually so in the overwhelming amount of cases, although investigations into the role of sexuality in the field of research may have to take many more steps than this one has). The same multiplicity of experiences and relationalities that can be found in friendships is present here too, although bound to happen on qualitatively different levels, different levels of intensity. Of course, friendship and romantic relationships aren't exclusive spheres of experience and being, and various forms of romantic attention and desire are likely to manifest. There certainly is nothing negative to be found about those as such – again, they are everyday experiences relevant to life on so many levels – but some experiences suggest that in contexts that still at least appear male-dominated on the quantitative level, this can result in forms of increased attention for women that are hard to sustain and may hurt prospects of building one's network of support. This issue can also be tied to aesthetic expectations of how a woman is supposed to perform (musically). Women are thus very much present in social connections, in friendships in these scenes, benefiting from and adding to them just as much as men – but sometimes they are still designated as other, as that which diverges from the standard, a tendency that, going by some interviewees' impressions, can either decrease or increase expectations in women's performance and skill. Due to these experiences' multitude and diversity, they are unpredictable, but they can damage musical trajectories' sustainability.

These networks, dynamic and heterogeneous as they are, change constantly. My tracing is thus a snapshot and at the same time laden with historical contingencies, the temporal gap between the interviews and the thesis's completion being just one of them. Still, factors of age, change and development could have been investigated more consciously, explicitly and with greater dedication. I hope to be able to follow up this thesis with one that approaches the same field of research and the same material from a perspective interested in these scenes' historicity (see chapter 6.2); in this thesis, I have mostly resorted to a general discussion of continuities (also via David Keenan's and Phil McMullen's remarks on the very presence of such "sub-underground"⁶⁴² (Matt Valentine) tendencies throughout (rock) history) and contingency, then moving on to questions of influence and knowledge. Aesthetic and ideological elements can be closely connected to scenes' local, trans-local and virtual characters, by shaping local scenes or being adapted to local contexts, or through the very example of trans-local

⁶⁴² Keenan: *The Fire Down Below*, 34.

activities (like riot grrrl's "networked media economy", as Mary Celeste Kearney calls it) potentially shaping further DIY activities.

Musical historical knowledge and record collecting are related, although that relation has likely been affected severely by the increasing presence, use and importance of the Internet. Knowledge and understanding of historical forebears in experimental, underground, oppositional music was emphasized not least in the circles surrounding Tower Recordings, Hall Of Fame and the Brattleboro Free Folk Festival. This doesn't necessarily make everyone involved a record collector, but collecting played an important role in this arguably local (developing around New York), arguably trans-local (spreading over New England) scene. Matt Valentine, having also been active in record stores and met examples of earlier related musical activity there, has made a point of emphasizing such connections in concerts and festivals he has organized – actual and virtual ones, although arguably actualizing the latter through the manifestation of these connections in social contexts. These lineages include both men and women who may then act as role models or, as Valentine himself suggests, whose practice may enable present practice. He hopes to enable future practice, espousing a musical ethics that through knowledge of quasi-like-minded artists and by remaining open to influences can create examples of its own, sustaining artistic practice.

This is one facet of musical knowledge and record collecting that can be discussed in terms of sharing and dissemination and is thus inherently positive. However, in a musical-social field that benefits from knowledge of seemingly deviant, idiosyncratic and thus often obscure musics, certain manifestations of knowledge and historical awareness can also be perceived as rigidities, turn-offs, hurdles – most notably as exclusionary. As hinted at in interviews and elaborated on in literature on the topic, record collecting tends to be a phenomenon encountered among males, and conflicting codes and roles of masculinity can manifest and be negotiated therein. Assigning different values of collecting and knowledge to specific agents of the field of research is difficult and hardly doable beyond the impressions discussed in interviews, so for now it remains viable to say that there is potential for numerous facets of collecting and reference to the past in these scenes. There can be a drive to enable, there can be a focus on *activity* that may in many ways be gendered due to preconceptions of male and female roles but may in the long haul override the most obvious implications of that gendering (as encountered in the case of Christina Carter's first record store job and further musical trajectory), but there can also be forms of exclusion, because exclusive /

specific knowledge can also serve the sustenance of closed, as opposed to open, scenes and their hierarchies. Here, reflection is needed.

Still, such reflection on scenes' handling and uses of historicity also needs to face massive changes in connection with technological developments: through the Internet's spreading and own changes, seemingly endless musical resources are now available at listeners' disposal, just as the Internet's use has facilitated touring and further technological developments, just as the emergence of the aforementioned pedals as well as of music software like *GarageBand* has facilitated the production of music. Quoting Nick Southgate, I have argued that labels like Not Not Fun can be conceptualized as "eclectic sound factor[ies]". This pluralism, which doesn't rest on signification, representation and adherence to overarching concepts or categories, can be considered democratic and enables many different masculinities and femininities in its recourse to and mangling of countless different musics and meta-musical concepts while going beyond obvious 'retro' activities. However, that very freedom can also be seen in connection to a fluidity that, while more democratic in terms of access than past undergrounds, also runs parallel to difficulties in establishing a sustainable musical career in surroundings where everything appears to be in flux. Increasing musical freedom and fluidity are, I would argue, inherently positive and can be helped sustain, but financial precariousness precludes any romantic view thereof.

Musicians past and present can serve as enablers, as intermediaries, as role models, as examples. Sonic Youth are many of these – through their sound, their dissemination of influence, the fact that the band's line-up is mixed in terms of gender (Kim Gordon's position as bassist and vocalist may match stereotypes in independent music, but her role is stronger than any such stereotype can suggest), their collaborations with musicians from these scenes and their involvement therein as curators. Riot grrrl, too, has had influences direct and indirect. This influence is felt more strongly in these scenes' DIY tendencies and connections, their lack of hierarchies, than aesthetically or in constant active questioning of gender constructions and roles. However, some of the most interesting attempts to deal with gender in these scenes have been influenced by riot grrrl, and in the case of Sharon Cheslow, a personal continuity to riot grrrl and earlier punk scenes exists. Riot grrrls, through their very presence, are potential examples for musicians working in DIY / underground contexts and may have contributed to a greater presence and visibility of women. Indeed, it seems likely that as the scenes discussed here are multi-generational, the very presence of musicians like

Christina Carter, or even relatively recent beginners like Eva Saelens, and their presence beyond stereotypes of what women are supposed to represent and how they are supposed to perform, have been influences on and examples for artists who have started playing music more recently. Instead of a relegation of women to stereotypical roles, there are greater and broader opportunities for them to engage in and a greater confidence in doing so that points beyond a passive initiation resulting from greater freedom to a confident and active taking up of these opportunities. These (or any other) scenes are far from gender-neutral, but it appears far more normal to encounter women artists therein now, a presence that needs to be considered in positive terms of activity, even entitlement.

It is by definition not just on the level of social relations that these musics are present in their performers' everyday lives. By discussing domestic spaces in which music is performed and mutual creative support is fostered, I have been able to trace some attributes important to how these scenes work: if they mostly consist of friends playing music together, it is not surprising that musicians' living rooms can serve as performance spaces (if the architectural and social surroundings allow). If they consist of like-minded friends, it is not surprising that this can sometimes lead to, or result from, people living together and supporting each other in shared living spaces. Basement concerts underline the musics' DIY character and arguably (some of) their aesthetics. But a space whose use in these scenes particularly contradicts its reputation and sometimes-theorization as a space of girls' passive cultural consumption is the bedroom. In combination with the increasing democratization of musical tools, agents, female *and* male, are increasingly able to record music in (and / or distribute music from) those intimate settings, which again reifies the seemingly paradoxical impression that in a field that I have written about in terms of commonality and collectivity, aesthetics and technology allow for the realization of such solitary projects beyond classic band politics – and yet, these too are part of a social network, be it local, trans-local or virtual.

Meanwhile, touring is an important factor on multiple levels; in this thesis's context, friendships and social relations can both be results of touring and enablers thereof. They certainly are constitutive of the scenes – local, trans-local and virtual aspects are interrelated and indivisible, and this is particularly obvious on this topical island. Interviewees are aware of this: touring was often discussed in terms of opportunity for

traveling or in the context of how others were met, contact with whom then facilitates future touring. Just like musicians will sometimes release on labels that generate exposure and interest beyond what smaller labels doing it themselves can achieve, tours can be set up on different levels of organization, attract audiences of different sizes; and just as self-released material sometimes serves purposes that larger releases don't (or the other way round), both tours set up by the artists themselves on a small, friendly level and professionally organized tours have their respective up- and downsides. The potentials of DIY art are greater than ever, it is easier to work on and more accessible than ever, and touring and social connections are just two aspects that have been not just augmented but changed immensely by the Internet's availability and development; and yet, there are moments still hard to achieve through DIY. DIY activities can lead to connections on a personal level more easily and serve a democratizing function, whereas there might be somewhat alienating or less *fun* aspects to professionally organized touring. At the same time, larger labels and professional bookers may be able to make musical activities less precarious and provide musicians with broader sets of potentials.

Touring experiences differ beyond these two ideal variants, and sometimes they can be experienced as gendered, especially when considered in the context of males still being seen as expressing musical and technological standards (and still being in the majority – often so in audiences, as perceived by many interviewees, although connectable to questions of geography and style). Touring generally is a high intensity phase of musical life, and while it can indeed be great fun and open new parts of the world to those taking the trip (including Finland, close connections to whose underground music fields were often made before touring already), it can also be exclusionary, pose specific performative demands on and off stage, gendered and non-gendered, flawed performance of which can risk sanctioning.

My thesis includes a chapter on “Organization / Fields’ Structures”, and Deleuze and Guattari’s comparison of fluid rhizome models and simpler, hierarchic tree models as well as their manifold combinations offers hints at how to understand them. However, I have come to think of (Deleuze-influenced) Lawrence Grossberg’s use of ‘articulation’ as at least as apt for the conceptualization of labels and festivals. Through the curatorship and material organization carried out by festivals’ and labels’ directors and owners, connections abstract and everyday, historical and taste-based can be articulated,

consciously or unconsciously. A concept may be signified and acted out, or those connections may be manifested without reliance on representation (at least beyond that which is at hand like artwork, specific and maybe release-limited ideas...) I would argue that here, too, these scenes tend towards the latter option, from spontaneous ‘third stage’ performances and friends’ meetings at the scene-building Terrastock festivals to Not Not Fun’s aesthetic pluralism based on friendship, enthusiasm and like-mindedness rather than on actual overarching concepts. Articulation can be rigid, simplifying and territorial, but it can also serve recognition of certain constellations worth talking about. Just like tours, festivals in these scenes are indivisible from social connections, and competent curatorship may be based on in-depth knowledge of these scenes and result in cultural capital being ascribed. Indeed, festivals don’t just articulate already extant connections, they also tend to result in important new ones, and sometimes, these articulations may be re-articulated as scene pivots in musicians’ discourse and maybe even more so in journalistic contexts: see the way Brattleboro’s Free Folk Festival birthed a genre term that mutated far beyond the initial intentions.

Whereas impressions on quantitative ratios on general organization levels vary, there appears to be a dearth of female label owners – once one goes past the level of small self-releasing micro-labels at least, on which many female musicians participate by issuing their own micro-editions on formats like CD-R, another example of technological developments and thus increased accessibility, the removal of hurdles. Further research on the level of dedicated label work needs to be conducted – for now, this field of research seems to reify gendered distinctions on the level of labels, found in the music industry outside of this field, too. On the level of activities like festival organization, impressions are more ambiguous.

Label rosters, too, can vary remarkably in their quantitative (gender) ratios. While it seems unlikely that any label in this field would try to just release music by men, some label owners or organizers, notably Not Not Fun, attempt to consciously involve women, seen as minoritarian – and possibly more special in their aesthetics. Event / tour line-ups curated by the likes of Byron Coley and Thurston Moore have tended to include great numbers of women, emphasizing the potentials of curatorship. Most often, it’s primarily aesthetic choices and tastes and not gender-related deliberation that inform labels’ roster ratios: this isn’t meant to imply that “aesthetic choices and tastes” are free of gendered aspects but that there isn’t necessarily conscious reflection on gender to be encountered in, for example, Secret Eye’s roster including many women and Last

Visible Dog's roster containing a majority of males. In the first case, diffuse, hard-to-grasp questions of gendered approaches to music were present: an idea of women, presumably as minoritarian in a male-dominated social field, tending to record more original music less interested in supposed roots than in immanent performance. In the second case, a label's focus is on musical styles that may generally be performed more often by males – mostly instrumental musics, possibly hinting once again at the peculiar case of vocals' genderedness. Label activities don't just articulate abstract connections, their specific role can also illustrate once again that finances in these underground scenes are precarious and subject to economic fluctuations. Doing it yourself is a mode of potential empowerment and can help some forms of sustainability, but the spaces in which you do it yourself aren't disconnected from, indeed, local, trans-local and virtual economic developments and can themselves be hard to sustain even despite those communities' tendencies towards care.

Musical styles aren't just gendered according to instrument education and socialization, aesthetics are likely to be gendered too, although it is hard or even impossible to discuss the scenes according to any supposedly unifying aesthetic. Improvisation, creative originality and the mind-expanding, category-defying excursions of psychedelia (more as a mindset than as an actual sound) tend to be valued, are sometimes questioned (is it really improvisation, which may also imply adherence to imposed values or certain standardized norms? Does abstraction not imply alienation or political laziness?) Sometimes, gendered metaphysics of music arise from discussions of gender and / or aesthetics. Female and male energies, feminine and masculine aspects are conceptualized in various ways, some of which match the contaminated essentialism Martin Büsser locates in 'free folk' musics. Ideally, this contamination, aesthetic pluralism, may dispel tendencies towards metaphysical purism and essentializing rigidity, letting the mystic elements serve as potential openers of sound worlds beyond ordinary categories and thus a multitude of voices to be inhabited. Of course, any ascriptions of femininity, masculinity, femaleness or maleness fail where they solidify, as happens particularly often in discussions of female musicians as sirens, angels, elves or witches – all images of femininity that point well beyond the ordinary and that which is established on the level of everyday experience and may be harnessable for unique performance at times but that, once solidified and if unquestioned, are just as conservative as any banal mode of expression they appear to go beyond.

Some musicians may make use of such stereo- or archetypes to varying success. However, as suggested by Holger Adam's critique of the lazy and / or culture industry-induced stereotyping of artists as 'folk elves' or 'sirens', any reception that defines artists' work according to perceived signification or representation is bound to be reductive and to reify strictures. Adam recommends locating regressive tendencies on the critic's side; his plea for a dedicated, anti-stereotypical criticism that makes its own perspective and position traceable is undoubtedly compatible with this thesis's work ethics. I believe that this doesn't just apply to 'the writer', 'the critic' or 'the theorist' but should be important to anyone caring for the music (or any other cultural practice) he or she enjoys and considers important to her or his approach to and experience of life. Similarly, I believe any scene, and especially ones like these, can benefit from (self-)reflection and the conscious articulation or pointing out of what may be perceived as issues.

In her conclusion to *Girls Make Media*, Mary Celeste Kearney writes about the "various gendered barriers"⁶⁴³ that keep girls / young women from getting involved in the production of music. They include economic factors (the creation of music being more expensive than various other forms of cultural production), socially constructed rules of patriarchy and matching aesthetics, sexism, certain instruments' association with maleness, lack of role models...⁶⁴⁴

How do these scenes fare in comparison? Mavis Bayton discusses three areas "where women have preserved and increased a long-standing domain":

Punk is particularly supportive for women because of its basic simplicity of musical form, the minimal music skills required, the ethos of DIY, amateurishness and iconoclasm. [...] In contrast to punk, high skill levels are required [in jazz, MS]. Experimental freedom is of the essence and the playing of a wide range of instruments beyond the guitar, drums, and bass of traditional rock and indie bands. A third area where women have preserved and increased a long-standing domain is folk/acoustic music because its 'unplugged' nature allows women to avoid the 'masculine'-coded forest of rock technology.⁶⁴⁵

All these musics have been influential, although to varying degrees in different contexts, in the scenes I have discussed here. Punk's DIY ethos is just as much "of the essence" here as experimental freedom, and it is connected to modes of friendship and support. Various forms of (constructed) masculinity are present in these scenes, but I

⁶⁴³ Kearney: *Girls Make Media*, 299.

⁶⁴⁴ cf. *ibid.*, 291–306.

⁶⁴⁵ Bayton: *Frock Rock*, 198–199.

would argue that they rarely include guitar heroisms that are usually associated with masculinity. Technology that is relatively easily available and usable plays a crucial role in the aesthetics of many musicians here. Connect this to the musics discussed in Jeremy Gilbert's elaborations on the rhizomatic moment of improvisation – free jazz, krautrock, Indian classical music, minimalism, all of which have been cited as influences by interviewees – and their tendencies to dissolve the genius subject's authorship and thus certain socially constructed (and gendered) strictures present in numerous musics, and what emerges is the image of a musical-social field that appears very easily accessible, very free of constraints. Solo musicians, not least the diverse (though often pigeonholed) female ones, here are able to “control their own representations”⁶⁴⁶ – even invited to do so by the demand for individual, idiosyncratic worlds (although these may not be so much about representation in the sense of representing and constructing the artist as a subject). At the same time, bands' replacement by wild collectives⁶⁴⁷ like Sunburned Hand Of The Man results in more complex, fluid constitutions of musical-social life which, while not gender-neutral, can attack hierarchies. Still, life in these scenes certainly isn't easy, can even be precarious⁶⁴⁸ and quasi-archaisms remain: numerous female musicians feel their gender hardly affects how they are treated, while others have experienced a certain otherness or novelty status at least in specific situations. Reference to a supposed “regularity of subjectivities” (as warned about by McRobbie, see chapter 2.6), be it male or female, needs to be avoided, but apparently gender-related phenomena need to be formulated as such.

I think the ethics of openness and open-mindedness that are often relevant to these scenes offer great emancipatory potential, and many have benefited from it already. However, maybe these emancipatory elements can be harnessed more efficiently through coordinated activity, examples for which include successful and politically informed curatorship that nonetheless avoids inhibiting the scenes' creativity. Agents like Sharon Cheslow, Byron Coley and Thurston Moore have set up events or enabled practices that negotiate implicitly and explicitly political topics while not imposing (aesthetic or political) categories, hierarchies and forms of representation that may result in creativity's inhibition. Eric Carbonara and Eva Saelens have proposed the

⁶⁴⁶ Kearney: *Girls Make Media*, 12.

⁶⁴⁷ Also see Büsser: *Free Folk*.

⁶⁴⁸ Also compare, for example, Elke Zobl's remarks on Ladyfest organizers' self-exploitation in precarious, neo-liberal times (cf. Zobl: *Zehn Jahre Ladyfest*, 216).

development of forms of community and collectivity that go beyond individual artistic activity (while potentially fostering that) in trying to enable sustainable, unconventional lifestyles. Many interviewees try to live such lifestyles; many interviewees are active and aware of histories and networks, trying to establish sustainable connections for their work based on mutual support; there is hardly any obvious wish for exclusivity to be found. In fact, as mentioned already, there is a wish for great diversity. Many musicians in these scenes play solo to various degrees of dedication and exclusivity (many of these soloists also perform in band collectives), and this is also reflected by psychedelic ethics like those elaborated on by Yellow Swans, in whose ideas individual mental liberation is integrated into collective, supportive practice. Yellow Swans' thought once again emphasizes the need for reflection that I think can be crucial for scenes' / musical-social fields' openness; successful forms of curatorship and organization as mentioned above are dependent on such reflection, and collective organization may be too. This may be relatively difficult to achieve in such scenes – not because of a lack of capacity for reflection, but because of the very everyday-ness of the musical-social practice. Articulation of social factors, of inclusion and exclusion, to some extent involves and requires the acceptance of certain aspects – scenedom? – as actual entities, as traceable. These tracings, too, need to be put back on the map – engage with your surroundings, disturb them, fix them, let it flow.

6.2 Velocity of the yolk: future prospects

One of the easiest and yet least complete thesis parts to write may be this, its last one, gathering ideas for future research based on the experiences made while working on and finishing this paper.

One planned facet that played a greater role in my thesis's early stages and was still present in the interviews I conducted was the topic of media coverage. I collected a lot of material that was relatively easy to gather – articles in webzines or in widely distributed magazines like *The Wire*. Articles in fanzines or other limited publications were and are harder to find, making a comprehensive study of writings about these scenes – and these writings' gender-related aspects – even more difficult. The close reading of media coverage of these scenes thus couldn't be conducted to the desired extent. A somewhat related, far broader topic – the general role of media and its formats – has been hinted at in this paper but not nearly to the extent initially planned. However,

I hope that the crucial, even constitutive role of easily accessible formats like CD-Rs and cassette tapes has been obvious throughout this thesis. The same goes for ‘the’ Internet: the opportunities it offers, especially in terms of communication and social networking, have facilitated the gathering and spreading of information and increased mobility – while at the same time, as some interviewees attest, resulting in floods of information or even actual artists that sometimes make navigation in these scenes more difficult. At the very least, the Internet’s presence and manifold uses have effected remarkable qualitative changes.

While my focus on the social didn’t exclude aspects of actual on-stage performance or recordings’ aesthetics, I mostly neglected them in my analysis. This makes sense insofar as my thesis’s constitutive ideas privilege the research field’s social aspects and consider them worthy of analysis, but also because a more dedicated analysis of these aesthetics and techniques would have had to rely on competence that far exceeds mine. It should be very interesting to polish my musicological knowledge and foster my dabblings in the philosophy of music so as to be able to hone in on these aspects in adequate ways. I believe theorizations of affect – not least via Steve Goodman⁶⁴⁹ and Lawrence Grossberg⁶⁵⁰, both of whom refer to Deleuze and Guattari – should be of great help for such plans. Although my own upcoming projects aren’t likely to focus on aesthetics, I hope to be able to engage more deeply with both authors’ work. Manuel Castells’s network concepts, as used by Elke Zobl⁶⁵¹, may be of use here too, helping make sense of how shared interests and like-mindedness constitute these scenes.

Also, the very (musical) heterogeneity of the scenes discussed in this thesis should be considered a worthy topic of analysis. If other scenes may be defined through their actual styles (according to certain sets of rules?), how come that these musical friends, hungry as they are, often produce recordings and present performances that *sound* remarkably different from each other? I believe this thesis has offered some hints – hungriness and open-mindedness as well as Southgate’s “eclectic sound factory” – but a more dedicated analysis might come up with particularly interesting points that could be worked into a music-centered analysis of these scenes that still wouldn’t neglect the social aspects so crucial to this paper. Such an analysis would also have to find means of conceptualizing trends in these musical-social fields, simultaneously engaging in

⁶⁴⁹ cf. Goodman, Steve: *Sonic Warfare. Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (Cambridge / London 2010).

⁶⁵⁰ cf. Grossberg: *We Gotta Get out of This Place*, 79–87.

⁶⁵¹ cf. Zobl: *Zehn Jahre Ladyfest*, especially 211.

discussion of ‘postmodern’ conditions of music making while staying alert to these scenes’ idiosyncrasies.

By definition, trends and changes of aesthetics and tastes have a temporal element. They will also have to be included in what I’ll be working on next: as my *Geschichte* (history) studies have yet to be concluded, I’m hoping to be able to continue work on the same research field and the same collected and assessed material for my second diploma thesis, which would have to be finished in late 2012 / early 2013. Through the inclusion of Foucault’s genealogy / effective history, Joseph’s minor history and Joan W. Scott’s conceptualization of gender, I already have various historiographic, or historicity-centered approaches at my disposal that have been connected to and tested on (my conceptualization of) the research field; these could be harnessed for further, more (historiographically) in-depth research. At the same time, getting the chance to work on such a thesis – possibly called “Hitoricity and American ‘free folk’ music(s)” – would allow me to close a number of gaps left in the thesis at hand. For example, I feel I have mostly neglected factors of age. Related aspects certainly can be encountered within this *Politikwissenschaft* paper – musical lives’ chronologies, various life phases’ respective relevances, technological developments, influences and role models, generational gaps between labels – but to make them the type of aspect to be traced in such a thesis should allow for a dense articulation of their interplay. The aim isn’t to write a “history of American ‘free folk’ music(s)” but to investigate those musics’ becomings, changes and velocities. The thesis I am finishing here asked: how does gender manifest in these dynamic, heterogeneous connections? The next thesis will have to ask: how does historicity manifest in these dynamic, heterogeneous connections? I believe the answer has been (and has to be) a multifaceted one in this thesis, and I don’t doubt that it will be a multifaceted one in the next thesis. Nonetheless, that expectation doesn’t absolve an exploratory researcher from attempting to construct and state the relevant problems, to make her / his tracings (and maps!) traceable, to articulate the potentials (and blockings) apparent (and not so apparent) in the field of research. These scenes’ musics’ may seem ‘otherworldly’, their aesthetics and modes of functioning may seem wild, but they are real and material. They need and deserve to be discussed adequately and carefully, and with a generosity and dedication that matches their own.

7 Literature

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Abstract (English):

Maximilian Georg Spiegel –

Gender construction and American ‘Free Folk’ music(s) (2012)

This exploratory study attempts to locate gender in heterogeneous and dynamic fields of American underground / psychedelic musics that are best described by tracing the complex social relations that constitute them. As a basis for this exploration, the field of research is considered in rhizomatic terms (Deleuze / Guattari) that enable an adequately complex conceptualization of these simultaneously local, trans-local and virtual (Bennett / Peterson) scenes. As they are constituted on an everyday level and between friends who share undogmatic approaches to musical performance, they can be conceived of in ‘folk’ terms (via David Keenan and Matt Valentine). Meanwhile, gender is conceptualized as not essential, in reference to Joan W. Scott’s multi-faceted and multi-dimensional definition and to Andrea Griesebner’s elaborations on gender as multiply relational. Tracing the field of research along narrations collected through qualitative / problem-centered interviews, mostly with musicians from these scenes, the thesis can be understood as analogous to Branden W. Joseph’s Deleuzian concept (via Mike Kelley) of ‘minor history’. The scenes are discussed in all their heterogeneity and contingency instead of being reduced to single traits according to aesthetic signifiers.

Consequently, the thesis’s results are just as heterogeneous. Over the course of eight sub-chapters built around analytically distinct but interrelated themes, a dense web is constructed that establishes connections between the results of these qualitative interviews’ analysis and further literature (especially on gender and rock music). These scenes appear very open and (relatively) devoid of hierarchy. The friendship that constitutes them and agents’ perceived like-mindedness enable mutual support; there is a fruitful tension between the scenes’ oft-perceived collectivity and commonality and their interest in individual creativity. With the exception of some style subsets, they don’t exhibit particularly noticeable hurdles for entry, instead rewarding DIY (Do It Yourself)-based creativity and relying on technology that is relatively accessible. Gender roles and relations, while rarely consciously questioned in performance, aren’t very rigid. Through some of these musics, improvisatory and multi-voiced even in some solo artists’ cases, gender and authorship are questioned, although rarely explicitly so; instruments’ use is heterogeneous and usually not measured according to rock music’s

gendered standards. Nonetheless, at times quasi-archaic patterns manifest, and specific situations make obvious that music can still be assessed according to standards associated with males or masculinity, potentially according female musicians a novelty status. The thesis closes with a plea for (self-)reflection on numerous levels: just like a scholarly paper, musical-social networks can best actualize their potentials through careful, complexity-aware reflection.

Abstract (deutsch):

Maximilian Georg Spiegel –

Gender construction and American 'Free Folk' music(s) (2012)

Diese explorative Studie versucht, Geschlecht in heterogenen und dynamischen Feldern amerikanischer Underground- / Psychedelic-Musik zu verorten. Diese Szenen lassen sich am besten durch ein Nachziehen der sie konstituierenden sozialen Beziehungen beschreiben. Als Grundlage für diese Erforschung wird das Forschungsfeld mithilfe rhizomatischer Konzepte (Deleuze / Guattari) gedacht, die eine adäquat komplexe Konzeptualisierung dieser zugleich lokalen, trans-lokalen und virtuellen Szenen (Bennett / Peterson) ermöglichen. Da diese Szenen auf alltäglicher Ebene und durch Freund_innen, die undogmatische Zugänge zu musikalischer Praxis teilen, konstituiert wird, lassen sie sich mithilfe von ‚Folk‘-Begriffen (via David Keenan und Matt Valentine) besprechen. Geschlecht wird als nicht essentiell konzeptualisiert, Bezug nehmend auf Joan W. Scotts vielfältige und multidimensionale Definition und Andrea Griesebners Ausführungen über Geschlecht als mehrfach relationale Kategorie. Die Arbeit zieht das Forschungsfeld anhand von Erzählungen (größtenteils von Musiker_innen aus diesen Szenen) nach, die mithilfe qualitativer / problemzentrierter Interviews gesammelt wurden. Sie kann als analog zu Branden W. Josephs deleuzianischem Konzept (via Mike Kelley) der ‚minor history‘ verstanden werden. Die Szenen werden hierbei in all ihrer Heterogenität und Kontingenz besprochen, anstatt sie anhand ästhetischer Signifikanten auf einzelne Merkmale zu reduzieren.

Dementsprechend sind auch die Ergebnisse der Diplomarbeit heterogen. In acht Subkapiteln, die um analytisch distinkte, aber zusammenhängende Themen konstruiert sind, wird ein dichtes Netz geknüpft, das Verbindungen zwischen den Resultaten der

Interviewauswertung und weiterer Literatur (vor allem zu Geschlecht und Rockmusik) herstellt. Diese Szenen wirken sehr offen und (relativ) frei von Hierarchie. Die die Szenen konstituierenden Freundschaften und ihre gefühlte Gleichgesinntheit ermöglichen gegenseitige Unterstützung; zwischen der oft perzipierten Kollektivität und Gemeinschaftlichkeit dieser Szenen und ihrem Interesse an individueller Kreativität besteht eine fruchtbare Spannung. Mit der Ausnahme einzelner stilistischer Bereiche warten die Szenen mit keinen besonders bemerkbaren Einstiegshürden auf. Stattdessen wird DIY (Do It Yourself)-basierte Kreativität belohnt, relativ zugängliche Technologien werden genutzt. Geschlechterrollen und -beziehungen sind nicht sehr rigid, wenn auch sie selten bewusst in der musikalischen Praxis in Frage gestellt werden. Durch manche dieser improvisatorischen und sogar im Falle diverser Solomusiker_innen vielstimmigen Musiken werden Geschlecht und Autorschaft – wenn auch selten explizit – in Frage gestellt; die Nutzung von Instrumenten ist heterogen und wird normalerweise nicht anhand geschlechtsbezogener Rockmusikstandards bewertet. Nichtsdestotrotz sind manchmal quasi-archaische Muster antreffbar, und spezifische Situationen zeigen, dass Musik immer noch anhand solcher mit Männern oder Männlichkeit assoziierter Standards gemessen werden kann, sodass weiblichen Musikerinnen ein Neuheitsstatus zugewiesen wird. Die Diplomarbeit schließt mit einem Plädoyer für (selbst-)Reflexion auf verschiedenen Ebenen. Wie auch eine wissenschaftliche Arbeit können musikalisch-soziale Netzwerke ihre Potentiale am Besten durch gewissenhafte, komplexitätsbewusste Reflexion aktualisieren.

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