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Pauline Oliveros and the Quest for Musical Utopia

Hannah Christina Johnson McLaughlin

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Pauline Oliveros and the Quest for Musical Utopia

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This thesis discusses music’s role in utopian community-building by using a case study of a specific composer, Pauline Oliveros, who believed her work could provide a positive “pathway to the future” resembling other utopian visions. The questions of utopian intent, potential, and method are explored through an analysis of Oliveros’s untraditional scores, as well as an exploration of Oliveros’s writings and secondary accounts from members of the Deep Listening community.

This document explores Oliveros’s utopian beliefs and practices and outlines important aspects of her utopian vision as they relate to three major utopian models: the traditional “end-state” model, the anarchical model, and the postmodern “method” utopian model. Oliveros exhibits all three models within her work, although this thesis argues that she is, for the most part, a method utopian. While her ceremonial group improvisations like *Link/Bonn Feier* resemble anarchical works by John Cage, they exhibit a greater interest in the past and in process than most anarchical models allow. Likewise, while her visions of a future aided by AI and biotechnologies appear end-state, her improvisational works with her Electronic Instrument System (EIS) suggest a more process-based, method utopian approach. Her Deep Listening practice is deeply method-utopian, and her Center for Deep Listening can be viewed as an attempt at bringing these method utopian principles to the real world.

Keywords: Pauline Oliveros, utopia, postmodernism, John Cage, utopian novel, electronic music, Deep Listening, improvisation, ceremonial music, Ray Kurzweil, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, speculative fiction
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INTRODUCTION

Music and Utopia

This thesis explores the utopian qualities found in the compositions of one of the 20th century’s greatest musical minds, Pauline Oliveros. Although little has yet been written about their relationship, music and utopia are undoubtedly interrelated. Even the strictest definitions of either term allow for an interchange between utopian idealism and musical expression. While there are indeed many definitions for the term “utopia,” all of them center around the themes of human perfectibility and possibility. At its simplest, utopia is a product of human imagining centralized on a better, perhaps unattainable world. Utopian authors, artists, and activists hope to transport others into this world, and do so in diverse ways.

Even before Thomas More’s *Utopia* of 1516 the written word has been a major medium for utopian dreaming. There are many examples, some of which will be mentioned and discussed throughout this thesis. Film has also proved a strong medium for utopian visions. Utopianism has also strongly impacted the world of architecture, where public consumption, social design, and private artistic impulse often intertwine. Of course, the performative arts – music, dance, theater, etc. – are similar in this regard. They are inherently social art forms, requiring audiences, resources, and human interaction through rehearsal or practice in order to succeed. Ernst Bloch, one of the most influential utopian philosophers of the 20th century, took an extreme interest in music’s utopian qualities. He even referenced particular musical works and genres as having utopian traits in his magnum opus *The Principle of Hope*. Other utopian scholars tout a similar interest in music and utopia. “The life of music is utopian in a very real sense,” Benjamin Korstvedt argues, “for the practice of music is never completed; every performance is absolute
While it occurs, yet never final.” Even when a musical performance has come and gone, a musical work continues to exist as a “text,” whether notated or not.\(^2\)

Considering all of this, musical works can be analyzed as a tool for creating utopian models, and precedent exists for it to be a common topic among utopian scholars. However, the significance of music is often overlooked in the discussion of utopianism. Fortunately, this fact is quickly changing as the field of utopian studies continues to grow out of practical obscurity since the 1970s. Now, many acknowledge the presence of music in utopianism, and more research on the subject has appeared since the 2000s.

It is important to note the difference between music in utopia and utopian music. The first phrase refers to the musical works, structures, and practices that exist within a fictional or prognosticated utopian world. The other refers to real-world composition with the intent of creating a better world. An example of music in utopia is the folk music in Ursula K. Le Guin’s Always Coming Home. This book describes the life of a fictional people called the Kesh, and includes musical “field recordings” of a fictional people who “might be going to have lived a long, long time from now in Northern California.”\(^3\) Co-written by Todd Barton, these song excerpts are not inherently utopian in their musical construction. They do, however, exist within a utopian space, and have the potential to convey utopian messages by Le Guin and her characters. Dozens of other examples of music in utopia exist across the span of utopian literature, and these ideas are worthy of study on their own. They, however, are not pertinent to this thesis.

Instead, this thesis concerns utopian music – music which exists in real-world society and acts as a tool for a) modelling utopian systems, and b) transforming real-world communities into utopias. Music, as far as this thesis is concerned, is not simply a product or symptom of a utopian
lifestyle. Instead, it is an active transmitter of utopian agendas. I will therefore often compare works of music to works of literature. Both communicate clear utopian narratives, as well as transport audiences into new states of being. Like the utopian novel, music can “educate desire” – inspire real changes from within individuals through experience rather than simply verbal rhetoric.

There are, however, extreme differences between a work of utopian music and a work of utopian literature. Music is far more abstract, and therefore subject to multiple interpretations. It is therefore very important to consider the individual composers’ motivations behind a piece of music. Did the creator of a given work identify as utopian? Was there a specific utopian narrative or agenda which inspired the work? Is there concrete evidence to support a utopian interpretation? Furthermore, it is also useful to consider the accounts of other participants, not just the composer, when attempting to identify utopian music. Again, music is an inherently social endeavor, and the social act of performing or witnessing a live performance can therefore be analyzed through a sociological utopian lens. While the work itself may possess perceivably utopian qualities, outside primary sources such as program notes, letters, interviews, and other writings confirm the “utopian-ness” of a musical work. I therefore take great pains in considering both closed analyses as well as historical context when discussing Pauline Oliveros and her music.

Before diving into Oliveros, it is also important address to the inherent impossibility of utopias. Indeed, utopian visions are purposefully unrealistic and larger-than-life. Many may ask what the point is, then, in studying them. As this thesis will hopefully demonstrate, utopias are not simply thought experiments or social blueprints for us to follow. Studying utopias is not simply a matter of proving their sustainability in the real world, nor is it about exalting them as
truly ideal models. Instead, utopias give us the opportunity to explore human attitudes towards their world. Utopias examine humankind’s penchant for idealism, as well as its penchant for trying to improve the world. While utopianism is undeniably influential in the world of politics and social organization, it also has played a profound role in the development of art. By viewing a musical artwork through a utopian lens, we not only gain a greater understanding of the individual artist, but also the zeitgeist surrounding her and the potential impact her work might have in coming generations. While true utopia may be impossibly distant from reality, utopian dreaming deeply impacts reality.

The Utopian Oliveros

In an attempt to demonstrate the worth of utopian music and its vital role in utopian dreaming, this thesis explores the philosophy and music of one particular composer, Pauline Oliveros, as a case study. Born in Houston, Texas, 1932, Oliveros has become one of the most important and influential composers of the 20th century. Not only was she one of modern music’s most recognized female composers, she also played an important role in developing electronic music. Early in her career, she helped found the San Francisco Tape Music Center, where she and other composers like Morton Subotnick, Terry Riley, William Maginnis, and Steve Reich became prime figures in the West Coast art music community. When the center moved to Mills College and became the Center for Contemporary Music, she was its first director. From 1967 to 1981, she taught at the University of California, San Diego. It was during this time when she fine-tuned her musical philosophy of Deep Listening, a compositional and performance practice involving improvisation, meditation, and intense listening to the surrounding world. She ended her tenure at UCSD to pursue a quieter and more independent existence in upstate New York, where she continued to compose and develop her Deep Listening practice. Until her death in
November 2016, she presided over the Center for Deep Listening at Rensselaer (formerly the Deep Listening Institute) and performed regularly. Oliveros is a suitable choice for a study in utopian music because she believed her work could provide a positive “pathway to the future.”

This thesis discusses several ways in which Oliveros paved this pathway and expressed her utopian optimism. To understand her place within the broader context of utopian thought, it is necessary to form a basic understanding of utopian thought at large: its history, its terminology, and its various approaches. Therefore, I devote Chapter 1 to establishing a working list of terms and concepts, which will then be applied to Oliveros and her music. This chapter contains a short history of utopian thought, placing emphasis on postmodern utopian ideas. It also outlines three distinct utopian models: end-state, anarchical, and method utopianism. For the remainder of the thesis, I attempt to apply all three models to Oliveros’s oeuvre. Ultimately, I argue that Oliveros is primarily a method utopian, more interested in process and everyday application than in a prescriptive blueprint or anarchical revolution.

Chapter 2 discusses Oliveros’s music through an anarchical utopian lens. This chapter contains an analysis of two pieces by Oliveros: Anarchy Waltz and Link, which was later changed to Bonn Feier. While both these pieces possess anarchistic elements, they must be judged alongside other anarchical musical works written around the same time. Therefore, I also compare Oliveros with another utopian composer, John Cage. Indeed, Link/Bonn Feier and Cage’s Musicircus are interesting points of comparison, and they reveal the differences in the two composers’ anarchical approaches.

Chapter 3 addresses the utopian aspects found in Oliveros’s Center for Deep Listening, which continues to operate today. This chapter examines the procedures, hierarchies, goals, and standards of the Center, all of which help situate the Center among other intentional utopian
communities. It also discusses how the Center exemplifies not only a method utopia, but an “everyday utopia,” as outlined by Davinia Cooper. Additionally, this chapter addresses some of the problems and insufficiencies present within the Center, preventing it from becoming an ideal utopian community. It contains content from a personal interview I conducted with Tomie Hahn, the current director for the Center for Deep Listening at Rensselaer.

The final chapter discusses Oliveros’s electronic music and published writings, which can be viewed as forms of science fiction utopian dreaming. Several of Oliveros’s published essays focus on the future of technology. Indeed, Oliveros believed in a future in which artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and space travel all play a part in expanding human consciousness and improving societal relationships. Oliveros was heavily inspired by computer scientist Ray Kurzweil, but adds an extra utopian element to his otherwise non-utopian predictions. Her electronic musical works reflect this interest in a better future; for example, Oliveros’s Electronic Instrument System (EIS) is an example of science fiction utopia put into practice through its use of improvisation and its use of AI technology.

Goals of this Thesis

This thesis serves three main purposes. First, it will contribute a new perspective to current conversations about Pauline Oliveros and her music. While several of her works frequently appear in both writings and performances, and are known by many in detail, many of her works, though important, useful, and inspiring, have fallen by the wayside. This study will shed light on some of these overlooked pieces, as well as provide new context and analysis for pieces which are already well discussed in the musicological community. This thesis may help answer questions surrounding Oliveros’s intent and application of these pieces, as well as provide possible new interpretations. With her recent death, many question what the future holds for
Oliveros’s work and practices. This thesis discusses how her work may continue to be valued in coming years, and how the Center for Deep Listening will continue to operate without her to lead it. It will also argue the importance and impact of utopian music. Through this thesis, readers will better understand how utopian music – especially modern, experimental utopian music – may make the world a better place. I argue that the efforts of experimental utopian performers and composers like Oliveros have the capacity to not only symbolize or embody social justice, but actually effect change. Oliveros is a shining example of this principle.

Above all, this thesis is designed to merge utopian philosophy with musical practice. Since the relationship between music and utopian theory is still an emerging topic in musicological and utopian studies, I aim to prove the interrelation of music and utopian dreaming through one example, in hopes that others might find similar relationships in other musical examples. There are, indeed, many composers throughout history like Oliveros, who are influenced by utopian philosophies. As we come to know these artists as utopians, we may find the value in utopian dreaming, and perhaps better acknowledge how it brings about positive changes in society, even if in small ways, resulting in a “communal quest for peace.”

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1 Examples include Claude Nicholas Ledoux’s town of Chaux, Charles Fourier’s Phalanstere, and Frank Lloyd Wright’s Broadacre City.
4 Pauline Oliveros, *Sounding the Margins*, xii.
CHAPTER 1:  
An Overview of Utopian Models  

The term *utopia* originated in Thomas More’s Latin novel of the same name, written in 1516. The concept of *utopia*, however, was not new in 1516; paradisiacal notions have persisted across cultures and time. “The age of gold, the state of nature, the Garden of Eden,” says Judith Shklar, “these dreams are as old as mankind itself.”¹ In the modern day, marketers use the word to advertise everything from luxury homes to coffee houses to salons.² The concept of utopia has also captured the imaginations of artists throughout the world. Utopia appears in the poetry of Homer, the *Republic* of Plato, Hieronymus Bosch’s *Garden of Earthly Delights*, Disney’s Magic Kingdom, and Todd Rundgren’s 70s progressive rock. Just last year, Björk used the term as the title for her ninth studio album. Indeed, utopian idealism is one of humankind’s most entrenched archetypes.

To create the term, More conflated the Latin terms *outopos* (no place) and *eutopos* (good place) to describe a fictional island society.³ Today, the term *utopia* formally describes a community that is not only good, but non-existent – an impossibly perfect world. Ruth Levitas, a leading scholar on postmodern utopian thought, describes the traditional definition of the term *utopia* as “an imagined perfect society or wishfully constructed place which does not and cannot exist.”⁴ Other writers frame utopia in a similar fashion. Joyce Oramel Hertzler, as another example, begins her discussion of utopias by describing them simply as “imaginary ideal societies.”⁵ However, in the centuries that have passed since More first coined the term, scholarly definitions of utopia have become more nuanced and varied. Lyman Tower Sargent, for example, defines utopia as “a non-existent society described in considerable detail.” His utopia is nothing more than a theoretically fleshed-out alternate society – not necessarily a good one.⁶ Alex Macdonald, on the other hand, states that the word *utopia* describes “an imaginary
commonwealth” which is merely better than the real world – not necessarily perfect. As a final example, Darko Suvin sees utopia as simply a response to Plato’s question, “What is the best form of organization for a community and how can a person best arrange his life?” These definitions, though very different, concern not only what is desirable for human beings, but also what is physically and socially possible.

Scholarly definitions of utopia deal with not only the nature of the utopian community itself, but also with the attitudes of its citizens. Hertzler claims that there exists behind every utopian community a “utopian spirit, that is, the feeling that society is capable of improvement and can be made over to realize a rational ideal.” Utopianism, under this definition, describes the “conception” of social improvement, whether in abstract narratives or real-world application. Levitas sees utopia not simply as a projection of a perfect world, but as “a particular mode of thinking about the ideal society.” Marlene Barr and Nicholas Smith agree, stating that “to conceive of utopia…is from the outset to reconstruct human culture.” The utopian outlook argues that the future could “transcend the present,” not simply changing surface-level aspects of society, but replacing entire approaches to living wholesale.

Utopians share an optimistic and idealistic attitude in the face of apathy and cynicism. Instead of dwelling on problems, they dare to dream of positive solutions, and have “visions of hope” which stand in stark contrast to the world around them. Utopianism, therefore, not only entails refusing to accept the status quo and protesting current social injustices. It also involves providing detailed alternative patterns through which society may reach its best potential. At its heart, utopianism is idealistic and argumentative, but also inherently hopeful.

Ernst Bloch, one of the world’s leading writers on utopian theory, believed that the utopian spirit inherently exists within all human beings. In his 3-volume treatise The Principle of
Hope (1954), Bloch argues that utopianism can be seen across cultures. He argues that all humans enter life with a sense of yearning – something he calls Heimat (“homeland”). Bloch describes Heimat as “the expression of a desire for a settled resolution of [an] alienated condition… It is a quest for wholeness, for being at home in the world.” Block speculates that this yearning may come from the inevitable confrontation that human beings have with death. Erin McKenna also argues that sentient beings naturally imagine different futures as a way to interpret the present and to guide it. Utopianism could therefore be a symptom of humanity’s adaptive nature, which has helped the race survive. Whatever the biological or psychological reasons for its existence, it is this yearning which causes humans to pursue new, better paths and to dream of new, better worlds.

The End-State Utopian Model

Although Bloch argues that utopia resides in any creative media (including, as this thesis will reveal, music), the study of “traditional” Western utopias begins with literature, specifically the literary novel. Utopian novelists attempt to present a world like More’s: a perfect, unattainable world. In most cases, poverty, war, violence, crime, and other destructive, unpleasant, or otherwise negative forces do not exist in a utopian society. George Kateb describes utopian peace in the following way:

Imagine a society in which all conflicts of conscience and conflicts of interest were abolished, a society in which all the obstacles to a decent life for all men have been removed, all the hindrances hindered, a society in which the resourcefulness of modern technology was put in the unfettered service of lessening labor and increasing and enriching leisure, a society in which the advances in biological and psychological science were used to correct the work of
nature and improve the species, a society in which peace, abundance, and virtue
are permanently and universally obtained. Such a society answers to the
traditional ends of utopianism…. Such a society…amplifies and elevates those
things which utopianism, in its vision of perfection, has always stood for.20

The visions presented in traditional utopian novels revolve around the structural form of the
society. They usually address the economic, political, and social systems which make up the
backbones of their worlds, as well as the habits, characteristics, and in some cases physical
features of the people who live within those systems.21 This focus on structure and system is an
important defining feature of the utopian novel, distinguishing utopia from other idealistic
visions. Unlike other models, such as Millennials and perfect moral commonwealths, utopias
do not depend on supernatural outside forces (divine or magical) to maintain their perfection.22
Utopias embody human logic and industry, for within them, humans control their environment
perfectly. Thus, utopias are uniquely replicable across time and space and especially pragmatic
in their approach to solving problems.

However, despite this interest in logic, traditional utopian novelists always present their
worlds with the understanding that such structures are fictional and cannot exist under current
conditions.23 For example, Edward Bellamy describes his own utopian musings in his novel
Looking Backward (1888) as “mere literary fantasy, a fairy tale of social felicity” and “a cloud-
apalace for an ideal humanity.”24 At the outset of writing, Bellamy did not wish to incite social
reform, or even to contribute to the serious discussion of such reform. His utopia hung “in mid-
air far out of reach of the sordid and material world of the present.”25 Indeed, many traditional
utopian writings follow escapist tendencies; they are simply dreams through which readers may
vicariously experience ideal peace and happiness. Whether they inspire actual change does not interest the traditional utopian writer.

Historical determinism heavily influences traditional modes of utopian thinking. Using rational logic, these utopias prescribe final aims which eventually lead to mankind’s predetermined destiny, presumably without fail. In this traditional model, the future lies outside of human control. Human decision may accelerate or decelerate mankind along this trajectory, but destiny and human nature have already plotted the final path that the future will inevitably follow. Traditional utopians optimistically assume that mankind is inherently predestined for an absolute good, that such an absolute good exists, and that this good can be identified and achieved by human action. This rational form of utopian dreaming likely emerged with both Enlightenment doctrine (based on logic and reason) and scientific method. Much like a scientific experiment, these utopian communities rely on a rational plan or blueprint.

Traditional utopias focus on the desired final state rather than on the process of change. For example, Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* tells the story of a character who, under hypnotic influence, slept for 100 years, awaking into a utopian future. As with many classical utopian novels, the protagonist of *Looking Backward* has happened upon an already perfect society, isolated from corrupt outside forces. The discourses in *Looking Backward* exclusively focus on describing his new paradise: the universal wages, the strong work ethic, the gender equality, etc. It does not explain how the world became what it was. By his own admission, Bellamy deliberately avoided addressing the process by which such a world could come to exist. If *Looking Backward* were to focus on the means of the utopia’s creation, “the result would have been largely to concentrate attention and criticism” upon those processes. He rather desired “to
Like other traditional utopians, Bellamy did not take an interest in presenting the *how* of utopia. Instead, he presented the *what* and the *why*.

Again, these are *traditional* utopian models. Erin McKenna calls these deterministic approaches to utopia “end-state” models. Other examples of end-state utopias besides Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* include Plato’s *Republic* (around 380 BC), Sheri S. Tepper’s *The Gate to Women’s Country* (1988), Marion Zimmer Bradley’s *The Ruins of Isis* (1978), Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* (1915), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile* (1762). It’s even seen in the broad theoretical visions of Marx. These utopian novels come from a variety of time periods and contain a variety of agendas and possible utopian outcomes. Some (including those of Tepper and Gilman) are even feminist. However, they all possess a positivistic, deterministic viewpoint and a detailed, unwavering blueprint for achieving perfection. They share an end-state interest in results, not processes.

Over the past century and a half, new models of utopia have appeared in response to the end-state model. In her book *The Task of Utopia*, McKenna explains how the end-state utopia is, in fact, one of three distinct utopian frameworks existent in the current age. The other two models, the anarchist model and the method model, not only allow for broader definitions of the word *utopia*, but also allow for pluralistic viewpoints within utopian dreaming. They will be useful in our discussion of Pauline Oliveros.

**New Utopian Models**

For as long as end-state utopian visions have existed, anti-utopians have been unyieldingly identifying the “problems of perfection” which prevent such utopias from existing in reality. Anti-utopian criticism came to a head at the turn of the century. At this point in history, the end-state model was the only accepted model for utopian visioning. Therefore, critics
of the end-state utopia were critics of utopia altogether. These critics often argued against (end-
state) utopias by asserting that, at their very worst, utopian visions may lead to authoritarian and
totalitarian regimes, the likes of which were seen in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia.
Scholarly communities generally agreed with this claim during the bulk of the twentieth century,
especially in the aftermath of the World Wars. According to Jacoby, liberal consensus
“successfully established a rough equivalence of utopianism and totalitarianism,” which was the opposite of liberal pluralism. The static, unwavering moral politics that drove powerful despots to commit terrible acts on humanity led many to associate utopian visions with harrowing nightmares. This attitude led to the rise of the dystopian novel – one of the most iconic being George Orwell’s 1984 – which act as cautionary tales against these horrific perversions of utopian perfectionism. Thus, “damning totalitarianism meant damning utopianism.”

But even without the threat of authoritarian dystopia, many have stressed the fruitlessness and unattainability of utopia, dubbing it a waste of time. As Wordsworth said, “Not in Utopia… / But in the very world which is the world / Of all of us… / We find our happiness, or not at all.” To Wordsworth, the belief that a better world can be obtained now should drive us to change. We should not rely on vain utopian fantasies.

Postmodern analysts also argue that traditional modes of utopian thinking seek to homogenize a population, limiting and narrowing diversity. Jacoby argued that utopianism and universality are inseparably connected. Therefore, utopia “withers” under the flag of pluralism. “Those who celebrate differences and discredit universals cannot think beyond the limited possibilities tossed up by history,” he states. Therefore, according to Jacoby, utopianism could not survive the post-modern movement. McKenna also argues that utopianism, at least end-state utopianism, has limited possibilities for the modern human experience. “Because future
possibilities are constrained by what is and had been,” she argues, “narrowing the present narrows the future.” Loss of individuality plagues many of these end-state utopian and dystopian models. Freedom from takes priority over the freedom to, and the group (the state) takes priority over the individual. Individual attributes could threaten the new order and as corrupting influences.

This kind of society could also stunt the growth of its inhabitants. In this end-state utopia, individuals may only flourish within approved limits of excellence. This may inhibit the growth of positive human traits such as courage. Perhaps such an idealized world could lead to the end of progress, of hope, of dreaming. It may mean the end of creativity and discovery. Elisabeth Hansot concluded that “once utopia is achieved, the problem of how man is to find new enterprises and purposes is left unresolved.” Why create something new if the world is already perfect? This leads to boredom, loss of heroes, loss of motivation, and mediocrity. If all suffering and hardship disappear, life may lose meaning. “In a finished world,” John Dewey stated, “sleep and waking could not be distinguished.” Perhaps an integral part of human happiness is, as stated by Aldous Huxley in Brave New World, “the right to be unhappy”? Perhaps opposition is needed for certain characteristics to be nurtured and fostered? In the words of Kateb, “Utopia does not allow the heights and depths of human possibility to be reached.” Hansot agrees, stating that worlds with no problems have “no purposes or goals beyond [their] own satisfaction,” despite their authors’ best efforts to make them dynamic or interesting. Ironically, in an end-state utopia, there must be an end to utopian dreaming.

In short, so long as people continued to embrace end-state utopia, utopianism had the potential to be dangerous and undesirable. Amidst these criticisms, many still refused to give up their identity as utopians. As distrust of utopianism grew, some scholars discovered that most
of these arguments did not attack utopianism itself, but rather its current manifestation. One can be against traditional utopian forms, but still identify as a utopian. Since the 1970s, many have argued that utopian dreaming itself does not cause totalitarianism, but rather the particular end-state approach to utopian world-building. The utopian perspective itself has merit and should be encouraged, but to be beneficial, it must be altered in its goals and methodology. Such criticisms of traditional utopias, rather than utopias in general, came to a head in the wake of 20th century postmodernism.

Postmodern utopians view the end-state notions of determinism and universality as highly problematic. Even before postmodernism, anti-utopians like Karl Popper claimed that utopian visions, up until the two world wars, too often relied on deterministic engineering.58 Once feminist ideologies appeared alongside the postmodern movement, many more concluded that the universalist, “God’s-eye” view of humankind promotes patriarchal oppression.59 They did, however agree with Popper that historical determinism removes responsibility and accountability from human beings. McKenna (a feminist utopian) argues that traditional utopians fall prey to the “Myth of Destiny,” the supposition that people do not create their own fate. McKenna says, “as long as the fatalistic view has a hold, people will consider themselves exempt from responsibility, and so without reason to resist, promote, or examine society’s organization and functioning.” This, she argues, is the main source for the totalitarian nightmares present in the real world and in dystopian novels. Since human society is not as clean-cut and predictable as most empirical experiments, society cannot be engineered into perfection without uncontrolled and oppressive dictatorship.60 Are acts against humanity worth the cost of maintaining perfection?61 Postmodern utopians resoundingly say “No.”
Even among self-identified postmodern utopians, impossible perfection presents problems because it provides impetus for those in power to impose an “engineered perfection” on society, which can stifle human rights. It seeks control of the future – over nature, society, and individuals – to the point of making undue assumptions, micromanaging, and neglecting diversity. The very question of how to define and quantify perfection is, therefore, questioned by modern utopians. Some even outright reject the model of human perfectibility. Instead, they concern themselves more with the utopian question: “What is desirable for human existence?” This question, of course, cannot be definitively answered.

Once it is decided what perfection is, how do we maintain it? Not, postmodernists argue, by forestalling change. According to Ralf Dahrendorf, most traditional utopian (and dystopian) narratives take place in a world where change is absent. Once “perfection” is achieved, the world has reached its ideal and stays that way, usually with the help of human activity. Many dystopian narratives describe the unspeakable measures to which governments may turn (from eugenics to “Thought Police” to brainwashing) to maintain the status quo. But, in the words of McKenna, “change cannot be forestalled indefinitely.” And with that change, much can go wrong. Outside forces will inevitably take their toll, and internal disruptions will make their way to the surface. Ursula LeGuin’s metaphor from her novel Always Coming Home fits well:

“...the sickness of Man is like the mutating viruses and the toxins; there will always be some form of it about, or brought in from elsewhere by people moving and traveling, and there will always be the risk of infection... It is a sickness of our being human, a fearful one.”

Some of the symptoms of this “sickness,” McKenna argues, cannot be seen and could inflict unimaginable destruction; human understanding, she claims, is too limited to perceive these
consequences.\textsuperscript{67} For example, citizens of a failed utopia might be unprepared and unequipped to withstand the reactionary forces which inevitably arise in the aftermath of society’s destruction.\textsuperscript{68} Perhaps, then, the attempt to perfect the world is futile at best, dangerous at worst.

Postmodern commentators also claim that traditional utopias do not provide enough information regarding the \textit{means} by which a perfect world can be obtained.\textsuperscript{69} In response to Bellamy, for example, Benjamin Tucker believed that \textit{Looking Backward}’s greatest weakness was its “absence of method by which so complete a change was effected.” This is the inevitable “weakness of all the plans that have for their object the sudden transformation of one state of civilization to that of another so characteristic of the sentimental reformer today.”\textsuperscript{70} McKenna, too, argues that end-state utopians overly preoccupy themselves with ends, remaining indifferent to means.\textsuperscript{71} Many find traditional utopias overly sentimental and naïve. They may, for instance, ignore the reality of scarce resources, placing their utopia in a fictional world with abundant food, energy, and space.\textsuperscript{72} This absence of want obviously has an impact on the utopia’s public; no want means no source for dissent and no suffering. Such an impact cannot carry over into real-world situations.

In the end, all of the problems accompanying an end-state utopia may cause readers of utopian narratives to feel uncomfortable and unsatisfied.\textsuperscript{73} For a utopia to work in a changing world, it cannot remain static. Utopian definitions, therefore, cannot remain static either.\textsuperscript{74} This leads us to McKenna’s second and third models of utopian thinking: anarchist and method utopias.

\textbf{Anarchist Utopian Models}

Many find the anarchist utopian model an appealing alternative to the end-state utopia.\textsuperscript{75} This model asserts that individuals can be trusted to govern themselves without any hierarchical
governmental force. Unlike traditional utopias which depend on the state, an anarchistic utopia views the individual agent as the heart of society. The community reduces decision-making on a group level to as little as possible, so that individuals can make most decisions on their own. Therefore, society and the individual need not be in conflict. If people are left free, rationalism will rule general societal patterns while also meeting individual desires. Only when individuals are given political power do they become a real threat to social welfare. Anarchists, therefore, trust people and their ability to make good decisions and can thus easily wear the utopian label.

Unlike end-state utopian models, which often depend on coercion and control, anarchist utopian societies instead leave individuals free to choose their own paths. Therefore, individuals must take full responsibility for their community and activity within it. When individual members of an anarchist utopian community understand that their freedom directly links to others’ freedom, they more likely hold themselves accountable for ensuring everyone’s freedom – no extra coercion needed. Also unlike end-state models, the anarchist utopia is fluid, with no predictable, iron-clad “perfect way” to run things. Instead, it acts as an “ongoing experiment.” Anarchistic utopias embrace change. “A free society cannot be static,” says Paul Berman. “It must form a fluid organism, a natural unity that left unhampered, freely adjusts and grows in the face of new requirements and aspirations.” Anarchist utopian models, therefore, preoccupy themselves with the present, focusing mainly on current problems and how to fix them. David Thoreau Wieck argues that anarchists look “squarely at the time and place they live in…deciding what can be done now to forward their goal.” This strongly differs from end-state utopias, which disregard current social climates in favor of engineering a projected ideal future at any cost.
While critics claim that anarchy and chaos are synonymous, anarchists believe that there must necessarily be order and structure within a perfectly functioning anarchistic community. “The anarchist thus no more advocates chaos than does the strictest authoritarian,” says Berman, “but the anarchist seeks order in diversity and agreement rather than in uniformity and control.” But unlike authoritarian models in which an overarching governmental force controls its citizens, the anarchist model relies heavily on the self-control of its people. Members cannot depend on a government body to protect their freedoms; local assembly is the sole venue for protecting rights. Usually, group actions depend upon consensus among citizens, thus inviting a “full and direct democracy.” Thus, every member of the community must be highly active in decision making. Indeed, active political participation among all citizens is crucial for an anarchist utopia to work. The people hold power and authority on a voluntary and consensual basis. Some may choose to subordinate themselves by not participating, but they then must accept the consequences that come when others make decisions that go against their interests. Anarchies, as one might expect, work best in smaller communities, where easy interaction exists between individuals and there is enough time for everyone to voice their opinion.

Anarchistic utopianism directly addresses and solves the problems seen in end-state utopias. There is no longer any pressure to build a perfect model or come up with final solutions. It embraces the fact that human beings differ. It promotes freedom, cooperation, and equality of opportunity, and targets the specific needs of a people. It also abolishes the perilous hierarchies of master/slave, rich/poor, and capitalist/proletarian. But despite these benefits, the anarchistic model also comes with its own problems. McKenna spells out many of these problems in The Task of Utopia. She argues that anarchistic utopian models improve upon end-state models, but are still difficult to begin and to maintain. These “difficulties of revolution, demands of freedom,
and the dubious promise of diversity” that accompany anarchistic movements will be explored further in Chapter 2.\textsuperscript{89}

While anarchism has become a highly politicized topic in recent years, its core principles are highly favored among many utopian thinkers. Of course, gaining support for a wide-reaching anarchist cause is far easier said than done in the current American social climate. But in dealing with abstract utopianism, many find the anarchistic model inspiring and useful. Several anarchist utopian novels have appeared in recent years, including Marge Piercy’s \textit{Woman on the Edge of Time}. This novel, along with other aspects of anarchistic utopias, will also appear as points of discussion in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

Method (or Process) Utopian Models

When one considers some of the problematic aspects of anarchy – particularly its violent revolutionary beginnings as well as the pressures it puts on its citizens – many utopians wish for a happy medium between the authoritarian end-state utopia and the radical anarchist one. Following the upsurge of feminist utopian writings in the 1960s and 1970s, a third ideal appeared: the method utopian model. Ruth Levitas – both a utopian herself as well as a scholar of utopian theory – is credited for outlining and exploring the theories behind this model. She describes it in detail in two of her books, \textit{The Concept of Utopia} and \textit{Utopia as Method}. In \textit{The Task of Utopia}, McKenna, too, discusses the method model in detail, linking it to feminism and pragmatism. Both Levitas and McKenna believe that method utopianism supplies a “more open definition of utopia as the expression of desire for a better way of living and being.”\textsuperscript{90} This version of utopia does not require violent anarchistic rejection of the state. Rather, it requires fluid, open exchange between government and individuals through process and critique.
Method utopian theory began, Levitas argues, in the late ‘60s within feminist novels. Unlike pre-World-War utopian “classics,” the utopias of second-wave feminism focused on human characters rather than on “iconic” discourses concerning the workings of utopian worlds. These novels also emphasized human agency and how individuals could shape their environment to meet utopian goals. They thus acknowledged the very real possibility of dystopia, and believed the trajectory of humanity depended upon human actions, which are not always good. Consequently, many of these novels involve conflict between utopian societies and surrounding non-utopian ones.

Levitas used these narratives to develop a new utopian model, which emphasizes process and methodology rather than prescribing an end state. To understand modern utopian theories, Levitas argues, one must understand utopia as a method rather than a goal. She states:

Utopian thinking in this sense is not about devising and imposing a blueprint. Rather, it entails holistic thinking about the connections between economic, social, existential and ecological processes in an integrated way. We can then develop alternative possible scenarios for the future and open these up to the public debate and democratic decision.

This approach is constructive rather than hermeneutic, analytic rather than descriptive, and focused on starting points rather than final ends.

Method utopianism rejects end-state universals and accepts the “plurality of modes of being human.” Rather than making homogeneity an end goal, difference – “a starting-point for reflection and action” – comes first. Method utopianism is therefore non-binary; instead of only one version of utopia or dystopia, there exists a plurality of utopias and dystopias, as well as things in between. This is not surprisingly similar to postmodern feminist theory. Both feminists
and method utopians reject “monistic, universalistic” viewpoints, favoring instead a more
dynamic, pluralistic view of society’s nature and needs. 98 In short, “claims to universality are
problematic; final solutions are not acceptable.”99 This makes method utopias far more
embracing of individual diversity. Many method utopian authors particularly focus on
differences in gender expression, race, sexuality, and language; the possibilities for diversity are
endless. Tobin Siebers term “heterotopia” also applies here, “where nothing is left out of the
grand mix.”100 In a method utopia, expression of difference is not only a right; it is, in fact,
necessary for society to progress.101

Method utopianism therefore accommodates all expressions of the “existential” utopian
quest, regardless of medium. 102 According to Levitas, method utopianism is not a complete
paradigm, but simply “the expression of the desire for a better way of being,” allowing for its
“form, function and content to change over time.”103 Such an approach could allow for more
“fragmentary, fleeting, elusive” expressions of utopian dreaming.104 It could also accommodate
various forms of cultural expression, not limiting itself to political, economic, or literary
theory.105 Music, for example, can play a role in utopian expression through the method lens.106

Levitas often calls these method-based, process-oriented utopias “critical utopias.”107
Indeed, method utopias openly explore and consider a “range of possible human conditions” and
are aware of their own flaws.108 In the words of McKenna, “we must continually re-evaluate
both the end-in-view being sought and the methods being employed. If either fails to be
satisfactory… new ends-in-view must be sought or the methods of achievement altered.”109
Critical utopians both assess their own theories as well as critique the concept of utopia itself
through deconstruction. They question term utopia itself and “[strip it] from its pretensions
toward neutrality and universalism.”110 Method utopians question aspects of utopian theory
which have been taken for granted for centuries: namely, that utopias must be perfect, isolated, or impossible. It follows, then, that method utopianism depends on critical freedom. There must always be room for speculation from all levels of society, and all have a right to critique. Thus, democracy is vital; all expressions and critiques must be considered to ensure optimum freedom in facing the future.

In response to these critiques, the method utopia is also subject to change and transformation. Along with “method utopia” and “critical utopia,” Levitas also uses the phrase “process model” to describe this third model for ideal societies. This term fits because, unlike end-state advocates, method utopians reject the notion of stasis. Like the anarchist model, the method model involves a “society engaged in continuous planning,” where “growth itself is the only moral ‘end.’” The assumption, then, is that method utopias are not entirely perfect, because perfection prohibits progress and change. Indeed, McKenna criticizes the perfectionism (as opposed to simply idealism) found in the works of Bellamy, Hertzler, and Wells, calling them “pseudo-utopias” because they fail to include the notion of progress. When one looks to the patterns and mistakes of the past, the chaos of trial-and-error becomes an educated hypothesis, as seen in the scientific method, which is more likely to succeed than blindly following arbitrary solutions.

Thus, in a method utopia, human beings are responsible for implementing positive changes within their own society. While the end-state model betrays scientific inquiry by leaving humans passive in their journey towards destiny and forcing desired results, the method model fully embraces real-world testing and the indefinite outcomes of those tests. In the words of McKenna:
The process model of utopia does not offer castles in the air, it does not rely on technology to solve all our problems, it does not allow people to sit passively, hoping for their dreams to materialize. The process model seeks to actively engage people in the task of making the future, accepting problems and conflicts as challenges to be met with critical reflection and intelligent action.\textsuperscript{117} 

This is not unlike the anarchistic utopian model. Indeed, both method and anarchistic models demand active political participation from its citizens. Since the future is not set in stone, the people hold the responsibility for creating a positive future. Laissez-faire attitudes are unacceptable; to enact true change, members of a method utopia must have an active understanding of society’s habits, customs, and institutions through sociological, psychological, and empirical study. Even if utopia cannot exist overnight, action must be taken now to ensure a better future. If we cannot do everything, we must do as much as we can.\textsuperscript{118} 

However, method utopias differ from anarchism in several ways. First, they reject the violence and extremity seen in anarchistic models.\textsuperscript{119} The method model involves slower, more gradual change within a society rather than abrupt and violent overthrow. It’s about \textit{evolution} rather than \textit{revolution}.\textsuperscript{120} Radical revolution is not realistic; one cannot immediately remove the world’s problems without creating chaotic power vacuums and vulnerable populations.\textsuperscript{121} Instead, through gradual transformation, one can redirect the bad parts of society and adapt them for new purposes.\textsuperscript{122} Rather than demand a complete erasure of dystopian forces, method utopians prefer to “push [a] principle a little further” within the practical limits.\textsuperscript{123} Furthermore, rather than completely abolishing past structures, method utopians desire to learn from the past. 

Method utopias possess a deep sense of \textit{community}, where people freely and actively seek to better relationships between individuals and subgroups.\textsuperscript{124} Like anarchies, method
utopian communities best operate on a local level with smaller groups. But this is not simply because small groups assemble easily and have fewer voices; rather, regular contact among community members leads to more empathy and unity in purpose. This interest in creating empathetic bonds is unique to method utopias, and will be explored further in Chapter 2.

Finally, method utopianism is pragmatic, grounded on real-world consequences rather than abstract, imagined possibilities. While end-state readings of utopia, with their unattainable conditions, can help us push forward, their sheer unattainability makes them unrelatable and static. Rather than taking eventual outcomes for granted, method utopianism invites us to consider how present real-world actions may affect the future. Thus, method utopianism encourages activism and change in the here and now. Bloch himself strongly distinguished between a more theoretical, abstract utopia and the concrete utopia (or utopias) which may follow. According to Levitas, this movement from speculation to praxis, from “purely fantastic to the genuinely possible,” should be viewed as a process rather than a classification — a method rather than an end-state.

While the traditional viewpoint of utopia applies almost solely to fictional works of literature (and, more broadly, art in general), many have set out to put these utopian principles into real-world practice. In America alone, thousands of intentional communities, grassroots movements, and political activist groups have appeared throughout history, advocating for a better world and presenting alternative lifestyles. Although most intentional communities eventually fail in their grand utopian goals, it is still important to consider them in discussions about utopia as a practice. These groups hope to answer Wordsworth’s call and build utopia now, despite the dystopian forces which exist throughout the mainstream world. Furthermore, they do it from the bottom up, rather than waiting on institutions to promote their utopian dreams. Most
everyday utopias therefore fall into the anarchist or method utopian model, mainly because they lack the resources or mainstream government support to get away with a more forceful end-state approach.

The method model works particularly well for describing many everyday utopias because of its interest in building community slowly among differing groups of people. In *Everyday Utopias: The Conceptual Life of Promising Spaces*, Davina Cooper argues that these real-world applications of utopian principles are experimental in nature, and therefore based on the method utopian approach outlined by Levitas. I will discuss everyday utopias further within the context of Pauline Oliveros in Chapter 3.

Some may argue that these imperfect visions, broad definitions, and everyday utopias adopted by method utopias are not truly utopian. However, Moylan argues that they indeed possess the hopeful utopian spirit: “These texts reject utopia as blueprint while preserving it as dream.” These critical utopias provide the arc of “transformation and redemption” which 20th century dystopian narratives lack. McKenna states that method utopian visions “can inspire and help people make changes” – a common condition for utopianism among all forms, not just end-state ones. They still have goals and cumulations, just now with dynamic contrasts as well as stability. Instead, “hope for a better world remains, but not in grand visions of change such as end-state and anarchist visions. Rather, hope remains in embracing a process of continual experimentation and adaptation.”

This has led many to believe that method utopias act as the saviors of utopianism from itself in the 20th century. Because they are self-critical, method utopias can build upon themselves, allowing for further exploration and creativity within an otherwise arcane and irrelevant artistic genre and political theory. In order to deal with the irony of the lack of
utopian dreaming in a utopian world, “there needs to be a constructive model of utopia that realizes problems, proposes solutions, and adjusts to needs rather than focusing solely on the ideal of perfectibility.”

A new model is needed to fit the postmodern era.

Of course, risks exist in the method utopian model as well. D. Harvey takes issue with those who “want to keep their own hands clean of prescription” by keeping the future endlessly open. Harvey argues that such an eternally open viewpoint can inhibit actual real-world changes from being made, for fear that they might be too damning of future possibilities; choosing not to choose is still a choice. Levitas also warns of this, stating that “without a certain element of closure, specificity, commitment and literalism about what would actually be entailed in practice, serious criticism is impossible.”

C. Wright Mills argues that even a method utopian can be too idealistic and trusting of people. For example, small and highly interactive communities run the risk of giving too much power to ignorant and prejudiced people. Even with limited governmental or state pressures, social pressure still exists within any utopian community. But due to the self-reflective nature of method utopias, these issues are constantly under consideration, and method utopians hope to someday overcome these hurdles through creative and democratic solutions.

Utopian Themes and Concepts

Before we delve into how utopianism relates to the music of Pauline Oliveros, it will be useful to understand some of the most prevalent themes and commonalities that exist among utopian narratives, whether they be end-state, method, or anarchsitic. These topics are not isolated to examples in utopian literature, but appear in other art forms, including music.
Alienation and Distance

Even within traditional definitions, utopian visions vary in scope, content, and message to the point where they have few things in common. Things get even more complicated when we expand the definition of utopia to describe postmodern utopian visions and real-world intentional communities. However, some trends do occur across these works. One major commonality is the notion of alienation and distance, which appears in both theoretical and everyday utopias.

Alienation and distance often appear in utopian theory. Levitas argues that it appears in Bloch’s notion of Heimat, Paul Tillich’s Christian utopian discourses on sin, and even Marx’s notion of the proletariat’s separation from ownership and control of their labor. She argues that utopianism occurs on such a universal level because human beings must, at some point, grapple with the separation that comes with death. Separation and alienation play an important role in the human experience, and our desire for wholeness, acceptance, and reconciliation is a human need.

In a literal sense, utopian communities – both fictional and practical – more likely than not appear significantly separate from the rest of the world. More’s Utopia, for example, exists on an island isolated from the world by geography. Since More wrote *Utopia* during the height of the age of exploration, this form of isolation makes sense. In modern times, utopian environments more likely exist on distant planets, rather than on any unexplored or undiscovered part of this well-documented planet. Time, as well as space, can be a useful distancing element; many authors set their utopias in the distant future. Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* and Morris’s *News from Nowhere* both take place around a century after they were written. In today’s unsettling world with an unsettling future, utopian narratives often appear in a future post-
apocalyptic world made desolate by nuclear war, man-made environmental erosion, or other means.\textsuperscript{145}

\textit{Human Needs}

According to McKenna, every utopian narrative must answer the following questions: What is desirable for human existence, and what is possible for human beings to accomplish?\textsuperscript{146} In answering the first question, every utopian narrative explores human desires, and, therefore, human needs.\textsuperscript{147} Several dichotomies appear in utopian works: needs vs. wants, individual vs. community needs, and human needs vs. available resources. McKenna argues that all utopian narratives (fiction and nonfiction) address the “balance of individual and community needs.”\textsuperscript{148} Davis also addresses the “inevitable gap between wants and satisfaction” that exists in human interaction. Utopians often propose possible solutions to the conflicts that may arise from this discrepancy. In Davis’s view, utopia concerns itself less with human perfectibility, but more with how these conflicts of human interests can be resolved.\textsuperscript{149} Utopians answer the second vital question – “what is possible for human beings to accomplish?” – in far more complex and individualized ways. Often, when faced with a current impossibility, technology becomes the solution. Chapter 4 discusses the role of technology in the utopian narrative in greater detail.

\textit{Group vs. Individual}

Utopian writings and projects often address this tension between the group and the individual. John Dewey, for example, argued that his utopian Great Community was under attack by what he called the “Doctrine of Individualism.” While it does have the potential to liberate people from oppressive regimes, he believed that individualism also could prevent people from connecting, and therefore an ideal community could not be formed. A utopia must balance the isolating force of individualism with the integrating force of community. McKenna argues that
this issue may not be as important as some make it out to be. She argues that society and the individual do not essentially oppose each other. She rejects Thomas Hobbes’s view of the impartial, rational, and disconnected individual (likened unto a mushroom in Hobbes’s analogy), and argues instead that no real isolation between the private and the public exists.150 “We might as well make a problem out of the relation of the letters of an alphabet to the alphabet,” she explains. “An alphabet is letters, and ‘society’ is individuals in their connection with one another… Neither authority nor community essentially or necessarily places fetters on individuals.”151 These three arguments – Dewey, Hobbes, and McKenna – prove that group-versus-individual politics vary among utopian narratives.

Human Nature

Utopians tend to have an optimistic view of human nature; they trust that people are mostly good, honest, charitable, adaptive, and cooperative. Critics of utopias have a more negative, pessimistic view, believing human beings to be naturally greedy, suspicious, self-interested, and apathetic. Rousseau captured this negative attitude well when he said, “Under existing conditions a man left to himself from birth would be more of a monster than the rest.”152 End-state utopians often share this pessimistic view, but provide a means by which humankind’s more destructive nature may be changed or controlled. This depends on the notion that human beings are plastic and changeable.153 McKenna argues that we should not take this for granted; humans do not likely change as easily as end-state utopians might believe. Thus, method utopians hope to explore the concepts of change and human nature more fully by exploring the processes of change. Perhaps human nature is completely unpredictable and therefore unknowable, and therefore any plan for a perfect world is fruitless? If such is true, end-state utopias would fall flat, while method utopias – which constantly change to match new contexts
and circumstances – would manage to survive. In any case, all utopians must consider human nature when devising their ideal worlds.154

_Education of Desire_

If, as end-state utopians assume, human beings are changeable, how would one go about changing human nature? Utopias (and dystopias) often explore tools for behavioral change – some more desirable and moral than others. Brute force, coercion, and threatening all change behavior to varying degrees of success.155 Some authors also consider psychological conditioning. Manipulation of this sort can be seen both in the Hate Weeks of Orwell’s dystopian _1984_ as well as in the golden chamber pots of More’s _Utopia_. Eugenics, while a highly immoral tool, also changes human nature and makeup, this time through selective breeding. Using drugs or other inducements – also largely seen as immoral – is another method of changing human behavior. McKenna also suggests that one of the most powerful means of dictating human decision-making comes simply by removing the obstacles that stand in the way of performing virtuous acts – using honey and carrots rather than vinegar and sticks.156

Education stands as one of the most moral options for influencing human behavior. Indeed, it plays a strong role in maintaining and developing utopian qualities in almost all suggested utopian societies.157 At the very least, education is seen as a privilege, but it is more often considered a human right in modern utopian depictions.158 Unlike other options, education self-perpetuates; each generation educates the next in a natural cycle. But a fine line exists between education and indoctrination, and several utopian authors concern themselves with distinguishing the two.

The nature of education varies between utopian narratives. In end-state utopian models, education is a homogenizing force, shaping individuals into what is desirable for the overall
community. In Rousseau’s *Emile*, education begins basically at birth. In contrast, Tepper’s *Gate to Women’s Country* presents a society where formal education begins a few years into childhood (each female citizen learns a specific craft, science, and art). Some societies, such as the 2003 London in William Morris’s *News from Nowhere*, have no institutionalized system of education, but rather encourage learning at one’s own pace throughout life. In this third example, formal academic knowledge and behavioral training become a low priority while applied skills are highly valued. In patriarchal utopias, formal education may be restricted to only men. One can find benefits and risks in any of these examples, depending on the society’s priorities and values. Because education homogenizes a society, it is important that the right values be taught: namely freedom, political responsibility, democracy, empathy, logic, etc.

Although he presented very little in regards to practical, real-world education plans himself, John Dewey argued that education in a method utopia helps create a “critically intelligent” population, equipped to deal with future problems as well as present. Critically intelligent people examine their own desires and ends-in-view. Above all, in a method utopia, education should instill the ability to direct oneself rather than simply mimic behaviors. According to Dewey, self-awareness is key to creating a utopian world, because otherwise human behavior would be completely unpredictable.

But beyond simply educating a utopian population on accepted behaviors and creeds, the utopian also hopes for an “education of desire.” This phrase, introduced by Miguel Abensour and expounded upon by Levitas in *Utopia as Method*, describes the process of teaching “desire to desire, to desire better, to desire more, and above all to desire in a different way.” Utopians, then, hope to “stimulate in readers a desire for a better life and to motivate that desire toward action by conveying a sense that the world is not fixed once and for all.” True utopians
therefore do not simply hope to change behavior, but to change what motivates behaviors to begin with. They value the process of changing human nature, transforming human needs, and enabling people to “work towards an understanding of what is necessary for human fulfilment, a broadening, deepening and raising of aspirations.”\textsuperscript{168} In a society with educated desires, members want to continue in their perfected state, and do so without compulsion from a totalitarian force. Their desire is voluntary, self-monitored, and thus “free.”\textsuperscript{169} Education of desire, then, is the ultimate function of a true utopia, “the lynch-pin of the good society.”\textsuperscript{170}

The education of desire thrives in a method utopian context. If people voluntarily educate their own human nature, then there needn’t be a fixed, dominating force which controls individual imaginations. Instead, it can be “de-territorialized,” unrestricted and imaginative.\textsuperscript{171} It follows that free and voluntary education of desire thrives in a utopian world which challenges blueprints and believes further change is possible. As McKenna explains, this process should promote reflective investigation and a sense of situatedness – a constant reviewing of context and possible adaptions to new contexts.\textsuperscript{172} The true victory, according to method utopians, occurs when humans experience this educative process within themselves. And, of course, this kind of education does not simply appear within the formal classroom, nor does it end with the conclusion of formal societal training. In Chapter 3, this thesis will tackle how musicians might go about educating desire, and how musical experiences might be an effective tool for inviting – but not forcing – human beings in a non-utopian world to start thinking like utopians.

Why Study Utopia?

One main question remains unanswered: Why study utopianism? Indeed, many scholars overlook the subject of utopianism and how it applies in their own fields. For example, literary theorists and political scholars have avoided utopian works on the whole, claiming they belong
to some other realm of scholarship besides their own. Some have dismissed utopian fiction as trivial and irrelevant to actual real-world problems. In the direct aftermath of the two World Wars, anti-utopians like Karl Popper effectively convinced the general scholarly public of the blind hopefulness, wasted resources, and dangerous musings of utopian thinking. But things have changed significantly since the 1960s. Once the newer field of sociology had been established, more scholars have braved the world of utopia, finding it a legitimate way of viewing the world. Historians today are also finally picking up the torch and studying utopian models as relevant critiques to once-current political, economic, and social problems.

But in recent years, more people have come to appreciate utopian visions. Many believe utopianism to be a vital part of the human experience. For instance, Robert Scheher believed that “without the cultivation of alternative perceptions of reality, society would be dead.” Hertzler argues that utopian models act as tools for exploring potential instruments and principles of social progress. Even historical utopias can still be useful. “While there is in them much that is naïve and useless from the point of view of the present, they breathe a spirit and offer suggestions which the socially minded evolutionist and the philosophical historian of to-day cannot overlook.” Additionally, McKenna has the following to say about the relevance of utopianism in today’s world:

Visions of the future have been used both to inspire and warn. A specific version of such future-oriented literature is utopian literature. Utopian thought, by providing visions to which we might aspire, helps us to understand ourselves both as we are and as we might be. Such visions can help us decide what to do now to improve the social order; they also can provide a description of an ideal which
serves to structure what goes on in our present actions. Utopian visions are visions of hope that can challenge us to explore a range of possible human conditions. Levitas also argues that utopianism reminds us not to take the present for granted. It reveals truths, brings human desires into consciousness, and inspires critical thinking and change. Jacoby agrees, stating that “the effort to envision other possibilities of life and society remains urgent and constitutes the essential precondition of doing something.”

Levitas also argues that people revert to utopian imagining more often than they know. She claims that method utopianism in particular “is already in use whenever and wherever people individually or collectively consider what the future might bring and how humans might choose to shape it.” Her wider definition of utopia naturally flourishes in non-traditional utopian settings. Angelika Bammer also argues this point: “As soon as we abandon the conventional concept of utopia,” she says, “we find that the utopian is not dead at all, but very much alive in people’s longing for a more just and human world, their belief that such change is possible, and their willingness to act on the basis of the belief.” At the very least, studying utopian visions helps us understand how people interact with their current worlds. Contrary to the beliefs held by Russell Jacoby, utopianism is indeed alive and well.

Scholars of various fields – including music – can help utopianism achieve its potential through analysis and interpretation of utopian desires. Criticism, as was established by the method utopians, plays an integral part in utopian discussions. Spotting the problems, inequities, and required resources within a specific utopian model is a necessary step in utopian visioning. Even if one does not agree with any utopian model, it is still useful to understand how an individual or group views the world, and how utopian desire may affect policy or culture in years to come.
This thesis depends upon the assumption that utopianism is an important and valid lens through which we can interpret artistic works. It also stands upon the notion that music can be used for utopian expression. The works of Pauline Oliveros act as proof of this point, as her musical compositions and written works rife with utopian messages. Oliveros believed her work could provide a “pathway” to the utopian future. She herself wrote of a future world inspired by technology, listening, and improvisation. Her musical works themselves also behave as models for utopian societies. In exploring her life, works, and writings, I hope to emphasize the importance of music in utopian discourse, and how Oliveros provided a unique approach to postmodern utopian dreaming that is still relevant and useful today.

The ensuing chapters will analyze Oliveros’s works and personal beliefs using all three utopian models: anarchist, end-state, and method. Chapter 2 discusses Oliveros’s relationship with anarchical utopianism, and how her pieces compare to the works of the most famous anarchist composer, John Cage. The following chapter discusses her Deep Listening practice as an everyday method utopia. Finally, Chapter 4 explores Oliveros’s writings. It argues that, while arguably end-state, her essays on sci-fi technology actually play an important role in her method utopian electronic works. This thesis concludes that, through her music, Oliveros exemplified the postmodern utopian attitude.

2 Examples: Utopia Frozen Yogurt and Coffee House in Ellensburg, Washington, the Utopia Nail and Spa in Wisconsin, Utopia Real Estate in La Jolla, California, and UTOPIA Fiber based in Murray, Utah.
See also Alex MacDonald’s Introduction to Bellamy’s Looking Backward (Peterborough, Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2003), 13.
4 Levitas, Utopia as Method, 3.
At one point, MacDonald refers to the utopian novel *Looking Backward* by Edward Bellamy as a form of “social prophecy.” This term might also be useful; it insinuates that utopian authors have optimistic viewpoints about the future and the potential of mankind. See MacDonald, Introduction to *Looking Backward*, 13.


Russell Jacoby, *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), xi. Jacoby’s definition of “utopian spirit” is “a sense that the future could transcend the present.”

McKenna, *Task*, 2. Response to Russell Jacoby’s belief that the utopian spirit has “vanished.”


Levitas, *Utopia as Method*, 17.

Ibid., 12.

McKenna, *Task*, 86.


McKenna, *Task*, 7.

For more information about utopias in relation to other forms of ideal society, see J.C. Davis’s *Utopia and the Ideal Society: A Study of English Utopian Writing 1516-1700* (Cambridge University Press, 1981). The Millennium model of an ideal society, Davis argues, can be seen in the Christian tradition. It involves collective salvation of the faithful through the interference of a supernatural deity (Jesus Christ). Perfect Moral Commonwealths involve a moral transformation every individual within a society, especially its kings and magistrates. Existing social arrangements and political institutions need not change; only the people themselves, through the influence of perfect leaders. The means by which this transformation occurs is not emphasized. Indeed, in examples like Sir Thomas Elyot’s *The Book Named the Governor* (1531) and Thomas Floyd’s *The Picture of a Perfit Commonwealth*, there is far more interest in personal perfection than in the molding of a more perfect society. As individuals perfect themselves, the society as a whole becomes more perfect. Although the Perfect Moral Commonwealth is more secular and humanist in its approach to morals, it still assumes an almost supernatural force being active within each individual, turning them away from vice and towards virtue. Davis describes this model as “naïve” to modern utopians, considering humankind’s “inescapable moral failures” (Davis, 382).

Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 14, 27.


Ibid.

McKenna, *Task*, 17.

Ibid., 18.

Ibid., 17.


It is important to note that McKenna reads *The Gate to Women’s Country* as a possible dystopia or critique of End-state utopias, but Tepper does not make her agenda clear enough to know for sure. McKenna acknowledges this:
“I do not think Tepper herself endorses Women’s Country as an ideal. She pushes to object, along with Stavia, and to see the complexity and ambiguity of the choices people are making. However, since no alternative is provided, this vision does not take us very far. It does succeed in unsettling most readers…. Some begin to suggest that, given the situation, this is what the women had to do. Stavia’s weeping is not seen as a critique, but as acceptance of a hard but necessary reality. Since there is no hint that Stavia plans to change things now that she understands what is going on, I think this is the more likely message that readers will take away. Even using the process model as a metatheory to frame interpretation I worry that this vision reinforces the notion that we need to try to control and manage our world, and the people in it, through some authority.” See McKenna, Task, 163.

32 Discussed in McKenna, Task, 22-23.
34 Ibid., 4.
36 Ibid., 18.
37 Jacoby, The End of Utopia, 43 and McKenna, Task, 18.
39 McKenna, Task, 2.
40 Jacoby, The End of Utopia, 137.
41 McKenna, Task, 18.
42 J.C. Davis, Utopia and the Ideal Society, 388.
43 McKenna, Task, 21-22.
44 Kateb, Utopia and its enemies, 225.
45 McKenna, Task, 24.
46 McKenna, Task, 35.
47 McKenna argues that human beings have a tendency towards hope and change, as much as we’d also like to resist it. It is how we imagine and prepare. It is a survival instinct. Bloch also argues this point. (Ernst Bloch, The Principle of Hope, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), 223. McKenna, Task, 35).
48 McKenna, Task, 10, 18, 21.
50 Hansot, Perfection and Progress, 198.
51 McKenna, Task, 10.
54 McKenna, Task, 24.
55 Kateb, Utopia, 16-17.
56 Hansot, Perfection and Progress, 112.
57 McKenna, Task, 8.
59 McKenna, The Task of Utopia, 17-18.
60 Ibid., 19.
61 Ibid., 10.
62 Ibid., 17-18.
63 Ibid., 21.
65 McKenna, Task, 22.
66 See also following quote from TToU, 21:
68 McKenna, Task, 34.
69 Ibid., 25.
70 Ibid., 27.

71 Mckenna, Task, 18.
72 Ibid., 24.
73 Ibid., 23.
74 Ibid., 9.
75 Ibid., 11.
76 Ibid., 50.
78 William Godwin argued that government is the “brute engine which has been the only perennial cause of the vices of mankind… has mischiefs of various sorts.” See William Godwin, Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, ed. Raymond A. Preston (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926), 71.
80 McKenna, Task, 49.
84 Berman, Introduction to Quotations from the Anarchist, 8-9. See also McKenna, Task, 49.
85 McKenna, Task, 52.
87 Emma Goldman, Anarchism and Other Essays, 49, 60.
According to Goldman, all human beings will have “free access to the earth and full enjoyment of the necessities of life, according to individual desires, tastes, and inclinations.”
88 Herbert Read, Anarchy and Order (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), 92.
89 McKenna, Task, 50.
90 Levitas, Utopia as Method, 4.
91 Levitas, Utopia as Method, 110.
Examples include: Ursula K. LeGuin’s Always Coming Home, Sally Miller Gearhart’s The Wanderground (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1979). These utopias “differ in both form and content from those of the fin de siècle.”
92 McKenna, Task, 12.
93 Levitas, Utopia as Method, 110.
These novels, according to Levitas, are “more fragmented narrative structure than earlier utopias. The discrete register of plot and character is foregrounded; the iconic register, describing the social structure of both utopian society and its foil, recedes. Again, the emphasis is on subjects and on agency.”
95 Levitas, Utopia as Method, 18-19.
96 Ibid., 4.
Society = “something to be modified, to be intentionally controlled. It is material to act upon so as to transform it into new objects which better answer our needs… it exists at any particular time as a challenge, rather than a completion; it provides possible starting points and opportunities rather than final ends.”
98 McKenna, Task, 2-3.
99 Ibid., 9.
McKenna argues that this was a favorite utopian talking point of John Dewey, who is quoted saying:

Levitas, Utopia as Method, 4.
Levitas, The Concept of Utopia, 8.
Levitas, Utopia as Method, 4.
Ibid., 4.

Method utopia “reveals the utopian aspects of forms of cultural expression rather than creating a binary separation between utopia/non-utopia.”

Levitas optimistically believes that more narrow definitions of utopia are dwindling among utopian scholars and theorists, and being replaced by this more open definition. See Levitas, The Concept of Utopia, 20.

McKenna, Task, 9.
McKenna, Task, 21, referencing Kateb, Introduction to Utopia, 23. See also Levitas, The Concept of Utopia, 172.

Levitas, Utopia as Method, 97-98.
McKenna, Task, 7.

McKenna also argues that traditional “End-state” modes of utopian thinking are far too static, leaving little room for evolution and change. See also Levitas, Utopia as Method, 10.


The terms “perfectionism” and “idealism” are tricky to differentiate within a utopian context. Here, I define “perfectionism” using McKenna as a reference: it is the refusal to accept any standard short of perfection – or, perfection at any cost. Perfectionism, then, is associated with end-state utopian practice. “Idealism,” though it still involves change and action, is a slightly more passive hope, applicable to all utopian visions. It is the pursuit of perfection, rather than the demand for it. Of course, countless unique instances of utopian visioning bring about differing levels of both these concepts.

Karl Popper, The Open Society, 423. Popper is discussed in McKenna, Task, 19-21.

McKenna, Task, 161.
Ibid., 84-87.
Ibid., 36.
Ibid., 6.

Ironically, Edward Bellamy was a member of the New Nationalist party. His book, Looking Backward, is far more of an end-state model than a method model. The sentiment here still applies nicely to the method model.

McKenna, Task, 115-116.

Subgroup interaction should actively support the community as a whole. McKenna calls this “conscious conjoint activity,” and says it is necessary for a Method utopian community. McKenna uses a drug gang as a counter-example, because it tends to isolate its members from society as a whole.


See also Leviatas, *Utopia as Method*, 111 and Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible*, 10.


In the words of Leviatas: Bloch is “adamant that wishful thinking or abstract utopia (which is a start) needs to become will-full thinking in reaching concrete utopia. For Bloch, the development from abstract to concrete utopia is a process rather than a classification, the process of docta spes.”


131 Moylan, *Demand the Impossible*, 10.

132 Leviatas, *Utopia as Method*, 111.

133 McKenna, *Task*, 8.


137 McKenna, *Task*, 18.


139 Leviatas, *Utopia as Method*, 125.

140 Ibid., 12.


According to Tillich, sin is “separation among individual lives, separation of a man from himself, and separation of all men from the Ground of Being” (in other words, separation from God).

142 Leviatas, *Utopia as Method*, 12.

Marx’s alienation: workers alienated from ownership/control of their work; This leads to the commodification of relationships, which leads to a distortion of humanity.


144 Ibid., 13.

Need for a secular form of “grace”; “connection, acceptance, reconciliation, wholeness.”

145 Examples: Sheri S. Tepper’s *Gate to Women’s Country*.


147 Ibid., 21, once again referencing Golffing and Golffing.

148 Ibid., 23.

149 Leviatas, *Utopia as Method*, 10.

150 McKeanna, *Task*, 111.

151 Ibid., 110-111.


153 McKenna, *Task*, 28. “On most End-state visions it seems necessary to assume that human nature is basically plastic.”


155 Ibid., 27.

156 Ibid., *The Task of Utopia*, 29.

157 Ibid., 27. Charles Fourier is one such example, claiming that “unity” can be achieved through education.


160 Example: Rousseau’s *Emile*.


42
American Schools = “instruments for the further democratization of American society.”

If Dewey ever said anything about specific educational polities/plans, it was in the New York Times on April 23, 1933: “Dewey Outlines Utopian Schools.” – namely making sure that children learn to have a positive and inquisitive attitude toward life. Keep them free of embarrassment, fear, self-consciousness, constraint, etc. See also McKenna, Task, 101.

Dewey, The Quest for Certainty, 199.


Tom Moylan, Demand the Impossible, 35.

Levitas, The Concept of Utopia, 141.


Ruth Levitas, The Concept of Utopia, 8, 162.


McKenna, Task, 119.

Hertlzer, The History of Utopian Thought, 2.

See Karl Popper’s The Open Society and “Utopia and Violence” for more anti-utopian discourses.

Even then, Levitas argues that many sociologists have taken issue with utopian visions because of their assumed connection with totalitarianism. See “Between Sociology and Utopia,” the fourth chapter of Levitas’s book Utopia as Method.

A good example of this is Alex MacDonald’s commentaries for Bellamy’s Looking Backward and Morris’s News from Nowhere, edited by Stephen Arata (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Literary Texts, 2003).


Hertlzer, The History of Utopian Thought, 2.

Erin McKenna, Task, 1.

Levitas, Utopia as Method, 218. In Utopia as Method, Levitas uses the Mirror of Erised in J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter as a metaphor for utopian visions.


Levitas, Utopia as Method, 218.


Jacoby claims that the utopian spirit has “vanished” due to its associations with totalitarianism.

Russell Jacoby, The End of Utopia, xi

Pauline Oliveros, Sounding the Margins, xii.
CHAPTER 2:
Oliveros, Cage, and Musical Anarchism

At first glance, Pauline Oliveros’s music seems anarchistic, defying Western conventions. Her anti-hierarchical scores bestow freedom and agency to performers. She frequently stated her left-leaning political beliefs in writing, sometimes including progressive messages in her works.\(^1\) She even discussed anarchism explicitly in her piece *Anarchy Waltz*. One of her influences was John Cage, an overtly anarchistic composer with a strong utopian spirit. However, there are many ways in which she differed from anarchical models. First, she did not embrace Cage’s Thoreauvian form of isolation and de-contextualization. Instead, she favored a communal utopia, in which members come together with common goals. She also replaced revolutionary anarchical rhetoric with a more *evolutionary* approach. Rather than abandoning conventions, she advocated for working within existing societal structures.

The purpose of this chapter is to assess Pauline Oliveros’s involvement with anarchism and how it has impacted her utopian music. Her unique utopian vision is best understood by comparing her works with Cage. Here, I will compare two works: Cage’s *Musicircus* and Oliveros’s *Link* (renamed *Bonn Feier*). Both pieces exemplify the rebellion and individualism of anarchism. They do this by de-emphasizing composer/performer hierarchies and bringing autonomy to performers. However, *Link/Bonn Feier* represents Oliveros’s distinct form of utopian life: one that does not abandon individualism, yet does not entirely embrace pure Cagean anarchism. Considering this evidence, it may be best to assess Oliveros’s utopian works through a different category of utopian thought: method utopianism.

The term *anarchism* encompasses myriad political movements emphasizing individual freedom and pure democracy.\(^2\) It eschews political hierarchy and potentially oppressive power structures in favor of individual self-governance and decentralized power systems. In an
anarchistic society, group decisions are only made when necessary, usually involving consensus-based democracy. Because of their interest in personal autonomy, anarchists encourage diversity and question the status-quo.

Due to some destructive behaviors of self-proclaimed anarchists, the term *anarchy* often has negative connotations in today’s political discourse. However, many vehemently argue that anarchy is not synonymous with chaos. Order is permissible in anarchy, as long as it is “order without authority.” “The anarchist thus no more advocates chaos than does the strictest authoritarian,” says Paul Berman, “but the anarchist seeks order in diversity and agreement rather than in uniformity and control.” Anarchism is not anti-system; its systems are just very simple: local assembly, “full and direct democracy,” and libertarianism.

The anarchistic utopia, in fact, depends on this order. Within it, the system is ideally structured and runs perfectly. According to J.C. Davis, utopias, by definition, consist of imperfect people putting their faith in an ideal societal *system*. In this way, they differ from perfect moral commonwealths, where members are born as perfect people with identically common desires. Utopias are organized by humans, perpetuated by human will, and replicable across time and space. They involve formal decision-making processes, procedures for solving conflict, and socialized patterns of behavior. Once the perfect system is established, it can then transform individuals into utopian citizens with utopian behaviors. Ruth Levitas calls this process “the education of desire.” “Educated” citizens maintain the utopian system so that it may continue into the next generation. Goals, priorities, and approaches differ among utopias, but all possess a framework of some kind. This, of course, contradicts the oft-assumed chaotic nightmare that anti-anarchists fear.
No longer is there a predetermined, iron-clad program, as in earlier end-state models. Rather, the anarchistic utopia is an “ongoing experiment,” in which “each directs and is directed in his turn… [with] a continual exchange of mutual, temporary, and, above all, voluntary authority and subordination.” Members may live as they please within the society and shape society according to their individual wishes, unencumbered by either systemic or individual oppressors. “Utopian experimentation can be tried, different styles of life can be lived, and alternative versions of the good can be individually or jointly pursued” without constraint. Consequently, the system is subject to change according to the constantly changing needs of its people. Members of the utopian community may freely question current systems and propose changes without fear.

Through this presumably perfect system, citizens of the anarchistic community behave in an idealized way. Individuals take full responsibility for themselves in being politically active and in running their own affairs. Members of a utopian anarchy understand that their rights to privacy, agency, and political voice are inseparably tied with the rights of everyone else; one’s agency cannot infringe upon another’s.

Although anarchism as a political movement had existed in the United States almost a century earlier, significant literary examples of anarchical utopianism did not appear until the 1970s. Alongside the more process-based method model, anarchical utopianism found its home alongside second-wave feminist utopian narratives of this period. In the wake of political struggle in the real world, many feminist authors viewed the novel as a place to safely consider new political structures – anarchism included – better suited for gender equality. McKenna presents Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) as an example of anarchist utopian literature. As with traditional utopian literature, Piercy paints a detailed picture of how an
anarchist community might ideally function. Through time-travel technology, protagonist Connie Ramos visits a possible future community called Mattapoisett. Through equal shifts, everyone in Mattapoisett participates in the governing body, and anyone can freely raise concerns or objections to suggested solutions. As with many authors of this genre, Piercy juxtaposes the paradise of Mattapoisett with both the horrors of the present as well as an even more unpleasant possible dystopian future.15

After considering the dictatorships brought about by end-state utopianism, the anarchical utopian model may seem very attractive. However, anarchist utopias are just as elusive and unattainable as any other utopian model. Problems and risks will inevitably appear in real-world anarchist communities. McKenna discusses three main areas in which an anarchy fails in its utopian vision. First, anarchists demand the immediate and thorough overthrow of a society’s beliefs, values, and habits; the re-education of desire must be immediate and complete. Radical anarchists wish not only to replace political schema and structures, but also to replace individual values and behaviors, thus ensuring the anarchy’s continuance.16 Anarchists, therefore, are uncompromising in their demands for revolution, in many cases to the point of violence.17 This is McKenna’s biggest argument against radical revolution. Violence, she argues, should be avoided at all costs.18 She also argues that anarchistic revolutions cannot help but be influenced by the corrupt past. Without a point of reference, the people’s focus quickly fades and the new world languishes with no direction or purpose.19

Second, the demands of freedom are too great. According to McKenna, a fully functioning anarchy requires full political engagement from every individual. “Freedom is not easily acquired or easily carried,” she argues; “anarchy asks a great deal of people.”20 Anarchies require vigilance in self-government, as well as in the constant protection of others’ rights to
self-government. Without a deterministic end, individual persons must create their own destinies. They therefore must be well-informed on every issue, taking full responsibility for their own actions or failures to act. Anarchists also demand the impossible task of reaching voluntary consensus. In short, the decision-making and justice-administering process is slow, and the burden of consequence falls on individuals. These are issues which representational and hierarchical governmental systems circumvent, though at the cost of absolute freedom.

Finally, McKenna argues that an anarchist utopia promises uninhibited diversity. Anarchists oppose end-state homogeneity. They claim that end-state determinist governments have misaligned priorities, placing uniformity above other important human rights and values. Anarchist utopians imagine a world in which diversity exists through uninhibited freedom. Unfortunately, past prejudices are near impossible to erase, but even within a cultural vacuum, human nature still impedes complete tolerance. “Absence of authority is not enough to ensure freedom and diversity among a group of people,” McKenna concludes. The promise of peaceful diversity is therefore “dubious” at best.

Thus, even with everything aligned perfectly, nothing is certain. Nevertheless, the utopian anarchist remains unfazed. Many still believe that a better world—perhaps a perfect one—may exist. Political idealism persists among anarchists as much it does among end-state determinists, and their beliefs have influenced many aspects of culture, including music.

John Cage and Anarchical Music

Music has always been a vehicle for expressing ideas about society, culture, and politics. Today, musicians often promote political agendas through their craft. Anarchist musicians are no exception, and they seem especially aware of music’s role in political discourse. “Music has always been a social force,” argues anarchist artist Tobias Fischer. “Thus it is a powerful
political tool... Freedom may come through music, not politics.”26 In particular, the anarcho-punk movement has been highly influential, providing rich content for scholarship and political dialogue.27 The Western art tradition, on the other hand, has proven to be a challenging venue for the anarchist musician. Its inherent ties to conventional power systems keep it from obtaining populist appeal and true intellectual independence. However, one of the most important figures in anarchist music emerged from this tradition: John Cage, arguably the first major American musician to identify as an anarchist.28 Cage often explicitly stated his anarchist views in interviews and publications, and found ways to incorporate them into his lifestyle. Richard Kostelanetz praised Cage’s devotion to his anarchistic principles, claiming that he “[epitomized] the noncompetitive life” and practiced what he preached.29 Most importantly, Cage infused anarchistic utopian principles into his music. Beyond simply dealing with revolutionary subject matter, his compositional process itself was revolutionary. Before Pauline Oliveros’s musical politics can be explored, it helps to consider Cage’s influential role as an anarchist utopian.

Several scholars have also argued the utopian implications of Cage’s music and philosophies.30 Ivana Miladinović Prica argues that Cage’s “call for the anarchic emancipation of listeners” embodied utopian principles.31 Gordana P. Crnović claims Cage’s book *Silence* directly represents a version of “utopian America.”32 N. Katherine Hayles claims Cage’s works embody an attitude of “utopian hope” through anarchy.33 Michał Palmowski also argues this point, stating that Cage was “motivated primarily by a desire to change the world.”34 The title of his published diary *How to Improve the World: You Will Only Make Matters Worse* hints both at the practicality and impossibility associated with utopian dreams. Much of his writings propose what a perfect world might look like. They also possess an urgency, suggesting that utopian ideas can and should be put into practice now, not later. In short, Cage’s tendencies toward hope
Cage believed that true education of desire could not be ordered from the top down; utopia must be voluntarily built from the ground up by individuals truly converted to the cause. With time and perseverance, individual voices of revolution could eventually impact society at large. He referred to this as planting “seeds of thought.” “Whether something vital will develop depends largely on the fertility of the human soil,” he explained. He offers up music as a useful tool for revolution because it requires a performer’s individual commitment and action.

The social aspects of music also attracted Cage. He acknowledged music’s inherent need for social interaction, and thus used musical processes as models for ideal social systems:

The performance of a piece of music can be a metaphor of society, of how we want society to be. Through we are not now living in a society which we consider good, we could make a piece of music in which we would be willing to live….

You can think of the piece of music as a representation of a society in which you would be willing to live.

Cage emphasized the usefulness of these musical models: “By making musical situations which are analogous to desirable social circumstances… we make music suggestive and relevant to the serious questions which face Mankind.” Statements like these correspond with the words of Levitas, Prica, and Bloch, who agreed that all art forms have potential of presenting musical models. Prica, for example, spoke of artists creating “aesthetic analogies of an alternative future.” Rather than presenting his utopian narrative in words, Cage “showed instead of told,” creating a model community which invites – not forces – observers to consider a new way of being. The music exemplified “practical utopias” – models for “practical anarchism.”
In sum, Cage’s music was intentionally didactic, designed to teach the world how to be.

Two questions now need answering: What kind of anarchy did John Cage envision, and how did he embody his vision in his musical works?

Cage’s anti-government and pro-revolutionary stance has been well-documented. “We don’t need government,” Cage firmly stated in his foreword essay for Anarchy. Government, he argued, did nothing more than perpetuate poverty, inequality, and dependence in a population.

I think we have more serious problems that the government is not able to solve…. Government[s] are concerned with power, and money, and neither one of those things is important. The important thing is to keep the thing working. To replace government, Cage advocated for what he called a “violent” revolution:

Periods of very slow changes are succeeded by periods of violent changes. Revolutions are as necessary for evolution as the slow changes which prepare them and succeed them…. The revolution is the creation of new living institutions, new groupings, new social relationships; it is the destruction of privileges and monopolies; it is the new spirit of justice, of brotherhood, of freedom which must renew the whole of social life and raise the moral level and material conditions of the masses by calling on them to provide, through direct and conscious action, for their own futures.

But beyond simply being anti-government, Cage proposed a specific form of anarchism involving extreme individualism. Cage believed that humans live their best lives as autonomous and separate beings, free from all societal pressures. “Society’s individualized,” he argued – an interlocking system of personal, independent choices. He claimed that a perfect world could exist as a “coexistence of dissimilars,” where opposing viewpoints are not disharmonious, but
rather “simply a harmony to which many are unaccustomed.” This viewpoint resembles the musings of Thomas Hobbes, who compared individuals to mushrooms which sprout from the earth “without all kind of engagement to each other.” This, according to Hobbes, was the “natural state” in which people were theoretically born, without any “obligations of obedience,” including political obedience. Hobbes argued free will to be “no stop, in doing what he has the will, desire, or inclination to do.” Cage stated his version of this principle the following way:

The liberty of man consists solely in this: that he obeys natural laws because he has himself recognized them as such, and not because they have been externally imposed upon him by any extrinsic will whatever, divine or human, collective or individual.

Other titles given to Cage’s individualizing, Hobbesian brand of anarchy include Erin McKenna’s “individualist anarchism,” and Richard Kostelanetz’s term “libertarian anarchist.”

Cage’s true political kindred spirit, however, was not Hobbes but Henry David Thoreau, whom Emma Goldman called “the greatest American anarchist.” Like Hobbes, Thoreau revered “the absolute will of the individual.” In his famous essay Civil Disobedience, Thoreau rejected government, stating that it “has not the vitality and force of a single living man.” Cage proclaimed himself a “Thoreauvian anarchist” and often referenced Thoreau’s writings in his own works. Cage’s poetic work Anarchy was in part inspired by the first line from Civil Disobedience: “That government is best which governs least.” Cage adapted this quote to read: “That government is best which governs not at all; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have.” There exists a strong utopian hope in this statement, as well as an anarchist bent.
Both Cage and Thoreau favored the “benign” practice of civil disobedience – a form of revolution on an individual level.57 “I don’t vote,” Cage announced in an interview, “I look forward to the time when no-one else does either.” 58 This dismissal of political obligation mirrors Thoreau’s statement, “Even voting for the right thing does nothing for it. A wise man will not leave the right to the mercy of chance, nor wish to prevail through the power of the majority.”59 Other ways in which Cage rejected political or societal obligations were avoiding elitist institutions and eschewing titles. 60

In addition to criticizing government and “money power,” Thoreauvian anarchists also promote “decentralization of population, simplification of life, and the love of mother earth.”61 Cage expressed an interest in values as well. His love of nature and advocacy for protecting the earth pervade many of his writings. Not only must music reflect the “natural laws” and processes found on earth, Cage argued, but human beings have an obligation to care of the earth for future generations.62 Environmental crisis, he claimed, is one of the problems government alone cannot solve.63

Cage therefore desired to create “anarchic kinds of music,” which could model potential “anarchic states of society.”64 Namely, he hoped to embody the intense individuality, peaceful coexistence, and harmony with nature that existed within his anarchical model. Cage’s music embodies this idea by being “nonfucused, nonhierachic and nonlinear,” and consisting of “collections of elements presented without climax and without definite beginnings and ends.”65 After considering general ways in which Cage’s music manifests these traits, I will consider Musicircus as a specific example. This piece embodies Cage’s general aesthetic and also captures his utopian spirit.
Cage’s compositional processes reject the dictatorial hierarchical impulses of the European tradition, and thus reject the end-state utopian model. “Cage rejected the hierarchy in meaning and denied the difference between true and false experience, between the natural and the musical sound,” Prica argues, “hoping that some day global humanity might live in an anarchic harmony.”66 Cage believed music’s purpose was not to communicate individual, subjective emotions. Rather, it should “liberate” the creator from personal taste, will, or intention.67 This is done by embracing naturally occurring sounds and chance procedures. Jean-Francis Lyotard encapsulated this idea with the statement: “No Other has the power over sound; there is no God, the determiner, as a principle of unification and composition.”68 By removing the composer’s ego from compositional processes, Cage discouraged egotistic human meddling in the building of utopia. Instead, he celebrated naturally existing sounds, which mirrors anarchist utopians’ embrace of the present. The rejection of “musical” sound is one example of Cage’s “civil disobedience” and anarchic “revolution.”

Cage mainly targeted the conventional stature of composers and conductors at the expense of listeners and performers.69 “The masterpieces of Western music exemplify monarchies and dictatorships,” he argued. “Composer and conductor: king and prime minister.”70 He also compared the conductor as an unnecessary “contractor” responsible for bringing about the “blueprint” of the composition.71 By removing these hierarchies, Cage created a musical environment in which every performer could take on the role of composer. Every musician is “a unique center in interpenetrating and nonobstructive harmony with every other musician.”72 Chance procedures were Cage’s primary solution for forsaking biases and ego, but he also encouraged ensemble pieces in which no conductor existed at all.73
Because it lacks the creating artist’s foreordained symbolism, chance-composed music is open to many different interpretations. It is, as Prica argues, a “multi-layered (open) text exposed to an endless play of meanings.”74 Cage himself hoped that each performance of his works would be a new experience, free even from the context of its past iterations.75 This gives autonomy and creative control to the listener, who may choose which of the sounds possess meaning and which do not.76 In the words of Prica, “The recipient, the listener, the performer carries the construction of meaning, not the composer. They are co-authors of the work.”77 The original composer and the performer-as-composer behave as equals in a utopian relationship.

Cage’s non-hierarchical approach also indicated his interest in Zen Buddhism and nature.78 According to Prica, Eastern philosophy begets a specific kind of anarchy – one of “unimpededness and interpenetration.” Cage argued that these qualities help human beings see the value and importance of each human being, and how each participant in a society might affect others.79 Cage also emphasized the importance of listeners embracing sounds in the moment of their creation, “before our mind gets the chance to turn it into something logical, abstract or symbolical.”80 This Buddhist principle of silencing the clutter of the rational mind leads to “a new mental awareness, and the complete merging of art and life.”81 This objective approach to music also better imitates nature. Prica argues that Cage’s musical strategies – particularly his chance procedures – imply “life in harmony with nature,” and therefore life in harmony with changes in relationships between people.82 As previously mentioned, harmony with nature is an important tenet within Thoreauvian anarchism. It is no surprise, then, that Cage found a way to infuse nature into his works.

Cage’s most notorious musical work embodying anarchistic utopian principles is his “silent piece,” 4’33”. This piece “abandons the autonomy of music as intentionally created
sound,” as well as “aestheticizes” ambient sounds of the environment.\textsuperscript{83} \textit{4’33’’} heralded a change in how both artists and audiences observed art. Another relevant piece is \textit{Lecture on the Weather}, which can be viewed as a Thoreauvian anarchist work. Here, the performer recites excerpts from \textit{Walden} and \textit{On Civil Disobedience}, which were chosen by means of chance operations.\textsuperscript{84} Cage also used visual elements and instrumental passages derived from graphics in Thoreau’s journals.\textsuperscript{85} Such a work not only had a political context engrained in the text, but also embodied the embracing of “natural” chance processes.

However, \textit{4’33’’} and \textit{Lecture on the Weather} are not the best choices for discussing Cage’s anarchistic utopian viewpoints. As pieces designed for solo performance, they do not adequately model social interactions. Ensemble works are more useful examples of anarchistic utopian processes. In a group-oriented work, both audience and ensemble can consciously observe ideal anarchical social interactions – musical utopias – coming alive on stage. Observers may then choose to continue taking part in the musical utopian process, and perhaps even apply the model to other social contexts.

While other composers arguably captured this same communal spirit, Cage’s 1967 \textit{Musicircus} is a particularly useful anarchic utopian model.\textsuperscript{86} More concept than composition, this piece is the virtual antithesis of \textit{4’33’’}: a collection of works played simultaneously. Cage did not prescribe any specific pieces for the event. Its premiere at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign included works by Cage and Satie, but later iterations have included music from many composers and genres.\textsuperscript{87} He wanted the collection of performers to be as eclectic as possible, from church groups to children’s choirs, jazz bands to rock groups, solo performers and larger ensembles. Audiences may move about the circus space, taking in any sounds they hear at once, without separating one musical event from another. Dissonant clashes in style, timbre,
harmony, and volume were inevitable, as well as chatting among audience members. Dickinson describes the *Musicircus* event as “simply an invitation to bring together any number of groups of any kind, preferably in a large auditorium, letting them perform simultaneously anything they wish, resulting in an event lasting a few hours.”\(^8\) Cage hoped to embody “the joyousness of the anarchic spirit,” and the piece indeed presents a model for how autonomous individuals may coexist in a utopian anarchy.\(^8\)

Aside from anarchical freedom, the themes of *Musicircus* include play, celebration, and full appreciation of the human experience. Cage takes the term *circus* literally, hoping to capture the sights, sounds, even smells and tastes associated with a circus or carnival.\(^9\) By invoking all the senses, Cage hoped to capture a true lived experience among audience members. Many call the work a “Happening” for this reason. John Falding described his experience with *Musicircus* as “occasionly exciting, frequently interesting, and always fun, thereby fulfilling the composer’s intentions exactly.”\(^1\) Cage’s terms “purposeless play” and “affirmation of life” are also pertinent for describing the *Musicircus* event.\(^2\) Furthermore, he envisioned an event free of charge, consisting only of “people who are willing to take part” from both the audience and performers’ ends.\(^3\) Such aspects aid in creating the utopian environment.

*Musicircus* challenged conventional concert-going experiences and the hierarchical distinction between performer and audience. No easily distinguishable conductor or leader exists. Additionally, there is no designated “stage” space. Audience members freely wander among the performers.\(^4\) John Falding argued that by moving around, listeners become performers, “because they could exercise control over the sound they were experiencing.”\(^5\) This both liberates and exalts the act of listening, a process which Cage believed was under-respected in the world of traditional music.\(^6\)
This coexistence of disparate musical performers embodies Hobbesian individualism. The performers must disregard their audience and each other. Cage wanted to create an environment in which performers in a group were completely independent from any outside musical forces – including each other. “It is high time to separate the players one from another,” he stated, in order to “facilitate the independent action of each person.” Otherwise, the performers may feel the temptation to “act like sheep,” relying on each other to create sounds rather than the “scientific” process of natural sound-making.\(^7\) While performers in \textit{Musicircus} may still be able to hear one another in the space, it is intended that their musical processes go on uninhibited and uninfluenced by those around them.

\textit{Musicircus} also fits the utopian anarchical mold by relying heavily on a previously accepted system. It involved, in the words of John Lewis, “a very structured kind of anarchy.”\(^8\) The sounds themselves chaotically collide and audience members have free reign, but the performers themselves must follow certain rules regarding what they play. They must prepare pieces in advance, and a dice throw or coin toss determines what to play next. The performers must not engage with the audience, but instead “perform like automata” as the audience mills about their midst.\(^9\) These “rules” suggest that Cage wanted to create a pre-fabricated utopian anarchical structure – one in which the structure of the society itself ensures ideal interactions between participants. Freedom for participants is ensured only through everyone’s respect of the system. For at least a short while, all participants could experience utopian peace and coexistence, with music as the main unifying element.

As with many anarchist utopias, this extreme rebellion against the status quo garnered criticism. Many questioned Cage’s success in creating a utopian environment through \textit{Musicircus}. Dominic Gill, for example, called the performance “a good, clean, unpredictable
bore,” while the Daily Telegraph dubbed it “a claustrophobic fairground.” These statements arguably echo complaints made against utopias in general – that they are either boring or stifling. John Lewis, on the other hand, stated that Musicircus lost its utopian grandeur in the 21st century context; “free” music pervades the market these days, and people possess a better awareness of multimedia’s effects. Like other utopian models, Musicircus is limited by its societal context. In the words of Herzler, “Men must start with what they find and build up from that… Humanity can never transcend the conditions of its existence.” Cage’s ignorance of future technological complexity does not negate his utopian motivations. Nor should one automatically assume that those involved with Musicircus during its first performances were unable to feel a sense of utopian camaraderie.

Before moving to Oliveros, it is important to mention the ways in which Cage undercut his own anarchical agendas. While he may have envisioned a perfect world with absolute liberty, some have noticed Cage’s missteps in attaining his vision. According to Elizabeth Ann Lindau, Cage is often miscast as the liberator of musical expression, and that his need for control over his own works nears pseudo-dictatorial. While it may be easy to equate chance procedures with an “anything goes” mentality, this was not Cage’s intent. Peter Gena equated a Cage composition with a recipe, which needed the proper ingredients in order to be appropriately realized. Some ingredients, it seems, are better than others. This resembles the deterministic “blueprints” proposed by end-state utopian visionaries. Lindau emphasizes this by citing instances in which performers sought out Cage’s supervision or approval before they performed pieces. “Some argue,” she states, “that familiarity with Cage and the extant performance tradition of his works is a prerequisite for attempting his scores.” In fact, several accounts indicate that Cage was especially passionate about his performances being done “the right way.” In 1975, for example,
Julius Eastman’s homoerotic interpretation of Cage’s *Song Books* left Cage “furious” and “greatly disturbed” by what he viewed to be a betrayal of his artistic intent. Joe Panzner described the scene:

During a tense lecture session on the next day, a student from the State University of New York at Buffalo asked Cage how the performance could be judged such a failure if the composer had failed to provide a more explicit score. Cage exploded, pounding his fist on the piano and exclaiming, ‘I’m tired of people who think that they could do whatever they want with my music!’ He went onto declare that serious performers of his music must share some of his sympathies, even going as far as to state that a thorough reading of Thoreau and familiarity with the music of Satie might be a requirement for their proper performance.\textsuperscript{105}

Richard Taruskin and Sara Heimbecker paint a similar picture of Cage as dictator or end-state empiricist. Heimbecker discusses Cage’s *HPSCHD* as an example of “avant-garde *Gesamtkunstwerk,*” referring to a term associated with Wagner, who was deeply connected with end-state methods.\textsuperscript{106} She goes on to argue that Cage worked almost exclusively with the elitist academic system, ignorant (perhaps even dismissive) of the oppression extant within that system, especially for students of color.\textsuperscript{107} The musical utopia Cage created, then, was far more isolated and exclusive; more like the island of Thomas More’s utopia than the utopias of Piercy or Gilman.\textsuperscript{108} Taruskin argues a similar point, stating that, for as much as Cage touted the message of liberation and independence from authoritarian constraints, his works actually insist on maintaining traditional philosophies; while the sonic content changes, the attitude toward that content remains as limited as always. “The audience is invited—no, commanded—to listen to ambient or natural sounds with the same attitude of reverent contemplation they would assume if
they were listening to Beethoven’s Ninth.” Lindau also mentions how Cage disliked improvisation, a practice commonly viewed as liberating and individualistic. Improvisation involved too much “stylistic convention and personal habit” for Cage’s taste.” Once again, performers are not free to play whatever they please in Cage’s ideal musical system. Instead, they are subordinate to that system – perhaps a more dystopian notion than a utopian one. This invites us to consider the nuance and imperfectability of utopian dreams, which must always be considered as they are studied and attempted to be put into practice. In short, Cage may have preached anarchism far more than his music, and the context surrounding it, actually reflects. Such limitations exist in *Musicircus*: performers face oppression in that they lack freedom to choose what they play, when they play it, and how they interact with the audience.

**New Utopias: Link and Bonn Feier**

Since Cage can be considered the “father” of musical anarchism, the first step toward understanding Pauline Oliveros’s relationship with musical anarchism is understanding her relationship with Cage. It was certainly a positive relationship, though they only crossed paths a few times. Cage spoke of Oliveros kindly, stating “through Pauline Oliveros and Deep Listening I finally know what harmony is…. It’s about the pleasure of making music.” He performed one of Oliveros’s pieces, *In Memoriam Nikola Tesla: Cosmic Engineer*, and also wrote a mesostic poem called “The Ready Made Boomerang” in reaction to the famous *Deep Listening* recording. Oliveros also respected Cage, and cared about his message. She heard about his work in the mid-1950s through the San Francisco-based KPFA-FM Radio, and met him personally when she performed in David Tudor’s “Tudorfest” in 1964. She considered this a “very important meeting,” and expressed her “tremendous amount of respect” for his commitment to
Zen and the eradication of the ego. She later called Cage’s ideas “seed work” which opened the playing field for many new sounds to have musical validity. In 1986, she wrote a piece entitled *Dear John: A Canon on the Name of Cage*, in celebration of Cage’s 75th birthday. In an homage to Cage’s chance procedures, she inputted the notes C, A, G, and E into a computer, which determined the order of pitches, tempo, and instrumentation.

While Oliveros’s interests in listening and electronic music may have developed independently of Cage, his work and success undoubtedly inspired her. “I don’t know if I’d be lost or not [without his example],” she argued, “but I certainly would never discount the influence.” This influence appears in many ways. David Bernstein notes the two composers’s shared interest in “musical pluralism.” Oliveros’s “inclusive approach to listening parallels the work of John Cage.” Both composers also sought to bring more power to the listener, and to increase listeners’ awareness and consciousness to their sonic environments. Listeners were invited to become composers, and the compositional decision-making in the hands of the performer. This also resulted in the emancipation of sounds. Ben Watson argues that composers like Oliveros were “buttressed by John Cage’s Zen homilies about vanquishing human desire.” Oliveros’s spiritually-driven compositional processes paralleled Cage’s use of Zen. She claimed to be inspired by Zen principles.

Like Cage, Oliveros’s works have faced some resistance due to their “anarchical” qualities. Ben Watson, for example, disparagingly comments on her “anarchistic” approach to free improvisation. “A current of anarchism in Free Improvisation,” he argues, is claiming that the form should be ‘non-hierarchical,’ and that critics and audiences should refuse to acknowledge heroes or leaders. Anything tainted by the will to
power is evil, so we should all lie on that floor and ‘deep listen’ while Pauline Oliveros squeezes her postmodern accordion.119

Watson, like many who reject anarchism, sees Oliveros’s work as chaotic. This response to outright revolution against convention is common among anti-anarchists.

Did Oliveros identify with or promote political anarchism like Cage in any major way? This question is harder to answer. A few have associated the music of Oliveros with political and social anarchism. Her work defies traditional hierarchical structures and embraces “non-musical” sounds. Tobias Fischer, a member of the anarchist artists’ group White Fungus, argues that some of her pieces are outright “rebellious,” because such music doesn’t simply question conventional borders of music; it outright ignores them.120

However, Oliveros never outwardly proclaimed affiliation with anarchist groups. Her political views were undeniably left-leaning: her connections with the feminist movement, gay activism, and other human rights movements are well documented. But these agendas concerned societal reform and private institutional change, rather than overturning any major government system. While she is known today as a feminist, she has no reputation for being a communist or socialist composer. This said, Oliveros did consider music a tool for political activism, and believed that even her more personal pieces could be viewed as political statements.

At least one direct musical connection between Oliveros and anarchy exists. In March of 1980, she composed Anarchy Waltz, which premiered at the Cornish School in Seattle on April 6, 1980.121 Her note for this piece states the following:

Anarchy here refers to freedom of individual action within a society with a common purpose. Violence has no place in this definition since individual freedom is impaired by violence. This may be an anarchical waltz or a waltzing
anarchy – the composer has only designated the common purpose, that is, anarchy waltz. It is for each individual who participates in the anarchy, or anarchically participates, to decide what Anarchy Waltz is. In any case, you are invited to waltz. Anarchy means literally ‘without a ruler’ from the Greek An Archos.¹²²

This is the extent of instruction for the work, which behaves more like a prompt than a traditional composition; much is left to the performer’s volition. Oliveros helped guide the performer by highlighting two possible interpretations of her score: the piece could be thought of as an “anarchical waltz” or a “waltzing anarchy.” The term waltz gives the performer at least some musical or dance reference, but she never states that a waltz piece or dance must be included. Beyond this, she let the performer decide the meanings behind the term waltz. Despite casual references and insinuations, readers know nothing concerning the number of performers, instrumentation, duration, or performance practice of Anarchy Waltz. The details seem irrelevant.

While ambiguous regarding its specific musical aspects, she clearly outlined the motivations and attitudes that should be present when performing Anarchy Waltz. All performers of Anarchy Waltz must share “a common purpose.” What determines the piece’s success or failure is the extent to which this common purpose is fulfilled. Such an approach is typical for Oliveros: the piece can be deemed unsuccessful if the performers’ (and perhaps also the audience’s) attitudes are not in proper alignment with the composer’s expectations. This piece appears, then, to be a tool for “educating desire.” If the performers are earnest in their quest for “common purpose,” they may experience utopia during the performance, regardless of what they end up doing during the piece.

Her careful definition of the term anarchy is also important, because it differs from other definitions of anarchism, including Cage’s. She mentions explicitly that her version of anarchy is
one in which individuals have freedom, but also move with a common purpose. She does not emphasize the “coexistence of dissimilars,” but rather hopes that individuals may acknowledge the things they have in common with one another. She also argues that anarchical freedom cannot coexist with violence, and this attitude flies in the face of many revolutionary and militant anarchist philosophies. We will see this difference in even further contrast as we look at another one of Oliveros’s pieces, Link/Bonn Feier. Both Link/Bonn Feier and Musicircus involve the simultaneous performance of several musical groups playing in different styles, but their commonalities and differences are far more complex, and reveal significant ways in which these composers viewed anarchism.

Oliveros subtitled her piece Link as “An Environmental Theatre Piece for Specialized and Non-Specialized Performers.” Larry Livingston commissioned the work for students at Palomar College, and the work premiered there in May of 1972. Originally conceived as a verbal score, it consists only of prose instructions, which can be adapted for different public locales. In 1977, she re-named the piece Bonn Feier and submitted it for a contest sponsored by Beethoven’s birthplace, the city of Bonn, Germany. The contest was a part of the city’s 150th anniversary celebration of the late composer. Link/Bonn Feier ended up winning the “Beethoven Prize” for its successful citywide scope of involvement.

One of Oliveros’s reasons for re-releasing Link as Bonn Feier was to comment on the legacy of Beethoven. To understand this, we must return to John Cage and compare his perception of Beethoven to Oliveros’s. Cage notoriously disliked Beethoven and the influential role Beethoven played in Western music. He stated the following:

With Beethoven the parts of a composition were defined by means of harmony.

With Satie… they were defined by means of time-lengths. The question of
structure is so basic, and it is so important to be in agreement about it, that we must now ask: Was Beethoven right or... Satie? I answer immediately and unequivocally, Beethoven was in error, and his influence, which has been extensive as it is lamentable, has been deadening to the art of music.\(^{125}\)

Beethoven frustrated Cage because he had come to represent “the peak of German music,” whose work reflected the fundamental “mistake” of relying on individual emotional expression. Subjective feelings, to Cage, “had nothing whatsoever to do with sounds.”\(^{126}\) In anarchistic utopian terms, the Romantic aesthetic associated with Beethoven is rife with end-state utopian sentiments. The notion of the artist-as-genius, for example, is a manifestation of the end-state “myth of destiny.”\(^{127}\) Beethoven has come to represent the deterministic, authoritarian, and limiting end-state system which Cage and other anarchists resented.

Oliveros viewed Beethoven with far less reproach. In an interview with Mockus about her submission of *Bonn Feier* to a Beethoven-centered festival, she said the following:

I was asked to do the *Bonn Feier* for the 150\(^{th}\) anniversary of Beethoven in Bonn.

And also, at that time, I was asked to write a statement, as were many other composers, about my relationship to Beethoven and my attitude to Beethoven. I wrote that as a little girl I was fascinated by a picture of Beethoven that hung on the wall in my grandmother’s piano studio; the wild hair and the frown. I would look at that very often in my childhood. Beethoven was the composer that I studied the most. I did some analytical work on the Eroica Symphony and various other Beethoven pieces. Then, of course, John Cage was against Beethoven, or perhaps the attitude that Beethoven admirers represented.

[Mockus: And you felt that Beethoven needed a little defending.]
Oh, yes. In fact, I remember the first time that I ever talked with John Cage, I talked to him a long time about how much I loved Beethoven.128

Oliveros’s positive view of Beethoven may be linked with her acceptance of subjectivity and personal expression in musical arts. She allowed music to mean something to the artists who performed it, and audiences may interpret its emotional content in their own subjective ways. In this sense, she and Cage were opposites.

Yet while Oliveros may have respected Beethoven, she still questioned the entire “cult of genius” surrounding his life and works. In 1974, she and Alison Knowles collaborated on a postcard art piece called “Beethoven Was a Lesbian.” The postcard displayed Oliveros reading Charles Williams’s *All Hallows Eve* under the watchful eye of a papier mâché bust of the deaf composer. She sent this out to several close friends and colleagues. Oliveros’s reaction to this piece in Mockus’s book is as follows:

I don’t remember how that inspiration struck me, but I thought it was really terrifically funny. Beethoven was a lesbian—let’s twist this thing around! If we’re out of the camp, then let’s turn it around. I mean, who’s going to prove that he wasn’t?...You know, if we don’t have any ‘great women composers’ let’s make sure they weren’t passing as men.129

She also wrote the following in her Sound Journal:

“My affair with Beethoven continues. First I see him in drag on the cover of the Feburary issue of *Hi Fidelity* magazine. Hmph! The editors are off as usual; everyone knows by [now] that he was really a Lesbian.”130
“Beethoven Was a Lesbian” questions the end-state principles of determinism, hierarchy, and prescriptivism present with Beethovenian Romanticism. This same questioning and subversive attitude is also present in *Link/Bonn Feier*.

Intended for “performance in a city, college, or university environment,” Oliveros created this piece to blend “special rituals, activities, and sights” with normal city or campus activity. Some of these activities include:

1. Costumed characters, such as “Neptune, Quetzalcoatl, Spiderwoman, the Tin Woodsman of Oz, or any other such figures.” These figures act as “guardians” posted by significant sound sources.  
2. “Usual” activities occurring in unusual spaces. For example: “A secretary performs her usual duties, but she establishes her office outside near a busy walkway.”  
3. “Mummers, jesters, or actors” performing in public spaces. Some examples include a mad Russian, a sleepwalking sailor, a fortune teller, an old hag, “any other fantastic characterizations.”  
4. Musical rituals, including talking drums and natural sound makers.  
5. Other performances, such as a picket march, slow moving performers, and participants who carry objects which are “larger than life.”

The piece ends with a “final circle or ritualistic ceremony” in which all performers gather together in a circle, chanting the title of the work. “The tempo of all sound and movement must gradually and imperceptibly increase until all activity is extremely fast.” Oliveros intended for this final ritual to last for at least an hour, and should only end when “each person can no longer participate.” *Link/Bonn Feier*, Oliveros explained, was an exploration of environment, performance, and perception. The purpose, she stated, was “to gradually and subtly subvert
perception so that normal activity seems strange or displaced as any of the special activities. Thus the whole city or campus becomes a theater, and all of its inhabitants players.”\textsuperscript{137}

\textit{Link/Bonn Feier} is an extension of Cage’s version of anarchist music, reflecting the extreme individualism of an anarchist society. However, though \textit{Link/Bonn Feier} resembles anarchist pieces like \textit{Musicircus}, important differences exist. These differences are substantial enough to question how fully Oliveros believed in Cage’s Thoreauvian anarchical structure. Rather than isolating members of her musical society, she encouraged synergistic, cooperative relationships. She also rejects violent revolution in favor of a slower, more evolutionary process of positive social change. Indeed, while democratic, \textit{Link/Bonn Feier} may not truly be anarchistic at all. Her attitude better fits into Levitas’s more process-based utopian model.

Let us first discuss the anarchistic similarities. Like \textit{Musicircus}, \textit{Link/Bonn Feier} subverts the traditional relationship between audience and performer by manipulating space. While considered one of Oliveros’s “theater pieces,” \textit{Link/Bonn Feier} does not take place in any traditional theater environment. Instead, its musical happenings occur throughout a campus or city, amongst the everyday goings-on of public life. Abnormal sights, sounds, and activities take place in otherwise unremarkable public spaces.\textsuperscript{138} As explained by Heidi Von Gunden, the campus itself “becomes a theater where everyone, knowingly or not, is a performer.”\textsuperscript{139} Oliveros herself states that \textit{Link/Bonn Feier} is designed to “gradually and subtly subvert perception so that normal activity seems strange or displaced as any of the special activities.”\textsuperscript{140} In the words of Amy C. Beal, such a work can transform any public area into “a liberated experimental concert space in which all sounds were music, all actions performance.”\textsuperscript{141} In this environment, the hierarchy between performer and observer disappears. Passersby cannot easily discern an active performer from a normal campus dweller. All participants – both knowing and unknowing – are
composers as well as performers. The musical and performative processes are so engrained into
the natural environment, participants receive a realistic taste of how the world could ideally be.

*Link/Bonn Feier* also explores the creative potential of an entire community of willing
individuals. According to Von Gunden, Oliveros attempted to “specify performer attitude,” and
thus guarantee the piece’s success. The quality of the work “depends on the full commitment,
attentiveness and understanding of the knowing performers.” Once again, intention matters. If
done right, the work presents a utopian environment in which every member of the community is
active, aware, and committed to the success of the project as a free agent. The score states: “Each
performer must be willing to undertake his or her part with the understanding that devoted and
UNDIVIDED attention to the chosen tasks, no matter how long they are, is necessary.” This is
no light commitment; it is expected that the work last at least 15 hours, but could go on for days
– even weeks – if desired. The *Bonnfeier* performance in Bonn lasted a week, from the 14th to
the 21st of May. Knowing participants must plan their roles in advance as well. The piece is thus
a test for performers to see how well they can maintain utopian anarchist practices over time –
the same test that any burgeoning utopia must endure.

As an anarchist community should, *Link/Bonn Feier* requires intimate awareness of a
society’s unique sonic attributes. Anarchists have often emphasized the need for government
systems to be adaptable to meet the needs of their communities. *Link/Bonn Feier* practically
applies this idea. Before performing the piece, performers create a sound map of the campus,
making note of the “continuous, intermittent, and probable sounds that usually occur in specific
areas.” Participants must acknowledge this “drone” of the campus environment throughout the
work. Guardians placed at each sonic map point must point in the direction of the drone’s source,
helping passersby become more aware of their sonic environments.
`Link/Bonn Feier` exploits the unique talents and attributes of a specific community. Anyone can contribute, so long as they are willing to sacrifice their time and talents to the cause. The piece incorporates performers with varying skill sets, beyond simply musicians; it requires choreography, costume, visual art, and props of all sorts. Much is left to the performers’ discretion concerning specific components. The score calls for “fantastic sights,” such as “larger than life wooden figures and totemistic objects, small to large and very colorful, carried slowly around… or placed in unusual spots.”145 “Moving performers” such as athletes, mimes, or dancers were welcomed to take part, as well as unique “Mummers, Jesters, or Actors” who served to engage the campus residents in “ridiculous conversations.”146 Beal describes the overall effect as a “playful street collage of simultaneous musical, theatrical, and ordinary events.”147 She also uses the term Gesamtkunstwerk to describe `Bonn Feier`; the integration of visuals and sounds could be considered a continuation of Wagner’s integrated art work.148

`Link/Bonnfeier` also shares the whimsical, celebratory chaos present in `Musicircus`. The eclectic collection of languages, costume, and activities invites the feeling of festivity and celebration. The finale of the piece was – pun intended for `Bonn Feier` – a bonfire, a communal celebratory event. Additionally, `Link/Bonn Feier` requires some performers to appear in clownlike costume, acting as mute indicators of certain sound sources throughout the venue. Oliveros invites additional performers to dress as specific characters (the Tin Man from *The Wizard of Oz*, for example) and engage people in ridiculous conversations. The overall effect resembles *Musicircus*: multiple isolated events occur for observers to experience simultaneously as a chaotic and celebratory whole.

`Link/Bonn Feier` uses everyday ambient sounds as musical materials, which keeps with the anarchist spirit of Cage. However, Oliveros intends for these unconventional sound sources
to be used in conjunction and harmony with one another. Cage’s performers behave like Hobbes’s mushrooms – isolated from one another, having no effect on each other. This leads to a jarring juxtaposition of sounds. In contrast, the musicians of *Link/Bonn Feier* react to their sonic environments symbiotically and sympathetically. While interacting with the area’s “drone,” musicians should “reinforce the environmental sounds by playing pitches, dynamics, and so forth that blend with the sound mark.” This strongly contrasts the isolationist philosophies of Cage, Hobbes, and Thoreau. No performer can be completely independent of their sonic environment. Although Cage’s ideas about “changing the mind” (read: educating desire) through unadulterated and unbiased exposure to sounds are legitimate and, at least for Richard Taruskin, “inevitably interesting,” Dana Reason argues:

> Cage was less interested in the function of music being used to communicate something in particular like an emotional or physical state, whereas Oliveros creates music as a way to mediate the inner sounding space of an individual with the outer world of technology, aurality and humanity… It’s not just an isolated or intellectual happening but rather an embodied, visceral and collective experience. The articulation of the experience completes the compositional process.

Later, Reason concludes that Oliveros took Cage’s philosophy of sound and silence “in another direction, one that involved community access and participation.” Instead of leaving sounds alone, Oliveros instead “liberates” sounds from their isolation. “They are not just empty signifiers,” says Reason, “but places from which stories are told and narratives shared.” Katherine Marie Setar agrees, stating that Oliveros was far more interested in the “group dynamic,” and thus inclusivity, than Cage ever was. *Link/Bonn Feier* is an example of this
difference. Through the utopian experience of *Link/Bonn Feier*, all become aware of their shared sonic existence, and sounds take on additional meaning.

Thus, in its own unique way, *Link/Bonn Feier* expands the utopian notions of interdependence and harmony between individuals through cooperation and listening. This desire for sonic cohesion becomes explicit at the end of the piece. At an appointed time, all performers come together and begin to chant the word “Link” or “Bonn Feier,” building from slow to fast in a final cadence that lasts an hour or more. This act gives meaning to the title of the work, and the work as a whole. Von Gunden explains that the ending “reveals the meaning and image of the link, which structures what might appear to be ridiculous and unrelated events into a unified whole.”\(^{154}\) By coming together rhythmically, members of the *Link* community become aware that their behaviors interrelate. Von Gunden equates *Link* to a series of tuning exercises, in which performers learn how to “tune” their awareness and attention to their surroundings and gage how their actions impact their environment.\(^{155}\) They find and use the context around them, rather than ignore it. This process of “tuning” one’s attention to their surroundings, according to Oliveros, can be applied to everyday life. Normal activities and expectations can be transformed, as during the performance.

Finally, *Link/Bonn Feier*’s performers are required to move very slowly. Slow movement characterizes Oliveros’s meditative works, and it appears in *Link/Bonn Feier* most notably during a picket march with blank signs. Picketers walk very slowly while someone builds a picket fence around them. This segment of the performance inspires participants to not only view the world differently, but to embrace the evolutionary processes of change. Slow movements symbolize the almost unperceivable transformations in one’s character and behaviors. “The idea in the piece,” she explains, “was that each performer performed daily, maybe you would do
something to change your appearance, but just a little bit, every day, until finally you were completely transformed.”156 She goes on to argue that “people get stuck in their ways and habits and just the way things are. This is a way of affecting change.”

*Link/Bonn Feier* and Cage’s *Musicircus* may simply be considered two different approaches to anarchism. But Oliveros was likely not interested in invoking *revolutionary* anarchism in her work. Unlike Cage’s true musical anarchism, in which sounds passively exist and are left “to be themselves,” Oliveros encouraged active engagement with these sounds.157 While Cage wanted sounds to be isolated from context, Oliveros wished to find context between sounds. Furthermore, her interest in slow, evolutionary process is not typical in anarchistic narratives, which are usually more urgent and demanding. *Link/Bonn Feier* re-frames rather than revolutionizes a familiar world. It takes the context of an already-present paradigm and transforms it into something more utopian. Thus, Oliveros chose to infuse new ways of thinking into already-established environments and structures, rather than revolt against them. Her piece rejects the prescriptive and passive end-state utopian ideology in favor of a more fluid social paradigm. However, according to Ruth Levitas and Erin McKenna, her more process-based utopian vision falls under a category outside of anarchism: “method utopianism,” which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

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1 One example: *To Valerie Solanas and Marilyn Monroe In Recognition Of Their Desperation*, the title of which poses a strong feminist argument.
2 McKenna, *Task*, 4.
4 McKenna, *Task*, 49.
5 Ibid., 52.
7 Ibid., 8.
9 Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 143.
10 McKenna, *Task*, 49.
13 McKenna, Task, 52.
15 McKenna also offers up Ursula K. Le Guin’s The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia (New York: Harper Collins, 1974) as another example of anarchist utopia appearing during the second-wave feminist era. Other books exploring themes of anarchism within a utopian context include Dorothy Bryant’s The Kin of Ata Are Waiting for You (New York: Random House, 1971) and Starhawk’s The Fifth Sacred Thing (New York: Bantam Books, 1993).
16 Anarchist writers Peter Kropotkin and Emma Goldman, for example, believed that any vestige of the former established society could corrupt and inhibit the progressive cause. Peter Alekseevich Kropotkin, The Great French Revolution, trans. N. F. Dryhurst (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1909), 577.
18 Bakunin, “Protestation of the Alliance,” in Quotations 108.
19 Ibid., Task, 36.
20 Ibid., 53.
21 Ibid., 11.
22 “The least divergence” from the status quo, says Emma Goldman, constitutes “the greatest crime” in oppressive end-state regimes. For anarchists, however, forced uniformity constitutes the greatest form of oppression. In the words of Herbert Read: “There can be no uniformity in a free human society. Uniformity can only be created by the tyranny of a totalitarian regime.” Emma Goldman, “The Place of the Individual in Society,” in Quotations from the Anarchists, ed. Paul Berman (New York: Praeger, 1972), 39.
24 Ibid., 67.
25 Ibid., 66.
26 Ibid., 69.
35 Prica, “Cage’s Utopianism,” 128.
“I think one of the things that distinguishes music from the other arts is that music often requires other people. The performance of music is a public occasion or a social occasion.”
See also Cage, “Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse) Continued 1967,” in A Year from Monday: New Lectures and Writings (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), 151. “Art instead of being an object made by one person is a process set in motion by a group of people. Art’s socialized. It isn’t someone saying something, but people doing things, giving everyone (including those involved) the opportunity to have experiences they would not otherwise have had.”


39 Prica, “Cage’s Utopianism,” 132-133.


41 “Practical Utopias” comes from the title of “John Cage in Conversation with Steve Sweeney Turner,” The Musical Times 131 no. 1771 (September 1990), 469-472.

“Practical anarchism” comes from Prica, “Cage’s Utopianism,” 130.


43 Cage, Anarchy, vi-vii.

44 Cage, Anarchy, vii.


47 Cage with Turner, “Practical Utopias,” 470.

It is important to note that the philosophies of Cage and Hobbes were not entirely complementary. Austin Clarkson claims that Cage’s philosophies on the purpose of music are based heavily around ideas of the Cambridge Platonists, who opposed Hobbes’s materialism. (See Austin Clarkson, “The Intent of the Musical Moment,” from Writings through John Cage’s Music, Poetry, and Art, edited by David W. Bernstein and Christopher Hatch, University of Chicago Press, 2010, pg. 79). Much of Hobbes’s ideas have been challenged, especially with the dawn of 20th century science and psychology. It is almost universally accepted that human beings are not entirely autonomous from one another and are not fully matured from birth. Social forces do have a strong impact on individual human organisms. Even Hobbes himself was aware that his model could only go so far in a real-world context. This said, Hobbes’s model is still useful for analyzing Cage’s theories of perfect anarchy. Both Cage and Hobbes valued individual choice and freedom from power-seeking societal pressures.


49 Cage, Anarchy, vii.


Erin McKenna compares individualist anarchism with communal anarchy or “social anarchism.” “With communal anarchy, individuals interests become more inclusive than exclusive because they are no longer essentially competitive and society and the individual are no longer seen as being in conflict, for they are no longer seen as separate entities.” See McKenna, Task, 57.


52 Frank M. Coleman, Hobbes and America: Exploring the Constitutional Foundations (University of Toronto Press, 1977), 135. “Thoreau embodied the Hobbesian principle that the sole source of right within society is the absolute will of the individual.” Additionally, Alfred S. Shivers described Thoreau’s philosophy as “lofty individualism.” (See Maxwell Anderson (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1976), 19).


See also Cage and Turner, “John Cage’s Practical Utopias,” 470. Here Cage states: “I repeat, then, the life of Emma Goldman; it’s the basis of my text called Anarchy, which is just now published in the Booknell Review…”

55 Thoreau, Civil Disobedience, 1.
56 John Cage, Anarchy, v.
59 Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience,” 5.
62 Cage, Anarchy, vii.
66 Prica, “Cage’s Utopianism,” 128-129.
67 Ibid., 131.
68 Ibid., 128.
69 Ibid., 130.
71 Cage, Silence, 37.
“According to Joan Retallack, utopianism for Cage was a carefully designed function built into his aesthetic, writings, and into the realization of his scores. He wrote music for orchestra without a hierarchy of musicians, in which each musician is, in the Buddhist manner, a unique center in interpenetrating and nonobstructive harmony with every other musician.”
“In other words, his works do not have their own specific meaning, instead becoming a multi-layered (open) text exposed to an endless play of meanings, which Cage himself confirmed by saying that ‘each performance has to allow for a completely new experience.’”
75 Prica argues that Cage’s music involves “purposeless play,” or “unorganized sound running uncontrollably within a given time-frame, while listening to music comes down to a subjective selection of ambient sounds.” (Prica, 131)
76 “Unorganized sound running uncontrollably within a given time-frame, while listening to music comes down to a subjective selection of the ambient sounds.” See Prica, “Cage’s Utopianism,” 131.
77 Prica, “Cage’s Utopianism,” 131.
78 Retallack, Introduction,” in Musicage, xxix-xxx.
79 Cage on unimpededness: “seeing that in all of space each thing and each human being is at the center and furthermore that each one being at the center is the most honored one of all.” Cage on Interpenetration: “means that each one of these most honored ones of all is moving out in all directions penetrating and being penetrated by every other one no matter what the time or what the space… In fact each and every thing in all time and space is related to each and every other thing in all of time and space.”
See Cage, Silence 46-47.
80 Cage, A Year From Monday, 98.
81 Prica, “Cage’s Utopianism,” 132.
82 Ibid., 130.
83 Ibid., 131.
86 Some of these composers include Cage’s good friend Christian Wolff, Frederic Rzewski, and Cornelius Cardew.
89 Ibid.
92 Cage, *Silence*, 12.
94 At one point during the first performance, some listeners even put their ears to a clavichord. (See Dickinson, referencing a conversation he had with Cage, “John Cage and his Musicircus,” https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/jun/20/john-cage-and-his-musicircus).
96 Cage, *Silence*, 171.
97 Ibid., 39-40.
99 Ibid.
107 Ibid., 488-89.
108 Ibid., 491.


Cage’s use of high volumes could also be considered anti-utopian. These arguably smothered thought and conveyed a monolithic, autocratic image.


As seen in the “Program for the Oliveros Foundation,” from the Houston Metropolitan Research Center’s Pauline Oliveros Papers, Box 4, Folder 9 (Miscellaneous: 1980-1989).


Prica, “Cage’s Utopianism,” 131.

Prica argues that Cage’s chance procedures create sounds which are “a result of the will of perceptual consciousness.” These relationships only appear when the music is listened to in real time.


“The various techniques of meditation used within the great systems such as Yoga, Zen Buddhism, Sufisim and Christianity all have different points of focus and may produce different results in the practitioners. My own way of meditation is personal and secular. It has evolved out of my relationship to sound.”

See also her reaction to Nicholas Slonimsky’s entry for Oliveros in the Baker’s Biographical Dictionary. UCSD Archive, December 27, 1979, Box 7 Folder 6.

“To say that I have embrace[d?]? Tibetan Buddhism is misleading. I have studied and have great respect for Tibetan Buddhism as well as other disciplines.”

Deborah Johnson and Wendy Oliver call Oliveros a “practicing Tibetan Buddhist” in their entry for Women Making Art: Women in the Visual, Literary, and Performing Arts since 1960 (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 65-85. They also argue for the Buddhist principles found in Deep Listening.

Watson, Derek Bailey, 220.


The piece was also performed at the North Carolina School of the Arts on the 22 of September that same year; according to the program schedule, Anarchy Waltz was split into two performances, played at separate times during the event. See the UCSD Pauline Oliveros Archive: Box 1, Folder 9. Written on April 1, 1980.

From the UCSD Pauline Oliveros Archive: Box 1, Folder 9. Written on April 1, 1980.


The score located at the Houston Metropolitan Research Center states that it was composed in Leucedia, California, November 1971. It also says it was commissioned by Palomar College, San Marcos, California.

The score is published under the title Bonn Feier through Smith Publications. See Heidi Von Gunden, The Music of Pauline Oliveros (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 1983), 83. It was also submitted as Sonic Meditation XXVI for Women’s Work, a collection of scores edited by Annea Lockwood and Alison Knowles in 1975.


McKenna, Task, 19.


Mockus, Sounding Out, 77.


Oliveros, Bonn Feier, Smith Publications, 2.

Ibid., 1.
Ibid., 4.

Ibid., 4-5.

Ibid., 6.

Ibid., 6.

Oliveros, Introduction to Bonn Feier, Smith Publications.

This is not unlike the internet-friendly “flash mobs” seen today.

From the copy of Link found at the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Box 4, Folder 7.

Amy C. Beal, New Music, New Allies: American Experimental Music in West Germany from the Zero Hour to Reunification (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 212.


Pauline Oliveros, Link [score], published in Women’s Work, ed. Alison Knowles and Anna Lockwood, (New York: By the Authors, 1975), 18.

From Link [score], Houston Metropolitan Research Center.

Ibid.

Ibid. In the Bonn Feier version, manhole covers were painted with mandalas, street sweepers wore tuxedos, women wore mustaches. Acrobats, clowns, and dancers roamed the streets. A pallbearers’ procession took place, and homing pigeons were released. (See Beal, New Music, 212).

Beal, New Music, 210.

Ibid., 212.

Von Gunden, The Music of Pauline Oliveros, 84.


Ibid, 102.

Ibid, 110.


Ibid., 85.

Ibid., 85.


Cage, Silence, 10.
CHAPTER 3:
The Deep Listening Practice as an Everyday Method Utopia

In 1988, Pauline Oliveros coined the phrase “Deep Listening” after performing in an empty underground cistern in Port Townsend, Washington State. Oliveros (who brought her accordion), who had developed an interest in highly reverberant spaces, ventured into this 2-million-gallon cistern with her long-time friend Stuart Dempster (trombone, didgeridoo) and her assistant Panaiotis (vocals). The three decided to record an album under the name “Deep Listening Band” with sound engineer Al Swanson. For five hours, the three musicians took advantage of the space’s 45-second reverberation time. The resulting album, *Deep Listening*, was released by New Albion in 1989. The hour-long span of the album consists solely of improvised sounds.

According to Oliveros, the title *Deep Listening* described “the way we had to listen in order to play in that environment… we were listening to our own sounds and to the other’s sounds and to all of the reflected sounds of the space as well.”¹ Although she published *Deep Listening* in 1989, she had been considering this approach toward listening long before her experience in the cistern. Almost a decade earlier, she published her *Sonic Meditations* (1970), a collection of works which she implemented among her colleagues while teaching at the University of California, San Diego. During this time, she developed her mantra, “Listen to everything all the time and remind yourself when you are not listening.”²

This simple mantra has grown into an entire curriculum for musicians, including literature, workshops, concerts, and compositions centered around the ideas of listening, meditation, movement, dreams, and healing through personal sonic exploration. In 1985, Oliveros established the Pauline Oliveros Foundation to provide more institutional support for these various Deep Listening activities. In 2005, the Foundation became the Deep Listening
Institute, Ltd. By this time, with the help of the internet, Deep Listening had become a worldwide phenomenon. That same year, Oliveros published her book *Deep Listening: A Composer’s Sound Practice*, a “handbook” for prospective Deep Listeners which also contains a collection of newly-written *Deep Listening Pieces*.

In 2014, she established the Center for Deep Listening at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) to replace the Deep Listening Institute, which has since been dissolved. She transferred her directorial duties to Tomie Hahn, an ethnomusicologist and teacher at RPI. Despite her advancing age, she served as a teacher and mentor at the Center until she died, overseeing certificate holders and participating in classes both in New York and abroad. Her partner Ione and her close friend Heloise Gold, two founding members of the Deep Listening Institute, continue to teach and help direct alongside Hahn at the Center for Deep Listening, which remains very active.

While Oliveros’s mantra to always listen is simple, the Deep Listening practice itself is complex and multi-faceted. One cannot simply apply Deep Listening during the composition process or during a performance; rather, it constitutes an entire lifestyle. “Deep Listening is listening in every possible way to everything possible to hear no matter what you are doing,” Oliveros explains. “Such intense listening includes the sounds of daily life, of nature, of one’s own thoughts as well as musical sounds. Deep Listening is my life practice.” Indeed, she hoped to incorporate a heightened sense of awareness of sound into not just her compositions and improvisations, but in her daily life and interactions with others. Tomie Hahn also adds that the Deep Listening “practice” does not begin and end in the practice room, but it rather embodies an entire “spiritual practice.” Deep Listening, therefore, is not simply something a person does, but what a person is, or strives to become.
The fully integrated Deep Listening practice does not simply involve interaction with sounds and music. In fact, Oliveros and her collaborators conceived three “modalities” which encompass the Deep Listening practice. “A lot of people will lead Sonic Meditations or read Pauline’s work and not necessarily realize that she envisioned it as a tripartite practice,” Hahn explains. Oliveros’s specialty was, of course, the Deep Listening modality, which involves both physical and imagined sonic phenomena. Heloise Gold, a tai chi master, teaches the “Deep Movement” modality, which focuses on movement and the body. As with Deep Listening, Deep Movement allows for individual participants to be informed by their own backgrounds. Hahn, a certified yoga instructor and an expert in Japanese traditional dance, often applies her training in these disciplines to her Deep Movement practice. The final modality is Dreaming, another highly personalized practice facilitated by Ione. All three of these modalities appear in Oliveros’s Deep Listening guide, and Deep Listening Certification requires that one be equally adept in all three modalities.7

Oliveros’s Sonic Meditations are iconic representations of her Deep Listening Practice. In 1970, she originally conceived these compositions as spoken scores, and thus did not initially write them down. They were simply exercises for her ♀ Ensemble to explore during her UCSD residency. However, she finally dictated and published them through Smith Publications in 1974. These 25 works, delivered in English prose, range in length, complexity, and abstraction. For example, the first meditation, Teach Yourself To Fly, is a fairly straightforward meditation on breathing in which participants slowly allow their breath cycle to become audible, and then voiced. Meditation #5 is far more oblique: Oliveros asks participants to “take a walk at night. Walk so silently that the bottoms of your feet become ears.”8 Since the official publication of
Sonic Meditations, Oliveros has written many additional pieces which encourage Deep Listening and sonic meditation. All of these works possess a common interest in listening as lifestyle.

Oliveros’s goal in creating the Sonic Meditations and the Deep Listening Practice transcended simply making interesting music and developing musical listening skills; she intended to also impact participants on both a personal and social level. In her written introduction to the Sonic Meditations, Oliveros asserted that, when appropriately executed, these pieces could lead to “heightened states of awareness or expanded consciousness” and “changes in physiology and psychology,” where “known and unknown tensions” turn to potentially permanent relaxations. Perhaps more importantly, the Sonic Meditations could also positively impact the group dynamic. Even in their earliest form, Oliveros conceived of the meditations “just to make it possible for people to work together using sound and music.” “Members of the group may achieve greater awareness and sensitivity to each other,” she stated in her introduction. Music, she observed, is merely “a welcome by-product” of this social activity. Later in her written introduction, she emphasized the “healing” qualities found in Deep Listening, which occur:

1) when individuals feel the common bond with others through a shared experience,
2) when one’s inner experience is made manifest and accepted by others,
3) when one is aware of and in tune with one’s surroundings, and
4) when one’s memories or values are integrated with the present and understood by others.

The Deep Listening Institute’s mission statement reads similarly, professing to cultivate “creative skills vital to personal and community growth.” Statements like these accentuate how much Oliveros and her collaborators valued positive social connections.
Indeed, Deep Listening depends upon social interaction. While sonic meditations may be done alone, the Center for Deep Listening’s infrastructure rests upon group meditation and group improvisation. Retreats, workshops, and group performances have always been major highlights for the program. To this day, Deep Listening Certificate holders must regularly hold Deep Listening sessions and maintain a local contingency of Deep Listening participants in order to keep their certificates. “We ask each person to… form their own private group wherever they live,” Hahn explains, “It can be anywhere from 2 people to 10 or 12 people. It can be a very modest group – it can be family members, even.”¹⁵ Not only does this ensure that the tenets of Deep Listening spread, but it also ensures that Deep Listeners are never without a network of feedback and support.

Why is this social network so important? Dana Reason argues that it has to do with Oliveros’s interest in feedback. “Many of Oliveros’s Deep Listening compositions have a feedback portion written into the compositional instruction and process itself,” she says.¹⁶ Many of the Sonic Meditations, for example, require groups to be successful. Meditation XVI, for instance, requires participants to alter their sonic contributions based on what others are singing. Stephen Miles concludes that while other forms of meditation invite subjects to “tune out” from the outside world, Oliveros’s meditations require the opposite – a constant awareness of what sonically goes on around them. The Sonic Meditations therefore “compose social relationships, allowing performers and audiences with the means to connect as musical and meditative subjects.”¹⁷ We are not isolated entities; contact with the empirical world is necessary – and this includes contact with other people. Technology has expanded the circle wider. Now, through video chat technology (the Center for Deep Listening uses Google Hangouts), participants from across the world can perform together.
Group work also improves one’s own communicative skills. Not only do participants receive sounds; they also project their own expressions into the sonic environment, and this requires distinct skills. Some of the Meditations (III, “Pacific Tell” being one example), even involve telepathic dialogue between members of the group – a process which requires great focus to achieve, as Oliveros explained. Another meditative piece, Sound Fishes (1992), invites performers to wait patiently for sounds to come to them, “like a fisherman waiting for a nibble or a bite.” Performers may only play sounds they successfully “catch.” If the air is clear (read: silent), she argued, then sounds become easier to hear. Pieces like these train participants in focus, discretion, selectivity, and patience – all important qualities to have both in improvisation situations as well as everyday social interactions. In this way, the Deep Listening pieces allow the sonic realm to merge with the social realm.

Oliveros’s meditative pieces, therefore, model everyday interaction, and help bring about “direct, concrete, and substantive” change in the real world. It should be no surprise, then, that these Deep Listening pieces carry utopian potential. These pieces do not simply require social interaction; they in fact orient participants toward a more ideal version of human interaction through concrete experience. This is something utopian novels cannot do. Even the most vivid language cannot fully transport readers into a utopian world. A musical performance, while temporary, can nevertheless engulf performers and audience in a utopian experience. Both audiences and participants can bear witness to the peaceful executions of common goals presented in the piece. In this way, music can effectively educate desires.

The remainder of this chapter explores the specific ways in which the Deep Listening community behaves as a utopian model. Specifically, the Deep Listening community falls into two categories: Ruth Levitas’s method utopia, and Davinia Cooper’s everyday utopia. These
categorical assignations are important because, as this chapter will reveal, the world of Deep Listening does not behave like an end-state literary utopia. It is neither perfect nor permanent, and it does not profess to have answers to every social problem. In sum, the world of Deep Listening exemplifies method utopian thought by emphasizing process, progress, and self-evaluation.

Utopias depend on structure and systems. The Center for Deep Listening is no exception; it is indeed an institution, not simply a soft school of thought. Oliveros herself trademarked and legally protected the phrase “Deep Listening” and the name of the Center, so as to distinguish them from other practices or schools of thought. Classes, workshops, and certification processes follow a pre-determined, replicable structure. All members of the Center share similar goals and missions, which are clearly publicized. There are systems in place for decision-making, holding meetings, teaching classes, and interacting with the public.

But most importantly, the Center for Deep Listening is a utopian system because it formally addresses the conflict between group and individual. The Deep Listening creed rests upon finding “homeostasis” between the global and the individual. Oliveros herself states:

I have learned that listening can be focused, linear and exclusive and listening can be open, global and inclusive…Learning to recognize these ways of listening is important musically, technically, socially, professionally, and humanly.¹⁹

Due to Oliveros’s acknowledgement of both inclusive and exclusive (group and individual) listening, every voice in the community has value and merit. These voices are all unique, and each contributes something different to the group dynamic, but no voice is inherently more powerful than another. Dana reason testifies of this phenomenon as she performed Oliveros’s Tuning Meditation at the Bang on a Can festival:
Each person was at once acutely aware of their ‘individuality’… and yet there was a comfortable space created in that another person was there to ‘catch’ your sound. You knew you were part of a transformative sonic community and that your individual voice mattered in the collective.20

Furthermore, these individual voices connect to their communities by free choice.21 This attitude carries over into the meetings, discussions, and everyday interactions within the center. Therefore, the Deep Listening program aligns with democratic, consensus-based political systems. Each of these individual “sounds within” meet the sounds of the collective in a group improvisation setting, as in an act of voting or sustaining a group decision.22 Oliveros’s anti-hierarchical methodology and activism on behalf of marginalized groups confirm the accuracy of this interpretation. Both also exist within the creed of the Deep Listening community.

Hierarchy in Deep Listening

Oliveros’s Sonic Mediations are also democratic. In what many see as an act of defiance against Western convention, Oliveros designed these and other Deep Listening compositions to be performed by anyone, regardless of musical ability. Since she wrote her scores in English prose, one need not even know how to read music to perform her pieces. She even invited audiences who have never even seen the score to join in during a performance.23 Her pieces also abandon traditional conventions regarding technique, virtuosity, and musical skill. Musical training, in fact, might interfere with the listening experience.24 Reason goes on to explain that these meditative pieces “eliminate attitudes of having to demonstrate clever or wry and musical or virtuosic elements. It was human just to be able to sound or to remain silent. Period.”25 In this way, Reason argues that Oliveros “problematizes the insider/outside paradigm in the field of new
music…All levels of ability are respected and encouraged.”26 The mission statement of the Deep Listening Institute was even more explicit in its inclusivity:

DLI fosters creative innovation across boundaries and across abilities, among artists and audience, musicians and non-musicians, healers and the physically or cognitively challenged, and children of all ages. This ever-growing community of musicians, artists, scientists and certified Deep Listening practitioners strives for a heightened consciousness of the world of sound and the sound of the world.27

Such a broad acceptance leads to countless interpretations of Oliveros’s pieces, which was exactly what she desired.

In today’s Deep Listening community, leaders invite everyone, new or old to the program, to compose. Tomie Hahn explains that each candidate for a Deep Listening Certificate is required to present and facilitate his or her own newly composed Sonic Meditation.28 Deep Listening devotees often pay tribute to Oliveros by composing their own works inspired by her Sonic Meditations. Such pieces have been welcomed since Deep Listening’s inception. Stephen Miles even noted that, while Oliveros clearly led and initiated the ♀ Ensemble, the original Sonic Meditations themselves were products of group activity – not the work of an auteur composer.29

The open-ended nature of each meditation also “invites…the performers to participate with Oliveros in the creative process.” Participants can thus freely discover “what ‘sounded-in-them.’”30 Both have agency in the compositional process, and thus Oliveros demotes herself from a position of interpretive power.

This said, is everything democratic and subjective in Oliveros’s world of Deep Listening? If this were so, we would have another anarchist utopia on our hands. However, this is not the
case. There are indeed several ways in which hierarchy, standardization, and quantifiable structure appear within the Deep Listening program.

First, although incredibly inclusive, Reason argues that Oliveros’s works are still “non-populist,” because they require “an acceptance or understanding of contemporary extended techniques, microtones and open form practices and the resultant sound.” Indeed, Oliveros’s pieces tend to be more attractive to those who have a solid understanding of 20th century music and the development of extended techniques. As much as Oliveros wished for everyone to appreciate and participate in her works, the concepts may alienate certain kinds of musicians and lay listeners. Participants are somewhat obligated to develop an understanding of both listening and performance history in order to effectively understand her meditative pieces. It is expected that Deep Listeners educate themselves in these areas.

Then there is the issue of certificates held by senior members of the Deep Listening community. Oliveros established the Deep Listening Certificate program in 1996 after she and twelve of her colleagues met for an advanced Deep Listening retreat at Rose Mountain, New Mexico. Oliveros believed such a program would aid in the process of “distillation and expansion of her materials for transmission.” Originally, the program took three years to complete, but it has since changed to be only a year-long residency. The process for obtaining a certificate includes:

1. Meeting with teachers on the first Sunday of every month. Sometimes this included Oliveros herself, Heloise Gold, or IONE.

2. Meeting privately with a class (or “pod”) organized by the certificate candidate the second Sunday of every month.

3. Taking good notes about what happens during Deep Listening sessions
4. Composing an original Sonic Meditation, which they perform at the end of the year.

5. Completing readings on all three modalities of Deep Listening.

6. Writing three two-page “quarterly reports,” which contain descriptions of/reflections on the group’s activities.34

After they have received the certificate, it is expected that these listeners maintain their own local Deep Listening group. Attendance and participation in Deep Listening sessions – whether online or in person – is mandatory.

At first glance, the Deep Listening Certificate may seem like an obvious distinguisher between “haves” and “have-nots.” Even Hahn herself could not deny that the certificates represented an advanced amount of skill and experience. “With anything, there’s an acknowledgement of an experience level. That over time, one gains a great deal with their artistic practice.” However, considering the highly democratic interactions within a small Deep Listening group (or “pod,” as they are called among the Deep Listening community), certificate holders’ authority becomes less important. The only true difference between those who hold certificates and those who do not is simply the amount of time spent in the program. All are welcome to spend the year gaining the certificate, and all experiences in Deep Listening are celebrated and respected, whether one holds the title of “Certificate Holder” or not.

But this begs the question: Is there even a way to measure the success of a Deep Listening Experience? Are there any objective qualifications within the notorious subjectivity of Oliveros’s Deep Listening compositions? Hahn takes issue with these questions entirely:

I wouldn’t necessarily say that something like this could be measured, actually…

It’s like asking somebody to measure love, or spiritual awakening. And that’s not something I feel comfortable weighing in on. [It’s about] trying very hard to let a
sound or an expression by someone be the way it is, and to be present with it. If one is Deep Listening by themselves outside in the woods, you’re not going to start screaming at the birds and the trees and the water and the leaves and say “Wait a minute! You’re not doing it right!”

Because of this, the Deep Listening community has put checks into place in order to maintain an inclusive environment. “Something that’s very strong within the community is ‘L.O.J.,’ which is ‘lift off judgment,’” Hahn explains. “We freely use that when we talk to each other, even on emails. It’s like insider language… We have to keep looking into ourselves... Trying very hard to let a sound or an expression by someone be the way it is, and to be present with it.”

In this way, Deep Listeners eschew exclusionary attitudes, objective replicability or conventional virtuosic technique. However, this does not mean that there aren’t ways of qualifying or quantifying the success of a Deep Listening performance. “Virtuosic listening” arguably does exist; Oliveros herself seemed to have it. Reason claimed she had an “acute virtuosity to the hearing and listening experience” which was both unique and inspiring to those around her. What distinguished Oliveros from other listeners was her commitment to listening all the time. Hahn herself recounts a personal story of how Oliveros could hear the quietest whispers from across an empty stage as they cleaned up after a performance. “This would happen all the time with me,” Hahn reminisced:

I’d be sitting literally next to her in a classroom, in a department meeting, walking down the hall, and she was simultaneously taking in every little tiny subtle sound alongside the larger sounds on a continuum… I think it is quite an amazing thing when you’re around somebody who’s achieving that… When you’re in their presence, it’s quite phenomenal.
Anne Bourne believed Oliveros’s talent for listening stretched beyond simply acoustical awareness, but also manifested itself in her sensitivity to others. “I soon discovered in Pauline a friend who never asked me to repeat myself,” Bourne stated. “She seemed always to hear me.”\(^{39}\) Though these skills may be difficult to measure, they are presumably common among truly committed Deep Listeners. Oliveros (and those who followed her) appeared to believe that anyone could improve these skills through hard work, repetition, and practice, as well as openness and relaxation. To Oliveros, these forces did not oppose each other. “These opposites make us whole,” she stated.\(^{40}\)

Another quantifying question: Is everyone participating? Hahn explains that full participation also includes active listening from the audience. Oliveros hoped to create an inviting space for audience members to listen first, and perhaps also perform if inspired to do so. “It doesn’t always mean that they have to be actively making a sound, like clapping or having a musical instrument or vocalizing, but listening is a really vital part of being part of a scene.”\(^{41}\) Someone’s presence in the space alone contributes to the success of the performance. Since there need not be any outward physical expression of listening, it is difficult to determine the involvement of everyone in the space. However, Hahn argues that there a palpable sensation occurs when everyone actively engages in the process, though it is “hard to describe.”\(^{42}\) Dana Reason seems to agree, recounting an experience she had at the Sound Symposium in Newfoundland, Canada in the 1990s. “Everyone was present,” she stated.\(^{43}\)

Thus, a culture of structure and system surrounds Deep Listening, putting it at odds with anarchistic utopian models. But for Deep Listening advocates, objective quality or success take the back-seat to the changes which occur when one listens deeply. Thus, Oliveros’s works are prime examples of Bonnie Wade’s “process music,” in which a musical work not only exists as a
“thing” – a static product reproduced to exactness – but also an action in real time. Oliveros wished for participants to “make a shift or take a leap...her pieces trigger changes in attention or awareness.” Even the smallest change in attitude is worth celebrating. This attitude existed since Oliveros’s first attempts at performing her Sonic Meditations. She viewed them more as a “laboratory” experiment than a finished product, an opportunity to simply explore how people listen and are affected by listening in groups.

It follows, then, that Oliveros’s meditative music resonates strongly with method utopianism. Far from being end-state blueprints, her Sonic Meditations are dynamic, open-ended social experiments. Along with embracing democratic power structures, Deep Listening also possesses a critical element; specifically, it questions the dualistic and hierarchical musical structures present in Western music. Her practice also welcomes diversity of expression and self-reflection. The Deep Listening community possesses a loose hierarchy of certificate-holding mentors, but encourages free dialogue and mobility within its program. It promotes certain standards of quality, but these standards fundamentally differ from those seen in Western musical tradition. In short, the Deep Listening community exemplifies the communal, flexible, and liberating environment of everyday method utopias.

Retreats and Everyday Utopias

Utopias commonly exist as worlds apart – both ideologically as well as geographically. To maintain their purity, perfect worlds are often isolated, self-sustaining entities. This allows the perfect life to continue unsullied by worldly influences. Utopians also often wish to reconnect with the natural world, so they favor a land untouched by human influences. Often fictional utopias are set on islands, secluded forests, or distant planets. In real-world practice, utopian founders like Robert Owen were drawn to the American wilderness. In today’s age,
complete isolation is difficult to achieve, but the notions of pilgrimage and life apart still exist among utopians. The Deep Listening retreat reflects this interest in physical detachment from the “normal” world.

However, Oliveros did not intend for the Deep Listening community to be a purely remote haven from the rest of society. Instead, Oliveros hoped that Deep Listening could spread throughout the world and inform individual cultures and communities, without the need for pilgrimage. Technology, of course, was a valuable tool in bringing about this goal. Today, Deep Listeners gather in their own communities, as well as online, while maintaining a “normal” lifestyle in the non-utopian world. Instead of being an all-encompassing and dominating cultural force, Deep Listening provides a temporary respite from everyday activities. Rather than physically gathering together, Deep Listeners learn to create their own “psychological space where one may repair at anyplace and anytime” through listening. Thus, the Deep Listening community strongly resembles the “everyday utopias” described by Davinia Cooper, in which radical new ways of perceiving the world inform regular daily life.

Before we explore the “everyday” quality of the Deep Listening utopia, let us first consider the Deep Listening Retreat. Since first conceiving the program, Oliveros wished to create a “retreat devoted to listening.” The first retreat took place at Rose Mountain Retreat Center in Las Vegas, New Mexico. Here, in 1991, Oliveros met with Andy and Heloise Gold, Ione, and other interested participants to practice listening. For the next nine years, Oliveros hosted annual retreats at Rose Mountain. During this time, she also developed the three-year Deep Listening Certificate program, which she initially granted to six people who remained for an “advanced retreat” in 1995. In 1998, Margrit Schenker organized an additional retreat at the Hotel Regina in the high Swiss Alps. Four additional retreats took place in Switzerland between
1999 and 2005. Other major retreats have occurred in Canada, Washington state, California, Spain, the United Kingdom, and New York.

Accounts from these retreats reveal a sense of gratitude for the opportunity to escape everyday life, embrace a simpler lifestyle, and devote all of one’s time to listening. To get to the Rose Mountain retreat, one had to embark on an 8,000-foot excursion on a bumpy road only navigable via four-wheel drive. The Retreat Center had no plumbing, and it had limited electricity generated from solar panels. The environment there was isolated and untouched in almost every sense – including the sonic sense. “The Center is in a relatively unspoiled location with very little technological sound intrusion except for occasional jet airliners. There is no local traffic. The location was inspiring for listening.” Caterina De Re shared a similar experience at the 1999 Muerren retreat: “Although not free of tourist traffic, the remoteness of Muerren in the Swiss Alps provided a suitable retreat environment.” Anne Bourne described her Rose Mountain experience as “a way of disconnecting from the busy mind and all sonic distraction that life had begun to surround us with.” In such a new and isolated environment, participants could freely explore new ways of listening – and living – without the burden of “real life” in constant focus.

For a week, retreat participants listened, sounded, walked, journaled, and composed with Oliveros, Gold, and Ione as guides. Most of the activities were based around Oliveros’s Sonic Meditations and Deep Listening Pieces, but performing these meditations was a small part of the total experience. Participants spent much of the day, in fact, simply experiencing the environment and engaging in non-musical activities. De Re describes a typical retreat schedule: Alarm rings before 6 a.m. Listen. Silence. Coffee fix. Dig that mountain view.

Each morning, from 10 AM to 1 PM, participants were to remain silent. In her account, Anne Bourne explains that this was a practice in exploring new modes of understanding:

Take the words out of the way of content. This was a silence to balance the two hemispheres of the brain and allow what had become the lesser hemisphere, the non-verbal hemisphere, to awaken, and detect its own more subtle interpretations. This was a silence to allow for the detection of new constellations of awareness and sensation, for vulnerability, for respect, for understanding to be an open field, for truth, for kindness, for listening. We could all be simple.

She later states:

In silence the breakfast table was not quiet...Asking for bagels, green chili salsa, and pieces of fresh fruit to be sorted and passed, through eye contact...A communication was devised as if language had not yet been invented.

Hemispheres balanced. Paced by the soft arrivals and departures of disarmingly beautiful cooks bringing clean food, there were waves of laughter, the shared rebellious response to a discipline, evocative of human folly, causing acceptance and quantum poetic breakthroughs. There is no small talk without words.\textsuperscript{57}

Her language here proposes a way in which silence might be a useful method for educating desire – to Bourne, it can transform human nature to be more peaceful, playful, and empathetic.
Part of this period of silence involved a “walking meditation up steep slopes,” or an “Extreme Slow Walk.” This involves stepping forward, heel-to-toe, as slowly as possible. “The challenge for this exercise,” Oliveros explained, “is that no matter how slow you are walking, you can always go much slower.” The purpose of such an exercise is to “challenge your normal pattern or rhythm of walking so that you can learn to reconnect with very subtle energies in the body.” Along with other body-oriented exercises, the Slow Walk inseparably relates to listening and awareness. By developing a listening body, Heloise Gold argues that “we can feel ourselves more easily, sense more profoundly, and respond more sensitively and immediately.”

Bodywork, then, is another tool for educating desire.

Other aspects of the Deep Listening Retreat include journaling, drawing, discussion, and composition. All these activities invite individual self-reflection and creativity. At the end of the week, all participants share their own meditative pieces, inspired by their experience. For Oliveros, these pieces testified to the success of the retreat. Participants of these retreats regularly left with an unequivocally profound experience. For a brief week, they could experience a utopian environment where everyone is united in listening. This speaks to the effectiveness of retreat and detachment for educating desire and forming a utopian community. Although the utopian retreat cannot last forever, the tools developed there remain as participants go about their normal lives. In the meantime, the Center for Deep Listening continued to hold smaller-scaled classes (both in-person and online), workshops, and events to keep the utopian spirit alive.

Deep Listening in the Real World: An Everyday Utopia

In her book *Everyday Utopias: The Conceptual Life of Promising Spaces*, Cooper defines “everyday utopias” as “networks and spaces that perform regular daily life…in a radically
different fashion.”61 As with all utopias, these are man-made systems of living, dependent on a replicable structure. However, unlike theoretical utopias found in literature, the everyday utopia is a real-world attempt at creating a utopian space within a normal, non-utopian environment. Cooper provides several case study examples of everyday utopias: a nudist colony, a women’s/trans bathhouse, a local exchange trading system, an alternative boarding school, etc.

Everyday utopias are inherently method-oriented; they must be, simply for their own survival. Although no everyday utopia is truly perfect, members of these communities nevertheless “bring about (or seek to bring about) new forms of normalization, desire, and subjectivity” through small, incremental changes.62 Rather than dwelling on a perfected blueprint, these communities emphasize what is doable and viable given the conditions of the present, all the while still challenging what is possible. Failure and struggles matter just as much as successes, as they are simply a part of the “constant adaptation and change” which pervades a method utopian system.63 While plenty of problematic elements exist within these societies, there always remains an acceptance of process, temporality, and agency. “They still rely on the work of enactment, whether imagined or socially trailed.”64

Everyday utopians care less about building completely new social structures, and more about engaging with already-existing objects, spaces, and practices. Interwoven within public society, they adopt aspects of mainstream culture while rejecting others. Cooper calls this “critical proximity,” because of its essentiality in maintaining a discourse between “outsiders” and “insiders.”65 This separates everyday utopias from intentional utopian communities; no physical isolation or pilgrimage is needed. Additionally, everyday utopians do not wish to pressure the outside world to conform to their standards. By maintaining physical proximity to
the normal world, they simply live their lives and invite outsiders to join in their alternative practice by simply being.

Everyday utopias successfully turn an abstract and perceivably untouchable future into a concrete, feasible reality. They re-contextualize taken-for-granted parts of the human experience (paper money, bodily fluids, clothing, modern education practices, etc.) in a practical and unsentimental fashion, addressing real-world behaviors and mechanics of a community with “the ethos of maintenance, of digging in and getting things done.”66 It’s about doing the best one can. Thus, in a very concrete way, everyday utopias create the change they wish to encounter, "building and forging new ways of experiencing social and political life."67 In this sense, they “more than imagined spaces,” not guilty of being too idealistic.68 All the while, members of these communities are still “oriented to the hope, desire, and belief in the possibility of other, better worlds” – namely more egalitarian, democratic, and emancipatory ways of living.69

Such endeavors, Cooper argues, have immense “transformative potential,” though both sides of the political line tend to overlook and criticize them.70 Because these “hot spots of innovative practice” reside alongside public society, they draw attention to their progressive (or, potentially, conservative) differences. Many, consider them radically unconventional, but this unconventionality invites outsiders to question the status quo surrounding them. “Visitors can be inspired by what they see and learn,” Cooper explains, “allowing their brief incursion into a more utopian world reframe the way they experience and think about a life largely lived elsewhere.”71 It follows, then, that everyday utopias are also highly inclusive. Anyone is invited to join and experience the benefits of the utopian community.

This description aptly describes Oliveros’s Deep Listening Community. More than just a retreat from the world or a critique of current social structures, Deep Listening is designed for
everyday worlds. While there are physical retreats and getaways, Deep Listeners must always return to their careers, families, and mainstream expectations and responsibilities. Amidst the routines of everyday life, Listeners meet on a regular basis to re-ignite their listening skills and experience utopia amidst the chaos of the “real world.” Members of an individual “pod” do not typically eat, work, and sleep in the same space. In fact, with modern technology, pods can be formed by people living across oceans and continents. However, they still can experience a sense of utopian unity when they come together each week. In the meantime, these Listeners interweave themselves within public society, thus maintaining the “critical proximity” between outsiders and insiders.

Furthermore, Oliveros believed in a non-confrontational and non-invasive approach to Deep Listening advocacy. Rather than separating from mainstream society, whether by physical exodus or by anarchistic revolution, Oliveros instead encouraged musicians to engage with established cultural traditions. “A society which admits no new ways may be subject to decay; whereas a society which has no tradition may be subject to continual upsets and lack of stability.”72 One should instead lead by example, and focus on changing oneself before changing others. “If I could not change the world,” she said, “I could at least change myself through this work.”73 Bourne believed Oliveros practiced as she preached: “Pauline’s teaching was experiential. Do as you do, not as I say.”74

The Challenges of Deep Listening

So far, this chapter has cited personal testimonies of the positive and utopian effects of Pauline Oliveros’s Deep Listening practice. These accounts suggest that Oliveros created Deep Listening to provide a utopian space for those who wished to experience it, and that it at least somewhat succeeds in achieving its purpose. However, Oliveros’s musical works are not always
utopian in practice. The remainder of this chapter will discuss aspects which thwart Oliveros’s utopian culture. One imped ing factor is the subjectivity of Oliveros’s musical compositions. Another is the recent death of Oliveros herself. These less-than-ideal circumstances present within Deep Listening culture do not damn the Deep Listening practice as a failed utopia. As with all method utopian models, critique is encouraged and vital to progress. Regardless of outcome, Deep Listening still symbolizes an inspiring and peaceful future for thousands of people. In discussing these setbacks, I hope not only to inform the general public, but also to engage fellow Deep Listeners in a constructive discussion about how the culture surrounding Pauline Oliveros could be improved or better interpreted.

One major challenge that Deep Listening participants face is the ambiguous nature of Oliveros’s scores. Because she wished to engage performers in the compositional process and provide room for personal interpretation, she usually wrote her scores in prose, and they act more as prompts than explicit instructions. Many consider this to be one of her greatest strengths in creating a utopian music. Many groups have enjoyed the freedom of adapting an Oliveros piece to fit their unique ensemble’s needs.

However, ethnomusicologist Barbara Rose Lange observed firsthand some of the conflicts and challenges that could occur in such an open-ended Deep Listening situation. In her paper “The Politics of Collaborative Performance in the Music of Pauline Oliveros,” she documents her case study from 2003, in which two performance groups from neighboring US cities attempted to collaboratively perform Oliveros’s Four Meditations for Orchestra. This prose score has four movements, each with its own short prompt. Additionally, Oliveros also directed the ensemble to include a “dynamic interplay” between members of the ensemble. “The creative process is shared,” she instructs. Yet despite this written advocation by Oliveros,
enough disputes occurred between the two groups to where they almost cancelled the performance because some members threatened to leave the project. The final performance, Lange argued, did not meet Oliveros’s expectations. It lacked the ineffable, utopian cohesion which otherwise characterizes a Deep Listening experience. Thus, the performance also fell short of achieving its utopian potential.

What caused such disruptive disputes? Most of the conflict arose from three major points of disagreement: the purpose of rehearsals, the performer-audience relationship, and the nature of the sounds within the space. Members of the groups aired their grievances on an electronic bulletin board, and their comments reveal two major takeaways. First, they reveal how Oliveros’s works can be (and are) interpreted in a variety of ways. Second, they reveal how today’s musicians differ in their fundamental philosophical approaches to music, which may inhibit future utopian musical projects.

These philosophical differences originated from the differing musical backgrounds of the two groups. Group A included a variety of musicians from eclectic backgrounds. Some were classical musicians, while others came from the pop tradition. They identified as “improvisors” and “creators,” playing electronic instruments as well as acoustic orchestral ones. Their interests, then, lied in spontaneous creation and limitless options for interpretation. It follows, then, that this group desired as few rehearsals as possible, so as not to overwork the piece. They were not concerned about the technical acoustic quality of the performance, as well. Sounds needn’t have an audible presence within the ensemble; instead, it was “about a loving relationship to one’s own sound.” They also prioritized the musicians’ experience over the size and comfort of the audience. In the words of one Group A musician,” “Music, or sound, or whatever you want to call it is the most important thing, the creation itself.” It didn’t matter if someone was
around to hear it. Lange concludes that Group A wished to “infuse music with freedom of exchange,” and saw music as a humanistic service rather than an intellectual property.

Group B, on the other hand, involved academically trained musicians who primarily played orchestral instruments. These artists were “decidedly specialist” and identified as composers.79 This may explain why they took such an interest in re-creating Oliveros’s piece in the way she intended. They viewed her work as an “art music project” which required practice, control, and self-discipline. They feared the “chaotic” elements Group A seemed to embrace, calling for extensive rehearsal time and a pre-organized plan for carrying out the formal structure of the piece. Because they modeled their ensemble after other successful art music groups, they took an interest in the number of members in the space and how they might best give their audience a pleasurable experience. Additionally, they wanted to make sure every member of the ensemble could be heard within the space, and worried about being “acoustically stepped all over” by louder electronic instruments.80

Lange argues that Oliveros’s “mixed messages about the role of practice and rehearsal” were partly to blame for these disputes. Both groups could cite and reference Oliveros as evidence for their separate arguments. Practice and repetition are indeed important parts of her Deep Listening methodology, yet she also appreciated non-musicians and audience members joining in impromptu during meditative performances. Her phrase “the creative process is shared” is ambiguous enough to be interpreted in two very different ways. Group A interpreted the “shared” experience to mean the peaceful cohabitation of individual sounds and sonic expressions. Group B, conversely, hoped to develop a “shared” creative experience through regular exposure to other members of the group, which could result in a more unified and cohesive group sound.
At one point, the members of Group A threatened boycotting the joint performance. However, Lange explains that the groups managed to maintain enough good faith in each other for the performance to take place. Oliveros herself saw the performance and was aware of some of the conflicts between the ensembles. While she believed “a lot of listening was going on,” she felt like the performers did not entirely fulfill the score’s objectives. Some of the problems were audible and technical in nature. For example, they did not play short enough durations in Movement III, and their dynamic range was too small in Movement IV, Oliveros argued.\(^8\) Additionally, Oliveros said the performance lacked an overall “electrical” sensation, which she believed was due to an over-reliance on their classical training and a lack of courageous musicality. In both Oliveros’s and Lange’s view, the groups only partially succeeded in their performance because they did not gain enough “sensitivity” to each other.\(^2\) Utopia did not appear.

Lange intimates that Oliveros’s *4 Meditations for Orchestra* might in fact create the opposite of a utopia; it may exacerbate disagreements between groups who espouse different musical philosophies and approaches. She argues that the piece “stimulates conflict by freeing musicians to apply their own ideals of preparation and expression.”\(^3\) Her “suggestive score language allowed musicians to project their ideals onto the *Four Meditations.*”\(^4\) In other words “making a piece one’s own,” may actually mean reducing it to whatever preferences or ideologies performers happen to hold, thus dismantling connections.

However, Lang also mentions that the piece allowed for opportunities to practice conflict resolution. Certain performers rose to the occasion and served as mediators between the opposing sides. The groups used the online bulletin board as a “desensitizing” agent and a useful tool for solving disputes at an objective distance.\(^5\) Additionally, Pauline Oliveros herself was
there to provide additional solutions; at one point, she suggested that the performers sit in a circle around the audience, thus allowing everyone in both ensembles to be heard by members of the audience. Considering this, it can be concluded that Oliveros’s pieces may also encourage free dialogue between differing groups of people, which leads to more creative solutions to problems. With time, these two groups may have learned from their past conflicts and eventually reached a commonality and a utopian environment could have appeared. This is the method utopian argument.

The Leadership and Legacy of Pauline Oliveros

In Lange’s case study, the two performance groups had the fortunate opportunity to have Oliveros hear their version of her piece and give them feedback. Now, groups who wish to perform Oliveros’s work can no longer seek the guidance of Oliveros herself. In the wake of her death in November of 2016, the future of the Deep Listening practice is inconclusive. She was, as with many leaders of utopian movements, a charismatic and inspired leader. For many, she was also a spiritual guru. Both the original vanguard of Deep Listeners as well as the new generation of certificate holders strongly feel her absence. If history proves correct, the death or departure of such a dynamic leader signals the end of a utopian era. Many intentional utopian communities led by larger-than-life personalities follow this pattern, including George Ripley’s Brook Farm, Robert Owen’s New Harmony, and John Humphrey Noyes’s Oneida. In his analysis of over 40 intentional communities, Christoph Brumann notes that the failure of a utopia may be partially caused by its over-dependence on one leader. When members cling to key figures, they become unable to survive without them. “Thus, the death of the leader also dealt the final blow to the commune,” Brumann concludes. “One could not really live without the other.”86 In these short-lived communities, leaders act as “kings rather than saints” – beings with
irreplaceable superhuman or god-like qualities. Additionally, there exists an extreme disparity between leaders and other members of the society, and this may cause an intense power vacuum and a chaotic scramble for authority among surviving members.87

However, Brumann notes an exception to this rule: utopian communities with less dominant leaders have a better chance of surviving after the leaders’ deaths. In these situations, the leader forsakes her claim to authority and subjects herself to the same standards as her constituents. Rather than claiming extra privileges or prestige, this leader views herself as an ordinary person who happens to have special gifts. She thus allows the philosophy and mission of the community to reign supreme, rather than herself. These kinds of leaders “give ordinary members the chance to lead themselves.”88 Such a rejection of power and prestige requires “a good deal of self-control and conscious effort on the part of the charismatic leader” to make herself dispensable, but this often results in a long-lived utopian legacy extending well beyond her lifetime.89

Oliveros was one such non-dominant leader because she cared more about the continuance of Deep Listening than she did her own personal stature or legacy. In her role as artistic director of the Deep Listening Institute, she shared the burden of leadership with capable individuals, including her partner Ione, Heloise Gold, and Tomie Hahn. These three women were well prepared to continue Oliveros’s work in her stead. She also made sure to trademark Deep Listening to ensure its continuity and integrity as an official program. “Pauline realized this very early on,” Hahn explains. “She intended Deep Listening to go on, and she intended it to not be…‘Sonic Meditations are just her thing.’” Instead she hoped that “people would continue to build them and create them and make them and workshop them, and they would be in the spirit of her original Sonic Meditations.”90 Indeed, the most important way in which she preserved
Deep Listening was in her music itself. It reflects her willingness to relinquish authority to ensure creative freedom for performers. “Her expectation is that you make them your own,” Hahn explains. “Pauline would give you the format for them, and as teachers we would learn them from her, but then it’s very clear that, subtly, they are different.” This, Hahn argues, is Oliveros’s greatest legacy.

How long will the Center for Deep Listening continue to operate? “Time will tell,” Hahn says. But she is optimistic. In the year following her death, applications for online Deep Listening Classes increased so much that the CfDL tripled the number of classes. “As director, I was receiving more than I could possibly imagine… We had to hire people to take on classes,” Hahn explained. In 2018, the Center made the conscious choice to return to normal enrollment, despite the continuing high demand. Classes are currently filled to the max. Meanwhile, artists from around the world continue to pay tribute to Oliveros on a regular basis. “A whole year of tributes and memorials have been going on... and on... and on... and on! Usually it’s like within the first couple of months... six months is pushing it.” But with Oliveros, things are different. “All over the world, oh my gosh, so many tributes!” All of this is “a testimony to the longevity and the legacy that this was her vision: That Deep Listening would continue.”

But, in true method utopian fashion, the face of Deep Listening will change with the changing times. Not only will it change with new leadership, it will also transform as the world evolves. Oliveros foresaw such an evolution, and wrote in detail about the trajectory the future would take. The next chapter of this thesis discusses Oliveros’s specific utopian predictions of the future, and how technological innovation might help ensure the continuation of Deep Listening and improvisation.


5 Oliveros, Foreword for *Anthology*, ii.

6 “My intention is to compose, improvise and live in a heightened state of awareness of sound, silence and sounding.”

7 Personal interview with Tomie Hahn, January 23, 2018.


9 This includes a collection of 24 *Deep Listening Pieces* which appear in *Deep Listening: A Composer’s Sound Practice*.

10 Pauline Oliveros, in a conversation with Fred Maus, “A Conversation about Feminism and Music,” *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 2 (Summer 1994), 179.


12 *Sonic Meditations* Introduction I.

13 Ibid.


15 Personal Interview with Tomie Hahn, January 23, 2018.


18 Ibid.

19 Oliveros, Foreword for *Anthology*, iii.

20 Reason, “Listening from the Inside Out,” 100.

21 Ibid., 97.

22 Ibid., 100.

23 Ibid., 98.


25 Reason, 100.

26 Ibid., 106.


28 Personal Interview with Tomie Hahn, January 23, 2018.


30 Miles, 20. Reason, 100.

31 Reason, 103.


34 Personal Interview with Tomie Hahn, January 23, 2018.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Reason, 112.

38 Personal Interview with Tomie Hahn, January 23, 2018.

39 Bourne, 278.

40 Oliveros, Foreword for *Anthology*, iii.

41 Personal Interview with Tomie Hahn, January 23, 2018.

42 Ibid.

43 Reason, 111. Emphasis added.

Reason, 107.

Reason, 110.

Dempster, Foreword to *Deep Listening: A Composer’s Sound Practice*, xii-xiii.

Oliveros, Foreword for *Anthology*, ii.

The six first certificate holders were: Tom Bickley, Anne Bourne, Abbie Conant, Norman Lworey, Dominique Mazeaud, and Kimberly McCarthy. See *Deep Listening: A Composer’s Sound Practice* 94, note 27. See also Anne Bourne, 283.

*Deep Listening, A Composer’s Sound Practice*, 94, note 23.

See the “Deep Listening Institute, Ltd. History and Time-Line Highlights” on the Deep Listening Website, http://www.deeplistening.org/site/content/history. See also *Deep Listening: A Composer’s Sound Practice*, 94, note 24 and 25.

Oliveros, Preface to *Deep Listening: A Composer’s Sound Practice*, xviii.


Bourne, 282.

Footnote 59 in *Deep Listening* defines Never-never as “colloquial Australian for sparsely inhabited desert country; a remote and isolated region, especially that of inland Australia; an imaginary land.” Utopian concepts abound in this idea, as well, but they lie outside the scope of this Thesis. See *Deep Listening: A Composer’s Sound Practice*, 97.

De Re, 75.

Bourne, 280-281.


Oliveros, Foreword for *Anthology*, ii.


Ibid., 5.

Ibid., 4.

Ibid., 25.

Ibid., 9.

Ibid., 6-7.

Ibid., 12-14.

Ibid., 3

Ibid., 2.

Ibid., 12.

Oliveros, “Software for People,” in *Software for People*, 178.

Ibid., 184.

Bourne, 282.


Lange, 44-45.

Ibid., 47.

Ibid., 47.

Ibid., 50.

Ibid., 46.

Ibid., 54.

Ibid., 48.

Ibid., 56.

Ibid., 48.

Ibid., 55.

Ibid., 434.
89 Ibid., 434.
90 Personal Interview with Tomie Hahn, January 23, 2018.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
Throughout the span of her over-60-year career, technology played a crucial role in Pauline Oliveros’s musical practice, as well as her utopian projections of the future. Even very early in her compositional career, Oliveros displayed an interest in alternate modes of thinking and being. Her choice of found objects as recording material, her unapologetic use of electronic noise, and her experimentation with electronic instruments challenged current musical conventions and encouraged audiences to think beyond their assumed reality. Later in her career, however, she moved beyond simply critiquing current society and instead began to envision a more literal future world which, through the help of technological innovation, would be better than the present. This corresponds with the “subversive and emancipatory” tendencies seen in science fiction utopias in the later 20th century.\(^1\) Sci-fi utopian optimism exists both in Oliveros’s electronic compositions and in her published writings: keynote addresses, essays, etc. Much of her written work was compiled and published in two major volumes, *Software for People* (1979) and *Sounding the Margins* (2010). In these books, she verbally – not musically – defined and described her utopian vision. These utopian writings inform her musical works and grant listeners permission to view her electronic music as a utopian vision in practice.

**Oliveros’s Utopian Vision**

In 1978, while listening to a playback of Karlheinz Stockhausens’s *Hymnen*, Oliveros penned her essay “Software for People.” She presented this essay in Mexico City, December of 1978, and later published it in *New Wilderness*.\(^2\) In 1979, she re-published it in her collection of selected writings, also entitled *Software for People*. The titular phrase alone speaks volumes of how Oliveros viewed the world, relating the “organic” human experience to inorganic
technological forces. Later, in 2010, she published her book *Sounding the Margins*, a follow-up to *Software for People* which included selected writings dating from 1992 to 2009. She dedicated *Sounding the Margins* “to the history of the future,” and intended it to be used as “a pathway leading to the future” – a positive forecast of the world of music yet to come. These collections, then, were toolboxes for bringing a better world into being through music.³ While much of these writings discuss Oliveros’s utopian attitudes, her essay “Quantum Improvisation: The Cybernetic Presence” in *Sounding the Margins* is a good starting point for exploring utopia.

*Kurzweil and Utopia*

Oliveros first presented “Quantum Improvisation” as a keynote address for the Improvisation Across Borders event at UCSD in April of 1999. In it, she predicted that technological advancements would seriously impact how people listen to and experience music. This, she argued, may impact society at large in positive ways. Oliveros relied heavily on the predictions of renowned entrepreneur and computer scientist Ray Kurzweil, who released his highly influential book *The Age of Spiritual Machines* in the same year Oliveros wrote “Quantum Improvisation” (1999). Indeed, she frequently referenced Kurzweil’s book throughout her address. The first sentences, for instance, are Kurzweil’s, and they form the thesis of her whole essay:

In a hundred years there may be no clear distinction between humans and computers. There will be enormous augmentation of human perceptual and cognitive abilities through neural implant technology. Humans who do not use such implants are unable to participate in meaningful dialogue with those who do...⁴
Oliveros went on to reiterate much of Kurzweil’s predictive claims. For example, she cited the 1937 Church-Turing Thesis, which states that all solvable problems can be reduced to a set of algorithms which can be read by machines. She also tracked the rapidly-evolving history of computational technologies over the twentieth century, including the invention of the desktop computer, which allows musicians to explore advanced computation from the comfort of home.

Most importantly, Oliveros reiterated Kurzweil’s predictions concerning super-human artificial intelligence. In “Quantum Improvisation,” she invoked the character Data from Star Trek: The Next Generation as a model for the potential of robotic music-making. “Star Trek’s android Lt. Commander Data is an idea of the future predicted by the Church-Turing Theory,” she argued. Not only can Data store quadrillions of bits of information and compute at trillions of equations per second, he is also a “sentient life form” with the same rights as other life forms. While Data undoubtedly comes straight out of science fiction, Oliveros also mentioned real-world robotic projects to illustrate how far computer intelligence had already come, particularly in the realm of music. In 1996, for example, jazz saxophonist Paul Hodgson wrote a computer program called Improviser, which could perform the musical styles of jazz legends Charlie Parker and Louis Armstrong as well as the classical keyboard music of Bach. The program wrote the music in real time, spontaneously choosing and mixing melodic and rhythmic materials in a manner so human-like, it was hard to distinguish Improviser’s music from another humans’. As these computer capabilities continue to advance, both Kurzweil and Oliveros argue that hardware will become small enough to incorporate these advanced computers into human brains.

Such speculations easily fall in the realm of science fiction (or, at least, science yet-to-be-fact). But are they utopian? Before this question can be answered, let us first consider Oliveros’s main source; is Ray Kurzweil’s Age of Spiritual Machines an example of utopian literature? On
one hand, Kurzweil emphasizes the benefits of “inevitable” future technologies. For example, he highlights the potential life-saving power of bioengineering in cancer and AIDS research. He argues that the entire human experience – from sensuality to spirituality – may be enhanced through virtual reality and nanotechnology. Any potential disastrous “glitches” or rogue software could be counteracted by other technological counterattacks, and are therefore not to be feared. Kurzweil also hopes for a peaceful coexistence between humans and machines, wherein many of the world’s current problems could be solved through cooperation between the two “species.” The final sentence of his book is a cheerful “Happy Evolving!” – an invitation to embrace this new future.

On the other hand, despite this optimism, it is difficult to label Kurzweil’s predictions as utopian. Although he often casts technology in a positive light in The Age of Spiritual Machines, Kurzweil also asserts that new problems might appear with evolved technology. The true dangers, he argues, are humans themselves, not the machines they create. He considers the “intentional hostile use” of these innovations to be the greatest threat to life and freedom on this planet. In the worst case, humans may knowingly weaponize these machines and destroy themselves. Thus, Kurzweil also presents a future dystopian situation which may appear if things go wrong along the way. Variations on this dystopian narrative appear throughout science fiction literature and film. The Wachowskis’ Matrix trilogy is one notable example, but hundreds of others exist in modern art and entertainment. Additionally, Kurzweil predicts the emergence of new factions in response to AI technologies; the Luddite movement may once again have a profound presence as the question of robot sentience and machines’ rights become relevant. Race wars, class wars, and political strife may appear due to humankind’s inability to adapt to their new “inferior” station.
Kurzweil’s book, then, is neither utopian or dystopian. While he did not wish to incite panic, he did provide an objective look at what the future may hold for humanity. He leaves it to his readers to decide their attitudes and decisions surrounding this inevitable change – utopian, dystopian, or otherwise.

Let us return now to Oliveros, who undoubtedly chose to emphasize the positive potential outcomes presented in *The Age of Spiritual Machines*. After reiterating Kurzweil’s predictions, Oliveros outlined a thought experiment centered around the following rhetorical questions: “What would I want from a ‘musician chip’ if I were to receive the benefit of neural implant technology? What kind of a 21st century musician could I be?” These questions capture the same self-reflective essence as Moylan’s sci-fi questions “Where in the world am I? What in the world is going on? What am I going to do?” Her answers to these questions are arguably the most utopian out of her entire body of work – written, musical, or otherwise.

*Improvisation*

First and foremost, Oliveros suggested the following musical skills be added to her proverbial “musician chip”:

1. The ability to recognize and identify any frequency, tuning, tempo, rhythm, or timbre
2. The ability to perform any frequency, tuning, tempo, rhythm, or timbre
3. The ability to recognize and identify any musical style across history
4. The ability to perceive (and perform) sounds which exist far beyond the spatial capacity for current human hearing, as whales sound and perceive the vastness of oceans.
These new capabilities, Oliveros argued, could allow human beings to participate in “interdimensional galactic improvisations with yet unknown beings.”\textsuperscript{8} The word \textit{improvisation} is most important here. Oliveros had high hopes for advancing improvisation skills with the help of computer microchips. Improvisation, she argued in her essay, goes hand-in-hand with new technologies. History demonstrates this; the development of improvisation in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century closely paralleled advancements in recording, radios, playback devices, and musical sampling. Recordings allow improvised moments in time to be captured, assessed, and manipulated in new contexts. Thus, an improvisation is no longer simply an ephemeral fleeting event, but an artifact which can be analyzed and re-appropriated. She concluded that while improvisation has remained an underappreciated “lost art” in elite music communities, it has managed to not just survive, but thrive, and it would continue to do so with the help of technology.

Early in her career, Oliveros gained a special appreciation for the enigmatic genre “free improvisation.” This improvisational style, she argued, stands in stark contrast to more traditional modes of improvising. In her words:

The improvising musician has to let go of each moment and also simultaneously understand the implications of any moment of the music in progress as it emerges into being. In historical improvisation, the course is charted or set by the conventions and codifications of the style—the Classicism of the music. In so-called “free improvisation” nothing is known about the music before it happens… If the outcome is known in advance it is not free improvisation, it is historical improvisation.

Free improvisation, she argued, is a far more innovative form of music-making.
What does, in fact, happen when a creative musician makes new music? How can it be new or free? What is it free of? What could be new about it? What is happening with a solo improvising musician? a group? The soloist gives herself feedback and enters a dialogue with herself and musical space—the group stretches the possibilities for dialogue and new relationships come about creating a myriad of new possibilities even though the course of the music—new as it may be—will flow with ineluctable inevitability.9

According to her philosophy, free improvisers constantly face the questions of what is new, what is known, and what is possible. Today’s computer programs, like Improvisor, are unable to address these questions. They are only capable of historical improvisation – spontaneous mimicry. The next step, Oliveros argued, would be to create a program capable of inventing and improvising new forms and styles of musical expression – to “boldly go where no musician has gone before [yet another Star Trek reference]… Finding new sounds and new sound relationships?”10 She calls this advanced form of processing “quantum improvisation.” If quantum-improvising computers could be incorporated into human brain processes, the possibilities for human improvisation would be endless.

How would these capabilities lead to a utopian world? The answer to this question lies in the additional capabilities Oliveros’s “musician’s chip” would provide:

(5) The ability to understand relational wisdom that comprehends the nature of musical energy—its form, parts and underlying spirituality—as the music develops in performance
the ability to perceive and comprehend the spiritual connection and
interdependence of all beings and all creation as the basis and privilege of music
making, and

(7) the ability to create community and healing through music making.11

These speculations reveal Oliveros’s trust in listening as a tool for educating desire, and are thus
profoundly utopian. Abilities like these appear to be inherent consequences that arise from a
broader sense of sonic perception. By exercising one’s ability to perceive sounds, one can
become more spiritually connected with the world and find deeper connections with other beings
that reside within it. If all had access to this kind of chip, Oliveros argues, the world would be a
more peaceful place.

Quantum Computing

Quantum improvisation also involves “quantum computing,” a system of computation
anticipated by Kurzweil to be implemented during the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Quantum computation, as
described by Oliveros, is a form of computation which “uses the abilities of particles… to exist
in more than one state at the same time.”12 This kind of computing could drastically impact
every aspect of human life, including music. “By analogy or metaphor,” Oliveros argued,
“quantum improvisation could mean a leap into new and ambiguous consciousness, opening a
new variety of choices.”13 Choice and variability, the necessary elements of improvisation, could
then be expanded beyond time and space, and humans could find “new ways to express and
understand the relationships between mind and matter.”14 This would further intensify the
healing and community-building powers of Oliveros’s sci-fi musician’s chip.
“Space is the Place—I Hear You Sun Ra!”

The topics of space, the universe, and life beyond earth also appear in Oliveros’s sci-fi utopian world. “Space is the place—I hear you Sun Ra!” she exclaimed in “Quantum Improvisation.” This is no surprise; she came of age at the dawn of the “Space Age.” As telescopic and cosmological technology advanced and the world became more aware of its place in the galaxy, many came to believe space travel could be force for good in the evolution of humankind. Sun Ra, for example, combined space-oriented Afrofuturism with nostalgic Egyptology to create an arguably utopian dream for Black Americans. Timothy Leary is another example; he believed space migration was “the inevitable next step” in human evolution, using the journeys of satellites, astronauts and cosmonauts from Sputnik onward as evidence. Like Kurzweil, Leary also argued that humankind is “riding an enormous evolutionary brain wave, a gigantic upsurge in information-release,” resulting in exponential technological advancement. The ultimate destiny of mankind, Leary argued, was the utopian world of “Space Migration, Increased Intelligence, and Life Extension, (SMILE).” In these examples, space became a metaphor for cultural reorientation and alternative life. Ajay Heble describes space as “a metaphor for possibility (or, perhaps, doing the impossible), for alternatives to dominant systems of knowledge production.” For many groups in the 1960s, space was the utopian place. This was especially true for disenfranchised or marginalized groups – Black Americans, counter-culturists, etc.

Like Leary and Sun Ra, Oliveros took a utopian interest in space migration. However, Oliveros concerned herself less with physical space travel and more with aural space exploration. In Oliveros’s view, human evolutionary expansion through space came mainly
through the expansion of human hearing capabilities. The “final frontier” was accessible through the power of bionic hearing. In “Quantum Improvisation,” she stated:

What would happen if a new musician chip were implanted in a human or a machine? All ranges would [be] increased. Processing would be possible beyond known present human capabilities. What could be heard? Could a new musical paradigm include a new spatial domain? Moments of local sound—moments of moving sound with the ability to detect locations from light years away—defining new interdimensional spatiality? What would a spatial melody sound like—a pitch beginning on Saturn moving to Aldeberon to Sirius to Earth? Space related frequency and amplitude—multidimensional melody—color/space/sound melody. Who would be playing this tune? Who would be listening and where? Melody across space stretched out and also happening everywhere simultaneously.20

In 2000, she stated the following:

With the Hubble telescope we are able to see into galaxies from the edge of the universe. How thrilling it would be if we could also hear this too. How about launching a parabolic microphone on the next satellite to listen for the music of the spheres?21

In other writings, Oliveros spoke of the “sonosphere,” the totality of energies and forces which exist throughout the universe. The sonosphere is wide enough to include both naturally-occurring sounds (the “biosphere”) as well as sounds from technology (the “technosphere”).22 Both worlds – natural and technological – provide “beautiful sounds,” some of which can be found on a cosmological scale.23 Exploration of the sonosphere could further aid in connecting humankind
with “yet unknown beings” that exist throughout the universe. In sum, spatial listening was yet another way in which humankind could expand consciousness.

As with much of her philosophies, a social element exists within Oliveros’s notions of the cosmic sonosphere. She believed that everything, including human activity, contributed to the sonospheric network. “Our world is a complex matrix of vibrating energy, matter and air just as we are made of vibrations,” she explained. “Vibration connects us with all beings and connects us to all things interdependently.” Douglas Kahn asserts Oliveros’s awareness of how individual energies may be tied together through shared events, even on a global scale, such as the Moon Landing or Princess Diana’s funeral. Such events, broadcast on television, “simultaneously entrained brainwaves among the worldwide viewers into a sonospherical synching.” Through shared sonic experience, individual energies could become coordinated.

The larger the scale, the greater the impact on humanity at large. Thus, Oliveros considered how human beings might be able to increase their sensitivities toward cosmic vibrations – and therefore increase sensitivities toward other human beings. The result of these efforts? A more empathetic population. This is yet another way technology could aid in the education of human desires.

From Practice to Theory to Practice

One year after Oliveros gave her “Quantum Improvisation” address, she presented another essay at the International Congress of Culture and Humanity in the New Millennium in Hong Kong. For this presentation, she wrote a follow-up to her “Quantum Improvisation” address entitled “Quantum Listening: From Practice to Theory (To Practice Practice).” Here, she once again mentioned the “hybrid humans, new beings born of technology, new challenges, consequences, dangers, freedoms, and responsibilities” that would appear with technological
advancement. “Will we stop the evolution through destruction and annihilation,” she asked, “or embrace it courageously and go forward into the new world it creates?” Choosing the latter option, she once again exhibited a utopian outlook toward the future, and hoped that others might follow suit.

However, this second address did not focus on specific technological advancements which would lead to quantum improvisation. Instead, Oliveros discussed meditation and listening, which she believed were the keys to managing this new world. Although meditative listening is often framed as an organic, abstract practice, Oliveros instead used quantum computing as a model for how musicians ought to listen. Just as quantum computing considers multiple outcomes simultaneously, “quantum listening is listening to more than one reality simultaneously.” This, Oliveros argued, is a skill that can be learned, taught, and practiced. Thus, the pedagogy of quantum listening could become a structural feature among the future world population.

Even in the early days of mass-produced playback devices, Oliveros discovered how technology could aid in improving one’s listening skills. From an early age, she reveled in the power of the microphone, which could pick up sonic details that her own ears did not notice in real time. The recorder was, in the words of Heidi Von Gunden, “an extension [of] sonic memory,” which made her “acutely aware” of her listening skills. Oliveros herself stated that the microphone revealed her “selective listening:” “The microphone discriminated much differently than I did,” she mused. In 1957, early in her career, she formed an improvisation group with Terry Riley and Loren Rush. The three of them met weekly at KPFA studios and tape-recorded their sessions. Afterward, they listened to the tape and talk about what they heard. As she practiced, both alone and with groups, she discovered that listening to oneself on
a recording unlocks a new level of consciousness. She also discovered during this time that recorded media could be completely transformed through tape delay. As she explored new sound technologies, she looked to the future both for the expansion of recording software and for a new cultural appreciation for recorded sound. In culmination of these discoveries, Oliveros created a mantra which she practiced for the rest of her life: “Listen to everything all the time and remind yourself when you are not listening.”

Oliveros argued that the skill of listening would become necessary for adaptation to future interactions with technology. “We need to be listening in all possible modes to meet the challenges of the unknown—the unexpected,” she stated. Listening would be a particularly pressing need as technology became more ubiquitous. The “great cacophonic puzzle” of new sounds – some perhaps very invasive – would be a challenge humankind must address. The ability to control sound inputs and frequencies on an individual level, Oliveros argued, could improve daily life experiences.

One final utopian principle in “Quantum Listening” is the notion of technology as a social equalizer. At present, great strides have been made in improving human hearing capabilities, especially for the disabled. Hearing aids and cochlear implants treat hearing deficiencies with impressive levels of success. However, we are still far from having a full understanding of how individual humans perceive the world through hearing, and we have a long way to go before all humans hear equally. “We assume,” Oliveros argued, “that as humans we hear in the same manner although not all ears have the same acuity.” This inequality naturally appears at birth, but beyond simply natural ability lies the influence of culture and societal selection. “Because we do not all share the same culture, we definitely are not all listening in the same way with the same attention,” she continued. She went on to insinuate that we might lessen
these inequalities through neural implants. Any limitations of human hearing, such as dynamic and pitch restrictions, could be breached with implant technology. The “bionic ear” may someday allow those who cannot hear naturally to achieve the same levels of hearing as a “normal” human being. But of course, bionic hearing will excel far beyond what is “normal” in today’s terms. With bionic ears and other technologies that communicate with the brain, anyone could listen to “anything, anywhere any time.” Furthermore, it could allow people to share their own sonic perceptions with others directly, crossing the proverbial chasm between individuals’ unique experiences and perceptions.

Oliveros also argued that this world of equal hearing would demand a greater equality among genders. “As music changes so will the world as we know it,” she claimed. “We need a balanced society with equal representation for both women and men and support for all composers and musicians” in order to face future challenges. This statement not only highlights gender equality, as one expects from Oliveros, but it also insinuates that all composers and musicians are created equal and should therefore be given equal respect and representation. Since all would have access to the same new technological resources in Oliveros’s idealized future, questions of merit and skill will have to be reframed. Quality could not be measured the way it has been for centuries in Western culture. In short, the musical structures of today’s society would have to change entirely to meet the new standards set by technology.

In her writings, Oliveros painted a rather concrete picture of how society might positively change with the help of technology. She almost wrote a full-blown sci-fi utopian novel, but avoided doing so by withholding the sense of fictional narrative or characters. As with science fiction, her utopian vision depends upon technological innovations not yet presently feasible: space travel, artificial intelligence, biomechanics, and other not-yet-existing technologies
involving recording and listening. Since they share the same artistic medium of written language, Oliveros’s writings are easily comparable with sci-fi utopian literature.

Unlike end-state utopianism, which operates best through an abstract literary lens, the method utopian model encompasses all artistic media. In her discussion of utopia as method, Ruth Levitas asserts that all creative arts – music, theatre, clothing, and architecture, as well as literature – have utopian potential. In this case, the abstraction that inherently resides within music (especially improvisation) allows for utopian imagining. Furthermore, the physical and social act of performing music methodizes utopian visions and brings them into a real-world context. Oliveros’s music is particularly utopian in this sense, because it is flexible and allows for human fallibility in its journey towards perfection. In her music, Oliveros did not prematurely force her future upon mankind. Instead, she invited listeners to consider for themselves what the future’s music might sound like by involving them in the creative and compositional process. She also exhibited a more process-based approach to musical innovation by adapting her pieces and methods as technology continued to advance. She embraced the newest technologies available, including Internet2, video calling, and synthesizing software. Thus, while she lived, Oliveros constantly looked forward and prepared herself for new technologies, inviting others to do the same. After considering Oliveros’s writings and how they explore science-fiction utopian concepts, it is now time to turn to a few of her compositions which highlight these same concepts.

Early Love of Incidental Sounds

Early in her life, Oliveros explored technology’s potential through listening, recording, and manipulating recorded sounds. She recognized electronic devices as instruments in themselves, with their own inherent and unique sonic qualities. She enjoyed the incidental static
of the radio, the interference of a car’s motor, and the winding down of her family’s Victrola record player. Oliveros described these sonic situations as “negative operant phenomena of systems.” While conventionally unwanted or ignored, she believed these synthetic and mechanical sounds had musical potential. Her interest in these kinds of sounds indicates not only her penchant for listening, but also her interest in finding meaning in seemingly inhuman and “nonfunctional” places. Even in her childhood, she questioned the music of Western convention and posited alternative methods for perceiving and creating music.

Her first-ever electronic work, *Time Perspectives* (1961), exemplifies her desire to re-contextualize common sounds. For this *concrète* piece, she used four-channel tape, cardboard filters, and her home bathtub as a resonator. The result was an other-worldly collection of sounds (gurgles, pops, ringing, “all kinds of noise”), most of which cannot be aurally traced back to their bathroom origins. This “vigorous, crackling, energetic” piece demonstrates Oliveros’s knack for electronic manipulation of sounds. It also demonstrated her interest in how time, memory, and listening with new ears may transform the listening experience. The title *Time Perspectives* confirmed her interest in these themes. While not exactly utopian, *Time Perspectives* still explored alternate ways of hearing, perceiving, and being. It was thus an important step in her journey toward eventual sci-fi utopian visions.

A year after *Time Perspectives*, Oliveros and a group of Bay Area composers founded the San Francisco Tape Music Center. Along with Morton Subotnick, Ramon Sender, and other notable composers of the period, she devoted much of her compositional endeavors to working with new recording and playback technologies. Although their resources were limited, the Center used what equipment they had to experiment with new electronic music techniques, thus beginning a long legacy of musical innovation in the Bay Area. During her time at the Center,
Oliveros created some of her most iconic electronic works. She peaked with the group in the years 1965-1966, when she composed *Bye Bye Butterfly*, a study in tape delay and feedback loops. This piece sampled a section of Act II, Part I of Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*. Though listeners may recognize the soprano’s voice, the distorted nature brought about by the feedback loop causes listeners to re-consider the nature of the original musical materials. The sounds here are “surreal,” “angular” and “warped” rather than light and connected. Melody, Puccini’s focus, takes the back-seat to timbre. “It is as if one is hearing distorted mirrors,” Von Gunden argues. “At times Madame Butterfly sounds like a reverberating melismatic chorus of herself.” Such complexity, she claims, does not appear in the original aria.\textsuperscript{44} Again, Oliveros embraced and maintained “electronic” incidental sounds – static, clicks of the turntable, etc. – throughout the 8-minute track. Von Gunden asserts that these inherently electronic sounds act as a sort of counterpoint to the pre-recorded material. One again, *Bye Bye Butterfly* subverts traditional Western operatic tropes. This work may not be purely utopian, but it can be considered both a critique and an alternative option for experiencing music – a harbinger of things to come.

A final early electronic piece is *I of IV*, recorded with two-channel tape at the Toronto Studio in 1966. Inspired by her experience with a power plant in Toronto, Oliveros wrote *I of IV* as “a statement about the nature of electricity, the very medium of electronic music.”\textsuperscript{45} *I of IV* thus musically reinterprets real-world sonic phenomena and explores the inherent musicality of pure technological and electronic processes. She especially wished to explore combination tones, subaudio and supersonic frequencies which appear when two or more tones sound simultaneously.\textsuperscript{46} Oliveros marveled at how combination tones can be audible even if the fundamental pitches exceed human hearing capacity. In *I of IV*, Oliveros intentionally brought
out the combination tones by eliminating the fundamental pitches altogether. Perhaps these very tones inspired her to write about her “bionic ear” decades later.

*I of IV* is especially important in tracing the evolution of Oliveros’s improvisational and electronic style because, unlike the *concrète* works earlier mentioned, *I of IV* is a performative piece. It involves the real-time, improvised manipulation of tape delay. The variables for improvisation in this piece are limited to timbre, texture, and intensity of the pitches; the pitches themselves, however, are prescribed. This piece, therefore, is a precursor to her utopian Electronic Instrument System (EIS), which will be discussed later in this chapter.

*Echoes from the Moon*

In 1967 Oliveros joined the faculty at the University of California, San Diego. Her affiliation with the university provided her with the resources to explore more complex ideas about music and technology. For example, she could now measure the synchronization of energies by measuring brainwaves. The Bio-Theater project, performed in 1975 by the Sonic Meditations Research Group and under advisement by other faculty at UCSD, was a synthesized sound/light presentation based entirely on “brain-waves, respiration and other bio-potentials.” She called the performers in this piece “bio-performers” because they controlled the sonic/light environment by altering their “mental modes.” Oliveros also supervised a UCSD venture called the Sonic Meditations Biofeedback project, in which participants created sounds through their alpha brainwave activity and then interpreted them. Of course, throughout these projects, Oliveros looked toward the future, when quantum improvisation could vastly improve these studies and provide “new ways to express and understand the relationships between mind and matter.”
But beyond simply mapping the waves found in individual bodies, Oliveros also wished to explore waves created by much greater bodies: those of planets, moons, and other cosmic bodies. After her tenure with UCSD, she became fascinated with what many call “the music of the spheres” – vibrations sent to and received from far distant spatial bodies. Inspired by the shared American experience of the 1969 Moon Landing, which she herself watched on television, Oliveros devised a musical installation piece in which radio signals could be sent to and received from the surface of the moon. This kind of “moon bounce” had been done by radio amateurs since 1960, but had not yet been given a compositional treatment. Oliveros collaborated with composer Scot Gresham-Lancaster, the technical director at the Center for Contemporary Music at Mills College, and scientist David Olean. With the help of Gresham-Lancaster’s technical expertise and Olean’s equipment, she built a device which consisted of a live microphone, twenty-four radio antennas, and a foot switch. The resulting piece for this “instrument,” entitled Echoes from the Moon, premiered in 1987. Oliveros describes the experience:

I sent my first “hello” to the moon from Dave’s studio in 1987. I stepped on a foot switch to change the antenna from sending to receiving mode and in 2-1/2 seconds heard the return “hello” from the moon. The sound shifted slightly downward in pitch—a Doppler effect caused by the motion of the moon moving relative to the earth… Then I played with the moon using a tin whistle, accordion and conch shell.

In utopian fashion, Oliveros desired to create a social experience with this technology. In 1996, during a lunar eclipse, four hundred people used the device to sing to the moon. The resulting murmur of sounds emanating through the vibrations of the moon symbolized, to
Oliveros, the sympathetic vibrations which come when people share a similar experience. Through this shared experience, participants could educate their desires – become more aware of the connections which exist between planetary bodies, humans, and their experiences. The utopian power of the experience becomes even more potent when considering the tense and combative political climate associated with the first moon bounce. “The idea of individuals touching the moon with their voices, or making it murmur as one might send waves across an ocean, sharply contrasts the masculine aggression involved in the first moon bounce,” Douglas Kahn argues.51

In *Echoes from the Moon*, Oliveros improvised with a past and slightly manipulated iteration of herself. This exchange is reminiscent of her modern EIS system, as well as her visions of trans-spatial sonic technology. Of course, her moon-bouncing device does not compare with the AI computers of the future. However, functions similarly to Oliveros’s “bionic ear” described in her “Quantum Improvisation” essay, giving humans access to “the music of the spheres.” Working within the parameters of modern technology, Oliveros created a prototype which anticipated a future where listening to the moon might be a normal, easy, and pleasurable experience. *Echoes of the Moon* can thus be deemed a science fiction piece.

Another moon-related experiment was Oliveros’s *Lunar Opera*, which premiered in the year 2000 at the Lincoln Center Out-of-Doors Festival in collaboration with choreographers Heloise Gold and Julie Lyon Rose. This large-scale environmental work shared similar qualities to her earlier *Link/BonnFeier* and had the same potential to unite members of a community through ritual, common experience, and listening. Both pieces lasted for several hours and demanded total commitment from every participant. Like *Link/Bonn Feier*, the *Lunar Opera* borrowed aspects of traditional opera like costumes (advised by Linda Montano), movements,
and characterizations. Also like Link/Bon Feier, Oliveros outlined specific listening exercises and processional events for the performers. However, the Lunar Opera differed from Link/Bonn Feier in significant ways. First, it had a more concrete overarching theme; consistent references to the moon appear throughout the score. Participants were “Lunactors” or “Moonstrals,” and the Lincoln Center became the symbolic country of Lunarus. Also, this opera had facilitators (Gold and Rose), who had the authority to cue actions (or inactions) and provide movement prompts for the ensemble. The piece concluded with a concert by Deep Listening Band and the Drepung Loseling Monks. In sum, the Lunar Opera contained more cohesion, structure, and hierarchy. Despite – and perhaps because of – these differences, the Lunar Opera could still act as temporary utopian environment for participants and laypersons, this time with a sci-fi twist.

Oliveros’s fascination with the moon also appears in other works, including her “Ceremonial Music for Elinor” which accompanied Stacked Deck (1973) by Dick Higgins. This piece involved performers uttering the word “moon” in “as many languages as possible.”52 Here, the moon signified cultural inclusivity. Another example is her theater piece Rose Moon (1977), which included a black-and-white instrument called the “moon rattle.” Leaders of the ritual procession passed the rattle between themselves, interacting with drummers. This rattle’s sound cues other members of the ensemble, guiding them through a ritualistic procession.53 Rose Moon, then, invoked the moon as a facilitator and structural catalyst in creative a shared sacred experience. In the piece Phantom Fathom (1972), a “dream ritual” took place, in which meditators sat in a pool of light known as the “Moon Pool.”54 Here, the moon represented enlightenment and expanded consciousness. In short, the moon was an important motif in Oliveros’s work, often accompanying utopian experiences. These pieces educated desire, built empathy, and encouraged peace among the ensemble.
Interaction with Machines: The EIS and Improvisation

Throughout her career, Oliveros consciously observed interactions between the manipulated past and the sounded present. The 1988 *Deep Listening* album exhibits this interest; the underground cistern’s 45-second reverberation time allowed Oliveros and her band to play with echoes of themselves in real time. In an electronic music context, Oliveros embraced the relationship between live acoustic sounds and their electronic re-iterations. This reached a culmination with Oliveros’s Electronic Instrument System (EIS). The EIS was a digital upgrade to the tape-delay systems Oliveros used in the ‘70s. She described this instrument as a “network” of digital devices and acoustical performers. With the EIS, performers could interact with digital long-delay recordings of themselves in real time. Microphones captured the performers’ sounds, and a computer software then processed the sonic input. Additionally, performers could also manually manipulate the sonic feedback through foot switches and pedals. The resulting sounds were broadcast through speakers to the audience, resulting in an audible duet between past and present.

Above everything else, Oliveros hoped the EIS would facilitate free improvisation. It did this by “improvising” with the composer, immediately responding to the performer’s instantaneous decisions. The EIS therefore modeled the “fluid environment” of improvisation that exists between human beings. It acted as a “real-time digital partner” in performance, interacting with the performer in a “humanly motoric way, even though its techniques [were] distinctly beyond human ability.” Thus, the performance still maintained its human “corporeality and fallibility.” Like the Improvisor program, the EIS never reached quantum computational skills, but Oliveros hoped to continue improving upon the network as new
technologies became available. Although Oliveros has passed away, the EIS lives on in concept and in practice by many of her followers.

Many method utopian and science fiction principles exist in the EIS’s musical processes. First, the EIS operates as method-oriented sci-fi utopia by presenting “what may be” through the lens of the present. The EIS simultaneously projects the future and critiques the here-and-now; it explores possibilities for human/computer interaction, but also addresses problems present in current musical environments. These problems include the public’s general lack of listening and improvisation skills, gender inequality in musical communities, and the blind acceptance of patriarchal Western musical conventions. Oliveros attempted to actively solve these problems through the EIS, at least in a small way, by inviting all musicians – male or female, young or old, virtuoso or amateur – to engage in the improvisatory process with a foreign body – in this case, an inorganic, digital body.

While no “protagonist” exists within an EIS interaction in the same way as in literary utopian fiction, performers themselves play the role of protagonist as they engage with the EIS. Often, the main character in a utopian novel – the one with whom we are conditioned to relate and empathize – acts as visitor to a new utopian world. In traditional end-state utopian stories, the visitor often enters the utopian community knowing nothing of his (they are predominately male) surroundings; he meets members of the community, learns their ways, and unquestionably converts to the utopian way of life. In the case of the EIS, the performer also enters the improvisational process as a stranger to an unknown future time. Much like a visitor, the performer learns her role in the improvisatory process in real time, discovering how past sounds are re-contextualized in future settings. She also learns how to interact with the new EIS entity in real time. At the end of the experience, the performer leaves more “converted” (her desires more
educated) to the new listening processes and interactions of the future. This was, at least, Oliveros’s hope.

The EIS performance possesses additional method utopian qualities. Method utopian narratives also differ from traditional end-state formulas by allowing critical discourse between utopian subjects and the visiting protagonist. The utopia need not be inevitable. Many method utopias such as Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* and Gearhart’s *Wanderground* present a peaceful world struggling to survive in the face of strong adversity. Utopian subjects must be constantly fighting and working to keep their utopia alive, and they often must perform great sacrifices to ensure its continuation. Additionally, method utopias possess more fragmented narratives; the focus turns away from the iconic, overarching structure of society and instead turns towards the visitor’s experience and interactions with the utopian world. All of this can be seen in an EIS performance. The narrative fragmentation of method utopian novels like LeGuin’s *Always Coming Home* or Gearhart’s *Wanderground* mirror the episodic nature of free improvisation. This is especially true of an EIS improvisation, in which past sounds reappear in new contexts. As in the method utopian novel, agency plays a key function in an EIS performance. The performer’s (or “critical protagonist’s”) decisions dictate future sounds, whether for good or ill. As with much of Oliveros’s music, *constant listening* is essential for a successful EIS performance. The performer holds the responsibility for maintaining focus and constant listening as she performs; she thus has an active role in enacting her own future. Acceptance of the utopian interaction cannot be assumed. Enough remains for the performer’s own perception to color the experience either positively or negatively. Depending on the performer’s response to these new technologies, any outcome is possible, utopian or not. Thus, the EIS is a method utopian projection – one which, in the words of Tom Moylan, explores the
utopian future in a “more complex and often discontinuous and self-aware manner” than traditional end-state utopian examples.

The EIS educates desire by improving performers’ consciousness of their own musical voice. Just as playback helped Oliveros to hear both taken-for-granted and intentional sounds in new contexts, the EIS demands that the performer become more aware of what she inputs into the system. The merging of past, present, and future “keeps you busy listening,” Oliveros contended. If humankind were to adopt these listening practices on a grand scale, the world at large might come closer to achieving the “healing and community” that Oliveros hoped for.

In addition, the EIS explores the relationship between human and machine. An EIS performance can act as a model for the utopian existence of humans with artificial intelligences. Although the computational power of the EIS is relatively limited, the interactions that take place during an EIS performance could easily be applied to higher technologies. In a future world where computers are both bodied and superhumanly intelligent, these “jam sessions” between human and machine might become common. Kurzweil himself spoke of this in The Age of Spiritual Machines. With the listening skill sets in place, Oliveros imagined (and enacted) an environment in which all beings – both organic and inorganic – can coexist and interact peacefully. “We need to find a way to work with non-human forms that can present us with musical intelligence and new challenges,” Oliveros stated. Interesting and beautiful improvised music could be the result of such coexistence.

Finally, the EIS developed significantly over the years since its conception in 1983, and these changes also reflect the political utopian attitudes of Oliveros and her collaborators. When David Gamper joined Oliveros’s Deep Listening Band in 1989, only two performers with free hands could work the EIS controls, and other performers had little direct control over the
processed sounds. In 1993, Gamper developed a new configuration which distributed control to all performers equally – an anti-hierarchical and egalitarian change. As technologies became available, they made the EIS more user-friendly so that guest musicians could use it freely. “There is no reason for this means of sound transformation to be obscure or esoteric,” said Gamper. “We try to keep the technology as transparent as possible and familiarity is one means to that end.” In fact, with just a bit of instruction, even complete novices to sound processing technology could find meaningful experiences through the EIS. Kurt Erickson of Mills College, for example, found himself achieving “very gratifying results” within just a few minutes of trying out the system. Oliveros and her crew often held “open mic” demonstrations so that laypersons could freely explore the EIS’s capabilities. Saxophonist John Ingle argued that the EIS could be a useful pedagogical tool for not just improvisation, but ear training and rhythmic awareness, among other things. He went on to remark that the true beauty of the EIS was its versatility; any musician, young or old, could get something different out of the network. The performing pool expanded further when Oliveros designed the Adaptive Use Musical Instrument (AUMI), a software interface which enables people with limited voluntary control over their body movement to engage in music making. Now, even children with profound physical disabilities can learn about improvisation and the creative process. The EIS is thus a democratizing and equalizing sytem, reflecting the political desires of its creators.

The Spiritual Cyberpresence

Spirituality plays a dynamic role in Oliveros’s projected technological world. While a comprehensive discussion of spirituality and religion in Oliveros’s music is a topic too large for this thesis, it is important to mention how Oliveros perceived spirituality within the context of
artificial intelligence and how an organic human being might interact with spiritual computer intelligences.

Douglas Kahn dubbed Oliveros’s hybrid philosophy of music, spirituality, and technology as a form of “spiritual technofuturism,” much akin to the theosophy of Henry Cowell and others. Oliveros’s spiritual egalitarianism differed from earlier theosophists, however, by including microchip technology within the spiritual discussion. Quoting Kurzweil and Matthew Fox, she argued that spirituality is “a pattern of information” in which the present experience takes the forefront of one’s thought processes. With the arrival of new neural technologies, one could induce spiritual experiences through direct brain stimulation. “Enter the Chip Monk!” she exclaimed, quoting a phrase by Stuart Dempster. Through an internal chip, one might be able to experience spirituality on levels presently unavailable. More importantly, one might be able to freely access the spiritual experiences from differing belief systems.

Will spirituality evolve on a microchip with the programmed essence of the best of our world religions available to all? Could the Chip Monk be ingested to assist one’s inner monk in the practice of deep ecumenism and the distillation of universal truth? If you are a Buddhist, listening leads you to the “Buddhaverse”; if you are a Christian, listening leads you to the word of God; if you are an artist, listening leads you to your material and to shape the material. If you are a scientist, listening leads you to theory and experiment… We live in these conditions and our listening simultaneously perceives and shapes the moments that we live whether we are Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, artist, scientist, etc. Religion is a set of rules and regulations for a particular kind of listening. Style in
art sets the way of listening. Quantum Listening is listening to our listening. The field expands to embrace all kinds of listening with openness to all possibilities.67 Perhaps this technology could also allow individuals to more easily share their spiritual experiences with others, as well as receive others’ spiritual experiences? Such a world where spiritual experiences can be directly and freely shared could very well lead to a world free from religion-based persecution and conflict. It could, in fact, lead to a world with one all-encompassing religion, shared by all, both human and machine. In any case, Oliveros seemed to believe that this new technologically-enhanced spirituality would lead humankind one step closer to spiritual and religious peace.

1 Tom Moylan, Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination, 19.
3 Oliveros, Sounding the Margins, dedication page and xii.
4 Ray Kurzweil, The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence. This appears to be a conglomerate quotation from the following pages: 234 and 280. Quoted in Sounding the Margins, 46.
6 Age of Spiritual Machines, 32.
7 Sounding the Margins, 46.
8 Sounding the Margins, 53.
9 Sounding the Margins, 48-49.
10 Sounding the Margins, 52.
11 Sounding the Margins, 53.
12 Sounding the Margins 54.
13 Sounding the Margins, 54.
14 Sounding the Margins, 54.
15 Sounding the Margins, 49.
16 Anthony Reed, “After the End of the World: Sun Ra and the Grammar of Utopia,” Black Camera 5 (Fall 2013), 199-120.
17 Leary, Neuropolitique, 142- 143.
18 Reed, 120.
19 Ajay Heble, Landing on the Wrong Note: Jazz, Dissonance and Critical Practice (London: Routledge, 2000), 131.
20 Sounding the Margins 49.
21 Sounding the Margins, 81.
24 Oliveros, Sounding the Margins, 53.

These “yet unknown beings” may be robotic or extraterrestrial. They are yet another sci-fi subject presented by Oliveros which I have chosen not to explore in this thesis for length and time purposes.
28 Originally published in *MusicWorks* 75 (Fall 2000). Also appears in *Sounding the Margins*, 73-91.
29 *Sounding the Margins*, 74.
30 *Sounding the Margins*, 74.
35 *Sounding the Margins*, 75-76. [recording was / in progress]
36 *Sounding the Margins*, 81.
37 *Sounding the Margins*, 84-85.
38 *Sounding the Margins*, 20.

See also Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 85.
43 One major new tool was the Buchla Electronic Music Box, one of the first-ever music synthesizers.
47 Letter of Approval to Lister Ingber from the Institute for the Study of Attention by Paul Saltman, UCSD Archive, Box 1 Folder 17.
48 UCSD Archive, Box 6 Folder 11. Biofeedback instructions by Bruce Rittenbach:
When you use the unit you will hear a sound of constant loudness, whose pitch varies as a direct function of the amplitude of your brain waves. During the sessions, the task will be to understand the “meaning” of this sound – where “meaning” in this case is taken to be a multidimensional quality.
On the most fundamental level you will want to distinguish between the sound of alpha and that of no alpha. To start out, hold perfectly still, keep your eyes open (since most people have no alpha with their eyes open), and adjust the knob on the box somewhere between 3 and 5 until you get a pitch which is more or less constant but is randomly wavering around. Then shut your eyes. Most people will hear a definitely periodic “warbling.” At any rate, the first distinction must be made between no alpha (small, random pitch fluctuations) and alpha (larger pitch changes that are periodic and warbling). After you have learned this, then you may try to understand the meaning in terms of psycho-physical parameters you are unconsciously manipulating, causing the sound to come and go.
Remember that is important to be perfectly still, so sit in a comfortable position, preferably with the spine straight.
Eye movements, body movements, and other artifacts all have their characteristic sounds, and it is sometimes a good idea to consciously produce them at first so you know them and don’t confuse them for alpha.
See also UCSD Archive, Box 6, Folder 12, 13, 14, and 15.
49 Oliveros, “Quantum Improvisation,” 54.
50 *Sounding the Margins*, 81.
52 UCSD Archive, Box 4, Folder 16.
53 UCSD Archive, Box 5, Folder 16.
54 UCSD Archive, Box 4, Folder 23.
59 *Age of Spiritual Machines*, 196. By the year 2009, “Human musicians routinely jam with cybernetic musicians.”
Kurt Erickson’s testimony: “With some initial trepidation, I recently had the opportunity to work with the EIS and I must relate how quickly those intimations vanished once I started working with it. The thing that surprised me the most about the system was its accessibility and opportunity for immediate artistic gratification. While I can claim no mastery of the system, I found myself achieving some very gratifying results within just minutes. In fact, some of the out-takes from my time on the system were later used as the basis for an electro-acoustic composition. To say that it made me rethink my approach to composition would not be an exaggeration.” (from a personal email from Kurt Erickson, January 17, 1998).
65 Deep Listening Website, “What is the Adaptive Use Musical Instrument (AUMI)?”,
http://deeplisting.org/site/content/whatisaumi.
67 *Sounding the Margins*, 86.
CONCLUSION

One could speculate whether Pauline Oliveros’s utopian musings are, in fact, a continuation of end-state utopian practices. This is a fair argument. The visions she describes in both her “Quantum Improvisation” and “Quantum Listening” essays could be read as end-state utopian prognostications. Like traditional utopian authors, Oliveros presented a blueprint – a “software for people” – which she believed would result in a world of peace and prosperity. Her dependence on Kurzweil also justifies an end-state reading of her work; both insist on the inevitability of Kurzweil’s theories, and thus appear to possess deterministic, finite visions which overpower individual human agency. Oliveros seemed convinced that society would turn a specific direction, toward technological advancement and sound-oriented interactions. Her use of terms like “accelerated artificial evolution” and “inevitable inevitability” in her “Quantum Improvisation” essay mirrors the same rational and deterministic rhetoric used by traditional utopian authors. Her on-paper utopian model, then, is not entirely unlike More’s eponymous island, Bellamy’s Year 2000, Wells’s Modern Utopia, or Gilman’s Herland. All these are considered end-state utopias due to their prescriptivism and deterministic narratives.

However, this end-state model transforms into a method model when considered with Oliveros’s music itself. The key is improvisation. Not only does improvised music invite critical inquiry regarding multiple possible outcomes; it also welcomes human agency and control in the utopian evolutionary process. Therefore, Oliveros’s creed takes on a more flexible and adaptable tone: Technological advancement may be inevitable, but our future, however, has infinite possibilities. “May the spirit of freedom embraced by the art of improvisation change the world to be a world not of confinement, but a world of choices,” she declared.¹
Indeed, method utopian thinkers often appropriate the word *improvisation* in their discourses. Ruth Levitas, for example, sees method utopias as “improvisations on the education of desire:”

In this active process improvisation creates possibility, both objectively and through the capacities of human beings to change themselves and their circumstances. The practice of democratic experimentalism opens up new possibilities for the social future and simultaneously enables (and constrains) changes in people as subjects and agents.² Later in *Utopia as Method*, she states right out, “It is the right way to think about the actual making of the future through collective improvisation.”³ Davinia Cooper also considers method utopias to be “dynamic, improvised.”⁴ A method utopia, like improvisation, is made up of learning from the past, experimenting on the present, and constantly considering new futures. It constantly references its own present self and changes according to present conditions, and it can be constantly refreshed and re-realized, forever present. End-state utopias, on the other hand, cannot be improvised. They are planned, premeditated, and restricted by pre-set conditions. Oliveros’s concept of quantum improvisation allows for method utopian self-reference and contextual framing. Furthermore, the free improvisation involved with the EIS does not simply perform the utopian role of challenging current societal systems; it also can be used as a tool for enacting better societal systems. Thus, the EIS is a miniature of Cooper’s “everyday utopia,” a real-world space in which utopian ideas can be practiced.

Music’s Unique Role

While many utopian projections have included music in their narratives, Oliveros’s utopian vision stands out because music and music-making play an active and necessary role in
the education of utopian desires. It is not simply a symptom of a utopian world, as seen in Ruth Levitas’s socialist-inspired utopian vision where all might have the spare time to explore music due to optimum work efficiency. Nor is the music-making process simply used as a model for other utopian contexts, as we have seen with works like *Musicircus* and *Link/Bonn Feier*. In Oliveros’s proposal, all members of the utopian society would be musicians, improvisers, and listeners. In her view, musicality and listening must be maintained throughout the population for peace, healing, and community to continue. Thus, in Oliveros’s vision, music is not simply one of many utopian activities to choose from; it is THE utopian activity.

This concept – that music-making itself is a form of utopian lifestyle – continues to thrive among the Deep Listening community, and still carries great potential for influencing both the world of music and the world at large. As discussed in an earlier chapter, the Center for Deep Listening thrives, despite Oliveros’s death. Throughout the world, with the help of technology, artists and non-artists alike join in continuing Oliveros’s legacy. Through their hard work, Oliveros’s message of progress, activism, and healing through listening will continue to spread. Her message might inspire future technological innovations; in the coming years, artists may continue to appropriate EIS and AUMI schematics in their own work, thus providing the world with more utopian musical experiences and hastening the “accelerated artificial evolution” Oliveros predicted. It may also embolden musicians and artists to continue questioning musical, political, and social assumptions. As Kerry O’Brien explains, her practice is a timely form of activism. Indeed, it breaks down barriers of class, gender, and ability in ways other political avenues do not. *Anyone* can take part in this practice, and they can begin at any time, tuning into the collective healing energy Oliveros left behind. By so doing, they voluntarily educate their desires, the first step in turning the current far-from-utopian reality toward a more hopeful future.
1 Sounding the Margins, 152.
2 Levitas, Utopia as Method, 183.
3 Levitas, Utopia as Method, 214.
4 Cooper, Everyday Utopias, 6-7.
APPENDIX:
List of Utopian Novels

Traditional (End-State) Utopian Literature
(Written between 1516 and 1950)


Campanella, Tommaso. *La città del Sole* [The City of the Sun]. Estados Unidos: University of California, 1981. (Originally published in 1602.)


Late 20th Century Utopian Science Fiction Novels


Late 20th Century Feminist Utopian Novels


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Music Sources and Archives

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*Link*. Published Score. New York: Published by Anna Lockwood and Alison Knowles, 1975.


*Post Card Theater* (including *Beethoven was a Lesbian*). San Diego: The Pauline Oliveros Papers at UCSD Special Collections, 1972. Box 5, Folder 7.


Archives

Papers of Pauline Oliveros, American experimental musician, composer and key figure in the development of contemporary electronic music. The collection contains Oliveros’s original writings, compositions, correspondence and sketches. Also included are interviews, programs and reviews, teaching materials and writings about and relating to Oliveros’s work.

The Pauline Oliveros Papers (MSS 1308). Located at the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas.

Contains correspondence, photographs, and miscellaneous materials related to Pauline Oliveros. Also includes manuscript score for *Link*. Also contains materials from Edith Gutierrez, Oliveros’s mother.